

Socialist Worker

WHAT A BANKER!

Is this man worth more than 35 nurses?



Laughing all the way to the bank: Ritchie Boucher

MEET Ritchie Boucher, the chief executive of Bank of Ireland who was paid €843,000 last year.

He thinks he is worth far more than ordinary folk and that he deserves all he gets.

Far more, for example, than staff nurses, who are stressed out trying to cope with up to ten or fifteen nurses at a time.

Last year, a young staff nurse at the start of her career was paid €24,041.

The government could have voted against Boucher's super salary because it is a shareholder in Bank of Ireland.

But it chose not to.

Yet now it is threatening to cut the pay of nurses even more.

Maybe it thinks that Ritchie Boucher is worth forty or fifty nurses.

Some may claim that Boucher must be paid his obscene sum because he is a financial genius.

Yet he has been a director of the Bank of Ireland since 2006 - when it was blowing billions in property speculation.

Just before the crash, he told an Oireachtas Finance Committee that his



Ritchie Boucher's predecessor, Brian Goggin

bank 'did not have capital problems'

If he was such a genius - why did he not cry stop.

Ireland has become a country where no matter what bankers do, they get rewarded. Take for example, Ritchie Boucher's predecessor, Brian Goggin.

Goggin was paid a staggering €3 million a year when he ran the Bank of Ireland into the ground.

But he did not suffer any punishment for destroying both his bank and his country.

At the ripe old age of 59, Goggin rode off into the sunset with a pension of €650,000 a year - guaranteed for life.

The workers at Waterford Crystal had to go all the way to the European Court just to get a fraction of a pension they paid into all their working life (see page two).

But the man who presided over one of the greatest gambling scams of the century walked away with a pension that is the equivalent of the average annual wage of 17 workers.

If this is where capitalism has taken us is it any wonder that many people are now crying 'We need a revolution'.

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Saturday 18 May at 4pm

Assemble at Central Bank, Dame Street

For more information see:

Web: actiononx.org

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Email:

actiononx@gmail.com

No Means No Campaign Rally

25 May Liberty Hall at 2pm

Ring Eddie Conlon on 0876775468 for more details

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Where next for public sector workers

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Waterford Crystal workers score victory

ON the eve of an historic victory for Waterford Crystal workers in the European Court of Justice, Tommy Hogan, a former shop steward in the company spoke to Socialist Worker about the pension benefits for workers.

SW - Tell us what happened when Waterford Crystal closed

Waterford Crystal went into receivership in January 2009 and was liquidated shortly afterwards.

Around 700 had been working in the plant and just before it closed the company spoke to negotiations with a venture capital company, KPS, based on Wall Street.

Eventually KPS pulled out and the place was closed down.

KPS then moved in and bought the intellectual property rights for Waterford glass.

They had no intention of mass producing in Ireland but wanted to outsource production for cheap labour.

Currently they have about 40 different sources for making the glass and all that's left in Waterford is a show room employing 40 full time staff.

SW - How did all this affect your pension?

I worked for 43 years in the company having started out as an apprentice there.

I had been paying into what we thought was a good defined benefit scheme and expected to come out with €395 a week in my pension from the age of 63 onwards.

Glass cutting is hard manual work and as workers get older they cannot keep up with the piecework system – so we had an earlier retirement age.

We were then suddenly told that our pension scheme was insolvent and our pensions would be cut.

Workers pensions are speculated in the financial markets and losses had been sustained since 2001.

But on top of all that, our company had not been putting adequate funds into the scheme.

The O'Reilly family did not make proper provision for the workers who had made their profits.



Tommy Hogan with other Waterford Crystal workers, inset: the factory in Waterford

The result was a double insolvency – the company was broke and so was our pension scheme.

For me, it meant that instead of getting €395 a week I was supposed to live on €100 a week.

SW - How did workers feel about this?

It was like getting a wallop in the head or a feeling that there was a hole in your stomach.

It is hard to put it into words.

We were being hit on all sides.

Some workers did not get their statutory redundancy money; others did not get wages they were due in lieu of notice; others did not get holiday pay.

Workers have to queue up just to get money from the state for statutory redundancy and that can take up to a year.

Eventually we had enough and when we heard that a government Minister, Mary Coughlin, was at an engagement in the Tower Hotel a hundred glass workers stormed in and sat down.

Coughlin was told that she was not leaving until

we were sorted.

A five person delegation then engaged in negotiations with her and it was agreed that she would sort our redundancy payments within a week.

We reported this back to the glass workers and reluctantly – and I stress reluctantly- they agreed to that proposal.

Within a week our money came through.

SW - Even after this your pensions were not sorted. Could you tell us about the legal situation facing workers?

In Ireland a pension is not considered a debt on a company when there is liquidation.

Every other capitalist creditor comes before the workers and we can be thrown on the scrap heap.

Neither the state nor a company is obliged to make good any shortfall.

Luckily we then heard about workers in Waterford Wedgwood, our sister company, who had brought the UK government to the European Court of Justice

and had won 89% of their pensions.

This then encouraged us to take a legal case.

SW - What happened next?

We took a case to the Commercial Court, which is an arm of the High Court.

The state tried to defend its disgraceful position by saying that we should live on the old age pension plus the scraps given to us by the company.

But the court referred a number of questions to the European Court including issues such as was the state obliged to ensure that workers got more than 49% of their entitlement and, secondly, - a point raised by the Irish state- did their obligation to the Troika mean that the state was not obliged to pay out.

When these issues went to the European Court, it ruled emphatically in favour of workers.

The Irish state must pay us something over 50% of the pensions we were entitled to and it is up to the High Court to decide how much.

SW - This sounds like a good news story but is it the whole picture?

I'm afraid not. First, the EU directive still gives huge latitude to government to pay anything over 50%.

Second, there has to be a double insolvency – in other words BOTH the company and the pension fund must be insolvent for an insurance guarantee to kick in.

Where this does not occur workers are still hammered.

SR Technic workers for example, lost out because their pension fund was insolvent – but not their company.

We need trade union action to demand a proper insurance bond scheme that protects workers pensions.

We need to change the law to give workers' pensions an equal claim on liquidated company assets as other creditors, and we have to ensure that workers get paid even when a parent company is still solvent.

There is still a long way to fight.

Trust women - make abortion accessible

By SINEAD KENNEDY

THE government's proposed abortion legislation to give legal effect to the 1992 Supreme Court decision in the X case is a travesty that will do little if anything to improve access to abortion for Irish women.

In fact the clear intention is to make it so restrictive that women will either not bother or be too terrified to access it.

Instead, they will continue to make the journey to Britain so that cowardly politicians can go on pretending that there is no Irish abortion.

The bill proposes to make a suicidal woman go through at least three and possibly six examinations in order to end an unwanted pregnancy.

Faced with the possibility of refusal by one or more doctors and an onerous appeals procedure, a woman is likely to go overseas.

Those who are too poor or too ill to travel are likely to become more despairing, increasing the risk to their lives.

Women who cannot face these



obstacles, and induce abortion themselves, are threatened with 14 years in prison.

They would be branded as criminals if they obtain abortions in Ireland – yet the government is happy to see it done in Liverpool.

What is to happen to a woman or girl, driven towards suicide by unwanted pregnancy, if the obstetrician on the government's approval panel says she is not suicidal? The Minister for Health, James O'Reilly, has disgracefully indicated that she is likely to be detained in Psychiatric hospital due

to risk of suicide. The exclusion of abortion for women where the foetus has a fatal abnormality and cannot survive is

another cruelty that forces women to carry an unviable foetus to term or go to Liverpool for termination.

Health and Welfare

The legislation also reinforces the distinction between a woman's life and her health and welfare.

A woman whose health could be severely damaged by pregnancy cannot get an abortion.

All of this reveals that neither Labour nor Fine Gael is serious about introducing meaningful X case legislation.

They are more interested in pandering to the tiny minority of anti-women bigots who oppose abortion.

What they seem to forget is that

they are a tiny minority.

The majority of Irish people want action on abortion now.

Opinion polls, including the most recent Irish Times and Sunday Business Post polls consistently show that most people in Ireland support X legislation.

Over 80% support access to abortion in cases of rape and incest, or to protect a woman's health.

We will accept no further delays. X case legislation is only the first step.

The majority of the 5000+ women who travel abroad for abortions every year do not do so because they are ill, have been raped or are dying.

They do so because they have decided that an abortion is in their best interests.

Sometimes it is a difficult decision; often it is not.

Working class women on low incomes, young women, and migrants particularly need access to abortion in Ireland.

All women deserve to live in a country that respects and facilitates their choice and does not criminalise them and abandon them like refugees to Britain and Europe.

The legislation must include the following:

- The risk of suicide as grounds for abortion
- No more than the opinion of two doctors is enough to approve an abortion
- Publicly funded, state-wide access – near to women's homes
- Provisions for abortion if a foetus has a fatal abnormality and cannot survive
- The decriminalisation of abortion – women who have abortions are not criminals.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and endangering the planet. 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.

REVOLUTION
The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The courts, the army and police exist to defend the interests of the wealthy.

To destroy capitalism, we need to remove the present state structures and create a workers' state based on much

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR
War is a constant feature of capitalism today as the imperialist powers try to dominate the earth.

The "War on Terrorism" is a crude device to attack any country which threatens US military, strategic or economic dominance.

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION
We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the

working class. We are for full social, economic and political equality for women.

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

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We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Cameron government.

Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'. We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain. Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY
To win socialism we need to organise in a revolutionary party.

This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system. We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

We stand for fighting trade unions and for independent rank and file action.

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What Socialists Say



Labour's shame on X

IN 1992 the Supreme Court found that when a pregnant woman's life was in danger she had the right to an abortion in Ireland.

It directed that legislation be enacted to allow women exercise this right.

The Irish people in two subsequent referendums endorsed this decision. Yet, nothing was done by six successive government and the spineless politicians in the Dáil.

Now 21 years later the government has finally acted, but instead of introducing sensible abortion legislation that addresses the real needs of Irish women they have decided to go for the absolute minimum.

Indeed the clear intention is to make it so restrictive that most women who will be affected will continue to make the journey to Britain.

The role that the Labour Party has played in this is particularly disgusting.

It is Labour Party policy to legislate for abortion, yet the only real commitment they have displayed in the past week is to hold the coalition government together, whatever the cost.

Instead of fighting for meaningful abortion legislation that protects and respects women they offered concession after concession to right-wing anti-abortion Fine Gael backbenchers.

While there may be a number of TDs in Leinster House who are willing to roll the dice on women's lives, thankfully, the majority of Irish people are not so callous.

The vast majority of Irish people support more open abortion laws.

However we cannot rely on the government or the courts to win us our rights.

In 1992 when the Irish state slapped an injunction on a 14-year-old rape victim preventing her from leaving the country for an abortion (the X case), it was not the Supreme Court that secured her rights, rather it was the thousands of people who took to the streets demanding that she should be allowed have an abortion.

This is why it is vital that we take to the streets in the coming weeks and show this spineless government that we will not allow them to play political football with the lies and health of Irish women.

Forest walk brings thousands to the woods

ON Sunday 28 April more than four thousand people took to the woods of Avondale House in Co.

Wicklow to protest against the Government's plans to sell Coillte's harvesting rights to vulture capitalists.

The protest was organised by the Natural Resources Protection Alliance and the Woodland League and was supported by People Before Profit, SWP, Unite, Keep Ireland Open, Friends of the Earth, and a number of celebrities and independent TD's.

The large crowd shows the potential for mobilising around the natural environment as Richard Boyd Barrett TD emphasized when speaking to Socialist Worker "We are getting an enormous

response from across the country for events like this one.

People are utterly shocked when they hear of the government's plan to sell-off this part of our natural heritage to pay off the gambling debts of bankers.

The purpose of this event is to urgently alert the wider public of the imminent threat to our public forest's – an absolutely precious cultural, historical and economic asset".

A second 'Walk in the Woods' is planned in Kerry on 12 May with more planned around the country as communities rally to save a valuable public amenity.

There will also be a protest at 5.30pm at the Dáil on 21 May to drive the message home that our forests are not for sale.

Analysis

Positions hardening in the unions against Croke Park II



By BRIAN O'BOYLE

IN the last few weeks Margaret Thatcher has died and the Irish trade union movement has shown signs of revival.

That these events have happened simultaneously is particularly fitting given the fact that Thatcher did more than most to smash the power of organised labour.

In the wake of the British miners defeat, career minded Irish trade unionists were more than happy to climb into bed with Irish employers and their government lackeys.

This arrangement has held ever since, as 'partnership' agreements have tied workers to their bosses through IBEC and the ICTU.

During the boom times, workers were encouraged to moderate their wage demands even as house prices exploded.

Wage increases as part of the benchmarking process were quickly overshadowed by rising prices, but Congress could at least console its members that pay was going up. Since 2009 this is no longer the case.

Workers never received the pay rise promised under the terms of the last partnership agreement.

Instead their pay was cut unilaterally in a move that slashed 15% from their basic wages and forced tens of thousands out of the public services.

Having called a token day of action, ICTU shamefully colluded with the government to convince Irish workers that they should do another deal.

Croke Park I (CP I) was the result and the outcome has been a workers movement paralysed in terms of its ability to organise resistance.

Speaking to the *Financial Times*, SIPTU President, Jack O' Connor, admitted that CP I had effectively taken the organised labour movement out of struggle.

More of the same

Unlike their European counterparts the Irish government have not had to fight a battle with hundreds of thousands of organised workers.

This fact, more than any pop psychology, explains why Ireland has not been like Greece and the ruling classes are anxious to keep it that way.

Croke Park II was conceived as a continuation of the government's strategy to discipline workers, whilst keeping them out of the battle against austerity.

Having co-opted the union leaders the government gambled that a deal that appealed to the naked self-interest of the poorest workers would be enough to get it over the line.

They presumed that all they had to do was frighten people enough that they would take the government's knife and plunge it into themselves.



They were wrong.

With the exception of Impact every major union voted down CP II - some with majorities of well over 80%.

In total, more than two thirds refused to be bullied in what amounts to the most serious threat to the government to date.

Labour vulnerable

Labour is particularly vulnerable as its backbench TD's are now faced with the prospect of legislating (and voting) for pay cuts to the very people that put them in office.

Whether they will have the stomach for the fight remains to be seen, but the important point from workers perspective is that the union grassroots is showing signs of revival.

At the recent CPSU conference delegate after delegate rose to condemn the Labour party, with a number of them calling on ICTU members to cut their ties or face the consequences.

Speaking to Socialist Worker, executive member Tony Conlon suggested that his "Members were in no mood to be bullied.

They have already made their contribution and are adamant that they have no more to give.

Labour has sold out workers and CPSU members will never vote for them again".

Grassroots resistance

In SIPTU a grassroots campaign to sever the political contribution to the Labour party has been underway for a number of months.

Political Fund Exemption Notices have proven extremely popular with disgruntled members and the same grassroots network

is now petitioning shop stewards to remove O' Connor from the head of the Union.

O' Connor often talks Left but he worked hard to secure a yes vote through demoralisation and a full time bureaucracy.

Now his plan has backfired as SIPTU Grassroots members are reinvigorated for the fight ahead.

Meanwhile the three teachers unions have also signalled their intention to fight.

In a rare move to pre-empt potential pay-cuts the TUI, INTO and ASTI trade unions are to ballot their members for industrial action should the government implement their threats unilaterally.

Mark Walshe from ASTI Fight-Back summed up the mood when he stated that "we want a fighting trade union movement that defends our rights, campaigns for decent public services and taxes the wealthy".

Another encouraging move has been the establishment of a cross union grassroots campaign to keep the unions out of any further negotiations.

In the wake of their initial defeat the government tasked Kieran Mulvey of the Labour Relations Commission to explore the possibility of re-negotiating CP II.

In response a **No Means No Campaign** has been launched by left wing activists across the unions.

The campaign will hold a major rally of public sector workers and pensioners on 25 May in Liberty Hall.

Kevin Farrell, a member of Executive of the TUI captured the sentiment of the movement suggesting that

"It is clear that austerity has failed. In voting against Croke Park 2 workers voted against the Government and against the collusion of the trade union leadership with the government.

The trade union movement must lead a campaign for a real alternative.

It must demand the introduction of progressive taxes.

If the current trade union leadership cannot do this then they should step aside".

All of this proves that grassroots union members are becoming increasingly radicalised.

Having defeated the miners and the Soviet Union, Thatcher fell when she least expected it.

Let's hope that Croke Park II will be Fine Gael and Labour's 'poll tax moment' as arrogance and complacency unleash a movement that can drive them from office.

■ For more information on Grassroots SIPTU or Political Fund Notices contact Socialist Worker on 0876574100.

■ To get involved in the No means No campaign contact Eddie Conlon on 087 6775468

The G8 are coming to Fermanagh – Join the protests!

By KIERAN ALLEN

THE G8 summit will take place near Enniskillen on 16 and 17 June. The most powerful world leaders will gather to co-ordinate policies for defending privilege and inequality.

It will be an occasion for protestors to gather and voice demands for global justice.

So far, the ICTU is planning a march in Belfast on Saturday 15 June. A counter summit is being organised by G8 Alternatives on Sunday 16 June in Belfast. And a major protest is scheduled for Enniskillen on Monday 17 June. There will also be public meetings in various locations to explain the role of the G8.

Who are the G8 - why you should join the protests.

The G8 is a self-selecting group of political leaders of the richest countries on earth. The eight heads of states come from the USA, Germany, Britain, France, Japan, Canada, Italy, and Russia.

The G7 - it became G8 when Russia was added - was formed in Rambouillet in France in 1975 in response to the oil shock of 1973 when prices suddenly soared.

Although there are conflicts between the G8 leaders on a number of issues, they



try to co-ordinate their actions through summits like this.

More detailed proposals are then worked

out in the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The G8 and its associates represent the pillar organisations of corporate globalisation.

Five reasons why you should protest

1 The G8 pushes bail-outs for the banks - and austerity for us. Since the Financial Crash of 2008, more than €10 trillion has been pumped into the global banking system.

Governments invented a new word, "re-capitalisation", for shovelling public money into private banks. They also took over the bad debts run up by the banks and made the ordinary people pay for them.

The amount of money that was spent on banks could have ended world hunger for fifty years.

A key figure attending the summit is Angela Merkel. She has been relentless in her determination to make the Irish people pay off bank debt. Her only concern has been that the Irish banks should in turn pay their debts to German and French banks. The suffering this causes is of no concern to her. Her top priority is to protect the EU banks.

The G8 leaders are co-ordinating action to privatise public services; lower wages; increase the retirement age; and cut back on free public services. Although the neoliberal policies they are promoting triggered the greatest economic crash since the 1930s, they have not changed one inch.

2 The G8 leaders include the world's greatest war mongers. The G8 countries spend more on weapons than any other country, bar China.

The USA and Russia devote 17 percent and 14 percent of overall spending on weapons of war. This is more than on health or education.

Despite the end of the Cold War, military spending across the world is rising. New resource wars are in the offing as countries like the US and China fight proxy wars to gain control of Africa's natural resources.

The US leads the way in militarisation, accounting for 41 percent of total global spend on weaponry.

One of the most sinister developments is Obama's support for drone warfare. These are small, unmanned aircraft



that unleash bombs and missiles on innocent people in Pakistan and Yemen, triggered by CIA operatives sitting in the US. Between 1,000 and 3,000 people have been murdered by these machines.

While Obama cultivates a "nicer" image than Bush, he regularly signs off on targeted executions.

In other words, he signs death sentences for individuals he has never met - purely on the basis of suspicion.

According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, there is an average of one drone attack every five days.

Sometimes these target funerals and rescue operations in "secondary missions".

3 The G8 leaders talk hypocritically about world hunger - but do nothing. More than 900 million people - a seventh of the world's population - are malnourished. Yet the G8 leaders talk platitudes and do little.

At the 2009, L'Aquila summit they promised to contribute just \$20 billion to alleviate this starvation.

But that is less money than was put into one Irish corrupt bank, Anglo-Irish.

Even then, just a quarter of the promised \$20 billion was actually delivered. Meanwhile the respected geographer David Harvey has estimated that more than \$4 trillion has been pumped out of the poorest countries in the world through so called structural adjustment policies.

Jubilee 2000 the faith based London organisation has argued that this set of policies in turn is responsible for the deaths of around 7 million children in Africa, Asia and Latin America every year.

This amounts to a holocaust every 24 months as millions die completely needlessly.

4 Our planet is in danger from global warming - but the G8 does little to tackle climate change. The planet

is experiencing increasingly adverse weather patterns as storms, tornados and monsoons become ever more frequent.

Almost every serious scientist agrees that global warming must be limited to a two percent increase in temperatures. But the G8 leaders are taking no serious action.

They refuse to share technology on green energy.

Instead, they rely on the "free market" to persuade corporations to change.

They continue to subsidise fossil fuels - the subsidies having increased from \$400 billion in 2010 to \$630 in 2012. Worse, they are now leading the way on fracking, - a technology that destroys the environment and increases global warming.

In Canada, they expend vast amounts of energy to extract oil from tar sands.

5 The G8 leaders promote ever more attacks on civil liberties. The G8 leaders pretend they are for democracy and freedom.

But they preside over growing attacks on civil liberties.

Every time they hold a summit they create a propaganda atmosphere to demonise protest.

Even though the North has a history of closing playgrounds on Sundays, the Assembly has no problem agreeing to Courts sitting on the Lord's Day when the G8 is in town.

In countries like Russia the situation is even more frightening.

The punk rock group, Pussy Riot, has been jailed by Putin's regime for daring to perform a "punk prayer" in a cathedral.

Three young women from the band are being held in the harshest of prison camps.

In other countries, political leaders use anti-terrorist legislation to criminalise protests.

On a more prosaic level, they try to clamp down on file-sharing on the internet lest it endanger the profits of big corporations.

Get to Belfast and Enniskillen

RIGHT across Ireland, people are suffering from the policies promulgated by the G8.

We have to endure a property tax or bedroom tax to help pay off bankers and bondholders.

Workers' conditions and wages are being worsened to create more opportunities for profit.

Our environment - particularly in the surrounding areas of Sligo and Fermanagh - is being threatened by fracking because the G8 leaders will not promote a switch to green energy.

Now is our opportunity to stand up against all this and PROTEST.



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

1 Contact Socialist Worker to get your factsheet on the G8.

2 Hold a meeting with friends or neighbours to explain G8 policies.

3 Contact local campaigns or Socialist Worker to hear about transport arrangements for the protest.

Home Tax

Activists bring spirit of Mayday to the streets of Ireland

By BRIAN O' BOYLE

A number of demonstrations occurred throughout Ireland on 1 May as part of the campaign against the property tax.

In general, the mood was lively and militant with direct action a common theme throughout the country.

Campaign activists across Dublin engaged in a wide range of activities including blocking roads, occupying banks and disrupting TD's clinics.

In Ballyfermot a determined gathering managed to block the N4 for a number of minutes before agreeing to move to the clinic of Fine Geal, TD Catherine Byrne.

Here they were met with campaigners from Drimnagh and the Dublin 8 campaign.

In Dundrum about 25 activists protested at the offices of a local bank, whilst in Artane about 25 protested at a strategic local roundabout.

Meanwhile 40 residents from Ringsend marched from the area down to the East Link Bridge.

In Wexford a group of campaigners managed to block Rosslare harbour for around 40 minutes, whilst others from the campaign blocked a number of strategic bridges in the county.

Over 50 activists marched to Wicklow council and revenue before occupying the building for a limited duration.

They then made their way to the office of Fine Geal TD Andrew Doyle to ask him why the government did not vote to reduce Bank of Ireland executive salaries while one in five children goes to school hungry.

Finally the campaign brought their protest to Bank of Ireland in Wicklow town where a limited occupation took place with activists cheering "bailout the



people not Richie Boucher.

This sentiment was echoed in Cork as around 80 protesters marched to a Bank of Ireland to protest against the home tax and the obscene salaries paid to Irish bankers.

After a peaceful sit in five members of the campaign including Jim O'Connell of the SWP were arrested.

In Donegal a cavalcade that started in

the Diamond of Carndonagh made its way to Buncrana and then onto Letterkenny for a protest at the revenue offices.

Finally in Sligo a group of activists started their May Day protests at the General Post Office before occupying the local Bank of Ireland branch for around 20 minutes.

Having made a number of speeches they decided to move to the offices of

local Fine Gale TD John Perry.

There they were met with a constituency worker who was asked on camera about Perry's lies in relation to the cancer services in Sligo General Hospital.

Another occupation ensued after which campaigners vowed to return again in the coming weeks.

Although the protests were generally small they do show the levels of anger

within the campaign, and, in general, the response of the general public was extremely encouraging.

Having had this day of simultaneous local activity the next step will be to have the national day of action agreed at the recent conference of the CAHWT.

The dates for this event are still provisional, but it is thought that it may take place near the end of May.

Analysis

Campaign Against Home Tax national conference

By MEDB NIC CRAITH

THE Campaign against Home and Water Taxes held a national conference on Saturday 27 April in the Regency Hotel in Dublin.

Almost 250 activists attended to discuss strategies to defeat the Local Property Tax in the coming months.

About half of these were based in the capital, with the rest travelling from other counties across the country.

A lively and amicable debate ensued, with a broad spectrum of members voicing their opinions.

The discussion opened with the question of the number of delegates mandated to vote on the motions.

The conference was originally intended to have five times the usual number of delegates a National Steering Committee (NSC) would have (which is five per constituency and ten for Cork).

There was a proposal to reduce this to NSC levels so as not to disadvantage those based further from Dublin.

A compromise was reached and the number of those empowered to vote taken down to ten.

Boycott

The first key strategic debate centred on the boycott.

Boycott has been a crucial tool of the

campaign to date, but a motion from Crumlin/Kimmage attempted to soften this position to accommodate those who have been bullied into paying the unjust tax already.

Whilst this point was accepted as valid, it was decided that a continued strong line on the boycott was fundamental, particularly in light of the recent upsurge of resistance in the unions.

Elections

Several motions were then submitted dealing with the upcoming local elections.

Some proposed postponing the discussion, others suggested that the CAHWT run a slate of candidates and other motions were opposed to this.

The elections will undoubtedly be an important vehicle for exerting political pressure on the government; however such a direction could alter the nature of the campaign from a broad-based, single-issue movement; to one which is forced to dictate on multiple issues from the top down.

In the end two distinct visions were delivered. Members of the SWP argued that candidates be endorsed by the campaign on the basis that this would reduce in-fighting around candidate selection and relieve individuals of the



pressures of uniting on what is still a relatively narrow issue.

Oposing the broadening of the campaign from the top, we argued for a broadening at the base which would see the campaign move from a single issue to a general vehicle in the struggle against austerity.

Against this, numerous delegates argued that the strongest signal would be sent by fielding single issue candidates that would supplement the left wing parties.

In the end the votes were close but the motions calling for CAHWT election candidates were passed.

Strategy

The final session of the day saw a welcome return to the traditional focus of the campaign as a number of motions turned on effective strategies for building the movement.

In particular, novel tactics involving linking in with the trade unions were proposed. SWP members active in the CAHWT spoke to the significance of gaining union support, particularly in light of the recent rejection of the Croke Park II initiative.

Unions

Alongside building the base of the movement and continuing with

national events the links to the organised labour movement will be crucial in the future.

Thankfully the signs are encouraging as the TUI, CPSU and Unite have all now publicly backed the campaign against the property tax, with the latter two unions encouraging their members to engage in acts of public civil disobedience.

In this context a key task for all CAHWT members is to contact local shop stewards in your areas.

CAHWT activists in SIPTU should also circulate the Political Fund Exemption Forms allowing SITPU members to stop their money going to the Labour party.

This should send a strong message against austerity and social partnership simultaneously. Campaigns like "SIPTU Grassroots", "ASTI fight back" and the No Means No Campaign are attempting to give power back to members at the base of the union movement.

CAHWT members should do all they can to support this movement with mutual support between the two camps strengthening both in fight against austerity.

Bangladesh: Hundreds killed in garment factory collapse

By JAMES O'TOOLE

MORE than 500 workers have died in a sweatshop collapse in Bangladesh with hundreds still missing. Garments found amongst the rubble belong to Penney's, Wal-Mart and other corporate giants.

Workers had left the building after noticing cracks appearing in the walls, but were forced under threat to go back in.

Extra floors had been added to the building, without planning permission, to squeeze in as many workers as possible.

"None of us wanted to go in, but the bosses came after us with beating sticks. In the end we were forced to go in," said one worker.

Workers are paid next to nothing with wages as low as \$39 dollars a month. Helpers earn as little as 18 cents an hour in conditions that remind one of the novels written by Dickens in the 19th century.

In 2006 a War on Want report found that Penney's had been using child labour paying 30p an hour for up to 84 hours a week.

More than 85% of workers in these sweatshops are women who are forced to bring their children to work as there are no crèche facilities.

Meanwhile the CEO of Associated British Foods, George G. Weston, who owns Penney's, Selfridges and Fortnum & Mason, made £950,000 last year with the company posting



profits of just over £1 Billion.

Backlash

Once the tragedy occurred the factory owner, Mohammed Sohel Rana went underground to avoid responsibility.

Rana who is a youth leader in the ruling Awami party was captured on Sunday 28 April trying to flee into India.

Such has been the anger that workers and their supporters have clashed with police, blocking highways and demanding legislation to end the practice of sweatshop labour.



An alliance of left wing parties and the main opposition parties have also reacted, calling a strike for 2 May.

Socialist Worker is appalled at this flagrant abuse of human life and we call on Penney's and other companies to respect worker's

rights, to recognise the right to form trade unions and to pay a living wage to employees. They must guarantee that their suppliers do the same.

Penney's and other companies should be forced to pay into a compensation fund to help the victims of the present building collapse.

Activists protested outside Penney's on Dublin's O'Connell St on Saturday 27 April at 2pm while collecting petitions demanding compensation for the victims and the respect of worker's rights home and abroad.



Crisis hasn't stopped traders gambling with our lives

KEN Olende looks at the murky world of super-rich commodity traders—charting how they kept their profits flowing throughout the years of recession

A small number of largely unregulated commodity trading houses have seen their profits rise astronomically over the last decade.

And their wealth has come at the expense of poor people, largely in the Global South.

Where bankers trade in money, commodity traders exchange things—often specialising in oil, coffee beans or rice.

Like the bankers they are not concerned with what the things they trade might be used for, only how to make money from moving them around.

Some deal in "futures" markets, for instance betting on what a wheat crop will be worth next year.

They can even buy and sell real commodities now to influence their future values.

These companies talk about soaring profits, but their manipulation of markets means life or death to the majority of the world's poor—people who suddenly find they cannot afford food or fuel.

But very little is known about their activities. Oliver Classen of the Berne Declaration NGO said, "The industry right now is a black hole."

Record

An investigation by the Financial Times has brought their dealings out of the shadows.

It shows that the world's top 20 independent commodities traders posted profits of €27 billion in 2008, up 1,600 percent from 2000.

Their combined revenue was almost €900 billion in 2012 - and the recession has barely slowed them.

For example Trafigura's profits were €700 million in 2012,

not far reduced from its record of €760 million in 2011.

Recently the International Monetary Fund boasted, "Soaring commodity prices were a hallmark of the global economic boom from 2003 to mid-2008."

"When the global financial crisis erupted and the Great Recession set in, prices crashed and the end of the commodity boom seemed imminent.

"Instead, commodity prices rebounded in the early stages of the recovery, and by the end of 2010, prices of many commodities were close to or above pre-crisis peaks."

A big part of the boom has been growing demand from developing economies—particularly China, which has sucked in resources from around the world.

These mega profits are threatened now that China's growth is slowing—and this is what worries the Financial Times.

Regulators are asking now if commodity trading houses have become "too big to fail" like the banks that triggered the current crisis.

Fraud

Enron, the firm that collapsed disastrously in 2001 in a fraud scandal, was one such commodities giant.

The companies gamble on commodity prices following information from their own private intelligence gathering networks.

They send people to count cocoa stocks in Côte d'Ivoire and work out coal reserves in Japan.

Many of these firms are based in Switzerland, where the government recently admitted, "Physical commodities traders are in principle not subject to any oversight."

Yet these unregulated giants are stepping into the gap left by Western banks which are too nervous to invest.

The Boston tragedy and the media hype

By JOHN MOLYNEUX

TAKEN by themselves the bomb attacks on the Boston Marathon on 15 April which killed three completely innocent people and injured many more were obviously a tragedy.

They were also a tragedy for the two young Chechens who, whatever their motives, perpetrated this horrible crime.

But this tragedy cannot be taken by itself.

Every individual event, no matter how tragic, has a wider political context that must be assessed.

Our rulers and their compliant media are well aware of this and invariably report it in such a way as to further their interests and promote their view of the world.

In general the US ruling class and its allies, which include the Irish government, want people to be very frightened of 'terrorism' as a whole and 'Muslim terrorism' in particular.

Specifically, they



want people to react to it with anger, nationalism, xenophobic hatred and support for the American government.

This is especially true of its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, its invasions and interventions in other countries and its various imperialist adventures which are designed to defend and strengthen its vast informal economic

"We got him."

#oneboston

—Mayor Tom Menino

empire.

For this reason the giant US and global media corporations massively inflated the tragedy in Boston and reported it on a scale and an emotional intensity they would never dream of applying to similar (or much worse) events in any other country, especially countries like Iraq and Afghanistan where more terrible

atrocities occur on a daily basis.

This is not just a question of the racist valuing of American lives more than the lives of others, especially middle-eastern or 'Muslims', though that is certainly an important element in what is going on.

There is also a definite political agenda being pursued.

At roughly the same time as Boston there was an explosion at a fertilizer company in Texas which killed 14 and injured 140, i.e. it was three times as deadly, but even though this was Texas, it received far less coverage than Boston because it was not a story that lent itself to the aims of American imperialism.

It is sometimes attacked as insensitive to point this sort of thing out, but in reality it is the capitalist media, including the Irish media, who are cynically exploiting tragedy for their own political purposes.

Syria: The struggle within the revolution

The Syrian revolution is portrayed as degenerating into anarchy and sectarianism at the mercy of outside powers. But as Simon Assaf reveals in this series of interviews, revolutionaries are taking part in committees determined to take control of their own lives in the midst of the fighting

SYRIANS jealously guard the independence of their movement, and the local councils and revolutionary committees that emerged out of the popular uprising.

In the first days of the revolution that began in March 2011, activists formed Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs) to organise protests against the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

Thousands of these committees sprung up in neighbourhoods, villages, towns and cities across the country.

The LCCs became an important voice of the revolution. They organised protests and published newspapers. Their aim remains to establish "a civil, pluralistic, and democratic state" and they firmly reject attempts by outside powers to hijack the revolution.

As the regime retreated from large parts of the country the revolutionary committees transformed into local councils known as the Majlis Mahali. Many hope these will still form the basis of a new democratic system.

Some of these councils serve hundreds of thousands of people, others have sprung up in villages with tiny populations. Across the country they represent millions of Syrians.

Revolutionaries

Abu Walid is from a committee in the capital Damascus, while Raed is from a local council in Idlib, northern Syria. It has become impossible for them to travel so they spoke by Skype to the World Social Forum in Tunisia.

According to Abu Walid, "The LCCs and local councils are the child of the revolution. They emerged out of the necessity of the uprising, especially once the state disappeared."

"As they emerged directly out of the uprising, there is no one model. The majority of them are elected, a few are appointed."

Early in the uprising many towns and cities that rose against the regime took up arms.

They were joined by mutinous soldiers to form "free army brigades" (FSA). These make up the vast majority of the armed uprising.

Raed explained, "As soon as the FSA



liberated Idlib, we transformed the revolutionary committees into local councils and assumed the responsibilities of the state.

"Our main task is to meet the needs of the people, but we are also part of the revolution, and work in support of the rebellion."

Meddle

Many of the brigades, which were set up to defend neighbourhoods, have good relations with the local councils. But there are problems.

Raed said that in liberated areas, "Our responsibilities extend to dealing with the armed rebels as sometimes they meddle in civilian affairs. These negotiations do not always go smoothly."

The councils are gradually extending their control over courts and prisons—and they have been joined by judges and lawyers who defected from the regime.

In the town of Manbij, northern Syria, large numbers of police abandoned the regime and began taking orders from the revolutionary committee.

In the town of Saraqeb civil servants reopened ministry buildings, now under the control of a council that has to be re-elected every three months.

The councils are stepping in as an attempt to coordinate the many currents inside the revolution—secular, nationalist, leftists, traditional Muslim organisations and some jihadist militias.

These groups are in broad agreement over a future democratic state.

However, Islamist groups that have a different vision for Syria have also grown in popularity.

They want an "Islamic state" without democracy, and have refused to accept the elected councils. This has led to tensions inside the revolution.

Despite this, many see the Islamists as allies. They are known as fearless fighters, rooted in the revolution, that are willing to defend the people.

Some of those who are drawn to the Islamist brigades are attracted because they are well-organised and effective. But many who are recruited insist they

are not fighting for a new dictatorship and accept that once the regime is defeated political differences will become more pronounced.

The tensions are already finding expression.

One Islamist brigade ran into trouble recently when it attempted to impose its will on locals and other rebel brigades following the liberation of Raqqa, a city in eastern Syria.

But in other regions Islamists work alongside other currents. And all fear that as the country slides deeper into the misery of war, Syria will be at the mercy of outside powers.

The West and other powers in the region are using the promise of money in an attempt to marginalise or control the councils.

Isolated

Abu Walid said, "Our biggest problem is that as the regime still controls the central bank.

We are not receiving any financial

support and are finding it difficult to maintain basic services. This has led to a severe financial crisis for many of the councils."

He said that very little of the much-vaunted "foreign aid" is reaching them. "We are very isolated from the outside world. Nothing is reaching us."

The problems are compounded by regime airstrikes and long-range artillery that regularly target the liberated areas.

Abu Walid was candid about the problems, "Our major difficulty is that the regime has destroyed crucial infrastructure such as factories, power stations, bakeries and hospitals.

"In the areas under siege we also have to manage huge shortages of basic necessities such as fresh vegetables and bread."

Another problem is emerging from within the revolution.

Raed said, "When some foreign organisations wanted to lend support to the liberated areas they channelled the funds through individuals and groups to bypass the councils."

"The opposition Syrian National Coalition wants to appoint its own councils and channel funds through 'selected representatives'.

"The Coalition has declared itself to be the 'transitional government'. But it does not represent the people, and has not been chosen by the people."

Abu Walid warned "that some councils have been imposed on the population, usually under the patronage of an influential member of the opposition—sometimes by coercion, but often with cash.

"These councils are not under popular control."

Raed stressed that despite these problems, "the majority of the councils have roots in the local population, are elected and represent the popular revolution.

"We have many difficulties, but we are making a revolution against a regime that has been in power for 40 years.

Our revolution is also against old ideas and old ways of doing things. Day by day we are working to transform Syria."

■ *We have changed the names of the Syrian revolutionaries to protect their identities*

Greece: Fury at racist shootings

by DAVE SEWELL

FARM supervisors opened fire into a crowd of 200 migrant workers on a strawberry farm in the village of Manolada, western Greece on 17 April.

They hit more than 30 workers, mostly from Bangladesh, and seriously injured eight of them.

The workers were demanding unpaid wages. They hadn't received their meagre pay of just €3 an hour in seven months.

"They hit us and said, 'We will kill you'" one of the workers told aid workers. "Three of them were shooting at us while the others beat us with sticks. The shooting went on for more than 20 minutes."

But the workers are getting organised, along with activists from the anti-racist coalition KEERFA and the union of immigrant workers. Petros Constantinou from KEERFA said, "More than 1,000 migrant workers came to an open



Photo: Workers Solidarity Greece

assembly."

Workers also had a mass demonstration in the centre of the village on Sunday 28 April which

called for an end to "the racist terror of the bosses," and "legalisation of all immigrants now".

Hundreds joined the union of

migrant workers, and planned to organise a strike on May Day as Socialist Worker went to press. Petros and others have been visiting other unions in the region to build support.

"We held a conference with lots of local unions. The teachers are holding assemblies to build for the demonstration."

Strawberries from around Manolada are exported all over Europe, in an industry worth €90 million.

Around 2,000 Bangladeshis live in the area, along with several thousand workers from elsewhere.

Many do not have official residence permits so have no access to healthcare.

Workers have to pay nearly a full day's wage every month to live in sheds at the farm.

Made from plastic sheeting, these house more than 20 workers each, with a hosepipe providing the only running water.

"What you have in the peasant

regions of Greece are capitalist exporters with huge profits," said Petros. "And we're building a new tradition of resistance there."

The Manolada workers follow in the footsteps of orange growers near Sparta, who struck two years ago.

They came home from work to find their belongings out on the street. Bosses wanted to kick them out of their homes and impose extra shifts without extra pay.

But the workers went on strike. They won back their homes—and the right to stay in Greece legally.

The Manolada workers are demanding legalisation, in the face of the government's campaign of terror against migrant workers. Tens of thousands have been rounded up and taken to detention camps since August.

But 20,000 migrant workers marched against the raids last year in Athens, and hunger strikers in the camps last month exposed the horrific conditions inside.

Socialist Worker

Security shield promised for G8 austerity gang



THE PSNI has promised “numerous arrests” when the G8 leaders descend on Fermanagh next month.

The Belfast Telegraph reports that an additional 2,500 police are being drafted in from Britain.

Three hundred new cells are being readied at Maghaberry and Magilligan prisons, the Hydebank Young Offenders Centre and the women’s prison in Belfast to handle the numbers the police expect to arrest.

For the first time ever in the North, courts will sit late at night and on Sunday.

So much for the DUP’s commitment to “keeping the Sabbath holy”.

A huge swathe of Fermanagh will be quarantined within a “ring of steel” erected to protect Obama, Putin, Merkel, Cameron and the rest of the architects of global austerity.

The PSNI has acquired two drones to patrol the skies and send pictures to police HQ of anything that moves for miles around.

This “will enable security officers to reach trouble-makers rapidly”, according to the PSNI.

The unprecedented show of strength and surveillance is intended to frighten protesters off in advance.

It represents a serious

assault on civil liberties which neither the PSNI nor Stormont would get away with in any other context.

The precedent will be used to criminalise challenges to authority in the future.

The Stormont parties have all gone along with the plan. The Assembly rushed through the law to allow courts to sit on Sundays.

Not a single member objected to the PSNI adding drones to its arsenal when the proposal came before the Policing Board in February. Sinn Fein and SDLP representatives shamefully went along with it.

The police and politicians say that they are mainly motivated by fear of “dissidents” joining the planned protests.

They also insist that the summit provides an opportunity to advertise the area to tourists.

So to protest is to “damage the economy”.

In fact, the G8 protests are being organised by trades unionists, socialists, environmentalists and international development organisations like Trocaire and Oxfam – all known for non-violence.

But PSNI spin-doctors are briefing journalists from around the world that

“anti-capitalist militants could align themselves with dissident republicans to disrupt this summer’s G8 conference”.

It is disgraceful that parties which claim to be of the Left and describe themselves as anti-imperialists are condoning all this.

■ The SWP is organising a “counter-summit” in Belfast on Sunday 16 June and buses to the march in Enniskillen on Monday 17 June for more details phone 087-6574100

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Who are the G8?