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Socialist Worker

Stop the country to stop the cuts!



Over 100,000 demonstrated on November 6

Pic: Paula Geraghty

THE FIANNA Fail-Green government is planning a new round of attacks on working people to pay for the bail out of the banks.

These attacks will include reduction in child benefit, pay cuts, slashing of public services and the introduc-

tion of water charges.

Yet they have already spent €11 billion on bailing out banks and plan to put another €54 billion into NAMA.

They have no mandate for any of these policies and have little public

support.

Far from advising the government on how to cut €1.3 billion from the public sector, the union leaders should be shouting: "WE are not the problem – NAMA and the bank bail outs are."

If the government wants to raise more money it should look to the super-rich who gained an extra €75 billion during the Celtic Tiger years.

They created the economic mess – and THEY should pay for it.

Join the pickets on the 24th Nov

ON NOVEMBER 24th, public sector unions will enter a decisive battle against the FF/Green government.

Despite months of a propaganda campaign from the media, tens of thousands of workers have voted to take action.

The immediate issue is the threat by the government to

launch a new round of pay cuts. But the dispute has deeper implications on a host of fronts:

■The concerted campaign by IBEC to achieve a 10 percent cut in wages for ALL workers has had mixed results.

In the private sector, employers have only been successful in smaller workplaces where they can

pressurise non-union staff to 'agree' to the cut.

In many larger workplaces, they have not dared to impose these cuts.

A defeat for public sector workers, however, would set a new headline for pay reductions for all workers in both the public and private sectors.

■The state's objective is to

reduce both wages and social welfare. A defeat for workers will be a signal to launch a full frontal attack on social welfare rates.

■The wider aim of the political elite is to slim down the public sector even further.

That will have a detrimental effect on the poorest sections of society who depend on such services.

A strategy to stop the cuts

■We should have nothing to do with any desperado strategy that believes that if the government does not cave in after a day or two, the battle is lost. From the very onset, every worker should be clear: This is a battle that will entail sacrifice to defeat a right-wing government – and we will have to repeat the action many times, if necessary into the new year, if we are to win.

■We must cast away all notions that hinder the movement going forward. We need mass pickets on workplaces to shut them down from early in the morning – but we then need to combine picket with mass public protests where ALL who are fed up with this government are invited to join in.

■We need to galvanise the energy of the grassroots. This starts with forming strike committees which are open to new activists to join if they want to help organise the struggle. But there should also be regular assemblies of workers so that the creative energies of the many can be unleashed.

■We need an escalating series of co-ordinated national days of action that continue before and after the budget. The government must be under no illusion that this will peter out after a day or two.

■We need to openly appeal to commercial semi-state workers and private sector workers to join in these actions. That will mean politicising the strike in the best sense of the word. The broader aims of this strike are to change state policy so that the rich carry the can for the crisis. This will benefit all workers, public and private, and so we should send out delegations to appeal to them for solidarity.

If these tactics are pursued and we shift from a bureaucratic strike driven and controlled from the top to one which is based on the energy of the grassroots, we can win.

CHRIS HARMAN

The theory that predicted the fall of the Berlin Wall



CHRIS HARMAN, (pictured left) a leading Marxist and member of the SWP in Britain died in November.

He made an enormous contribution to the development of Marxist theory during his lifetime, not least in explaining that the Stalinist regimes in the old USSR were not socialist but another form of capitalism – state capitalism.

Here in one of his last articles, he explains the continued relevance of the theory.

WITH THE fall of the Berlin Wall, many on the left concluded that socialism had failed. Others of us saw these countries as state capitalist and an integral part of the world system. This theory has renewed relevance today

When I joined the Socialist Review Group, the precursor of the Socialist Workers Party, back in 1961, our opponents on the left called us the “state caps” – short for “state capitalists”. This was not because we were in favour of state capitalism (although rumour had it that one of our members had joined for that reason). It was because we rejected the notion that the USSR, China and the Eastern European states were in some way socialist or workers’ states.

If the workers could not even discuss government policies without fear of incarceration, we argued, how could anyone possibly believe they controlled the state and were freely building socialism?

The “state capitalist” theory was based on recognition that the parameters within which the rulers of the Eastern bloc states operated were determined by competition. This was not internal competition, but external competition with the west European states. An increasing amount of this competition was for markets, but most was military.

This might seem different from what happened with competition between firms in a Western economy, but it had the same effect in terms of the economic dynamic of the system.

The various Eastern rulers could only survive this competition if they exploited workers to the maximum, using the surplus they obtained to build up industry. This was exactly the same picture as that presented by Karl Marx in Capital, where he showed that the competition

between capitalists to sell commodities led to each undertaking “accumulation for the sake of accumulation”.

Competitive accumulation had a double consequence. On the one hand it would lead to a new period of massive economic crises. On the other hand it was building up a working class that had the potential to overthrow the ruling class. No state mechanism, however repressive or totalitarian, could indefinitely subdue that working class.

To most on the left it still seemed the deepest sort of pessimism to write off the states that ruled a third of the world. But with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when the truth could no longer be avoided, they often concluded that socialism as such had failed.

For us, by contrast, 1989 showed that capitalism in any form is vulnerable to mass resistance from those it exploits.

One additional point followed from the theory. If the crisis in the Eastern states was a result of competitive accumulation within a world system, then simply moving to the Western model of capitalism would not bring it to an end. How right we were was shown by the way economic crises that had begun under Brezhnev and Gorbachev deepened in the early 1990s – and have now returned with a vengeance during the present world crisis.

Some people will ask, is any of this relevant today? It is, in two ways. First, state capitalism as a theory never simply applied to the Eastern states. It also had relevance in the West, since at least a third of every Western economy is in the state sector.

War is still with us, precisely because the state is part of the capitalist system and one of the forms that the competitive struggle between states takes is the accumulation of armed strength.

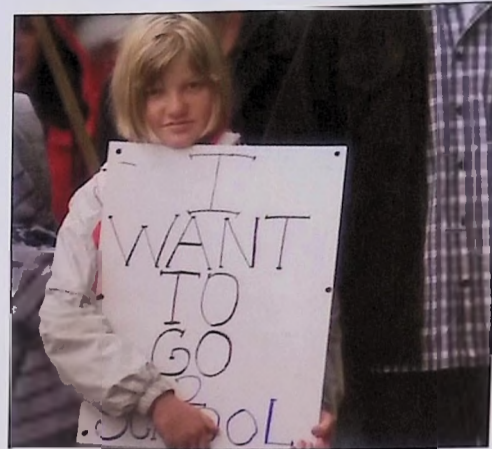
Billions for the bankers, cuts for the most vulnerable

SPECIAL NEEDS child, 11 year old Angel Mc Donagh, faces into another week without schooling because of the failure of the Department of Education to provide the necessary resources to St Michael’s House, the special needs school, which her father was told could cater for her needs.

James and Angel hit the national headlines when he walked into the special Green Party convention in the RDS, demanding to speak to Green leader, Minister John Gormley and was forcibly evicted by security and Gardai.

Angel suffers from closed Spina Bifida, Global Developmental Disorder (affecting motor skills) and ADHD, requiring special needs education, which the state has failed to provide for over a year.

The Department of Education is maintaining that St Michael’s House is



adequately resourced to cater for Angel’s needs. However she says that recent staff cut backs and a tightening on funding mean they do not have the necessary resources to cater for her.

As well as failing to provide schooling for Angel for the last year, the state has

failed to provide her with the occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech therapy she needs for her condition.

The HSE are also refusing to accept that there is any crisis.

James, Angel and his other child Michael are also forced

to live on a completely unsuitable halting site on the west pier in Dun Laoghaire because of the failure of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Co Council to provide proper housing for the family for over three years.

James Mc Donagh said, “It looked for a while, as a result of my protests and the media coverage they received that progress was being made but, in reality, Angel is still not in school and is still not receiving the therapy she needs. The bottom line here is that the Department of Education are still refusing St Michael’s House the resources they need to cater for Angel and the HSE is still not taking this situation seriously. Meanwhile, Angel is suffering and my family are finding it increasingly difficult to cope. I am really desperate and do not know where to turn. I appeal to the Batt O’ Keefe and the HSE to stop passing the

buck and fobbing us off and honour their obligations to a vulnerable child.”

Cllr Richard Boyd Barrett of the People Before Profit Alliance, who has been assisting the Mc Donagh’s in highlighting Angel’s plight, said, “This appalling situation shows the terrible lie behind government claims that the vulnerable will be protected from the cut backs they are now imposing. How can these politicians and HSE executives, who pay themselves vast salaries, sleep at night when a special needs child is being neglected in this way?”

James Mc Donagh said “They have money to bail out banks and pay Brendan Drumm massive bonuses but refuse to provide my daughter with education and proper care. How can that be right?”

Over 100,000 march against the government

OVER 100,000 trade unionists came out on the streets on November 6th and many have also voted for strike action to oppose the government’s proposed package of cuts.

After the huge protest on November 6th and November 11th, the trade union movement must escalate or face defeat.

A strategy for victory should be based on the great French strike of 1995.

When the Juppé government attacked social welfare and public sector pay, the unions engaged in a series of co-ordinated national stoppages.

These stoppages were initially led by public sector workers but eventually they drew in private sector workers who had their own

grievances.

The one day strikes in November and December 1995 defeated the French government – and we can do exactly the same here, provided there is the will to fight.

We need to take control of the struggle from the trade union bureaucracy and elect strike committees at grassroots level to organise rotas for picket duty.

These strike committees should co-ordinate with other striking public sector workers in their area and call area assemblies.

This fight must be widened to bring in all workers, public and private sector.

We need to drive this government from office if we are to stop the cuts and save our public services.



People Before Profit Contingent On Nov 6 Dublin Protest

5000 march in 24/7 protest



THE 24/7 Frontline Services Alliance held a protest in Dublin over Government cuts, Wednesday 11th November 2009.

The 24/7 Frontline Alliance represents workers, including Gardai, nurses, fire fighters, prison

officers and ambulance personnel.

They spoke out, saying they deliver emergency and other vital services to the public, often at considerable risk to themselves. They are committed to protecting its members interests and

the services they provide to the public.

There are six affiliated unions and staff associations, including the Irish Nurses Organisation, the Prison Officers Association, the Psychiatric Nurses Association and SIPTU.

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A struggle that must be won

By KIERAN ALLEN

THE CONFRONTATION over the budget cuts is happening primarily because the political elite has spurned all advances by the union leaders who were willing to go to considerable lengths to restore a version of social partnership.

Under the slogan 'More for Less' a number of union leaders were prepared to allow the state to cut up to 20,000 jobs and impose new flexible patterns of work – if the pay cuts were taken off the table.

However, the scale of the crisis facing Irish capitalism means the state wants to impose a decisive defeat on unions – and is not interested in compromise, at least for now.

Similarly, a resurgence of grassroots activity particularly in the 24/7 Alliance reduced the room for manoeuvre of the union leaders.

Given this context, the stakes in this struggle are enormous. The unions must, therefore, fight with everything they have got from the start.

How French workers won

In December 1995, a strike of similar confrontation occurred in France. The Juppe government launched a pay freeze for public sector workers and an attack on the social security system to bring its budget deficit into line with the

EU targets.

Unlike Thatcher's attack on British trade unions – which was guided by the Ridley plan drawn up well in advance – Juppe began a frontal attack on unions on a broad front without much proper preparation.

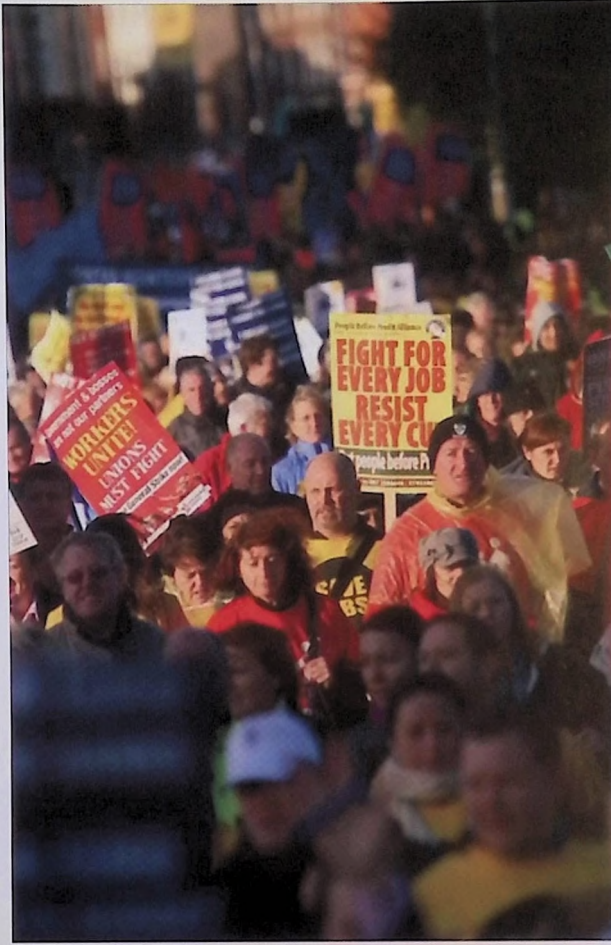
The first day of protest began on November 24th – coincidentally, the same day the Irish action begins. But it combined mass pickets of workplaces with a huge demonstration that brought half a million people onto the streets.

The strikes/demonstrations were then repeated on a number of other occasions, each bringing newer layers of workers into the struggle.

Mass action was supported by assemblies in different workplaces where the energies of numerous workers were channelled into discussions on the tactics and strategies for the struggle.

Soon, links were forged between different workplaces as delegations began to visit each other. This grassroots activity became the motor through which the movement was driven forward.

The strike was eventually a success. It was based on an escalating series of one day, co-ordinated actions that combined picket lines with demonstrations. The energy came from the grassroots who knew that they had to fight hard and fast.



Post union should restart strikes

By A CWU UNION area processing rep in Cambridge

LEADERS OF the postal workers' union were wrong to suspend strikes at Royal Mail.

It is testimony to the strength of the union that Royal Mail was forced repeatedly to return to talks – and to offer a number of concessions. But can we trust Royal Mail management to stick to their word and start serious negotiations?

All the indications are that we can't. Royal Mail management is as vicious as ever, and the pause in our strike action seems to have done little to discourage their attacks.

The secret Royal Mail presentation published in *Socialist Worker* shows bosses' clear intention to avoid any industrial action in the Christmas period, only to return to the offensive in the New Year when the volume of mail falls significantly.

Now many strikers fear that, despite weeks of rock solid action, the company will be able to use the "period of calm" promised by the deal to clear the giant backlog of mail.

The interim agreement signed by the CWU union and Royal Mail does not solve the key issues behind the dispute.

And the prospect of further hard-hitting action had both management and the government on the ropes.

In many delivery offices, management have so far refused to even meet with union reps to discuss resolving the chaos caused by attempts to "re-design" delivery rounds.

Our members in delivery offices across Britain and



Northern Ireland are still being threatened if they don't complete new rounds by working overtime for free.

Meanwhile our mail centres are still being deliberately starved of work in order to reduce overtime. The agreement states that offices that have had their work diverted to scab "outhouses" should have it returned to them.

These are clear breaches of the "interim agreement" and the union should insist that the company either honours its side of the deal or face the immediate resumption of national strikes.

Postal workers in my mail centre, like many others, see this battle as being about more than defending terms and conditions. It's about the future of the industry and the right to have an effective union to represent you. It's also about defending public services and stopping the privatization of Royal Mail.

Eason faces staff action over pay cuts

THE EASON chain of stores has announced that it is to impose a 12.5% pay cut on its 1,500 employees across its 38 stores throughout Ireland.

The attack is being resisted by staff, all of whom are in SIPTU. SIPTU described the proposed cuts in pay as "bordering on the immoral". Noel Maguire, union organiser, said staff can't afford to take the cuts. Eason is a rich company with assets that could be used to realise any necessary cash without attacking staff wages.

SIPTU held discussions through the Labour Relations Commission with Eason's management team, which was headed up by new boss, Conor Whelan, on Friday 6th November. Eason made no comments ahead of the hearing.

No agreement was reached and so the case will now go to an industrial relations tribunal at the Labour Court. A decision is expected in the next month.

In 2007, Eason made a profit of €1.2m but it recently filed accounts revealing a loss of €26.3m for the year to

29th January 2009, including a €22.4m charge due to the decline in the Irish property market. Turnover fell from €466.8m to €248.4m because of poor retail sales but also due to transfer of the wholesale news section of the business.

Eason pension holders were alarmed recently to receive notification that there are now insufficient funds to cover their pension entitlements. However, this alarm has turned to anger on discovering that a company director who is a major shareholder took €2m out of the pension fund – as he was entitled to by the company pension rules – before the notifications were issued. This is a clear indication of the company's ethos, which the current staff will have to confront to protect their pay.

Last year the company didn't pay a Christmas bonus; nor will they do so this year. The proposed 12.5% pay cut is on top of this. If the court rules in the company's favour it is likely the staff will be balloted over strike action. The feeling on the shop floor is militant.

Boots need a good kicking

By DETTE MCLOUGHLIN,

THE RESULTS of the MANDATE ballot of union members working in Boots stores throughout Ireland were announced on Friday 6th November.

Almost two-thirds voted for strike action. Boots has about 1,000 members working in 57 stores in Ireland. There is no closed shop agreement but roughly two-thirds of the permanent staff are MANDATE members. There was an excellent turnout of 89% for the ballot. MANDATE intends to serve notice of industrial action on Monday 9th November.

Although Boots make record profits year on year, the company is to enforce reduced pay and terms and conditions on its staff. Boots Ireland has an estimated value of €70 million and made €20 million in profit over the twelve-month period ending March 2009. The company is using the recession as an excuse to attack workers to make even larger amounts of profit. This is disgusting practice.

Now, although Boots has recognised MANDATE trade union since setting up in Ireland, it has decided that, from 17th November, it will no longer honour any of the industrial agreements made. In advance of this date Boots, has recruited new staff to open a new store and all the workers are on "reduced pay and conditions".

Some of the key changes include:
 ■ A 15.5% reduction of the top pay scale from €14.20 to €12

- per hour;
- A 25% reduction in public holiday pay;
- A 25% reduction in Sunday Premiums;
- Increased flexibility in week-end work for full time staff.

One of the shop-stewards told *Socialist Worker* how the Boots management really came down on the union members at many of the stores and tried intimidating them by phoning them at home to talk through management's side of the argument. Other managers even turned up at ballot centres to ask individual staff how they voted. The union officials have been barred from some stores. One senior member of management verbally abused a MANDATE official. At one Boots store a list of the union officials' salaries was pinned up. However, the scare tactics did not work on the majority of union members and they were not deterred from voting for industrial action.

Gerry Light, MANDATE Assistant General Secretary congratulated the workers for what he called a very brave decision. Mr Light said that the union will gladly go back to the negotiating table with the company and would welcome the opportunity to attend the Labour Court. However, this does not appear to be on the company's profiteering agenda.

Now all the union members need to stick together, get on the picket lines, observe the strike and show solidarity with each other, as the company is notorious for harassing shop stewards and bullying individuals.

Revolt has come to the countryside

By SEAN MORAGHAN

IN THE words of one service provider in Kerry: "We say NO! No to cuts to social welfare, Rural Transport, Community and Voluntary sector supports, RAPID, Community Services Programme, Education for young people with disabilities, minimum wage and Christmas bonus for the poorest in Ireland. These proposed cuts have a strong anti-rural bias and we won't take them!"

And we say YES! Yes to capping earnings by fat cat TDs and Civil Servants on at least €100,000 per year, inclusive of all expenses and perks. Surely they can live on that? There are savings to be made but we must all work together to come up with solutions, not penalising the most vulnerable."

Worker and community militancy, previously a long-standing feature of urban life is now part of rural life. During the Celtic Tiger, people in rural areas received minor improvements in the provision of some community services. But at the same time, health care was run down and services were removed.

Now the Recession and cutbacks threaten to remove social care services that people expected as a right and to make local hospital services worse and more centralised and distant from the public.

Factories which opened and appeared to provide good jobs have now shut down or have transferred

their operations to more profitable locations abroad. Suddenly, jobs and social care provision that people thought they had secured have been removed and barely tolerable services have been further downgraded.

That's why the culture of protest has spread to rural Ireland. And leading the defence are the Community Sector workers and local hospital protest groups. The last couple of years have seen surprisingly large health care demonstrations in even small towns and the advent of protests at the constituency offices of many TDs.

In Tralee, previously untouchable TD Tom McEllistrim was subjected to a ferocious barracking over the first round of Public Sector wage cuts; and a recent protest called to support the retention of disability services was attended by hundreds.

Continuing education to Third Level, and the ubiquity of satellite TV, means that the rural population are exposed to ideas as never before. The hegemony of Fianna Fail/Fine Gael is crumbling.

If you talk to members of the public now about how Fianna Fail used to be the party of "the small man" in DeValera's time but is now in bed with Big Business, people will nod vigorously in agreement.

The decline of FF and an openness to Left-wing ideas is now a reality. It's an opportunity that must not be missed by the Left in Ireland.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

<p>Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and endangering the planet.</p> <p>A new society can only be constructed when the workers take control of the wealth and plan its production and distribution for human need and not profit.</p> <p>REVOLUTION The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The courts, the army and police exist to defend the interests of the wealthy.</p> <p>To destroy capitalism, we need to remove the present state structures and create a workers' state based on much</p>	<p>greater political and economic democracy.</p> <p>AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR War is a constant feature of capitalism today as the imperialist powers try to dominate the earth.</p> <p>The "War on Terrorism" is a crude device to attack any country which threatens US military, strategic or economic dominance.</p> <p>END RACISM AND OPPRESSION We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the</p>	<p>working class.</p> <p>We are for full social, economic and political equality for women.</p> <p>We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.</p> <p>FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Brown government.</p> <p>Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'.</p> <p>We want to see an Irish workers republic where all</p>	<p>workers gain.</p> <p>Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!</p> <p>FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY To win socialism we need to organise in a revolutionary party.</p> <p>This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system.</p> <p>We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.</p> <p>We stand for fighting trade unions and for independent rank and file action.</p>
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INTERVIEW

World leaders do nothing to stop climate change

Campaigner Jørn Andersen spoke to Socialist Worker about the protests that will greet world leaders at the UN climate summit in Denmark

Jørn Andersen is from the Climate Movement in Denmark – known as Klimabevægelsen. He is also part of the coordination group of the 12 December Initiative – a broad coalition of organisations preparing for the demonstration at the United Nations (UN) climate summit in Copenhagen on 12 December.

THE KYOTO Protocol, which is due to expire in 2012, commits a number of countries to targets for cutting carbon emissions.

Copenhagen is the last time that a meeting at government level will take place before Kyoto expires.

Many won't be surprised that our governments are throwing away the chance to stop climate change.

The fight against climate change has exposed the gaping hole between the needs of ordinary people and the priorities of world leaders.

What preparations are being made for the protests in Denmark?

In December last year climate movements in Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and Britain, together with Friends of the Earth Europe, sent out an open invitation for a Global Day of Action demonstration in Copenhagen.

Uniting such a broad coalition around specific demands is not an easy task. But, we are all united on several things – the need for urgent and ambitious solutions based on global justice, and on social justice.

So there is a main slogan, "Planet First – People First".

Cities around Europe will hold local demonstrations on 5 December. These will be built at the same time as mobilising for Copenhagen on 12 December.

During the summit there will be a Climate Forum 09 – an European Social Forum-like alternative summit with debates, exhibitions and teach-ins. The Climate Forum will decide on a declaration to be presented to negotiators as well as to participants in the demonstration.

What reaction have you got to the call for a protest?

Politicians, the media and the police have so far focused on

saying that anybody protesting during the summit is a potential troublemaker. They have painted an image of thousands of "violence prone loonies" coming to Copenhagen to "smash the city".

They are trying not to talk about their inability to do anything seriously about the climate crisis. So they try to blame the protesters.

What will happen at the UN meeting?

The main conflict is between the peoples of the world, who are increasingly demanding solutions to the climate crisis, and the world leaders, business leaders and neoliberal ideologists, who want "business as usual".

But they know they can't continue to do that forever – so they talk a lot.

World leaders say they want to reduce carbon emissions.

But they don't want to do it now.

They want to set targets for 2050 – or maybe 2020 if they are non-binding.

We should be clear that the UN climate summit will not solve the problem.

Their 'solutions' are a continuation of the market based "solutions" set out in the Kyoto Protocol, which after ten years have failed miserably in making real reductions where it matters.

The deal will be non-binding and it will not be based on principles of social and global justice.

We need to spread the arguments for fair, ambitious and binding climate action outside the present green and climate networks.

We need to put concrete demands on our own politicians. And we need to involve much bigger forces in the process.

After the summit lots of people will realise that world leaders didn't solve the problem, and the argument for "action from below" will make sense.

The lies Lenihan's

By RORY CONNOLLY

AS BRIAN Lenihan prepares his December budget, the battle lines between the rich and the rest of us are hardening by the day. The key issue in dispute: who is going to pay to get the country out of the mess it is in – 'them' or us?

It's abundantly clear where Lenihan and his cronies stand.

Their argument runs like this: *Ireland is broke and the government is now spending so much more than it is collecting in taxes that tough medicine is urgently needed. The rich can't afford to pay more, so the answer has to be pay cuts for public sector workers, welfare cuts for the sick and the unemployed, pension cuts for the elderly, and a lot fewer jobs for state employees. There is no other way.*

This mantra has been repeated so frequently, and by so many, that you could be forgiven if you started to believe it.

Big lies, when told often enough, become accepted truths, and never before have economic decisions been so blatantly driven by lies.

Lenihan himself acknowledged in a recent interview that economics is not a neutral science but is, rather, "about making decisions on how society's wealth is to be divided."

And Ireland's wealth is divided more unequally than almost any other developed country; a position Lenihan is intent on maintaining.

In a budget warm-up speech at the end of October, he declared that the rich were already taxed to the pin of their collar and that it would be futile, and even unfair, to try to squeeze more out of them.

There was, he said, "no pot of gold that can be raided from the wealthy that can solve our difficulties." As such, "soaking the rich" just wasn't an option.

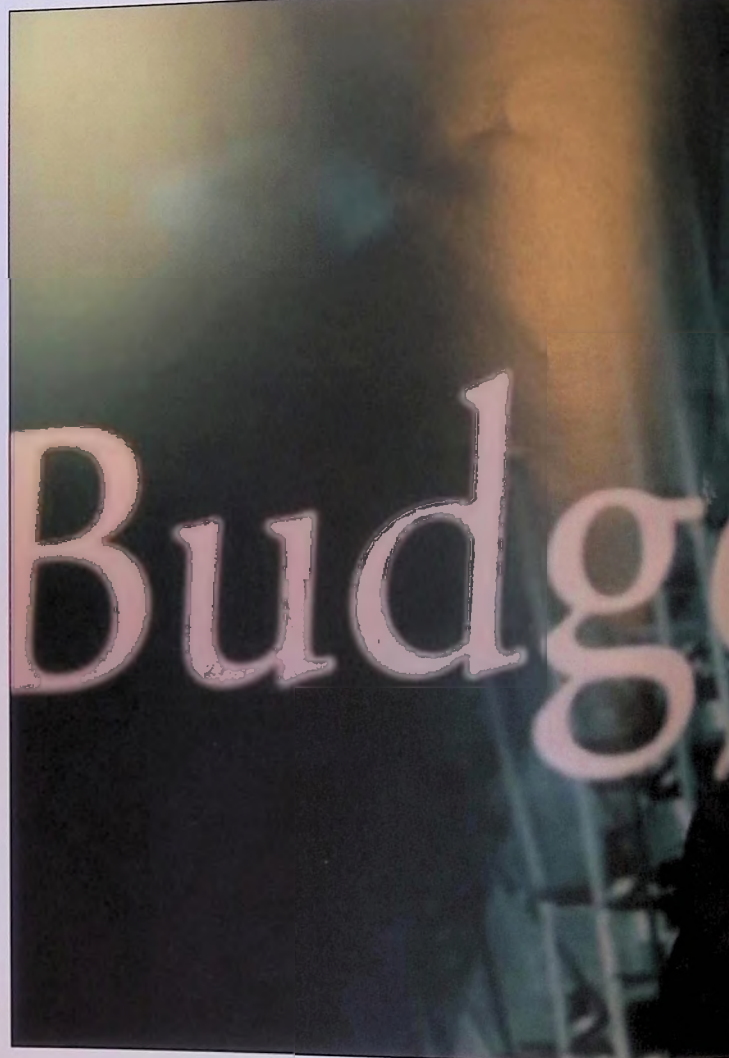
Lenihan's comments earned him prolonged applause, and not surprisingly since he was addressing an audience of chartered accountants, people who spend their time helping wealthy clients *avoid* tax.

But Lenihan's assertion that the wealthy can't pay more is a massive lie.

Within hours of him telling us the rich had been squeezed dry, news broke that one of the country's wealthiest men, Sean Quinn, had just distributed €200 million in dividends to his children.

Even with the recession, the amount of wealth that is concentrated in the hands of a tiny number of very rich people is mind-boggling.

And they were encouraged to accumulate this wealth by using a vast array of tax avoidance schemes over the last decade, mostly spawned by



the darling of big business, Charlie McCreevey, when he was Finance Minister.

According to the Bank of Ireland's annual wealth survey for 1995, when the Celtic Tiger was in its infancy, the richest 1% of the population owned a stunning €25 billion between them.

But the 2007 wealth survey revealed that the richest 1% had *quadrupled* their wealth and were now worth a staggering €100 billion.

It would take the government eight years to collect an equivalent amount in income tax from the entire workforce, and yet that amount of wealth is concentrated in the hands of just 1% of the population, 40,000 individuals. They wouldn't even fill half the seats in Croke Park.

Of course, Lenihan and his cronies claim that most of this wealth has evaporated since the crash, and there is nothing left to tax. But this is another monster lie.

The €100 billion figure quoted by Bank of Ireland *excludes* residential property, so it is money that has been cushioned to some degree from the worst effects of the crash.

When residential property was factored in, the richest 1% were worth a mind-blowing €170 billion.

And it is a nonsense to claim that wealth 'vanishes' when the price of property falls.

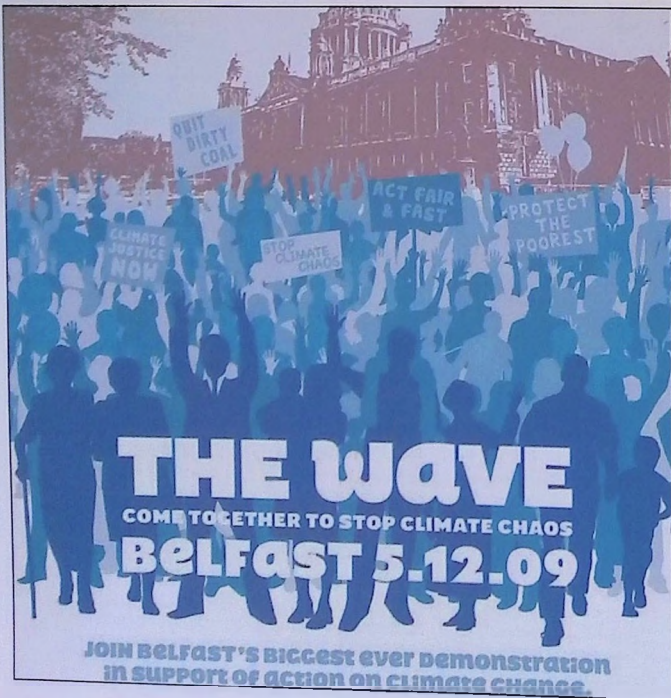
Certainly big developers like Sean Dunne and Bernard McNamara have seen the *value* of their trophy sites in Dublin's Ballsbridge and Ringsend fall from €379m and €412m respectively to around €60m each.

But remember that Dunne *paid* €379m to the Doyle hotel family for his site. That was real money going into their pockets.

Likewise, McNamara and his associates paid businessman Paul Coulson €412m for his land in Ringsend. The money didn't vanish, *it simply changed hands*.

But Lenihan has no intention of taxing this massive pool of ill-gotten wealth, even though a fraction of it would balance the books, and its owners would still be astronomically wealthy.

Lenihan has also ruled out a higher rate of income tax for the state's highest earners and again bases his



behind s budget



tricks of the trade, and get paid handsomely for their knowledge. It is all perfectly legal, but it is a world that is entirely alien to ordinary workers.

The advocates of swingeing pay cuts for public sector workers, as an alternative to higher taxes for the rich, have perpetrated another big lie: that because 'average' pay across all public sector grades is over €50,000, big pay cuts for all are warranted.

But this 'average' is bloated because of the enormous pay received by elite groups on the public pay bill like consultants, judges, politicians, senior civil servants, university top brass, and so on. Many in these categories pocket several hundred thousand a year.

There are 414,223 people on the public pay roll. 15,294 (3.7%) of them earn in excess of €100,000.

But 48.7% (201,727 workers) earn less than the average industrial wage of €32,000, and 44% of the total (183,629 people) earn less than €30,000. Almost 30% of the total (114,000 people) actually earn less than €20,000 a year.

Lenihan and his cheerleaders claim that cutting public spending is essential to re-balancing the nation's books. This is yet another lie.

Despite all the cuts in the April budget, the gap between government income and expenditure has actually widened. In April, Lenihan predicted a deficit for 2009 of €18.413bn, or 10.75% of GDP. Now the ESRI says the deficit will be €21.121bn, 12.9% of GDP.

Philip Lane, a leading economist who fully supports spending cuts, says that even with a €4bn cut out of government spending in 2010, which is Lenihan's aim in this budget, the deficit will fall to just 12.8% of GDP, an insignificant difference.

But if cutting public sector wages won't solve the crisis, it will achieve one positive outcome for Lenihan and his cronies: a massive shift of even more of the country's wealth from the many at the bottom of the pile to the few at the top.

This must not be allowed to happen.

The problem we face is that neither this government nor any alternative government-in-waiting involving the main parties is going to take serious money off the rich.

Nor will the rich voluntarily part with their loot.

So it boils down to this: either the workers pay the price with their livelihoods and jobs or we sweep away the tiny parasitic class who stuffed their pockets with €100 billion of the nation's wealth in the past decade, and in the process brought the country to its knees.

It's them or us.

– just over €4 billion rather than €6.55bn.

And when couples are treated as two earners, rather than one, Flanagan discovered that those earning between €30,000 and €100,000 a year contribute 59% of the tax take rather than 48% as Lenihan would have it, an increase of almost €1.5 billion.

So the tax burden falls much lighter on the super-rich than Lenihan and his cronies would have us believe. As a result, there is enormous scope for greatly increasing tax on the top earners.

According to the latest Revenue figures, just under 47,000 people earn over €100,000, but 6,000 of these, or 0.3% of the working population, got between them 7% of all the income – an average of over €1 million each.

Yet at the same time, a massive 70% of earners get less than €50,000 a year.

And, unbelievably, there are still 110 separate tax breaks in operation in Ireland today – loopholes that are availed of by wealthy people to avoid paying tax.

Many of these people are advised by ex-revenue officials who know all the

ANALYSIS

Capitalism can't escape economic crisis

By BRIAN O'BOYLE

STRATEGIES FOR accumulation are always supported by an ideology, and when accumulation begins to falter, it is inevitable that questions will be asked about what went wrong. Economic crises challenge ruling-class legitimacy, and one response is to jettison those ideas that previously offered an ideological defence.

This can be seen, for example, in the crisis of the 1970's, when the (40-year) Keynesian hegemony was quickly replaced by an ultra right-wing variant of neoclassical economics. While the Keynesians had argued that a trade-off existed between unemployment and inflation, Friedman's monetarists pointed to the existence of stagflation (inflation and stagnation) as proof of the folly of trying to interfere with the market. Control of the money supply (to control inflation) was all that was needed, and the economy would find its optimal position automatically. The reality of course, was very different. However, the crucial objective had been achieved, as the capitalist class now had a new set of ideas to prop up their legitimacy.

This monetarist interlude was quickly replaced by a more robust ideology known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism had two parents not one, as Friedman's emphasis on the efficiency of markets was bolstered by Hayek's insistence that capitalism expressed our deepest desires to be free. Neoclassicism was thus amalgamated with ideas from the Austrians and both were pressed into ideological service by a newly emboldened capitalist class.

Neoliberal ideology remained intact for twenty five years, as free-market capitalism became the overwhelming orthodoxy in policy circles. Margaret Thatcher's insistence that capitalism had no alternative was widely accepted, and the 'laws of the market' defined the bounds within which everyone could act.

Today the idea that markets adjust to an optimal equilibrium is obviously difficult to sustain! We are,



Children in Asia eating scraps from the street

after all, in the midst of the biggest crisis for seventy years, and even staunch defenders now accept that markets become utterly destructive if left to their own devices (see for example Martin Wolf in the *Financial Times*). Markets must be regulated, and those that have undermined the system must be forbidden from doing so in the future.

Fine words indeed, and when these are added to the massive stimulus packages currently being implemented, one could be forgiven for thinking that Keynes had 'arisen from the ashes'. In Britain, commentators such as Will Hutton speak for many on the left when he argues that we are now embarking on a more left-of-centre (Keynesian) policy agenda, and that this should help to redress some of the dreadful consequences of free-market capitalism.

That governments are now extolling the virtues of managing the economy is no doubt true, but to expect that this will lead to a more just society is to fundamentally misjudge the nature of the relations between theory and reality. Bourgeois theory is little more than an ideological prop, and whilst the capitalist class may shift their allegiance from one to the other, the basis of policy making is always to sustain the conditions for capital accumulation.

Thus it was that, during the (so-called) Keynesian era, governments rarely if ever embarked on counter-cyclical policies, only doing so around the time that Keynesianism itself became discredited! Similarly in the neoliberal era, national governments (despite official pronouncements) continued to play a massively important role in sustaining

the conditions for accumulation to take place.

This job is well nigh impossible in a decentralised competitive economy and Nation-states must continually support the process if it is not to collapse. Capitalism is structurally unable to sustain itself, and even with government intervention the tendency is always towards instability and crisis.

This then leads to the need for competing ideologies. For just as the neoclassical school can offer a strong justification for markets in a neoliberal upswing (best allocator of resources; maximizes welfare, etc.), it becomes less than impotent in the collapse. This is where the alternatives come in, as Keynesianism is used to justify massive stimulus packages for those deemed 'too big to fail'. While for the rest of us, the recession becomes somehow a 'blessing in disguise' as Austrian ideas about 'trimming the fat' and 'creative destruction' come to the fore.

One of the perversions of capitalism is that crises are functional to its long-term survival, as mass destruction (of capital and livelihoods) allows the system to restructure itself. Boom and bust are inherent features of the economic system, and bourgeois theory reflects this, with ideological props for each of these periods.

Hutton may well rejoice at the new found acceptance of Keynesian intervention, but as this policy has been implemented, it has become clear that what we actually have is Keynesianism for capital (massive transfers from working people to sections of the capitalist class) and neoliberal austerity for the rest of society. Mary Harney famously argued that we should follow (neoliberal) Boston as opposed to (social democratic) Berlin in letting markets dictate our economic future.

Today, she argues that 'the time for ideology is passed'. Indeed it has, for today the government must get on with the serious task of convincing capital that Ireland is 'open for business' regardless of what the theory says.

COMMENT

Israel's war crimes exposed



By KAMILIA HERTANI

THE RECENT UN report condemning Israel and Hamas for war crimes in the January 2006 war has sparked controversy and debate on impartiality and accountability.

However perceived, it has been one of the most damning reports of Israel's misconduct at international level, an attitude seldom adopted by leading officials.

Judge Goldstone and his fact-finding team uncovered the aggravation committed on the civilian population, with the deliberate targeting of innocent men, women and children.

Professor Christine Chinkin, a member of the fact-finding mission in Gaza, outlined their evidence during a recent trip to Belfast. She noted the deaths of families; illegal detentions; destruction of infrastructure; disproportionate use of force; deliberate targeting and shelling of UN-marked buildings, as well as mosques and schools; and the unacceptable siege and economic blockade imposed by Israel. She pointed out that Israel's right to defend itself does not in any circumstance justify collective punishment and crimes against humanity. Their fact-based evidence and testimonies have further countered Israeli justifications that they abided by the laws of war.

Typically, Israel has rejected all of the claims, labelling the report as one-sided and refusing to participate in the investigation. It has called on its key ally, the US, not to endorse the report at the Human Rights Council. Obama's rhetoric of a democratic world without human rights abuses is yet to be seen and translated into action.

Goldstone, a prominent judge, has been at the brunt of the attack from the US

and Israel. They doubt his impartiality, which he has called on them openly to prove. Evidently, their spurious claims cannot be justified and are merely a way to demoralise and debase the credibility of the report.

Hamas has reiterated its right to resistance in the face of the occupying power and welcomed the international community's effort to listen to the Palestinian people and witness first hand the devastation and destruction.

The publication of this report is a watershed in the drive for legal accountability, an aspiration that has been actively and rigorously sought by the Palestinian people.

This is juxtaposed with the role of Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, who, under pressure from the US, delayed a vote on the report to appease Israel.

The UN General Assembly have recently voted in favour of a resolution endorsing the report. Referral to the International Criminal Court would ensure accountability for victims and set a precedent for crimes against humanity not to go unpunished.

Will this happen? A sceptic view is widespread as the UN has shown, even in the furor over this report, its own futility and lack of power and further emphasised Israel's impunity. Countless UN resolutions against Israel's illegal, apartheid policies and actions have gone unnoticed which leaves little faith in prosecution.

The report has publicised Israel's gross violations of international law and international humanitarian law at a prominent level. However it will take mass action by the Palestinian people and workers across the Middle East to get justice for Palestine.

BOOK REVIEW

Revolution from the barrel of a gun?



The Workers Party in the 1960s

**The Lost Revolution
The Story of the Official IRA
and the Workers' Party
Brian Hanley & Scott Millar
Penguin**

Review BY LIAM CUMMINS

FOR A generation that came to socialist politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Workers' Party – under its various names, Sinn Féin, Official Sinn Féin (although never 'officially' called thus), Sinn Féin, The Workers' Party, and finally the Workers' Party – played a central role in their political development.

Because of the party's importance, even those on the left who were not members or sympathisers found themselves defining their politics relative to those of the WP. It is still the most significant left wing party to have been built in Ireland. At its height, it had seven TDs, an MEP, Proinsias De Rossa, who was also a TD, and numerous councillors. Its activists and supporters played a very significant leadership role in the building of the huge PAYE demonstrations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many former members are still in leading positions in the trade union movement.

Throughout the 20th century, Left-republican rethinks emerged as a result of military or political defeats. This was the case in the 1920s and 1930s. The same pattern followed the failure of the IRA's Border Campaign in the 1950s. Influenced by returned emigrants or others who had come in contact with left wing politics, the movement turned to radical agitational politics. But as Cathal Goulding, then IRA Chief of Staff, emphasised, his objective was "to take the whole movement in that [radical] direction, not to

break away, to stick with it and to take the whole movement."

The agitation that followed took many forms and included fish-ins and action against the payment of ground rents aimed at the remnants of landlordism; the Dublin Housing Action Campaign which mobilised thousands in a campaign of occupations, squatting and street protests against slum housing conditions in the city; strike solidarity action. But sometimes this solidarity was in the form of military support, such as the strike at the Silvermines in Co Tipperary in 1971 where bombs were placed on the electricity transformers. A young IRA activist died following extensive burns suffered during this action. Similar 'active support' had previously been provided during the long-running cement strike, when premises, machinery and vehicles of two Dublin strike breaking construction companies were destroyed.

But not all republicans followed the new direction. In the early years, most of those who did not agree with the shift drifted away from the movement. Then the emergence of the Civil Rights movement in the north changed the dynamic. The violent state and loyalist reaction was unexpected. The attacks on nationalist areas, particularly in Belfast, clearly demonstrated the republican weaknesses and lack of military material to provide defence to the areas. Despite Goulding's stated wish to hold the movement together, a formal split occurred and the Provisional IRA was founded in late December 1969. Sinn Féin then split at an ardheis a month later over the proposal to change the movement's policy of abstentionism.

Initially, despite the split and

leadership hostility, things continued more or less as previously at a more local level. I knew one young activist in the southeast who continued to receive newspapers from both the Officials and the Provisionals, which she would diligently sell every week. The book mentions that at a local level, both organisations cooperated in actions against the British army, sometimes even passing material and intelligence between them. However following a number of politically disastrous actions, an OIRA ceasefire was declared in 1972. Continuing tensions within the Officials led to a further bitter split and the foundation of the IRSP in 1974. In the following years, the WP developed a Northern policy almost indistinguishable from the Unionists – the enemy no longer being imperialism but the Provos.

So where did it all go wrong? At the centre of Marxist politics is the idea that change has to come from below – that the emancipation of the working class has to be the act of the working class. At the heart of republican politics is a secretive, conspiratorial culture which leads to a form of radical reformism or change from above: we will do things for you, whether as military activists, trade union leaders or elected TDs.

That view of change from above also married neatly with a political attachment to the Stalinist states and their organisational version of Democratic Centralism, which in reality was all centralism and no democracy. While some privately expressed reservations about support and links with totalitarian regimes like North Korea, this was never freely debated in the party. As long as these regimes survived, this was just about tenable and

was made more or less palatable because of potential political and financial support. But the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 changed all that. Many former supporters of the Stalinist regimes rushed to embrace the market and western liberal democracy as the only alternatives.

But in its move to embrace the establishment there was the embarrassment of its continuing historical baggage – the Official IRA or Group B, as it by then described itself. Technically on ceasefire since 1972, it had never decommissioned and continued to be involved in military and 'fundraising' actions. Although never publicly acknowledged, in the period after the 1972 ceasefire, the need for a military organisation was sometimes justified in the South, and quietly accepted as a necessary requirement in the event of a Chile-type coup. In the North, the ceasefire was always conditional and the OIRA maintained the 'right to defend any area under aggressive attack by the British military or by sectarian forces from either side'.

Increasing media scrutiny of the links with the OIRA, combined with the collapse of the Stalinist regimes, led the WPTDs, with the exception of Tomás MacGiolla, to split and form a new party – New Agenda – that subsequently became Democratic Left. DL formed part of the FG-led coalition of 1994-97 and later, despite previous mutual hostility, merged into the Labour Party.

This is an interesting book, which once again highlights the point that, despite the often-considerable bravery and sacrifice of republican activists, radical change cannot come from within republican politics. Recommended reading.

Racism on the Border?

A new threat to the Common Travel Area

By MICHAEL POTTER,

Policy and Research Officer for the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) in Dungannon, an organisation which supports vulnerable people in the community, including migrant workers and people from a minority ethnic background.



IN WHAT appears to be an election speech to an increasingly xenophobic public, Gordon Brown has announced a reduction in the number of professions allowed to be recruited from outside Europe, a tightening of the 'labour market test', where jobs will have to be advertised for longer locally before firms can recruit outside the country, and a cap on student visas.

All of this comes hot on the heels of the announcement last week by the Immigration Minister, Phil Woolas, that European Union citizens from Bulgaria and Romania will be restricted for a further two years at least, extending their vulnerability to exploitation and destitution.

This has been part of a general move by

the Labour Government to close down the UK's borders to people from other countries. The Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act passed in July 2009. Amongst other things, the Act extended and narrowed the path to UK citizenship, while limiting access / rights of non-citizens. The Act also extended the powers of customs and excise officers to act as immigration officials (and vice versa), permitting them to check the immigration status of anyone entering the UK. In its original form, this changed the previous legislation, which exempted those travelling within the Common Travel Area, an arrangement by which people travelling between the different jurisdictions of the UK and Republic of Ireland could do so freely

without immigration checks. An amendment in the House of Lords protected the Common Travel Area in the final text of the Act.

However, the Policing and Crime Bill, in its final stages in the UK Parliament, empowers customs officers to check the immigration status of anyone entering the UK, only this time it has not been amended to protect the Common Travel Area. This may not have a significant effect on most travel, but it has the potential to be a problem for the UK's only land border: between the north and south of the island of Ireland.

Immigration checks between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are problematic. Everyone's immigration status will have to be checked, which will involve border posts, and will require anyone travelling between the jurisdictions to carry passports or equivalent documents. This would be against the spirit of, and possibly in violation of the terms of, the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The only alternative would be for officials to target people they consider unlikely to be UK, Irish or EU citizens. The name for this is racial profiling, which is illegal.

Concern about racism and racial profiling on the border is not new. Operation Gull, which entailed 'intelligence-led' immigration checks, resulted in people whose skin was not white being stopped and asked for identification. The new legislation will allow this to happen all the time.

The government is developing a process in which where people are divided between those who are considered to belong here and those who do not. Increasingly, this division has been according to who is and who is not a European citizen, marked by the colour of a person's skin. The more this distinction is made, the greater the likelihood and severity of racism and xenophobia in our society. The passing of the Policing and Crime Bill will create the conditions for this to be played out on the border.

To join the Migrant Worker Support Network, please contact Keelin McGartland at keelin@steoni.org.

Millions more turn against Afghan war

GORDON BROWN'S Afghan strategy lies in tatters. Millions of people want the troops brought home right now.

A growing number of military families are adding their voices to the anti-war movement as casualties are continuing to rise.

Lance Corporal Joe Glenton—a soldier who is refusing to fight in Afghanistan—was arrested and charged in connection with helping to lead the Stop the War demonstration on 24 October and speaking at the protest after being told this would be breaking orders.

The charges carry a maximum of ten years imprisonment, along with the threat of three to four years for desertion.

Army top brass are trying to scare soldiers into silence with the threat of prison sentences. But this will not change public opinion that this brutal war must end.

Brown's strategy appears more threadbare than ever. Some 232 British soldiers have now been killed in Afghanistan – 95 this year alone. Public support for the war is at an all-time low.



Loyalists in Northern Ireland want to corral people into silence by saying any criticism of the war is being disloyal to the troops.

But many family members of serving soldiers have to send food parcels over to their sons and daughters so they can have enough to eat. The reality is that young men are being sent over to kill and be killed in a brutal war for empire.

The best way to 'support the troops' is to get them out of harm's way: end the war and

withdraw them now.

The war has only brought death, destruction and misery to Afghans and has only led to greater destabilisation in the region.

People are not convinced that the war is worth the blood of British forces or the Afghan people.

A recent BBC poll showed that 63 percent of British people want the troops brought home as quickly as possible.

Gordon Brown is desperately

trying to argue that we need more troops and more years of bloody war to turn the situation around.

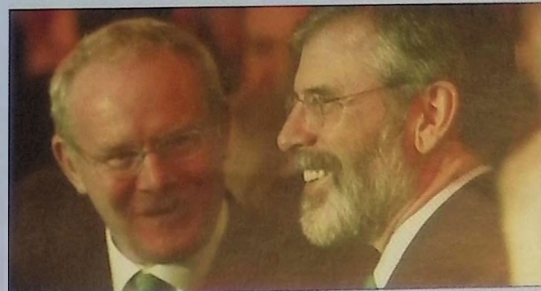
But since 2001, the war has lurched from one disaster to another. Meanwhile the stated aims of the war—to fight the "war on terror" and bring "democracy" to Afghanistan—have been lies. The farce of the recent elections showed that Karzai, the US and NATO-backed president, is completely illegitimate.

He is only in power because of massive corruption backed by warlords and the occupying armies.

With unemployment reaching 60,000, Assembly politicians in Northern Ireland are happy to let the recession be a recruiting sergeant for the army. The money wasted on war would be better spent on creating jobs for young people.

Assembly politicians who are also threatening to cut 370 million from the public sector this year should instead demand that the war is ended and that the money saved is instead used to keep our public services going.

Is Sinn Féin a party of the Left?



By EAMONN MCCANN

THE 2009 Brass Neck of the Year award goes to Jim Gibney of Sinn Féin for his column in the Irish News on November 12th.

Reporting on the ICTU rallies against cuts and in defence of the public service, Gibney wrote that, "Sinn Féin ministers in the executive have made their position crystal clear in opposing any attempts to cut front-line services or introduce privatisation measures... It was therefore disappointing to hear union leaders at the rally in Belfast accuse all the parties in the executive of being in favour of cuts..."

In fact, all the executive parties backed the budget, which has made savage cuts in services inevitable. The budget incorporates the three percent year-on-year "efficiency savings" demanded by the British Treasury. SF, like the DUP, has swallowed this whole.

They can go to Downing Street and bang the table for hundreds of millions to smooth the way towards devolution of policing. But there's no banging of tables for adequate resources for health or education or public sector jobs.

The 2008-09 budget for youth services has been slashed by seven percent by SF Education Minister Catriona Ruane.

She has also inflicted severe cuts on after-schools provision, which involved breakfast clubs, homework sessions, various extra-curricular activities, etc.

These are front-line services attacked by a SF Minister.

Massive job losses are threatened under the "review" of local government, through which the number of councils will be reduced from 26 to a projected 11. SF is not only going along with this but is actively promoting the scheme – and the job cuts. Their only concern has been the Orange-Green breakdown of the new arrangements.

In Derry, prominent Sinn Féiner and former mayor, Cathal Crumley, publicly told council workers to "shape up or ship out".

Hundreds of jobs have gone in the water service, as the private-sector "government-owned company", Northern Ireland Water (NIW), slims the operation down in

preparation for privatisation. Regional Development Minister, Conor Murphy, insists that NIW won't be fully privatised. But he and SF adamantly oppose taking the service back into the public sector, which is the only guarantee against privatisation.

Minister Murphy hasn't awarded a single roads contract which hasn't involved private finance.

In the Assembly in June, SF Assemblymen Dáithí McKay and John O'Dowd were first on their feet to welcome DUP Minister Edwin Poots' Local Government Bill, which eases the way for privatisation of council facilities such as leisure centres, refuse collection and recycling depots.

This is not to suggest that SF is more gung-ho than the other Executive parties about cutting frontline jobs and privatising services. They are much of a muchness. The SDLP may be marginally to the Left of SF, but it's a close-run thing.

Despite all this, Sinn Féin – showing as much honesty as Gerry Adams insisting he was never a member of the Provisional IRA – presents itself as a party of the Left.

One reason for their brazenness is that Right-wing commentators regularly attack them for supposedly socialist beliefs. This is the same crowd who, with as much plausibility, denounce David Begg, Jack O'Connor, etc. as dangerous revolutionaries!

Political parties reveal their true colours when they are in office. In opposition in the South, SF can put a Left face forward.

But had they succeeded in forming a Coalition with Fianna Fail after the last election, they would have proven as tamely conservative as they are North of the border.

The excuse that, for the sake of the "peace process", they have to maintain an alliance with the DUP is bare-faced dishonesty.

They have been willing to threaten to collapse the institutions over other issues – policing, an Irish Language Act – but not over the interests of the working class.

Nothing more clearly demonstrates that SF is a Nationalist Party, not a socialist party. The Left should expose the likes of Jim Gibney every time they present a false prospectus.

Socialist Worker

Fight for every job —resist every cut!

SAMMY WILSON wants to slash public services to pay for the mess the bankers created.

Assembly politicians were willing to go to the wall over the devolution policing and justice but won't lift a finger to defend our public services. In fact they are wielding the axe with gusto.

They want to make us pay for the recession.

The NI Executive Budget for 2008/2011 introduced cuts of £1.604bn across all Departments in Northern Ireland.

Now the Executive is planning for an additional £370m in cuts before the end of the current financial year.

In the Belfast Trust alone, this will mean an extra cut



Flashback: Visteon occupation showed the way

in the order of £25m and the closure of 150 beds in the two largest hospitals in Belfast.

The threat of additional water charges has been raised again.

On November 6th, trade unionists across Northern

Ireland protested against the cuts and to defend our public services. Peter Bunting, ICTU Assistant General Secretary, spoke at the Belfast rally:

"We need to challenge the consensus that cuts are inevitable in our public serv-

ices. In a recession like this, the only source of demand in the economy is coming from the public sector.

We hear much about how well-paid the public sector is compared to the private sector, but tell that to a cleaner, or a classroom assistant or a

nurse, or a dole clerk."

"We do not recognise false distinctions between workers in the public or the private sector.

"The real pay gap is not between the private sector and the public sector in Northern Ireland; it's the 20% difference between private sector workers here and private sector workers across the water.

"If low wages created jobs, we would not have 350,000 of our citizens unemployed or economically inactive.

"Low wages create poverty."

The Assembly spends more on corporate welfare than it does on paying public servants. Consultants, PFI projects and service contracts take a bigger slice of

the public budget than the health workers and the fire fighters and the teachers and all the other public servants put together.

Extra money can be raised if the Assembly politicians are willing to tax the rich. Abolishing the cap on the regional rate would go a long way to raising the money.

On top of that, the Assembly should demand an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The money saved would more than fill any hole in the public finances.

None of the parties in the Assembly will raise these demands.

That's why we need a real alternative for working people—a party that puts people before profit.

NI worst child poverty in UK

By GORETTI HORGAN

THE REPORT on child poverty in Northern Ireland, written by Marina Monteith and I and published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, is not a good news story.

The report dug below the headline figures to show that child poverty in Northern Ireland is worse than in other parts of the UK.

It showed that, over a four-year period, one in two children in NI were living in poverty at some time and 21 per cent were in poverty for either three or four of the years (this is called 'persistent poverty').

The figures show that every other child in NI can expect to experience poverty at some time in their lives, while a fifth spends a significant part of their childhood in

poverty.

There are a number of reasons why there are such high levels of persistent child poverty here: there are not enough jobs—particularly outside Belfast; the jobs that are available are low-paid with no 'prospects' or hope of a pension.

In 2007, half of all men working full-time in NI earned less than £424.80 per week. This is just 85% of the UK figure of £498.30 and about £15 a week less than the next lowest paid region of the UK, the North East of England.

Part of the problem is that the North is promoted as a low-wage economy.

Invest Northern Ireland, the agency that promotes inward investment in the region, asks on its website: "Why locate in Northern

Ireland?"

The answer? "Northern Ireland provides one of the most cost-efficient business environments in Europe. Salary costs are up to 30 per cent lower than other similar European locations.

Labour costs are comparably lower than the rest of the UK and Europe."

When Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness visited the USA recently, Robinson emphasized how little people in Northern Ireland were willing to work for—and McGuinness joined in, joking that they are willing to work for even less in Derry!

There are a lot of other issues highlighted in the report—including the high levels of people unable to work due to disability and ill-health.

Levels of mental ill-health in the North are particularly high and several studies have linked this to the legacy of the conflict.

As in the South, childcare is scarce and what is available is really expensive, making it difficult for mothers to work full-time.

Public transport is also scarce and expensive—which makes travelling to work difficult.

Over a quarter of households do not have access to a car while, at the other end of society, 30% of households have access to two or more cars.

38% of households in Derry and 29% in Belfast do not have access to a car, along with over half of all lone parents.

Treasury figures show 2006/07 expenditure per head on transport in NI

(£226) was less than half that in Scotland (£489).

Half of the report looks at what young people in a range of studies have said about growing up poor in the North.

Children growing up in poverty say they feel left out at school, that teachers "look down on" them and don't show them respect.

They worry about their families' inability to meet the hidden costs of education or to afford out-of-school activities.

Some activities, like the cinema, swimming pool, or bowling alley may be seen as luxuries, but when children and young people cannot afford these things, it often means they cannot meet friends outside of school.

As well as affecting their social lives, it can feed back into their feelings about being "outsiders"

at school.

But instead of making more facilities available for young people, Youth Services have suffered a series of cutbacks in funding over recent years, with Sinn Fein Minister Caitriona Ruane imposing an 8% cut in its 2008/09 budget.

Some young people have said that they feel like an "outsider" in school and even within their own area.

Most of these young people live in areas that experienced the worst of the Troubles; areas that remain in deep social distress.

In both Catholic and Protestant areas, they tend to be the victims of police harassment and paramilitary "punishment beatings."

The report is available to download free at www.jrf.org.uk.