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Socialist Worker

North and South

Fight the cuts

JOIN THE ICTU PROTESTS ON NOVEMBER 6TH!

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

FIANNA FAIL think they have a mandate from winning the Lisbon vote to drive through cuts in public services while saving the skins of their banker friends.

They're wrong. A wave of anger has erupted against the government proposals to further cut public sector wages.

On the back of the 'pension levy' pay cut they now want to impose a further 5% pay cut on public sector workers.

This is part of the build up to the December budget where they want to make over €2 Billion in cuts.

These cuts are to make us pay for the €54 Billion mistakes of the bankers and speculators that FF and the Greens want to fork out under NAMA.

An alliance of frontline emergency staff, the 24/7 alliance, held mass meetings of 1000 in Sligo and 1500 in Cork.

More meetings are planned around the country. 15,000 people joined the SIPTU Communities Sector march in Dublin on the 30th September. Many of the community groups are now organising local protests and are planning to join the ICTU day of action on the 6th November.

This has the potential to be an historic day as trade unionists north and south of the border come out on the same day on the same issue – stop the cuts in pay and public services.

But we need union leaders who will fight.

Last march the leaders of ICTU threw away a mass movement that could have gotten rid of this government. Instead they raised



Workers take to the streets against Nama

the meek demand of relaunching social partnership.

The bosses in Ireland have no intention of going back to social partnership, they are using every weapon they can, from sackings to court injunctions to stop trade unions fighting.

We need a new leadership in the trade union movement that isn't afraid to fight.

The best way to ensure that is

to organise workplace meetings to build the campaign for November the 6th at a grassroots level. There should be a national stoppage on the 6th, not just lunchtime protests. If the ICTU leaders won't fight we need to take action independently of them.

We also need a political alternative to the pathetic show that is the Labour Party and the Greens. They have been bought by the es-

tablishment. The Greens will do anything to stay in Government and the Labour Party showed it's a safe pair of hands for the establishment through its YES stance on the Lisbon Treaty.

The Socialist Workers Party and the People Before Profit Alliance are building that alternative. If you want to help fight for a decent future for working people, and make the bankers pay, join us.

By EAMONN MCCANN

LAST WEEK Sammy Wilson declared that the Assembly will be cutting £370 million from public spending.

The immediate effect is that 152 beds are to close at the Royal and City Hospitals in Belfast. And that is just the start. In the same announcement, Wilson said that water charges would have to be introduced after all. All the promises of a better future under the Stormont administration are turning to dust. And none of the four main parties are offering any opposition to this cuts agenda.

In the same week, it was revealed that Invest NI has handed out tens of millions of taxpayers' money to firms which didn't use it to create jobs. The billion-pound quango has been throwing public money around like snuff at a wake. But we are told that the coffers are empty when it comes to saving a home for the elderly.

There's a hullabuloo up at Stormont about the Invest NI scandal exposed by an official review. But no apology from any of the main parties for letting it happen. It wasn't a secret that tens of millions were being handed to companies which didn't need it – even as essential services that working class people depend on were being slashed.

Devolution to Stormont made no difference. The faces changed, but the policies stayed the same.

There's controversy now about Invest Northern Ireland looking to bring low-paid jobs here. But this has always been the case. Socialists and trade unionists repeatedly drew attention to the boasts on



Sammy Wilson

the Invest NI website about the low wages that local workers would accept. Indeed, Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness, on a visit to the United States two weeks ago, repeated the boast about low wages here, even joking that wages were lower still in the North West.

Invest Northern Ireland should be abolished. The fat salaries of its failed bosses should be used for better purposes.

The companies which INI has handed millions of our money to should be made to hand it back.

We urge rank and file members of mainstream parties to push their leaders to change direction on public spending. Claw back the money wasted in hand-outs to firms already making millions in profit.

Invest instead in the things that people need. People Before Profit calls on trade unionists, community activists and working class people generally to show their anger at the spending priorities of the Stormont Executive.

We need a militant campaign against the cuts, drawing in people from all areas to challenge the rotten priorities of the Assembly. Get on the streets on November 6th so show your opposition to the cuts.

Lisbon: A Battle Lost:

Don't let them win the war!

THE DECISIVE Yes vote to the Lisbon Treaty was a defeat for the left.

The political establishment won an important battle but they have not won the wider war to impose cuts on workers' living standards. We need to pick ourselves up very quickly and resume the fight.

The Lisbon Treaty had huge significance for the political and corporate elite. They were under enormous pressure from their EU counterparts to remove the last remaining obstacle to a dream of building a militarised and neoliberal Europe.

When Cowen, Kenny and Gilmore repeatedly spoke about the 'damage to our reputation' that would follow a NO vote they really meant their reputation as rulers.

If a NO voted had triumphed, they would have lost control of their population and would become the equivalent of the village idiots of Brussels.

This is why the Yes camp used every lever of control they had in society to bully and blackmail the population into voting Yes. When our rulers are confident, they can allow a degree of 'repressive tolerance' that parades itself as competing opinions in the market place of ideas. But when the chips are down, the openings for real debate narrow. This is what happened on this occasion.

The crudest forms of manipulation were used to gain a Yes vote.

Employers sent circulars to their staffs stating that their jobs depended on a Yes vote. University heads claimed that only a vote Yes could guarantee research funds.

The print media dropped all pretence at neutrality and gave disproportionate space



to the Yes side.

The employers' organisation IBEC mobilised vast sums behind the scenes to fund so called 'civic society' groups.

The debate was fundamentally framed in terms of economic blackmail.

Instead of dealing with a specific treaty, people were asked did they want to be part of Europe and did they want an economic recovery.

Such a depoliticisation of politics is built into a capitalist society.

Not only do the wealthy control the means of production, they now think that they can use that control to dictate how people should think and vote.

Yet this huge mobilisation of establishment resources could only be successful under two conditions.

1. That the Labour Party

and most of the trade union bureaucracy gave the Lisbon Treaty a left 'progressive' colouring.

The Labour Party focussed almost exclusively on the Charter of Fundamental Rights and pretended that it was a magnificent document that gave workers improved rights.

In fact, the much cited Article 28 gives as much of a right to employers to use the lock out tactic as it does to workers to strike.

In any event, it is totally explicit in stating that these rights are exercised in accordance with national law - i.e. that the charter makes no real difference.

The leaders of SIPTU and the ICTU called for a yes vote without even consulting their members because they feared the No sentiment in their ranks.

These actions are a sign

for the future : Labour will put the interests of the political establishment before their own working class supporters.

2. The economic crisis has generated a huge level of both fear and anger. The use of economic blackmail by the Yes side zoomed in on this fear about jobs. Its effect was to create new pools of reluctant Yes supporters because many working class people were not so politically confident as to resist the fear tactic.

Commentators have already remarked on the difference in voting patterns between manual work class areas and white collar areas. It is certainly the case, that there is a strong class consciousness amongst manual workers and, despite their fears for jobs, many voted strongly against the treaty.

But it would be a mistake to conclude that Yes support-

ers are predominantly middle class.

The term 'middle class' is a confusing one which lumps together managers and routine white collar workers.

It is therefore more accurate to acknowledge that many white collar workers voted Yes because of a combination of reasons, some of which were alluded to already. Among these layers there is a stronger sentiment that sees Europe as 'progressive' and as bringing Ireland into a more modern age.

This perception ignores how Europe has shifted more to a neo-liberal agenda in recent years and that the primary concern of its elite is profit and not extra rights. However, the prominent poster campaign conducted by groups like Coir actually helped the Yes camp because it played into these sentiments.

The conclusion that springs from any serious analysis of the referendum is that one third of Irish society are presently under-represented in the political spectrum.

The challenge now is to rapidly construct a broad radical left alternative that gains a key foothold in the Dail - BEFORE Labour betrays its own supporters even more dramatically when they enter a coalition with Fine Gael.

Socialist Worker is fully committed to the project of building a new united left and has worked assiduously inside the People Before Alliance to bring it about. Our hopes are that the project of a new left will assume an even greater reality in the months ahead.

We urge you in the meantime to join us in preparing for the new battles ahead.

Last push in Royal Mail national strike ballot

THE BALLOT for a national strike at Royal Mail is extending this week, and each vote is vital.

Every form marked "yes" to a strike will be a blow to a management that wants to slash jobs, pay and pensions – and prepare the public service for another attempt at privatisation.

"Our reps are doing an excellent job of explaining

the issues to the members, and telling them to return their forms before the deadline of Thursday 8 October," says Dave Scott, a CWU union area delivery rep in Suffolk.

"But, to be honest, management are doing a better job. All their attacks, including stopping our members' pay for allegedly not working hard enough,

are backfiring.

"We've had gate meetings at all our units and I'm convinced we can win this by a big margin.

"But it's important that reps tap into the mood of anger and keep pushing till the last moment.

"The bigger the turnout and yes vote, the harder we will be able to hit them."

David Wilshire, from

Bristol CWU said, "Tell your members, if local strikes can force this vicious management to get back around the table for talks with the union, imagine how they will respond to national action."

This is a key week for what is now a central focus for the industrial and political struggle.

This is about the

defence of public services, jobs, resistance to union-busting, halting an assault on pay and conditions and combating Labour's neoliberal desire to make workers pay for the crisis.

Socialist Worker is encouraging all our readers and supporters to organize solidarity and support group meeting for the postal strike from next week.

Waterford Council of Trade Unions invite Mawman film director

WATERFORD COUNCIL of Trades Unions (WCTU) has invited world famous filmmaker John Sayles to the city.

Sayles is to take part in a live interview and introduce his masterpiece 'Matewan' at Garter Lane Arts Centre on Thursday 15th October at

7pm. The film is being shown as part of the centenary celebrations of the WCTU.

Sayles films tend to be politically aware; social concerns are a theme running through most of his work. He has twice been nominated for an Academy Award for

Best Original Screenplay for 'Passion Fish' and 'Lone Star'. He has also directed several music videos for Bruce Springsteen including 'Born in the USA' and 'I'm on Fire'.

'Matewan' concerns the attempt by an IWW union organiser to unionise coalmine workers in the face of

violence, brutality and vicious exploitation. The character Joe Kenehan preaches a doctrine of working class solidarity and consistently argues against recourse to force.

'Matewan' is a marvellous celebration of working class solidarity and courage in the face of the most brutal

employers. It focuses on the rank and file experience of the 1920 strike with the intention of inspiring similar solidarity and courage among the working class today.

Tickets are €15 (€10 concession) and are available from 051-855038 / boxoffice@garterlane.ie.

ROUND UP

Taxi drivers shut down Dublin for a day

OVER 100 taxi drivers, part of a new grouping called the 'Irish Taxi Council', closed down Dublin's O'Connell St to protest against the ongoing insanity of the Government's policy of deregulating the industry, which has led to drivers incomes falling well below any reasonable level.

One driver told Socialist Worker that he had taken home, after expenses, around €85 in the previous week.

This is the madness of Neo Liberal economic logic- let the 'market' regulate- which in reality translates as let dog eat dog be the rule.

Taxi drivers are set to continue their protests and the manner in which they have conducted these protests is an inspiration to workers as the Dublin Chamber of Commerce stated that the action on O'Connell St had cost (the probably exaggerated) figure of 10 million.

That's the way to make the Government stop and listen.

Derry residents want proper consultation

THERE HAS been considerable vilification of the residents of the Galliagh area of Derry who are campaigning against facilities being built in the wrong place and without consultation.

They have been accused of not wanting facilities for the children and young people of the era. Nothing could be further from the truth. Most of the opponents of the scheme have families themselves and want to see more facilities, not less.

There is a problem here which isn't confined to Galliagh – people not only being told what's to happen in their areas but instead being told that they have already been consulted about it. Community organisation which are dependent on official bodies for their funding far too often become representative of State agencies to the people rather than the other way round. This was also an issue in other parts of the city.

Stream Lessons

THERE ARE lessons for all workers in the debacle of Stream Call Centre in Derry.

Hundreds of local workers are being thrown on the scrap-heap because the company has made its profit from their labour and now wants to move to an even lower-wage economy.

There was no union representation at Stream. The company was dead set against it. Now we know why. They wanted an unorganised workforce that they could treat like dirt. The workers don't even have proper representation in bargaining for redundancy.

When Stream arrived, all the establishment voices in Derry were against pressing for union recognition. This would only deter other firms, they said. And it would make the Stream bosses more likely to move away.

That argument looks a bit sick now.

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain from being in a union - and being militantly active in the union. We never won anything by being nice to the bosses.

Amenity campaign wins

THE RECYCLING and amenity centres at the Brandywell and Eglinton in Derry, closed as part of a cost-cutting exercise have finally re-opened thanks to the Amenities Action Group and other environmental campaigners.

The closure of the amenity sites was a disaster. Derry City Council had to spend even more money collecting waste that householders used to bring to the site. Campaigners predicted that this is what would happen, but the Councillors would not listen until we started to protest outside every one of their meetings.

It was also clear that any money the Council would save in the next year or two from closing the sites would be lost several times over when the EU starts to fine them for sending too much rubbish to landfill.

The residents were told by Sinn Fein and SDLP councillors – in the most straightforward way – that we had to just accept the cuts and needed to get used to them because there would be more coming down the line next year.

Every ratepayer in Derry should make it clear that we will not accept a single cut in services while City of Derry airport is costing the rates payers £3.5 million every year to keep Ryanair happy. If the Council told Michael O'Leary that we are no longer going to subsidise his airline, we could have more services for local communities instead of contributing to O'Leary's millions.

This is an important victory: we have shown that protest works, that it is worth standing up for working class communities and we have made it clear that they will not get away with imposing cuts on services next year.

NI public sector unions call meeting to fight the cuts

UNISON, NIPSA and other public sector unions in Northern Ireland are calling emergency meetings of their members to discuss the 370 million in cuts announced by the Assembly last week.

These cuts come on top of 700 million in cuts in the health service announced last year. The cuts will mean the immediate closure of 152 beds in the City and Royal hospitals in Belfast. Similar cuts are happening across the north.

The ICTU has called lunchtime protests on Friday 6th November, the same day that unions in the South will be on the streets fight cuts from the Fianna Fail/Green government.

The mood at the meeting in the City Hospital was furious. One nurse in the Royal Victoria Hospital said that pregnant women coming in for a C-section had to be sent home because there weren't enough cots for newborn babies available – and this is before the cuts are implemented.

Socialist Worker urge all our supporters to hold emergency workplace meetings on the cuts, if your union has not already organized one, to discuss how you can build the protests on November 6th.

15,000 join Community Workers' Protest



Photo: Paula Geraghty

SEPTEMBER 30th saw a magnificent show of anger against the government's bank bail out and planned cuts in the Community sector.

They came from working class estates and communities all over Dublin and from around the country to let their voices be heard crying as one against McCarthy's savage 'Bord Snip' cut backs which will see the loss of up to 6,500 community sector jobs, at a time when our dole queues should be shortened by job creation.

Estimates for this lively march on the Dail vary from 8,000 to 15,000.

This movement is set to grow with further protests planned to challenge Fianna Fail's December budget.

Between now and the budget we should join the demonstrations outside the Dail on Wednesdays and build to get people mobilised for a demo at the Green Party conference on Oct 10th.

MTL workers continue strike



THE DOCK workers at Marine Terminals Ltd have been on strike for 12 weeks against enforced redundancies and worsened terms and conditions.

They are still fighting and with the help of the support group they have staged a series of protests. The protests have not only been held down at the port itself but companies related to MTL have also been targeted for example Deutsche Bank and Dunnes Stores. Deutsche Bank owns 49.9% of Peel Ports (owner of MTL) and two successful protests were held outside the head office in Dublin. In addition, when the Managing Director of Deutsche Bank (London) Basil Geoghegan was in Dublin to be wined and dined at taxpayers expense at Dublin castle

during the Global Irish Economic Forum, a protest was held with workers and supporters shouting 'Crumbs for the workers- Banquets for the rich'. Dunnes Stores, which continues to use MTL's services despite the ongoing dispute has been targeted for a protest where a letter was given to the staff asking them to consider not handling goods coming in through MTL.

On the 24th of September dockers from around the world came from the International Trade Federation meeting in Cork up to Dublin in a protest at the gates which managed to shut the company down for several hours. The participants came from Australia and the USA and 'Solidarity forever' was sung outside the gates to remind the company that these workers are not going away and other workers are willing to help them win the dispute.

The workers have been served with several injunctions from the High Court including the 'naming and shaming' of scabs. This shows how the state and the courts are on the side of the employers against the workers.

And the hypocrisy of accusing the workers of intimidation when strikers have been followed in cars and in pubs by what they think are private security or special branch Gardai. Supporters have also been intimidated, when staging a peaceful protest outside the Four Courts and five special branch Gardai photographed protesters as well as following them in their car.

SIPTU and workers decided to go to the Labour Court under a section 20 hearing. This means that the decision made by the Court is binding on SIPTU, but not the company.

What could, in the worst case, come out of this is if the Labour Court deems the first 13 redundancies as necessary SIPTU can no longer help those workers. This would be devastating for those young workers who have families and huge mortgages, who are then left with no job and no income. The Labour Court is hearing the case on the 28th September (as this article is being written).

Let us once again shout: 'Scabs out! Dockers in!'

Coca Cola bosses reject Labour Court findings

ON THURSDAY October 3rd, Coca Cola HBC rejected the terms of the Labour Court recommendation to end the six-week dispute at the company's Irish operation.

130 workers have been on strike after they were told their jobs would be outsourced.

The Labour Court recommended that the firm should offer a redundancy package in line with previous deals.

It has also called on both sides to conduct a feasibility study to see if any of the jobs at the Ballycoolin plant in Dublin can be retained.

One of the strikers told Socialist Worker, "The company rejected the recommendation and would only stick with their original lousy redundancy offer.

Strikers have been picketing throughout as well as leafleting shopping centres to get the word out to boycott Coca Cola products.

"We leaflet Ballyfermot Tesco shopping centre today and got a good response. But we were put out of the Mill



Coca Cola strikers join anti cuts demo Photo: Paula Geraghty

centre, Clondalkin by the management there."

Coca Cola workers were prominent on the anti cuts protest last weekend as out photo shows.

Tuam Coca Cola workers launch boycott

The SIPTU pickets have been in place outside the

Tuam Coca-Cola plant, Co. Galway for the last 7 weeks. From this week the numbers on the picket line will be scaled back as the strikers

commence new tactics and undertake new tasks to broaden solidarity action in their dispute.

On Friday 2nd October the union agreed to

escalate the dispute to include a boycott of Coca-Cola. This has been met by a fantastic response in Tuam. Immediately O'Toole's Supervalu removed coca-cola from its shelves, then the 2 Costcutter branches followed suit.

The local manager of the Coca-Cola plant instructed a shop assistant in one of the stores to replace the products to the shelves and was promptly run off the premises by the shop manager.

The Coca-Cola strikers lead a march from the plant of 200 local community supporters into Tuam town on Saturday 3rd October. Local councillors and TDs were asked to speak at the rally but not one of them attended, only the mayor gave his support.

Boycott Coca Cola!

Email messages of support to kevin@swp.ie and we will pass them on.

Join the Socialists

...and we will pass them on.

...and we will pass them on.

Showdown:

How the Protest Movement

By KIERAN ALLEN

Fianna Fail propagandists have claimed that we are in the midst of a decisive '100 days' where the government have three obstacles to overcome – Win the Lisbon Vote; Push through NAMA; Bring in a budget to cut public sector pay and impose more cutbacks.

We should not be fooled by this propaganda. The battle to bring down this government can flare up at any time – during or after the 100 days.

But behind the propaganda, there is an important reality looming. Large numbers of people are moving into confrontation with the government and new battles will be joined.

Three recent events indicate the scale of what is to come.

First, the protest of the community sector brought about 12,000 onto the streets of Dublin. The community sector grew up during the Celtic Tiger when resources were made available to fund basic infrastructure in working class areas. This largely replaced the older models of provision by religious orders and many working class people came to believe that they had a right to community services.

The McCarthy Report, which was written by a former business consultant turned academic, displayed an intense class bias by targeting both social welfare recipients and the community sector more generally.

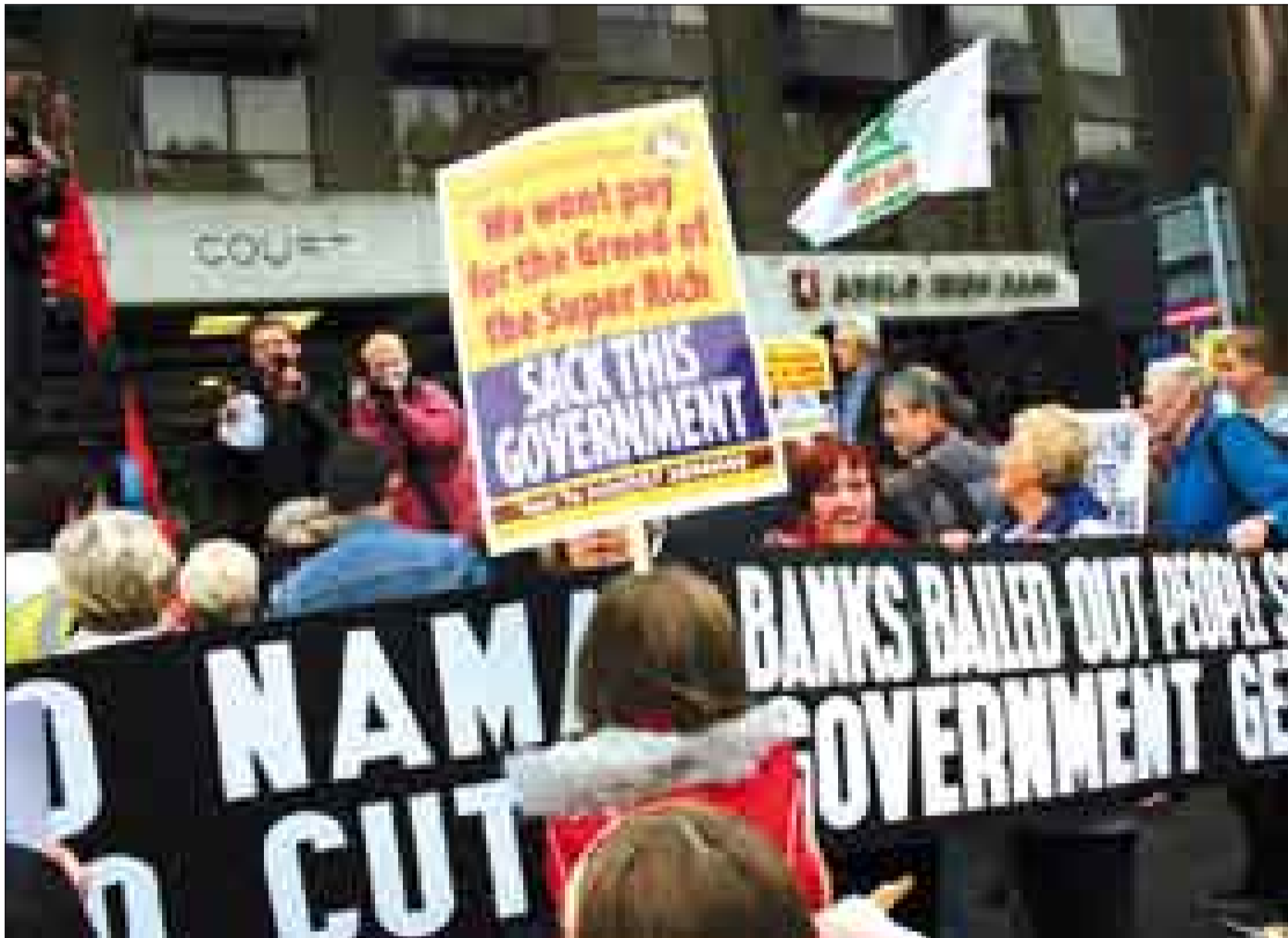
These threatened attacks have, however, only spurred on the efforts of SIPTU and IMPACT to organise the sector. Large numbers have already joined both unions this new form of union organisation was at the heart of the recent mobilisation.

Second, taxi drivers have started to escalate their actions to bring about major blockages of Dublin's city centre. Taxi drivers are bearing the brunt of an extreme de-regulation that was promoted by the Progressive Democrats. Today there are over 13,000 taxis in Dublin – more than in New York, which is a city that is eight times the size.

This 'open market competition' means that taxi drivers are forced to work very long hours just to earn a meagre income.

The first major response of the drivers was to form Taxi Drivers for Change, a grassroots organisation that challenged the complacency of official unions. It brought thousands onto the streets but was arrogantly brushed aside by the authorities. Now the protest movement is coming back with a vengeance.

Third, the sleeping giant of organised public sector workers has started to awake. A new 24/7 alliance has brought together nurses, firefighters, the police, prison warden and soldiers who are embittered by



the way a pay cut was imposed on them last February and the failure of the ICTU to respond adequately.

The alliance held huge meetings in Sligo and Cork and more regional meetings are planned.

This new alliance has co-incided with a quiet but effective revolt by the grassroots inside SIPTU.

Last month, SIPTU called major meetings of its local activists where the union leaders received a severe rebuke over their failure to challenge pay cuts. Angry activists denounced the union leaders for failing to take the battle to the employers and for lacking a strategy.

One result has been a public acknowledgement by SIPTU leader Jack O Connor that he made a mistake in calling off the March 30th demonstrations and that he was fooled by a government that took that gesture as a sign of weakness.

In the run up to the SIPTU conference in October, O Connor and the ICTU leadership more generally knew they had no option but to re-mobilise their membership for a decisive confrontation. November 6th has now been set as the start of a public campaign of protest.

THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

The FF-Green government are trapped but want to lash out.

Initially, their strategy was to impose major cuts in the February budget and then move on to a new combination of cuts and tax hikes. Their aim was to ram through water charges and impose new taxes on family homes.

The McCarthy Report and the Commission on Taxation – both stuffed full of elite figures were teed up to provide the objective justification for these

attacks.

But the growing mood of protest has shaken their confidence and some section of the government have come to believe that a strategy of cutting public sector pay and slashing social welfare might be an easier opposition. Their calculation was that the unions had been decisively weakened by the debacle of March 30th and would not be able to resist.

To prepare their ground for these attacks, a new propaganda war has been made ready to go. Just like the build up to the 'pension levy' a new round of reports have started to appear which purport to show that public sector workers are earning too much.

In one of the most blatant example, an ESRI article which claimed to show that public sector workers were earning 23 percent more than private sector workers was actually a recycled version of an

earlier report which received extensive publicity. In the interval, the so called pay gap had also increased!

Far from being objective studies, these reports are propaganda weapons for a numbers of reasons

1. Agencies like the ESRI are on public record as supporting wage cuts. Far from being a neutral agency, they have therefore already taken a side against workers.

2. The report use outdated figures. An ESRI report, for example, used data from 2003 and 2006 rather than from the period after the pension levy was imposed.

3. The comparisons between the public and private sector excluded self employed professionals, thus artificially lowering private sector income.

4. The reports are not based on a comparison of one groups of similar wage earners with another because there are no private sector prison warden or soldiers.

Emergency Services Alliance to fight cuts

JOHN KIDD, a Dublin Fire Fighter and a leader of the 24/7 Alliance spoke to Socialist Worker.

"THE 24/7 Alliance is an alliance of front-line staff in the emergency services – Fire, Ambulance, Nurses, Gardai, soldiers".

"Our members have already had an 8% pay cut through the so called 'pension levy'. Over a third of emergency services pay is made up through allowances. If the cuts in the McCarthy report are implemented we could see a 20% pay cut".

"€120 Billion has left Ireland in the last year, €42 Billion in the last 6 months. The rich are moving their money out to keep it safe. Why aren't there special levies on that wealth?"

"Politicians and managers talk about

international best practice. But €1 in every €5 spent on the public sector goes on management – why aren't they cutting them. 1000 Fire Brigade staff in Dublin is giving the same level of cover that would require 2500 in a similar city in Canada".

"I've been working in the Fire Brigade Ambulance service for 25 years. In that time we've gone from responding to 25,000 to 90,000 calls a year in Dublin with no corresponding increase in service".

"Union members are angry. We're not going to take this any more. There is no NAMA for workers, we've had enough and are going to fight. We'll be on the streets in uniform on November 6th and are calling on every worker to come out and join us".

New protest alliance for

NO TO NAMA – NO TO CUT BACKS, BAIL OUT JOBS AND SERVICES

THE NEWLY formed United Alliance Against Cuts (UAAC) unites community, trade union and left political groups including People Before Profit Alliance, Canal Communities, Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party, Sinn Fein, Portest against Child Unfriendly Budget and Independent councillors.

UAAC are beginning a major national campaign to demand a reversal of current and planned cut-backs and stealth taxes affecting communities, workers, young people, pensioners and other vulnerable groups in society.

The Alliance has organised dozens of public meetings in communities nationwide. The Alliance claimed that the combination

of the NAMA bank bailout alongside the proposed Bord Snip cuts and the commission on taxations proposals amounted to a plan for "national social and economic suicide" that would "impoverish the least well-off and the most vulnerable in our society and do immense damage to the social and economic fabric of our society for generations to come."

"The government is bailing out those responsible for the current economic disaster, while savaging workers, the poor and the vulnerable is simply unacceptable".

UAAC said that the current direction of the government's plans for dealing with the financial and economic crisis now gripping the country were not only totally immoral and unjust but were also a form of economic

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Instead the new propaganda report are based on an average of hugely diverse groups and the use of spurious mathematical techniques to apparently control for differences of wage or education.

The government's aim is to use these reports primarily to demoralise public sector workers by making them believe that everyone is against them. They hope that the constant attacks from the private radio stations controlled by the tax fugitive Denis O'Brien and the Independent Groups of Newspapers owned by O'Brien and O'Reilly will break the morale of workers even before the struggle commences.

LEADERSHIP IS DECISIVE

This is where the question of leadership becomes decisive.

In the run up to November 6th, activists should campaign for the largest mobilisation. Instead of simply a protest, a fight has to be waged for a 24 hour shut down, with pickets to be placed on a 24 hour basis.

Workers – and their employers – have long gone past the stage of 'bluff and gesture' mobilisation. Both sides know that serious issues are at stake and so November 6th must become a major French style stoppage.

No excuses from union leaders about the Industrial Relations Act should be tolerated. Most unions – including IMPACT – have already balloted for action on the pay cuts last year – and these can now be implemented. Pickets therefore need to be placed on every workplace as a basic test of loyalty to the union movement.

While backing the new mobilisation with huge enthusiasm, the union movement can no longer stay silent about the disastrous leadership that has already caused one debacle

Take the example of Peter McLoone, the leader of IMPACT. Most unions have a rule about removing people 'who bring the union into disrepute'. Nobody could infringe this rule as much as McLoone.

His tenure of the FAS board was associated with gross misuse of public money on perks for a managerial elite and sections of private business who battered off FAS.

Whenever McLoone appears on the media, many already regard him as a discredited figure.

More broadly, many union members doubt whether many of the current leadership have really the stomach for a fight.

We need therefore to enter into this new round of struggle by continually pressuring the leaders for decisive action – and if they fail to deliver this time set about removing them.

formed ICES NOT THE BANKS

that would further deepen the recession.

are calling for the government to n plans for NAMA and instead take king system into public ownership, refocus government economic plans or public job creation programmes protection of public services and standards for working people and the ble in society.

alliance rejects both the Bord Snip mmission on Taxation reports and ead for a socially progressive tax with increased taxes and caps on profits and high earners to fund services and establish greater social

Communities against the cuts

by COUNCILLOR BRID SMITH, Ballyfermot

DURING THE recession of the 1980's Ballyfermot was one of the blackest spots in the Irish economy. Unemployment levels were higher than the national average, educational achievement was way lower than the national average and the number of heroine addicts and HIV sufferers was among the highest in the country. Over the following decades the community in Ballyfermot fought hard to ensure that political decisions on funding local services led to this community making a major change in its education, employment and health levels.

Although the Celtic Tiger economy passed over many of the working and unemployed poor, community programmes and facilities have been greatly increased in Ballyfermot because the people fought back and demanded that they had a right to a better life. In the last few years Ballyfermot has been recognised as a vibrant, healthy and dynamic community with some of the best programmes and facilities for young and old and for recovering addicts and their children. Poverty and lack of educational opportunity has not gone away, but its effects have been minimised mainly due to the participation and intervention of the community services.

The recommendations of the McCarthy report will tear this area asunder if they are implemented.

A recently convened public meeting by People Before Profit Alliance for the local community to discuss the impact of An Bord Snip in Ballyfermot. Over 80 people attended and the meeting was very representative of the voluntary and community sectors which will be hardest hit by McCarthy. Typical of Ballyfermot though, the spirit of the meeting was defiant and optimistic.

Local people heard the testimony of the community workers and volunteers from the Family Resource Centres, the Drugs Task Force, the youth clubs, the sporting and residents associations. All present committed to building support for protests against NAMA and against the cuts. Representatives from SIPTU talked about the campaign against the cuts bringing together community workers from all over Ireland.

On Thursday 24th September the Ballyfermot/Chapelizod Partnership launched a major report completed by TSA Consultancy on "THE IMPACT OF THE MCCARTHY REPORT PROPOSED CUTBACKS ON THE COMMUNITY SECTOR IN BALLYFERMOT".

Its findings are like a snap shot of the ferocious nature of these cuts for communities throughout Ireland and make grim reading. Not only does it appear that McCarthy and the Fianna Fail led government are preparing to throw areas like Ballyfermot back into the dark ages of the 1980's - it is worse than that. Already cuts to mainstream services like health, education and housing are already having an impact. Ballyfermot lost seven special needs teachers which has already led to increased class sizes and a reversal in educational progress for some of the most needy children. The City Council have cancelled basic maintenance work on the



Photos from the Community Sector Protest Pics: Paula Geraghty

homes of many tenants and disability grants for home improvements have ended. The bus service to the area has been cut and serious attempts were made to close down wards in the local Cherryorchard Hospital. The hospital has only survived because of locally organised opposition.

So opposition to these cuts on a political and local level will be crucial. A glimpse of the TSA report makes for grim reading if McCarthy and the Government get their way.

The report shows that:

education/primary education attainment compared to 21% of the entire Dublin City population. Over one quarter of the area's population (26%) left school before they reached 15 years of age.

■ Ballyfermot has a high proportion of households with children headed by a lone parent - 40% compared to 32% in the Dublin City area.

■ Ballyfermot has a high rate of disability with 14% of its population having a disability compared with 11% in the Dublin City area as a whole.

■ Ballyfermot has a high proportion of Travellers living in the area at 1.4% of the total population compared to 0.4% for Dublin City.

According to the report, "All of the community and voluntary organisations have an anti poverty focus. They provide a range of services and advocate on behalf of children, young people, people of working age and old people. In addition, a number of organisations provide an array of specialist services to: recovering drug users, lone parents, homeless people, ex-prisoners and people with disabilities."

If the recommended cuts go ahead a total of 68 jobs will be lost to Family Resource Centres, Community Development/Local development inclusion programmes, Drugs Task Force and Community Services. This will mean withdrawal of services to 2,875 individuals in the community. 65 community groups and sporting organisations would not be in a position to provide services to an additional 1,022 young people living in the area. Therefore a total of 3,897 individuals will lose these vital community services.

On top of this 604 older people would no longer receive services including social and recreational programmes, home repair and subsidised hot meals. Over time this will inevitably place an extra burden on the HSE arising from the need for acute and long term beds for the elderly whose ability to live independently will be seriously undermined by these proposed cuts. And a similar scenario will develop for long term drug users who benefit from the services of the local drugs task force increasing the return to increased drug dependency and all the consequences that brings onto an area like Ballyfermot. In the words of the report "These cuts, would over time, lead to greater demands being placed on many mainstream state services".

So, Mr McCarthy and Mr Cowen, where is the saving for the people of this country, for the working people and the poor? It won't happen. All it will do is shift another proportion of wealth in this country from the doorsteps of the very poor to the very rich.

That is why we have no alternative but to fight. Communities like Ballyfermot know too well what it was like to live through the last recession when they had to tighten their belts but the Haughey led Government engaged in flamboyant spending and corrupt deals for land and privilege with their mates in the building trades. Lets make sure we don't see history repeat itself. Let's bury them this time in the dust bin of history and fight to defend our living standards and the future for our kids.

■ Ballyfermot had more than twice the level of unemployment (11.2%) than the rest of the city (5.2%) in 2006 (it has got worse since 2006)

■ 7% of Ballyfermot's population are unable to work due to disability compared with 4.2% for the rest of the city.

■ Ballyfermot has a relatively high young population. 29% are under 19 years of age compared to 19% of the entire Dublin population.

■ Ballyfermot has a low education attainment level. 38% has no formal

SF debate SW on Israeli ambassador visit to NI

Last issue we printed an article by Eamonn McCann criticising Sinn Fein's joining in the meeting with the Israeli ambassador's visit to the north.

A CHAIRDE, Gerry, Tom and I met the Israeli Ambassador in May.

The party has a position - which I believe to be right - of being prepared to talk to anyone.

On that basis we have spoken to British governments - whose role in Ireland is as bad as the Israeli government's role in Middle East - but for a lot longer. We have also met unionist paramilitaries who have killed our friends and family.

So, we are willing to speak to Israeli politicians and government officials. But we do so on the basis of party policy.

The Israeli Ambassador came to Belfast in an effort to blunt the report which Gerry was due to publish on the Middle East and specifically Gaza.

Since then party representatives, including Pdraig Wilson and Pat Sheehan and Raymond McCartney have been back

to the Middle East meeting Palestinian leaders, including the leadership of Hamas in Damascus.

As for the claim that no one raised with Bush or Blair the Iraq situation that is rubbish. Not only was it raised on that occasion and a letter handed over but at other meetings that I was present at Gerry and Martin warned Blair that it would be wrong to go into Iraq.

Regrettably there are some of our former comrades and some on the left who believe they and no one else holds the holy grail - and who are cynically trying to use PR photos taken by Israelis to score points over Sinn Féin. I would have thought the plight of the Palestinian people should not be used in that way.

As for the rubbish about Sinn Féin not being a left party or socialist party, what can I say - sure didn't the left in Britain slag off Connolly!

Instead of internal bickering over whose analysis is right the left - and Shinners do - needs to remember who the real enemies are.

SWP response to SF

PERHAPS THE most significant step forward for Irish-Palestinian solidarity in recent years has been the trade union-sponsored campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

The campaign became official ICTU policy with the passage of a resolution at the biennial conference in Bundoran in July 2007, proposed by Derry Trades Council delegate Eamonn McCann.

SF representatives commonly present themselves as supporting this policy. And yet, there is no denial now that during their meeting with Israel's UK ambassador the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of the Stormont Executive, Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness, jointly agreed to send a TRADE DELEGATION to Israel.

We can all put whatever spin suits us on particular events, but there's no way any party can spin their way out of that contradiction.

As for SWP "cynically trying to use PR photos taken by Israelis to score points over Sinn Féin". It's said that a picture can be worth a thousand words.

These are not images captured surreptitiously. Gerry Adams and Tom Hartley are both experienced, media-savvy politicians. They were not taken unawares by a photographer, Irish, Israeli, or whatever. They clearly posed smiling broadly for these pictures to be taken.

We still say that what they depict is disgraceful.

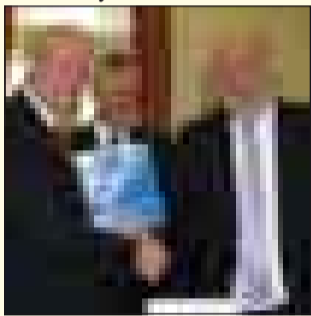
Anybody interested in this exchange should also read again the statement issued by SF after the meetings with the ambassador. Leaving aside the question of whether they should have met the UK ambassador at all, what are we to make of the statement saying the meeting was "Useful and informative...an opportunity to listen to the Israeli government perspective".

"I told the Ambassador that following my visit to Israel, Gaza and the West Bank I am more convinced than ever that a process of dialogue between all of the participants is essential for progress."

Can anybody identify a phrase in the statement which couldn't have been uttered by Fianna Fail? or the Green Party? or DUP? or ex-PD's?

No question, then, of anything along the lines of, "I told the Ambassador that following my visit to Israel, Gaza and the West Bank I am more convinced than ever that the Palestinian people are entitled to resist the racist oppression and thuggery which he represents and which US imperialism backs to the hilt..."

And thanks to the SF spokesman for reminding us all that we should "remember who the real enemies are." As far as Palestine is concerned, that would be the entity embodied by the Israeli ambassador. So who is it that seems to have difficulty remembering who the real enemy is?



Israel's Separation Wall



CRH: Building for the future?

By CLAUDIA SABA, IRISH Anti War Movement

IRISH BUILDING materials company Cement Roadstone Holdings, newly branded as CRH, is further cementing itself in the construction of Israel's illegal structures.

It all started eight years ago when CRH first invested in Israel, a year later the building of the illegal separation wall began.

CRH conducts its shady deals through its 25% ownership of Mashav Initiating and Development, the holding company of Neshet. Neshet provided cement for the construction of the separation wall, checkpoints and West Bank Israeli settlements.

The company's products are being used in the construction of the light rail project in Jerusalem - an apartheid public transport system which connects Israeli settlement neighbourhoods with the city centre while cutting off

Palestinian neighbourhoods from each other.

Adding to their list of dubious subsidiaries, CRH and Mashav recently bought Hanson Israel - a company notorious for its illegal mining activities in Palestinian areas. Hanson Israel is the second-largest building materials company in Israel and operates a quarry in the occupied West Bank which the Israeli High Court ruled a six month freeze on in March this year.

The court made that ruling after human rights groups proved that the quarry exploits occupied Palestinian natural resources and sells them off to the Israeli construction industry.

Hanson Israel also owns two concrete plants in the settlements of Modiin Illit and Atarot, and an asphalt plant south of the Elqana settlement, all illegally built on occupied Palestinian land.

In early 2008 Dutch ASN Bank,

which prides itself on social responsibility, divested from Irish CRH. This echoes a previous move by ASN Bank to divest from French company Veolia after several human rights organizations had complained about Veolia's investment in the Jerusalem apartheid railway system. So how did CRH view the withdrawal of ASN Bank's euros from its colonial construction projects?

It's hard to know since there is very little on CRH's website about their deals and affiliations with their Israeli partners.

One wonders what discussions took place in CRH's boardrooms about the Dutch slap in the face. I contacted CRH to request an interview about this matter but the interview was not granted.

During these times of economic hardship, one would think that a corporation like CRH would conduct itself in a manner that would attract investment - instead

of divestment. The fact that it is proceeding with the purchase of Hanson Israel indicates that there is more profit to be made out of that dirty deal than is worth passing up.

Did CEO Liam O'Mahony realize the implications of collaborating with an occupying entity that is increasingly exposed to world scrutiny and criticism?

It is a pity that in a country like Ireland, where famously the Dunnes Stores workers began the Irish boycott of apartheid South Africa, we now have a corporation actually buying up companies in an apartheid state.

Perhaps then, those in the best position to apply pressure on CRH leadership are the CRH workers themselves.

The Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign is about to launch a divestment plan to convince CRH to cease its involvement with the Mashav Group.

Department of Defence's shameful deal with Separation Wall supplier

AN ISRAELI company, Elbit Systems Ltd, has just won a defence contract to supply surveillance equipment for new Irish army armoured cars.

The surveillance equipment is to be mounted on the 27 new Irish armoured vehicles which are being bought for €19.6m from BAE Systems of South Africa.

Elbit Systems is a leading Israeli company, which manufactures and integrates advanced, high-performance defence electronic and electro-optic systems worldwide.

The surveillance equipment is a significant component for the control regime of the 450km illegal separation wall constructed by Israel around the West Bank.

The wall - which is mainly

constructed beyond the 1948 Green Line, on UN recognised Palestinian - territory has destroyed Palestinian homes, olive groves and farm land in the process along and severely restricts the free movement of Palestinians in their own land.

Under International Law Ireland has obligations not to not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the wall.

Entering into a contract with a company who is directly implicated in the oppression of the Palestinian people is illegal and unacceptable.

Earlier this month Norway's finance Minister declared that Norway would now exclude Elbit Systems \$5.4m stocks from its pension fund due to it supplying surveillance equipment for the

Separation Wall.

The central bank-managed fund follows ethical guidelines issued by the finance ministry, and in the past it has excluded companies that produce nuclear arms or cluster munitions, damage the environment or abuse human rights or worker rights.

Minister Kristin Halvorsen declared that "The International Court of Justice has said the fence construction breaches the Fourth Geneva Convention and that Elbit is clearly aware of exactly where and how the system is intended to be used".

This is in direct contrast to the situation in Ireland where it appears the Department ignores international humanitarian law when it

comes to Defence spending.

The Minister for Defence, Willie O'Dea, has turned a blind eye when acquiring defence equipment.

Since 2005, the Department has purchased small arms ammunition, X-Ray equipment, helmets, an Artillery Fire Control System and Unmanned Drones to a value of €9.2m.

He confirmed that tendering depended on 'best value' for money.

It would appear that these guidelines take no account of any ethical or humanitarian criteria despite the agreements between the EU and Israel in the Euro-Med Agreement which obliges Israel to abide by generally recognised principles of international law.

Honduras:

Coup sparks mass resistance



Turmoil in Honduras

By ALISTER FRASER

HONDURAS, A country of almost eight million people, has been in crisis mode since June 28, when right-wing plotters deposed the country's elected President, Manuel Zelaya.

The coup has been led by Roberto Micheletti, who has tried all the tricks of the trade to cement his position.

Although the coup was condemned by the Organisation of American States and even U.S. President, Barack Obama, the golpistas (coup-leaders) have been invited to Washington to meet Hilary Clinton – who, disgracefully, has not condemned the coup.

In response to the coup, pro-Zelaya supporters, including the National Front for Resistance (NFR), have launched a mass movement of resistance.

As Socialist Worker's Mike Gonzalez reports, "There have been strikes, highway blockades, street protests, student demonstrations, and peasant mobilisations against the coup."

More of this sort of action is

exactly what is needed.

The protestors face incredible brutality. Reports by La Via Campesina, a transnational peasant movement, and from the NFR have told how soldiers have shot at protestors, killing peasant organizers, union leaders, teachers, and others.

There also have been attacks on pro-Zelaya media: one radio station, Radio Globo, was shut down by the new government but has since begun broadcasting clandestinely.

Meanwhile, there have been curfews and attacks on pro-Zelaya supporters, and repression of neighbourhood uprisings with rubber bullets, live ammunition, tear gas, beatings, and sexual assault.

Despite the repression, the resistance movement has gathered strength.

And calls for Zelaya to be returned to office are now being trumped by calls for a new Honduran society, something Zelaya was very slowly inching towards.

The vast majority of the country's young population live in

poverty.

At the top, a small ruling class tries to control politics and the Honduran economy. They are the owners of the country's banana and coffee plantations, the new industrial zones, and the media. But their hold over Honduran society is weakening.

Zelaya is a landowner; he comes from the elite. But his moderately left-wing politics have been a positive change for Honduras.

He made good strides by raising the minimum wage and resisting some forms of privatisation.

However, when he then called a non-binding referendum on whether to convene a special assembly to reform Honduras' Constitution, which it was handed by the U.S. in the 1980s, the right-wing pounced.

The golpistas arrested Zelaya and kicked him out of the country. They said he was too pro-Chavez, too pro-Cuba, even though his policies were far from the sort of left-wing agenda needed in Latin America.

Zelaya managed to get back into Honduras last week, eventually ending up in the Brazilian

Embassy in Tegucigalpa.

He says he is determined not to let the country's coup leaders get away with their plot.

He said, "The coup leaders are like anyone who committed a crime and want to hide it.

"You have to keep the spotlight on it."

And so by staying in the capital city and creating a new focal point for his supporters who rallied to his cause at the Brazilian embassy, he has reminded the world of the Honduras crisis.

Perhaps what he has also achieved is to remind everyone, not least the left in Latin America, that the struggle for justice in the region will not be straightforward.

The left must expect local ruling classes to call in the troops, the bullets, the tear gas, and call in support from their right-wing allies in the U.S.

That Barack Obama has not done more to get Zelaya back into office is proof again of his failed politics.

Why not fly to Tegucigalpa, Barack, and fight to uphold democracy, like you promised you would?

Have German voters shifted to the right?

While the media makes much of the defeat of the SPD, the Left Party (Die Linke) made impressive advances.

ANGELA MERKEL'S conservative CDU party was re-elected in Sunday's German elections into coalition with the right wing FDP.

The FDP is a party that stands for cuts in taxes on the rich and slashing public spending.

Much of the media has called the election a shift to the right under the weight of recession.

But that idea is not borne out by the results, says Stefan Bornost, editor of German magazine Marx21.

While the SPD saw its vote collapse to just 23 percent

– its worst election result since 1953 – the results for Die Linke, its new left wing challenger, were very encouraging.

Die Linke took 11.9 percent of the vote, up 3.2 percentage points on the previous general election, and won 76 MPs – 22 more than last time around.

It overtook the Greens, who also had a record-beating election.

Die Linke fought its election campaign on core issues – the immediate implementation of a minimum wage, taxing the rich, troops out of Afghanistan, repeal of the harsh unemployment benefit

laws, and no to raising the retirement age to 67.

The election saw Die Linke rise to being the biggest party in most states in the former East Germany.

Party leader Oskar Lafontaine says the key tasks ahead include joining governments in order to block federal legislation, winning future elections, and taking to the streets to protest against cuts.

However, joining governing coalitions at a time of budget cuts would almost certainly mean implementing policies that hit the party's working class supporters, says Stefan.

"You cannot say that a vote for Die Linke is one that will defend public services, while at the same time making cuts," he says.

"But the pressure to take office is great. The revulsion with the CDU is such that the vast majority of Die Linke's voters say they want our party in government."

"We need to forge a united front to fight back against the attacks that are coming," says Stefan.

Two supporters of Marx21 magazine, Christine Buchholz and Nicole Gohlke, were among the Die Linke candidates elected to the national parliament.

COMMENT

Will capitalism recover?

By BRIAN O'BOYLE

CAPITALISM IS currently in a crisis of epic proportions. Capitalist production is inherently unstable and cyclical downturns are part and parcel of the normal workings of the system. This crisis is, however, different.

The profits rates that drove the 'Golden Age' have long since disappeared and in its attempts to revive them, global capital has overseen a series of imbalances that will be prove long-lasting and difficult to escape. Of these, the most evident has been that between China and the USA, but no less significant has been the imbalance between wage labour and capital.

The shift to a neoliberal policy regime in the 1980's helped to sustain the 'for profit' system on the back of increased exploitation. Liberalised capital markets paved the way for a reassertion of capital dominance, and this in turn increased the levels of absolute surplus-value extracted from the working class.

The increasing importance of financial markets emerged as a consequence of this, and short-run speculative profit making increased dramatically. This proved functional to the system as a whole, as cheap credit and a series of bubbles provided the income streams for workers to consume.

Throughout this period the USA became known as the 'buyer of last resort' as vast quantities of foreign produced goods made their way into the American market. Americans continually took advantage of easy credit to consume 'beyond their means'.

On the flip-side, the Chinese working class consumed far less than it produced and overtime their ruling class amassed vast quantities of foreign exchange. A symbiotic relationship therefore emerged as both sides needed the other to continue a relationship that was ultimately unsustainable.

China is now under massive

pressure to spend its reserves, and as it has pumped billions into the global economy there are signs that the worst of the immediate depression could be over. Be that as it may, there is still the structural difficulty to deal with and it is far from certain that the US can continue in its role as the world's big consumer.

This brings us to our second problem.

Neoliberalism was always premised on increasing exploitation, and as Marx was quick to point out, this inevitably leads to problems of overproduction (or underconsumption).

The logic of competitiveness means that from the perspective of the individual capitalist, wages are always a cost to be minimized. However, if this process is generalised, the demand for goods and services quickly dries up. After all, who will buy the mass of products if not the workers?

Cheap credit provided a temporary fix, but the solution is now worse than the problem, as the example of the sub-prime market (made up of those people most exploited by financial capital) makes clear.

Will the system recover? All we can say is that there are serious structural difficulties to be contended with, and that if capitalism is to escape this crisis, it will only do so on the backs of working people.

Bourgeois commentators continually talk of recovery in the hope of improving confidence. Yet sentiments cannot buy commodities, and as long as there is a central contradiction between social production and private accumulation any recovery will only be temporary.

This brings me to my final point. Whatever else we may say, it is undeniable that short of a global catastrophe (such as another world war) the 'Golden Age' of capitalism will not be repeated. Profit rates have been falling for over thirty years and while this crisis may not be terminal, one just like it surely will be.

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Afghanistan:

End the war now!

By JULIEN MERCILLE, Irish Anti War Movement Steering Committee

THE TWO items now on the news in Afghanistan are the fraud that marred the recent elections and the debate in Washington on whether to send more troops to Afghanistan, and if so, how many.

Preliminary results from the poll that took place on August 20 indicate that Hamid Karzai is winning with about 54% of the votes. But the UN-backed Electoral Complaints Commission has said there was "clear and compelling evidence of fraud" and ordered a recount and audit of ballots at about 3,000 polling stations.

Depending on how many votes need to be recounted and how many are determined to be invalid because of fraud and irregularities, Karzai could drop below 50%, which would force a runoff with Abdullah Abdullah, the second most popular candidate.

Time is running short if a second vote is to be held because winter snows typically start in November and make much of the country impassable.

President Karzai has made many compromises with warlords responsible for numerous human rights abuses and deaths.

His two running mates, Khalili and Fahim, are both infamous warlords. Abdullah Abdullah is one of the most powerful men in the Northern Alliance.

Not great choices for Afghans, and the direct result of US/NATO policy of empowering warlords by showering them with weapons and millions of dollars since 2001.

Currently, more than 100,000 foreign troops are in Afghanistan, around 65,000 of which are American.

But General Stanley McChrystal, the top military commander in Afghanistan, recently warned in an assessment published by the *Washington Post* that he needs more troops—perhaps 10,000 to 45,000 more.

This means that if McChrystal gets the maximum number of troops he wants, total troops in Afghanistan will

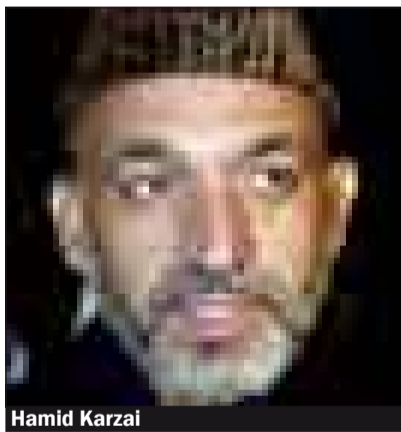


exceed 135,000, exceeding the size of the occupation force the Soviets sent to Afghanistan for the first time since the 2001 invasion—another great record of US-NATO foreign policy.

But more and more voices are being raised against extra troops and in favor of withdrawal.

Even George Will, the conservative journalist, wrote a column in the *Washington Post* in which he argued the case for an American withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Also, a majority of Americans are now against the war. A recent CNN poll found that 58% opposed the war while 39% favored it. A McClatchy-Ipsos poll at the end of August found 56% of Americans



Hamid Karzai

opposed to sending more troops, while

35% favored it.

Once again, the US government is acting in ways contrary to the wishes of its own population. Elites and common people clearly don't have the same interests.

A June 2009 Pew Global Attitudes survey of 25 countries also found that majorities or pluralities in 18 of 25 countries surveyed say the US and NATO should remove their troops from Afghanistan as soon as possible.

Recent polls have also recorded clear opposition to the war in several NATO countries, such as Germany, Italy and Britain.

However, it's important to keep in mind that whatever international opinion on Afghanistan is, Afghan opinion should

be the focus of our attention. Afghans are the ones who have been invaded, bombed and killed, so they should choose for themselves what needs to be done.

A BBC/ABC poll released in early 2009 showed that only 18% of Afghans think the number of foreign troops in the country should be increased, and 51% of Afghans want US and ISAF/NATO troops out within two years or earlier, a percentage that has probably increased since then.

This demonstrates that the US-NATO are not in Afghanistan to spread democracy, otherwise, General McChrystal would take a minute to listen to the large majority of Afghans who don't want more troops, and certainly not 45,000 more.

Stop Nick Griffin on Question Time

ANTI-FASCIST CAMPAIGNERS are promising a storm of protest in response to the news that Nazi leader Nick Griffin is to appear on the BBC's flagship Question Time programme in London on Thursday 22 October.

Broadcasting union Bectu is the latest organisation to throw its weight behind the protests.

Bectu's general secretary Gerry Morrissey says that the union will support any of its members at the BBC who refuse to work on the programme.

He said, "I have raised this issue with the BBC's director general Mark Thompson.

He added that the union "will be working with anti-

fascist groups to ensure there is a significant turn-out" for demonstrations outside the studios.

The BBC claims it has to invite Griffin, the leader of the fascist British National Party (BNP), on to Question Time under its "impartiality" rules.

And some people seem to have been fooled that Griffin's appearance is justified in the interest of "free speech".

But the BNP is not just another political party – it is a fascist organisation that whips up racial hatred and violence.

It certainly has no respect for freedom of speech towards people who are black, Asian, Jewish, gay or disabled.

Giving a platform to Griffin – a fascist who wants an "all-white" Britain and has a conviction for denying the Holocaust – just gives the Nazis the gloss of respectability they crave.

Justice secretary Jack Straw has angered many anti-fascists by agreeing to appear on the programme alongside Griffin.

This has created a row in the Labour Party – which had previously refused to appear alongside the Nazi BNP.

Several senior figures, including Alan Johnson, have already refused to appear with the fascist organisation.

Former cabinet member and Labour MP Peter Hain has



BNP Boss Nick Griffin

asked the BBC to meet him to explain their decision.

He said, "I have told the BBC that I will never share a platform with the BNP. More than that, I will refuse to appear

on Question Time until its producers meet with me to justify their reasons.

"Giving the BNP this kind of free publicity elevates them to a level of respectability that they

do not deserve.

The Anti-Racism Network (ARN) is calling a demonstration outside the BBC in Belfast and Derry on the Thursday 22 October to protest at the BBC's decision.

Two months ago it was revealed the BNP has their main back office call centre in Dundonald.

They raise over £1500 a day from this bunker. An open letter calling for the centre to be shut down has been signed by many prominent personalities and politicians. The ARN are holding a mass meeting in Belfast at the end of October to organize to shut the call centre down.