

WORKERS

SOLIDARITY

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Twenty Years of Irish Anarchist News

<http://www.struggle.ws/wsm>

Mayday, Mayday

EU leaders in their castle - we'll take the streets

On Saturday, the first of May, anarchists and other activists from the Dublin Grassroots Network are calling for a day of action and protest against the EU.

According to the government Mayday is going to be Bertie's big day out as EU president. This is the day - traditionally workers' day - when the EU will officially expand. The government is planning on 'celebrations' for the population, while the 25 heads of state will be wined and dined in Farmleigh house. We intend May 1st to be the highlight of a full bank holiday weekend of opposition to some of the things we think are wrong with the EU: neo-liberalism, militarism and Fortress Europe.

Neo-Liberalism: In 2000 the leaders of the EU came up with a plan called the Lisbon Agenda. Essentially this targets education, healthcare and services like gas, electricity, the postal services and transport for privatisation. Before the government can privatise public services it has to make them attractive to potential investors. In Ireland the FF/PD coalition is doing this by introducing bin taxes, stealth fees for third level education



Euro Crooks meeting in Dublin - Bertie, Berlusconi, Blair

and by attempting to sell off the most lucrative routes operated by Dublin Bus. Privatisation means reducing costs by lowering wages, cutting staff and increasing the cost to the consumer while delivering worse services.

Militarism: Just as the business policies of the European Union are based on looking after the fat cats, so too is its foreign policy. As the European Union develops into a more cohesive economic unit it needs to be able to 'defend' its interests. The development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Rapid Reaction Force allows for this to proceed and together they form the basis of a European Army.

Fortress Europe: While the leaders of these accession states might be welcome in the EU (along with their farms and sweatshops), most of the current EU countries will remain closed to the people of the accession states for the next 6 years. In advance of

joining the EU these countries have had to open their borders to the flow of money, and to close their borders to anyone outside the new Europe. The EU's repressive anti-immigrant policies claimed the lives of at least 3,000 people between 1993 and June 2003, people drowned in the Mediterranean, were electrocuted at the Channel Tunnel and suffocated in Wexford. This is 10 times as many as were killed at the Berlin Wall during its 30-year history.

The Irish government currently holds the presidency of the EU and its behaviour typifies what's wrong with the EU: the attempt to implement the bin charges continues and the ministerial meetings that have taken place so far have been surrounded by expensive police operations. To cap it all off, the first 'achievement' of the Irish presidency was the establishment of a 'repatriation fund,' to allow the wealthy countries to share the costs of deporting people.

We aim to show them that their plans won't succeed, that they can't just impose their agenda on us and decide our fate without our opposition. We'll be out in the streets on May 1st. We hope to see you there.

Irish Anarchist News and Analysis Inside

International Women's Day >> Palestine >> Immigration & Deportations



Slaving your life away just so you can make ends meet; having no say in the major decisions that affect your life; criminal politicians and businessmen plundering the country. Try to do something about it and they'll lock you up. Yes,



Housing Shambles

The backlog of 130,000 people on local authority housing waiting lists in the 26 counties will take over 30 years to clear. That's if the government keeps building at its present rate. Unfortunately our rulers intend further cutbacks in social housing. One quarter of households on the lists have already been waiting for over three years.

Racist Attacks: the powerful just don't care

Attacks against black and Asian people in the six counties have risen by about 40% in the last year, with many families being forced to leave their homes in south Belfast. The latest figures on racist attacks showed there were 189 offences reported in the year ending March 2003. Yet, there were only seven prosecutions, and seven others still under investigation. Makes you wonder how much of a priority stopping hate crimes is to the state forces.

Fianna Fail - putting the mafia to shame

"I came into a country that was on its knees, with queues outside the American Embassy and kids begging on the London Underground. I think it's despicable that people running the country had no interest in anything other than feathering their own nests." Tom Gilmartin on how Fianna Fail leaders liked to take bribes. He should know, he was bribing them.

Deporting our neighbours

Government plays race card to divide and rule

On Wednesday the 11th of February, Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) officers began a covert operation, arresting 65 failed asylum-seekers.

The 53 Romanians and 12 Moldovans were arrested in their homes in Dublin, Meath, Westmeath and Wicklow, before being brought to Mountjoy and Cloverhill prisons to await their deportations. At 7.30 the following morning they were flown on a chartered flight, which went first to Romania and then on to Moldova. 12 of the deportees were children; some of whom may have been Irish citizens, the GNIB refuses to release that information. We do know however that 34 of the Romanian deportees were men, 12 women and 7 children.

One of the Romanian deportees, Mr. Josif Fagoras (27), left behind his wife and three young children, all under seven. One of Mr. Fagoras' children is an Irish citizen whose family is supposed to be protected under article 41 of the Irish Constitution. It seems that the Irish State is under no compulsion to obey its own laws. Instead the State has decided that 'Irish Born Citizens' are a different kind of citizen, these young Irish Citizens, who can't stand up for themselves, are having their constitutional rights trampled on by the State, and by the Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell.

It is extremely difficult to understand why the State wants to deport so many immigrants. Even if we look at the immigrants as the State does, not as human beings but as economic units, the State's immigration policy doesn't make sense. Last year alone, Minister McDowell signed 2,428 deportation orders; for all of these deportation orders to be carried out it would have cost the Irish taxpayer in the region of 6.5 million euro. Clearly it is not the immigrants that are



costing the economy but the State's racist immigration policy.

Considering that the ruling class is terrified of a shrinking work force, the State's immigration policy makes even less sense. The week after last month's operation, Blair, Schroder and Chirac (Germany and France's respective heads of State) called on Europeans to have more children. Kofi Annan, General Secretary of the UN, recently warned that 'Without immigration, the population of the soon-to-be 25 Member States of the EU - 452 million in 2000 - would drop to under 400 million people by 2050...Were this to happen, jobs would go unfilled and services undelivered. Your economies would shrink and your societies could stagnate.'

There's no reason for the State's current draconian immigration policy except the age-old tactic of 'Divide and Rule'. It suits the Irish elite to scapegoat refugees for all the problems that their mismanagement of society causes. The ruling class wants to set Irish workers against immigrant workers so as to prevent the workers from seeing that their interests are the same regardless of nationality. But libertarian socialists know; Immigrant and Irish workers: same bosses - same struggle.

McDowell jackboots in some new laws

Michael McDowell, continued his racist term in office as the current minister for justice, injustice might be a more apt title, by announcing his plans for a referendum in June designed to deny automatic citizenship to children born here to non-national parents. The state is taking a racist stance in the run up to the local

elections, in an effort to win support for government party candidates. McDowell is doing his part to ensure that Ireland shuts its door on people who are desperately seeking a new life. All we can do is be thankful that other countries didn't adopt that attitude when hundreds of thousands of Irish people left here.



Michael McDowell at the PD Ard Fheis

When the summit circus came to Quebec and lost Quebec 1, Global Elite 0

With the Mayday EU demonstrations on the horizon for Dublin we take a look at opposition to a previous summit and the organising that went into it.

The Summit of the Americas, a meeting of 34 head of state to advance the agenda of neo-liberal capitalism, was held in Québec in 2001. The local population, given the events in Seattle, initially met the prospect of hosting such a summit with apprehension. However a huge popular campaign eventually led to a 50,000 strong demonstration. But that's not what's so unique about Quebec 2001. Even more striking was the positive response of the local population to demonstrators - black bloc militants and peaceniks alike. A six month long grass-roots campaign in the neighbourhood where the Summit was held had a lot to do with it.

Comite Populaire Saint-Jean-Baptiste

Six months before the Summit, members of a local Quebec community group, the Comite Populaire Saint-Jean-Baptiste, decided to organise against the it. The Summit was billed as "the biggest Canadian security operation ever" and the Comite Populaire chose to focus on the security measures because it was here that the Summit clashed most clearly with the interests of local people. Opposition was particularly strong to the huge security fence as it was attacking a basic civil right, freedom of movement, with residents having to show a special passport at checkpoints.

Initially some activists thought the issue of the fence was a secondary issue. However, the Comite Populaire saw it as the main point of friction for people. The first thing the campaign did was to collectively decide on a plan of action. We cannot overestimate how important this was, as it gave everyone a sense of direction. We chose to focus on two big events: an information campaign and a mass action.

The protection racket

The attitude of the authorities, especially the cops, helped us a lot! They didn't want to meet with people, or give information on the security fence. People were forced to turn to the campaign for



information. We just had the information that was in the news, but since we contextualized it and put it in a leaflet, it looked like we provided more information than the cops did.

The authorities said the security measures were basically in the interest of the locals since it protected them from 'anarchist hooligans.' However, since they left most of the local shops outside of the fence, people concluded that it wasn't to protect them but instead to protect the politicians.

After much discussion over what type of demo to hold, we came up with the idea of a fake funeral to highlight the burial of civil-rights. The advantage was that it was a mix between street theatre and a traditional demonstration. Also, it didn't really matter how many people showed up, since the symbolic effect would be the same whether we were 50 in the street or 200. The thing we didn't want was another angry demonstration because we felt it would play directly into the media stereotype of activists. There were some 400 locals at the funeral. This was far beyond our wildest expectations (we only made 100 placards!). The crowd was really diverse with the vast majority being ordinary working people, moms, kids, and older people, as well the usual suspects.

Carnival of Resistance Against Capitalism

It was during the first week of April that the fence was erected in downtown Quebec City. The people and media spontaneously called it the "Wall of Shame." It was a shock for many people who didn't bother much about it before. The fence in itself probably did much more than our campaign to radicalise people. From that point on there was no need for further agitation against the fence. New graffiti appeared every day. People and groups in Saint-Jean-Baptiste took it on themselves to redecorate the fence and put all kinds of objects on it.

To the activists the job of the Comite Populaire was more or less over. However, that's not how the folks in the neighbourhood saw it. For them it seemed our job was just beginning... They wanted us to organise something during the Summit on the main street of the neighbourhood. They wanted a peaceful demonstration/street party directly at the edge of the fence! The Carnival on Saint-Jean, as the protest elsewhere, was a smashing success. But that's another story.

Nicolas Phebus is a member of the NEFAC, the North-Eastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists. For a longer version of this article see www.nefac.net/newswire/display/112/index.php

An interview with Dr. Ciara McMeel, a GP working in West Tallaght

On the frontlines of the health crisis

There is a common perception that our health service is in crisis. However, there is little understanding of where the problems lie and what can be done about them. We interviewed a GP working in one of Dublin's poorest areas to get a view from the inside.

Is there a problem with the Irish health service?

Yes, there are serious problems in both primary care (GP service) and in secondary care (hospitals). The GP service has less obvious problems than the hospital system, as those who are seen are generally well looked after.

However, there is a large number of people who aren't eligible for medical cards and who can't afford to pay to see a GP or to buy prescription medicine. The first time that these people come into contact with the health service is often when they appear in an A&E department with critical symptoms. Often times these crises could have been avoided if they had seen a GP in time.

Although the hospital system is generally free to use and you are generally well looked after once you have been admitted, the major problem is getting in. The only ways to get admitted to a hospital is through an A&E department or by being referred by a GP.

If you arrive at an A&E department with serious symptoms, you might have to wait at least 8 hours before you are even seen, then lie in a trolley for 3 days or more waiting for a bed to become free. If you are referred by your GP, you will generally have to wait for between 2 months and 2 years before getting an appointment to see a specialist - and these people aren't even included in the government's waiting list figures.

Is it just a problem of not enough money?

Money is obviously important, but it's not the only problem. The fact that many people can't afford to see a GP means that they come to hospitals only when a crisis hits. Also, people who are waiting a long time for an appointment have to show up at A&E departments when their symptoms flare up.

For example, if you are waiting for an operation on your gall bladder for a couple of years, you might have to visit A&E six times or more before your operation is scheduled. This is a serious problem as crises obviously have to be prioritised and they are very expensive to deal with.

If you arrive at A&E, having had a heart attack, you will need to use expensive equipment and be cared for by highly skilled staff in an intensive way. If you had been



able to afford to see a GP in time, or had an appointment to see a specialist sooner, this could have been avoided and the care would end up being far cheaper. In fact, a system where primary care is free, like the NHS in Britain, probably ends up being cheaper in the long run as many problems can be spotted through screening and prevention before they reach crisis point and require expensive treatment.

Another problem is that it is increasingly difficult for the health service to recruit and retain key staff, such as doctors, nurses and physiotherapists. Many of them have to put up with extremely difficult positions and low pay. In particular, I don't know how it is possible to survive on a nurse's salary in Dublin and as a result many are emigrating or getting jobs in the private sector. This is the main reason that wards are being closed in hospitals.

Nurses in most units are highly skilled and when one quits it is often impossible to replace them. For example, if there aren't enough specialised nurses to man an intensive care unit around the clock, the hospital has no choice but to close the beds.

Finally, there is the fact that many private patients are heavily subsidised by the public system. When a private patient takes a bed in a public hospital, their insurer pays for the bed and the consultant. The public is left to pick up the tab for all of the other areas that are crucial to their care, such as nursing, junior doctors and administration.

If you compare the difference in costs between a private bed in a public hospital and a bed in a fully private hospital, you get some idea of the level of subsidies. I don't mean to blame private patients, it's a problem with the system and people who can afford it are obviously going to opt for the best care available.

The government are reforming the health service administration and are creating

an executive to replace the health boards, is this likely to address the problems?

In general, relations between doctors and the government have been very poor. The health boards are bureaucratic, inefficient and mainly run by people who have no experience of actually working in the system. They are manned by senior civil servants and business people rather than doctors or nurses. Doctors also have a lack of faith in the health boards due to a history of guidelines on working times and various EU regulations being ignored.

The health service executive will be another top-heavy bureaucracy run by people with no experience in health care. It is part of the government's drive to introduce private sector management into a system which has to be run on ethics and where cost can't be the bottom line. This leads to a situation where hospitals are tied to a fixed budget and are penalised if they exceed it. Thus, medical staff are unable to respond to crises when they arise. Again this can actually be more expensive in the long run.

When hospitals aren't allowed to purchase new machinery for screening or have to eject the 'least sick' patients to admit new serious cases, the consequence is more people coming to A&E in crisis conditions which are expensive to manage.

How can the problems be addressed?

Well, as a GP, I'm biased. Prevention is better than cure and we should spend more money on picking up problems early. Free, or at least affordable, access to GPs for check ups and screening would pay off in the long run.

In hospitals there is currently a crisis that has to be managed. They are using all the money that is available to them and they simply need more money, especially to pay for more nurses with better pay and conditions. There are currently many beds that are empty for lack of nurses. Re-opening these would provide badly needed beds for patients. Hospitals should also have the right to break their budgets in times of crisis.

The administration of the whole system should be radically reformed. Health boards should have much more direct accountability and should be made up of people who actually work in the system. Representatives of doctors, nurses and other hospital workers have a much better insight into the problems. It's a waste of time to have to explain problems to outsiders and the benefits of certain spending decisions are obvious to health workers even though they might go over budget.

Book Review - **Palestine** by Joe Sacco

Brutality Brought Home

by Dermot Sreenan

In the book '1984', Winston Smith is told what the future is going to be like. He is told to imagine a boot grinding a face into the ground over and over again. That's the type of reality that's been going on in Palestine since 1948. Recently someone gave me *Palestine*, by Joe Sacco, as a present. It's a story of the Israeli occupation told using the form of a graphic novel, a form that is used to great effect.

For example, beneath the wide expansive picture of everyday western life in Jerusalem, he takes us into the small subterranean world of the torture and beatings dished out to Palestinians a few metres below the surface. Each frame in the book gets smaller and smaller creating a claustrophobic effect until we are right there, tied to the pole with our arms aching in a tiny black box losing all hope for the prisoner. There were times when I had to stop reading because my heart was so heavy.

Sacco's account is set at the end of 1991 as he, the quiet rational anti-hero, goes on tour to all the hot spots that we are familiar with: Gaza, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, and Hebron. Here in overcrowded living rooms he meets, what Edward Said calls in his introduction, 'history's victims'. Young boys sit around and talk of throwing stones at soldiers. Old men talk of what it was like to have their land seized in 1948. People lift their jumpers to reveal the cuts and scars, the remnants of interrogations. A mother tells the story of how she had to bury her sons in the dead of night, after they had been shot by soldiers and refused treatment long enough so that their deaths became inevitable.

The same characters appear again and again in the West Bank. In Jabalia, a refugee camp that vies for the position as one of the most densely populated places on earth



(65,000 people within two square kilometres) Ariel Sharon's troops bulldozed large sections in 1971 in order to 'pacify' the Gaza strip. This is the same camp where the first Intifada started in December 1987. Now, sixteen years later a new Intifada involving a new army of youth and suicide bombers rages, whilst Sharon sits as Prime Minister of Israel. Now he and his ilk are building a wall around the West Bank that they failed to pacify thirty-seven years ago.

There is one picture that's always stayed with me from this conflict. It's the footage of the Israeli soldiers breaking the arms of some youth by bringing down rocks on his extended arm. When you brutalise someone in this manner, you demean all humanity. This book brings home to us the terrible and tragic reality of the Israeli occupation - of the boot that continues to grind Palestinian faces into the ground.

International Women's Day

...continued from back page

with women from the estate I live on. I have met women as we marched, leafleted, picketed and posters for the right to have an abortion on Irish soil.

There are many many ways in which life is difficult for women in Ireland, from our pay packets, to the fact that we get little support if we decide to have children and no support if we decide not to have children. We have to wait weeks (and

sometimes months) for something as simple as the result of our smear tests. Like men we live in a country which can't provide housing, medical services, and security, basic human needs for all citizens. Yes there is a lot to be angry about and a lot to change. Thankfully, many of us, like those women who marched in the cold 87 years ago, are not willing to make do with what we have been offered. International Women's day is a celebration of those women who make things better.

EVENTS & CONTACTS

ANARCHIST GROUPS

Workers Solidarity Movement

Platformist Anarchist Organisation

Publishes this paper

PO box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland

<http://www.struggle.ws/wsm.html>

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Organise! Working Class Resistance

Class Struggle Anarchist Organisation

Publishes "Working Class Resistance"

PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ

organiseireland@yahoo.ie

Cork Anarchist Group

Anarchists Active in Cork

Publish "The Cork Anarchist Conspiracy"

corkanarchists@yahoo.com

Anarchist Prisoner Support

Anarchists Supporting our Prisoners

<http://www.anarchistps.org>

aps@anarchistps.org

LIBERTARIAN NETWORKS

Networks and collectives with a libertarian ethos in which anarchists are involved

Magpie Collective

Direct Action / Squatting Collective

iwannaspace@wildmail.com

Grassroots Network

Non-hierarchical Direct-Action Network

Network of grassroots activists with groups in Dublin, Cork & Galway.

Organising Mayday anti-EU protests

<http://www.geocities.com/eufortress>

Indymedia Ireland

Irish Branch of Global Media Collective

Open Publishing web site where everyone has a voice. The place to find Irish campaign news. Also publishes "Printflare"

<http://www.indymedia.ie>

Alliance For Choice

Campaign for women's freedom to choose

<http://struggle.ws/ireland/allianceforchoice/index.html>

EVENTS

8.30, Monday April 5th, Teachers

Club, 36 Parnell Sq. Dublin 1

WSM anarchist discussion evening.

An account from a member of the Anti-Authoritarian Network of Greece which

organised protests against the EU summit

in Thessalonika in 2003.

8pm Tuesday April 13th, Room 4,

ULSU, University of Limerick

WSM introduction to anarchist meeting.

Subject to change Contact us for details.

6.30pm, Friday April 30th

Gdn of Remembrance, Parnell Sq.

Critical Mass to start Mayday Weekend.

Further Mayday details on indymedia.

EMAIL/WEB

irishanarchism@yahoo.com
Big, high-volume anarchist discussion list

ainriail@struggle.ws

Low-volume newlist from the WSM

<http://www.anarchomedia.cjb.net/>

Anarchist media website

<http://anarchism.ws/ireland.html>

Index of Irish anarchist Internet resources.

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Affiliated to International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS/SIL) <http://www.ils-sil.org>



Workers Solidarity is a bi-monthly publication of the Workers Solidarity Movement. We are anarchists; we believe that socialism and freedom are two crucial foundation stones for a future society. These two principles are linked and one cannot be achieved without the other and consequently one cannot be sacrificed for the other.

As anarchists we don't set ourselves up as leaders with a perfect blueprint that must be imposed. But we do have a vision of the world that we want and this is certainly not matched by the world that we live in. Preventable crises in education and healthcare stagger on forever, while vast sums of money are wasted on invading third-world countries and lining the pockets of the filthy rich. There is no reason the world has to remain the way it is. That it does is a reflection of the strength of widespread belief in capitalist and hierarchical ideas and the weakness of the libertarian opposition.

But rather than sitting waiting for change to fall from the sky, we actively engage in the everyday struggles of the working class. 6,000 copies of this paper are distributed on estates, at gigs and in work places all over Ireland. We are participants in the Grassroots Gathering (a collection of various people interested in exploring new forms of anti-authoritarian organisation), anti-war activity, the anti-bin-tax

campaign, the struggle to bring democracy back to the trade unions, and, of course, the upcoming Mayday protests.

We hold regular open meetings and anybody interested in anarchism is welcome to come. The next one will feature an account of last year's anti-EU demonstrations at Thessalonika, Greece, by a libertarian from the city. We'll also be holding a meeting on anarchism in Limerick on April 20th. For details of how you can get involved in these and other activities, see the events and contacts column in the back page.

Subscribe to *Workers Solidarity* and our magazine *Red and Black Revolution*, which is produced annually and contains longer and more detailed articles.

Rates:

Ireland » €10 for next 9 issues of *WS* and next 2 issues of *R&BR*
Britain » £5 for next 6 issues of *WS* and next 1 issue of *R&BR*
Europe » €7 for next 6 issues of *WS* and next 1 issue of *R&BR*
Rest of world » US \$10 for next 6 issues of *WS* and next 1 *R&BR*

We also distribute information over the Internet. Our website (see above) includes a huge archive of articles about the history of anarchism and Irish struggles.

Immigration

by Paddy Rua

Thinking about Anarchism



We live in a world in which Capital flows with immeasurable speed from one extreme of the globe to the other; in which the soldiers of the US and the UK can invade anywhere in the planet in the wink of an eye; in which products manufactured in distant lands, by unknown toilers, flood our markets; in which food from across the oceans satisfies our appetites; in which hordes of tourists can safely cross the Atlantic Ocean, the Sahara or the Indian Sea in a few hours.

But the flip side to this world of freedom of movement for the wealthy and their commodities is that there are massive restrictions on the freedom of movement for those seeking to escape the poverty of the third world. They are left to rot in war zones or have to risk travelling illegally in precarious ships to reach the shores of "abundance", escaping their misery at risk of their own survival. Is this just? Certainly not. Then why does this happen?

There are many reasons for this, but a major one is that the much-vaunted "globalisation" is not something that benefits everyone equally. Big business investment in the third world doesn't mean rivers of profit for the locals, but rather for the Transnational masters.

The globalisation of Capital and business generates inequalities in the distribution of wealth. And this causes migration. Immigrants don't come because they are mean barbarians that want to steal our jobs. Immigrants come here because their countries (usually former colonies) have been ravaged by imperialist rule, have been drained of their wealth by multi-national companies, or have become ruins after war. In those countries they are

facing difficult times: haunted by the ghosts of starvation, war and poverty and they live under brutal regimes.

Immigrants are people just like you and me, concerned about their future and about the future of their children. So many make the hard decision of leaving behind their home and the ones they love to go to an unknown county to realise their dream of a better future. Large parts of the world today are as devastated as Ireland was at the time of the famine. People fleeing these countries are like the millions



who had to leave Ireland from the 1840s right up to the 1990s in order to seek a better life elsewhere

It's also good to remember that there has never been an absolutely isolated human community, and that interaction between different

cultures has always resulted in social progress and cultural development for everyone. Racist prejudices are born out of ignorance and nurtured by the rulers who benefit from divisions amongst working people everywhere.

Rulers, both of the political and business variety, oppose open borders for people for two main reasons. First, because they intend to keep the vast majority of the poorest people of the third world in the third world so they can always count on huge masses of unemployed who will be desperate enough to work for even the most pathetic of wages. This exerts a negative pressure on wages everywhere as bosses will threaten workers of one region that they will move production to wherever is cheapest at that moment.

Secondly, because they know that some people will always come to Europe to work, but that by keeping them illegal they can easily exploit them far more than is permissible under the law. An immigrant worker will always be wary of complaining of terrible working conditions. After all, the boss can blackmail them with the threat of deportation.

Our opposition to the immigration restrictions of Fortress Europe is based on the recognition that immigration is a phenomenon produced by Capitalist globalisation that makes life unbearable in many areas of the world. It is based on our recognition that every human being has the same right to happiness, to the opportunities and good things of life no matter what their skin colour or place of origin. It can't be a fair world in which there are more travel rights for Capital, bank accounts and commodities than for people.

Hijab: lifting the veil

Standing up to religious oppression or state racism?

In France at the moment there is a big controversy about the recommendation by a government commission and by the president, to ban the wearing of religious symbols such as the Islamic headscarf (the hijab) in state schools. The government declares that this proposed ban is in keeping with France's long tradition of secular education, and also that it would promote equality between the sexes. Many of those in France's considerable Muslim minority however see this step as racist and intolerant and as a direct attack on their civil rights.

For many people, the wearing of a headscarf is a symbol of oppression against women. The advice in the Koran that women should dress modestly is generally interpreted today as meaning that Muslim women should cover their head. Within the Muslim community, women are often judged on what they wear and the hijab is viewed as the measure of a woman's piety.

Many argue that the hijab is used as an instrument to control women's sexuality. There exist extremely negative attitudes, for example, which consider women who do not cover their hair as somehow "unchaste". Women are also advised to wear the hijab for their own protection against sexual harassment. This is really a sort of justification for sexual harassment if you don't wear the veil. This sexist argument holds that men are not at all responsible for their actions (reminiscent of how when rape victims go to court what they were wearing when they were raped is often scrutinised as if what they wore could somehow justify being raped).

The hijab is forced on women in many countries under the influence of Islam, either legally or under cultural and social pressure. In States where women have no civil rights whatsoever and are treated as subhuman, forcing women to wear the hijab or a much more extreme dress code is clearly used to subjugate and humiliate woman.

The women of RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) state:

"We will never allow the fundamentalists to define and decree what women should or should not wear. They have no right to impose the veil upon us. As far as we are concerned, we will NOT wear the veil as far as security and social discretion allow us, for we regard rejection of the veil as a symbolic form of resistance and defiance of the fundamentalists. To wear, or not to wear, the Islamic veil is a completely personal issue and no

one has the right to interfere with this decision or impose the veil upon us".

Context, however, is important when considering the hijab. It is important not to equate fundamentalist Islam with all Muslim people. Not all Muslim men are misogynistic. And for women, the wearing of an Islamic headscarf may not be in itself inherently oppressive. Many Muslim women certainly wear the hijab



out of their own free will and often resent being seen by western culture as oppressed victims. While the women of RAWA reject wearing the hijab in defiance of religious fundamentalists, some Muslim women in Western society say that for them wearing the hijab is an act of defiance in a world increasingly hostile towards and intolerant of Muslim people - that they wear the hijab as part of their Muslim identity despite the racist abuse they often get for wearing it.

Others say that they wear the hijab for cultural and religious reasons and that the idea of modesty behind the head-scarf is not necessarily sexist; that they want judgment of their physical person to play no role whatsoever in social interaction.

They correctly point out the fact that Western society is oppressive with regard to women's appearance. For women who freely choose to wear the Islamic headscarf, it can be difficult to take being told you are oppressed for wearing it from a culture where around 5% of all females spend their teens puking over a toilet bowl so that they can look like Kate Moss.

One Canadian Muslim woman explains her perspective:

"Women are taught from early childhood that their worth is proportional to their attractive-

ness....Wearing the hijab has given me freedom from constant attention to my physical self. Because my appearance is not subjected to public scrutiny, my beauty, or perhaps lack of it, has been removed from the realm of what can legitimately be discussed.

Feeling that one has to meet the impossible male standards of beauty is tiring and often humiliating...true equality will be had only when women don't need to display themselves to get attention and won't need to defend their decision to keep their bodies to themselves."

Although we do not see progress for humanity coming from religion, at the same time we do not hold the West as the ideal cultural model. In any case it is up to Muslim women to struggle against sexist oppression and to define the parameters of that struggle, not for us to tell them what to do.

The US State has conveniently used the poor treatment of women in countries, like Afghanistan and Iraq, as a form of justification for war. The hypocrisy of this position is highlighted by the fact the US-backed Iraqi Governing Council has cancelled secular family laws in Iraq and moved family law under the jurisdiction of Islamic (sharia) law; a law that destroys women's rights regarding marriage, child custody, inheritance and allows women to be stoned to death for adultery.

In France it is hard to see the government's proposed ban as anything but a cynical political manoeuvre to appease the right-wing constituency in France and hold onto power in a country where the extreme right is growing. They are hypocrites who on the one hand marginalise and stigmatise young Muslim girls under the guise of secularism and on the other continue to substantially subsidise private religious schools.

As anarchists we have a long history of struggle for secularism. However, banning the hijab can only lead towards further exclusion of the Muslim women in France and encourage religious fundamentalism.

Ultimately we believe that people should have the freedom to dress whatever way they like. This means freedom from state interference and freedom from religious interference in how one should dress.



If the workers took a notion...

Transport privatisation: working conditions under attack

Reduce wage costs, increase fares, cut back on less used routes. That's the plan for the bus service. The government wants to privatise it, beginning with a sell-off of 25% of Dublin Bus routes.

by Alan MacSimoin

Airport workers are also looking at worsening conditions with the threatened break up of Aer Rianta. Why is this happening to a successful company? It's simply so that the bank accounts of profiteers like Ryanair's Michael O'Leary can be stuffed with even more cash.

Politicians and business people have consulted, discussed and decided. The people who actually work in and use these services don't get to decide anything. Nothing unusual in that - it's the bosses' idea of "democracy".

Many union officials in CIE and the airports are trying to divert the struggle away from the issue of privatisation. Instead they want 'guarantees' that will protect the wages and conditions of existing staff, regardless of who the new boss is. Whether such 'guarantees' would add up to much after a few years of privatisation is unknown.

What is known is that any new workers would not be covered and we would end up with a two-tier work force, where new workers get lower pay, worse conditions and have fewer prospects for advancement. This is quite a radical departure from the old trade union slogan "an injury to one is the concern of all".

Why do we run away from confrontation and always seek a deal, no matter how crap it is? Well, it is undeniable that there is a much lower level of confidence than there was years ago. Almost two decades of 'social partnership' agreements and very few major strikes have led to a feeling that not much is possible. We are supposed to be satisfied with a few crumbs rather than looking for a big slice of cake (and only a small minority has the audacity to talk of taking over the whole bakery!)

If we are 'partners' with the government and employers, why would we engage in a serious fight with them? Surely we can



sort all this out in the Labour Relations Commission? That's how many union officials see it. And that's why, despite occasional fiery speeches, they don't want to see the sort of strike action that could win and topple the whole 'partnership' apple-cart.

CIE workers showed great imagination with the 'no fares' day. And they stuck together despite management threats to refuse to implement the agreed wage increase. Aer Rianta workers know they have the power to close down the airports.

Buses, trains and planes need drivers, booking clerks, mechanics, cleaners and all the other workers who maintain the service. Without transport workers there would be transport chaos. That would really put the government on the defensive, we would be looking at stopping privatisation rather than merely seeking better terms for when privatisation happens.

As the IWW songwriter Joe Hill put it:

*"If the workers took a notion they could stop all speeding trains;
Every ship upon the ocean they can tie with mighty chains.
Every wheel in the creation, every mine and every mill;
Fleets and armies of the nation, will at their command stand still."*

International Women's Day

There are a few ways in which International Women's Day can be approached. It can be ignored. This is what mostly happens in the mainstream media. Unlike Valentines Day and Mothers Day, cards aren't given and presents aren't bought. With no profit to be made out of it, the day is not exactly one that jumps out and grabs the attention.

by Aileen O'Carroll

For International Women's day this year in Dublin, as an act of civil disobedience, the Alliance for Choice publicly distributed leaflets that included the names and telephone numbers of clinics in the United Kingdom and Europe, thus breaking the



1995 abortion information law which severely restricts Irish people's access to information about abortion services abroad. On the other side of the country, Global Women's Strike called for a picket at Shannon airport to demonstrate against

US military refuelling at the airport.

International Women's Day is an expressly political day. In 1907 women sweatshop workers marched in New York and thus the first International Women's day was born. Often when women are celebrated it is because they are either cute (Valentine's Day) or caring (Mothers' Day). There is nothing wrong with being cute or caring, but on International Women's day we get to highlight those of us who are politically active, those who are fighting for a better world, those who know that there can be a better world.

I don't know their names but I know I have linked arms with women at Shannon Airport protesting against the war. I've stood in front of bin lorries

Continued on page 5..