

WORKERS SOLIDARITY

March / April 2010

Twenty-Six Years of Irish Anarchist News

Public Service Work-To-Rule *What Game are the Trade Union Leaders Playing?*

Since the middle of January civil and public servants have engaged in a work-to-rule in an attempt to force a reversal of the pay cuts announced by the government in the December budget. Across the country workers in government offices, colleges, schools, hospitals etc. are taking action, which they hope will result in a change of government policy.

Gregor Kerr

Up to 300,000 public service workers have had their pay cut by up an average of 16% ('pension levy' + income levy + pay cut) in just over 12 months and they are rightly angry. They know that the wealthy that caused the financial crisis are getting off scot-free and that government policy is all about making ordinary workers shoulder the cost of the bank bailout, NAMA etc.

It is against this background that the current action is taking place. But while there is an obvious need for a fightback by ordinary workers against these attacks on our living standards, serious questions exist about the nature of the current industrial action.

Firstly, it appears clear that this action is very limited in its scope and seems unlikely to have any real impact on government policy. When the trade union movement took a day's strike action across the public service on 24th November, we were in a strong position and we'd shown our potential. But this

....continued on page 4



Transformation Agenda

This is a plan to secure "efficiencies" by getting people to work harder and for longer, meaning that some existing jobs can be scrapped. Of course there are some sensible suggestions for improving services, but they mask an agenda for getting rid of jobs.

"There is a lot in the transformation agenda that is close to the Taoiseach's heart" said Kieran Mulvey of the Labour Relations Commission. And that should tell us something. Does even the most deluded fool still think that Brian Cowen has the living standards of workers close to his heart?

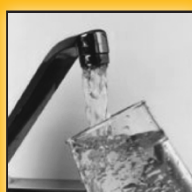
Half of all the money taken from public servants in the budget, €2.5 billion, is to be given to twenty law firms in fees for servicing NAMA. And his government is still insisting that the pay of the top 250 civil servants will be cut by less than those earning under €35,000!

The end objective is up to 17,000 redundancies across the public sector. This means jobs destroyed and the rest of us having to work harder to keep hospitals, schools and offices functioning.



Haiti

Intervention and Imperialism after devastating earthquake.



Water Tax

Environmental green-wash covers plan for double-taxation and privatisation.



Solidarity Books

New radical book shop and meeting space opens in Cork.

...continued from front cover

was completely undermined by the subsequent actions of the trade union leadership. (See 'Trade unionists betrayed by leadership' from Workers Solidarity 113 <http://www.wsm.ie/story/6321>).

If a serious campaign of opposition to government attacks is to be mounted, it will have to involve ongoing and intensive strike action building towards a national strike of all public servants and leading on to a general strike which will unite public and private sector workers against the government and the wealthy. There is no indication that the current limited industrial action will be built upon to formulate such a campaign.



There is however a more fundamental worry about the current action. There is a huge gap between the agenda being pursued by ordinary trade unionists engaged in the work-to-rule and the agenda of the trade union leadership who appear more and more unaccountable and removed from the democratic control of the members. Ask any public servant what the objective of the current action is and s/he will be clear that it is to force the reversal of December's pay cuts. Ask any public servant for his/her view on the so-called 'transformation agenda' which was 'agreed' in the pre-budget talks and you'll find out that there is very little support for it and that it is seen for what it is – an unprecedented attack on the rights and conditions of workers which reverses many of the gains made by the unions over several decades.

However, the attitude of the Public Service Committee of ICTU is some-

what different. Peter McLoone, Jack O'Connor et al believe that the 'transformation agenda' is the goal of the current industrial action. They are of the view that we should be attempting to get back to the deal, which was 'agreed' and then un-agreed in the days before the budget. Rather than seeing the 'transformation agenda' as the attack on members' working conditions that it is, they attempt to peddle it as a modernising step forward. But what they haven't done is put this 'goal' to a vote of the members and looked for a mandate for the views they espouse.

Neither do they even see the reversal of the December pay cuts as an objective of the current action. Indeed it seems as if they're itching to get back into talks with government on the 'transformation agenda' in the hope that this will avoid even further pay cuts in the 2011 Budget. However if they've learned anything from the past few months it should surely be that even the act of participating in such talks will be an invitation to the government to put the boot in even more.

Only one thing will reverse current government policy – a campaign of strong and determined strike action. This is not the agenda being pursued by the trade union leaders so are we simply being toyed with by the current work-to-rule? While recognising that union members are taking action and that this may result in increased confidence in some workplaces, should we be telling the union leaders that we are no longer willing to be pawns in their agenda? We should be taking control of our unions and imposing our own agenda of out-right opposition to all attempts to blame ordinary workers for the financial crisis.

www.anarchistblackcat.org



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

Contacts

Workers Solidarity Movement

PO Box 1528, Dublin 8.
www.wsm.ie
wsm_ireland@yahoo.com
cork@wsm.ie | belfastwsm@yahoo.com

Organise!

PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ
organiseireland@yahoo.com

Revolutionary Anarcha-Feminist Group (RAG)

PO BOX 10785, Dublin 1.
<http://ragdublin.blogspot.com/>

Indymedia Ireland

Alternative user-generated Irish news.
<http://www.indymedia.ie>

Seomra Spraoi

Dublin Social Centre
 10 Belvedere Court, Dublin 1.
<http://www.seomraspraoi.org>

Solidarity Books

Cork Radical Bookshop & Meeting Space
 43 Douglas Street, Cork.
solidaritybooks@gmail.com

Galway Social Space

24 Middle Street, Galway.
<http://www.galwayspace.org>

Free Education for Everyone

Campaign to stop the reintroduction of college fees and to promote the right to free education for all.
stopfees@gmail.com
<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

Haiti: Intervention & Imperialism

The horrific death toll from the earthquake in Haiti briefly focused the world's attention on the plight of the Haitian people. The earthquake was a natural disaster coming on top of decades of human disasters imposed upon the people as its economy has been forced to transform to suit the needs of transnational corporations. This is the reason so many people were packed into substandard accommodation in Port-au-prince.

Andrew Flood

Those who want to turn all of Haiti into one vast low wage sweatshop have used the earthquake to advance their agenda. On the day it occurred, the US Heritage Foundation issued a statement arguing that "the U.S. response to the tragic earthquake in Haiti offers opportunities to re-shape Haiti's long-dysfunctional government and economy."

There is a very long history of the US 're-shaping' the Haitian economy in the interests of US corporations. This has taken the usual form of the carrot of IMF loans (conditional on Haiti raising prices for electricity and refusing pay increases) and the stick of military occupation. US troops have repeatedly invaded Haiti and occupied the country; the immediate response to the earthquake was to send thousands more troops to the country, as if it had been destroyed by a civil war rather than an earthquake. These occupations have then been used to dictate policy. In 2005 exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide told Naomi Klein how "Washington's negotiators [demanded] the immediate selloff of Haiti's state-owned enterprises, including phones and electricity" when sending troops to depose the military junta in 1994.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas today, with 70% of its population living on less than 2 dollars a day. Haitian workers in the garment sector, making clothes to be exported to the US, have been fighting for a minimum wage of five dollars a day. Yet the UN considered that even this miniscule minimum was too much. In a



2008 report released ahead of a parliamentary vote, it threatened that while clothing exports to the US could create hundreds of thousands of jobs "factories' overhead costs must be kept low." Haitian president Rene Preval refused to sign the minimum wage law in 2008, saying the workers should only receive three dollars a day! When 2000 workers protested the decision, he deployed police to use tear gas to disperse them.

At the same time workers are facing rising food prices due to the deliberate destruction of the domestic peasant agriculture that once allowed Haiti to be self-sufficient in staple foodstuffs. The World Bank development strategy had the goal of forcing the economy into "deeper market interdependence with the United States." In agriculture this meant shifting 30% of the arable land from food for local consumption to export cash crops. Haiti was also forced to allow rice from heavily subsidized US agriculture to be dumped in its domestic market, driving domestic producers out of business, after which prices started to rise. In the space of only 20 years these policies meant that Haiti shifted from being self-sufficient to being the third largest importer of US rice. In a similar fashion chicken and pork production was destroyed. These policies drove hundreds of thousands of peasants off

the land and into the slums in the cities.

2008 saw a global rise in food prices, which resulted in riots in many poor countries including Haiti. In April of that year, crowds chanting "We are hungry! He must go!" tried to storm the presidential palace demanding the resignation of President Rene Preval. They were attacked by Brazilian UN troops with assault rifles, tear gas and rubber bullets, killing several people and wounding dozens.

The people of Haiti will need ongoing support and solidarity in their attempts to reconstruct their country in the years to come and to prevent reoccurrences of events such as those outlined above.

Haiti Solidarity Ireland is a broad-based coalition to support Haitians in their struggle against foreign intervention and for an inclusive, democratic and equitable Haiti. We are organised on the principles of international solidarity and anti-imperialism and have branches in Cork and Dublin.

We call for the immediate departure of international troops from Haiti, and for aid and reconstruction efforts to be controlled by Haitians themselves through their unions and community organisations. Haiti Solidarity Ireland can be contacted at <http://haitisolidarity.wordpress.com/>

For a more detailed exposition of Haiti's sufferings under imperialism see <http://anarchism.pageabode.com/andrewnflood/haiti-history-slave-intervention-occupation-resistance>

Keep Water Free

The ruling class strategy of making working people pay for the crisis has seen public and private sector pay cuts, job losses, welfare reductions and slashing of important services like special needs assistants for children with physical and mental problems. Coming soon, if Cowen and Gormley have their way, is the return of a domestic water tax.

Alan MacSimóin

About 100 people attended an anti-water charges forum called by Socialist MEP Joe Higgins in February. We discussed building opposition to this latest attempt by the wealthy to put their hands into our pockets.

15 years ago a mass campaign of non-payment, which the Workers Solidarity Movement helped to organise, forced the Fine Gael/Labour government to abolish water charges. There is no timetable for bringing in the new tax but it's expected to be within the next year or two. The first step will be trying to install meters in each house.

This is so they can pretend it's "envi-



ronmental". The plan is to start off with households being allocated a "free" allowance of water and only when they use more than this amount will they start paying. We can be sure that's just a temporary measure, as demonstrated recently by the introduction of charges in Dublin for bin waiver holders.

The real purpose is to generate an "income stream" and eventually privatise water supply. That's what happened with water supply in Britain and it's what happened here with refuse services.

Speaking to the forum Michael Taft, Research Officer of the UNITE trade union, reminded us of the huge differences of wealth in Ireland, where the top 5% own 40% of all wealth and the top 1% have 33% of all the financial wealth. He also pointed out that service charges are part of the ongoing transfer of wealth from working people to the rich.

Environmental engineer Maurice Sweeney rubbished the Green argument that ordinary people waste water. The

real waste is down to the crap state of mains water pipes in much of the country. About 35% of all drinking water is lost through leaks. Some of this is down to aging Victorian pipes not being replaced, while some is down to letting building firms on state contracts get away with incredibly low standards in recent years.

He explained that there is no evidence to suggest that meters will lead to a reduction in consumption. A good example is England and Scotland, where water use per household is slightly more than in Ireland, despite the fact that they have meters and charges in these countries already. Meters, he said, were simply a tool to charge for water.

Everyone at the forum seemed to be agreed that mass non-payment must be the basis of a national campaign. The government is getting ready, and so are we. A large number of those present volunteered to be part of an interim organising committee to discuss, in detail, the nuts and bolts of building a campaign.



That's Capitalism



Tullow Oil chief executive, Aidan Heavey, took home a total pay package of €25,962,983 last year.

Average pay for a chief executive in an Irish-listed company was €936,000 in 2009. The average basic salary for the highest-paid director was €612,000 in 2009, more or less unchanged on 2008.

Employers get more aggressive during recessions. They prefer to sack when they want to cut jobs and redundancy is an expensive luxury in their warped little world. Even so, being sacked for the sake of a slice of cheese is taking it to a new level – and the Dutch courts would seem to agree, as they have forced McDonalds to pay a sacked worker over £3,660 as compensation for sacking her because she put a slice of cheese in a co-worker's burger.

In late January Fianna Fail TD Charlie O'Connor turned up to 'support' an anti-cuts protest outside the Dáil. His local paper reported that "footage, which is available on Youtube, shows Deputy O'Connor arguing with protester Gregor Kerr from the Workers Solidarity Movement – a well-known anarchist organisation. Mr Kerr asked O'Connor why he does not vote against the cuts. O'Connor hits back by saying he will not vote against the government."

With a neck like a jockey's bollocks, O'Connor was protesting again a couple of weeks later. This time it was against sacking special needs assistants, another cut he voted for.

Mark Fielding, of the employers' association ISME, admitted on Pat Kenny's Frontline TV programme that the minimum wage is not enough to live on. However, he added, "it is not up to employers to pay over the going rate to provide a living income". He wants the PAYE taxpayer to subsidise poverty wages through the Family Income Subsidy.

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

Thinking About Anarchism

The word anarchy has its origins in the Greek *an-archos*, meaning absence of a ruler. Since the mid-1800's, anarchism has developed as a definite political theory which aims to create a society without bosses and without authoritarian rule.

E. Walsh

People often question why a political movement would use the word anarchy at all, given its' common associations with destruction and lawlessness. Well, perhaps some destruction is in order - for capitalism, for war and for empire, at whose hands both humans and our planet have suffered so heavily.

Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta challenged the idea that anarchy is the bogeyman those in power would have us believe: "[if you] convince the public that government is not necessary, but extremely harmful [then] the word 'anarchy,' precisely because it signifies 'without government,' will become equal to saying 'natural order, harmony of needs and interests of all, complete liberty within complete solidarity.'" When the Sunday Independent and Sky News use the word anarchy, it is to describe chaos and disorder. These mouthpieces of the rich could never imagine a world without strongman rulers and order imposed from above, aided by well-resourced police, courts and prisons. This message of the bosses hasn't always been lapped up as some kind of eternal truth.

At different times, in places as far apart



as Mexico, Spain, Ukraine and Korea, the words anarchy and anarchism have carried very different associations. To millions of workers in these places, anarchism has meant organising for a world based on solidarity and mutual aid, for a world described by Rudolf Rocker as requiring "the abolition of economic monopolies and of all political and social coercive institutions within society". This would be a world where, instead of capitalism, we would have "a free association of all productive forces based upon co-operative labour, which would have for its sole purpose the satisfying of the necessary requirements of every member of society." For workers in countries where anarchism built strong bases, it became a liberating idea, something to be embraced and not at all a thing to be feared.

In recent years, here in Ireland, the Work-



ers Solidarity Movement has endeavoured to build an acceptance that anarchism can be a force for freedom and equality. In Dublin and Cork, sustained anarchist participation in left organising and social movements has earned our ideas credibility and given us the chance to show the value of our politics in practice.

The absence of a ruler or a government or a monarch doesn't necessarily mean an absence of organisation, peace or equality. Indeed, true equality cannot be achieved as long as there are government and governed. Decisions in the hands of those directly involved and wealth in the hands of we who produce it - the working class; this is the change the world needs to see and it's no quick or easy task. When all is said and done, you get judged on what you do and not on what you're called.

Anarchism & the WSM

With the big freeze over, the WSM recommenced activities early in 2010. As well as the activities mentioned in the article on Solidarity Books in this paper, our Cork branch has also commenced a 12-week discussion series on anarchism at that venue. Thus far, this has covered topics such as 'Parliament or Democracy', 'Nationalism and Imperialism', 'Oppressions' and 'Lessons from Russia and Spain'.

The WSM also organised well-attended public meetings in Cork and Dublin on Haiti titled 'Catastrophe and the Legacy of Imperialism' with a Paris-based Haitian journalist and representative from the Latin American Solidarity Centre speaking. We have also been busy preparing a new 'Radio Solidarity' show, which will hit the airwaves on Dublin's Near FM in the coming weeks.

Elsewhere, we held, in conjunction with Organise! from Belfast, a picket of the German embassy in Dublin in support of the Free Workers Union (FAU), which has been prohibited by the courts in Germany from calling itself a union. The FAU has been in dispute with the Babylon Mitte cinema in Berlin on behalf of the workers there for a number of months.

The WSM were at the the centre of International Women's Day celebrations in Cork. Spokeswoman Nicola Morry said:

"The original idea for the Douglas Street celebration was proposed at one of our meetings but it has since achieved a momentum



Speakers at recent talk on Haiti, organised by WSM, in Cork

of its own and it is deeply gratifying to witness the local community getting involved with such enthusiasm. Our own interest in International Women's Day is first and foremost political: we plan on highlighting the continued need for full reproductive rights for women in Ireland while celebrating the contribution of women workers and activists throughout history whose struggles resulted in better working conditions for today's women, a struggle that continues today."

WSM members continue their involvement in their unions, the Seomra Spraoi social centre (www.seomraspraoi.org), Shell to Sea (www.corribsos.com) and Haiti Solidarity Ireland, a newly set-up "broad-based coalition to support Haitians in their strug-

gle against foreign intervention and for an inclusive, democratic and equitable Haiti". We attended protests in support of strikers in Green Isle in Naas and in solidarity with Pat O'Donnell, jailed for his role in opposing the Corrib Gas project.

Internally, the WSM has reorganised our structures so as to try and devote more time to particularly important projects, such as organising in the trade unions, Shell to Sea, fundraising, combating unemployment and the upcoming struggle against water charges. We hope that these new structures will improve our efficiency and increase our impact but there is no substitute for power in numbers so if you are interested in getting involved, get in touch!

Solidarity Books opens its doors in Cork

Cork has a tradition of being open to alternative ideas, a tradition reflected in our name as 'the rebels' and in the history of Barracka Books and other radical bookshops which have popped up in the city over the years. Solidarity Books, though, is the first of its kind to be set up and organised by Cork anarchists.

Andrew O'Regan

Located at 43 Douglas Street, it has a bright yellow shop front and is open Monday to Saturday from noon to 7 p.m. The space is home to an office for the Workers Solidarity Movement in the city as well as hosting cam-

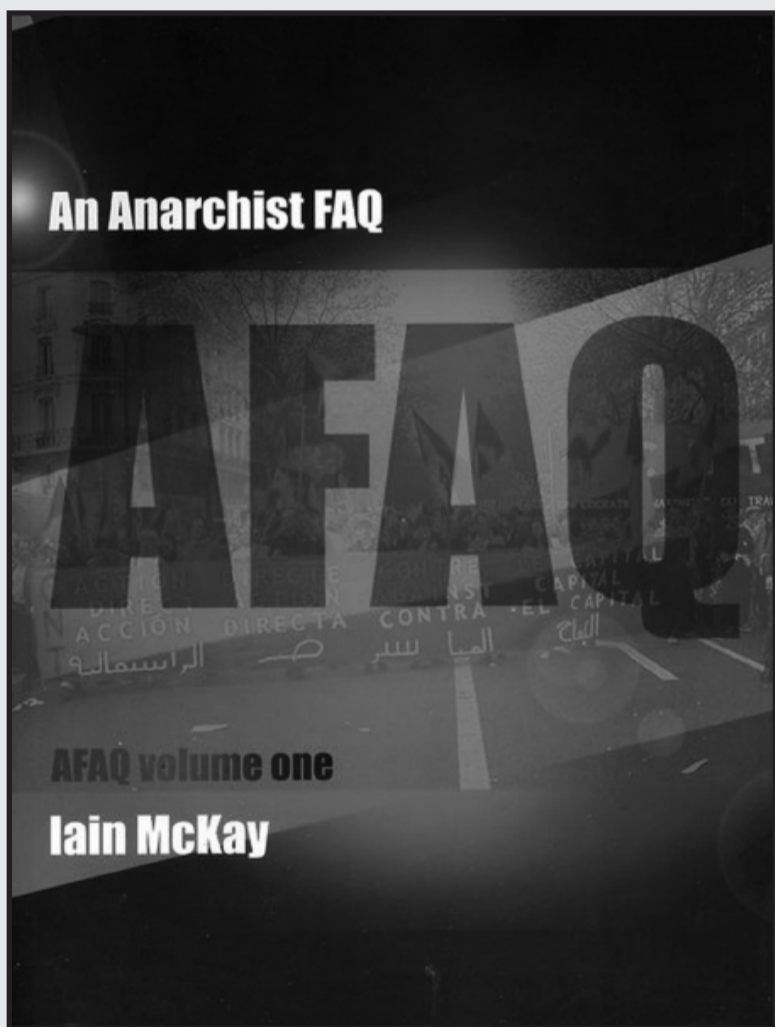
paign organising meetings, public talks, film nights and much more, for example, board games on Sundays from 6pm and a wholefoods market on Thursday afternoons.

The shop itself boasts a growing collection of socialist, anarchist and other left and class-struggle books, pamphlets and papers while it's also home to more mainstream writings, at much better value than you'll find elsewhere. A large collection of second hand books at €2 each means you'll never know what treasures you might find while browsing around. Top quality coffee from the Zapatista communities of Mexico is also available. The store itself has a relaxed atmosphere, with couches for reading or simply lounging about with a cup of coffee or tea.



Since opening in early December the shop has been doing good business and is a focal point for grassroots organising, hosting meetings of WSM, Shell To Sea and many others. The shop is open to progressive groups as a meeting space, simply enquire

in store. We are hoping the space becomes an important community tool for gathering and exchanging ideas, hosting meetings and a rallying point for democratic organising and effective direct action.



Review of An Anarchist FAQ

This is easily the most comprehensive FAQ on anarchist theory, history and practice available today. The Anarchist FAQ provides the answers to questions as straightforward as "What is Anarchism?" but also responds to inquiries about what an anarchist society would look like. It first appeared online as a rebuttal to claims that "anarcho-capitalism" was a form of anarchism but its scope has since been hugely expanded.

Brian Fagan

The book presents answers to questions about all aspects of anarchism while also responding to the criticisms levelled at anarchism from both the left and right. It also includes an interesting appendix on the symbols of anarchy. It describes the history of the black flag used by anarchists including its use by Nestor Makhno's partisans in the Russian Revolution when they managed to keep Ukraine free of authoritarian rule for two years.

The writing is such that the reader can find him/herself drawn into the book quite rapidly. It explains complex ideas in a relatively simple manner and it contains many illuminating and memorable quotes that capture the idea that they are expressing very well. Similarly, Clifford Harper put the idea of anarchism eloquently when he wrote "Like all great ideas, anarchism is pretty simple when you get down to it - human beings are at their best when they are living free of authority."

The purpose of the book is to present the case for anarchism, to convince people they should become anarchists and to act as a resource for anarchists. It is the go to guide for the curious and critical about anarchist theory, history, and practice. More a reference volume than a primer, the FAQ engages with questions in a thorough, matter-of-fact style. If you thought Wikipedia was the place to delve into the ideas of anarchism then think again, "An Anarchist FAQ" can be acquired in paperback form and is also found, in full, online at www.anarchistfaq.org.

€20.00 [including postage] from WSM Books, P.O. Box 1528, Dublin 8.

European Anarchists Meet in Paris

Over the weekend of February 5th the Workers Solidarity Movement sent delegates to Paris for a conference of European groups involved in Anarkismo.net. This multi-lingual news and analysis website is supported by 31 organisations around the world.

Julian Brophy

Members of Alternative Libertaire from France, Organisation Socialiste Libertaire from Switzerland, Liberty & Solidarity from Britain, Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici from Italy, Counter Power from Norway and the WSM spent the weekend debating and agreeing a set of motions. These included proposals to improve communication between our different or-

ganisations, and to develop common understanding and strategies with regards to workplace organisation, migration & the European Union. We also informed each other of the current struggles happening in our respective countries and the development of our organisations.

At the start of the conference we presented a detailed report on the WSM and our activities. The other organisations did likewise and this, alongside the informal discussions between delegates, has greatly expanded our knowledge of the day-to-day activity of the European Anarkismo affiliates. We hope this conference becomes the first step in an ongoing process of improving co-operation and in encouraging others to get involved in Anarkismo both on the European and global level. www.anarkismo.net



Subscriptions

If you would like to subscribe to Workers Solidarity, fill out the following form and send to:

**Workers Solidarity Movement,
PO Box 1528,
Dublin 8.**

or email us at : national@wsm.ie

Name:

Address:

