

SOLIDARITY

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

The Folly of Racism

Citizenship Referendum: Politicians played the race card and most workers were fooled

Racism is alive and well in Ireland. Only the very dishonest or the very naïve can deny it. We all knew it was bad, we only had to listen to our friends, neighbours and workmates. We only had to look at how generations of Travellers were treated. But the result of the citizenship referendum really opened our eyes to how widespread it is.

The referendum was carried by 4:1 (79.17% to 20.83%). An RTE exit poll of over 3,000 voters taken immediately after voting ended indicated that 36% voted Yes because the country was being "exploited by immigrants" and a further 27% voted Yes because there were "too many immigrants". That's 2 out of 3 Yes voters giving an explicitly racist reason for their vote.

To conclude that all these voters across the country are hardened racists would be silly. The handful of self-proclaimed anti-immigrant campaigners standing in the local elections got a pathetically small vote.

But there is a "soft" racism out there. The Yes vote said that some children are less equal than others - because of where their parents come from. To treat someone worse because of their race is *racism*. It's that simple.

The referendum arguments got lost and deliberately confused in a mess of jargon and lies: of 'non-national babies' 'flooding' our hospitals; irrelevant EU cases; allegations of 'citizenship tourism' and 'abuse' of 'liberal' Irish citizenship laws. The government didn't have to win these arguments. It was enough to raise them.

And this was nothing new. Over the last ten years the parties in power have been consistently blaming refugees and asylum seekers for everything. Faced with anger at the terrible state of our health care system or the housing crises the government conveniently deflects the blame from themselves - the true culprits - and instead point the finger at the 'hoards' of invading asylum seekers.

Thanks to government lies, most people in Ireland today would be surprised to learn that in fact only 14.7% of those who immigrate to Ireland are asylum seekers¹. Instead of allowing asylum seekers to work, and become really integrated into Irish society, the government prefers to isolate and marginalise them.

Successive governments' campaigns to scapegoat asylum seekers have resulted in widespread ignorance about immigration. Rumours that immigrants get priority on the housing list and get higher welfare payments are accepted as fact. To some, everyone

from Africa or Asia is an asylum-seeker and everything they have must come from social welfare. That they might be on work permits, or student visas, or even be Irish doesn't seem to get a thought. And the government has no interest in correcting this.

In Northern Ireland in recent times, there has been a marked increase in violent racist attacks. It's not coincidental that this happened when politicians and newspaper editors were demonising asylum seekers.

It's all about divide and rule. Rulers keep the majority in their place by dividing and playing us off against each other. We gain absolutely nothing from racism, just a false feeling of superiority to distract us while the rich get richer and the rest of us struggle to build a reasonable life for ourselves and our children.

The important difference is not between white and black (or Protestant and Catholic), but between rulers and ruled. Instead of looking for scapegoats, it would make a lot more sense for working people of all colours to get together, end the rule of the millionaires and make the world a better place for all of us.

Footnotes

1. 2002. The Needs of Asylum Seekers in Cork, Cork: NASC, The Irish Immigrant Support Centre



Q: Did we get away with it?



Tá/Yes (79%)



Níl/No (21%)

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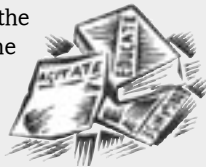
In the last few months, if you've been following the news, there's a few things that have stuck out. There's been a lot of talk about democracy and more about the economy. We've gone through local and European elections and hosted an EU summit. We've been told that our Taoiseach is one of the great statesmen on the world stage. We've also heard that the Celtic Tiger is back and that we enjoy one of the top ten living standards in the world. The message is fairly obvious, that we have it good and that we shouldn't forget it.

Well not everyone swallows the hype. We don't believe that being able to choose between a bunch of gangsters, grafters and gombeen men every few years adds up to democracy and we don't think that pimping yourself out to a boss in return for whatever he'll give you is anything to be grateful for. We hear them mention freedom and we think of the government's reaction to recent protests against the E.U. and Bush, which were met with the biggest police operations the State has ever seen. When they talk about Bush and democracy we think about the tragedy in Iraq, where a people are being brutalised so that huge corporations can divide up their oil. We also think about the fact that the U.S. use Shannon airport as a military base despite the fact that most Irish people are against it. So much for democracy!

They talk about the high standard of living we enjoy and we just wonder where they got their information from. Did they ever have to wait on a trolley in Accident and Emergency for days while over-worked hospital staff tried in vain to cope? Don't they know about the housing shortage where people have waited for years on council lists or about the people lucky enough to be able to buy a house getting into debt they can't possibly keep up with?

There seem to be two different realities in Ireland today, the reality that the powerful tell us about and then the reality that actually exists, the one most of us really live. Basically, the outlook you take depends on how much money you have or what family you were lucky enough to be born into.

Workers Solidarity is the newspaper of the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM). We're an anarchist organization who hold the pretty simple idea that society shouldn't be divided up into bosses and workers, and that we shouldn't be separated by gender or race. We want to spread our ideas so every two months we publish at least 6,000 copies of this newspaper and distribute them in our neighborhoods, workplaces, on demonstrations and to friends. We organize ourselves in a non hierarchical fashion and make decisions democratically, so everyone gets a say. Lately we've been involved in organizing the days of action around Mayday, the protests against Bush and campaigning against the racist referendum. We've also opened an office, expanded in membership a little and, as always, are keen to hear from anyone who would like to get involved or find out more.



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

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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.

Midwest USA: An Anarchist View



It was my first time in the USA. I came with all the baggage. I had lived near a tourist town and had experienced thousands of grey haired, green clad, overweight, camera wielding yanks. The Midwest was an eye-opener.

The visual stuff was off putting: "Support our Armed Forces" signs in many lawns, lots and lots of big cars and endless roads, strip malls - I fucking hate them, they make

all towns look the same. But the people who I met, overwhelmingly working class, were friendly and open. Americans are by and large direct so they tell you what they think.

I found people pretty class-conscious in terms of knowing they were workers and that the rich ripped them off. They were distrustful of the government and suspicious of the police. The USA is divided lots of ways: rich and poor, black and white, conservative and liberal, pro and anti-Bush, pro and anti-war. There's anger and there's apathy. Unions are powerful in many industries but are very institutionalised, very much part of the system.

I have to say that in the US I saw the future of Ireland under capitalism. Consumer culture is very strong, the vast consumption of resources by the US is very visible as is the wanton waste. But when I got home I saw a Humvee in my own patch and was gobsmacked by an awful feeling that the society I had just visited is the vision that our ruling class share.

If there is hope in America it is in the palpable anger there at their latest ruler and the decency and solidarity of working class people. When you ask, people have little nuggets of info about a glorious history of struggle by workers, women, blacks and gays. Have a read of *A Peoples' History of the USA*

It takes a huge repressive machine to keep things in check in America; corporate Media, corrupt aloof politicians, copious amounts of drugs and plenty of gun-toting trigger-happy cops. Everyone who stands up in America I salute you.

They Steal, We Suffer

A brand new €30 million surgical unit is lying idle in Clonmel hospital because the government won't release €2 million for staffing. A second hospital in Mayo also cannot open a new €10 million operating theatre because the state will not sanction the staff to run it. Yet there is no shortage of money for grants to the Punchestown race course owners.

When the poor cheat the system it is called "fraud". When the rich cheat the system it is called "tax avoidance". When extremely rich bankers cheat the system they have "tax issues". Guess which group is most likely to see the inside of a jail cell?

Despite a solemn pledge in 2002 by Fianna Fail that hospital waiting lists would be abolished within two years, they haven't been. In fact there are now an additional 2,000 people waiting for treatment.

Between 1989 and 1999 the rates for all causes of premature deaths were over three times higher among the lower paid than among the ruling class, and the incidence of chronic physical illness has been found to be 2.5 times higher for the poor than for the wealthy. Figures come from research by the Public Health Alliance of Ireland.

Slaughter and Lies

The Truth Behind Russia's "War on Terror"

Chechnya lies at the edge of Europe between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Over the past decade this small mountainous country has been torn apart by a vicious and brutal war between Russia and Chechen separatists.

The Russian government believes that the controversial referendum of 2003 has validated Russian sovereignty over Chechnya and claims that the country is now entering an era of peace and stability. However, the facts on the ground suggest otherwise. In May the President of Chechnya, who worked closely with the Kremlin, was blown up by separatists. On the 12th of July, Chechen nationalists attempted to kill the interim President and 42 people were killed in battles on the same day. There are regular attacks on Russian troops in the region and Chechen Islamic extremists have been responsible for a number of terrorist attacks outside of Chechnya.

Conflict between Chechens and Russians dates back to the Russian invasion of the Caucasus region at the end of the 18th century. The Chechens were only one of many culturally and ethnically distinct peoples forcibly absorbed into the Russian Empire. The Russian state has never fully subdued the Chechen people and there have been sporadic armed uprisings in the region but Russian military might and forced cultural assimilation has kept Chechen separatism in check. The darkest chapter of Russian misrule in Chechnya was the forced deportation of the entire Chechen population to Central Asia in 1944. Over 30% of these people died within a year and those who survived faced legal restrictions on their language and culture. This extraordinary act of ethnic cleansing didn't fully succeed and the Chechens moved back to their homeland in 1957 after their "rehabilitation" by Khrushchev.

As the USSR crumbled in the early 1990's, the Chechens made several botched attempts to establish an independent state. Squabbling amongst various Chechen factions and Russian policies in the region led to war between 1994 and 1996. The conflict blew up with even greater ferocity in 1999 after bombs were set off in several Russian cities. The Russian government claimed it was the work of Chechen separatists - although this continues to be disputed - and launched an invasion. During this crisis Putin emerged as



a major political figure by advocating war as the solution to the problems in Chechnya. In fact, Putin's zeal for war ensured his victory in the presidential election that year. One bloody year later Putin declared victory in Chechnya but the conflict has ground on ever since - albeit at a lower level of intensity.

The human cost of the war has been truly appalling. The Russian state has never shown a great deal of respect for human rights either inside or outside its borders and the war in Chechnya has been prosecuted with unrelenting brutality and with absolutely no concern for civilian casualties. The Russian army has used rockets and aerial bombardment to reduce towns and cities to rubble. It has been estimated that between 50,000 and 100,000 civilians and between 13,000 and 20,000 combatants have died since 1994 (out of a population of one million). Human rights groups have also found evidence that the Russian army is guilty of torture, illegal detention, extortion, looting and rape.

Putin's warmongering has also cost tens of thousands of Russian lives. The majority of soldiers sent to Chechnya are badly trained and ill-treated working class conscripts and are clearly regarded by the Russian state as little more than battlefield offal. The Kremlin has consistently shown scant regard for the men sent to die in Chechnya to defend the geo-political interests of the Russian elite and to ensure their continuing control over the Transcaucasian oil pipelines.

Predictably, Putin has, in the wake of September 11th, been quick to use the self-

righteous and bloated rhetoric of the "war on terror" to defend Russian state terrorism in Chechnya. Just as predictably, Western leaders have, for reasons of political expediency, chosen to ignore the destruction of Chechnya. The pattern is depressingly familiar; as in Iraq and Palestine the simplistic and self-serving actions of the global elite has exacerbated complex ethnic and political conflicts and encouraged the growth of Islamic extremism. It's clear that the likes of Bush and Putin will happily wade through blood while talking about morality.

There is no end in sight for the Chechen people who are caught between the blind militarism of the Russian state and a resistance movement increasingly dominated by the nihilistic politics of Islamic extremism and world leaders who believe in "moral massacres" or tactful silence in

by Jimmy Finnegan

Ruling Class?

According to investment bank Merrill Lynch, there are 15,000 individuals in Ireland who own more than €1 million. This does not include any real estate they might have and needless to say it also doesn't include all their extra cash salted away in offshore bank accounts and 'single premium' policies.

Between them, this 0.4% of the population are worth €43 billion and effectively control the country. And some people don't believe that we have a 'ruling' class!

The Joy of Reclaiming Streets

The first feeling at any Reclaim The Streets is a strange one for someone accustomed to the plodding, predictability of your usual lefty “protest”. It’s that unsettling feeling of not knowing: a) where we are going and b) what is going to happen over the next few hours.

Strangely-dressed people look for a sign or signal, a few paper-sellers hawk their wares somewhat warily. A signal goes up - the bikes head off and then, suddenly, we’re moving and moving quite quickly! The next emotion is a tingle of expectation. As the motley group begins to coalesce and swell in numbers a sense of purpose emerges, the crowd quickens its pace. When it hits a certain size a spontaneous roar surges up from nowhere, it begins to sense its own size and capacity for adventure. And suddenly we’re there.

There’s usually a brief moment of excitement and complete chaos as the sound gear sets up - often followed by a long period of frustration as the generator fails to fire, some one has forgotten one of the unbalanced mono leads, the police are already in the van and are turning it over for evidence of hidden wombles. But pretty shortly something approaching a crackly cough of sound emerges. And the crowd goes



“Singing and dancing, man expresses himself as a member of a higher unity. He has forgotten how to walk and talk and is on the verge of flying up into the air as he dances.” The Birth of Tragedy, F. Nietzsche.

Photo: William Hederman

wild. It switches off again.

A few bongo players try and keep some sort of noise going. Oh no! Someone is in possession of an acoustic guitar with intent to play. But, eventually, it’s on! Never since, maybe, the drugged-up days of the really, really, really early rave scene will you see a crowd more enthusiastic, more creative, more “up for it” and more willing to move. Despite the fact that the DJs can’t mix, one deck is broken and the sound is like a broken walkman being peed on at the bottom of a toilet, everybody seems to be having a good time.

A strange collection of hippies, crusties, passing kids, homeless people, full time hedonists (just out the scratcher), students, freaks and ordinary “professionals” meld into one motley whole and swirl around on a street that just previously hosted nothing more than an anonymous traffic queue. The day goes on - the drink flows, the organisers begin to worry, the cops look grim, another sound system unloads, a few conscientious heads start filling black bags with cans. What will happen next? - Will everyone get home OK? Will the party ever end? Will it wander off somewhere else?

The interesting thing is you really can’t be completely sure just what will happen - it’s up to you!

by Krossphader

Living on the Minimum

A Personal Account of Surviving in Dublin on the Minimum Wage

The amount of money you earn is one of the most important factors that influence your quality of life. Surviving in Dublin on minimum wage is not something you want to be doing for longer than you have to. As someone who has been earning minimum wage for the last few years, I think of the cost of many items in terms of hours at work rather than in Euros. e.g. As a music fan, I enjoy going to gigs but with a concert ticket priced at €30, I have to consider whether the satisfaction I’d gain from attending the gig is worth the four and a half hours in work.

Rent, my single biggest expense, is €100 a week for a reasonable sized room in a reasonably priced part of Dublin. So, I have to work at least 16 hours a week just to have a roof over my head. After paying ESB, gas and phone bill and buying food to meet the basic necessities of life, there isn’t much left over for any of life’s little luxuries.

Health-care is a more serious issue. The potential implication for your health is probably the worst aspect of surviving on a low wage. I’m lucky that I’m in good health as otherwise I could be in serious trouble. Earning minimum

wage, you’re not entitled to a medical card and you have to pay the equivalent of 6 hours work for one trip to the doctor. With a better paying job, getting health insurance would be the first change that I’d make in my life.

I’m also in no position to have a family. There’s no way that I could afford to pay all the expenses that go with bringing up children on the wage that I earn. Having the security that comes from buying a house is completely beyond my reach.

Even though I work roughly 40 hours a week, the work is comprised of shifts which vary from week to week and my employers classify me as a part-time worker. This allows them to arbitrarily cut the hours of ‘troublesome’ workers. For example, if you were to demand holiday pay, sick pay or other basic benefits that employees are entitled to, you might find that your shifts suddenly dry up. This phenomenon seems to be quite widespread in the low-wage retail sector. Working conditions are also uncomfortable as my bosses are unwilling to spend any money on improving things which don’t affect them or their profits.

The turnover of staff in minimum-wage jobs is very high and there are many non-nationals working in such jobs. Many of them are happy to be getting such high wages relative to what

they could be earning at home but many of them are also just as conscious of the same issues as I am. I’ve noticed that it’s often Europeans or those who have been living in Ireland for longer who are more aware that they are being exploited. They are aware that sick and holiday pay are basic entitlements and at the end of the day, they too have to deal with the same high rents and cost of living in Dublin.

The nature of my job means that there is only one employee working at any one time and there is little opportunity to form a good relationship with fellow workers aside from chatting when shifts change and one employee replaces another. Without the opportunity to develop good working relationships with co-workers, there is little possibility of us organising to change things and get better pay, respect or working conditions.

A sense of solidarity and long-term commitment is needed for any serious move to change things for the better. Most of us (including myself) see the job as a step towards getting a better job. The problem is that some of us end up getting a new job which is merely different - but not better - and that those who replace us in the old job still have to deal with the problems of surviving on a minimum wage.

by Anthony

EVENTS & CONTACTS

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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

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

Red Ink Infoshop

Anarchist / Radical Book & Zine Store

4 Upper Fownes St. Temple Bar (Above Flip Clothes Shop)

Grassroots Network

Non-hierarchical Direct-Action Network

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

Organisers of 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. <http://www.indymedia.ie>

Alliance For Choice

Campaign for women's freedom to choose

<http://struggle.ws/ireland/>

allianceforchoice/index.html

Residents Against Racism

Campaign against racism & deportations

Meets on Thursdays at 8pm in the Teachers Club, 36 Parnell Square in Dublin

<http://struggle.ws/rar.html>

EVENTS

Cork WSM Open Meeting

The Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism

8pm, Thursday September 2nd

Independent Workers' Union hall,

55 North Main Street, Cork

Dublin WSM Ideas and Action Day

What sort of anti-racism do we need?

A day of talks and discussion, with speakers from anti-racist and immigrant groups

1pm - 6pm, Saturday September 25th

Teachers Club, 36 Parnell Square, Dublin

EMAIL/WEB

irishanarchism@yahoo.com

Big, high-volume anarchist discussion list

ainriail@struggle.ws

Low-volume newsletter from the WSM

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

Index of Irish anarchist Internet resources.

Squatting in Dublin

One Squatter's Story: Housing is a Right, Not a Luxury

It's a simple idea - cities should be run by and for the people who live in them. As it stands though the gombeens, businessmen and speculators have the run of the place and as a result Dublin is a badly planned and serviced city with spiralling house prices. Many Dubliners are being squeezed out of their city and are forced to spend hours in traffic commuting from outside of Dublin. Often working class communities have no proper facilities for the youth or the elderly and young families are in dire need of affordable crèche facilities.

The politicians and their friends the developers clearly don't care about housing shortages and the lack of community facilities as our cities are full of derelict or empty buildings. One way of responding to this situation is to squat these spaces. With effort and imagination these abandoned buildings can be transformed into a place to live, an advice centre, a social centre, a co-op, a crèche - or whatever else answers a local need. This is precisely what happened last year in the heart of Dublin city. Unfortunately, the council managed to have it closed down in April and to date the house remains empty and unused. What follows is a short account by one of the squatters of why she chose to squat the building in the first place and what they did with the space.

On August 8th of last year, a group of us moved into an abandoned and run down house on Leeson St and proceeded to make it our home. The house, lying empty for somewhere between 8 and 10 years, was in a very poor state of repair. Windows had been left open, allowing dampness to seep in and thick mould covered most of the walls. The back garden was a tangle of weeds which had choked the pipes and drains. There were piles of rubble in every room and no running water or electricity. Gradually, over the eight months that the house was occupied, it was transformed into a colourful home for the people who lived there and for the many visitors who stayed with us. But more than this, it was used as an autonomous space; a place from which to organise meetings, workshops and discussions. In its short existence, the squat facilitated meetings by groups such as Reclaim the Streets, Gluaiseacht, Food not Bombs, anti-war groups and a woman's group. It housed the 'Bad Books' library and was used as a creative space for artists and street theatre enthusiasts. Friends and neighbours living in flats and apartments and with no access to their own gardens, turned the former weed-choked yard into an organic vegetable garden.

Squatting provides a space for all these activities to take place in. A space that is organised and managed collectively by those who use it. A space that does not cost so much money that small groups or individuals such as those mentioned cannot afford

to pay for it. A space that government and local councils are unwilling or unable to provide and so we provide it for ourselves. Squatting challenges the notion that we must pay exorbitant amounts of money for somewhere to live or languish on council housing lists if we cannot afford to rent when empty and unused buildings litter the city.

Squatting a building can be a huge responsibility. At times there is a sense of fear and insecurity with the knowledge that the council or Gardaí could show up and evict us all at anytime. But the feeling of empowerment that comes with taking an empty building and turning it into a home and a social space and the solidarity and friendship that come from living and working collectively are things that transcend the building itself so that even if it is lost, the desire and need to squat remain alive.

by Sandie M



Dublin Grassroots Network activists re-occupy the Leeson Street squat during the Mayday protests "Against the EU of Capital". Photo: www.indymedia.ie

The Role of the Gardai

The primary role of the police is to preserve the status quo in society. In other words, the first task of the police force, of any police force, is to ensure the rule of the State and the rich elite. In practice this means priority is given to concerns of State over that of the population. For example, in Stoneybatter, near Dublin city-centre, on a number of occasions, the Guards have responded to break-ins over 12 hours after the event. In contrast the Guards were always prompt in attending to the scene of a bin-truck blockade.

The fact that Guards also do useful work, like investigating genuine crimes such as rape or doing traffic control, provides them with a level of cover for the fact that their primary role is to control the population in the interests of the rich. While it would be foolish to dismiss the useful work the police do, it is naive to think that it is the fundamental reason for their existence.

Garda Behaviour

Garda misbehaviour, incompetence and plain subversion of justice happens all too regularly. When you think about the continuous nature of the scandals, you are forced to conclude there is something rotten about the police. Take just a few of the more well-known examples: The Guards investigating the savage murder of two elderly women in Grangegorman framed Dean Lyons, a totally innocent man. They simply forced a confession out of a vulnerable person. It isn't the only case of Gardai faking confessions and setting people up, though perhaps it is the most blatant and tragic - another couple died before the real killer was caught and Dean Lyons suffered under the shame and subsequently died prematurely.

The Gardai in Donegal tried to frame Frank McBearty for murder. Again, they tried to fake a confession and they also severely harassed the man's family by issuing over 200 summonses against family members. It turns out that Gardai there were also faking the discovery of explosives in order to gain credit from their superiors for disrupting the IRA.

The roll call of shame has a long meandering history; from the heavy-gang antics of the 1970s, where policemen helped suspects talk by giving them a good heavy beating, to the Kerry Babies case of the 1980s to the shooting of John Carthy in Abbeylara a couple of years ago.

The Gardai's actual competence as a police force that protects the community is put in perspective when you consider the almost total lack of prosecutions against serial child-abusers, for example in institutions run by religious, in Irish society until the 1990s. It is inconceivable that the Garda didn't know what was going on in wider Irish society in the fifties and

sixties, yet they singularly failed to intervene to protect the most vulnerable.

Routine Lies

The routine lies that Guards peddle in the District Court to gain convictions are so common as to be barely worth remarking upon. Rarely acknowledged too are the regular beatings meted out to working class youths. The Department of Justice pays out over €1,000,000 annually in compensation for unlawful arrest, assault and harassment. And that figure represents the tiny minority who have bothered to make complaints that were successful. Many more are intimidated out of doing so; many never bother making a complaint at all.

Very recently we have witnessed the wholesale militarisation of Dublin, with over 4,000 Guards, many dressed in storm-trooper like gear and water-cannon, protecting the European elite. The same absurd level of policing was readily available for George Bush when he graced us with his presence. The sheer level of resources poured into these events illustrate the priorities of the State and the police: the elites take precedence, dealing with joy-riders, drug-dealing and assault is very much a secondary consideration

The Good & the Bad

So there are problems with the Police Force. What else can one expect with a large organisation of over 10,000 members? But the problems with the police force are systemic and arise because it is a police force rather than from the proverbial bad apples. If it were the latter the problems could be rectified, but of course they never are.

In fact it is often mentioned, rightly, that Gardai join the force with the honourable motive of assisting society. Also, many individual Gardai sympathise with the aims of, say, anti-war activists or dislike the bin-tax or many other measures it is their job to enforce. However, it isn't the individual that is the problem, but the institution of the police force itself and its manipulation of the individuals it controls. The institution is a bureaucratic machine which implements the wishes of those in control, i.e. the rich, and the lower echelons follow their orders. The system encourages individual Guards to identify their interests with that of the State and status quo. The individuals in the bureaucracy 'switch off' a part of their individuality when doing their job so that a Guard who is personally anti-war can find herself arresting anti-war activists for actions she probably thinks are justified!

Whose Streets? Our Streets!

The police force is in fact the core function and essence of any State. That is why priority is given to political policing, even at a mundane level. The recent Mayday events in Dublin organised by the Dublin Grassroots Network, were hardly a serious threat to the State. Nevertheless activists were routinely

stopped and questioned for the subversive act of leafleting working class neighbourhoods.

The political nature of the police and their function is the reason why they dislike Reclaim the Streets and anarchist tainted events such as the Mayday weekend. We are reclaiming space that the State insists on controlling. An unauthorised RTS or occupation of Fitzwilliam Square is in effect saying to the State: "we will decide for ourselves where to go, we don't need your permission". Such actions also have a wider resonance, a symbolic message of people going out and doing things for themselves; of refusing to obey orders; of questioning the rights and privileges of the rich and the State to control our actions.

And that is why the police often try to have a heavy police presence at our events; all that fluorescent yellow is an attempt to symbolise that they are in control of the streets.

Outside of Popular Control

Anarchists refuse to acknowledge the right of the State to decide what is legitimate and what is not. As mentioned above, the police force is the quintessential face of the State. As such it must be beyond effective community control. If it weren't, the ruling class would find that they no longer had a reliable force to, say, break up pickets of striking workers and suppress opposition. For example, when they were needed last autumn, the police were there at bin-tax pickets getting names for the courts.

People mightn't remain indoctrinated in the lore of capitalism forever, and at the first sign of the throwing off of their 'voluntary submission' and dissent, it is necessary for the capitalist class to have a force capable of containing it.

Talk of the Gardai being unarmed is basically false. They are a police force, not a police request service. If you don't do what they want they will force their will upon you. They and their colleagues in the army, are the only organisation in the country permitted to use force. And they have easy access to firearms if needs be. The fact that they are not an everyday sight is indicative of the ideological success of capitalism rather than a benign policy of the State.

Freedom!

Anarchists want to minimise the use of force in human relations. The basic anarchist thesis is that it is only legitimate in self-defence and must never be under the control of a minority. For that effectively grants power to the minority, who will, as everybody with power does, use it primarily for their own ends and with a view to controlling others. But it is possible to live without recourse to controlling elites and their organised coercion. Anarchists have confidence that people can run their own affairs, particularly in a libertarian socialist society where society is structured to facilitate freedom and justice.



Crime

by Andrew Flood

Thinking about Anarchism



Anarchists say the criminal justice system, the cops, courts and prisons, are not designed to protect ordinary people but are primarily instruments to keep the rich rich and the working class in line. That said, most people faced with anti-social crimes like mugging, burglary or joy riding want something done about it. And while they might agree that crimes against property depend on a divide between rich and poor existing in the first place they are not so convinced that crimes like rape and murder will simply vanish 'come the revolution'.

Whatever nice theories anarchists might come up with we can be sure that any community subjected to a murder or a rape will want something done about it. This would include detecting who had committed the crime, confirming that they were the guilty one and finding ways of ensuring they would not commit another crime. Particularly where the victim is a child, the failure to fulfill these three needs would very quickly lead to vigilante justice.

In historical revolutions this task has been undertaken by militias but a post-revolutionary society would obviously need some way of fulfilling these tasks without reconstructing the current judicial system with all its flaws. In particular, the current justice system gives a lot of power to judges, police and prison wardens and creates hierarchies of abuse simply due to the class nature of this society.

But what about the here and now? Poorer urban working class communities today often find themselves caught between vicious anti-social crime driven by poverty, lack of hope and heroin addiction and a police force that sees its role as stopping such crime spreading outside the boundaries of those areas. Young people are particularly likely to be faced with

the contradiction of police harassment if they socialize outside their estates or being seen as (and often being) an anti-social nuisance as they hang around their own street corners.

In Ireland the state does not have a monopoly on organized Violence. Sometimes paramilitaries step in to curb anti-social behavior through punishment beatings and exile. Yet these are forms of punishment that would never be tolerated if carried out by the Gardai or PSNI. Are there alternatives to this sort of vigilante approach to anti-social crime?

One set of important experiments are the Community Restorative Justice projects where those guilty of anti-social crimes are confronted by their victims, made to realize the harm they are doing and ways are found for them to make up for damage done. These provide a useful guide on which to base an anarchist approach to anti-social crime. Community based anti-heroin initiatives in Dublin have also shown ways of the community dealing with drugs and drug related crime. It is significant that the Gardai often seemed to be more concerned with suppressing these initiatives than ending the dealing.

But dealing with anti-social crime in the here and now cannot be reduced to a question of policing. Much anti-social crime is fuelled by deprivation and heroin addiction. Even the Governor of Mountjoy Prison, John Lonergan, has admitted that the inmates come overwhelmingly from a few areas of social deprivation. Research carried out in Mountjoy found that 75 percent of Dublin prisoners came from six clearly identifiable areas, or - as he described them - "pockets of disadvantage...infested with heroin". For this reason combating anti-social crime is very dependant on winning extra community resources, building a sense of solidarity and eliminating poverty. That the perpetrator may be from a deprived background is of little comfort to those who get mugged. Yet most

of us already know that in such a situation the police are pretty useless anyway. They seem to have little or no interest in preventing anti-social crime in working class areas and when a victim reports a crime can take hours to show up, if they bother at all.

There will never be a simple answer to anti-social crime because of its nature. It is one section of the working class preying off another section. It covers a broad span, from teenagers making too much noise to rape and murder. We can, however, note that experiments with alternatives to accepting the capitalist 'justice' system already exist. Learning from these helps us build an anarchist theory of crime prevention.





SIPTU's Dirty Deal

SIPTU has signed its first ever no-strike deal. Connex, who run Dublin's LUAS trams, have been promised there will be no industrial action whatsoever. LUAS staff didn't vote for this, they were stitched up by the 'social partners' who run Liberty Hall.

In return for an agreement forcing LUAS staff to join SIPTU (and no other union, like the ILDA-ATGWU!), SIPTU official Noel Dowling has agreed "there will be no industrial action of any form during the life-time of this agreement" and "any form of industrial action will lead to immediate removal from the payroll and could render any employee involved in such action liable to summary dismissal".

Where is the democracy in being forced to accept deals you had no say in? What is the point of being in a union which declares it won't use its muscle to better the lot of its members? What sort of union agrees that anyone going on strike or working to rule should be sacked?

The top brass in SIPTU seem to have forgotten why we have unions. They are more interested in



getting the members' weekly contributions than in actually helping the members to improve their wages and conditions. If ever we had proof of the different interests of the bureaucracy and of the membership, this is it.

Sometimes activity within our unions can be boring, demoralising, and appear to be a waste of time. But we should remember that the reason the bosses (and many of 'our own' bureaucrats) are so eager to castrate them is because of the tremendous power they could have.

If we manage to wrest control from the bureaucrats currently strangling them, they will prove to be one of our best weapons in the battle for a free and equal society. And this starts with convincing our fellow workers to take more control at workplace and section committee level.

by Alan MacSimoin (SIPTU member)

Understanding Power

Mark Malone Reviews *Understanding Power* by Noam Chomsky. Ed. Mitchell and Schoeffel, Published by Vintage 2003, €17

Understanding Power is a collection of edited interviews, presentations and discussions that Noam Chomsky has had with activists and community groups over the ten year period from 1989-99. Put together in question and answer format and covering topics ranging from globalisation, activist strategies, and the media, *Understanding Power* is an accessible, even essential, read for all those concerned with how the very few use structures of power to maintain their grip on the majority of people across the globe.

Chomsky has been the recipient of much gushing praise for his analysis of power structures and their corroding impact on the development of a truly democratic society. The New York Times describes him as "arguably the most important intellectual alive." Quite funny then that the NY Times has no less than 38 separate entries in the book's index, which cite examples of deliberate misreporting and convenient omissions, in its role of 'informing' the public. It is Chomsky's demystifying of deliberately intellectualised arguments, backed up with a serious amount of supporting facts and plain common sense that makes this collection important and readily digestible.

Much of the discussions are based on the continuing oppression of many of the world's peoples. The historical context of old style imperialism, neoliberalism and the war industry are explored as is the media's increasingly important role in maintaining the status quo.

American and European foreign policies are stripped to their hypocritical core in great detail. The left does not escape Chomsky's attention. He rejects the idea of an elitist Vanguard Party with the "capacity to lead the stupid masses towards some future they're too dumb to understand themselves...The same guys that were Stalinist thugs...of the former Soviet Union are now running banks and are enthusiastic free marketeers, praising the US." Marxism as an applicable theory is dismissed. "We don't discuss Einsteinism or Plackism." They "had somethings to say, some right and absorbed into science, some wrong and later improved on...if you set up the idea of Marxism, you've already abandoned rationality." He describes the form of libertarian socialism practised in Barcelona in the late 1930's as "about as high a level as human beings have reached in trying to reach libertarian principles, which in my view are the right ones"

Repeatedly Chomsky returns to the need for organised resistance to all forms of undemocratic power, and provokes the reader to empower themselves to help "build a movement that is truly democratic, to provoke reform and ferment the opportunity for revolution." By highlighting the achievements made by the sacrifice and collective work of many, against seemingly overwhelming odds this book may just get you to stop shouting at the tv, shift your ass and get organised.

