

Socialist Worker

With ministers like these...



NO WONDER FINE GAEL PROTECTS THE RICH

HEALTH Minister, James Reilly, lives like a lord in a palatial mansion, whilst claiming a tax break for the privilege.

Is it any wonder that Fine Gael politicians like Reilly claim that taxing the rich is unrealistic?

The 13 bed Loughton House in Offaly is the official private residence of the man charged with running the health service. It has 150 acres of farmland and woodland surrounding it. Reilly has declared ownership of the land in the Dáil register of interests, but his wife is deemed the owner of the property.

The house was bought by Reilly in 2002 for about €2 million, but he has also spent money in renovating it. Some of the costs of the refurbishment can be written off for tax purposes but predictably Reilly has refused to declare by how much.

A property portfolio

Reilly's wealth is not just tied to this mansion. He also owns a commercial complex in Lusk, including a supermarket and a doctor's surgery as well as an 86-acre

former family farm that is now let for tillage. He has other sites in Balrothery and Stamullen as well as a holiday home at the Doonbeg golf course,

To top it off, he is the part owner of a private nursing home in Carrick on Suir. One of his other co-owners is Anne Devitt, who recently resigned from Fine Gael after the Mahon tribunal criticised her for 'inappropriate' actions.

In other words, Reilly reeks of money and wealth.

This class position, no doubt, colours his attitude when running the health service.

Over the next year, for example, Reilly will cut 900 community public beds. This will cause immense hardship for people who rely on the public health service to look after elderly relatives.

But at the same time, Reilly is surrounding himself with over-paid advisors and consultants – at public expense.

One advisor, Les Nixon, is being paid €164,000 a year to discuss 'improved performance for unscheduled care' while

another, Martin Connor, gets €160,000 for advising on waiting lists. Connor spends much of his time doing research in Stanford University, but the man's words are deemed so valuable that gets paid this huge sum for his ideas.

It is the same story for the medical consultants that Reilly once represented when he acted for the Irish Medical Organisation.

Extra Fees

Some are getting extra fees of €15,040 a year for 'administrative duties'. This is on top of an annual salary of over €200,000 plus extra income from private patients.

Health managers are also getting fantastic bonus payments – €150,000, for example, for one hospital manager in Tallaght.

When you live in a stately mansion and get tax breaks for re-furbishing it, you develop an attitude of entitlement to privilege. The most natural thing in the world is to assume that you should

pay big salaries to a small elite – while making excuses for the suffering visited on the poor.

And when some left wing TD suggests that, just maybe, the rich should pay more tax, the first thing we are told is that this will force them to flee the country.

But would the likes of Reilly really leave behind his life of privilege in his stately mansion?

Remember that he made his fortune here and he is far from being alone.

According to the latest figures from the revenue commissioners, more than 109,000 Irish people earned upwards of €100,000 in 2009.

Between them they were paid €20 billion (€181,000 per person) and just like minister Reilly this gives them plenty of reason to stick around.

So next time you hear one of these parasites threatening to take flight, remember that most of them rely on this country for their incredible fortunes and that leaving would be like killing the goose that lays the golden eggs.

Inside

Where next after the Fiscal Treaty?

Page 4

The Revolutionary Struggle in Greece

Page 6

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Bord na Mona strike for pay increase

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

AS Socialist Worker goes to press 2000 workers at Bord na Mona are due to strike on Tuesday 5 June over the company's refusal to pay a 3.5% claim.

The claim was upheld by the Labour Court. The strike involves all workers including office staff, those working on bogs, in stores and in briquette factories.

The company instead offered a bonus scheme with below inflation pay increases tied to future performance increases.

The deal was to be accompanied by a pay freeze until 2016. This was rejected at a mass meeting of members who instead called for a strike.

Group Secretary of the Bord na Mona group of unions Oliver McDonagh said:

"Worker after worker at the meeting stood to express their dismay and anger at the refusal of management to make good this payment".

"Members felt that what was on offer was a far cry from the 6% they were originally promised back in 2009 as part of the national wage agreement and paid to all other semi-state companies. The company has been profitable since 2009."



Bord na Mona revealed pre-tax profits of €72.7 million for the year ending March 2011 - an increase of 12.6% from €64.6 million in 2010. This years figures aren't available, yet however Group CEO, Gabriel D'Arcy, said: "Bord na Mona recorded increased earnings growth last year for the fifth year in a row." D'Arcy takes home a tidy sum of €392,000 in salary and benefits.

Bord na Mona has sufficient stockpiles to withstand a one day strike. Following the victory in the Fiscal Treaty management will be more bullish to push through cuts and austerity. Workers should push their unions to take stronger action to demand their rightful pay increase.

VITA CORTEX WORKERS VINDICATED



By BRIAN O' BOYLE

FIVE and a half months after occupying their workplace, the staff at Vita Cortex finally got their lives back on Thursday 24 May.

The details of the case have been well publicised.

After duping the staff into working to dismantle the moribund plant, owner Jack Ronan suddenly pleaded poverty and refused to give staff members any more than the minimum statutory redundancy.

Outraged, the workers immediately decided to occupy and after 25 hard weeks their heroic stand has finally paid off.

Although the final settlement cannot be disclosed for legal reasons, Jim Power, one of the original occupiers, told Socialist Worker that it was "fair to say that it was a very good offer that was close to

the original terms that the workers had been looking for".

He also wished to thank all those workers and families, who had stood in solidarity with the staff over the long and difficult winter -

"At first this case was obviously about the money, but as it went on it became much more important than this. If we had worked the five and a half months the money would have probably been higher, but we were actually fighting for a hell of a lot more by the end. Our stand became linked with our pride our dignity and our responsibility to all those workers who looked to us for inspiration. We got support from them and we owed to ourselves and our supporters to see it through to the bitter end".

"If we had listened to the poli-

ticians we would have packed up months ago. Luckily we listened to the ordinary people of Cork and our fellow workers across the country. These people gave us strength and we just hope that our stand gives people confidence and puts real pressure on employers not to throw workers on the scrap heap. Better still the government should legislate to make sure it doesn't happen".

Jim and his fellow workers will reunite on 16 June in the Friar Wall Tavern on what promises to be a night to remember.

Until then the workers can get back to their families and friends safe in the knowledge that they have made a real advance for workers across the country.

Socialist Worker congratulates their heroic actions and wishes the staff well for the future.

Irish Cement strike wins

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

WORKERS at Irish Cement have won their strike with the company over unpaid wages.

The strike by over 100 workers began on 3 April and ended on 21 May. It was a complete victory for the workers, management agreed to pay all the money owed - between

€5,500 and €9,500 for each worker.

Irish Cement Ltd is part of the Cement Roadstone or CRH Group, one of the world's largest building materials companies.

Last year CRH turned in profits of €711 million - a staggering rise of 33%. Its chief executive, Myles

Lee, was paid €2.4 million in benefits and bonuses.

Companies have used the crisis to push through vicious cuts to boost their profits. Workers should use the example of Irish Cement to push their unions to fight harder to defend pay and conditions.

SIPTU HOME HELP NURSES MOBILISE TO RESIST CUTS



By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

HUNDREDS of SIPTU members in the Home Help service and their supporters attended a rally in Liberty Hall on Saturday 2nd June as part of their campaign against the outsourcing of the service by the Health Service Executive (HSE).

A mass rally in Cork the previous week pulled hundreds of supporters.

SIPTU is calling on the HSE to honour its previous commitment to home help nurses by not contracting out the service to private organisations.

Other cuts being imposed by the HSE could mean a home help nurse who is currently on 25 or 30 hours being reduced to a mere 5 hours a week. This is a drastic reduction in pay and also means shorter time with clients.

This will result in greater work pressure and poorer care standards. It also means a greater turnover of carers making it harder to build relationships with those being cared for.

Tina Barrett, a Home Help in the Dublin area, said she was concerned about the increased time constraints being placed upon her work.

She said; "Greater constraints are being placed on the amount

of time Home Helps can spend with clients.

"No account is taken of when a client is ill and you need to be able to spend that bit more time with them.

"There is also less time being provided to work with clients' families.

"These new procedures are being implemented by management without proper regard for the interests of clients or the experience of Home Helps working on the ground."

Among those who were at the rally was Tony Hogan, whose 78-year-old father is in receipt of Home Help care.

He told Socialist Worker that "Among my family's concerns about the Home Help service provided by private companies is that many of the carers are working on a short-term, part-time basis.

"They are also regularly changed which results in a situation where it is difficult for a relationship to develop between the client and the Home Help.

"Developing such relationships, which allow relatives to be confident about the standard of care being provided, is a vital aspect of the service."

A full hearing of the issues currently facing the Home Help service was scheduled for the Labour Court for Tuesday 5 June.



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WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and endangering the planet. A new society can only be constructed when the workers take control of the wealth and plan its production and distribution for human need and not profit.

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

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

greater political and economic democracy.

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

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

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

working class.

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

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH
We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Cameron government.

Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

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

This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system.

We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

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

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What Socialists Say



Greece shows the way

THE Irish government has been attacking the Greek people. At a recent EU Finance Ministers meeting, Michael Noonan, was the first to denounce them for not sticking to austerity policies.

Noonan, Kenny and Gilmore try to frighten Irish people into thinking that they will face the same hardship as the Greeks.

But the reality is that Greece is suffering because they have entered a second memorandum with the same Troika that is crucifying Irish workers. Their governments have also been as abject as ours and were the first to vote for the Fiscal Treaty.

The big difference is that Greek workers have shown how resistance gets results.

They have staged seventeen general strikes and may now elect a government dominated by Syriza, a coalition of the radical left.

Syriza has promised to tear up the memorandum with the troika and to restore cuts in pensions. They will impose an immediate tax on the rich – and then tell the EU leaders that it is up to them to accept the new reality.

Syriza is to the left of Sinn Fein in these policies. The Greek party have not bent to the pressure to be 'more realistic' but have stated clearly they will pass a law to tear up all deals concluded with the IMF and the EU.

If elected Syriza will face economic terrorism and will be tested on how they respond.

Their only hope lies in appealing to workers to take action to resist the sabotage of the rich.

A left government would also have to take steps to disband the riot police and the political police who have shown themselves to be sympathetic to the fascists.

It is by no means clear that the left reformist leadership of Syriza will take these steps.

Other smaller forces, such as Antarsya, the Anti-Capitalist Left, are therefore positioning themselves for the struggle ahead.

Whatever the outcome, however, Greek workers have much to teach us when it comes to resistance.

Labour's demise

THE Labour Party is in serious trouble as their voter's desert them for Sinn Fein and the United Left Alliance.

Labour sided with the neoliberal right on the Fiscal Treaty referendum – while the manual working class areas voted No.

Pat Leahy, the Sunday Business Post political correspondent, summed it up:

'There are more and more people willing to listen to an analysis of politics that is profoundly class-based and some of which is straightforwardly revolutionary in nature.'

The Labour Party – and the SIPTU union leaders, who are closely associated with it – represent the most defeatist mood among Irish workers.

They are the people who try to scupper every call to resist with the cry 'But we can never win'. They mask every defeat with the sigh, 'But it could be worst'. Despite claiming to soften the hard right edge of Fine Gael, they have become its boot boys.

A crucial step in the political development of Irish workers is moving beyond this pathetic organisation.

We need to organise petitions in our unions to demand that not a single cent is used to fund Labour.

We should organise anti-household protests outside the clinics of Labour TDs.

Now is the time to put the Labour traitors under pressure and lay the basis for a new radical party for Irish workers.

HOUSEHOLD CHARGES: Campaign moves to next phase



By BRIAN O' BOYLE

THE Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes (CAHWT) met on 19 May for its founding conference.

Coming in the wake of over 1 million people refusing to pay the €100 household charge, the conference brought around 300 delegates together from over 70 campaigns around the country.

Top of the agenda was the nature of the coming offensive against 'Big Phil Hogan's' threats and intimidation.

After months in hiding, the minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government has once again raised his head, threatening to send over 650,000 letters to non-payers in the coming weeks.

Expecting these sorts of 'bully boy tactics', numerous delegates spoke of their determination to fight the government.

Active Resistance

CAHWT had previously vowed to take legal action should anyone be dragged in front of the courts.

But the mood at conference was for much more active resistance.

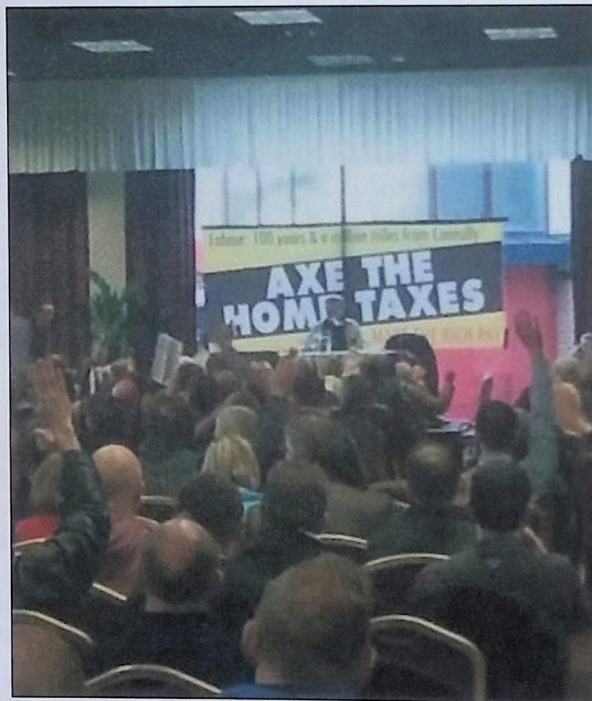
Claire Daly TD called for mass mobilisations in every area that non-payers were targeted, whilst Cllr Brid Smith spoke of the need to build on the great successes of the campaign to date.

Central to everything will be a continuation of the bottom up activity that has thus far characterised the campaign.

Over the last number of months the CAHWT has become the most important vehicle for resistance to austerity around the country.

Tens of thousands of people have attended public meetings, joined the campaign and protested locally.

In addition, there have been extremely successful national protests at both the Fine Gael and Labour party conferences.



Since then, many CAHWT activists have turned their attention towards defeating the austerity treaty.

But with summer coming, it is vital that we now redouble our efforts.

Upcoming protests

The government hopes that the campaign will gradually lose its momentum.

To make sure that this doesn't happen delegates voted overwhelmingly to hold a national day of local protests at the end of June and a coordinated march on the Dáil in the last week before the summer break (week of July 19th).

There was also a welcome turn towards 'inclusive resistance' when delegates voted to open up future demos to all those groups that are

under attack.

Over the last four years the government has tried to divide and conquer. We must use the opposite tactic if we are to succeed – uniting the resistance wherever possible.

Water Charges

The issue of water charges was also extremely prominent.

With the Fiscal Treaty safely passed, it is inevitable that a whole raft of utility charges is in the pipeline.

Indeed, if the Sunday Business Post is to be believed, water charges will hit €570 in the next two years.

This will cripple families' already in massive difficulty and conference decided a number of initiatives.

As soon as the government

moves, CAHWT must be ready to act with massive political pressure applied to local councils around the country.

Alongside these political mobilisations it was decided to draw up campaign literature to explain the issues around water metering, privatisation and the national water network.

There was an important call to stop the political fund in unions like SIPTU automatically giving subs to the Labour party.

Labour have been in the vanguard when it comes to imposing cuts and welfare reductions and members were extremely insistent that we show up these traitors for what they really are (see editorial).

Democratic Structures

All these decisions will require more democratic structures and accountability.

Conference therefore voted to have a bottom up structure based on 5 delegates from every county alongside 5 delegates from the Dáil constituencies in the Dublin area.

Together these delegates will make up a new National Steering Committee with responsibility for driving the campaign both locally and nationally.

This is a welcome development.

However, it doesn't take away from the need for determined work in increasing the resistance in every area.

The CAHWT has thus far succeeded in fostering a whole series of local networks.

Organised leaflet-drops, building up the membership base, holding local meetings and pushing local protests will need to be the lifeblood of the campaign in the coming period.

Let's make sure that this continues so that when Big Phil comes calling, the campaign will be more than ready for him

AFTER THE FISCAL TREATY: NO STABILITY —PREPARE FOR BATTLE



*Interview with
Kieran Allen
National
Secretary of
the SWP.*

Question: How will the Yes vote help the government? Will it bring 'stability'?

The government can feel quite pleased with themselves.

They bullied the population into believing that the ATM machines would dry up if they said 'No' to the Fiscal Treaty. Once again, they got their way in cowing the population.

But 'Stability' is the last thing they will get. As the Irish were voting, a new and deadly crisis was unfolding for the euro.

The latest phase arose because Spanish banks engaged in an even bigger property lending spree than the Irish – but have only recently been forced to acknowledge their losses.

One of them, Bankia, needed a staggering €19 billion in 're-capitalisation'. This has led to a massive run on the Spanish banking system with €100 billion leaving the country in the last three months. Spain, it appears, is likely to become the fourth EU country to enter a troika agreement.

The Spanish right wing government has engaged in a game of brinkmanship with the EU authorities. They are demanding that money from the European Stability Mechanism – yes that is the same one that is supposed to be Ireland's fairy godmother – be poured directly into their banks. That way, they hope, they will avoid the same fate as Ireland, Greece or Portugal.

These moves have provoked panic amongst the global rich. Already, the big banks are demanding that any loans to Spain be backed directly with assets from Spain – lest they be caught by a sudden break-up of the Euro.

Meanwhile, the rise of the left in Greece is giving the privileged another cause for concern. Syriza, a coalition of left organisations, is rising in the opinion polls and looks set to score around 30%. If, as looks possible, they become the largest party, they will get a 50 seat bonus and will dominate a future government.

Syriza has pledged to tear up the memorandum of understanding concluded between Greece and the troika and to halt all interest payments on government debt.



It has further promised to cancel €11 billion in cuts imposed by the last government; reverse changes in labour law; and tax the rich. If Syriza wins the coming election, fear among the EU elite will turn to outright panic.

So all talk about 'stability' that will come following a Yes vote is simply mockery. And the promises of growth and talk about 'investors responding positively to a Yes signal', is just a sick joke.

Question: Why did the majority vote Yes?

In a word: because the level of resistance is very low and so people lack confidence. Fear grows when solidarity recedes and people are sucked into a mindset that 'we won't be touched if we keep our heads down'.

Resistance has started through the mass civil disobedience on

household charges. But it is not strong enough nor sufficiently general to give people a language to oppose the 'economic speak' which dominates the air waves. The majority fell for the 'Show me the money' argument.

Public sector workers are an important case in point. The first group that will be hit by legislation to limit public spending will be nurses, teachers and other public employees. Indeed, with the referendum out of the way, the government will launch a new round of cuts to their allowances.

But the Croke Park agreement – promoted by a right wing union leadership – has created an atmosphere of fear that makes workers prone to the argument that they need a guarantee of funding after 2014. They are still sympathetic to left arguments – but many voted Yes with a heavy heart.

Question: But did the NO side make any errors? The media claim that Sinn Fein performed well but the 'far left' in the ULA did not?

Some of the No campaign made a tactical error that played into the hands of the right wing media who framed the issue around 'Where will we get the money if we vote No?'

In its desire to shift to a more moderate position, Sinn Fein consciously decided not to focus on defaulting on the debts that were forced on the Irish state by the banking crisis.

They instead concentrated on other sources of borrowing such as the IMF or the EFSM fund or, even more stupidly, went to the High Court at the last minute to claim they could have access to ESM funding.

The alternative approach was

to expose the ESM fund and to focus on a need for a default on bank debts and to tax the rich. But it was only late in the campaign that people learnt that the ESM would cost Irish taxpayers an extra €11 billion and that the fund was primarily designed to help bankers.

The corporate media will always come down hard on calls to default on bank debt and to tax the rich. That is why they try to marginalize the radical left through derision.

Question: Does the vote show that we are moving to class based politics?

The most significant trend in the vote was the division on class lines.

Wealthier areas, such as Foxrock in Dublin, voted by 90% for Yes and poorer areas, such as

Ballymun, voted 80% No. The more working class the area – the more it voted No.

The Labour Party have attempted to play down this pattern because it reveals a wider trend – the manual working class is deserting Labour in droves, not just on the Fiscal Treaty but more generally. Polls show that Sinn Fein and 'Independents' – which include the left – have a higher vote in these categories than Labour.

It would be tempting to define this class divide as one between working class and middle class but this would be confusing. The term 'middle class' is a catch-all phrase which includes many white collar workers.

The reality is that manual workers have experienced greater poverty, unemployment and have developed a more instinctive response for collective rebellion.

White collar workers have a higher rate of trade unionism today – but their traditions were forged in an era of social peace. Many identify support for the EU as a step beyond Irish 'backwardness' and as a move towards a more liberal and cosmopolitan outlook.

Mistakenly, these outlooks combined with the fear factor to lead them to vote Yes.

Question: What are the main tasks for the Left now?

The Fiscal Treaty will give our rulers a temporary fillip. They will use their boost of confidence to launch new offensives that they have postponed until the referendum was won.

Their promises of 'stability' will quickly dissolve as they and their fellow EU elite face much greater problems.

The left can grow quickly in manual working class areas. Instead of hanging out in back rooms dominated by sectarian discussions, we must move quickly to sink roots.

That is more possible than ever because of the impact for the household charges campaign. But it requires the left to take up the day-to-day issues affecting people and to be at the forefront of organising for struggle.

Socialists also must reach out to new layers of white collar workers who are fearful but angry. Instead of sheltering behind defensive dogmas, the left has to speak the language of the 21st century and to focus – in a clear and sensible fashion – on the abject failures of Irish capitalism.

By doing so, we can recover quickly from this temporary defeat.

Something fishy down at the docklands

By DAVID O' FARRELL

IN 2007 the Dublin Docklands Development Authority (DDDA) was part of a consortium, including developers and financiers such as Bernard McNamara and Derek Quinlan, which bought the 25 acre former Irish Glass Bottle Factory site in Ringsend.

Then the total cost was €431 million.

Today the site is valued at €45 million and the loans of the company set up to purchase the site are in NAMA.

A special report into the DDDA's roll in this transaction was conducted by the Comptroller and Auditor

General (C&AG) last February.

However, publication was delayed as the government sought to avoid any bad news during the Fiscal Treaty campaign.

The report reveals that the total cost of the deal to the DDDA was €52.1 million including a transfer of €7.8 million of property assets to NAMA to cover loan guarantees related to the deal.

The report also found that the deal went ahead despite the board of the DDDA being warned that the property market was dangerously overheated and without an independent site valuation.

All of this is extremely concerning.

A cosy cartel of developers, financiers and political appointees on state boards have effectively had their gambling losses taken on by the state and yet despite these findings no one is named in the report and no prosecutions are likely.

Phil Hogan has even announced that the DDDA will be wound down over the next 18 months showing that the government lack the political will to hold those responsible to account.

In the absence of this political will this report is nothing short of a whitewash.



Retail workers €109 fall in weekly wages



By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

A new report from the Mandate union shows that 39% of retail workers have experienced an average fall of €109 in take home

pay over the last year.

The report argues that the Government needs to re-examine proposed changes to wage setting mechanisms and the implementation of the EU Directive

on part-time working.

The research also shows that the fall in wages is driven primarily by cuts in the working hours of retail workers as well as increased taxes and levies.

The report reveals that:

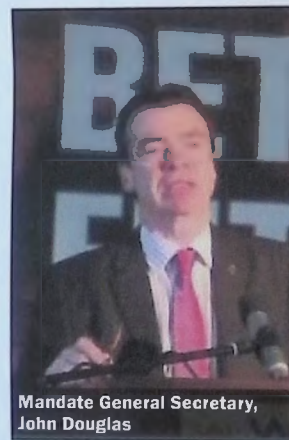
- 39% of Mandate members reported a fall in take home pay over the last year, with an average fall of €109 per week;
- Around a third of Mandate

members are finding it difficult to adequately feed and clothe their families, and to pay off household loans. Four in ten are experiencing difficulty paying their mortgage or rent, over half are struggling to pay utility bills;

■ More than seven in ten reported that they had cut back on their spending so much that they can afford little or no social activities and that they are now far less likely to visit a doctor because they could not afford the cost;

■ Around one in ten had got a second job, and 17% had started to claim a social welfare payment. For a significant proportion, these options weren't available: 11% of members reported that changes in their working patterns had made it more difficult for them to qualify for social welfare, and 13% said these had made it harder for them to secure another job;

■ Around three in ten borrowed money from a credit union and from close family or friends,



Mandate General Secretary, John Douglas

some had borrowed from more than one source

Mandate General Secretary, John Douglas, said; "This research shows that Ireland's labour market crisis will not be solved with a 'more jobs at any cost strategy'. We need to look at the quality of jobs that are being created otherwise we will just increase the number of working poor."

Iarnrod Eireann 450 jobs threatened

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

UNIONS in Iarnrod Eireann will ballot this month on a package of cutbacks that management want to push through by July.

The cuts include 450 job losses, a reduction in subsistence allowances, overtime, uncertified sick leave and changes to pension arrangements.

The job cuts equal cutting 11% of the company's workforce.

Management claim that the cuts are needed to tackle the €45.3 million deficit.

But they can't quantify what savings the job losses will deliver. Staff numbers have already fallen by a third since 2002.

This package is all about making Iarnrod Eireann more



attractive for privatisation. Instead of bailing out the banks with billions, the money should be used to invest in jobs. The state should invest

in better public transport, including light rail. The success of the LUAS shows people want high quality, efficient public transport.

Corporate donations allowed to go under the radar

By BRIAN O' BOYLE

ALL of the mainstream parties have publicly committed to declaring donations received from corporate sources.

However a recent report uncovered by the Irish Examiner has revealed a raft of dodgy deals involving government figures.

Last week figures from the Standards in Public Office Commission listed just €30,997 in donations received by political parties in 2011, despite it being an election year.

But separate information, released by the Companies Registration Office, has revealed other donations that parties were legally allowed to keep from public scrutiny.

Among the most explosive information was a company called Custom Compost



In the frame: Ivor Calleley

that used a secret account to hide more than €235,000 in staff bonuses from Revenue helping to fund Fine Gael's election campaign in Wexford.

The brother of junior minister Alan Kelly donating €7,500 through a

co-owned Stone Park Taverns to help elect the north Tipperary politician to the Dáil, and a donation of €1,000 to disgraced Fianna Fáil senator Ivor Calleley that he failed to disclose.

All in all the report exposes a myriad of links between corporate Ireland and political Ireland that belies the public commitments of government ministers.

Although the Irish system seems robust, there is a series of loopholes that allow gifts to be split between private and corporate entities.

There is also ways to solicit sums so that they remain just below the disclosure thresholds and ways to allow costs incurred during fundraising activities to be written off against the amount donated.

Politicians may claim to be squeaky clean. But the reality is unfortunately very different.

Special focus on the revolutionary struggle in Greece



Interview with
Panos Garganos
of the Greek SWP

Question: The left seems both strong and fragmented in Greece, so perhaps you could begin by telling us exactly who ANTARSYA are and what is their relationship to SYRIZA?

ANTARSYA is the Alliance of the Anti-capitalist Left and the acronym translates into "rebellion" in Greek.

It was created immediately after the December 2008 rebellion in Athens when mostly young people took to the streets after police shot a 16 year old student.

It brought together organizations of the revolutionary left dating from the Polytechnic uprising against the military Junta in 1973, the New Left current that broke away from the Communist Party (KKE) when the party joined a coalition government with the Greek Tories in 1989 and many militants active in the student movement and the trade unions.

SYRIZA is the Coalition of the Radical Left and its main component is itself called Coalition, a party that has its roots in what used to be called the "eurocommunist" left.

Militants of ANTARSYA and SYRIZA have worked alongside each other in many struggles, in the strikes, in the occupations of the squares and in student occupations.

Question: Our own organisation is itself a part of Antarsya – could you briefly explain the roots of the SEK and its role in the current struggle?

SEK is the Socialist Workers Party, the sister organization of the SWP in Greece.

We started as a small group back in 1972 during the dictatorship and were able to grow by relating to student struggles and the workers fight back in the 1990's.

We worked alongside the Coalition comrades in the European Social Forums in Florence, Paris, London and Athens, but always insisted on an anticapitalist orientation.

We played an important role in the formation of ANTARSYA.

Question: One of your key demands is to leave the euro but what would the consequences of such an action be?

The conservative New Democracy party and the Labour-type PASOK describe this as a catastrophe in order to scare people.

These ruling parties that have presided over the worse deterioration of living



standards in Greece since the days of the Nazi occupation during the Second World War claim that an exit from the euro will be worse.

The truth is that it will be a break with the austerity imposed by the European Central Bank and the European Commission.

Staying inside the Eurozone means that any Greek government is committed to producing a budget with a surplus so that it can pay the interest to the banks and repay the debt.

Governments have been trying to do that since 1985, they have paid €622 billion to the banks and yet the debt only got worse.

An exit from the euro can break this vicious circle if it is part of an anticapitalist programme that will cancel the debt and nationalize the banks under workers control.

So the answer to this question depends on who takes the initiative.

An exit from the Eurozone imposed by the EU may be punitive action.

An exit organized by the left can be part of a people's default that will punish bankers rather than workers.

It will mean workers across Europe have a chance to stand shoulder to shoulder with their Greek brothers and sisters against the bankers.

Question: All of this seems to hinge on struggle from below so perhaps you should say something about what is happening in the strike movement?

The scene is dominated by the new election called for 17 June.

Despite that, there were strikes last week by workers defending their collective agreements and a spike in resistance in the media (see box).

A new law imposed by the Troika is coming into effect and threatens to further cut wages.

So workers in the food and leather industries along with printers and bookshop workers went on strike on Tuesday 15 May.

All in all there have been 17 general strikes and Antarsya are continually orientating to this resistance from the ordinary workers.

Question: Who is running Greece in the weeks before the next election?

There is a caretaker government in place with a mandate that is supposed to end with organizing fair elections.

In reality our rulers are entrenching themselves in office in anticipation of a political crisis.

A retired general, ex-Chief of Staff of the armed forces has been appointed Minister for Defense. The chief of police took over the Greek Home Office. A veteran diplomat the Foreign Office.

The chief economic adviser that carried out all the negotiations with the Troika under Papandreou and Papademos is now Finance Minister. A leading judge is Prime Minister.

There are left leaning figures too (a professor of constitutional law, a former president of the lawyers association) but the overall picture is a bad omen for the struggles to come.

Question: The most worrying aspect of the election was the rise of the fascist's but who exactly are Golden Dawn and what does their vote signify?

The electoral success of this neo-Nazi group was a shock for millions of people.

In part this was orchestrated from above. Electoral analysis shows that almost half of police personnel voted for the Nazis.

Golden Dawn and police have been working together against immigrants.

But around this hard core there were people who thought they were voting for

a party that would punish mainstream politicians.

Small shopkeepers that have been ruined by the crisis gave a frightening 19% to Golden Dawn.

It is an urgent task for the left to isolate the hard core from these people.

Question: Finally with Syriza riding high in the polls, what shape does radical left reformism take at the moment in Greece?

The leadership of SYRIZA is promising that we can escape austerity by reforming the European Union.

They say that a government of the left should not take any unilateral steps like canceling the debt and breaking with the euro but should rather seek a negotiated exit from austerity.

As a step in that direction they seek a budget with a surplus because they claim that this would strengthen the negotiating position of Greece with its creditors.

In effect this is a postponement of the promise to end austerity until the German government and the banks agree to it.

That is why ANTARSYA is saying that we need a strong anticapitalist left and a continuation of the strike movement.

Greek media workers debate all out strike during election period

by JULIE SHERRY

MEDIA workers in Greece shut down newspapers and TV news stations when they walked out on strike on Monday of last week.

"Bosses want to force workers to work without any rights and

on ever reduced salaries," said Moises Litsis from the Eslea Journalists' union.

The media workers will now ballot for an indefinite strike across the sector, Litsis added. "The proposal came from the bottom up, so we'll build it from the bottom up," he told Socialist

Worker.

"We'll visit every workplace to win the vote for this escalation."

If the media strike goes ahead it will coincide with elections in Greece that could see the anti-austerity Syriza coalition take power.

This has led to debate within

the union.

Some argue that journalists have a duty to work during an election to make sure people understand what the different parties stand for.

Others, such as Litsis, see the election as an opportunity for a high impact strike—one

that would be an example to the working class if it succeeds.

"The big media barons are afraid of the left", Litsis added. "They use the media as a machine to discredit the left—and they bully media workers to maintain that machine."

Focus on the Arab Spring

Egyptian elections throw up key questions for the struggle ahead

Reporting by Philip Marfleet (in London) and Francesca Reynolds (in Dublin)

WHEN Egypt's parliamentary elections produced a majority for the Muslim Brotherhood last year, many journalists and academics declared that the revolution was over.

After the first round of the presidential elections this week they are saying the same thing. They were wrong last year and are likely to be wrong again.

Of the thirteen candidates, the two polarising front runners are Mohamed Morsi, candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) and Ahmed Shafiq, former Prime Minister and ex-military commander under the ousted Mubarak regime.

As neither candidate came close to securing the 50% threshold necessary for outright victory, both will now contend the second round of the presidential election set for June 16 and 17 with polls placing Morsi narrowly ahead of his rival.

Some activists are dismayed at the results, which mean there will be a run-off between an Islamist and a candidate that represents continuing military rule.

Shafiq is, after all, a leading representative of what Egypt's revolutionary movement calls the feloul—"remnants" of the old dictatorship.

This may well seem like a "nightmare scenario".

Cloned

In fact the choice is clear. A vote for Shafiq would be a vote against the revolution.

A vote for Morsi is a vote against the legacy of Mubarak and for continuing



change.

Revolutionary activists will not enjoy voting for Morsi.

If they do not do so, however, they are likely to experience the real nightmare scenario—a president cloned from the dictator they overthrew last year.

The Left Vote

On a more positive note, there was strong support for change in the showing for Hamdeen Sabbahi's first-round vote.

Sabbahi, a left wing Nasserite, presented himself as one of the people and

was backed mainly by workers, urban poor and revolutionary activists.

Sabbahi had none of the advantages of the Brotherhood, with its national network of branches.

Nor did he enjoy the benefits that Shafiq—who was backed by SCAF and

much of the media—did.

Yet he carried Cairo, Alexandria and most cities heavily involved in the struggles of 2011-12, ending only 2 percent behind Shafiq.

This was a vote for the revolution on a scale which surprised even Sabbahi's own supporters.

But perhaps it shouldn't have, given the groundswell of support for real change in many areas.

On Saturday 2 June we saw another example of this as Mubarak was sentenced to life imprisonment for complicity in the massacres of the revolution.

The Muslim Brotherhood has called for mass protests in reaction to the sentence imposed on Mubarak and his former interior minister.

The verdicts have prompted outrage as both Mubarak's defense team and lawyers for victims say that such a sentence can be easily overturned.

Either way, Egyptians will be better off with Morsi as president and an unstable Brotherhood in parliament than with Shafiq in office.

The ruling junta—the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF)—will take a vote for Shafiq as an affirmation of their continuing control.

Their position within any new political structure would thereby be strengthened and the revolution pushed backwards.

It is time to put Morsi to the test—and to continue struggles over jobs, wages, union rights and for radical political change.

Massacre in Houla marks point of no return for Syrian Regime

by SIMON ASSAF

THE terrible massacre of civilians in the village of Houla near the restive city of Homs marks a watershed for the Syrian revolution.

Despite Bashar al-Assad's regime blaming the atrocity on rebels and "Al Qaeda terrorists" it is clear that responsibility for the carnage lay at the feet of his security forces and his sectarian Shabiha militia.

It appears that the tragedy unfolded when troops fired on a protest that began after Friday prayers.

There are scores of such demonstrations every Friday in Syria, and they attract many children and young people who join in the singing of revolutionary songs.

In response, armed rebels attacked regime positions on the edge of the village—triggering a deadly round of artillery bombardment that killed dozens of demonstrators.

That day the Shabiha militia targeted the edge of the Houla, murdering at least 62 people. Women and children were stabbed or shot at close range as they



sought refuge in their homes.

The massacre in Houla marks a point of no return for the revolution and the regime. Revolutionaries in towns across Syria attempted to raid arms depots as news of the atrocity filtered out. Protesters are increasingly calling for arming the revolution.

Assad gambled that a combination of mass arrests, executions and a military assault on Homs would break the will of the revolution. This strategy has clearly failed.

On Friday the regime deployed its tanks in Aleppo, Syria's industrial heartland, for the first time. Tens of thousands took to the streets in the biggest show of mass defiance in the city to date.

The revolution is now travelling on two tracks. In many rural areas, as well as cities such as Homs, Hama and Idlib, there is a growing armed insurgency. In Aleppo and the capital Damascus, street demonstrations still dominate.

The massacre is widely seen as a

sectarian attack, but there is evidence of sympathy for the revolution growing in Alawi Muslim areas.

Many leading members of the regime and its security apparatus are drawn from the Alawi minority and the regime assumed the Alawis would remain loyal.

Assad's move towards deepening the sectarian tensions is designed to break the momentum of the revolution by turning neighbour on neighbour. There is as yet little evidence of any mass revenge attacks on Alawis, but this is now a serious danger.

Many of those who started this revolution have now drawn the conclusion that only an armed rebellion can break the impasse.

More weapons are falling into the hands of rebels, including heavier anti-tank weapons, but it is impossible to get an accurate picture of this. But the call for arms opens the door to outside forces who would like to hijack the revolution.

As the regime turns to even bloodier tactics in its desperate attempts to cling to power, the twin dangers of sectarianism and foreign intervention remain strong. But as the continuing mass protests show, this is far from inevitable.

Mourning— and organising

FOLLOWING news from Houla the leadership inside the Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs) called for a day of "mourning" strikes.

These strikes appear to have had a big impact, with large areas of the country shut down.

The revolution committees still enjoy mass support, and many Syrians have heeded its uncompromising stance against sectarian provocations.

The strike call by the LCC, and the growing street movements in key cities, show that many in Syria still believe there is an alternative to a purely armed struggle against the regime.

Western military intervention would destroy the Syrian Revolution

by SIMON ASSAF

WESTERN powers have pounced on the massacre in Houla to once again talk up the idea of foreign intervention in the revolution.

As socialists, we remain firm in our opposition to any such intervention.

Already the Western economic boycott is extracting a terrible price from ordinary people.

Since the sanctions began last spring, the Assad regime has cut social security

payments and slashed fuel and food subsidies.

A military intervention would make the situation worse for all those struggling for change in Syria.

Any intervention will be in the interests of Western powers, not the people of Syria. Many pro-western regional powers, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia, want to hijack the revolution as part of a campaign against resistance to imperialism in the

area.

There is also no such thing as benign military intervention.

A "no-fly zone" would lead to foreign powers controlling the skies.

Every time the tactic has been used civilians have been killed.

For the revolution to succeed it has to develop in the key cities of Aleppo and Damascus.

All the indications are that this is now

happening at speed.

The future to the success of the revolution lies in these forces, and the continuing appeal for conscript soldiers to mutiny.

The revolution is entering dark days, but it has to look to its own power to deliver victory.

Any Western intervention will mark the death of the revolution, and leave Syria powerless in the face of imperialism.

Socialist Worker

GIRDWOOD: HOMES FOR ALL

SMASH SEGREGATION



IT was revealed two weeks ago that a secret deal had been struck between the Stormont parties in an attempt to address the housing crisis in North Belfast.

What is referred to as the Girdwood "Master plan" deals with housing development on the derelict former prison site on the Crumlin Road.

The new "Masterplan" shows the creation of two separate housing zones, one near the Antrim Road which appears likely to attract nationalist residents, another on Clifton Park Avenue, just outside the Girdwood perimeter, which seems oriented towards unionists.

This is nothing short of a Sectarian carve up in the allocation of public resources by politicians who profess to promote a shared future.

But the real crime is the fact that people who need houses aren't getting them.

According to the Housing Executive, 90% of newly built homes in North Belfast should be in "Nationalist" areas.

For example, New Lodge, a predominantly Nationalist area, has a population density three times the Belfast average – with people squeezed and in desperate need of housing.

The housing executive claims to allocate housing on the basis of need-but not when it comes to Girdwood.

There is a housing crisis in the Nationalist area of north Belfast,



instead of addressing it, we see a deal struck behind closed doors to suit the needs of the political establishment rather than the people who are in critical need of somewhere to live.

This is the reality of capitalist opportunism where working class people are subject to the games of political parties manoeuvring to defend their own party and positions.

Catholics and Protestants should not be pitched against each other in this debate, we should be looking at who needs homes and allocating on that



With one foot in North and one in West Belfast the Shankill area has more than 9% of its residents unemployed, this is significantly higher than the national average.

Rather than separating people or struggles, we need unity on the ground to fight against the housing crisis plus the scandalous situation of unemployment and lack of jobs.

Both are interconnected. They come from a Stormont regime that is interested in maintaining the divide between Catholic/Protestant and the rich and poor.

We can only get homes, protect our public services and beat the benefit cuts when Catholics and Protestants unite and fight together!

The idea that people in the North need to live in segregated, separate communities needs to be smashed.

Surveys show that over 80% of people want to live in mixed communities.

However 90% of newly built public houses are segregated.

The Socialist Workers party is committed to fighting for a society in which everyone has the right to a home, a job, and a decent education.

We also believe that sectarianism is a barrier which prevents this possibility and has to be tackled by organising in working class communities, through the trade unions and grassroots campaigning.

basis.

The decision of Girdwood has caused much consternation.

We were told post the 1998 Good Friday Agreement that such naked sectarianism would be a thing of the past. This case has shown that sectarianism is still a reality in the Northern state.

The way resources are allocated in this sectarian way flows from the top of a state, based on division and pitting communities against each other.

North Belfast is in the midst of a housing crisis, but also an unemployment pandemic.