

WORKERS SOLIDARITY

Irish narchist Paper



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www.struggle.ws/wsm.html

Women - still carrying the baby at work and home!!



Over the last 100 years, there is no doubt that women's situation in most first world countries has improved dramatically. Now that we've reached the 21st century, many would say that sexist inequality no longer really exists. However, if we take a brief look at just one aspect of our lives - work - it is clear that there is still a lot left to fight for.

Over the last ten to fifteen years there has been a particularly large increase in the number of women working outside the home. The jobs women are filling, however, tend to be low-paid and part-time work. Despite changing attitudes, the ultimate responsibility for childcare and housework generally lies with women which is the main reason why women are much more likely than men to be part-time workers. 30% of female employees work part-time compared with 6% for men (1).

As part-time work is more often low paid, women are more likely to be low paid. However, even in full time work there is a considerable wage differential between men and women and the average hourly wage for women is still 20% below that of male workers (2). Also, men are more likely than women to get job-related fringe benefits such as pension entitlements, health and medical insurance, and housing or mortgage benefits (3). Another change that has occurred over the last 15 years is that women are now more likely than men to live below the poverty line (4).

Ireland, where 47% of women work outside the home, is still among the countries in Europe with the lowest participation rates for women in the labour market (5). As well as low pay, a major barrier for women seeking paid employment is the availability and cost of childcare. Too often it just does not make economic sense for women to work. When women are not in

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Women - still carrying the baby

continued from front page

paid employment they are either entirely dependant on social welfare or else economically dependent on their partner, a factor which often affects the balance of power in the relationship. Also, because childcare and housework is unpaid work, it is generally undervalued and not seen as 'real work' and, as it is mostly women who do this work, this tends to make women in our society undervalued.

What can we do to change this situation? For a start we need to get more active in our trade unions to fight for higher pay for part-time work, longer and better paid maternity leave, crèche facilities and childcare allowances. Equally important is paid paternity leave and paid parental leave, neither of which currently exist in Ireland, and which would encourage men to take more responsibility for childcare. Gains such as these can be won. For example in Sweden, which has 80% union membership, as well as paid paternity and maternity leave there is a parental allowance of 450 days which is paid at 80% of earn-

ings and can be taken any time before a child reaches the age of 8 (6).

Divisions and hierarchy within the working class is always beneficial for the bosses and the inequality that exists between men and women is no exception. It is difficult to see how sexist inequality could be completely done away with as long as capitalism exists. However there are clearly many things we can fight for now which would lessen this inequality and thus improve the lives of both women and men.

Deirdre Hogan

Sources

(1) Women and Poverty in Ireland, Brian Nolan and Dorothy Watson, Combat Poverty Agency, Oak Tree Press, pg 89. (2) The Irish Times, Thursday, July 1, 1999. Childcare is top concern of women workers. (3) How Unequal? Men and Women in the Irish Labour Market. T. Callen (ed). The Economic and Social Research Institute, General Research Series. Oak Tree Press. 2000, pg 45. (4) Women and Poverty in Ireland, Brian Nolan and Dorothy Watson, Combat Poverty Agency, Oak Tree Press. 1999, pg 18. (5) *ibid*, pg 83 (6) Work-Life Research Centre, Department of Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University, http://www.workliferesearch.org/fw_stats_sw.asp

Argentina says "Enough"

On the 19th and 20th of December 2001, there was a major popular revolt in Argentina. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in the streets. The demonstrations were sparked by the government's plan to cut public spending as part of an emergency financial package demanded by the IMF. 20 years of IMF loans and structural adjustment plans have left Argentina with a ruined economy and the highest debt per capita in the world. This time the people simply refused to allow further cuts as part of another hopeless 'rescue' package.

Across the country people of all ages and from all walks of life descended onto the streets, armed with pots, pans and sticks. They gathered outside the presidential palace in Plaza De Mayo, outside congress and outside the residences of the Prime Minister, De La Rúa, and his senior ministers. The police repeatedly attacked demonstrators and tried to drive them from the streets. The battle was particularly intense in The Plaza de Mayo, the historical centre of power in Argentina. More than twenty people died in the fighting. Despite the repression, the sound emanating from thousands of sticks banging empty pots was enough to force the government to resign.

Although Argentineans were united in opposition to the government and its economic policies, they lacked any political strategy or idea of an alternative. One of the distinguishing features of the demonstrations was the rejection of party flags. The only accepted identity was the national flag, the only unanimous song the anthem, the only slogan "Argentina, Argentina". This attitude of popular nationalism was encouraged by the mass media and meant that the demonstrators were very unwilling to listen to the ideas of radical organisations. As a result the protests tended to lack coordination and were often fragmented.

Anarchist involvement

Many Argentine anarchists took part in the revolt, In the street battles individual anarchists played a prominent part and anarchist

militants did participate in the organization of barricades, but this was a minor and relatively anonymous role in a massive popular mobilisation. Nevertheless the anarchist have learned some valuable lessons. They have been able to reflect on their need for a strategy of action in such cases of spontaneous revolt. They have also learned that the left in general is not considered a valid representative of the 'people arisen'.



Popular assemblies

In the weeks since December 20th, there have been ongoing large demonstrations, several of which have erupted into violence, but away from the demonstrations there have been other, more constructive elements of the uprising which have been completely ignored by the mass media.

After the 20th, in every district of the Federal Capital and in some districts of Greater

Buenos Aires, people began to organise popular assemblies to meet once per week. On Sunday the 13th of January, there was an assembly of all the districts, in a mass meeting which brought together more than a thousand representatives. This meeting included a delegate from an occupied factory in Tierra del Fuego, friends of the demonstrators who were killed by the police, delegates from the messengers' union and 200 delegates from the University of Buenos Aires.

The neighbourhood assemblies have resolved, among other things; to renationalise the privatized electricity and telephones services; to renege on external debts; to develop the 'revolts of pots' against the Supreme Court; to march with the friends and relatives of the three young people murdered by the police while protesting in the Plaza de Mayo. Most importantly they have rejected the present rulers and recognized the class character that the movement needs.

Although the revolt cannot be attributed to any particular political strategy, it did bring together the experiences of more than ten years of working-class struggle against neoliberalism. It did bring forward new actors, new ways and new values to understand this policy. The radicalising effects of the uprising and the growth of the popular assemblies have created an opportunity for the revolutionary forces. Capitalism seems incapable of solving Argentina's problems. The challenge now for Argentine anarchists is to persuade the Argentine people that the only real solution is libertarian revolution.

Chekov Feeney

A slightly longer version of this article is on our web page

Have your say

Write a letter to us at WSM, PO Box 1528, Dublin 8. You can also comment on any of the articles in this issue at

www.struggle.ws/wsm/comment.html

Thinking about Anarchism



Irish anarchists voted NO in the anti-abortion referendum. Not only members of the Workers Solidarity Movement, but most other Irish anarchists were out in the weeks beforehand putting up posters, delivering leaflets, raising funds, organising meetings and convincing their neighbours, friends and family to also vote NO.

Of course we don't accept the conclusions of the referendum as final. We still fight for a woman's right to control her fertility up to and including free, safe abortion on demand. Such things are democratic rights in themselves, something no majority should have a veto over.

But, I hear somebody say, don't anarchists have an objection to voting? Anarchists have no problem voting. We vote to elect shop stewards in our workplaces, we vote for a secretary in our local residents associations, we vote for suggestions we support in our organisations. The process of finding out how many and how few people want to do something is essential - unless we want to leave all the decisions that will effect us to a few leaders or bosses.

So why do we not take part in parliamentary elections? Anarchism is real democracy. Central to our politics is the idea that everyone effected by a decision should have their say in making that decision. Anarchists have always opposed participation in elections, which are about choosing rulers rather than ending the division into rulers and ruled.

Obviously it is better to live in a parliamentary democracy rather than a dictatorship. Even the most flawed democracies are forced to concede rights that dictatorships do not, such as some independence for trade unions, a limited right to organise, and a certain amount of free speech.

Anarchists will always be to the forefront in defending those basic democratic rights, they are good things to have and they give us some opportunity to organise and explain the anarchist vision of how society could be. But we do not confuse democratic values with choosing which gang of rulers will run our lives for the next four or five years.

The real purpose of parliament is not to ensure the country is run according to the wishes of all the people, cherishing all their views equally. Parliament instead provides a democratic facade beyond which the real business of managing capitalism goes on.

The parliamentary process involves most of the working class relying on a few representatives to enter parliament and do battle on their behalf. Their main involvement is voting every few years, and perhaps canvassing and supporting the party through paper sales or whatever.

Anarchists do not believe any real socialist/anarchist society can come about through the good actions of just a few individuals. From

the beginnings of the anarchist movement over 130 years ago, we have argued that the liberation of the working class can only be achieved through the action of the working class. The process of bringing about an anarchist society will either be carried through by the mass of the workers or it will not happen.

This idea is obviously the complete opposite to the parliamentary idea. We do not seek a few leaders, good, bad or indifferent to sort out the mess that is capitalism. Indeed we argue constantly against any ideas that make it seem such elites are necessary.

Even the best intentioned individual who gets into a position of power finds a divergence of interests with those she/he represents. This is as much true of revolutionaries and union bosses as it is of TDs and ministers.

If you don't want to live in a society where a small number of bosses and politicians make all the major decisions that effect the rest of us, why would you take part in an election to choose those very same rulers? The anarchist alternative is about real democracy, those effected by a decision make that decision, locally, nationally, internationally. And the means we use must be consistent with our goals - that's why we won't be voting for any of them in May.

Alan MacSimóin

That's Capitalism



Thames Trains, one of the firms operating Britain's privatised railways, has announced that it is suing the Health and Safety Executive for failing to stop the breaches of safety law that caused fatal Ladbroke Grove crash. What next, sweatshop bosses suing the cops because they didn't raid their premises and stop them using child labour?

The government finds it easier to jail the homeless than to house them. An increasing number of women prisoners do not want to leave Mountjoy Prison when they have served their sentences because they have nowhere to go. This was admitted by Minister for Justice, John O'Donoghue, at the launch of the Government's Homeless Preventative Strategy on February 27th.



Getting involved

Anarchism is a very simple idea - basically society should not be divided into order-givers and order-takers, instead it should be organised in a non-hierarchical way. We don't need bosses, politicians, bishops or anybody else to tell us how to live our lives. Anarchists look to a society which will be based on the idea of 'from each according to ability, to each according to need'.

We want to bring about a society organised from the bottom up, a society based on real grassroots democracy, where power remains at local level and is organised upwards through workplace and community councils.

This society will only be brought about through revolution! There is an old anarchist slogan which says that if elections changed anything, they'd be illegal. This is not just an empty slogan. The thinking behind it is that real democratic change cannot come from the top down but must be built from the bottom up. Instead of voting in elections and effectively giving someone else control of our lives, we stand for direct action and solidarity among and between workers. Real and meaningful change will only come about through our own efforts, by our own strength - when we all stand together against exploitation and wage slavery!

The Workers Solidarity Movement aims to spread anarchist ideas and anarchist methods of organisation among the working class and among people fighting exploitation. At the moment, as well as producing this paper six times a year, we also produce a magazine 'Red & Black Revolution' twice a year, and an occasional newsheet 'Anarchist News'. Members of the WSM are actively involved in trade union struggles, the fight against racism and the campaigns against double tax bin charges in Dublin and Cork. We were part of the Alliance for a No Vote which campaigned against the governments anti-abortion referendum.

With our relatively small numbers, there is a limit to what we can do. That's why we need people like you to get involved. If you've liked what you've read in this paper, maybe you'd be willing to take a 10 or more copies to distribute among your friends or workmates. The more people who read the ideas, the more people who get involved in struggle, the sooner we will reach our objective - a world free of poverty and exploitation, a world where freedom is a reality for all.

Low pay = Jobs?

A global lie

A low paid job is better than no job. At least that's what those supporting corporate Globalisation argue. Big companies like Nike and Gap pay workers badly, expect them to work long hours in appalling conditions, buy off or exclude their trade-unions but at least at the end of the day, these workers take home a pay packet. It might be small, but it's better than nothing, and anyway, it's just a start.

That was the logic that led many Mexicans to seek work in the Maquiladoras. These are foreign factories, operating along the US-Mexican border. In them wages are low, there are few unions and they are exempt from most government controls. Conditions may not be great, but it was hoped that the factories would provide much needed employment. They were seen as a temporary stepping stone which would eventually lead to the development of more secure, better paid work in Mexican industries. At least, this was the story spun by the Mexican government.

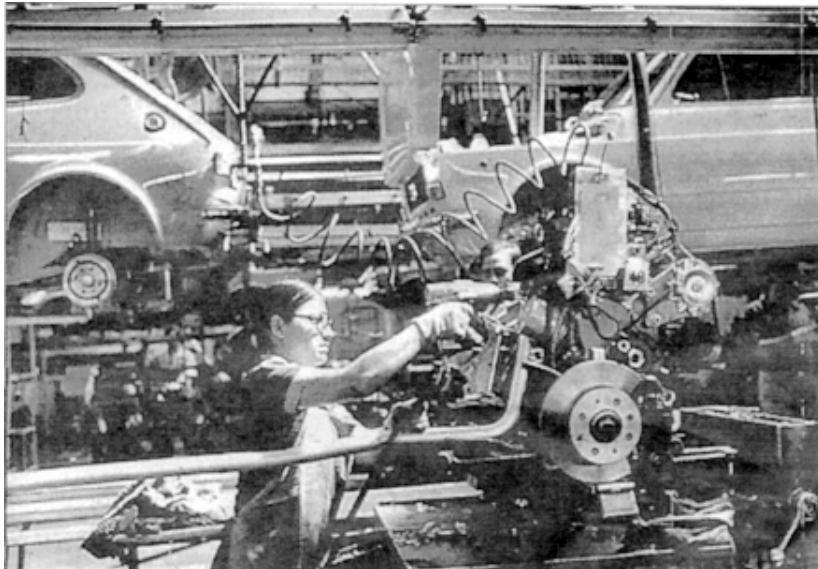
As *Mexican Labour News* (Vol 7, No 1) explains, "between 1965 when the first maquiladora laws were passed and about 1982, Mexican government officials and business leaders argued that the maquiladora could help solve Mexico's employment problem. The border plants, it was suggested, would provide jobs for workers without altering the national program of a mixed economy and a policy of import substitution industrialization. Workers would find jobs in the maquiladoras - then conceived as perhaps only a temporary phenomenon - until absorbed by other Mexican industries." In the late 1990s the Maquiladoras were the fastest growing sector of the Mexican economy.

Then last year, the US economy went into recession. Maquiladoras began to close and a couple of hundred thousand maquiladora workers have been laid off. Some of the companies, such as Thompson and Philips who were operating in Mexico for twenty years closed their operations and are moving to other parts of the world, most likely Asia. They laid off 15,000 workers. Twenty years of low pay and few rights has ended in unemployment in a country

with no benefits or social support for those who have lost their jobs.

In Mexico workers could expect to earn \$5 dollars a day, in Asia they will get \$1. Investors once based in Thailand, where wages are now \$1 an hour, are moving to Cambodia to take advantage of pay at 25c an hour or less. There are no winners, wages are below the poverty level.

Mexican Labor News concluded that "the lack of worker's rights and living wages undermines workers not only in the developed world, but also in the developing world ..the problem is not the low-wage Mexican or Chinese worker, or from the



point of view of other countries, the low-wage U.S. worker; but rather the high profits of the corporations and the low morals of the politicians."

The power of the corporations is being challenged however. For example, in Thailand the Ladybird Garment Company has been producing children's clothes for export to the west since 1987. The company paid workers less than the legal minimum wage so in 1996 they formed a union. The company tried to break the union by refusing to allow union members work overtime. In Thailand basic pay isn't enough

to survive and workers rely on overtime.

They offered union members bonuses if they left the union, they called to their homes. They began hiring temporary workers so that in the event of a strike they would have a supply of scabs available to them. For two years the unions negotiated. Then the employers ordered a lock out of those they considered to be the ringleaders.

Meanwhile international groups began to respond to an appeal for support. The Amsterdam-based Clean Clothes Campaign, the International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation, and the American-based Campaign for Labour Rights demanded that Ladybird's customers tell the employer to negotiate in good faith. Italian unions applied pressure on PreNatal and its parent company, Artsana, both Italian owned.

Asian Labour Update explains what happened finally "With mounting pressure from his customers and with government officials finally telling him he had to compromise, Mr. Veerasak and worker representatives were able to sign a contract on 2 July. The contract failed to make wage raises become based on seniority, but workers did get to a pay rise and won compensation for pregnant women, making them one of the few workforces in the country to have such an agreement.

The contract also gave the union paid time off for union activities, had provisions for incentive pay, provisions for adequate company transport and required the company to clean up the cafeteria. The agreement also allowed the 77 locked out workers to return to work immediately without repercussions or retaliation from management."

This is just one example of how workers themselves, organised in unions, can fight and win improvements in their working conditions. Unchallenged the big corporations will be happy to pay poverty wages until they find a cheaper and weaker workforce to exploit somewhere else. The only way their power can be stopped is if workers in all countries organise and fight for better wages and conditions for themselves and support the struggles against corporations where ever they occur.

Aileen O'Carroll

An American Addiction: Drugs, Guerillas, Counterinsurgency - US Intervention in Colombia

by Noam Chomsky
(AK Press Audio)

CD Euro 16.30/stg£10.00

In tracing back the history of the current narco-trafficking industry in Colombia, and the peasants' real place in all of it, Chomsky recalls the Eisenhower administration's 'Food for Peace' plan which entailed the flooding of third world markets with heavily subsidised exports from agri-businesses, essentially putting all local producers out of business. Thus, in Colombia, their wheat production industry was destroyed. And so, taught as they were to be 'rational peasants,' the locals, forced from their lands by drug barons and land owners into the outer reaches of the Amazonian rainforest, began to grow the only thing that would enable them to live and feed their children: cocoa. Enter Plan Colombia with the Clinton Administration. Chomsky describes here the reasoning and method of the plan, and unsurprisingly neither has anything whatsoever to do with curbing the drug trade or rehabilitating addicts.

Almost all of the 1.7 bn in 'aid' travelling to Colombia is in the form of chemical and biological warfare and money that is given to the military and paramilitaries (almost one and the same) who in turn are responsible for the majority of atrocities committed as well as being the main proponents of narcotics-trafficking in the country. A tiny percentage of the money has been allocated to the development of alternative crops to cocoa. No FARC controlled areas are to receive any of this money, though it is in these areas that the peasant population is suffering the most.

And inevitably, the US is utterly compliant in the narco-trafficking industry itself. Of the estimated 500 billion dollars generated within it per annum, over half of it passes through NY banks. US colonels training 'counter-narcotics brigades' in Colombia have been found guilty of trafficking. The list goes on and a number of things become clear: if quelling the drug trade and subsequent abuse was really an objective, all of the 1.7 bn would be going toward treatment of addicts, development of alternative crops and changing the social conditions in which that trade flourishes, as well as targeting the drug-barons.

Chomsky compares the current wave of annihilation in Colombia to that which happened to the Kurds at the hands of the Turkish government. The reason these two cases are similar is that Turkey at the time was number one on the US list of recipients of military 'aid' – this being so necessary to crush that insurgent oppressed people there. When that mission was a success, with thousands of Kurds murdered, Columbia moved into the number one spot, with the same kind of mission in mind.

An amusing and highly pertinent point is raised by Chomsky. If the problem of trafficking of lethal substances is really in question here, we need only look at US tobacco companies whose product constitutes a far greater health hazard than any narcotic in terms of mortality rates. "Many more people die in Co-

lumbia from US lethal drugs than the number of people who die here from Colombian lethal drugs...if we have a right to carry out these campaigns in Columbia, why don't they have a right to carry out chemical and biological warfare say, in North Carolina?" Good point.

Monday 25 March, 8pm Globalisation after Porto Alegre

Porto Alegre confirmed that sections of the globalisation movement are determined to impose a backward looking and reformist agenda on the movement. How can anarchists promote a revolutionary agenda instead?

NEWS FROM THE WSM VIA THE INTERNET

Our email list Ainriail distributes regular news updates and notices of events to subscribers. There are 4 - 8 emails a week. To join the list just email ainriail-request@struggle.ws with the subject subscribe. Our web page www.struggle.ws/wsm includes a huge archive of articles about the history of anarchism and Irish struggles.

Black Hawk Down

It was reasonably predictable that a slew of patriotic films would follow September 11th. By the time you read this "Black Hawk Down" may, finally, have made an exit but following closely is "behind enemy lines" and Mel Gibson's "We were soldiers" where America finally gets win the Vietnam war. I will shortly deal with the slack jawed excuse for a film that is Black Hawk Down but first a very short trip into history: what really happened!

On December 12th 1992 28,000 US soldiers moved into Somalia on a supposed humanitarian mission with the UN. In 10 months of occupation more than 10,000 Somalis died as a result of aggressive US military action. In reporting on the US/UN operation in Somalia the human rights group Africa Rights stated that "troops have engaged in abuses of human rights, including killing of civilians, physical abuse, theft...many UNOSOM soldiers have also displayed unacceptable levels of racism towards Somalis" The UN/USA force left shortly after the aborted attempt to kidnap Mohammad Farah Adid described in this film. They left behind a shattered country overrun with warring factions and starvation and it remains so today. The mission certainly did not succeed in its stated objectives.

The incidents involved in *Black Hawk Down* are described in the book by Mark Bowden. From the excerpts I've read the entire operation was clearly a piece of total military incompetence. But Hollywood's job is to transform an embarrassing defeat into a glorious victory. In the course of the days fighting 1000 Somalis died and 19 US rangers. In the film there are only 3 very short speaking parts for the Somalis or "skinnys" as the rangers call them (charming eh?). Their main purpose is to jump up, be mown down in sheets, leap on to bullets and generally look nasty. Each of the 19 rangers dies in

Dublin Open Meetings

Every month in Dublin we host a gathering of anarchists and other libertarian socialists to discuss a topic of interest over a pint. The meetings, for experienced activists and new comers alike, normally feature a local guest speaker with some expertise in the area, and are intended for thought provoking open discussion - not indoctrination!

We hope to develop these meetings so they become an essential monthly meeting point. Newcomers welcome - just bring along an open mind. The meetings are in our usual venue. Check our web page or phone us at 087 9558930 for the location of this venue.

Monday April 15, 8pm Call this choice!

As we get near to the general elections a discussion of the anarchist arguments against electoral politics and what sort of campaign we can mount during the elections.

loving slow motion with martial music shooting to the last clip, clutching photos of their loved ones wringing every ounce of sympathy. Indeed in this version of history, hey they could have made it **if only** Washington had of authorised some tanks and spectre gunship planes (*..those fools in Congress*) or **if only** the other UN troops hadn't of been so slow to act (*..those god damn Pakistanis*).

At the end of the film we get the name of every ranger killed – the "skinnys" remain nameless. In some ways they are like the alien creatures in director Ridley Scott's other film. Another even more meaningful comparison was made by John Patterson (Guardian February 1st) "what remains is basically a remake of "Zulu" with a tiny outfit hemmed in on all sides by a multitude of ululating savages".

Back in the real world we now know the name of every casualty of September 11th but none of the estimated 4100 Afghan civilians (thanks to the meticulous counting of Professor Marc Herold see www.struggle.ws/stophewar for a link) killed up to December 20th. Most people will probably remember where they were when they heard about September 11th for the rest of their lives. But on that day, just like every other, 38,000 children died of starvation and related diseases – who remembers them?

Conor McLoughlin

The Sellafield MOX Blockade

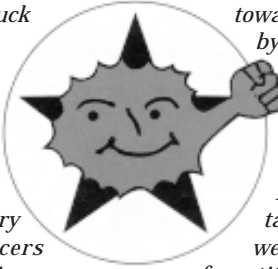
On 20th December 80 Irish activists delayed workers entering Sellafield on the opening day of the new MOX nuclear reprocessing plant. This certainly rattled a few cages and saw the British police acting in a heavy-handed manner once again. I spoke with some members of *Gluaiseacht* who were at a second demonstration in February, attended, by 200 which also blockaded Sellafield.

Tim Hourigan: "Despite five weeks prior notice of the protest the police responded completely inadequately. The specially trained SGI unit was not on duty. Instead of SGI we got a bunch of traffic cops from Workington police station. They became frustrated, pulled at protestors who were locked together, causing injury to wrists and hands. A female journalist told me that she was struck by a constable."

Barry O'Donovan: "...UKAEA constabulary and ... Police Support Units (PSU)...wore army combat boots, navy combat pants and police high-vis jackets, they wore no divisional insignia and very few wore numbers. These officers showed little interest in preventing cars from crashing through the protest lines... On one occasion a protestor was carried over half a mile on a car bonnet, the only officer on the

scene having left on his bike some minutes earlier. UKAEA police later expressed that this was not a concern to them. They proceeded to push and drag protestors out of the way of any car which attempted to pass through the protest line, going so far as to throw one woman, Esta Carter, into a ditch.

I was shouldered in the back and spun toward the edge of the road twice by a member of the PSU.



But as to the positive effects of the direct action, **Tim Hourigan** says "First off, it's helping to highlight the issue. More people are thinking and talking about Sellafield. When we started collecting signatures for petitions last November, a lot of people had no idea where Sellafield was, what it did and some even thought it had closed years ago. It's now topical again. The open-

ing of the MOX plant made the news, but the series of protests after it is showing people that there IS real opposition to Sellafield and it should not be ignored. Secondly, it is putting pressure on BNFL. They're no push-over so it will have to be sustained pressure, but they are already fighting to keep a dying industry alive, and they'd rather not have to worry about dealing with us. ... When the news shows 200 people taking a long trip (15 hrs one way) to protest at Sellafield, they start asking what the government is doing about it, and if that is enough."

The fact is that direct action is having an effect, and has gotten under the British Government's skin. And as we certainly cannot rely on our government for anything, other than to abuse their power and make empty promises, it is the most effective weapon at our disposal.

Tim Hourigan thinks "the nuclear industry is under the illusion that if they can prop the thing up for long enough that they can stage a comeback." But with continuous pressure and a refusal to be shaken by scare tactics Sellafield and the Mox plant will be denied this chance and finally be shut down.

Cliona Murphy

Scapegoat Wanted Only Asylum Seekers Need Apply!

In the past few months, there has been an upsurge of attacks on asylum-seekers and refugees. Politicians worried about their re-election chances and about losing their place on the Dáil Éireann Gravy Train have led the attacks, unashamedly targeting vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees. Physical attacks including the vicious murder of the Chinese youth Zhao Liu Tao have resulted.

These politicians have linked Asylum-Seekers to all sort of problems – hospital waiting lists, housing waiting lists, even 'un-Irish' activities to do with the food they eat. In one outrageous attack, by Cork's millionaire TD Noel O'Flynn, a small group of asylum-seekers were virtually accused of almost taking over part of Cork City. Flynn and others like him have decided that there are votes to be had in blaming asylum-seekers. They are doing what politicians always do – finding a scapegoat.

Everyone knows that there are huge problems to do with the Celtic Tiger boom. The profits and windfall have gone in one main direction – to those who are already wealthy. Across the board in recent years

- Inequality has risen
- Hospital waiting lists have got longer
- Affordable housing has disappeared while rents have soared.

Most of us are working *harder*, for *longer*, and under *more difficult* terms than we have ever been. The likes of Flynn in Cork or Callely in Dublin know this, but like true politicians they are cynical and greedy to be re-elected. They have no qualms about pointing the finger in the wrong direction.

The upshot of this new situation is that it will lead to more violence against Asylum-Seekers and refugees. For example

in Cork, one radio station – 96 FM – and its sidekick 'freebie' newspaper *Inside Cork* – have given vast amounts of airplay and column inches to Flynn and another local politician, Joe O'Callaghan, to attack asylum-seekers. Clearly this radio station has taken a decision to highlight and target asylum-seekers. On the matter of corruption in City Hall, it is noticeably silent.

What can be done? Racists are gaining a lot of confidence from recent events. A climate where 'mainstream' politicians are 'talking racist' talk will inevitably lead to more violent attacks. To do something about the issue is really about CONFRONTING these racist politicians (and radio stations and newspapers). If there is one thing they hate

it is being challenged. There is a need also however to move beyond the simplistic notions that 'the current problem' is just about a 'need for more tolerance'. This is not the situation that we face with this current upsurge in racism. On the contrary, politicians like Flynn and others know that this matter is all about power and wealth and who continues to control it. To fight racism right now we must also draw attention on the real problems in this country – most of us have little say and little power. The big decisions, the ones that make a difference in our lives, are taken by a small elite – in the interest of bankers, investors and big business.

In this sort of environment – where many of us feel powerless – racism thrives. Fighting racism now has to be about fighting against the way this society is organised – how it's structured, how decisions are made. We can defeat racism but we must be prepared to fight it wherever it rears its ugly and divisive head.

What You Can Do

We all come across racism in our day to day lives – at work, school, college, around where we live. Believe it or not, this is the best place to begin the fight against racism. Here are some practical things that anyone can do

- Challenge all racist comments and slurs when possible.
- At work or at college, take racism seriously. Bring issues – comments or slurs – to the attention of your steward or union rep. Makes the union take the issue seriously. Get your colleagues to take an anti-union stand.
- Remember one rule of thumb: racism doesn't happen in a vacuum. It thrives in a society where people feel powerless and where there's inequality. Fighting racism always means fighting these problems too.
- Asylum-seekers appreciate solidarity – don't hold back.

Kevin Doyle



To break or not to break - new union to be set up?

When Mick O'Reilly and Eugene McGlone were suspended from their positions of Irish regional secretary and Northern Ireland organiser respectively of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU) last June, it was expected that their fightback would be short and sharp.

This proved not to be the case, and - due to a variety of circumstances - their process of appeal is only now (as this article is written in mid-February) coming to a head. It is now emerging that there may be a broad left majority on the incoming general council of the TGWU, and that in this way O'Reilly and McGlone may yet hold on to their jobs.

As a result of these suspensions, an idea has been floated among sections of the left and among activists in the ATGWU that a new union - independent of the ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions) and strongly anti - 'partnership' - be formed. Those behind this idea have come up with a name - Independent Workers Union (IWU) and an outline of what the new union should stand for. They describe the trade union movement in its present form as having become "...an arm of the state. Its function is now more to control workers rather than to advance their interests." The new union, they say "...will not be part of Congress (ICTU) and our industrial strength will stem from key sections of the economy, who have indicated a willingness to join."

Those behind the IWU see the membership of the new union coming from three distinct sectors "...entire homogenous units who wish to leave their existing union... new recruits coming from the vast army of the unorganised workers... support/solidarity members, many of whom will retain their existing union membership but who will hold a dual mandate, using the IWU as a catalyst to force a more radical agenda within the ICTU union."

It is not the intention here to look at the specifics of the IWU - not enough information is available to allow this. However the general question of 'breakaway' unions raises some interesting points for debate by anarchists, libertarians and by trade union activists in general.

The starting point must be of course an absolute acceptance of the right of any group of workers to join the union of their choice - or indeed to leave if they choose to do so. When the traindrivers of the ILDA left SIPTU and the National Bus and Rail Workers Union to form their own union, the establishment - management, government and trade union bureaucracy - reacted with horror. This incredulity from the establishment at the cheek of a group of workers thinking for themselves was only surpassed when the ILDA joined the ATGWU. As if the members of ILDA were slaves from the days of old, the ATGWU was ordered by Congress to 'hand them back' to unions that they themselves had decided they didn't want to be part of.

While accepting that the ultimate decision by any group of workers as to which union they want to join is theirs and only theirs to make, there are some arguments against the formation of breakaway unions. The first of these is that the principal effect of such a breakaway could well be to take the minority of combative/radical activists out of the old union, thus leaving the rest of the members totally at the mercy of the bureaucrats whose anti-democratic behaviour had initially provoked the split. In theory at least, the radical activists would use their ener-

gies much more effectively by staying in the union and fighting to win over the broader membership to their radical ideas.

This is, as I say, good in theory. The practice on the ground however can be very frustrating. Not being personally a member of SIPTU, but knowing activists who have spent more years than they care to remember trying to do just that (fighting to win the membership to more radical ideas) against an increasingly anti-democratic bureaucracy in that union, I can certainly see why the prospect of leaving SIPTU and starting afresh in a new union could have appeal. The relevant question would be of course whether it would be possible to break groups of workers away from the all-smothering embrace of the SIPTU leadership, as opposed to just taking isolated activists out of the union.

The history of breakaway unions in Ireland has not been a good one. Indeed it is ironic that SIPTU's own origins can be traced back to 'left breakaways'. Both the Irish Transport & General Workers Union (ITGWU) and the Federated Workers Union of Ireland (FWUI) - which merged to form SIPTU were born as 'left breakaways' - as was the aforementioned NBRU. The lesson from this must be that in the absence of a radical overhaul of the structures any breakaway will soon become a mirror image of its parent.

This raises an interesting challenge for anarchists and libertarians. If a new union is to emerge, it surely provides the opportunity for us to put forward proposals for radical democratic structures which - if accepted - might ensure that such a union would actually provide a real alternative. We haven't heard the last of this issue, let's hope that what has happened in the ATGWU will at least start a debate which will go beyond the personalities and look at the need for real changes to the structures of the existing trade unions if they are to become the organs for change which they could potentially be.

Gregor Kerr (INTO, personal capacity)

Irish indymedia launched

<http://www.indymedia.ie/>

Over the last couple of years dozens of Indymedia web sites have sprung up across the globe. Anyone can go to one of these sites and add their own news story, photographs or even audio or video to the site. Anyone who visits the site can then view this.

After months of preparation an Irish Indymedia site was launched at the start of this year. Below James McBarron, a relative novice on the internet reviews the site to date.

There is nothing like reading a press report, listening to a radio report or watching a TV report of something you were involved in, particularly if it was oppositional politics. It doesn't matter if it was a service charges picket, a critical mass cycle protest, a sit-in or whatever. When you watch the state or capitalist media you don't recognise the event. It's different from the one you were at, there are mistakes, distortions or just damned lies. It's frustrating as hell.

That's why when somebody gets an alternative media outlet together where participants report on the action, where the journalists are working to an agenda of truth and wish to inform and publicise reality, then you're just blown away. 'Okay, you say, we have our left papers'. Yeah I know but watching footage of the Shannon protest, hearing the voices reading the truth is so refreshing. I was there - the report is real - the crap in the papers or local radio is just twisted. So viewing



the Irish indymedia site was a pleasure and I know I can place a little trust in the site to do it's best to project the real story. Now I can go there to get the updates on actions and events taking place all around the country. As long as someone participating in an event is clued in enough to post the stuff to the website I'll get the story from the horses mouth. I'll be able to balance that against the media spin. Ain't that just great.

Everyone who ever challenged the powerful has been a victim of the establishment media, now we've got another place to get real news. The site for an internet novice like me is user friendly, welcoming and unthreatening. It is highly accessible and easy to recommend. Keep up the good work you guys.

PDF version, for more PDF files see www.struggle.ws/pdf.html

Defeating the Bin Charge

Corporation gets NASTY – DON'T PANIC DON'T PAY

The Council decided to start off 2002 by getting tough on the people of Dublin who haven't paid them a penny of their unjust double tax known as the refuse charge. On a dark night in November the Council voted to impose the charge for a following year, despite the fact that they were made well aware of the widespread opposition to it.

Now like a schoolyard bully who is meeting some opposition – the council has decided to back up its new double tax with threats. Thousands of letters went out all over the city threatening people with court action within ten days of receiving the letter. The campaign acted quickly and over 50,000 leaflets were distributed informing people of developments within the campaign.

There are meetings happening all over the city to reassure them that the campaign will not leave them to fight this bully on their own. We are pushing for increasing the membership of the campaign – as those 6 Euro per household can add up and we'll need that money to defend those who are unlucky enough to be brought to court.

We are entering a crucial time for the campaign. Now we really have to stand strong. The Council's plan to get everyone to accept the new unjust tax has not gone well. That is why they've resorted to the threatening people with court action.

Of course judging by the calls that I've received after this letter arrived on people's doorsteps the Council have only succeeded in really annoying the people of Dublin. This legal option is the only one open to them – and they cannot possibly bring the 50,000 people that haven't paid a thing to court. Now we really begin the fight. Join the campaign, organise your street, and convince the unfortunate people who've paid this tax that they shouldn't pay the council another cent. We will demonstrate outside the courts, we will haunt the councillors and politicians who brought in this bin-tax – and ultimately we'll give them the bitter defeat that the council deserve..

They're losing the battle – now with some more work and energy it's our chance to win the war.

Dermot Sreenan (Campaign Secretary, personal capacity)

Figures as of start of year
In the Corpo. area 167,000
bin-tax bills issued
39,724 have fully paid
2,998 have partially paid
83,412 have paid nothing
40,866 have got waivers
Excluding waivers for every
one household that has paid
two have not!



BIN THE BILL

Anti bin charge campaign launch in South Dublin

The campaign against the newly-imposed bin charges is getting off the ground in South Dublin. At a meeting in Tallaght before Christmas attended by about 25 people who were active in the campaign against water charges, it was decided to establish an interim co-ordinating committee to do the groundwork in terms of building the campaign on the ground, leading up to a conference to be held in early summer. Since then public meetings have been held in a number of different areas and more are planned. If you live in the South Dublin County Council area, your help is needed in building this campaign. Contact the **Campaign Against Refuse Charges** by ringing Gregor Kerr on 087-6996046, Mick Murphy on 087-9683814 or Gerry Kelly on 01-4517203

Dublin Corpo. Campaign Conference

Central Hotel, Essex Street, Dublin 2 – March 9th

All non-payers welcome

Contact: Campaign Mobile - 087 - 2837989 or Dermot at 087 - 6277606

More on the bin tax at <http://struggle.ws/wsm/bins.html>

LETTER

Drogheda Residents Against Bin Charges & Privatisation

DRABCAP is the anti-bin charges & Privatisation campaign group in Drogheda. Contact: (Secretary) Harry Phelan @ 041 9830335.

Drogheda Borough Council is now collecting ALL bins (since December 14th last) irrespective of "Paid" stickers/tags being displayed.

This situation arose following DRABCAP threatening High Court action (via P. H. O'Reilly, Solrs., Phibsboro, Dublin) against Drogheda Borough Council and Louth County Council for failing to implement Supreme Court decision (Cork 8th. of November 2001) in Drogheda.

DRABCAP, since the charge was introduced in the town in January 2000, organised a mass non-payment campaign against the bin charge. DRABCAP "volunteers" collected

refuse from boycotting households and dumped it into the Council's bin trucks on collection days in the different areas of Drogheda.

This action began on August 2nd 2000 when the Council withdrew the collection from "no-pay" households, and continued until December 14th 2001 when the council were forced to implement the Cork Supreme Court ruling in the town by the threatened legal action.

In the two years 2000/01 the Council just managed to collect £400,000 in bin taxes in Drogheda from a potential £3.2 million.

The Drogheda campaign continues apace, and will use the general election campaign to pressure the candidates to abolish charges.

For more Info, PLEASE contact Harry Phelan (DRABCAP Secretary) at 041-9830335. Any publicity you can give the campaign in Drogheda VERY WELCOME.

Frank Gallagher (Vice-Chair). DRABCAP.

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