

75 years of principled struggle

The policy adopted on both sides of the Atlantic is to blow up the bubble a bit more, bailing out the bankers and speculators, giving no help to workers threatened with the loss of their homes or their pensions. If successful, this will only postpone the crash, not avert it.

Clearly, interfering in the market in the interest of private investors, banks and big monopolies is okay. Hunger and food shortages are affecting tens of millions of people as countries are forced to switch from growing food to growing bio-fuels to feed the western addiction to cars.

Good sense has not entered into the consciousness of our policy-makers. The drive to uncontrolled capitalism continues: freedom for speculators, the privatisation of public assets, cuts in public services, increasing military spending . . . The Lisbon Treaty is a part of that process.

The Irish Government, like the others, is responding by cuts in public services, including the already notoriously inadequate health service. Meanwhile grants, tax breaks and sites on public land are available to private health companies from the United States. Home-owners are strapped to the limit to pay mortgages on houses that are greatly overpriced. Families are locked in to financial structures that will burden them into old age. The equally blinkered British government is intent on privatising water supplies in Northern Ireland.

The hollowing out of democracy

The Lisbon Treaty presents the Irish labour movement with a dilemma: whether to take a narrow view and seek some sort of cobbled-together settlement with the Government in regard to agency workers in return for giving their support to this treaty, or to take an internationalist position and strike a blow for the workers' movement throughout Europe.

When the Treaty of Lisbon was being negotiated the labour movement believed that "social Europe" was an intrinsic part of the European Union. But recent decisions of the European Court of Justice have firmly demolished that myth. The Viking, Laval and Ruffert cases have laid bare the real motives underlining the neo-liberalist policies at the heart of the European Union.

This treaty would further undermine democracy and democratic control at the national level, replacing accountability with diktat by unelected bureaucrats. It would cede to the European Union greater powers to make laws that would be binding on us in many new areas, without any democratic mandate, and would further erode the role of national parliaments and the ability of citizens to influence or effect change at the national level. Over the coming decades, democracy at the national level would be hollowed out, devoid of any real or meaningful substance.

Building a centralised bureaucracy

This is designed to allow corporate lobbyists the maximum influence over laws and decision-making by the European Commission and thereby the Council of Ministers. An estimated three thousand such committees exist, their personnel unknown. This process is about the construction of a neo-liberalist superstate, giving maximum freedom of operation to capital with a minimum of regulation, and the maximum regulation of labour with a minimum of rights. If they succeed in their strategy we would have more rights as "consumers" than as citizens.

The "Charter of Fundamental Rights"

If rights are fundamental, they are rights in all circumstances. Recent decisions by the European Court of Justice have ruled that they are not fundamental or absolute but must be considered in relation to their "social function." What the monopolies and the political elite are building is a European Union in which workers will be pitched against each other in a race to the bottom. "Divide and rule" has become the main card to be played by employers, pitting workers against workers. This will lead to growing racism and potential violence as workers are locked in to economic structures that we cannot change.

Working-class • Revolutionary • Patriotic • Internationalist

The privatisation of public services

The growing number of services directives, regarding the health service, public transport, etc., are for opening up public services to competition—that is, privatisation. This strategy is for pushing more and more public services into private or corporate hands, narrowing the public economy and the state's role in economic decision-making and the provision of services. This strategy is to raid the public purse to overcome capitalism's growing contradictions. The European Union of itself would get new powers in such areas as taxation.

Independent Irish foreign policy

The European Union would become superior to its member-states. If it adopted a policy in relation to an international issue, all member-states would have to follow. This would mean the end of any independent foreign policy. The EU "high representative" would speak for everyone.

The need to resist

There is a growing need to resist the continuing assault on workers' wages and conditions, both nationally and internationally. We need stronger, better-organised and more independent trade unions. "Social partnership" has sapped much of the movement's strength and stripped workers of an independent political and economic view of society.

For seventy-five years the Communist Party of Ireland has been to the fore in building workers' organisations, in the mobilising of workers and the unemployed in defence of their rights, in the struggle for gender equality.

As a party we have striven to bring unity to the working class, to bring unity to our country. We have stood alongside those nations and peoples that were struggling for national liberation and for social justice and for those attempting to build socialism in very difficult conditions.

Communists played a leading role in establishing the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, striving to unite people around demands that would weaken unionism and lay bare its anti-democratic practices and its anti-worker policies.

Ireland needs a strong working-class party, a party that has a long and proud record of uncompromising struggle to end exploitation, for social and gender equality and for national unity—an internationalist party.

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Workers' rights now under attack

Globally, capitalism is experiencing a growing financial crisis of enormous proportions, confounding many economic gurus, who are unable to understand or to explain the extent of the problem, which is leading to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs and the wiping out of workers' pension funds.

After the last great crisis of capitalism and the terrible war it unleashed, governments instituted controls over big business and finance. For some years now these controls have been whittled away by governments in Europe and the United States. Institutions of the European Union have steadily pushed back state regulation, allowing a free-for-all for financial sharks, inevitably bringing about financial mayhem and the economic crisis we are now threatened with.