

WORKERS SOLIDARITY

January/February 2010

Twenty-Six Years of Irish Anarchist News

Trade Unionists Betrayed by Leadersip *Reclaim Ownership of Our Movement*

On Tuesday 24th November 2009, 250,000 public sector workers took strike action in opposition to the government policy of public service pay cuts. This was a potentially massive show of defiance and the first time in more than 20 years that the trade union movement had flexed its collective muscle.

Gregor Kerr

Yet, just over two weeks later Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan announced a budget which everyone recognises as a vicious attack on ordinary workers and those dependent on social welfare. What happened over that two week period demonstrated clearly that the gap between ordinary trade union members and the supposed 'leadership' of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions is huge and possibly unbridgeable. The potentially massive show of defiance had been turned into a whimper and the government could proceed to do just as it wished.

Workers had taken to the picket line under a barrage of criticism and attack



Peter McLoone IMPACT General Secretary



David Begg (ICTU), Jack O'Connor (SIPTU)

from economists, politicians and political commentators. Huge energies had been spent in attempting to drive a wedge between public and private sector workers. Workers employed in the public sector were told constantly of the need to 'share the pain'; workers in the private sector were fed the line of a 'bloated' public service enjoying fantastic perks and privileges.

Truth v. Fiction

The truth, of course, was vastly different. Public servants had already more than 'felt the pain' of the economic crisis, having had their wages cut by an average of up to 13% in the past twelve months when the so-called 'pension levy', the other levies imposed and wage increases foregone were all taken into account. And far from being

'overpaid' and 'bloated' 54% of public sector workers were earning less than €40,000 before those cuts had been implemented.

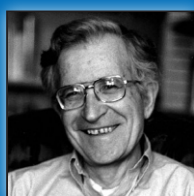
The real difference in Irish society is not between public and private sector workers but between the very wealthy who have made fortunes during the years of the boom and the rest of us. To take just one example - In the last three years of the boom (2004 to 2007) alone, the richest 450 people in Ireland added €41billion to their combined personal wealth.

But a very clever political strategy has been pursued by those in power.

Continued inside...



Climate Change
UN talks in Copenhagen cop-out to big business.



Noam Chomsky
An exclusive interview on his visit to Ireland.



Robinson & Adams
Affairs and child abuse in the North

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Those who would prefer that we wouldn't be thinking about the possibility of taking the wealth from the hands of the elite would prefer to set us at each others' throats. Thus private sector worker is pitted against public sector worker, worker against social welfare recipient, etc.

It means that while we're busy fighting with each other, the wealthy can get on with dividing up the spoils. And of course the real agenda was clear – if the government could get away with cutting the wages of public servants then an attack on wages across the private sector (and, most importantly, on the minimum wage) would quickly follow.



The legacy of 'partnership'

It was in this context that public sector workers voted overwhelmingly for strike action in the face of another round of threatened pay cuts. And it was the solidarity and strength shown by workers who took to the picket lines on 24th November that could have undermined and defeated the 'divide and conquer' strategy. Unfortunately the rug was pulled from under us by a leadership whose political outlook and belief is fed by over 20 years of so-called 'social partnership' – a leadership who themselves were terrified at the idea of trade unionists discovering the strength of collective action.

Even before the pickets were lifted on the evening of Nov. 24th, the ICTU Public Service Committee's spokesperson Peter McLoone was agreeing in an RTE interview that pay cuts were inevitable. Instead of declaring that as a movement we were strong enough and determined

enough to force our agenda onto government, the union leaders conceded that agenda and entered talks on how a pay cut could be made most 'sellable' to the membership. This led to the insulting concept of "unpaid leave", which incredibly the media managed to portray as a victory for the trade unions, a view not shared by ordinary trade unionists who recognised it for what it was – a pay cut by another name.

In itself this was bad enough but more worryingly it provided a cover for the so-called "transformation agenda". This involved agreement on a whole range of changes to the terms and conditions of public servants amounting to a huge attack on living standards and working conditions.

This 'deal' eventually collapsed only because the government realised that they no longer needed the connivance of the trade union leaders. Everything had been conceded by the union side in return for nothing so the government was able to take even more.

Our Challenge

Following on from the budget, and from this defeat of the trade union movement, the challenge that faces trade union members is to begin the process of reclaiming ownership of our movement, and re-orientating the political outlook and direction of the trade unions. We've had more than 20 years of 'social partnership' and it's proven to be a disaster for the independence and strength of the trade unions.

But the trade unions belong to union members, not to overpaid bureaucrats. In every union we should now begin the process of reclaiming ownership. Members should be looking for special general meetings to be called to discuss what has happened. At these meetings, motions of no confidence in the leadership and strategy of the Public Services Committee of ICTU should be proposed, and a discussion should begin on formulating a new strategy to defend workers' pay and conditions against government attacks.

It's up to each of us to take up the struggle in our own union. We may have lost this battle but there are a lot more struggles on the way.

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Indymedia Ireland

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Free Education for Everyone

Campaign to stop the reintroduction of college fees and to promote the right to free education for all.
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http://free-education.info/

Shell to Sea

Campaign to move Shell's gas pipeline offshore from Co. Mayo.
http://www.shelltosea.com

Hands Off the People of Iran

Anti-imperialist network for solidarity with Iranian trade unionists & the women's rights movement.
http://www.hopoi.org

Choice Ireland

Abortion rights action group
choiceireland@gmail.com
http://www.choiceireland.org

Alliance for Choice (NI)

http://allianceforchoiceni.org

Residents Against Racism

Opposing racism and deportations.
24 hour helpline: 087 666 2060

Climate Change

The Business Connection

As this is being written we are currently in one of the coldest snaps of winter weather the country has seen in a long time. Temperatures reaching -15 and below have been recorded and stocks of grit & salt for ensuring safe travel are at an all time low.

The government has ordered that schools remain closed for almost a week. This is replicated right across the UK and continental Europe.

Brenda Farrell

So what about global warming and climate change? Well, firstly there is a difference between weather and climate. Weather is the immediate conditions a local area experiences. Climate is the much longer-term trend in weather conditions across the planet over periods of decades and longer.

And whilst it might not have felt like it in the past few weeks, the planet's overall climate is heating up at an increasing rate. If this continues, it is predicted to reek havoc across much of the world, and create famines, mass migration, and resource wars unlike any previously seen in the history of mankind.

There have been previous changes in the earth climate, such as the beginning and ending of the "ice ages". They have always had a catastrophic effect on living creatures as floods, droughts and the knock on effects within ecosystems caused relatively balanced food chains to collapse, leading to widespread species extinction. The rate of warming is greater than anything humans have experienced in the last 10,000 years.

The single biggest factor that has caused and still continues to cause climate change is the burning of fossil fuels to



generate energy. This has been primarily in the western world, but this is changing rapidly across the globe. China is now the single biggest emitter of carbon, whilst the US remains the biggest emitter per head of population.

Without the use of these fuels (oil, gas and coal) we would not live in the type of world we live in today. It has been literally and metaphorically the lubricant in the wheels of capitalism. It is this continued dependency upon fossil fuels that has massive implications for us all, as climate change recognises no borders. However it is the poorest and most marginalised who will bear the brunt, while big business continues to profit from the exploitation of these resources. This is an issue of justice and power as much as it is one of science and energy.

At present it is estimated that 325 million people are seriously affected by climate change — a number likely to double by 2030, as more people are hit by natural disasters or suffer environmental degradation caused by climate change. There remains a gap between understanding the causes and foreseeable impacts of climate change - which we do - and anything being done about it.

This is the backdrop behind last December's United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen. Commonly referred to as the COP-15, the summit was hailed as the last realistic chance that governments across the globe had to reach a legally binding and enforceable agreement to reduce carbon emission across all our societies. However it was doomed to failure as the entire process of national and international discussion of climate

change have been driven by ideology and greed rather than science and fact.

Governments talk about cutting carbon emissions yet we rarely get more than a few token gestures and a lot of empty talk. The only thing they are all agreed on is that working people will pay the price even though we have no control over the decisions that caused the problem. The new carbon tax is a good example.

Many of us have to use our cars to get to work because we don't have regular and reliable public transport in our areas, many of us have to use oil or gas for home heating because that's the system that came with our houses. Ordinary people didn't take the decisions to run down public transport, to refuse to have a national programme of free home insulation, not to invest in solar, wind and tidal energy rather than having turf and oil burning power stations.

Dirty technologies need to be replaced by clean and sustainable ones. It is possible, but the ruling class is most unwilling to deal seriously with this. When there is a conflict between the needs of the majority and the profits of big business, guess where their loyalties lie!

We are facing a big problem, not something that will be sorted out by lobbying or publicity stunts. It will take a big movement fighting for conversion of power stations to clean technologies, for free and quality public transport, for sustainable growth to improve living standards worldwide.

As long as the capitalist minority controls industry, there will be a conflict between their interests and ours. This is not to say that we can't force concessions from them; many of the things we take for granted, like paid holidays, the right to join a union or even legal contraception, had to be fought for by previous generations.

The best and most rational solution is to have those affected by decisions having a say in making those decisions. Would we be rushing into the prospect of big weather changes and flooding of coastal areas if we had workers' control of production? The only long-term and permanent answer is to reorganise the economy to serve the needs of all. That means real socialism and real democracy, in one word 'anarchism'.

Women & Children Attacked

Recent events amongst the North's political elite show that mainstream politics has changed a lot over the past 15 years. Amidst all the tabloid frenzy it's easy to forget where we came from. Corruption at the highest levels of government and salacious affairs may be preferable to war on our streets, but it isn't democracy and we know it.

Stephen Molloy

The revelations about the Adams and Robinson families may impact on some prominent figures themselves and may yet have implications for Stormont and the saga of devolved policing powers. Yet in truth the real issues lie much deeper and are more painful, yet real for all of us concerned with working towards a just and equal society. And the worst has yet to come.

The North's recent past will not easily be brushed away. The sex lives of consenting adults, married or otherwise, isn't the issue here. None of us need lessons in morality from Christian fundamentalists who would like to turn the clock back 100 years. Nor should any group which operated "safe houses" for the rapists of children be considered legitimate. They have deservedly lost any legitimacy they had through their (in)actions.

We are witnessing, and are part of, a society that for decades was dominated by violence, sexism and hard men, and by ultra-conservative religious institutions and political parties. Victims killed and



injured as a direct result of violence by all armed participants are remembered publicly and rightly so. However there are many victims within our society who have had no little or no voice and whose plight gets little attention.

Violence against women and children was, and still is, common. Last year there were over 5,500 recorded crimes of "domestic abuse" carried out on women over the age of 17. This included 68 rapes and almost 90 other sexual assaults. In the same time period there were 774 recorded crimes of domestic abuse of children under 17. Given the low rate of reporting the real figures are likely to be considerably higher.

In terms of the organised emotional, sexual and physical abuse of children, there is no reason to believe that the protection afforded to clergy abusing children by the Catholic Church was less prevalent in the north than it was in the south. That church didn't change when it crossed the border and hasn't changed. However the full extent is still not known.

Even less publicly acknowledged are the cases concerning members of the RUC protecting paedophile rings. One such as that around William McGrath and the TARA paramilitary group, which also included the sadistic murderer and leader of the Red Hand Commando, John McKeague. The wall of silence around this still needs to be broken.

Within loyalist and republican communities, punishment beatings and mur-

ders were carried out by self-appointed judge/jury/executioner armies, seemingly stamping out "anti-social" behaviour but primarily reinforcing local paramilitary authority. Yet men who regularly beat the shit out of wives, partners and children continued to be accepted in their community, and indeed in some cases were members of those same organisations.

We can't allow these realities to be air-brushed from our society's collective memories. We owe it to today's survivors of abuse and to future generations to give expression to the depraved and abusive realities that unquestioned authority engenders. Whilst child abuse and violence against women is common across the globe, the particulars of the North's conflict have left many unable to openly question and challenge it.

Untangling patterns of abusive behaviour is a necessary component to ensuring we live in a society where victims of abuse get full support and that perpetrators are not hidden but made accountable. What remained hidden behind the closed and militarised communities of the troubles and the doors of churches should never be allowed to happen again.

As anarchists we are committed to ridding our communities and society of the sexist ideas and repression that have fostered such abuse. We are committed to building just structures to replace capitalism and greed. Both go hand in hand in ridding our society of organised exploitation and injustice.

That's Capitalism



The new Financial Regulator at the Central Bank, Matthew Elderfield, will be paid more than €400,000 a year - almost €150,000 more than his predecessor. He starts work this month.

Ireland's new EU Commissioner, Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, receives a Dail pension of over €107,000, as well as her €217,280 salary. The previous Irish commissioner Charlie McCreevy, took home a combined TD and ministerial pension last year of more than €125,000 as well as his salary, and former taoiseach and EU ambassador to the US, John Bruton, trousered a pension of over €150,000 on top of his €238,000 salary.

However, all three refused to tell the Sunday Tribune (29/11/2009) if they would be willing to "forgo some or all of these payments in view of the current economic crisis".

23% of all homeless people in the USA are military veterans. A case of 'fight for your rulers and then feck off'?

When the government gave €7 billion to AIB and Bank of Ireland last year, they also appointed 'public interest' directors. All four of them, including former Labour Party leader Dick Spring, agreed not to take part in the decisions and votes on NAMA because of a possible 'conflict of interest'. It was decided their first duty is towards bank shareholders and not the taxpayer.

www.anarchistblackcat.org



A friendly and respectful online discussion board for anarchists of all stripes and those just interested in seeing what anarchists think.

anarkismo.net

International Anarchist website with news & discussion from all five continents.

Thinking About Anarchism: Anarchism & Human Nature

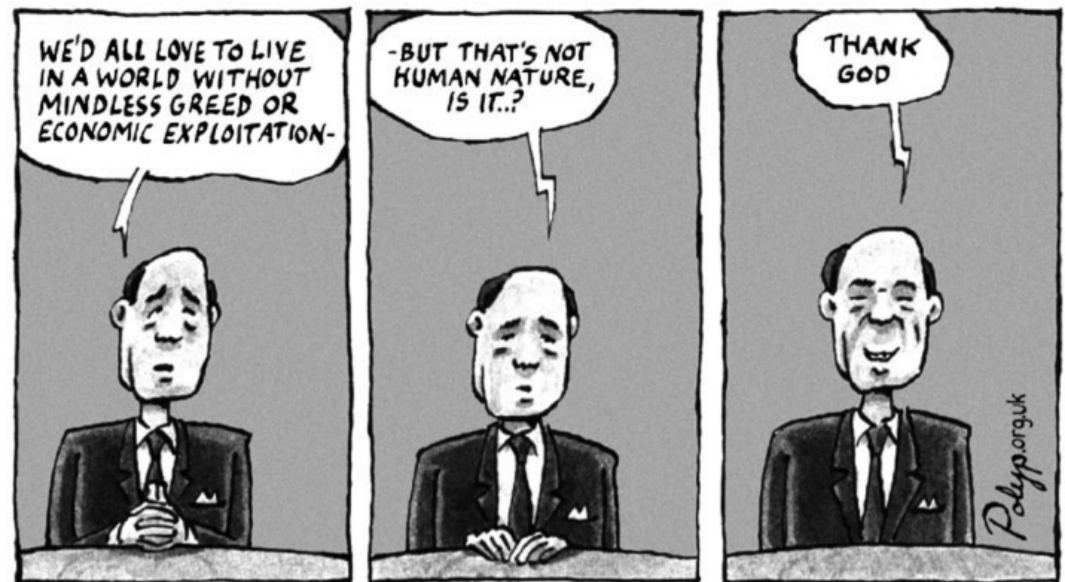
"Human nature being what it is, you could never have an anarchist society - not one in which both individual freedom and co-operation exist anyway". How often have you heard something like that?

Greg Ryan

It is constantly put to you that people are naturally short-sighted, selfish, apathetic or prone to violence; and are incapable of creating anything better than the present mess we live in.

The idea that there is some abstract and eternally flawed 'human nature' that we can't do much about gets plenty of plugging from the churches and others with an interest in the present set-up. But, for anarchists, the way people behave reflects the type of environment they find themselves in, and not the after effects of some mythical original sin.

The reason selfishness and self-centred behaviour are so common is because we live in a society where, in order to succeed or even survive, people must take part in a system of competition for jobs, money, etc. Apathy is the result of the lack of power most of us have over our own lives. War, crime and poverty all have their roots in the system that puts the accumulation of



'THANK GOD'

profits before all else. It is not down to some undefined 'human nature'.

Yet in spite of all the madness of the capitalist system, human beings remain social animals - otherwise any form of society would be impossible. When people are motivated they show themselves to be capable of tremendous acts of solidarity. The numbers who donate money to charity and volunteer their time does show that people are not 'naturally' or irredeemably selfish.

However it is during periods of mass struggle that the most striking changes take place. In any struggle against the ruling class, if we are to win, we must act as a class

rather than as individuals. We must strive to involve as many people as possible. It is through struggle that we learn the value of group action and co-operation, thereby laying the basis for a new kind of society.

It is the struggle for a better world that creates the spirit of solidarity and the attitudes necessary for an anarchist society to exist. It is this that makes a new society possible and is why no small elite or conspiracy can make the revolution. An anarchist society can only be created by the activity of masses of ordinary people.

Anarchism & the WSM

Although the period in the run up to Christmas is generally a quiet one for political activity, WSM members were busy in their unions organising for the national public sector strike of November 24th last, and there are extensive reports of our members' experiences that day at www.wsm.ie/story/6241. We were also involved in the budget day protests outside the Dáil on December 9th. While the initial battle may have been lost, we realise that the resistance to attacks on working conditions, both in the private and public sectors, and to attacks on public services will be a long one.

To this end, we held a national training day for our newer members in union organising and campaigning in December. To round off the year, this was followed later that evening with approximately 150 members and supporters attending our 25th anniversary celebration in Dublin's Central Hotel.

Meanwhile the WSM Cork branch has opened an office and bookshop at 43 Douglas Street. It's the place to go to in Cork for your socialist and anarchist books; open from 12-7, Monday to Saturday. Evenings



Solidarity Books, in Cork, ready for a recent film screening

often see film shows and public discussions, you can keep up to date with coming events at their Facebook page (Solidarity-Books).

2010 will present many challenges for anarchists in Ireland as the economic situation continues to deteriorate. Many people are now looking for an alternative to the status

quo and we will be hoping to spread the anarchist message to as many as possible. If you are interested in finding out more, we would be delighted to hear from you!

Noam Chomsky Visits Ireland

Workers Solidarity reporters met America's most famous dissident for breakfast during his recent visit.

What do you think the anarchist response to the recession should be?

The answer should be, these are the policies we've followed for 30 years ... we've financialised the economy and destroyed productive systems, because it enriches rich people and strengthens finance capital ... These are the policies of Clinton, Carter, and Obama, and the US Republicans have [only] carried that a little farther. In fact the guys who are Obama's financial advisers, those guys ought to be in jail ... they're the guys who created the crisis.

What should anarchists and workers do to counter anti-union culture?

Never any magic key to this, it is education and organisation. You have to have tactics that relate to the level of peoples' understanding and perception that focus on meaningful goals. There's just no magic key. We have to fight back.

The decline in workers solidarity has been pretty remarkable over the last 20 years. There was a striking example this year when Obama wanted to show his support for working people. He undermined everything he promised to do, what he did was, he went to a factory in Illinois, the factory he chose was Caterpillar. So, there were protests from peace church groups ... there were no protests from the labour movement.

15 years ago in the early 90's when Obama was in Chicago, he has got to know about it, it was all over Chicago, the Chicago Tribune, a right-wing paper that happens to



carry labour issues very well, Caterpillar in the early 90's was the first manufacturing corporation in generations to call in scabs to break up the strike..

Caterpillar is basically following the model of Reagan, but they were first industrial corporation to do it, and that's where Obama goes to give his solidarity speech and nobody objected.

When you compare that to Argentina ...

The crisis really destroyed the economy, like it was down to zero, and then you had spontaneous revolts. Now there are little bits of that in the United States, but business thinks fast. For example did you follow the Republic Windows and Doors dispute in Chicago, well they were attempting a number of sit-ins and they were planning to take over the plant.

At that point the multinational, the banks, whoever owns the things, decided, instead of closing it down, to sell it off, and a lot of the workers got their jobs back, and they didn't take the next step, which was imminent. A lot of that stuff is just below the surface.

Auto-plants are being shut down, and it is quite honestly, kind of surreal. The industrial plants are being shut down, the Obama administration has got officials off in Spain and France using Federal stimulus money to purchase high speed rail technology, which could be built in the plants [except] for the banks and so on.

So, [they're] using taxpayer money to buy it from Spain. If the communities and the workforce had reached the right level of consciousness, they would just take over the plant, reconstruct it, and start producing high-speed rail transport.

... Which is what they did in Argentina

But they did it in Argentina after everything had collapsed, so nothing is functional anymore. There is still an inspiration you can take, but you don't want to wait until everything has fallen apart

Who does the media work for?

How many labour reporters are there, and how many business reporters working for the Irish Times? They're doing their jobs; the media are part of the state corporate system ... what should be praised is that occasionally they break out [of it]. But, most of the time they're doing their job, and ... journalists and editors and so on, they believe in what they're doing, just like Soviet party hacks believed in it.

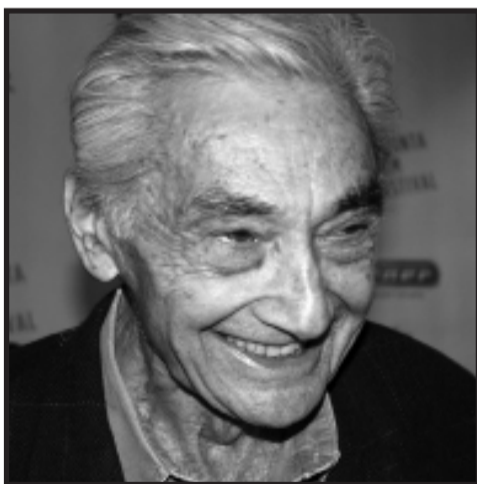
It's easier for the Irish media to be critical of US policies

It's always easier to criticise someone. That's why in England and Ireland too, the Balkans are portrayed as worse than Israel and the United States, because they are criticising someone else's crimes. Media critique is a good thing to do, I've spent a lot of time on it too, but you can't act as if you're surprised.

I mean ... it's like objecting to General Motors because they try to make profits. But if they ever break out of the pattern briefly, fine, support it, and when you do a media critique, it's not to try and change the media, it's to get people to understand the difference between the world and what passes through the filters, so you're talking to the population, not the editors.

A People's Historian - Howard Zinn

Howard Zinn is an American historian best known for his book 'A Peoples History Of The United States', however he has written much more on the subject of American working class history. He is also a World War II veteran, a playwright and, to this day, remains a political activist.



Donal Ó Fallúin

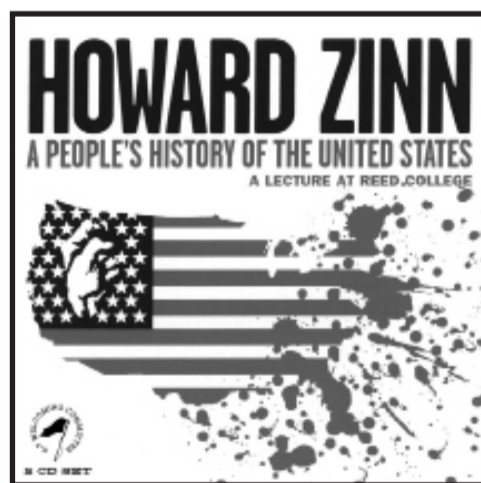
"It was quite ignored in Academic Circles, and it was not reviewed in the major historical journal 'The American Historical Review'" he noted, when asked about A Peoples History of The United States. "Now that it has sold over two million copies, it is harder to ignore" he stated, adding that "It managed to infuriate conservative historians"

Studying the American working class is no easy task. Why is it that the Obama election campaign ignored the working class for talk of 'Middle America'? "I suppose the working class has always been identified with immigrants, with uneducated and unskilled workers, so people

in the working class hesitate to identify themselves that way"

Asking Zinn if a particular figure from history inspires him, he identifies some choice characters who he feels are "...neglected or barely mentioned in our history books" and amongst these, he feels, is "Mark Twain, the anti-imperialist". How infrequently Mark Twain is viewed in that light is an interesting point in itself.

It seems immigrants are central to the story of Americas working poor. I asked Zinn about the likes of the Saint Patrick's Battalion, a small group of Irish catholic soldiers who deserted the U.S Army to



fight alongside the poor of Mexico. "There was no need to make an effort to eliminate these people from history. It was the easy and safe, comfortable thing to do"

Asking Howard if he finds it frustrating that 'democratic' nations can go down the road of repeating the darkest days of their own history, he states "Of course I find it frustrating that people know so little history, most Americans don't know about the Alien and Sedition acts, not about its successors in our time, the Sedition act of the first World War, the Smith Act of the second World War, or the Patriot Act of today even. Yet I know people are deprived of their real history

without them knowing it, so I feel not frustration but a strong impulse to correct that"

Zinn makes no attempt to hide or 'package up' his own politics. When asked about Marx in Soho, his popular play on Karl Marx, and whether or not the play was an attempt to make human the man of a thousand statues, he stated "Yes, it was to show his humanity, but also to show how his critique of capitalism is still true, and how his dream of a communist society still valid"

"When we recall the history of movements we tend to notice the leaders, not the mass movements" Zinn's work is about making sure such overlooked characters, and the mass movements of history, find their rightful place in the library.

Informacje i artykuły w języku polskim dostępne na stronie www.wsm.ie/polska