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Socialist Worker

GREEK WORKERS - WE SALUTE YOU!



CHANTING, "WE'RE not Irish, we are Greek, and we'll resist," tens of thousands of striking Greek workers took to the streets in mid February in a mass protest against government moves to savage their living standards.

Their dismissive view of Irish workers' failure to fight back is entirely understandable as the world's media praise Cowen & Co for putting the boot in and *getting away with it*.

The response of most media in Ireland to the events in Greece has been to depict the Greek people as lazy corrupt wasters who pay no taxes, enjoy an easy life, and fiddle their accounts.

The truth is very different.

Greece was ruled for years by a right wing

government that shared most of its core economic ideas and political values with Fianna Fail.

Corrupt

It was a corrupt and increasingly violent regime that looked after the rich and viciously attacked working class living standards.

Now the political establishment here, along with their well-heeled supporters and fawning media, want us to believe that by resisting a further assault on their living standards, Greek workers are threatening 'our' recovery; that they are, somehow, our enemy.

Again, the truth is very different.

The Greek government is in hock to the

same faceless international moneylenders who have Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Italy over a barrel.

These blood suckers are the ones demanding cuts in workers' wages, in pensions, in social welfare and health services.

They want governments everywhere to spend less on these things so there'll be more money for those who live off other people's labour - big businessmen, bankers, bondholders.

Parasites

Right across the world, these parasites and chancers are desperately trying to save the decayed and collapsing capitalist system that

in the past enabled them to accumulate huge wealth and power.

Resisting

Now they are demanding a transfer of even more wealth to themselves from workers everywhere.

Workers shouldn't believe the nonsense that says we are on the same side as these parasites.

Our interests are the same as the workers in Greece, as in every country.

For resisting this onslaught, Greek workers deserve our praise and admiration, and as we know, imitation is the greatest form of flattery.

(See full report from Athens on p2)

GREEK WORKERS SHOW THE WAY

Panos Garganas reports from Athens.

ONE WAY or another, every European country will be affected by the outcome of the "Greek tragedy".

Some hope that the 'stabilization plan' agreed between the EU and the Greek government will stem the immediate crisis and provide a breathing space for other countries, like Spain, Portugal and Ireland. But increasingly more and more people are nursing a different kind of hope, namely that working class resistance in Greece will show an alternative way out of the crisis.

There is a lot of anger among workers down here - as was to be expected in a country that had endured vicious attacks by the previous conservative government before it exploded in December 2008.

That social explosion - with young people laying siege to police stations against police brutality, and thousands of trade unionists taking to the streets in solidarity - finally brought the Greek right-wing government to its knees and PASOK, a Labour-type party swept into office last October.

And yet, within three months, workers are back on the streets again.

Firefighters, who are not allowed to take strike action because the Fire Brigade is organized along military lines, staged a mass demonstration in Athens on January 29.

Around 3,000 of them stormed their headquarters saying No to wage cuts and longer working hours.

Five days later it was employees in the Tax Department and the Customs Service who staged a warning 48 hour strike. Imports and exports were paralysed.

And then, on 10 February, a generalized strike swept across the Civil Service, schools, hospitals, local authorities, trains - and some areas of the private sector too.

Workers in the power industry, telecoms, banks and the rest of the private sector are set to strike on 24 February, along with public sector workers. March may see a new wave, starting with teachers who have already announced strike action for 8 March.

Why so much anger? Don't people realize that the country is in danger of becoming bankrupt as every European newspaper keeps repeating? Workers in Greece have many reasons to be in the streets, and just as many to shun the 'bankruptcy' scare.

First of all the ruling party, PASOK won the election by promising there would be no wage cuts and the economy would recover by simply getting rid of the previous conservative government and its hated policies. These promises were betrayed from the very first day.

One example: PASOK had said they would renegotiate the privatization of Greece's main Port Authority - which the conservative government sold to a Chinese company against a bitter strike by dock workers.

But the new PASOK government of George Papandreu is now begging the Chinese government to lend it money by buying Greek government bonds. So the dockers were betrayed in an effort not to upset Chinese bankers.

Even worse is the U-turn of the PASOK government in the face of pressure from European bankers.

Many people had illusions that as a gesture of solidarity, the European Union would help Greece overcome its financial difficulties.

They are now shocked to discover that the EU is treating Greece, one of its original 10 member states, in a manner worse than the IMF treats Third World countries.

If European money, or German or French money, is to be lent to Greece, it will come at a huge price and workers will again be



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toiled they're the ones who have to pay, by taking even deeper wage cuts, working even longer hours, and losing even more of their meager social benefits, while watching their public utilities sold off to private profiteers.

No wonder people are opposed to the so called stabilization plan. But there is even more to it than that, because the bitter medicine is seen to be increasingly ineffective.

The bureaucrats in Brussels said the markets would calm down once the stabilization plan kicked in. There is no sign of this happening.

Instead, the government in Greece - as in Ireland in the recent past - is being forced to pay ever higher interest on its borrowings because ruthless speculators are gambling

that the government will default on its loans. (see box: Speculators Rule ok?)

Clearly, the problems are not simply "Greek" or "Irish" or European for that matter. The international crisis of capitalism has entered a new phase.

Last year governments everywhere were claiming that the huge amounts of public money they threw at the banks had stopped the rot and the 'green shoots of recovery' were about to sprout. That was patent nonsense.

Now they are saying public spending has reached unsustainable levels and, as a consequence, they have engaged in competitive "stabilization plans" against each other.

The aim is to keep capitalism afloat by making workers pay, and those who inflict

the most damage on their workers' living standards believe their chances of survival will be greatest.

The USA is blaming China for exporting too much and not importing enough; Germany is blaming the so called PIGS (Portugal, Ireland/Italy, Greece and Spain) for weakening the Euro. It is a "beggar thy neighbour" situation that workers - wherever they are - will do well to resist.

If capitalism is to survive this crisis it will be at a terrible price, borne exclusively by workers, their families, their children and grandchildren.

So if Greek workers' resistance can grow and threaten the survival of capitalism, it will be good for workers everywhere. And all the better if workers everywhere learn the lesson and join the fight.

SPECULATORS RULE OK?

THE GREEK crisis is being fuelled by speculators.

Some are betting on Greece not being able to pay its debts. Others are betting on the value of the Euro falling dramatically as a consequence.

Many are betting on both.

And these speculators command such vast amounts of money, mostly in hedge funds, that they can often bring about the outcomes they want, even if it means

bankrupting a sovereign country or impoverishing its workers.

Greece's problems are often measured by reference to the market in credit default swaps (CDSs), a kind of insurance against the government failing to keep up its debt repayments.

But you don't have to have lent money to Greece to have a stake in this type of insurance. People who want to see Greece default are speculating heavily in the CDS market.

Even the Financial Times has expressed deep concern. Dealers in CDSs, the FT points out, "require volatility and even panic to make their game a profitable one. If contagion spreads in uncontrollable ways, so much the better for the traders in volatility."

It's a bit like someone taking out insurance on someone else's house and then burning the house down to claim the insurance. They don't care who gets hurt so long as they make a load of money.

Huge international hedge funds, like the Paulson Group and Moore Global, are trying to push Greece towards defaulting on its debt by driving the interest rate the government has to pay on its borrowings ever higher, to a point where it can no longer borrow.

The government response is to slash public expenditure on wages, welfare and pensions, so as to reduce its borrowing requirements. Ordinary people pay a dreadful price while the sharks keep circling.

And billions have been gambled on the fall in value of the Euro in the event of a Greek default. Speculators have borrowed billions of dollars to fund contracts for dealing in Euro. As the value of the Euro falls in the deepening crisis around Greece's debt problems, the speculators make enormous profits on the margin.

This is the anarchy of capitalism. This is what the 'international money market' is all about: making millions suffer to satisfy the greed of the few.



The face of a speculator: John Paulson whose hedge fund is believed to be one of the biggest now betting on Greece defaulting on its debts and the euro collapsing in value.

WEALTH WATCH

“WE’RE ALL in the same boat, and we all have to do our bit to save the economy.”

The mantra is the same all over the world. Workers’ wages are being slashed, welfare benefits cut, the sick and the elderly made fearful for the future. Regrettable, we’re told, but unavoidable—because there just isn’t any money left.

Oh really?

€936,000: the average annual salary chief executives in Ireland’s stock market listed companies earn. Consultants, Hewitt, say 63% of these poor souls didn’t get a pay rise last year. But that means nearly 40% did!

€1.1m: the sum Limerick University forked out for a new house for its president, Don Barry. If he hold’s the odd meeting in ‘his’ new house, he won’t have the public sector pay cut applied to his €212,000 annual salary.

€4m: the amount wasted by the government in setting up a community information website that never worked and was shut down suddenly a few weeks ago.

€4.8m: the bill for turning the residence of the Irish ambassador to Canada into “an abode of unbridled luxury, a sprawling mansion, financed by a country on the economic skids,” according to one Ottawa newspaper.

€8.5m: the amount paid to new Marks and Spencer boss, Marc Bolland, just for signing his contract. It would take the average M&S worker 595 years to earn that amount. Bolland also gets €1.1m a year, 77 times his workers’ average pay.

€8.7m: the debts of Dublin businessmen, Simon and Christian Stokes, who were accused of ‘thieving’ by Judge Peter Kelly for deducting taxes from workers’ wages but not paying the money to the Exchequer.

€11m: the dividend recently dished out to Senator Feargal Quinn and pals who own investment company, Claret Capital. They gambled on US private health care and won. Claret recently got rid of 22 of its workers and boasts among its investors former bank boss, Sean Fitzpatrick.

€20m: the latest profits at Irish fuel supplier, Topaz, whose boss Neil O’Leary, is involved in bio-diesel ventures in Haiti, a country he sees as a wonderful investment opportunity. Topaz directors bagged a 28% pay rise last year.

€24m: the amount our TDs and Senators managed to stuff into their pockets in ‘expenses’ in the last 30 months. Expenses for what? Pulling strokes in their constituencies in an effort to ensure they get re-elected so as to perpetuate their privileges.

€33.6m: the after tax profits at Glen Electric, Northern Ireland arm of Glen Dimplex, 100% owned by Co Louth man Martin Naughton. Glen Dimplex doesn’t publish accounts but it’s reckoned its NI arm accounts for a third of Naughton’s income. Last year the company ‘shed’ 246 jobs.

Let’s move up a gear.

€350m: the dividend recently paid to David Harding of hedge fund Winton Capital. Harding’s sidekick is Klaus Regling, the man Brian Lenihan appointed to carry out a preliminary investigation into Ireland’s banking fiasco. At least he knows what side his bread is buttered on.

€400m: the tax the Revenue Commissioners say 26 rich Irish people avoided paying because of a loophole that allowed them *invent losses* on huge property and share deals that they and then offset against taxes. For years the government turned a blind eye. Lenihan—who believes the rich already pay too much tax – has finally had to end this wheeze.

€1.05bn: the annual profits just reported by Rolls Royce, the world’s most luxurious car. That’s a 4% increase on the previous year and resulted in a 6.5% jump in the value of company shares. Open the Champagne someone.

There’s plenty of money left in the system. It’s just concentrated in too few—and the wrong—hands.



Lengthening dole queues are a deliberate part of government strategy.

‘IRELAND’S SUFFERING offers a glimpse of Britain’s future under the Tories’.

This was a recent headline in the *Guardian* newspaper written by its Economics Editor, Larry Elliot. It was spot on.

Despite the impression manufactured by the Irish media that the only way forward is pay and welfare cuts, what is happening in Ireland is a full frontal assault by people wedded to far-right Thatcherite politics.

Within mainstream economics,

The hard right

claim that

‘market forces’

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But even on this

right wing end

of the spectrum,

Ireland is

positioned on the

extreme edge.

there are two conventional approaches to a recession.

One supports greater state intervention to stimulate a recovery. Broadly described as Keynesian, after the famous British economist of the depression era, JM Keynes, this suggests that a government should adopt ‘counter-cyclical’ responses and inject money into its economy to make up for a collapse in private sector investment.

This approach has been adopted by most governments in the world, whether they use right wing or left wing rhetoric, including those as diverse as China and the US.

The other response comes from the hard right who claim that ‘market forces’ eventually recover, provided the state stands back.

These argue that a stimulus package only creates future debt and so are willing let unemployment rise steadily.

But even on this right wing end of the spectrum, Ireland is positioned on the extreme edge.

It has enacted a Financial Emergency Measures (Number 2) Act, which contains a clause (Section 7) which states that ‘in 2011 and every year after 2011’, the government will review public sector wage cuts in the light of ‘national competitiveness’ and prepare recommendations for the Dail.

In other words, the public sector is being used as a lever to enforce a downright ‘race to the bottom’ on wages throughout the economy.

Evidence of what this strategy means can be seen in the private hospitals. Groups like the Mater, Bons Secours and Mount Carmel have all tried to cut wages to main-

tain parity with wages that have been cut in the HSE.

As wage cuts form a central pillar of government policy, other measures naturally follow.

Not only is social welfare being cut, but particularly vicious measures – cuts of 50% - are directed at young people to force them to emigrate.

Next in line are 300,000 workers in sectors such as hotels, retail and catering who are covered by Employment Rights Orders.

On foot of a Labour Court order, these workers used to get nearly a euro above the minimum wage.

The government is now working closely with the small firms association, ISME, to allow them claim an ‘inability to pay’. Once that is done, the government will claim that the national minimum wage is uncompetitive for other firms and will seek reductions.

It all adds up to a ‘shock doctrine’ technique described by the writer Naomi Klein.

She has pointed to a pattern where a hard line section of the ruling elite emerges to exploit a situation where people are reeling from either natural or social disasters.

Driven by a fanatical belief in ‘pure’ capitalism, the hard liners promote mass unemployment as a way of disciplining people to accept new ‘market realities’.

The Irish Thatcherite response is being carefully orchestrated by RTE and the corporate media.

Typically, they use a chorus of neo-liberal economists who see no reason to revise their opinions about ‘market efficiency’ even after the global crash.

Their latest choreographed mes-

Thatcher ment



WHERE IS THE REBELLION?

ARE THE Irish a particularly compliant lot? Public sector workers have suffered a 14 percent wage cut and the only response is a work to rule. Young people are told to live on only €100 a week social welfare but there have been no riots. What is wrong with us?

These are questions that many activists are asking.

Two common explanations are offered. One is that a tradition of fatalism is rooted in Ireland's political culture because of the Catholic Church. The Irish prefer to drink and complain – not organise and fight.

However, Irish workers have had a magnificent record of struggle. Huge protest movements forced governments to back down on building a nuclear power plant in Carnsore, on water charges, and most recently on medical charges for the over seventies.

A second explanation is the media brainwashes the population. It is true the media operates as a propaganda machine for the rich and that deliberate campaigns are fostered to divide public sector from private sector workers.

But people do not simply soak up what they are told when it contradicts their experience. They learn to decode the media and disregard parts of the message which don't suit them. If people are more prey to the corporate media at this particular moment, it is because they had not got involved in struggle in the first place.

The Russian revolutionary, Leon Trotsky, argued that workers do not respond to recessions in a mechanical way. It depends on their level of struggle and consciousness in the preceding period.

In Ireland, the workers' movement was chloroformed by social partnership. For nearly twenty years, trade unionism became a type of casework insurance advocacy – you joined a union to ensure that an official processed your case through industrial relations machinery and nothing else. Union activity on the shop floor declined, attendance at meetings shrank; time-serving hacks took up posts on union committees. Overall, union membership shrank from a half to one third of the workforce.

The recession has created a crisis for this type of trade unionism. It is therefore inevitable that a rebirth of struggle will be accompanied by a major battle inside the workers' movement to oust the collaborators who brought the movement to such a low point.

A second reason for the slow response relates to Karl Marx's argument that 'the ruling ideas in society are the ideas of the ruling class'. The key institutions of a capitalist society promote a set of ideas which mask conflict and encourage a belief in the system. In Ireland, for historical reasons a key strain of those ideas came in the form of an economic nationalism



– that we must all pull together for the sake of our economy.

These ideas need to be challenged by a revolutionary party which understands both the class nature of the state and the madness of the system. The rapid growth of organisations like the Socialist Workers Party and our ability to sink real roots in working class areas is therefore key to challenging these ideas.

But while a fight inside the unions and the building a socialist organisation are important, so too are the wider subterranean changes that go on in workers' consciousness. The Italian revolutionary Gramsci argued that workers often have a 'contradictory consciousness'.

As they listen to the media with one side of their brain, fear and compliance become the dominant response. But, on the other side, the voice of anger resonates at the way in which the state just looks after the rich.

In a huge social crisis, people often vacillate rapidly between the two responses. Huge issues are at stake in this fight – and most workers know it. They sense that a serious fight will bring them up against the very limits of the system itself and do not have the organisational or ideological weapons for the battle. For a period, therefore, they hesitate before gaining strength.

The combination of workers' own experience plus the political battles waged by the left will therefore be decisive. Big confrontations are on the way – and activists need to develop a 'thick skin' to ride the ebbs and flows of struggle.

sage is that 'the worst is over' and as its reward for taking hard medicine Ireland will experience a recovery, some say as soon as the second half of this year, others say in 2012.

On the same day that the government advisor, Alan Aherne, claimed that wage cuts would 'kickstart growth', the ESRI Professor John Fitzgerald claimed that 2012 would see a 'vigorous recovery'. (The same expert had predicted a booming economy in 2009!)

There is, however, a major problem at the core of Thatcherite economics: cutting wages in the midst of a depression risks setting off an even deeper cycle of economic failure.

There are several reasons to think that this has already started to happen in Ireland.

First, private investment by capitalists is in free fall. Ireland's gross domestic fixed capital formation fell by 43% between 2007 and 2009. In Germany, the fall from peak has been nearly 12%, and in the UK and

US, 15%.

Second, as the capitalists go on an investment strike during the recession, revenues to the state enter an even sharper decline.

The severe retrenchment in the Irish economy means that ever more workers are being laid off. With 436,936 signing on the live register, PAYE taxes go down, and VAT goes down because everyone is spending less.

As a result, in January, 2010 taxes declined by a further €700 million compared to the previous year.

Or to put it differently, one third of the 'savings' generated by cutting public sector wages were lost immediately in the state's lower tax take.

Third, wage cuts plus lay-offs have created a time bomb in housing.

Vast numbers of people are living in houses that are now worth much less than they owe on their mortgages (negative equity) and a minority of these have already fallen into arrears with their mortgage payments.

Over €1 billion is already outstanding as 26,000 people are more than 90 days in arrears.

With over 300,000 unoccupied dwellings, there is little prospect that people will recover their property investment and will instead be overloaded with debt for the rest of their lives.

And as interest rates rise, there will a surge in house repossessions that will trigger another banking crisis as the banks won't be able to sell the houses, and the state won't be able to raise the money to bail the banks out a second time.

Finally, the suffering which the

government is imposing is all premised on one big gamble – that after the whip of unemployment, workers will be glad of new jobs at lower pay rates and so make Ireland Inc 'competitive' again – just as the global economy takes off. But this assumes that there will be a sustained recovery.

While predictions are difficult, there are growing signs that the recovery underway is weaker than expected and there are even some signs of a 'double dip' recession – a false recovery followed by an even bigger collapse.

The stimulus package which governments created has left them with a huge hangover of debt.

In the crazy world of global capitalism this in turn has become a target for a new wave of speculation as hedge funds target countries like Greece.

(Later they may turn on Spain, Ireland and Portugal - these four countries are known in the financial world as the PIGS of the EU)

Moreover even if a recovery develops, it is more likely to be centred in Asia, as China emerges as the major centre of capital accumulation in the world economy. Irish capitalism, tied for decades to the US, has few links in this area – and so wage cuts will do little to increase 'competitiveness' in this arena.

The reality therefore is that Irish capitalism is in desperate straits despite the bluster offered by the government and its chorus of economist hacks. Its only answer is more attacks on workers for at least two more years.

This is Ireland's Thatcher moment – and it is time to fight back.



Alan Aherne, Economic adviser to the minister for finance

Capitalism in Crisis Kills

THE ECONOMIC crisis is causing a dramatic increase in suicides in Ireland. After the crash of 2008, figures for the first three months of 2009 showed a 43 per cent increase in the suicide rate. Mark Walshe reports.

According to the Central Statistics Office, 106 people took their own lives from January to March last year — 85 men and 21 women.

By November, the total number was over 500, compared with 424 for 2008 as a whole. The year 2008 also recorded the largest increase in “self-harm” in six years.

Before the economy crashed, suicide figures had actually been falling.

Sadly, the recent increase in suicides was entirely predictable.

Speaking in Dublin recently, Stephen Platt, Professor of Health Policy at Edinburgh University, said unemployed people are three times more likely to commit suicide than those in work.

Even where there is no mental illness involved, he said, there was a 70% greater chance of an unemployed person dying by suicide.

Unemployment in Ireland trebled in the last two years, from 4.6% to 12.7% and the government itself predicts that another 75,000 people will lose their jobs this year.

President McAleese, a dyed-in-the-wool Fianna Fáiler, pointed out that “following job-loss people report higher levels of anxiety, stress, depression, anger and loss of control and self esteem.”

But instead of looking for an alternative to the permanently crisis-prone capitalist system, McAleese, in common with so many like her, wants only “programmes for

Unemployed people are three times more likely to commit suicide than those in work.

unemployed people that help increase their resilience.”

What they need, she said, was “strength and imagination to get through this tough period.”

In other words, just grit your teeth and accept your lot in life.

No-one could argue with the need for more resources for suicide prevention.

It should never, ever, be the case that mental health services are short of funding, as they have always been in Ireland.

However, this kind of response tends to treat self-harm and suicide in terms of individuals experiencing mental health difficulties.

It seeks to treat the symptoms rather than the causes, looking for individual solutions to a societal problem.

While those who advocate the ‘individual’ response might readily acknowledge that suicides tend to increase during periods of economic depression, few question why we should tolerate an economic system that regularly sinks into such depressions.

Some, of course — like McAleese and her political cronies, and many commentators who have voiced concern about rising suicide rates — support and cheerlead the capitalist system regardless of the damage it does to people’s lives.

When a crisis occurs, they are fully behind big business and the government of the day as it consciously decides to make people pay for the crisis — just as they are doing at present.

The result is massive disruption to people’s lives as they are discarded by their employer, betrayed by their trade union (if they have one), and even evicted from their family home.

But the answer to the individual despair unleashed by such events is collective solidarity.

We need to stand shoulder to shoulder to hold our political and union leaders to account for their attempts to make us pay for the crisis.

We didn’t cause the crisis and nobody should have to pay for it with their job, their house or, ultimately, their life.

MOVIE

Destroying humanity, rewarding hypocrisy

Review by Margaret McMahon

Up In The Air, directed by Jason Reitman and starring George Clooney, Anna Kendrick and Vera Farmiga

GEORGE CLOONEY’S latest film works on many levels including as a metaphor for the vacuity and destructiveness of modern capitalism.

Clooney’s character, Ryan Bingham, spends most of his time detached from real relationships, up in the air flying business class around America with only hand luggage, avoiding his sterile, anonymous apartment.

He works as a peripatetic hatchet-man who sacks people for a living, hired by bosses who are “too much of a pussy to do it for themselves”.

His victims are played by non-actors who were sacked in real life.

They respond to Bingham’s suave techniques with varying degrees of anger, frustration and despair.

Bingham’s boss runs through a list of impending corporate closures. “It’s the worst time on record for America,” he says. “This is our moment.”

His assistant in the nationwide cull is Natalie (played by the wonderful Anna Kendrick) straight out of college and brimming with perky energy who dreams up a scheme to save



Natalie Keener (Anna Kendrick) in *Up In The Air*

on air fares by sacking people over the internet, threatening Bingham’s own job in the process.

Bingham describes his job as “taking people at their most fragile and setting them adrift,” and when one victim tells them she’s suicidal, Natalie asks if he ever follows up on such threats. “No,” he replies, “nothing good is going to come of that.”

Bingham’s own life serves as a searing indictment of the alienation and isolation of

contemporary life with its ludicrous accumulation of useless things.

His life’s ambition is to clock up 10 million air miles, not for the free travel it would give him, but because he gets a gold card, and meets the airline’s top pilot.

The inevitable romantic interest is initiated by a strangely lascivious exchange of plastic executive swipe cards in an airport business lounge!

As Bingham’s relationship with the new woman in his life

develops, he comes to realize that it is more important than his detached empty life style, but his attempt to break free ends disastrously. He too is a victim.

If I have a criticism it is that those who are sacked by Bingham seek individual solace in their families rather than in collective resistance.

But this is still a questioning look at a society that destroys humanity and personal relationships while rewarding ruthless hypocrisy and sterile rhetoric.

MUSIC

‘Come, let the revolution take its toll’

Review by Sandra Ball

Muse: The Resistance

MUSE — the band that sold out the famous Madison Square Gardens Arena and Wembley Stadium — are one of the most prolific live bands performing today.

Their sound of alternative progressive rock, with electro and classical influences, makes for epic world class live shows.

With record sales of 11 million and sold-out world tours, their music and their message reach millions.

Their latest album, *The Resistance*, is their most political.

A huge current of anti-globalist revolutionary sentiment makes this album a force to be reckoned with.

“Rise up and take the power back, its time the fat cats had

a heart attack”; “they will not control us, we will be victorious”, and “paranoia is in bloom, the PR transmission will resume; they’ll try to push drugs to keep us all dumbed down, and hope that we will never see the truth around” — are some of the lyrics from the opening track, *The Uprising*.

When lead soprano vocalist Matt Bellamy was asked what the resistance was against he said, “the corporate domination of the western world...we are living in a situation where the corporations are giants of power”.

He spoke of how the album was a voice for the growing shift in the world, that people are sick of this ‘in the corporation we trust’ lifestyle.

With a track titled *United States of Eurasia* this album pulls no punches with its disdain for



the globalist corporate world.

With powerful messages of unity, love and revolution underlying a powerful and a beautifully composed album it is a must have for the children of any revolution.

With millions of fans across the globe, this album’s sentiment of revolution enjoys the powerful medium of music, and powerful live shows.

It is a breath of fresh air for any activist — and music lover.

Sinn Fein's Criminal Policy on Justice

By EAMONN MCCANN

ANYONE STILL living with the delusion that Sinn Fein is a party of the Left should look up its latest pronouncement on law and order.

In an article in the 6 February edition of *An Phoblacht*, SF candidate for Foyle, Martina Anderson, declares that one of the reasons the party wanted policing and justice devolved was that the courts in England were *too soft* on offenders.

The police bring the culprits to court, she complained, but British judges merely give them "a slap on the wrists". Under devolution, she promised, this will change. Anti-social elements will get what's coming to them.

Leaving aside the question of the judiciary's supposed independence of politics, many will be surprised at a Republican ex-prisoner jeering at British courts for being too lenient and promising a harsher attitude once Republicans have influence over policy. But history shows that surprise is misplaced.

When Republicans go respectable, they go the whole hog.

Once they make peace with the constitutional set-up, they give total support to the status quo.

They pass from being revolutionaries to reactionaries without going through the intermediate stage of reformism. Ms. Anderson is following in the footsteps of previous generations—the first Free State government, then de Valera, and so on.



Sinn Fein candidate for Foyle, Martina Anderson: "a slap on the wrists"

Debate over sentencing policy goes on all the time. The pages of the *Daily Telegraph* in Britain and the *Independent* in Ireland are frequently full of tirades from retired generals or the likes of Kevin Myers, shouting that hanging and flogging are the only things these people understand.

On the other side are those who recognise the connection between

social conditions and the likelihood of offending - those who are commonly denounced as "bleeding-heart liberals" by Martina Anderson, Kevin Myers etc.

But it's a matter of observation that those who come before the courts are drawn overwhelmingly from the bottom half of society. This is obvious from who's in the dock in any mag-

istrate's court.

The relevance of class is even more obvious if we look at who's sentenced to prison.

The poorer you are the more likely you are to be locked up for a particular offence.

Ms. Anderson promises that once Sinn Fein has a say-so they'll be locked up for longer.

In the short-term, there may be some satisfaction for the victims of crimes in seeing the perpetrators, or people like the perpetrators, put behind bars.

But all experience shows that if you don't deal with the underlying causes you simply move the problem on, or put it in abeyance for a time.

The United States has one of the harshest punishment regimes in the world.

The "three strikes and you're out" principle means draconian sentences for relatively minor offences. The most disadvantaged are most at risk of being jailed.

Fewer than five percent of prisoners come from the top 50 percent of the population - ie, more than 95 percent come from the bottom half.

And, even under Obama, there are more young black men in prison than there are at college.

But the US also remains one of the most crime-ridden countries in the West. Put simply, tough sentencing might give victims a passing thrill, but in the end proves counter-productive.

Those who want real change have to take a firm stand against the State cracking down even harder on those with most reason to feel aggrieved in society.

Socialists and all progressive people should reject Sinn Fein's law-and-order policies outright.

The aim is to change the system from below, not defend it from above.

DENIS THE MENACE

By PATRICK MCKENNA

BILL CLINTON and Denis O'Brien said a couple of strange things while suggesting to the would-be masters of the universe gathered recently in Davos, that they should be investing big time in Haiti.

First, Clinton claimed that his friend O'Brien "lived in Ireland, except when there is an earthquake in Haiti".

Perhaps he knows something the Irish Revenue Commissioners don't, for Denis claims to be 'non-resident for tax purposes'.

Later, O'Brien petitioned potential investors to put their money into Haiti "for the right reasons ...not just for altruistic reasons but for economic reasons", as though the members of the capitalist elite present needed to stop looking out for the little guy and put themselves first for a change. Described last year by one

newspaper as "the largest investor in Haiti's history", billionaire tax fugitive O'Brien has never enjoyed such a high profile.

Digicel, his Caribbean mobile phone empire, has won acclaim for helping 'rebuild' a devastated country, and O'Brien has become a useful reference point for media organisations seeking out the rich white man to put a positive gloss on the disaster.

While O'Brien appeared on nightly interviews with Charlie Bird on RTE, the tawdry matter of the Moriarty Tribunal - which has been investigating alleged corruption in the awarding of O'Brien's first Irish mobile phone licence - seemed well buried. Sarah Carey, a former employee of O'Brien's, used a column in the *Irish Times* to cast shame on those who would think evil upon his activities in Haiti, describing criticism of him as 'unbecoming'.

Already selling his Digicel brand mobile phones in Haiti long before last month's earthquake, O'Brien has clearly realised that there are benefits to be got from mixing a bit of 'corporate responsibility' with the hard headed pursuit of profits.

There is even a 'business model' for this approach, as revealed in a 2008 book with the revealing title *Just Good Business - The Strategic Guide to Aligning Corporate Responsibility and Brand*.

The book praises O'Brien to the skies, pointing out that his apparent altruism paid off when ordinary Haitians protected his Digicel shops during previous outbursts of 'street anarchy'.

The message is clear: if you want to turn a profit in a poor and starving country, ravaged by looting dictatorships and IMF austerity plans, where the US deposes any democratically elected government it doesn't like, you better make sure the



Denis O'Brien: 'The largest investor in Haiti's history'

people think you're on their side.

O'Brien dispensed with the mask at Davos where he told executives that Haiti presented an "enormous opportunity" for companies to make loads of money. It was "a low cost country" with 10m "consumers".

And it's a gateway to much richer picking in the US.

When French foreign minister, Alain Joyandet, criticised the role of the US military in Haiti with the words "this is about helping Haiti, not about occupying Haiti," O'Brien rounded on

him: "The last thing we need is for people to be so critical".

O'Brien has dabbled in Caribbean politics before. When democratically-elected Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was overthrown in a military coup last year - after introducing moderate measures favouring workers, like raising the minimum wage - two elite business organisations, the Tegucigalpa Chamber of Commerce and the Honduran National Business Council, backed the coup. O'Brien's Digicel is a member of both organisations. Digicel lent its own helping

hand to coup proceedings by withdrawing advertising from one of the few radio programmes, *Hable Como Habla*, which had maintained opposition to the coup.

Heading the putsch was Roberto Micheletti, former head of Hondutel, Honduras's state telecoms company.

And guess what? Micheletti is a forceful proponent of privatising Hondutel.

But only a hardened cynic could imagine that the prospect of profiting from such a development might have influenced our altruistic Mr O'Brien.

STAND BY TO REPEL WATER CHARGES!

CAMPAIGNERS AGAINST water charges in the North are preparing for action as the Executive parties hint they might renege on pledges made before the last election.

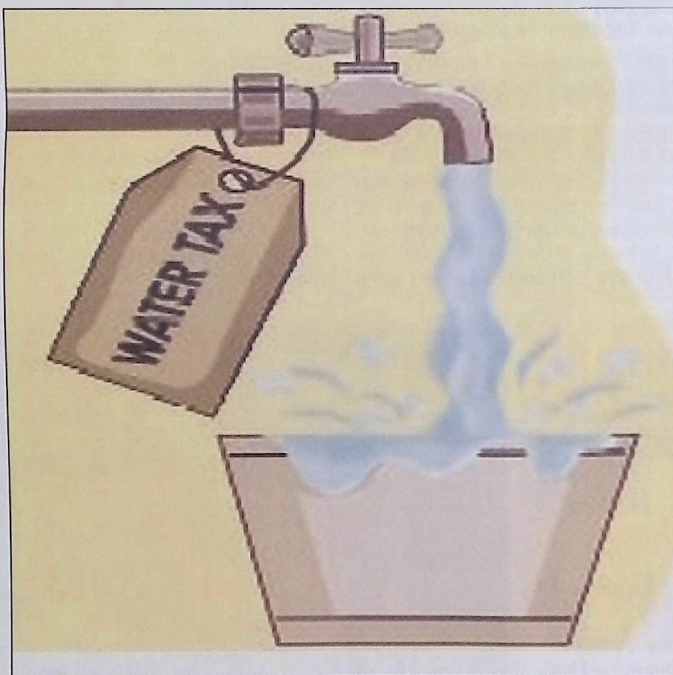
A consultation document from Stormont in January made three mentions of water changes as a possible means of raising revenue.

None of the mainstream parties has intervened to rule the possibility out.

In response, Communities Against the Water Tax (CAWT) has begun organising again.

The proposal for water charges came originally from the Northern Ireland Office under Direct Rule. Westminster wanted the charges in from 2006 - but backed down in face of a mass refusal to pay.

The DUP, Sinn Fein, the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP



all promised that the idea would be dumped once the Assembly was up and running and they were in control.

Now they are retreating from this stance.

There is a distinct possibility of charges being included in budget proposals due in March.

At the moment, water is controlled by the semi-privatised NI Water.

People Before Profit is arguing that Minister Conor Murphy should take the service back into public hands, end the freeze on rates and pay for water through the rates.

This would mean that the most vulnerable sections of the community would not have to pay the water charges, since they don't have to pay rates.

People Before Profit has also appealed to all groups

which support non-payment to come together in a single campaign.

Removal of the cap on rates would mean that the well-off would pay their fair share.

At present, the super-rich pay the same as middle-class people and - as a proportion of their income - the poor pay the most.

If the New Labour Government can nationalise the banks and pour tens of billions into them, the Executive can say to the Treasury, "The only way we can get people to pay for water is if we bring it back into the public sector and collect the money through the rates".

If they try to re-introduce separate water charges, the non-payment groups will spring back into action to ensure that we keep water public for the coming generations.

A RADICAL ALTERNATIVE

EAMONN McCANN is to fight the Foyle constituency under the People Before Profit banner in the forthcoming Westminster general election. The poll will be held, at the latest, on 6 May 6.

The journalist and SWP member was nominated at a meeting of PBP in Derry on 13 February.

The Foyle seat is currently held by Mark Durkan of the SDLP. Martina Anderson is standing for Sinn Fein.

Following the nomination, Derry PBP spokesman Davy McAuley said: "Commentators

say that this election is simply a contest between the two Nationalists as to which would be the better champion for the Nationalist community. We want to challenge this whole approach.

"There is a crying need for a radical alternative to the main parties.

"They were willing to bring the Assembly and Executive crashing down on issues of policing and parades.

"But they are in agreement on cuts in spending which will hit the least well-off hardest. Their priorities are upside



down.

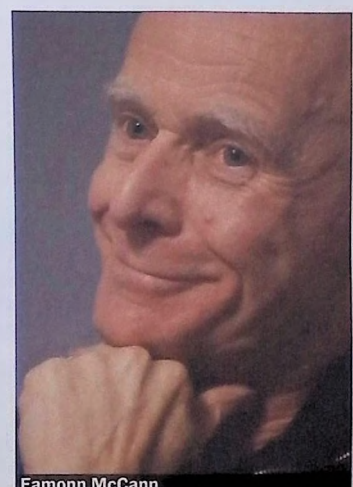
"There are many thousands in the North who want to see candidates on a platform against the cuts, for defence of public sector jobs, against

household charges, for the restoration of trade union rights and so on.

"We might disagree on all sorts of other issues. But if we come together on a basic programme along these lines, we can make a real impact.

"We in Derry are up for a fight and urge others across the North to step forward and offer a real alternative."

If you want to get involved in Eamonn's campaign, or any other activity with the People Before Profit Alliance, contact info@peoplebeforeprofit.ie www.people-before-profit.org/



Eamonn McCann