

# Voice

WILL 1999 BRING A  
WORLD CAPITALIST  
SLUMP?

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**Paper of the Socialist Party**

Issue no.19 ■ January 1999

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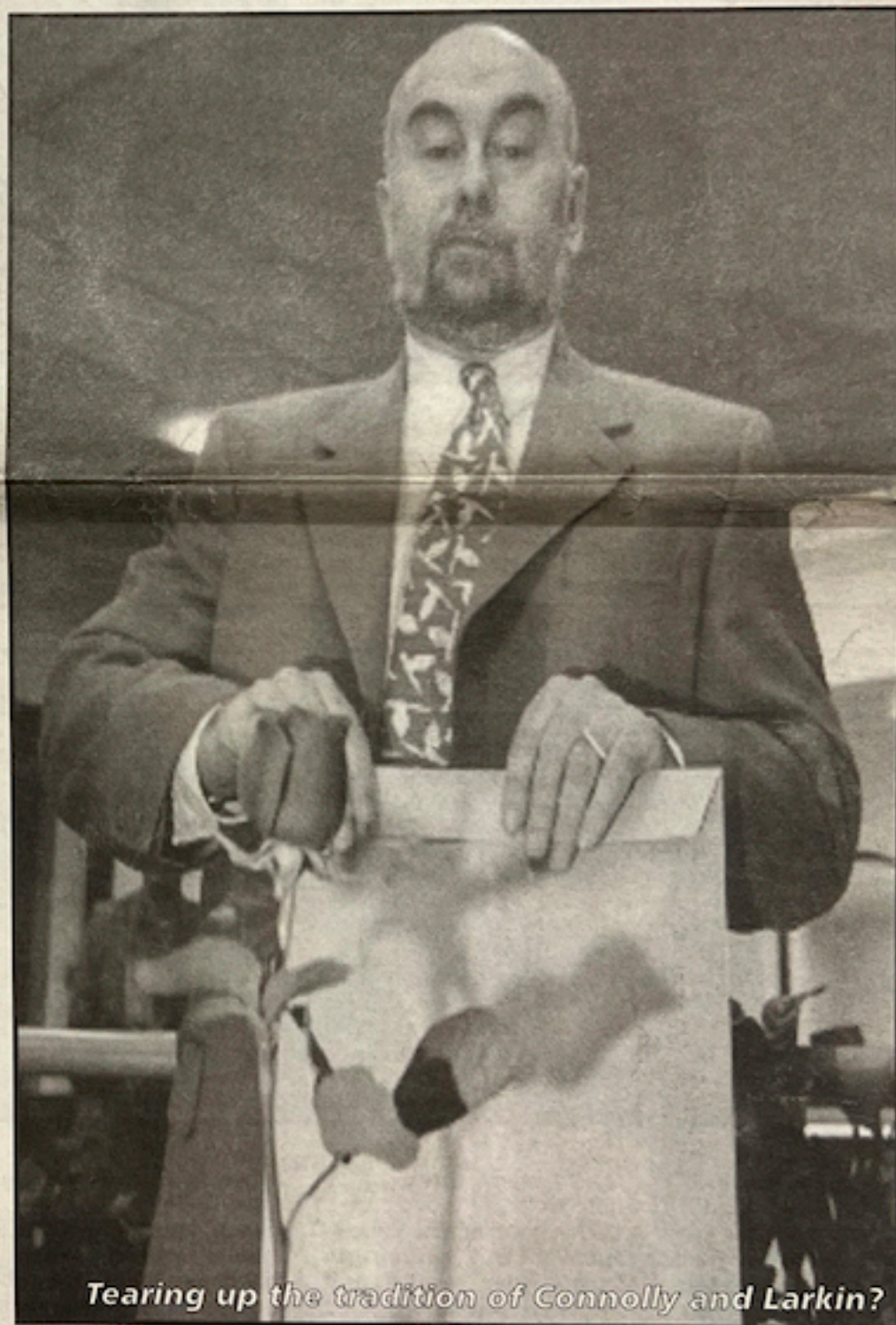


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## Quinn and De Rossa merge parties to form

# NEW LABOUR SELLOUT!



*Tearing up the tradition of Connolly and Larkin?*

**"One TD did stand out. Despite the best efforts of our  
stumblebum of a Ceann Comhairle to stifle his  
contributions, Joe Higgins has brought a sense of  
indignation to this place that has not been seen since  
the departure of Noel Browne.**

**.....He is the Opposition."**

**Sunday Independent, January 3rd, 1999**

**M**ORE BLAND than Blair's New Labour, this merger came out of the disastrous results in the last general election and in Democratic Left's collapse from being a political party into an unsustainable parliamentary clique.

In the past Labour responded to the disastrous effects of coalition by attempting to shift to the left to recoup its base. Now they have moved even further to

the right and this merger is part of the process.

Politically discredited in the eyes of working people the only way they could try and pose themselves as different was to come together.

The decline of Labour and Democratic Left since 1992 was because of their anti working class policies while in government. They are planning to get back into power as quickly as possible.

The merger is a move to try and save as many Dail

seats as possible. Then they will go into government with whatever is on offer. Fianna Fail or Fine Gael, it makes no difference.

The main effect of the merger is to create a huge vacuum on the left in Irish politics. The Socialist Party intends to step into that vacuum.

We will take the socialist ideas of Connolly and Larkin, long abandoned by Labour and DL, and make them into a powerful force for real change.

**JOIN THE SOCIALIST PARTY  
THE REAL ALTERNATIVE**

# Local and European Elections Roll on June 11th

**CORRUPT LAND rezonings, water charges, cuts in services and huge waiting lists, that is the shameful record of the local authorities elected in 1991.**

By Kevin McLoughlin.

In a whole number of areas the Socialist Party will provide a real alternative to these right wing and ineffective councillors in the elections on 11 June. The European elections are being held on the same day.

The last eight years has seen profound changes in Irish politics. Massive corruption has been exposed. Elected representatives have continually pushed through decisions that have favoured their big business friends.

Labour and DL have betrayed the trust of working class people. In particular they played a shameful role on the water charges issue. Scared to face the people, these parties have postponed these elections which were due in 1996.

There is a huge vacuum on the left and in 1999 the Socialist Party is determined to become a real factor in Irish politics. Local areas are currently finalis-

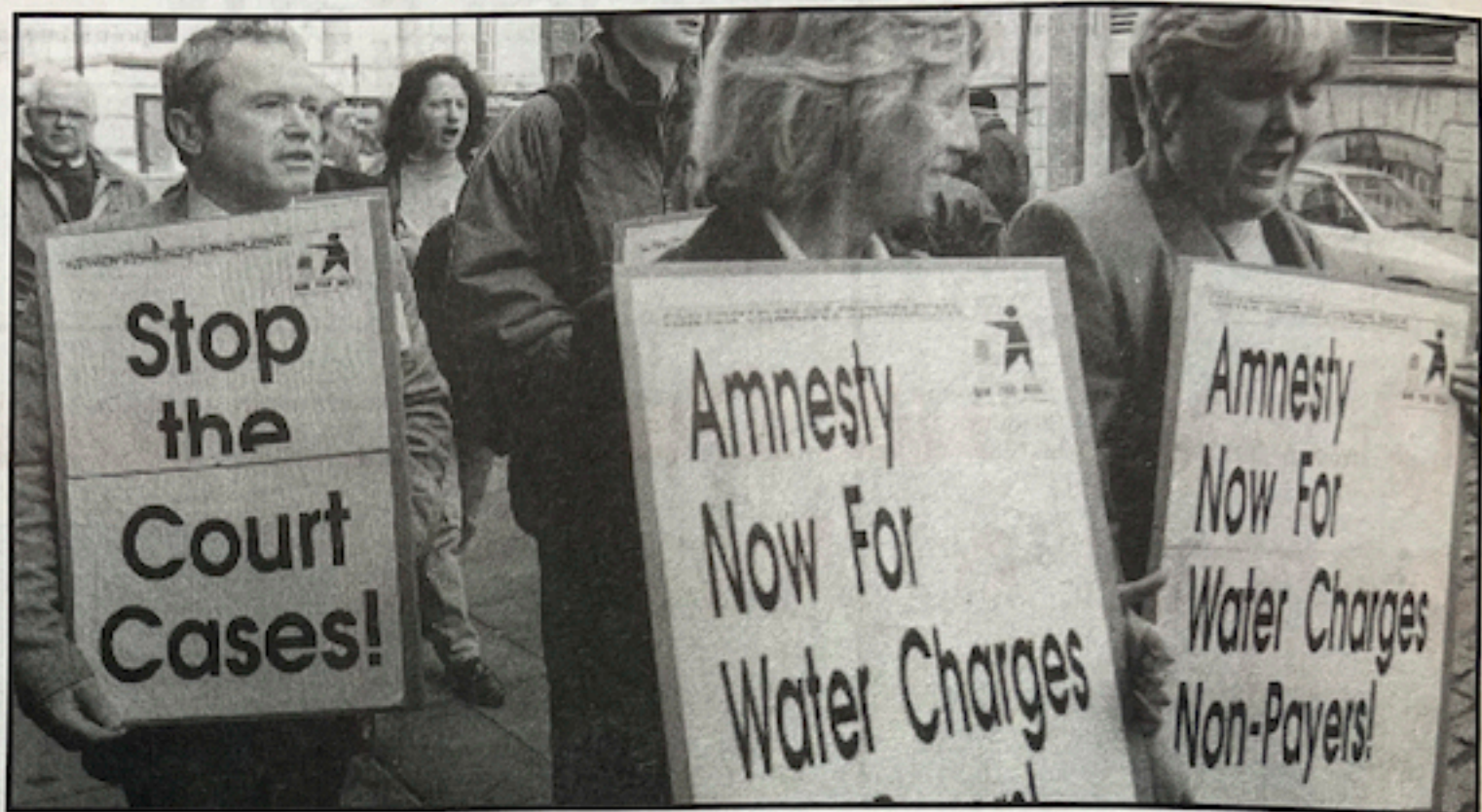
ing their preparations. We will formally launch our policy platform and candidates for the local elections within the next month.

We will be standing over ten candidates, our largest ever number. With our campaigning record and our clear socialist policies linked to the excellent work of our TD, Joe Higgins, we are confident that we will do very well.

In Dublin we are going all out to try and win four council positions. In other areas we are standing in order to strengthen our base for future campaigns and elections.

Getting up to four councillors would be an enormous breakthrough for our party. Ordinary people would have serious fighters for their rights on the councils. It would also put the party in a good position to seriously challenge for a number of Dail seats in the next general election. Such a performance would also expose the false idea some of our opponents put forward, that is, that we are a "one man party".

Local authorities take decisions that impact on people's lives daily. There will be many localised



On June 11th remember who gave you the water tax.

issues but also national issues like housing. As one part of tackling the housing crisis the Socialist Party will demand that central government has a responsibility to provide whatever funds are necessary so that the councils can build decent affordable homes for all.

Joe Higgins will be standing for the Socialist Party in the Dublin Euro constituency.

Our party will provide a socialist alternative on a whole range of national and international issues in this election. We aim to develop our national profile and hopefully extend our

political influence into areas where we are currently not organised.

The Socialist Party will be linking up with its sister organisations in Europe and perhaps other groups on the left who will be contesting the European elections in order to form a common left platform to

which workers throughout the EU could affiliate to.

Both the water charges campaign and the election of Joe marked important stages in the development of the Socialist Party in Ireland. A successful election campaign next June will mark a new turning point.

## Home Helps Victory



**T**HE GOVERNMENT has been forced to concede a pay increase to home helps employed by the health boards around the country. From the start of April home helps will be paid a minimum of £3 an hour.

By Mick Barry, Secretary, Home Helps for Decent Wages.

Although £3 an hour is still a shockingly low rate of pay the increase represents a real breakthrough for home helps who have recently begun to organise for better pay and conditions.

When Home Helps for Decent Wages was begun in Cork in Autumn 1997 home helps in the Southern Health Board area were paid £1.70 an hour. Pay was increased to £2 an hour in 1998 and the new increase will be worth £1,000 a year

to a woman working a 20 hour week.

The government concession of £4.5 million to expand the service and increase pay rates was announced in the Budget debate on December 2.

The pay victory was won by women organising, joining a union and fighting hard for improvements. In particular, huge public support linked to a threat to target politicians in next June's local elections forced changes.

The campaign is not over yet. January's Southern Health Board estimates meeting must be observed very closely to ensure that no jobs are cut to partially compensate for the pay increase.

The campaign must organise to ensure that home helps will be covered by the new minimum wage

legislation in 15 months time.

Last but not least the issue of working conditions for home helps must be brought to the forefront in 1999. Holidays, holiday pay, pensions, job security and trade union recognition are basic rights for all workers and home helps must organise to now win all their rights.

Now that it has been proved that it pays to organise, all home helps should join the campaign and union by phoning Mary Arrowsmith at 021-303324 or Nell Murphy at 021-277151.

Finally the Socialist Party is proud of the role it has played in helping to initiate the campaign and in providing assistance right down the line and pledges to continue with this work in 1999.

## In memory of Fran English

**MEMBERS OF the Socialist Party were shocked and saddened by the news of the death of party member Fran English in November of last year. Tragically, Fran who had been suffering from depression over a period of time, took his own life.**

.....

I first met Fran back in the 1980s when we were both active as trade unionists and socialists in the Kilmore area. Fran joined the Kilmore branch of the Labour Party, as a Militant supporter in the late 1980s.

When we left the Labour Party in 1991, to set up Militant Labour, Fran immediately played a leading role in building the new socialist organisation in Dublin North Central. Here during the early 1990s Militant Labour grew quite successfully under the local leadership of which Fran played a key role.

I remember Fran being very serious about building socialist ideas in his neighbourhood and in his workplace, Cadburys.

Fran got more involved in his union SIPTU and became chief-shop steward for SIPTU in what was one of the biggest unionised

private sector workforce in Dublin. And only as an active trade unionist can you appreciate what he was taking on!

But Fran was also an extremely likable bloke, very open and always ready to entertain. He was extremely popular in his workplace. Fran like many of us in the 1990's, was swimming against the stream, struggling to maintain the ideas of Marxism. And like many of us who are genuinely concerned for our class and its future we make many sacrifices. Fran had a lot to give through his politics, his art and his drama and that's just what he did. He made many sacrifices, maybe too many to his class, his colleagues and the ones he loved.

Unfortunately Fran found these pressures too much. This compounded other difficulties in his life and he gave up his union position.

Fran will be sadly missed by all his comrades in the Socialist Party. In particular our sympathies go out to Fran's partner Jackie and their children Darren, Barbie, Stephen, Pamela, Eric, Gavin and Emmet.

By Terry Kelleher



Fran English

## Joe Higgins, the real opposition

**I**N HIS review of the Dail in 1998 John Drennan wrote:

"One TD did stand out. Despite the best efforts of our stumblebum of a Ceann Comhairle to stifle his contributions, Joe Higgins has brought a sense of indignation to this place that has not been seen since the departure of Noel Browne.

"He is one of the few TDs who have managed some sort of indignation about a Dail which is content to oversee the jailing of two building workers for striking for the right to pay tax, and accept contributions from a bank - the AIB - which allegedly doesn't bother with such trifles. He is the Opposition.

Sunday Independent, January 3, 1999.



## The Joe Higgins Column

**1999 PROMISES to be an exciting and challenging year for the Socialist Party. On June 11th we will be taking on the establishment political parties in the local and European elections.**

The local elections will be an opportunity to outline to the communities how the local problems which they experience arise from the way our society is owned, controlled and run by a small elite and the political parties which represent it.

The hard work which Socialist Party members and our supporters have been doing on many issues in the communities will show our candidates as genuine fighters for ordinary people in contrast to career politicians on the make.

The Euro election will be a great opportunity to pitch the Socialist

Party against all the right wing and establishment parties in the greater Dublin area which is one constituency. We should endeavour to involve in the campaign the countless individuals, campaigners and activists groups with whom we have worked in Dublin on a huge range of issues over the past 25 years.

It is very significant that a number of political commentators in the capitalist media pointed out the opportunity that now exists for the Socialist Party in the context of the merging of Labour and the former Democratic Left.

We pointed out how this new merger was not an exciting development on the left but rather the coming together of opportunist politicians whose main aim is to form coalition governments with either Fianna Fail or Fine Gael, depending on numbers in Dail

Éireann.

We derided the idea put forward by representatives of both parties that somehow New Labour would be greater than the sum of the two parts forming it. We pointed out how both parties had suffered in a general election 18 months ago as a result of the disillusionment among working class people in the policies and strategy of their leadership in government.

Certainly, the first opinion poll published in the new year based on surveys carried out on December 16th last, shows New Labour at 11%, a fall of 1% compared to what the two components had in a previous poll in October.

Clearly New Labour has not inspired young people in this country. In an IMS poll taken in December very few young people supported New Labour. In the minds of young people Labour

politicians are a part of the tired old establishment towards which they are so cynical, with that poll finding that 75% of under 25 year olds have little confidence in politicians.

However, that same poll showed the tremendous opportunities for a political party that is genuinely radical and fighting in opposition to the big business dominated political scene. A huge majority are sceptical of the Catholic hierarchy as well as the political establishment with even higher percentages rejecting the church's views on issues of lifestyle and morality.

With, not just young people, but indeed people of all ages, rejecting the corruption, profiteering and self-seeking of the capitalist establishment and its political lackeys, there was never a greater opportunity for the Socialist Party to

develop and grow. With our activity in 1999, including the crucial election campaigns, we can more than double our membership and really announce our arrival on the political scene in Ireland.

The decision by Councillor Johnny McLoughlin of Omagh to join the Socialist Party in Northern Ireland has been enthusiastically welcomed by our membership. Working class people in his locality hold Johnny in very high esteem.

With his experience and commitment to ordinary people and with the ideas and commitment of the Socialist Party, a great step forward can be taken in 1999, developing a socialist alternative in Northern Ireland.

I wish the readers of the *Voice*, our members, supporters, voters and potential voters the very best for the coming year.



# Affordable homes for all

The housing crisis means a huge increase in the numbers of homeless people.

**THE RATE of increase in new house prices has fallen significantly in the last quarter** said Mr. Robert Molloy T.D., Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, commenting on the figures in the September 1998 Housing Statistics Bulletin. I think Mr. Molloy should control his euphoria and wake up and smell the coffee.

Karen Allen

A slow down in the rate of increase of house prices means that not quite so many extra people are being priced out of the market this month as there were last month, but it still means that more working class people are being priced out of the opportunity to own a home every day. This is apparently a situation that a government minister can find comfort in!

The Socialist Party launched a radical

approach to the housing crisis in November 1998.

Other parties have made noises about the housing crisis and critically attacked the present government. These same parties were in government themselves when house prices started to go through the roof from mid 1995 onwards.

They did nothing then and if they were back in power they could not be trusted to do anything now. None of their so-called solutions will take on the greed of the builders and speculators who have caused the crisis and caused the average house price to increase by 110% in five years.

The increased demand gave an opening for the naked greed of builders and developers to increase their profits at the expense of ordinary men and women.

The Minister, Mr. Molloy, did not mention in his introduction to the Housing Statistics Bulletin anything

about local authority housing lists. He did not mention it because he had nothing to say about it. He had no new funding to announce or no good news for the 45,000 families who are at present on waiting lists without much hope of an early reprieve from the horrific situations they find themselves in.

Private landlords are laughing all the way to the bank while this crisis continues. People like Mary, single people on an average wage, couples on an average wage and students are all caught in this trap.

The Socialist Party programme on housing tackles all these facets of the housing crisis. To implement such a radical programme would take a political will that does not exist in any of the main political parties. They do not want to upset their wealthy backers.

Support our campaign to put peoples' needs before greed and profits.

### The Socialist Party will campaign for:

#### Control of the Price of Building Land

- Lands for residential building should be acquired by the relevant local authority through compulsory purchase order at their current use value or compensation for proven need.

#### Outlaw Profiteering - Control the Price of New Houses

- Houses should be priced at proven building cost.

#### Social Housing Investment

- For a major investment to accommodate all those on local authority housing waiting lists.

- There should be a radical overhaul of the Shared Ownership and House Purchase Loans schemes to enable low and average income workers to purchase their own home.

#### Rental Accommodation

- Enforce the regulations governing rental accommodation.

- For rent control and long term lease options as in much of the EU.

- Purpose built accommodation by state agencies for 3rd level students at affordable rents.

Mary (not her real name) has two children under ten. She has been privately renting a two bedroomed house in Dublin 15 for the past four years while waiting patiently for her turn to come on the housing list. Her landlord saw the increase in house prices and decided that he could increase Mary's rent from £250 a month to £400 a month. Mary could not afford this increase and was given a month's notice. All rents in Dublin have shot through the roof and Mary could not find a new home.

She tried to put pressure on Fingal County Council as she herself was feeling the pressure but the councils are meeting situations like Mary's everyday. Mary and her children moved back to a three bedroomed council house and shared for six months with her parents, two brothers and a sister. Needless to say this situation puts immense pressure on everyone. But this story is not unique nor is it the most horrific. Mary and her children did not sleep rough like many have had to.

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# WHAT WE THINK

**THE VOICE** would like to wish all of our readers a happy, peaceful and prosperous new year for 1999. But will this year bring peace and prosperity to working people and their families throughout Ireland?

The Good Friday Agreement promised to bring peace. We believe that the Agreement is not a solution, but it may bring a respite for a period from the "troubles". More importantly, in doing that, it can pose the opportunity to build the basis for a real solution.

As usual, after much huffing and puffing, the sectarian politicians arrived at a last minute deal in December which will allow the Assembly to take responsibility for running a range of government services, with a ten member Executive. There is still a very serious problem on decommissioning, but again it is possible that as on other issues, after pushing it to the wire, a last minute deal will be done to keep the Assembly on the road.

If this happens the Executive will be set up sometime in the early part of the year

and cross border bodies will be established at the same time.

With the establishment of the Executive, the luxury which politicians in the North enjoyed of blaming Westminster for hospital closures and cutbacks, and for problems in education, housing and other services will be gone. The Assembly and the ministers will become a focal point for the anger of working people on the issues that affect them in their day to day lives.

This poses the opportunity for building class based politics in the North, and exposing the existing political parties, not just for being sectarian, but right wing, anti working class sectarianism to boot. The Socialist Party is launching campaigns to fight health cut backs, to stop water privatisation, and to resist closures in the textile industry, as part of our general aim to build a socialist opposition to the Executive.

What can working people look forward to in the southern part of the island? Well, for a start, more revelations of the corruption and rottenness of the political and big business establishment. The reduction of

Charles Haughey's tax bill from £2 million to zero, by a special tax inspector who happens to be the Taoiseach's brother in law, was a stunning indication that anything and everything is possible in the rotten world inhabited by these people.

The same government which claims it is powerless to do anything about this is adopting a hard line stand on the issue of nurses' pay. They claim that the increase demanded could add up to £200 million. Even if that is the figure, half of it could be collected from the AIB bank, as the outstanding tax bill on the off shore tax scam that they ran in the 1980s. A proper investigation of the other banks would no doubt come up with the rest.

This situation very accurately sums up the "Celtic Tiger". A boom for the rich, who are above the law, and a boom for the poor only. Now there is a very real threat of an economic slump hanging over the world economy, which as it develops, will send the "Celtic Tiger" into a tailspin. Who will then be asked to foot the bill? Working people. A recession has already begun in Britain,

and is already impacting on the North.

With a year to go to the new millennium, the Socialist Party is determined to use every opportunity to build the socialist alternative throughout Ireland. All the other forces which in the past period were on the left or claimed to be on the left, are in a state of collapse, or else have moved sharply to the right.

The merger of the Irish Labour Party and Democratic Left does not represent the creation of a new force on the left. What has been created is an Irish version of Blair's New Labour. It represents another stage in the movement of these parties to the right, abandoning finally any link which might have remained from the past as parties seeking to represent working people, and embracing openly the bosses' market system.

This opens up a huge vacuum in Irish politics, on both sides of the border. The Socialist Party has started the task of filling that vacuum. Join us and help us put in place the only guarantee, a united socialist movement of working class people, for a peaceful and prosperous future for all.

# Threat to acute services

**HEALTH MINISTER John McFall has given his approval to a plan that would see a dramatic reduction in the number of acute hospitals in Northern Ireland.**

*Ciaran Mulholland*

There will be a three tier hospital system. Regional centres, such as the Royal Victoria, will provide specialist services, (neurosurgery, cancer treatment, etc).

At the next level would come hospitals that provide most services, such as the new Caleraine hospital.

Such hospitals would have a casualty department and would have a full range of medical and surgical treatment.

A number of smaller hospitals are to cease to operate as acute units. These include the Mid-Ulster in Magherafelt, The South-Tyrone in Dungannon and the Downe in Downpatrick.

These units will not have casualty departments and will provide basic services only. It is this aspect of the plan that is causing most controversy.

McFall is recommending the plan but it will be up to the Assembly to implement it. Unsurprisingly every Assembly member who has spoken up has done so to defend their local hospital.

Assembly members who accept the financial constraints of the budget devolved from Westminster will have to defend their local hospital at the expense of others.

By implication they will be arguing for somewhere else to close. The result may well be paralysis, the Assembly unable to agree anything.

We must have a rational debate on the way forward. It is logical to concentrate certain highly specialist services in one place.

**There is no justification for the removal of all acute services, especially Accident and Emergency provision from local hospitals.**

Not every service can or should be provided in every hospital. It is imperative that the NHS provides safe, effective and accessible treatment to everyone however.

Some believe that such treatment can no longer be provided in the smaller hospitals. A key factor in their thinking is that a few consultant surgeons

and physicians carry too much of the burden, effectively working 80-100 hour weeks for all of their working lives. Their solution is to close the smaller hospitals.

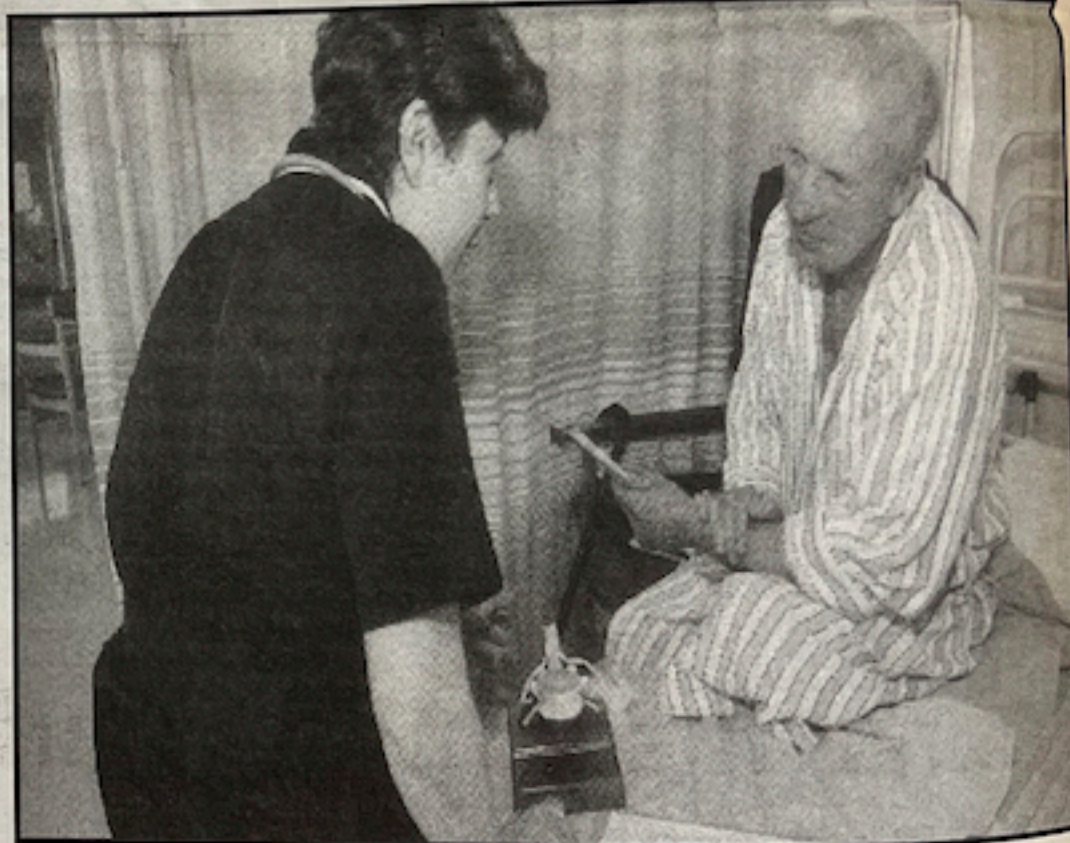
Local people in the areas affected are up in arms. They want their local hospital, easily accessible and responsive.

Not everyone has a car, not every road is always open in Northern Ireland, and the Omagh bomb illustrates horribly how vital a local service can be.

Despite the need for the centralisation of some treatment, there is no justification for the removal of all acute services, especially Accident and Emergency provision from local hospitals such as the Mid Ulster, the South Tyrone or the Downe.

The present hospital network can only survive with substantial investment. In particular there needs to be a massive increase in investment in people. We need to double the number of hospital consultants per head of the population to the level in Germany.

Other members of staff, such as nurses, can take over many of the roles of junior doctors. New staff and extra training for existing staff can make sure that all our hospitals contrive to provide excellent treatment, with only



minimal rationalisation of services when it is absolutely necessary.

Overall this debate is about resources. There is a tension within the NHS between the community and the hospital sectors.

Many workers who are hard pressed on a day-to-day basis can see no way out except by cutting in one sector to give to another.

The new plan is posed in this way - money has to be saved in the hospital sector to invest in the community.

The reality is that we live in a rich society. We can have a high quality hospital service and a properly resourced community service. It is only the way that our society is organised that prevents such a desirable outcome.

## Broken promises

**NORTHERN IRELAND** Health Minister Ian McFall's promise that there would be no cuts in health services until the administration bodies were set up in the NI Assembly has already been broken.

The maternity services in the South Tyrone Hospital are to go, despite the fact that there were over 1200 births in the hospital over the last year. This is more than the government criteria to maintain the service.

The removal of this vital service from the

South Tyrone hospital certainly puts the acute services in the Mid-Ulster hospital at grave risk. Low level services in the "mid" are continually being undermined.

A delegation from the Save the Mid-Ulster Hospital action committee met with Ian McFall to put the case for the maintenance of acute services in rural areas.

Despite a sympathetic ear to the delegation, it became clear that the government aim is to centralise acute services as was the policy under the Tories.



# Hands off our water

**T**HE GOVERNMENT is planning to sell off our water. The recent Department of the Environment consultation paper on the future of water services in Northern Ireland makes this clear. Of the four options offered for the service in the future, two are privatisation. The implication is that the government has already made up its mind about what is best for us.

By Colin Sinclair, Belfast.

The document sets out mechanisms for removing the Northern Ireland system of paying for water as part of the local rates bill, with separate billing for water services being an obvious precursor to the privatisation of the service. Water is very expensive, despite its natural abundance, and the Government feels that the only way to bring Northern Ireland into line with modern practices and technology is to get private investment into infrastructure.

It does not seem to matter that the service has been under-funded by central government for years. They do not feel that they are the ones who should be paying to put right decades of negligence. It is argued that the required £2.5 billion extra investment over the next ten to twenty years would take money away from other essential public services funded by the government, but it is important to realise that every year the government fails to collect over £40 billion in corporation tax. Perhaps some of this money could be used to pay

for the most essential service of all?

The privatisation of water utilities in the rest of the United Kingdom failed to usher in a golden age of high capital investment and low cost, efficient services. Water charges have increased rapidly, whilst hosepipe bans have become as much a part of British summertime as strawberries and ice cream, and water still seeps from ancient pipeworks.

It is unlikely that Northern Ireland will fare any better under similar conditions and the consultation paper raises immediate fears about job security, wages and conditions of service for workers in the water indus-

**The public must send a clear message to the Assembly; no separate water bills, and no privatisation.**

try. There is much emphasis on driving down costs and securing low prices, and as the whole point of the exercise is to increase capital investment in the physical structures of water supply, it would seem that more work for less money will be required from staff under the new regime.

This is yet another example of New Labour's love affair with



Protesting against privatisation

capitalist short termism, and their dire lack of long term goals. Water is a vital service and the government should be prepared to invest in its future - rather than selling off something that the public own, and then using public money to rent it back and creating even more fat cats.

The Department of the Environment says that they want to consult widely on this issue, and so it is important that the public sends a clear message to the government and the Assembly: no separate water bills, and no privatisation. We do not want further selling off of vital utilities, we want a properly funded, accountable and public, water service.

Further information is available in a special Socialist Party bulletin on water privatisation or contact us directly on 01232 232962.

**The Socialist Party will campaign for;**

- No separate water bills.
- Freeze bills at existing levels.
- No metering of domestic users
- An additional £80 million annual investment from the government to upgrade the service.
- No privatisation.
- For a democratically run public water authority.

## Agony over for Danny MacNamee

**T**HE TWELVE-YEAR agony of Danny McNamee from Crossmaglen came finally to an end on 17 December when the Court of Appeal in London quashed his 1987 conviction for "conspiracy in the UK and elsewhere to cause explosions".

His appeal was allowed on two grounds. Non-disclosure to the defence of evidence pointing to another man as having made the bombs he was alleged to have made, and serious doubt about the identification of a fingerprint as being his. Danny spoke to Anton McCabe:

"The result was the vindication of the whole 12 years campaigning. I never felt despair; I was always plodding on, determined to get them in the end. If it wasn't for the campaigners, I wouldn't have got back to the Court of Appeal". His supporters were vilified in the press, but he knows "anybody involved in a campaign gets a bad press".

He spent eleven and a half years in SSUs (Special Secure Units, prisons-within-prisons) in England. For three years, he had no visitors because of the nature of searches both he and they were subjected to. "Time will tell" if these years have impacted on his health.

Danny was released in November, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, but remained no less determined to clear his name.

Danny rejects the suggestion that his victory marks the end of injustices. "There are stacks of people in jail that are innocent. One man I met in England had done 20 years for murder. The police held back a statement from the man he is supposed to have attacked saying it wasn't him that did it. According to official figures, 1% to 2% of all prisoners are innocent. That's thousands of people".

## Consumers in the dark

**I**T WAS like living in the dark ages. For five days over Christmas with nothing more than a few candles, a small fire and a freezing cold house.

The only way to keep warm was to wrap up in blankets, keep a hat and

scarf on. Meanwhile the food in the fridge is going soft and beginning to smell, so every time you eat you are worried about food poisoning.

I spent a fortune eating out, and had it not been for friends I'd have had to go without a bath for nearly a

week. For pensioners it must be a lot worse.

The most irritating thing of all was trying to get through to the NIE hotline, to find out when the power supply will be restored.

So much for NIE's crisis programme!

Harry Hutchinson



Power cables were hit by falling trees

## NIE in profit

**N**ORTHERN IRELAND Electricity bosses certainly haven't suffered cuts since privatisation.

The company was broken up and sold off in April 1992. Dr Patrick Haren - who was appointed NIE Chief Executive in March 1992, one

month before the sell off - was last year awarded a 33% pay rise. His total earnings rose from £325,000 to £433,000.

NIE holding company, Viridian, made pre tax profits of £41.5 million in the six months to September 1998. Small wonder the electricity regulator has accused NIE of

overcharging.

Their "generosity" in offering compensation to those cut off after Christmas has to be set against years of inflated bills.

The generating companies are guilty of even greater overcharging. After privatisation they were given con-

tracts to supply NIE until 2010. The price they charge is 40% more than their counterparts in Britain.

The answer to high prices and problems of supply is to bring the whole industry, from generation to distribution, back into public ownership.

# THE YEAR OF CAPITALIST SLUMP?



**Market Madness**  
"the global capitalist system which has been responsible for our prosperity is falling apart at the seams"  
George Soros, Financier.  
(September 1998)

**NEO-LIBERALISM**

Neo-liberalism is a return to the "free market" policies of the 1980s, which were based on free trade and non-interference by government in the national economy. Its essential points have been privatisation of state industries, deregulation of markets and business activity, and the undermining of workplace rights and union organisation to establish labour "flexibility".

Through agencies such as the IMF, the World Bank, and GATT, a free market "restructuring" was imposed on Third World countries forcing them to open up their economies to multinationals and international finance capital.

Neo-liberalism was a policy aimed at restoring the profit levels of capitalism, which it achieved in spectacular fashion. In the US, the model for neo-liberalism, the top 1% now owns as much wealth as the bottom 90%.

**KEYNESIANISM**

This takes its name from the economist John Maynard Keynes, who after the great crash of 1929 advocated increased government spending on public works and social welfare to stimulate demand and to try and reflate the stagnant economy. His ideas were taken up in the New Deal in the US in the 1930s, but did not have much effect.

However his ideas came to the forefront in the new social and economic conditions in the boom which followed the second world war. Particularly in Europe, Keynesianism meant increased state intervention within the national economy with nationalisation of some basic industries, higher levels of welfare supported by progressive taxation, and government manipulation of spending, taxation and monetary policy to try and smooth out the boom-slump cycle, particularly to try and stimulate demand in an economic downturn.

**GLOBALISATION**

Globalisation, like neo-liberalism, represented a certain return to the policies pursued by capitalism before the first and second world wars. It represented a new period of imperialist penetration and domination of the world economy by the major imperialist powers. New technology, especially in computers, became a vehicle for the globalisation, or linking into one world system, of financial markets. It also meant a certain relocation of production by multinationals to cheap labour economies.

During the 1980s net private capital outflows from the "advanced capitalist countries" (ACCs) amounted to an average \$13 billion a year. By the mid 1990s \$300 billion a year was flowing into about 25 "emerging" countries, mainly in SE Asia.

Globalisation however works both ways. The flood of highly mobile capital to the emerging markets in Asia created a speculative bubble which collapsed in 1997. There was then a flood in the opposite direction.

**THE LAUNCH** of the Euro on the 1st of January represents an attempt, for the first time since the days of the Roman Empire, to create a European currency. The intention is to replace existing currencies fully by the Euro in the year 2002. But 1999 is likely to be remembered not for the launch of the ill fated Euro, but for the development of the worst slump suffered by world capitalism since the second world war.

Dermot Connolly

By the end of last year, it appeared that world capitalism had calmed down after 18 months of turbulence following the economic collapse in SE Asia. The combination of three cuts in interest rates in as many months in the US, and the continuing "flight to quality" of capital out of the Third World created the basis of the so called Santa Claus rally on Wall St. Despite sharp falls in the previous year, share prices were back to their previous highs.

On the FTSE exchange in Britain, share prices actually finished the year 20% higher than the start of 1998. But this irrational behaviour of the markets as the real world economy actually enters a slowdown, is not a signal of stability being restored but of the enormous volatility of the world capitalist economy.

Up to 40% of the world economy is already experiencing a slump. In 1998 some \$600 billion, the equivalent of the GNP of Canada, has been wiped off the value of world production. Asia has experienced a 9% fall in economic activity. 100 million people were thrown into dire poverty. The world's second largest national economy, Japan, is in a severe depression. There have been six failed attempts

in the 1990s, costing an estimated \$650 billion, to try and reflate their economy.

The crisis spread rapidly from Asia. In August, Russia went under. In that month alone there was an 8.5% fall in the economy. Half of the banks were forced to close. Living standards fell by 20% in a month. Forty two million Russians are now living on less than £20 a month.

The flight of capital out of the so called emerging markets to the west has helped the stock markets to recover after a number of severe shocks. This has been the case particularly on Wall St. However, the unreal situation on Wall Street cannot be maintained, with shares valued at 23 times their yearly earnings.

Low interest rates are the key factor now in staving off a collapse. The low level of interest rates means that it is much more attractive for those with money to invest in stocks than to leave it sitting

**Up to 40% of the world economy is already experiencing a slump.**

in a bank, or to invest in government bonds or other investments. But in order to maintain confidence in the stock exchange, it will be necessary not just to keep rates low, but to continue to cut them at regular intervals to provide the market with the necessary "fix" to keep the whole thing afloat.

The US Federal Reserve were forced to abandon their obsession with inflation for

these reasons in the latter part of 1998. The fear of the effects of a stock market collapse on the real economy became paramount. The big corporations now rely on the stock exchange for 70% of their credit needs. In addition 100 million people now own shares in the US. A stock market crash would plunge the economy into a severe slump such as happened in Japan at the start of the 1990s.

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**THE STRATEGISTS** of capitalism are now beginning to understand that the real problem in the world economy now is not inflation, but its opposite, deflation. With sluggish economy growth at best, mass structural unemployment even in boom periods, and a low level of demand for raw materials, goods and services, prices are tending to fall, not rise.

This is a factor which will allow them to operate a low interest rate policy, and if necessary other measures to try and stave off the crisis, without the fear of provoking inflation, at least in the short term.

Forced to adopt this policy, the US will demand that everyone else, and especially "Euroland", follows suit. This is what brings into play the other side of the problem, the danger of an international currency crisis. If the Euro develops as a strong currency, which is likely in the short term, it will undermine the dollar which is already weakening.

The Euro is a new and unstable factor in an already very unstable situation. When Brazil threatened to follow the Russian rouble and economy into freefall in the autumn, the IMF stepped in with a \$40 billion bail out. But the real amount needed to cover Brazil's debts is closer

to \$300 billion. A forced devaluation in Brazil, of up to 30%, is very likely.

A crisis in Brazil will spread like wildfire in Latin America. It is estimated that a third of Latin America's debt is uncollectable, with another third being ten years in arrears. Defaults on these loans, and a round of devaluations in the region could plunge the world financial and currency markets into

**The IMF have cut their forecasts for the world economy by a half for 1999.**

chaos. A crisis in Latin America would hit the US particularly hard. For example only 1% of US exports go to Russia, but 20% of its exports go to Latin America.

The US economy and Wall Street are the key to the world capitalist system. The US accounts for 20% of world demand in goods and services. A slowdown is already well underway. Corporate profits are being squeezed due to the Asian crisis, where they face not just a massive fall in the markets, but also being hit by cheaper imports due to the currency devaluations in Asia.

The development of a recession, with job losses and general uncertainty about the future, will bring on a tendency by people to hold onto their cash. A crisis of demand will develop and deepen the recession. Inevitably this will impact on the Wall Street bubble, if it does not crash before that

and bring on a slump anyway.

There is no way that Europe can avoid following the US into slump. The IMF have cut their forecasts for the world economy by a half for 1999. But even the 2.2% growth they are now forecasting is hopelessly unrealistic. They are predicting growth of only 1.8% in the US and 2.4% in Europe, again very unrealistic figures. A slump in Europe will send the Euro project into a tailspin, just as the recession in the early 1990s did to the ERM.

It is not possible to predict exactly when or how a slump in the world economy will develop. Any one of a number of factors could trigger it off, including a currency crisis, a new wave of stock market falls, defaults on loans by Third World countries, a collapse of a major investment company like ACMT last year, or simply the inevitable slowing down of the real economies into recession.

It will however be a near miracle if capitalism can stave off the inevitable for the course of the year. How deep the slump will be will depend on whether it hits the world economy simultaneously which is very likely given the process of globalisation which has taken place. It will also depend on the severity of the crash on the world stock markets. But it will also depend on how the capitalists respond on an international scale.

If there is a complete reversal of globalisation and a closing down of world trade due to protectionist measures by the different capitalist blocs to defend their home markets then the slump will be deeper and more prolonged. This tendency towards protectionism already exists side by side with globalisation, as



Third World children are dying from curable diseases.

witnessed by NAFTA and the drive towards the Euro.

**EVEN A relatively mild slump like that of 1973/75 when the world economy experienced a 1% drop, would have a major impact. The world economy has in fact been in a period of general depression since then. The key indicator of that is structural mass unemployment, with 36 million out of work in the Advanced Capitalist Countries even during the recent boom.**

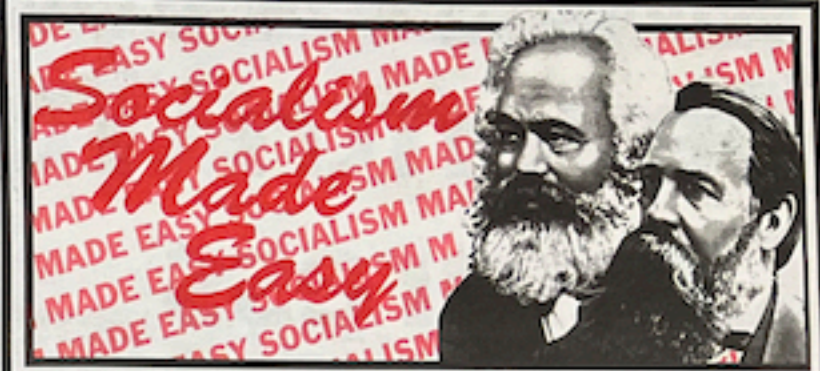
A slump will open up a new period. It is likely to spell the end of globalisation. Already the strategists of capital are discussing the need for some controls on the movement of capital, given the Asian experience. The policy of neo-liberalism could be replaced with a policy of neo-Keynesianism, as governments are forced to intervene to stop the possible collapse of national

economies. This would not mean a return to the policy of the welfare state, though some concessions may be made to workers to stave off social upheaval.

Neo-Keynesianism will mean a move to "nationalise" the crisis. Banks may be taken over by the state, key industries will be bailed out, in order to transfer the debts from the bosses to the taxpayers.

Capitalism is set to enter the new millennium facing a massive crisis and mass opposition to the market. All the ballyhoo about the "end of history", the triumph of the market and the "new world order" is already a distant memory.

However there is still much to be done to build the forces which can present the genuine ideas of socialism as the only alternative to the madness of the market. This is the key task for the new millennium.



## Marx and capitalist crisis

THE CRISIS developing in the world capitalist system is a classical crisis of over production. The contradictions within capitalism which give rise to this tendency were identified by Karl Marx in the middle of the last century.

Marx explained that capitalism constantly revolutionised the means of production, constantly introduced new techniques, but in doing so tended to push against and even go beyond the limits of private property relations. By private property relations Marx meant the private ownership of capital, that is factories, offices, machinery used in production and so on, but also the private ownership by capitalists of the wealth produced by working people.

While capitalism is a system based on individual or private ownership of the means of production, and the wealth created under the system, it is not a system based on individual production, but on co-operative or what Marx called "socialised" production. In other words wealth under capitalism is not produced by individuals working on their own, but is produced by the co-operative labour of many people. The wealth is created by a majority in society, but it is owned and controlled, not by society, but by an elite within it.

The introduction of socialised production was one of the progressive features of capitalism as was the introduction of the world market. The world market forces capitalism to organise production not just on a national basis, but ever increasingly on a world scale. A crude form of a world plan of production is necessary for the multinationals to marry together raw materials, labour and markets over the five continents.

Both of these features, socialised production and the possibility of a world plan of production are key ingredients for a socialist society. They have arisen and developed under capitalism but are now in absolute contradiction to it.

Capitalism is a system based on production for profit. These profits come from the unpaid labour of the working class. Workers do not get paid for what they produce but are paid an agreed wage. For the system to work and for the boss to make a profit, the worker has to produce more than the value of his or her wages.

For the boss to be able to realise the profit the goods produced by the worker have to be sold at their real value or thereabouts. But the market for these goods is mainly provided by working people who are the great majority in society. There is only a limited market in luxury goods for the capitalists and the upper layers of the middle classes. There is also a limited market in capital goods, machinery and tools, infrastructure for society and so on.

The main market is for mass produced, cheap goods for the needs of the majority. But if workers are paid less than the value of what they produce, it follows that they cannot buy all the goods that their labour has produced. There is therefore the tendency for over production or lack of

demand in the capitalist economy.

The more wages are driven down in the drive to increase profits, the more this tendency will exert itself. The policies of globalisation and neo-liberalism has meant a severe driving down of the wages of workers internationally over the last twenty years. The policy of cutting social and other spending by the state also affects the market, driving down demand.

In the past this would have meant the build up of huge amounts of unsold goods. In the modern capitalist economy it is reflected in spare industrial capacity. That means idle factories. It also means that there are huge amounts of capital for investment which are not used in production, but are used for all sorts of speculation.

This is precisely what we have seen in the financial and property markets over the last twenty years. In Japan now, because of the collapse of the speculative economy in the 1990s, there are actually huge amounts of capital which are simply lying idle.

The contradiction between the existence of the world economy and individual capitalist states also gives rise to all sorts of crises as each state tries to achieve the best position for itself. These crises are a reflection of the fact that the productive forces available have come up against the barriers of private property and the nation state and are trying to break out and go beyond them.

A new social system needs to be put in place which will resolve these contradictions. What is needed is socialised exchange to go hand in hand with socialised production. Private ownership has to be replaced by social ownership of the means of production and the wealth produced by the labour of society.

The profit system has to be ended and with it the capitalist market. Instead society should decide on the basis of a rational and democratic plan which goods and services need to be produced and distribute them according to people's needs.

This could be done now on the basis of a world plan of production. All the horror could be ended, no starvation, no children dying of easily curable diseases, an end to the waste of arms production, no more wars, the protection of the environment and every living being guaranteed the basics for a dignified existence.

Over time a classless and stateless society would be created. The state is an instrument of class rule. It exists to defend the interests of the ruling class. Without classes, the need for a state, even a democratic workers state, would disappear. The over-coming of the nation state, and uniting the people of the planet into one co-operative society is only possible on this basis.

These are the essential ideas of Marxism and socialism, sneered at by the capitalist class and their lackeys in the media as mad. There is nothing mad about them, they are the only hope for a future for humankind.

## Committee for a Workers' International

## Seventh World Congress

AT THE recent World Congress of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), the socialist international to which the Socialist Party is affiliated, the Voice spoke to Peter Taaffe, a founding member of the CWI and long standing member of its International Secretariat.

"The Committee for a Workers' International is what it says, is made up of different organisations and parties - some quite sizeable and influential such as the Socialist Party in Ireland, the Socialist Party in Britain, and in Sweden our party there is very influential. These parties and groups come together to fight for the establishment of a new mass international.

"The working class is not politically organised on an international scale. Historically there were first and second interna-

tionals - they collapsed. The third international which was organised after the Russian Revolution collapsed because of Stalinism. The various attempts by Trotsky to create a fourth international didn't prosper for a mixture of reasons - the difficulties of the political situation and the mistakes of the leadership.

"But we are in a new period now and the idea that Trotsky raised in the 1930s and in 1937-38 when the Fourth International was established - that will become a reality we believe in the period we are going into.

"We want to help that process along. We are at the World Congress here in Belgium, these congresses take place every few years, not as regularly as we would like because we are a poor organisation. The Congress is made up of delegates and observers from all the different national sections and its purpose is



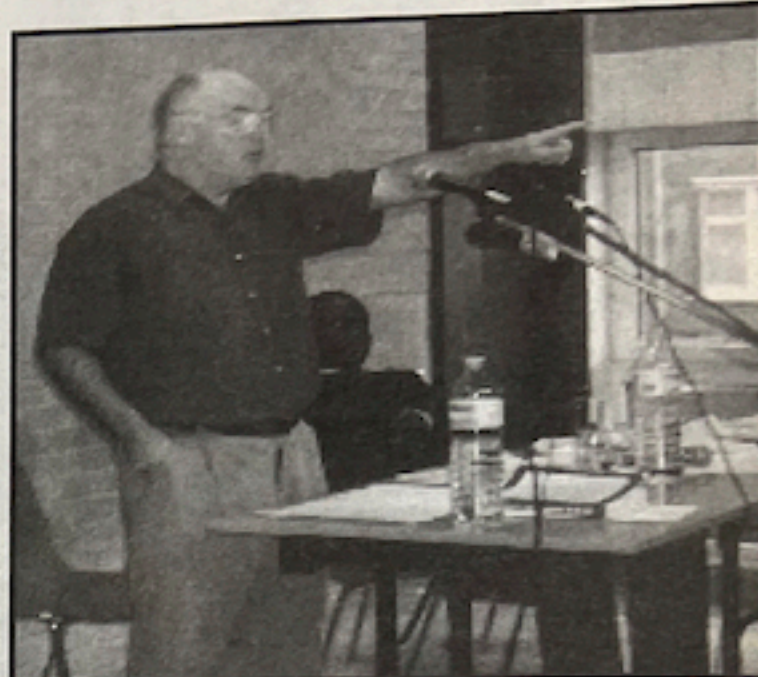
Delegates from India address Congress.

to discuss the documents presented by the International Secretariat and the International Executive Committee. The documents address the perspectives for world events and various tactical, strategic and organisational questions, to prepare the

CWI for the coming events not just politically but organisationally.

"We think our ideas can not only grow but become very influential within the broad labour movement internationally.

"For example in the Congress discussion on



Peter Taaffe speaking at Congress.

Europe - after a period when Europe has been experiencing a so called boom that is about to come to an end in the wake of what has happened in Asia.

"The same thing will happen in the USA and Europe and that will in turn give an enormous impetus to the struggles of the European working class. We are in a very good position to intervene in that situation.

"In Europe at this time there are thirteen centre left governments. None of them stand for socialism. Most of these governments are made up by coalition with other right wing parties and social democrats who are really ex-socialists.

They have abandoned the ideas on which those parties were formed and are now reliable props of the capitalists in Europe. Therefore that means that the working class is politically without a voice now in many countries. That raises the question for the CWI to put forward the idea of new mass workers parties in Europe, which we think will become a reality in the period that we are going into.

"Such parties will not be created artificially but through mass struggles, the intervention of the working class on the industrial field fighting against job losses and for improvements in living standards."

## A reply to the S.W.P.

IN DECEMBER of last year the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) wrote to the Socialist Party asking for a meeting to discuss the local elections.

They wished to work out an agreement whereby the two parties would not stand against each other.

While generally in favour of such an approach, given the record of the SWP in not cooperating with others on the left, and particularly in the unions, we felt it necessary to raise these and other issues in our reply.

While we have not yet received a reply to our letter sent at the end of December, we have decided to make our reply public. We believe the issues raised are serious ones for the left, and that a discussion around these questions should take place out in the open. We appeal to members of the SWP to avail of this opportunity to partake in a serious discussion on programme, tactics and strategy for building the revolutionary left in Ireland.

WE WERE surprised to receive your letter of 1st December. We recognise by your action in standing in the General Election of last year that you have effected a fundamental change in your policy on revolutionaries standing for election to bourgeois institutions.

This however has not stopped the Socialist Workers Party from continuing to denounce the Socialist Party for being "reformist", for adopting a "Parliamentary road", and on a number of occasions attempting to link us to the not only reformist but Stalinist Workers Party. All this is done on the basis that we stand in elections.

You are entitled to criticise the Socialist Party in any way you wish, but you cannot have your cake and eat it. You cannot denounce us for standing in elections (which we believe revolutionaries should do, as in any other field where we are taking on our class enemies, as seriously and effectively as we can) and at the same time seek an election agreement with us. We would like an honest clarification from you in relation to this.

The Socialist Party

favours the maximum co-operation between anti capitalist and socialist forces. The Socialist Party fought the General Election in 1997, not only under our own banner, but as part of an alliance which included the Federation of Dublin Anti Water Charges Campaigns, Cork Householders against Service Charges, and the Tipperary Workers and Unemployed Group.

That alliance recorded over 20,000 votes, won a Dail seat (through the Socialist Party) in Dublin, and narrowly failed to win a second one in Tipperary. The only response you have made at the time or since has been to attempt to deride the Socialist Party for having, according to you, some sort of obsession with parliamentary politics.

This dishonest assertion flies in the face of reality, that this alliance emerged from one of the most significant non parliamentary struggles of working people seen in this country for decades.

You made no attempt to seriously analyse these developments, to look at the class base of the forces involved, their programmes, etc. We believe

co-operation on the left or in struggles of working people is only possible when there is agreement on a principled basis. This has to firstly include an honest approach to questions of political differences.

The other key principle must be to maximise forces to have a greater impact in the class struggle, to help take such struggles forward, or to have a greater impact in workers' organisations, such as the trade unions, to combat bureaucratism and to argue for a militant programme.

Such co-operation can raise the standing of socialist organisations and the ideas of socialism in the eyes of workers, and achieve real successes for the left.

We have, however, never experienced any desire to engage in such principled co-operation in any sphere of activity from the Socialist Workers Party. This was the case in relation to the anti water charges campaign, it is the case in relation to the movement against racism and deportations, and it is particularly the case in the trade unions.

We wish to raise the question of two unions in par-

ticular, SIPTU and the CPSU. In both of these unions there is an opportunity to develop a strong rank and file opposition to the right wing bureaucracy. This was demonstrated by the 43% vote in SIPTU against P2000 and followed by the excellent vote of Carol Anne Duggan in the elections of the National Officers.

The Socialist Party welcomed the initiative of standing in those elections, and did what we could to gain the highest possible vote. However we were seriously hampered in doing that, as were other left activists, by your approach. You refused to have a broad campaign. As a result a great opportunity to build an organised opposition has been temporarily lost.

In the CPSU there is an opportunity to build a rank and file opposition which can take that union out of the hands of the right wing. This is seen as a major threat by ICTU. Yet you persist in attempting to form an alternative grouping to that which already exists. In plain English, attempting for sectarian reasons to split the left and the ranks when they are involved in a

major struggle.

Despite our difficulties over these issues, the Socialist Party would be open to discussing the issue of co-operation, but only over the range of issues raised in this letter. In relation to the elections we would also want to have a discussion on the question of programme.

As you are aware there are serious differences between our parties on a range of issues, but particularly on the national question. Up to quite recently, you supported the "armed struggle" of the Republican movement. We would like clarification on what your position is now on this issue.

If we could arrive at a position where there was an honest approach to political differences, a real co-operation in the interests of the workers and socialist movement in general, while leaving organisations free to defend their own programmes and attempt to build their own forces, and creating the basis for some mutual respect and trust, then a discussion may have some useful outcome.

We look forward to hearing from you,  
Dermot Connolly.

# Iraqi people suffer

**A**T THE end of last year, just as the Christmas party season was entering full-flow, the US and Britain launched a vicious bombing campaign against Iraq. The lives of Iraqi people were being sacrificed for the career of one man - Bill Clinton.

By Kieran Roberts

Many innocent Iraqi lives were lost in the bombardment, while many more will have been injured. This is on top of the thousands of Iraqi men, women and children who were already suffering from the devastating effects of sanctions. Sanctions are also weapons of mass destruction, which for eight years have made the lives of millions of Iraqis a misery.

The American and British governments' attacks were not about eliminating nuclear, biological or chemical weapons, or restoring democracy. Nor was it about Iraq's failure to honour UN resolutions. Israel has annexed territory, bombing neighbouring countries, developed nuclear weapons and defied

many UN resolutions, yet it suffers no sanctions or bombing raids.

The bombings were notable for the lack of enthusiasm that they generated, not just among the US and Britain's allies in the UN but among the working class. Tony Blair's support for America's action is a disgrace.

Most people saw them as a blatant diversion by Clinton away from his domestic problems, on the eve of his impeachment.

We pointed out the hypocrisy of the Western governments who armed Saddam in the first place and who now want his removal, now that he is no longer a compliant puppet in their hands.

Clinton and Blair's actions have not achieved anything. The bombings have stopped for now, but the Middle East is more tense than before, with Saddam still firmly in place.

If the bombings start again then the Socialist Party will resume the protests and escalate the campaign against the slaughter.

**SOCIALIST PARTY** TD, Joe Higgins immediately condemned the bombing of Iraq and issued a statement which read in part: "The bombing of the Iraqi people is a cynical attempt by the US and Britain to assert the dominance of Western interests.

"In any new confrontation, Saddam is likely to get more support from many of the Arab regimes, who are angered by US imperialism's failure to deliver concessions to the Palestinians under the Oslo accords.

"Despite the ruthless, totalitarian character of his regime, Saddam is seen throughout the Arab world as standing up to US imperialism. There is universal anger amongst Arab people at the suffering imposed on the Iraqi people by sanctions, and by the contrast between US hostility to Iraq and its indulgence of the Netanyahu government in Israel.

**MEANWHILE THE** last Tory government's "arms to Iraq" scandal rumbles on. Gerald James, the former chair of Astra Holdings, one of the British companies that supplied parts for the Iraqi "Supergun", is suing the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for malicious prosecution.

The allegation is that the DTI, acting for the Tory government, made James the fall guy for their policy of selling arms to Iraq in breach of international sanctions.

Sanctions had been imposed on both Iraq and Iran during their war in the 1980s. The Tories however allowed British companies to continue exporting arms to Iraq, even after Saddam had gassed Kurds in northern Iraq.

Another British arms supplier which busted the sanctions was BMARC. Sitting on its board of directors was an MI6 government secret agent and future Tory cabinet minister, Jonathan Aitken. He now faces criminal proceedings for perjury following the collapse of his libel case against the *Guardian*.

## World News

### Clinton's trial

**BILL CLINTON'S** trial in the United States Senate has begun. The Lewinsky scandal which began almost a year ago is thus finally set to reach its climax. Nevertheless, there seems almost no chance that this will lead to Clinton being kicked out of office. Last November's Congressional elections resulted in a sharp swing away from the Republican Party by an electorate sick and tired of their hypocritical moralising. With Clinton continuing to receive 60-70% support in opinion polls it is amazing that the outgoing Republican-dominated House of Representatives in its dying hours went ahead with impeachment proceedings. But the Republicans are clearly a party "not in their right mind". They are heavily dependent on money and activists from the religious far right who have demonised Clinton as the embodiment of the decay of "traditional" American values. But the Senate is a different matter to the House of Representatives. To remove Clinton from office, a two-thirds vote is required and the Republicans simply do not have enough Senators.

### Cambodia

**TWO OF** the key leaders of the notorious Khmer Rouge have surrendered to Cambodian authorities. Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, were part of the genocidal regime led by Pol Pot which murdered over two million of their own people after coming to power in 1975. The Khmer Rouge were driven from power by the Vietnamese who invaded in 1979 but remained as a guerrilla force carrying out attacks on civilians and government forces. Now the Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen is advocating that Samphan and Chea be forgiven saying that it is time for society to move on. His corrupt regime is clearly hoping that this surrender means the end of the Khmer Rouge and is worried that putting them on trial could reignite their campaign. But ordinary Cambodians understandably are not in such a forgiving mood and want to see these butchers put on trial for their crimes against humanity. The Khmer Rouge regime is often labelled "communist" but in reality their demented leaders received covert assistance from US and British imperialism who saw them as a counterweight to the Vietnamese Stalinists.

### Hurricane Mitch

**HURRICANE MITCH** swept through Central America at the end of October unleashing a deluge of rain and mud. The trail of death and destruction in its wake left more than 11,000 people dead and over 13,000 missing. The two worst affected countries, Nicaragua and Honduras, are both desperately poor and now face years of rebuilding their infrastructure and devastated agricultural sector. International appeals were subscribed to by thousands of working class people. The major powers also stepped in, with \$120 million of promised aid to Honduras. But this this is pittance compared to the massive burden of debt owed by both these countries to the international banks. Honduras owes \$4.5 billion to foreign creditors, costing \$564 million in debt servicing per year. The whole situation is reminiscent of the Irish famine in the 1840s when ships full of agricultural produce left Irish ports while the British government belatedly brought in maize to feed a starving population. And while there has been much outrage there is little sign of the IMF bloodsuckers forgiving these debts especially because of the "bad example" this would set to other poor countries in a period of international economic crisis.

## Law Lords let Pinochet off the hook

**J**UST BEFORE the Christmas break, in an unprecedented move, the British House of Lords reversed its earlier decision and halted extradition proceedings against the former Chilean dictator, General Pinochet.

In reversing their decision the five Law Lords have provided the "Chilean butcher" an escape route.

In a farcical ruling the Law Lords said that one of their number, Lord Hoffman, by association with the human rights group Amnesty International, had made a biased judgement in allowing extradition proceedings against Pinochet. The Law Lords, biased?

Do bears crap in the woods?

The most recent high profile cases involving miscarriages of justice, eg the Birmingham Six and the Broadwater Three, have all revealed the anti-working class bias of the judiciary and the criminal justice system.

This decision has again exposed the rotten role of the unelected and unaccountable judiciary as part of the capitalist state machine. At the end of the day, these feudal relics exist to serve the interests of the ruling class.

Socialists in Britain must continue to pressurise Home Secretary Jack Straw to secure justice for the victims of Pinochet's terror.



General Augusto Pinochet



# Fight textile closures

**O**N DECEMBER 7th, 225 workers in the Desmonds factories in Irvinestown, Swatragh, Omagh and Derry, received an early Christmas present from their employers - they were made redundant!

*Stephen Boyd, Omagh.*

Desmonds, who made £3.5 million profit in 1997, have stated that these redundancies are due to a 10% shortfall in projected sales. That they have products stockpiling in their warehouses is because Marks and Spencers (who made profits of £284 million for the first 6 months of 1998) have cut their order. 1400 jobs have been lost in the textile industry in Northern Ireland in the last year. Textile companies are blaming "cheap labour" in the Far East for a loss in market share. The truth is that these companies are consciously switching production to the Far East and North Africa, for the simple

reason that the poverty wages paid to workers in these countries means that they can make even bigger profits.

**The unions must be forced to defend their members' jobs.**

The response of the trade union GMB to the redundancies in Desmonds was simply to try and get an acceptable redundancy

package, and they failed to even do this, with the workers only getting their statutory entitlements. The Socialist Party was the only political party to oppose the redundancies. Other parties, including Sinn Fein, were prepared to accept them while making token calls on the IDB to attract alternative companies.

The Socialist Party produced a leaflet calling for mass meetings of the workforce and affected communities. We argued that shop stewards should have been involved in the negotiations with management, that, as an alternative to redundancies, the working week should be cut without loss of pay, and that there should be a diversification of production and a pursuit of alternative markets.

Ultimately we argued that the owners should be made pay for the economic "crisis" not the workers. They can afford a cut in their profits but the workers, their families and communities can't afford to lose

their wage packets. It is projected that 60,000 jobs will be lost in the textile industry in Britain and Northern Ireland in 1999. Increasingly, companies like Marks and Spencers, Desmonds, Adria and Fruit of the Loom will switch production to cheap labour economies. Thousands of jobs in Derry, Strabane, Omagh and many other communities in the North are at risk.

If we are to avoid the destruction of the local textile industry (as happened in the recession in the 1970's) then textile workers must become organised in a unified fightback.

The unions must be forced to defend their members' jobs. Socialist Party members working in the industry intend to try to bring shop stewards and activists together to discuss a strategy to fight redundancies.

This could be the first step towards a real campaign to stop the destruction of the industry.

# Crisis in childcare



Kevin Lawrenson speaking at the conference on childcare

**A MAJOR crisis is fast developing in childcare provision in Northern Ireland. Just over two years ago the Child Care Order came into effect.**

*By Kevin Lawrenson  
NIPSA Executive member  
(personal capacity)*

While the objectives of the new Order, to increase family and community support, are laudable, the extra resources needed to implement it have not been provided.

When the Order was introduced, the Social Services Inspectorate recommended 200 extra social workers to put it into effect. The reality has been no more than 20 new staff.

Meanwhile overall resources are shrinking. Administrative and clerical support has been reduced. Children's homes are closing. In 1986 there were 688 places in homes. By 1997 these had fallen to 240 with a further 42 being phased out.

The result is an impossible strain on social workers and back up staff. So serious is the situation that my union, NIPSA, held a major conference on the issue at the end of November.

We invited representatives of all the parties in the Assembly to make them aware that we will not accept the continued underfunding of this service.

New criminal justice legislation now coming into effect will make things much worse. The Training Schools now run by the Northern Ireland Office are to be closed. Responsibility for the young people referred by the courts to these centres will pass to social services.

The Trust most affected by this will be North and West Belfast, an area where the crisis in childcare is already acute. 55% of all the teenagers in Northern Ireland who come under the

## NIPSA General Council elections

THREE MEMBERS of the Socialist Party are standing for election to the NIPSA General Council (executive).

Kevin Lawrenson and Padraig Mulholland are from the Public Officers Division. The 3rd candidate, Tony Cluskey is from the Civil Service section. NIPSA members should vote for these and other Broad Left candidates.

remit of the criminal justice legislation are from West Belfast. A further 10% are from North Belfast.

We are demanding more jobs, proper community support networks and additional residential places.

If these resources are not provided, staff will not be able to implement the legislation. Children, the community and staff will all suffer.

My NIPSA branch in North and West Belfast are already taking limited industrial action. If the situation continues this will have to be stepped up.

We will be demanding that NIPSA ballot members working in social services for further action, including strike action.



## 30% of new Derry jobs below minimum wage

**A** SURVEY by the Derry Low Pay Unit in the local job centre has found that a staggering 30% of all the jobs advertised still offer wages below the national minimum wage of £3.60.

*John Quigley Derry*  
It seems that the extremely low rate of £3.60 per hour is still too high for some employers. Some claim they know nothing about it.

Jim McCracken of the Low Pay Unit says they

are in for "a nasty shock in the spring."

"We would ask any employee whose boss refuses to pay the appropriate rate to contact us, any employer claiming they don't have to pay is probably wrong".

It seems that workers will still have to fight for what is theirs by right, a paltry £3.60 an hour minimum wage. Let's not stop and keep up the fight until we get a decent minimum wage.

## Newcastle demo

**A** MAJOR demonstration against low pay is to be held in Newcastle upon Tyne on 10 April. The demo has been called by the health service union Unison and already has the backing of most major unions. It is the first open challenge from the trade unions to the right wing policies of the Blair government.

According to Unison, 5.73 million workers earn less than £4.42 an hour. Only 2 million of these will benefit from the paltry £3.60 minimum wage

been proposed by New Labour.

Trade unions in Northern Ireland must back this demonstration. Wages here are lower than in Britain. One worker in five now earns less than £4.50 per hour.

Trade unions, Trades Councils and trade union branches should be asked to sponsor members and lay on transport.

We must demand an immediate £5 per hour minimum as a step to the full implementation of the European decency threshold of £7.

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## CPSU vote on Partnership

# MORE TIME FOR CAMPAIGN NEEDED

**AN act of opposition to partnership, ICTU and their own leadership, activists in the Civil and Public Servants Union (CPSU) successfully forced through a national ballot to withdraw from Partnership 2000.**

Terry Kelleher

The head office used its full resources together with the national media against the vote. The outcome was 60%-40% in favour of staying in P2000, but as I will explain this is not seen as a vote for partnership but a vote of no confidence in the leadership in achieving anything outside partnership, as well as the lack of an alternative.

At the last annual conference of the CPSU a motion was unanimously passed, to hold a special conference to review our participation in P2000. This was held last November, on a Saturday, with 180 delegates in attendance. At this conference in Liberty Hall only one delegate spoke against withdrawing, with all other delegates speaking strongly for the ballot to withdraw. The biggest

applause were for those calling for the strongest action, a ballot with a recommendation to withdraw.

Despite many head officials speaking against withdrawal, the first of six motions to withdraw was accepted by 108 votes to 70, with some delegates abstaining. The conference erupted in cheers and a clear mood of defiance was to be seen.

However the motion that was passed, a Telecom Eireann motion, called for the ballot to be conducted within a month, that is, in December. This actually meant a two week ballot before Christmas which hindered any campaign to convince the membership of a "yes" vote for withdrawal.

During the next two weeks the full apparatus of head office was used against the democratic decision of the special conference. The November budget and more importantly the ostentatious media hype, aided by our own union, also persuaded some members that they were finally getting their share.

The actual ballot paper was written in a biased manner and in my opinion contained cer-

tain lies or untruths. It was only accepted by the executive committee by nine votes to eight.

Head office produced a record number of circulars on the special conference, the budget and the nature of the ballot. More space was given to the "no" argument (no to withdrawing) than the "yes" argument. Head office officials rushed around the country to hastily organised meetings of members. Their line was simple: to scare members into the safety of staying in P2000 because to go outside would be "suicide"! Coincidentally many of these meetings were allowed to be organised on company time. Now that's real "partnership"!

The activists in the union produced a four page bulletin for the November conference which was distributed around the country. Another 5,000 leaflets were produced and distributed inside the union. Our arguments were simple: at a time when the economy was experiencing its biggest boom, our members were getting the smallest pay rises.

The turnout for the ballot was predictably low, less than 50%, and the enthusiasm for the

whole ballot was very bad.

The ballot was lost in the civil service 60%-40% and by five to one in Telecom but was actually won in An Post by three to one.

The clear difference in An Post has been both the tradition of struggle and that of a strong local branch leadership which has offered an alternative to members in An Post during the last four years.

The 38% of those who voted calling for a withdrawal despite all the propaganda against represents a solid base to build real trade union ideals. This is not to say that the vote is not a setback because it is, but it has to be appreciated that with only a short amount of time to campaign against all the resources of the union it was always going to be hard to win.

Everywhere that the left and genuine activists got a chance to debate on an equal footing, at the two conferences and a small amount of branch meetings, they won.

The real task is to develop a network of activists in as many branches as possible, to put forward these arguments and ultimately to win the membership over to real trade union ideals.

## Treated like dirt by Aer Lingus

**A S TEAM Aer Lingus was finally signed over to the Danish multinational FLS late last year, the 60 or so workers who refused to transfer to the new company found themselves back in Aer Lingus in November.**

By Clare Daly

These are workers in possession of the so-called "letters of comfort", that is, Aer Lingus workers who were assured when TEAM Aer Lingus was formed as a separate company in 1990 out of the old Aer Lingus Maintenance and

Engineering Department, that they would remain Aer Lingus employees and that "in the event of TEAM getting into business difficulty, existing employees will continue to maintain the Aer Lingus fleet as a minimum".

They are highly skilled craftworkers with years of loyal service to Aer Lingus, in some cases 30 years. Their treatment at the hands of Aer Lingus management, with Mary O'Rourke and the government standing idly by is nothing short of scandalous.

They have been dispersed around the company and placed

into positions in the lowest operative and clerical grades, with no prospect of ever moving off those grades although obviously maintaining their level of pay.

These workers whose skills played a part in the excellent safety record of Aer Lingus find themselves emptying bins, sweeping floors and taking instructions from people with a fraction of their service. This is clearly designed to demoralise them and break their resolve.

Their fight goes on. Early in the year they will have a court hearing to secure their jobs which had been guaranteed.

Also, their unions have put forward the proposal that, given that TEAM has continued to employ contract workers, that Aer Lingus should contract out or second these craftworkers to FLS to maintain the Aer Lingus fleet.

This is a valid claim. The minister while meeting the workers has refused to intervene. They have been betrayed by the political establishment.

As the moves to find a strategic partner for Aer Lingus accelerate, all Aer Lingus workers should stand by their ex-TEAM colleagues and support their struggle.

## Talking Shop

### Botanic sellout

**LOCKED OUT** gardeners in the Botanic Gardens returned to work just before Christmas, after eight weeks outside the gates. The gardeners were locked out after they voted not to undertake new work which management was proposing, which would have significantly changed their terms of employment.

The gardeners, represented by SIPTU's State and Related Agencies Branch, had to watch other workers in the Gardens (members of other SIPTU branches as well as other unions) pass their pickets on a daily basis for more than six weeks because SIPTU did not call for an all-out strike. When the application was finally made to ICTU and agreement for an all-out strike was reached, management still had to be persuaded into talks by officials of the Labour Relations Commission.

The settlement reached at the talks included an agreement that the new work would not be imposed while an "independent panel of experts" conducted an enquiry. The enquiry team are to report by 15 January but SIPTU members will not be optimistic when they think of similar "settlements" reached in Irish Life and Ryanair when militant action by ordinary workers was undermined by union officials' obvious reluctance to fight for their members' interests.

### Ryanair disaster

**IT WAS** reported in December that four of the Ryanair baggage handlers who had been sacked at the end of their probationary period (clearly because of their union activities) had reached an "amicable settlement" with the airline and had withdrawn their claim for unfair dismissal from the Employment Appeals Tribunal. It appears that SIPTU's solicitor was closely involved in the negotiation of the settlement while the union team was led by Vice-President Des Geraghty. It seems that prominent SIPTU members of the former DL are as unwilling to fight in the industrial arena as their party is in the political one.

### Nurses' pay battle

**IT LOOKS** increasingly likely that nurses are going to have to take strike action on their pay claim. Talks currently underway in the Labour Court are going nowhere.

The government and the employers are trying to waltz on implementing the nursing commission report, by insisting that its recommendations be taken under P2000, instead of the PCW.

The report was commissioned as part of the settlement made in 1987 on a claim under the PCW by the nursing unions. The government and employers' position is a tactic. If they will not negotiate seriously, then they have to be taken on.

The mood is there for action among the rank and file. All the preparations for a serious struggle must now be put in place.

Strike committees should be elected in every workplace, to work out picketing duties, to decide on which emergency services should be provided, and to arrange solidarity action from other health workers.



A TEAM and Aer Lingus workers' meeting.

Solidarity price £1

# Voice

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**Paper of the Socialist Party**

Issue no.19 ■ January 1999

Minister for Justice John O'Donoghue and the Department of Justice have given a whole new meaning to the words "Cead Mile Failte". While over a million Irish emigrants were returning for Christmas from the four corners of the globe, Scrooge O'Donoghue and his Department were busy trying to use the holiday period to quickly, quietly, and, more than likely, illegally deport as many refugees as they could.



## 'Scrooge' Deportations Stopped

Roma refugees in Monaghan.

**T**HE WEEKS leading up to Christmas were being used by the Department of Justice to cover up a string of deportations. It was halted by a united campaign of anti-racist and pro-asylum seeker groups including the Socialist Party.

By John McCamley.

On 14 December Ekundayo Omoniyi, a Nigerian asylum seeker, was arrested and detained in Mountjoy prison. He had been told to turn up at the Department of Justice for an interview but was taken away to be deported.

The next day, a Romanian, Jula Costain, was removed by Gardai from his home and also placed in Mountjoy for deportation.

Pickets were started outside Mountjoy and press statements went out twice a day. Around the country different groups campaigned

against the detentions. The fightback had begun but on the morning of 16th Ekundayo was taken to Dublin Airport to be deported.

We were alerted at 8.00am that he was due to fly on the first flight to Brussels. However Ekundayo resisted and the immigration police had to postpone the deportation until 11.45am, on an Aer Lingus-Sabena flight to Brussels.

Ekundayo's country of origin, Nigeria, is run by a notorious military dictatorship with a well publicised record of brutality and murder. This is the persecution Ekundayo faced if returned there.

The postponement of his deportation until 11.45am gave anti-racist campaigners enough time both to go to the airport to protest and to go the courts to secure an injunction against the deportation on the basis that the

Department of Justice did not even observe its own "procedures". The injunction was granted at 11.30am, fifteen minutes before the flight.

Nonetheless, the immigration police have charged Ekundayo with assault when resisting their attempts to deport him despite his hands having been handcuffed and an arm being placed over his mouth so he couldn't shout for help.

Two days later two more Romanians were arrested in Rosslare and brought to Mountjoy. In both their cases as well as Jula's, high court injunctions have been granted against their deportations. This was on the basis of possible legal discrepancies on how their cases were handled.

They are now all out on bail with their cases being heard on 11th January. Ekundayo appears on 14th January on the assault

charge.

The Department of Justice has to be taken on directly in order to prevent more deportations. Ekundayo is still in prison and others could follow. Join us now and be ready to take on racism whether it comes from the state, media or neo-nazi thugs.

Our members are active in different anti-racist groups including: Mid-West Against Racism in Limerick, Immigrant Solidarity in Cork and the Anti Racism Campaign in Dublin.

For more information about what is happening telephone 088-2621487.

Anti Racism Campaign- 088-2129770.

Mid-West Against Racism- 086-8403782.

Immigrant Solidarity, PO Box 178, Eglinton Street, Cork.

Students Against Racism- (01) 4734567

## Where we stand on the key issues

- ★ For a minimum basic social welfare payment of £100 a week for the unemployed, pensioners, widows and those on sickness and disability.
- ★ A guaranteed right to a job or training with decent wages and full workers rights.
- For a legal minimum wage of £6 an hour to end the scandal of low pay.
- ★ For democratic trade unions to fight in the interests of their members on pay and conditions.
- Repeal the 1991 Industrial Relations Act.
- For a 32 hour week without loss of pay.
- For all workers, whether full time, part time or on contracts, to have full pension, sick pay and holiday rights.
- For a major campaign to unionise all workers and to make it illegal to sack workers for joining a trade union or engaging in union activity.
- ★ Increase the tax eligibility level to £8,000 a year for a single worker.
- No worker to pay PAYE above a 25% rate.
- No more tax amnesties for the rich, make them pay their full share.
- No to local charges - no double taxation in any form.
- ★ For a properly funded public health care system to put an end to waiting lists.
- No to a two tier health service.
- For free and comprehensive health care, with clinics in all areas to provide primary medical services.
- ★ Change the law and court procedures to protect the victims of violence.
- For the provision of refuges, financial support and counselling services by the state to help those suffering from domestic violence.
- For an end to all forms of chauvinism and sexual stereotyping in the media, advertising and in schools.
- No discrimination in pay or employment or promotional opportunities for women.
- ★ The Socialist Party is opposed to all criminal and anti-social behaviour, and supports democratic community action to tackle these problems.
- Cut across drug related crime and the power base of organised crime by providing treatment, maintenance and counselling facilities for all heroin addicts including support services for their families.
- Treatment centres to be established with the agreement of the local community, treating addicts from the local area only, and with a proper monitoring system for the local community.
- For community control of the Gardai to ensure they work with and implement the policing priorities advocated by the communities.
- ★ Take economic power out of the hands of the bankers, speculators and wealthy industrialists and transfer it to those who do the work and create the wealth, working class people.
- For public ownership and democratic socialist planning of the key areas of economic activity.
- ★ The Socialist Party advocates a socialist Ireland and a socialist federation of Ireland, England, Wales and Scotland on a free and equal basis.
- That means working for an agreed settlement on the national question, it also means tackling issues such as unemployment, poverty and social deprivation throughout Ireland.
- For the building of a mass socialist party to unite Protestant and Catholic working class people to fight for a socialist solution.

**Join the Socialist Party** I would like to join the Socialist Party

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