

Corruption drives the system



The Sunday Tribune of 7th March 1999 reproduced a photograph taken in the grounds of Dublin Castle in June 1990. Beaming at the camera, without an apparent care in the world, are the then 12 Prime ministers of the European Union, along with their foreign ministers.

What most people watching the deliberations in Dublin Castle on that weekend ten years ago were not aware of, however, was that many of those who had been entrusted with the task of planning Europe's economic future had more than a love of fine port in common. Of the 12, at least 7 have since been implicated - either directly or by association - in shady dealings, cronyism and downright dishonesty. The then Prime Ministers of Ireland, Greece, France, Britain, Italy, Spain and Belgium have all been associated with charges of varying degrees of fraud, nepotism and political favouritism.

Needless to say, none of these upstanding politicians have spent an hour behind bars. In addition 20% of the members of the cabi-

net of the then Irish Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, are under investigation, by the tribunals sitting in Dublin Castle, for receipt of political "donations", involvement in shady land deals and the selling of political favours.

The murky world of Irish business and politics is being exposed as never before. Yet one is left with the feeling that this is no more than scratching at the surface. Strenuous efforts are being made by politicians of all parties to portray those being exposed as either the rotten apples in the barrel or as yesterday's men. The fact that the majority of the ministers in the current cabinet served alongside those now being accused is being brushed aside.

...in politics and business

It is not just politicians who are coming under the microscope. From the beef industry to the banking world, scams and corruption are being uncovered throughout the Irish business world, and the two-faced nature of the Irish judicial system is being exposed.

Consider the following - as pointed out in a letter to The Echo newspaper on 11th March 1999. A young woman who paid a bus fare of £1.00 instead of £2.25 was fined £105 and sentenced to 14 days in prison. Meanwhile Allied Irish Banks - then making £2.2million profit every single day - got away with paying just £14million of the £100 million it owed in Deposit Interest Retention Tax due to a fraud involving non-resident accounts.

If AIB were to be prosecuted for this crime on equal terms with the bus fare dodger, they would have had to pay a fine of £7.224 billion and whoever was chiefly responsible for the fraud would be sentenced to 26,473 years in prison.

Of course, we don't expect the 'scales of justice' to be evenly balanced. We know that 'corrupt politicians' or their mates in the banking or building worlds won't end up doing time. We also know that the only

reason for this 'corruption' is basically that they can do it. A political system, which siphons all control away from working class people and entrusts it to an elected elite, can only end up thus.

The alternative

Parliamentary democracy, by its very nature, breeds corruption. It puts people into a position of control and authority over those they are supposed to 'represent'. Deals are done in secret, ordinary people are never actually asked for their own ideas - they are only asked every couple of years to 'approve' or 'disapprove' of ideas already prepared for them.

There is an alternative system of democracy - one that would remove the power from the 'politicians' and thus remove their potential for corruption. It is the system known by anarchists as 'direct democracy', a system which is based on the premise that people know best how to look after their own situation; that we don't need specialists to tell us how to run our places of work or our communities.

Direct democracy is based on delegation not representation. Delegates are only elected to implement specific decisions. They do not have the right to change a decision previously made by an assembly of people. They can be immediately recalled and dismissed from their mandates if they don't carry out the specific function allocated to them.

Such a form of democracy is the only antidote to the cancer of corruption. In the meantime, tribunals and investigations will provide us all with plenty of entertainment but don't hold your breath waiting for any real results from their deliberations.



Lock 'em up and throw away the keys?

It's tempting, isn't it? The politicians who took bribes, evaded tax and made fortunes for themselves are the same politicians who voted in the 1980s and 1990s for cuts in health spending. That meant longer waiting lists and some patients dying from treatable illnesses before they reached the top of the queue.

They are the same politicians who voted to cut back spending on local authority house building, which has contributed to the housing problems of today. They are the hypocrites who never tired of telling us to tighten our belts, while they lived the life of Reilly at our expense.

But what would be gained from locking them up? Well, what would be gained apart from putting a lot of smiles on a lot of faces? We can look for revenge or we can look for 'restorative' justice. That means putting

right what the criminal did wrong.

So how about taking all their ill-gotten wealth from them and just allowing them to have an average family home and an average worker's wage? Use everything else for the common good; for health and education spending. How about turning Charlie's mansion in Kinsealy into a homeless hostel, how about using some of his land for good quality local authority housing?

How about seizing Liam Lawlor's "consultancy fees" and handing them over to Concern? How about moving a homeless family into Michael Lowry's extension? How about giving Denis Foley's offshore cash to one of the drug treatment programmes?

Now that would wipe the grins from the faces of the politicians and their business pals.

The Anarchist alternative

Every five years the politicians come around our doorsteps, selling their promises. "Vote for me and I'll give a tax cut". "Vote for me and I'll open a new school". "Vote for me and I'll put people before politics"??? I'm waiting for an honest politician to make a promise that I know I can believe - "Vote for me and I'll make you poorer, my rich friends even richer, and get paid £38,000 a year - by you - for my trouble"

Real democracy means deciding issues for ourselves, instead of electing people who then ignore our wishes. Starting with the things that effect you directly - how your workplace is run, the facilities, or lack of them in your community - and which obviously don't make sense to have decided at a national level. If we're to change things for the better in our lives, we need real power at each of these levels.

Democracy means mandating representatives, telling them exactly what to do, and being able to fire them as soon as they stop doing as we tell them, instead of having to wait five years before getting a choice between them and someone else who'll ignore us. It means paying those representatives the same wages we get, and it means getting rid of professional politicians. We can't let people make a career out of representing us - we all know that power corrupts, and even a mandated delegate can get too fond of their position if they keep it for too long. Representing a workplace or a community can only be a temporary thing, a break from your real job that's rotated between everyone - its time to get rid of the division into rulers and ruled.



Don't be a scab for a bag of sugar

Six workers at the Aldi supermarket in Parnell Street have been on strike since June 3rd. When the workers joined MANDATE (the union for shop and bar staff) management responded by refusing to talk to the union. They then sacked two union workers for "poor performance" (despite having offered one of them a management job only days previously because his work was so good!) and suspended three others for refusing to carry out heavy duty cleaning, such as toilet cleaning, as well being cashiers.

The workers joined the union because of things like:

*Aldi's claim to pay £7.00 per hour is a lie. To earn £7.00 you would have to meet an unachievable productivity target.

*Workers were not happy with the way their hours were being recorded by management (i.e. they were not being paid for all their time at work). Aldi recognises unions in Germany, Denmark and Britain. If they get away with smashing the union here, other bosses will try to copy them, and Aldi themselves will almost certainly try it on in other countries. This week Aldi have an advertisement seeking staff on a "self-employed" basis. This means no sick pay and no holiday pay.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

*Don't shop in Aldi until the strike has

been settled.

*Show solidarity, stop at the picket for a minute and let the strikers know that you support them.

*With just six people on strike we can make sure that they suffer no financial loss, that they will not be forced back to work by poverty. Can get your union committee to make a donation to the strike fund? Can you do a collection at work/among friends/at a gig? Any money collected can be given to the strikers on the picket line or sent to Aldi Strike Committee, Mandate trade union, 9 Cavendish Row, Dublin

About Anarchist News

Anarchist News is produced by the Workers Solidarity Movement. We stand for a socialism that is based on freedom and real democracy. If you'd like information about anarchism send a 30p stamp to WSM, PO Box 1528, Dublin 8.

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WORKERS SOLIDARITY

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