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Socialist Worker

THE FIGHT BACK BEGINS



POLITICIANS, THE wealthy, and the media tell us we must be patriotic and pull together to save the country.

But behind the scenes, the establishment is looking after its own.

The government has just chosen twenty law firms to share out €2.5 billion in fees for servicing NAMA

That's more than half of what they grabbed from public servants in the Budget.

Just before Christmas Brian Lenihan announced that the pay of the top 250 civil

servants will be cut by *less* than those earning below €35,000!

Despite the bosses' propaganda, workers' resistance is slowly starting. Nearly 300,000 public sector workers have begun a go-slow.

Public offices will close at lunch times; some phones calls won't be answered; teachers won't work on after school hours.

These workers have been abused by a government that has cut their pay twice – and which refuses to rule out further pay cuts.

The corporate media have already started to respond by saying the work to rule is an excuse for laziness, conveniently forgetting when thousands of public employees worked night and day in terrible weather to help people cope with the floods and the big freeze.

There is nothing lazy about public sector workers – they are just angry. And they mean to resist.

Over the next month, the action in the public sector needs to be stepped up to strategic strikes and national strikes, bringing tens of

thousands onto the streets.

But beware! ICTU leaders may try to sell us out again by accepting 17,000 redundancies across the public sector – making everyone else work harder - in return for a partial restoration of the pay cut.

This isn't on!

There would be no need for all these cuts if we stopped the bank bail outs.

This is why *Socialist Worker* appeals to its readers to give full support to those fighting back.

What lies behind the water crisis?

The current water crisis, the result of years of inadequate investment in public infrastructure, has been seized on by advocates of water charges. The Privateers are close behind writes Liam Cummins

IT SEEMS extraordinary when our weather has been dominated by record rainfall, that stories of polluted water supplies and water shortages dominate the news.

There were the horrendous outbreaks of cryptosporidiosis in Galway in 2007 and Ennis in 2008 and more recently we've had restrictions - and even complete failure - of supply, with thousands in Dublin forced to collect water from tankers.

Although water falls freely from the skies, it requires considerable human intervention to collect, purify and deliver it and then to clean it when it becomes waste. But a recent report found that water treatment capacity in Athlone, Dublin, Galway and Letterkenny may be insufficient to meet development objectives by 2013. These huge urban centres, along with Mallow and Wexford, may also experience inadequate waste water treatment capacity.

It was already announced in December's Budget, that a system of domestic water metering is to be introduced, with charges based



on consumption above a free allocation. The argument is that our 'free' water does not encourage us to conserve supplies. In other words, we are to blame for wasting water.

Superficially the figures seem back this up. Daily domestic consumption per head is around 160 litres in Ireland. This compares to 150 litres in the UK where 25% of water users are metered, 126

litres in Germany, and 116 litres in Denmark where all water is metered.

But there is no evidence that lower consumption is a result of metering.

The introduction of quotas, which provide for limited free water, will require the installation of an expensive national metering programme. Even if the majority of homes could limit their usage

to below quota levels, the savings could be cancelled out by the running costs.

The money spent would be better directed to improve domestic water conservation measures. And there are plenty of options.

We don't need drinking quality water to flush toilets, wash clothes or cars, or water our gardens. There are proven systems for the collection of rainwater and waste water

for such functions. And if homes had proper insulation people wouldn't have left taps running to stop freezing. *It's measures like these rather than metering that account for greatly reduced usage in Germany and Denmark.*

In fact, domestic users are not the biggest wasters of water. On average 43% of drinking water is lost through pipe leakage and illegal connections in the distribution network. Our antiquated pipework is a direct result of years of under investment.

And one-off housing is a significant contributor to water pollution. Almost a quarter of all houses are one-offs, and most use septic tanks for sewage.

Privatisation

The long-term prospect, if charges are implemented, is, of course, privatization. This is exactly what happened in England and Wales when Thatcher privatized the ten public regional water companies. Privatized suppliers were to bring new investment and improve services. The direct opposite happened.

The number of households being disconnected soared, tripling in the first 5 years, with 18,636 households disconnected in 1994 alone, jeopardising public health. Prices soared by 46% in nine years while profits were up 142 percent.

“In recent weeks the penny has been dropping that something has gone horrendously wrong with the privatisation of Britain's water industry.

“When it was privatised in 1989 the water industry was hailed as the jewel in the crown of the Thatcherite privatisation programme...

“In reality, as a string of reports have confirmed... the water industry has become the biggest rip-off in Britain.

“Water bills, both to households and industry, have soared. And the directors and shareholders of Britain's top ten water companies have been able to use their position as monopoly suppliers to pull off the greatest act of licensed robbery in our history”.

'The Great Water Robbery' in the *Tory Daily Mail*, 1994

Union action starts across public sector

UNIONS ACROSS the public sector are starting a campaign of non-cooperation in opposition to government pay cuts. But doubts persist over the willingness of union leaders to escalate the action.

"The action is about damage reversal," said one CPSU activist in the Department of Social Welfare.

"Our members were totally demoralised by the behaviour of the union leaders last year.

"They called us out on a huge public sector strike on 24 November, but did not pursue it.

"We feel we have been whipped by the media and are not sure how to respond. But at least with non-cooperation, we are starting that response."

In January, the ICTU Public Services Committee – a small group of top union leaders – announced their campaign strategy to challenge the pay cuts.

They called for a low intensity strategy that would be co-ordinated on a joint basis by different unions working together.

In the **civil service**, the work to rule will mean that public buildings will open only for 'core hours,' closing at

lunch time.

Workers will refuse to cooperate with attempts to promote flexibility through a 'transformation agenda.'

In **teaching**, the work to rule means a ban on many extra curricular activities and a refusal to take up duties that arise from unfilled posts.

In the **health sector**, some nurses have already gone on a work to rule while IMPACT members will engage in a go slow in administrative duties.

The ICTU-led work to rule provides a new opportunity to galvanise union organisation at workplace level.

More union reps will be needed to implement it and more regular meetings will have to be called to ensure that everyone is on side.

In some areas, new activists are already joining union committees, displacing tired members who were formed in the partnership years.

But a work to rule will not defeat the government, as even the ICTU leaders acknowledge.

Their strategy document therefore calls for 'selective strike action to be used intermittently alongside a sustained work to rule non-cooperation



Flashback: Public sector strike on 24 November 2009

campaign'.

In some union quarters, this is taken to mean a min-max strategy - minimum cost for workers while maximising the pain for the government.

"You could look at bringing out the fire-fighters, for example, or the water workers.

"Or you could hit a key section of

The government is, however, aware of this danger and is moving to ban strikes in essential services.

This helps to explain Noel Dempsey's reaction to the air traffic controllers' strike, claiming that it should never be repeated.

The drum beat of the corporate media calling for a ban on strikes in essential services has also begun.

As is now patently obvious, the state and the media work together to attack and undermine every form of worker resistance.

A key activist in the fire service gave us his response,

"We just have to take them on. We can't keep retreating. The trade union movement should unite around a work to rule policy combined with strategic stoppages.

"But we should also make sure that there are national stoppages where the unions call everyone who has a grievance with this government onto the streets.

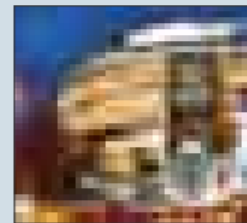
"I think that, maybe, we should have the first of these stoppages on the anniversary of the Easter Rising. That would show we mean business."

Judge for Yourself

ON SATURDAY, 16 January, around 50 people took part in an angry protest at the official opening of the new Criminal Courts of Justice on Parkgate Street in Dublin.

This vast new complex of concrete, glass and steel was built by a Public Private Partnership that will cost a total of close to €300m. From its plush benches fat judges on even fatter salaries, will dispense 'justice' to 'criminals' – for the most part, poor people who have offended against the rights of private property.

The new court's opening ceremony was attended by the



President, Mary McAleese, and the Lord Mayor, Emer Costello, but while they clearly enjoyed the no-expenses-spared reception, the message from this government to the residents of nearby O'Devaney Gardens is abundantly clear: make do with slum housing because you'll nothing better from us.

The flats in O'Devaney are in an appalling condition after decades of neglect by the Council. Yet while the Fianna Fail/ Green Party coalition is willing to spend millions on a luxurious but completely unnecessary courts complex, it won't spend anything to provide desperately needed decent housing for ordinary people living under its shadow.

All the parking spaces – including disabled spaces – in the vicinity of the new court house are permanently clogged with unmarked Garda cars. The errant cops don't pay to park – as they are supposed to – but they never get fined, clamped or towed away. Funny that.

In 2008 millionaire developer, Bernard McNamara (with his enormous mansion on Dublin's Ailsebury Road, complete with swimming pool beneath the retracting floor of his ballroom), pulled out of a €900m PPP deal with Dublin City Council leaving local residents of O'Devaney Gardens – and those in the St Michael's Estate, Dominic Street and Croke Villas communities as well - living in overcrowded, sub-standard conditions. McNamara simply decided he couldn't make enough profit from housing poor people, so he walked away from the deal – and expected the rest of the world to feel sympathy for him!

Colm Stephens, representing the local People before Profit Alliance who called the court house protest, told Socialist Worker, "Working class people who are hit hardest by savage cuts are being left high and dry without decent housing. It's another case of Government and Council policy failing to deliver to ordinary people because they can't guarantee that millionaire businessmen will get even richer in the process."

There is lots of anger locally. Joe Kelly, a local resident said, "I don't like the building at all. It's a symbol of State oppression and mis-use of power and wealth. Spending almost €300m on it while kids are being taught in leaky pre-fabs is appalling. I hope the judges when they look at the dereliction in nearby O'Devaney gardens are ashamed of themselves as they relax in the roof-top gardens."

Youth Projects fight threat of further budget cuts



Hundreds of young people and project workers joined a protest called by Dublin Focus on Youth outside the Dail on Wednesday 27th January against cuts to funding.

They demanded an immediate reversal of the 2009 cuts to Youthwork funding and funding for Youthwork projects and services to be maintained at 2008 levels for 2010 in order to maintain all frontline services to the most at risk young people in Dublin.

Photo: Paula Geraghty

Incinerator plans must go up in smoke

By VASCO PURSER.

AS DUBLIN City Council says it is pushing ahead with construction of the Dublin Bay incinerator, major cracks are opening up in its plans.

First, the incinerator is to be run as a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) which means a private corporation will be trying to maximize its profits by disposing of the city's rubbish.

In the contract signed with US firm Covanta, the four Dublin local authorities have guaranteed a supply of 300,000 tons of waste per year. If they fail to meet this figure, massive financial penalties apply. But as a result of recycling and recession, total waste will be well under 200,000 tons a year!

If it is to avoid the massive financial penalties due under the contract, this leaves DCC with an incentive to produce more waste - either by reducing recycling or importing waste.

Importing waste from another EU state is illegal so it would have to come from further afield. And, worryingly, that could still be cheaper than paying the



Francis Corr of Combined Residents Against Incineration

harsh penalties.

Second, DCC has just lost an important court case with private waste collectors. The private operators are now no longer obliged to bring their waste to the proposed incinerator.

As they are in this for profit as well, they will get rid of their rubbish the cheapest way possible, and that probably won't be by having it incinerated.

According to Francis Corr of Combined Residents Against Incineration (CRAI),

Third, the planning costs of this project are immense, long before it is built and starts losing money. To date €20m has been spent on consultants alone. Its footprint is the size of Croke Park, its height that of Liberty Hall.

The whole thing is to be enclosed in a steel and glass structure.

As they are in this for profit as well, they will get rid of their rubbish the cheapest way possible, and that probably won't be by having it incinerated.

"people are under the impression that it's already built."

But nothing is built, no building contracts or tenders have been submitted. CRAI, who organised a mass rally in Ringsend at the end of January, promise to keep up the pressure.

"Everyone is encouraged to join in. This is not just about Ringsend but affects all of Dublin. Bin charges will go up to pay for this scheme," said Ms Corr.

Some believe that DCC are in fact looking for a way out - without losing face - or money. But we can't rely on Environment Minister John Gormley to stop this madness, as he has said he will.

The Greens, just like Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour, support Private Public Partnerships in general, even though it is the pursuit of profit by private companies that ultimately means the rest of us pay more.

Gormley's proven ability to sell out every principle he once claimed to stand for, and then claim he's a hero, means we have to rely entirely on our own strength as the ones with most to lose if this goes ahead.

MAKING DISABLED CHILDREN PAY

IN A move that shows just how low Brian Cowan's government is prepared to go to grab money for the banks, they have just sacked an estimated one thousand Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) from schools around the country.

They say the move will save around €10m, but teachers and SNA representatives say the loss will cause incalculable long-term damage to children's lives.

SNAs support the class teacher by working alongside pupils who have recognized and serious disabilities.

Their work means that children with a physical disability or an intellectual disability like autism are no longer confined to Special Schools but can take their place in the ordinary classroom along with all other children which gives them a much needed boost.

But now the government has decided to drastically cut this service. It's done so by making it much harder for a child to qualify.

The children who are most likely to lose out are children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Schools are now being told that an SNA will only be provided for a child in this category if they are a danger to themselves or others.

This not only means that these individual children will suffer; their classmates will too.

Without an SNA to support a child and often help control their behaviour, the teacher will now in many cases be forced to divide his or her time between the class as a whole and the special needs student.

So all pupils will be dragged down as a result.

There is also a much stronger likelihood of disruptive behaviour in class, as frustrated children with behavioural disabilities lash out.

And these children will also now be more likely to find themselves excluded from schools too.

Schools will be far more reluctant to take them in if they fear supports such as Special Needs Assistance, won't be granted.

All this - across hundreds of schools - for a saving of just €10m.

And when 1000 Special Needs Assistants have no option but to sign on, the 'savings' will be wiped out. But the long-term damage to many people's lives will remain.

Action in hospitals

Workers Protest at Mater Private



Workers at Mater Private hospital in Dublin on a lunchtime protest in January

Photo: Paula Geraghty

WORKERS AT Dublin's Mater Private Hospital have voted overwhelmingly to take strike action against pay cuts.

The hospital is owned by CapVest, an investment company whose sole interest is enriching its shareholders. In 2009, they made over €10m in profit.

But despite profiting so handsomely on the backs of the sick, they seized the opportunity provided by the government's policy of cutting workers' pay to boost their profits further.

Just after the December budget, which slashed the wages of public sector workers, the Mater Private began

arguing that if wages at the Mater Private were cut, why shouldn't the private hospital follow?

On 22 December, they announced that wages in the private hospital would be cut by 5 to 10 percent from 1 January. On top of that, allowances would also be cut by 5 percent.

The pay cuts are in fact illegal under the Payment of Workers Act.

In order to be seen to comply with the law, employers have attempted to pressurise workers into 'voluntarily' agreeing to pay cuts.

But the arrogance of management led them to forego even the most fake form of

'consultation'. They simply cut pay!

The main unions at the hospital have responded in a determined and clear way to the pay cuts. Of the 213 SIPTU staff at the hospital,

200 voted to take industrial action from 1 February if management do not back down.

With the assistance of the bosses' organisation IBEC, the Mater Private has been

While trying to impoverish their workers, the owners of private health care in Ireland have amassed personal fortunes. A few years ago, the Mater Private's Chief Executive, Mark Moran, and his pals bought the Mater from the Mercy nuns for €42m. Moran and his pals later flogged the hospital to UK private equity firm Cap Vest, for €350m. The biggest Irish shareholder now is Seamus Fitzpatrick who is also a director of the Fianna Fail associated company, Conroy Diamonds, which is run by a Richard Conroy, a former FF Senator.

Shanakiel: No Pay Cuts Here!

WORKERS AT Shanakiel Hospital, a 44-bed private hospital in Cork owned by the Quality Healthcare Group, are continuing to resist the imposition of a 7% pay cut that was announced three months ago.

In November 2009 staff at all grades were written to informing them of management's intention to cut pay by 7% from February 1st 2010.

Management realized, however, that they would require written consent to alter the terms of their employees' contracts. Workers have so far refused to give their agreement to this.

In the meantime, Shanakiel continues to benefit financially from the long waiting lists at under-funded public hospitals by taking in patients on the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF).

Under this scheme,

right-wing Health Minister, Mary Harney, has managed to privatise vast swathes of Irish health care by running down public hospitals on the one hand while pouring taxpayers' money into private outfits like Shanakiel through the NTPF.

The owners of the Quality Health Care Group are not short of money.

They claim to have invested €5m in Shanakiel alone and they run clinics in Waterford and Belfast as well.

But they seem determined to use the current 'crisis' in the public finances to clobber their workers.

Management are now attempting to bully workers at the hospital by inviting them to meetings in small groups to 'explain' the rationale for the cut.

Nurses in the INO are refusing to attend these meetings.

MTL

Port company reneges on Deal

THE BOSSES of Marine Terminals Ltd, the Dublin Port company that employed ex British Army SAS men as strike breakers, appears to have gone back on a deal that ended last year's bitter dispute.

The dispute itself started when new contracts were issued last May and only ended with a Labour Court recommendation in October.

Under the terms of settlement both sides agreed to be bound by the recommendations of an independent arbitrator.

The arbitrator's report was issued in January – but the company has done nothing since. Further industrial action may therefore be in the offing.

acting in conjunction with the Bon Secours and Mount Carmel private hospitals, which are seeking to impose similar pay cuts.

Now the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) have voted overwhelmingly to take strike action in the Bon Secours hospitals from 8th February.

Over 100, hospital staff came out for a lunchtime protest on 20 January where they were addressed by the General Secretaries of SIPTU and the INO. But as we know from experience, workers have to keep up the pressure from below to leave our union leaders in no doubt that we mean business.

Join the Socialists

For the first time in Ireland, we have a Socialist Party. We are the only party that stands for the interests of the working class. We are the only party that is not afraid to fight for the rights of the poor and the oppressed.

Our programme is to:

- 1. End the current economic crisis and create jobs for all.
- 2. End the cuts in public services and social welfare.
- 3. End the domination of Ireland by multinational corporations.
- 4. End the exploitation of workers by employers.
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HAITI – NO NATURAL DISASTER

By MARNIE HOLBOROW

HAITI'S DEVASTATING earthquake has made Port-au-Prince a hell-hole of human misery with some 200,000 dead and three million displaced, many seriously injured or orphaned, facing disease, amputations, hunger and dehydration.

Everyone can see that practical help needs to pour into Port-au-Prince. But we also owe it to the Haitian people to understand *how and why* it became such a human catastrophe.

Any large city would have suffered extensive damage from such a serious earthquake. Yet an equally massive quake that struck California in 1989 killed 63 and injured 4,000. Damage to buildings was relatively small. Costly but decent building standards made a huge difference.

Crippled by Debt: From Slavery to Neo-liberalism

HAITI WAS not always poor. Saint-Domingue, as it was in the 18th Century, was France's richest Caribbean colony, the world's largest producer of coffee and sugar. Its wealth was created by thousands of slaves, forced from West Africa. French traders exchanged people for commodities, such as the timber they shipped to France.

Geologists say the resulting and almost complete deforestation made the land much less stable when earthquakes struck, resulting in much worse damage and loss of life.

France imposed such a cruel slave regime that thousands died from torture and terrible maltreatment.

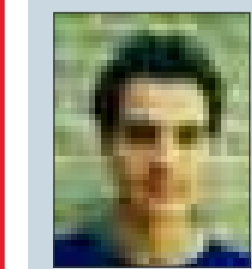
In 1804, the forefathers of today's earthquake victims carried through the only successful slave revolt in history, overthrowing their all-powerful colonial masters. Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the revolt – described by American black socialist, CLR James as "one of the most remarkable men of a period rich in remarkable men" – was an inspiration to liberation struggles thereafter.

Later ousted from power, L'Ouverture and his family were taken to France where he was imprisoned and starved to death on Napoleon's orders. The French never forgave the rebels. In the 1820's they imposed crippling reparations, lumbering the Haitians with a debt of 150m francs, \$21 billion in today's money.

By 1900, Haiti was spending 80% of its national budget on repayments and began to depend heavily on loans from US banks to meet the bill. In 1915, the US took over the country to keep the payments flowing.

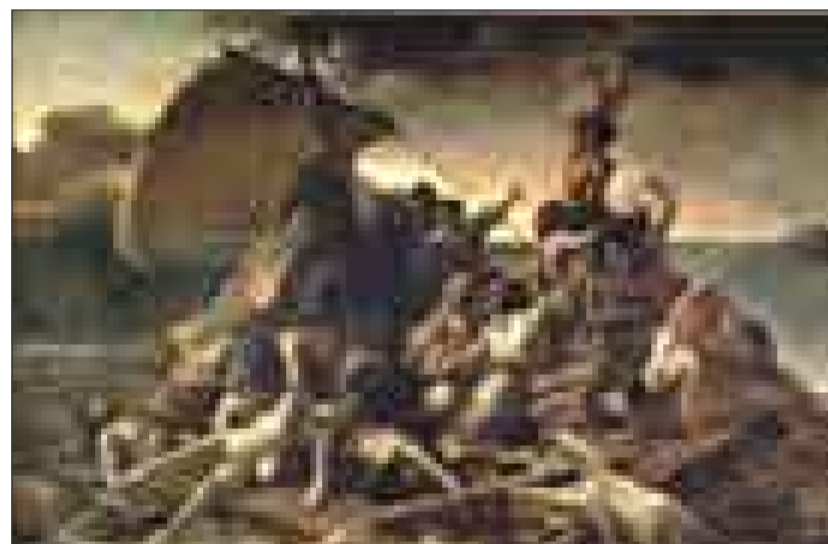
In time, the US saw Haiti as the front line against Cuba and communism in the Cold War. The Americans ruled through puppet dictators and their brutal militias, like Papa Doc and his notorious thugs, the Tonton Macoutes, who suppressed discontent with torture and murder.

Later, Washington imposed the dictates of neo-liberalism on Haiti, with devastating effects. Protective trade tariffs were removed, forcing many small farmers to leave the countryside and seek work in Port-au-Prince. The Americans wanted to shift labour away from subsistence farming into industries profitable for them. Garment sweatshops appeared and crowded slums like Cité Soleil sprang up beside them.



"Decades of neo-liberal adjustment and neo-imperial intervention have robbed Haiti's government of any significant capacity to invest in its people or to regulate its economy. It is this poverty and powerlessness that account for the full scale of the horror in Port-au-Prince today".

Prof Peter Hallward, Middlesex University



The Raft of Medusa painted by the French painter Géricault in 1819 revealed to French society just how cruel the French slave trade could be and became part of the abolitionist campaign in France. This was no natural disaster either. Below: Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue in 1804.



The Haitians still refer to this project as the "death plan."

And these are the densely crowded jerry-built working class slums that have been flattened by the recent earthquake, killing tens of thousands.

The US presence was always resented. In 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected. A priest influenced by left-wing movements sweeping Latin America, Aristide advocated social justice and popular self-defence against the army.

But the Haitian elite and its US backers staged a violent coup, forcing Aristide into exile. He agreed to return in 1994, when Bill Clinton promised humanitar-

ian help. But in the 1990's, the IMF and World Bank enforced "structural adjustment programmes" that increased Haiti's debt. Aristide accepted ever greater debt repayments. He was even accused of embezzling funds.

Through further tariff reductions, home grown rice couldn't compete with subsidised American rice and by 2008 Haiti, once a net exporter of rice, was now forced to import it from the US.

Foreign aid also increased foreign dependency. Aid was given as food, not in the form of skills for development.

Debt was crippling the country - in 2003 Haiti spent \$57.4m to service its debt - while foreign aid - amounting to \$39.21m - was stifling it. National development, education and health care were by-passed in this revolving door of debt and aid.

A country always prone to earthquakes, Haiti has been kept so poor by the neo-liberal agenda that it has never had funds to invest in measures that could reduce earthquake damage and save lives.

In 2004 the UN sent troops to occupy the country after Aristide - again seen as an obstacle to US interests - was kidnapped and removed to the Central African Republic. A puppet government was installed.

Today the IMF continues its stringent measures, even amid the devastation. It announced, to great fanfare, that it will lend a further \$100m to Haiti. This will add \$165m to the debt the country already owes the IMF.

The loan will have the usual strings attached: higher prices for electricity, pay cuts for public employees, etc.



US marines point guns at peaceful Haitian demonstrators in 2005

US MARINES TO THE RESCUE?

BECAUSE HAITI is widely seen as a "failed state" with corrupt and blinkered leaders, many accept that intervention from the West is necessary.

But this conveniently forgets that the UN has been running Haiti since 2004, and the present government has consistently implemented US plans for the country.

The UN already had 9,000 troops in Haiti, many from Brazil, along with 1,500 advisors and a budget of \$600m a year. These troops came to be resented as they patrolled the slums, guns at the ready.

Now Obama is sending 16,000 US marines, with their planes taking precedence over planes carrying aid, because of the supposed "risk of riots".

But many journalists on the ground in Port-au-Prince say that the aftermath of the earthquake has been marked by cooperation within communities, not crime.

While some desperate people have grabbed what food they can, the threat

to "law and order" has been grossly exaggerated.

Foreign troops had already entered the country to reinforce United Nations "peacekeepers" and Haitian police - among them former Tonton Macoutes - responsible for the indiscriminate killing of civilians.

Humanitarian assistance led by the Pentagon - instead of by civilian agencies - can look very much like a continuation of the same old military intervention.

US Southern Command has been entrusted with dominant decision-making. "Marines are definitely warriors first but we are equally as compassionate when we need to be," was how one spokesperson put it. This is about giving a new look to US intervention, Obama-style.

The unspoken mission of the US Southern Command, which is involved throughout Latin America, is to ensure the maintenance of US-friendly regimes - ie those committed to US neo-liberal

Experts know that shallow fault lines, like that under Haiti, are particularly destructive, yet Port-au-Prince had expanded into a city of over two million, with sprawling urban slums, as poor people fled the countryside to escape western-imposed economic hardship.

They didn't stand a chance. But one building left standing in Port-au-Prince was Denis O'Brien's new Digicel Headquarters. He told RTE that he'd made sure his building was built safely, proof that money can defy nature.

Haiti's poverty has been the focus of much media coverage - as if Haitians were responsible for their own plight. But much of the explanation lies in the actions of those in power down the years.

The country's history teaches a harsh lesson: it was the aftermath of French colonialism and US neo-liberalism that made the Haitian earthquake a mega tragedy.

Never Miss an Opportunity

NAOMI KLEIN sees the interface between mega-disasters and super-profits as part of the way that capitalism operates.

Corporations take advantage of the devastation to provide a clean slate for making mega profits. Speaking after the Haiti earthquake, she sees the same thing happening again.

The neo-conservative Heritage Foundation said it plainly: "In addition to providing immediate humanitarian assistance, the U.S. response to the tragic earthquake in Haiti offers opportunities to re-shape Haiti's long-dysfunctional government and economy as well as to improve the image of the United States in the region."

Former President Bill Clinton, UN

special Envoy to Haiti, certainly seems to understand the usefulness of this approach.

"As we clear the rubble, we will create better tomorrows by building Haiti back better," he says. He sees more privatisation and deregulation as the way to go.

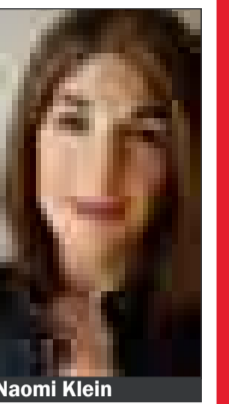
Clinton has already lured The Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines into investing \$55m on Haiti's northern coast, at Labadee. He hopes tourism for the rich will provide the basis for recovery.

One of these luxury cruise liners docked in Haiti three days after the quake. The owner saw no problem with sipping rum cocktails a few miles from the disaster area.

Haitian recovery, Washington-style,

represents a new sick chapter in shock doctrine capitalism.

Haiti does not need luxury liners or more sweatshop manufacturing. It needs schools and hospitals and sustainable agriculture, with local people making decisions and running projects themselves. It needs America off its back.



Naomi Klein

St Denis to the Rescue?



Denis O'Brien

IRELAND'S RICHEST businessman, Denis O'Brien, understands full well the opportunities presented by the Haitian disaster.

He's head of the Jamaica-based Digicel mobile phone group which now has 7.3m subscribers in the Caribbean and Central America. It is the leading operator in Haiti with, astonishingly, more than 2m subscribers.

O'Brien has been very prominent during the relief operation. He has been seen arm in arm with Bill Clinton calling for a new Marshall Aid plan. With a straight face he told RTE that Haiti needed "one

hundred Bernard McNamaras".

O'Brien's new found philanthropy corresponds with his search for new markets for his phones. He has offered €5m in aid to Haiti, but at the same time is providing €15m worth of 'free' mobile phone credit.

Digicel director, Lucy Gaffney, told RTE that O'Brien "saw Haiti as a great opportunity" as early as 2006. Now, she said, "we are quite militaristically giving out free mobile phones, along with solar chargers."

But when things settle down, O'Brien will start charging in a market cornered

through 'philanthropy'.

And he'll get more than a fat return. The mobile phone market there is set to expand way beyond ordinary Haitians. All the aid agencies, US marines and UN troops will be there for years to come, all needing a network.

O'Brien has useful connections to the NGO network. On the board of directors of Digicel is Leslie Buckley, who happens to run HAVEN, an NGO which builds houses and shelters. HAVEN is already in Haiti where they plan to build up to 10,000 new houses. But the NGOs, too, are part of the bigger problem.

NGOs Not the Answer

THE RESPONSE to collections for the Haiti earthquake has been overwhelming. Oxfam's appeal here raised €300,000 instantaneously.

Over €2.5m was raised in charitable donations in Ireland over a six day period. Such huge generosity from Irish people is an important act of solidarity.

The problem is, we do not control our contribution is used. Many of the smaller aid programmes and NGOs are run by energetic and dedicated people who want to effect change. However, the US military, who have taken effective control in Haiti, say small agencies are getting in the way!

Larger NGOs, like those running services throughout Kabul and Baghdad, can often be plain rackets that are highly remunerative for their bosses. They set up western enclaves alongside the people they are aiming to help and their grand lifestyles and SUVs stand out like sore thumbs.

In Haiti, NGOs have been the conduit of foreign aid for years. The official reason for this is that less of the money is likely to go missing through corruption, but still not enough of the aid reaches the poor. An old Haitian joke explains why: "When a Haitian minister skims 15% of aid money

it is called corruption. When an aid agency takes 50%, it is called "overheads".

The vast majority of Haiti's social services are run by domestic or foreign NGOs. They dominate the landscape but have made no difference to poverty levels.

Much of the early aid to Port-au-Prince consisted of "search and rescue" missions by undoubtedly dedicated, self-sacrificing individuals, mainly firemen from around the world.

But while massive effort went into pulling relatively few survivors from the rubble - with as many as 100 rescuers working in the full glare of the TV cameras to save one individual - just yards away people were left dying at the roadside in their hundreds, with no aid.

It's as cynical as this: high profile rescues keep the donations flowing. On a broader level, socialists need to be wary of NGOs. Despite the genuine goodwill of many who work for them, they dovetail conveniently with the wider interests of big corporations and sometimes occupying armies.

They claim to be non-governmental, but rely on government finance. NGOs often end up implementing official "US friendly" foreign policy to continue their funding.

HAITI – WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

- Cancellation of the debt still being collected in Haiti.
- No further imposition of neo-liberal policies through the IMF and the Inter-American Development Fund
- Grants not loans: support for aid campaigns that are based on local committees and volunteers
- Haitians in the US to be given protected status and all those held in US jails for deportation to be released immediately
- No involvement of US troops under the guise of humanitarian intervention



1994 US military intervention allows Aristide to return to power. The US removed him again in 2004.

policies.

The renewed military presence in Haiti will be used to pursue US strategic and geopolitical objectives in the Caribbean basin, objectives largely directed against Cuba and Venezuela

(ironically, the first nations to send help to Haiti).

Thus "emergency relief" is providing cover for another "surge" of military might. And behind the army, the businessmen.

The Profits of Panic

In the last few months hundreds of thousands of Irish people, and millions around the world, have been vaccinated, at huge public expense, against the threat of Swine Flu.

This disease was predicted to kill vast numbers in a terrifying pandemic. It never happened. Now the spotlight is on the pharmaceutical giants, who made a fortune selling the vaccine, and their relationship with the World Health Organisation who set the alarm bells ringing.

SANDRA BALL reports

A PANDEMIC is an epidemic of infectious disease that spreads through human populations across continents. When one threatens, the World Health Organization (WHO) establishes an expert group to decide on the severity of the situation and the response.

Obviously, the infrastructure in place to deal with such a crisis must be top-class. But with the recent 'outbreak' of Swine Flu the integrity of this infrastructure has been seriously questioned.

Danish journalist Louise Voller, along with German Social Democratic politician and public health specialist, Dr Wolfgang Wodarg, have probed the ties between the WHO and the pharmaceutical companies producing the Swine Flu vaccine.

Voller found that members of the WHO expert group are on the payroll of the pharmaceutical companies that are producing the vaccines, and complained, "there is not enough transparency on financial disclosure on the expert groups". This raises a huge question about conflict of interest and a potentially darker capitalist agenda.

Wodarg says drug companies collaborated with WHO officials to deliberately create a "campaign of false disaster" over Swine Flu. He claims that the threshold for the alert was intentionally lowered by the WHO allowing a 'pandemic' to be declared despite it not warranting this status.

He has been supported by members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) who unanimously voted on his recommendation to investigate this matter officially.

Now consider the bigger picture.

If the WHO and the big pharmaceutical companies have hyped up panic and fear over this virus, then pushed an insufficiently tested vaccine onto the public and put public health at risk - all for private profit - we have to ask is this how they normally operate?

While mainstream media ran with the fear campaign, independent alternative media have reported: the suspicious content of the vaccine, including nervous system disrupters and inflammatory chemicals. They exposed the millions in profit made by the pharmaceutical companies, and the military-style mass inoculation carried out in parts of the world.

It could be years, even decades, before the health ramifications of this vaccine are discovered. In the meantime, when we face the next threat of a pandemic, if the same corrupt infrastructure, dominated by profit-driven pharmaceutical giants, remains in place, then public health, and the lives of millions, could be in serious jeopardy.

In order to promote their patented drugs and vaccines against flu, pharmaceutical companies have influenced scientists and official agencies, responsible for public health standards, to alarm governments worldwide.

"They have made them squander tight health care resources for inefficient vaccine strategies and needlessly exposed millions of healthy people to the risk of unknown side effects of insufficiently tested vaccines".

Resolution from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

OBAMA ONE YEAR ON:

Can 'Good Men' Change the World?



By PATRICK MCKENNA

IN THE end, victory belonged to the fresh-faced man of the people. He'd promised to go to Washington and sort out America's health care crisis with bold new leadership, and he'd won the election alongside an energised grassroots movement that had caught the national imagination. As he made his victory speech, the crowd chanted "Yes We Can!"

IT SOUNDS familiar, but this is the story from supporters of Scott Brown, the hard-right Republican who won the recent race for Democrat Ted Kennedy's old Senate seat.

Brown's victory has dealt a serious blow to Barack Obama's health care reform plans, and, as a consequence, to the long-term health prospects of fifty million broke and desperate Americans. Stocks of big health care companies soared at the news.

One year on from Obama's inauguration, 'Change We Can Believe In' is in short supply.

Hundreds of billions in public funds have gone into the restoration of Wall Street's political and economic supremacy, while some 26 million Americans remain out of work.

Health care reform plans, for all the tough talk, have been largely shaped by the interests of predatory private insurance companies.

But at least they're debating the power of private health care companies; the continuing rise in public funding for the war industry under Obama goes largely unremarked.

Any restraints to corporate power are being removed. The Supreme Court has recently "thrust politics back to the robber-baron era of the 19th century", according to the *New York Times*, with a ruling that corporations can "spend as much money as they want to elect and defeat candidates".

One answer is that individuals, even US presidents with supposedly good intentions, don't determine the fate of nations. Obama certainly looked the part.

So what happened to the promise? How come, a year after Obama swept to power on a wave of radical hope, the tide has turned against him and a nasty right-winger like Scott Brown becomes the new pin-up?

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The man who was going to rattle the power structures in Washington and Wall Street and deliver a bright new tomorrow.

But, even if he had been as radical as he seemed, and as many of his supporters believed him to be, he wasn't going to deliver.

Real power in America, as in any capitalist country, resides with a nameless, faceless, unelected and unaccountable class: those who own and control the country's vast wealth.

Obama has never even hinted at uprooting them. Nor could he have, even if he wanted to, without a massive uprising of America's working class and dispossessed.

And that's not what Obama stands for either.

Obama's image has been produced by top marketing experts, and its one that invites workers to think he is on their side, even as he takes the side of corporate power.

Bizarre though it may seem, many believe that Scott Brown's victory in Massachusetts can be explained by Obama's 'socialism'.

The argument runs like this: Obama moved too far and too fast to the Left, alienating middle America and creating the backlash that propelled Brown to victory.

The opposite is the case. Obama compromised with corporate power and imperial warmongering at the outset of his presidency. In electoral politics, disappointment quickly turns to disillusionment. It's the same everywhere.

If Obama's first year in office teaches anything it's that real and radical change doesn't come by electing great men to perform heroic acts.

The Obama years may be remembered as just an interlude in the destruction of the American working class unless workers can organise to wrest power from the ruling class.

Among other things, this means working to shatter any illusions there may still be about Barack Obama.

The Canonisation of Brian Lenihan

By KIERAN ALLEN

IN A social crisis, there is often a yearning for a 'strong man' - a stern father figure who takes 'tough decisions' for the good of all.

Brian Lenihan has been chosen for that role. But he's not just 'tough'. He's a saint, and his canonisation has been in the making for some time.

In 2008, after he announced the guarantee scheme for the banks, the *Irish Independent* carried an obsequious article under the headline 'Lenihan's audacious deal has earned him the nation's respect'. It told how "the adrenaline of the fray was coursing through (Lenihan's) veins" as he was interviewed, and how he "had done a lot to lift the morale of a deeply worried people". Another journalist present reportedly commented, "It is one of the rare occasions when I could say I was proud to be Irish".

Lenihan's battle against illness has added to the image-making process. Even Vincent Browne has claimed that the country needs Lenihan because "if he has now to withdraw... even temporarily, our problems are graver, considerably so".

This adulation is misplaced. On a human level, most people sympathise with anyone fighting cancer. But this is an entirely different matter from Lenihan's record and policies.

Lenihan typifies the new elite in Fianna Fail, a party that once scorned the trappings of 'old money' but now apes the traditions of the British ruling class. His personal history reflects the change. He was born into a political dynasty. His father and grandfather were both FF politicians. His aunt and brother still are.

But despite FF's rhetoric of republicanism, Lenihan went to a private school, Belvedere College, followed by Trinity and later Cambridge. Now we're told he's a genius because he plays Chopin on the piano, speaks French and knows Latin.

At first as Minister for Finance, he displayed extreme incompetence combined with the undisguised politics of privilege. He was easily duped into the original bank guarantee scheme. He even claimed "it was the cheapest bank bail out in the world" although it has cost untold billions.

BANK INQUIRY WON'T REVEAL TRUTH

By RORY CONNOLLY

SO, AFTER all Fianna Fail's arguments as to why an inquiry into the banks would be unwise and unhelpful, we are going to have one anyway.

But it was always clear that Brian Cowen and his old pals the bankers and developers, would never agree to an inquiry that might reveal the truth: how they plundered the nation's wealth then mugged the workers who created that wealth so these chancers could hang on to the loot.

The government's decision to bail out the banks, starting in September 2008, represents the biggest transfer of wealth from workers to the owners of capital ever seen in this country - €80bn and counting. Yet the banking enquiry has been told this transfer of wealth is off limits. It can only look at what happened before September 2008.

You can bet the inquiry's starting point will be equally restrictive. A two year time span has been suggested, starting in 2006. Two decades, and then some, would be more appropriate.

We know bank regulation here failed utterly, but the rot set in long ago.

In 1976 a Central Bank inspector discovered that a bank run by Taoiseach Charles Haughey's accountant, Des Traynor, was hiding



millions of pounds in secret Cayman Island accounts so wealthy Irish business people could evade tax. The trouble was, one of those accounts belonged to Ken O'Reilly Highland, a Director of the Central Bank, the bank that regulated all the other banks. Instead of digging out the rot, the report was washed. It was 20 years before the 'Ansbacher' accounts were re-exposed.

Fast forward a decade to 1986. The neo-liberal deregulation of world finance that year allowed capital to flow freely around the globe. Money grubbing Haughey responded with the International Financial Services

Centre in Dublin. Its aim? To suck in as much loot as it could.

The IFSC competed for business all over the world and to up its game it was endowed with 'light touch' regulation.

"Compliance with the regulatory requirements is minimalist in nature," a leading Dublin lawyer told big monied clients in 1991. Like a virus, the culture of minimal interference spread throughout the banking system.

This was also the time when *bonus-driven risk taking* entered the banking world, along with the banks' right to create credit out of thin air and borrow

without limit on international markets - all factors in promoting the spree of reckless lending that eventually brought the banks to their knees.

But the banks, of course, were only one element in the equation.

From the mid 1990s, Fianna Fail was busy creating a property bubble through a plethora of tax incentives that allowed developers and builders pay virtually no tax at all on their profits. Bernard McNamara, who went belly up a few weeks ago, owing €1.5bn to the banks, said in 2001 that it was tax breaks that turned him from simple builder to mega developer.

There were countless warnings that this would all end in tears. In 1998, one economist reported that the developers' tax incentives had created a property bubble, and warned that if this continued - which it did unabated for the next decade - there would be "a devastating impact on the Irish economy" in which "homeowners, investors, homebuilders and the banking system could all be exposed to potentially catastrophic consequences."

In 2000, the economist Peter Bacon recommended a tax on speculative property deals to deflate the bubble. McCreedy promised such a tax, but within months said he'd changed his mind.

Three years later, in 2003, the *Economist* magazine published an article, 'House of Cards', which said

Lenihan said his aim was to avoid nationalising the main banks, but it looks like that could happen anyway later this year. He also had egg on his face when it emerged he hadn't bothered reading a critical report pointing up seriously improper behaviour in loan and deposit swaps between Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Life and Permanent.

No wonder the *Financial Times* rated him the worst Finance Minister in the EU.

Now Lenihan has been reinvented through a careful strategy of honing one or two simple arguments and repeating them endlessly to a docile media who bought the spin.

Lenihan's defence of a privileged elite comes naturally to him. Developer Seamus Ross is a close friend. Other friends and supporters have invested millions in the property market, encouraged by FF tax incentives.

Little wonder that he reacts with fury at the mildest suggestions for increasing taxes on his own social class.

Lenihan has now positioned himself in FF as a stronger opponent of the unions than Cowen. In this he revels in the hard man image, boasting that other EU Ministers were amazed at his ability to inflict pain on workers. "In France, you would have had riots if you tried to do this", he said.

He has suggested cutting the minimum wage and he's credited with scuttling the recent proposed public sector deal with the union bureaucrats. SIPTU leader, Jack O'Connor, publicly called on Cowen to "rein in" his "hawk".

In his new guise as a fearless class-warrior, Lenihan tried to broaden the pay cut offensive against semi-state groups like ESB workers. But in an adroit tactical move, Cowen reined him in - no doubt to prepare the ground more carefully.

The glorification of Lenihan has little to do with his talents. The elite were just desperate for a 'strong man' who can proclaim 'the worst is over' while attacking the poor with ever more vigour.

The reality is that Lenihan only looks strong because the sleeping giant of the Irish workers' movement has not yet been awakened. As Larkin said "The great only appear great because we are on our knees. Let us rise."

Irish housing was 42% over-valued and predicted a crash within 5 years.

That year, too, Department of Finance officials warned that tax incentives, "add to the rate of increase in property prices generally and provide a bonus to land and property owners and investors who are usually the better off." Fianna Fail, in bed with the developers, didn't want to hear.

When Brian Cowen took over as Minister for Finance, one of the first documents to hit his desk was the Central Bank's Financial Stability Report for 2004 which warned that, "the risk of an unanticipated and sudden fall in residential property prices, accompanied by an increase in the default rate among mortgage holders... is the risk that poses the greatest threat to the health of the banking system."

Fianna Fail likes to pretend that only a tiny handful of nay-saying economists had concerns about the property market and reckless lending by the banks.

Everyone else, they say, supported their neo-liberal policies. Bertie Ahern actually says everything was hunky dory until Lehman Brothers crashed in September 2008, unleashing a sudden Tsunami.

The factual evidence says otherwise. What happened here wasn't a Tsunami. It was slow burning arson. Now the arsonists are running the inquiry.

Film Review: Avatar: the biggest budget movie ever made

By LINDA MJO.

JAMES CAMERON, the Canadian filmmaker who made *Titanic* and futuristic action-thrillers like *Aliens*, *Terminator* and *The Abyss*, now gives us *Avatar*, the biggest budget film ever made.

Avatar on one level tackles human greed and imperialism while depicting an alternative world, inhabited by humanoids who have experienced a spiritual growth which embraces and embodies mother nature and the universal energy which brings them happiness.

The plot is set on earth and a far-off planet called Pandora, where the inhabitants are known as the Na'vi.

On earth the military, along with scientists, are working hard to find out more about the Na'vi, in order to

force them out of their land so it can be colonised.

The film is generous in its depiction of the world where the Na'vi live in harmony with nature and the animal kingdom through a common universal energy which allows trees, humans and animals to communicate seamlessly.

The military plot to conquer Pandora centres on Jake, a US marine. His first journey to Pandora sees him in clashes with the inhabitants.

He steps on the green, luxurious trees; he is chased by dinosaurs and dragons because he is at odds with nature and is almost killed by the gorgeous Pocahontas-like warrior.

But at the last moment, she saves him because a tiny flower could see that he had a good heart. Girl saves boy = love story.

Jake spends time with the Na'vi and almost becomes one of them, in tune with nature's energy. However, the military launch a war which escalates to the full destruction of life on Pandora.

Avatar seems like a futuristic and utopian film but it is also describing what is happening in the world right now.

Imperialism aims to conquer, dominate and master energy resources at all costs.

The message is: if we can grow in consciousness and achieve symbiosis with nature and each other, we can overpower the maddest megalomaniacs of this world.

The biggest powers on earth can be defeated if we fight back. Then it becomes possible to go back to nature and live in harmony.



Socialist Worker

NORTH'S POLITICAL CRISIS DOESN'T STOP THE CUTS



Brian Cowen and Gordon Brown at Hillsborough Castle

As the Stormont institutions teetered on the brink of collapse, Executive Ministers continued their attacks on front-line services.

The DUP and Sinn Fein may have been at loggerheads over parades and policing. But there was no sign of a bust-up over attacks on health, education and social services.

Health service cuts come to £113 million, targeted on the elderly, childcare and mental health.

Two wards will be closed at Belfast's Knockbracken Hospital. Mixed-sex wards will be created.

Young people and minors will be in an adult

admission ward.

In Derry over Xmas, the voluntary St. John's Ambulance had to cover Altnagelvin Hospital because no health service ambulances were available.

Says Seamus Young of UNISON: "The community health service has been weakened by cuts, privatisation and outsourcing, in which health service staff have been replaced by not-for-profit organisations and privatised provision.

"How much worse will it get when hospitals refuse admission to seriously ill patients because of fewer beds?"

"The Assembly is loading its budget problems onto the section of the population least able to engage in political resistance to the cuts."

Education Minister Catriona Ruane is set to impose job losses and a cut in classroom funding.

She warned the Assembly's education committee on January 14th that "action needs to be taken during the 2010/11 financial year to secure significant budget savings and this will involve 'pain'...

"It will simply not be possible to avoid some reduction in funding direct to the classroom..."

As over 70 percent of the education budget is salary costs, there may inevitably have to be staff reductions."

Sinn Fein and the DUP showed they were willing to bring the Assembly down over parades and policing. But they don't oppose measures which will hit hardest at those least able to take any more "pain".

Only resistance by health and education workers with community support holds out hope of preventing the cuts. Rank and file trades unionists should be pressing their leaders to back militant action in defence of jobs and services.



By EAMONN MCCANN

THE LURID details of Iris Robinson's private life have provided rich pickings for the media.

But the involvement of rich property developers is more

important.

Iris Robinson solicited £50,000 for her lover from two prominent developers - then asked her lover to hand back £5,000 to herself in cash.

Whether there was a brown envelope involved, we don't

ROBINSONS' JAM

know.

But the transaction was strikingly reminiscent of Fianna Fail shenanigans in the South.

FF and the DUP may be at daggers drawn in relation to Orange versus Green.

But when it comes to dodgy money, there's little difference.

One of the initial mysteries was how Mrs Robinson was able to go to the tycoons, builder Ken Campbell and property mogul Fred Fraser, and, in short order, have them sign cheques for substantial sums, payable to a young man they didn't know.

The explanation which has come to light is that the transactions were part of a pattern.

Not only were both of the wealthy developers donors to the DUP, but Mrs Robinson had done them some service in the past.

She had lobbied in 2005 for approval for a development

by Campbell in the Robinson stronghold of Newtownards, and in 2003 for a Fraser scheme in the same area.

More suspicious still was the Robinsons' purchase from Campbell, for £1 (one pound) of a property in North Street, Newtownards, to be used as a constituency office.

Five years later, in 2007, the premises were sold for £207,000 to a Gibraltar-based company owned by a Co Down developer called Adam Armstrong.

The Robinsons then rented the office back for £16,000 a year - which they were able to claim in full in expenses from the Stormont Assembly.

The only thing clear from these transactions is that they stink.

The picture of the DUP now coming into focus is a far cry from the party's traditional image as a stern organisation with a righteous, religious

motivation and principles

The image had already been damaged by last year's revelations that the Robinsons were pulling in more than half a million pounds a year in Westminster and Stormont salaries and outrageous expenses claims - £400 for a pen, for example.

In addition, four Robinson family members were employed as parliamentary aides and constituency managers.

All this - and it's widely believed there's more to come - helps explain how the Robinsons were able to afford a mansion in the North, a flat in central London and a luxury holiday home in Florida.

And Ian Paisley Junior, it will be recalled, came to grief in 2008 over his relationship with developer Seymour Sweeney. So it's not just the Robinsons.

Working class people who voted DUP in the belief that its leaders were in politics to

represent the interests of all of the Protestant people have had a rude awakening.

They certainly weren't standing up for working-class Protestants when they were lining their own pockets and lobbying in the interests of property tycoons.

This exposure of the class nature of the dominant Unionist party opens opportunities to build a party which will fight for specifically working-class interests, irrespective of religious background.

Whether these opportunities are taken depends to a large extent on whether we can create a broad party of the Left with the credibility to take on not only Unionism but also the Nationalism of Sinn Fein and the SDLP which, for all their occasional rhetoric about the working class, stand for one community only.