



# SOCIALIST VOICE

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## Respect the people's decision!

**T**HE seventh of June will go down in history as a great victory for democracy and common sense. The Government was obliged by the Constitution to consult the people on the Treaty of Nice, a treaty that would have far-reaching effects on the Irish state and constitution in a whole range of areas, while conceding more powers to Brussels. They elicited the opinion of the electorate in a popular referendum, and received a momentous shock.

The political establishment—Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party, the ICTU, bosses and big farmers' groups—supported by a powerful majority of the national media, called for a “yes” vote. They were ignored; their honeyed words and bullying tactics were ineffective. The Treaty of Nice was rejected.

The result of the referendum was 54 per cent against and 46 per cent in favour. If the result had been the reverse, the size of the turn-out would not have been a factor, as it now is: the “yes” campaign would have been very happy to claim victory. It is also clear that working people in urban areas voted no and the middle class voted yes, with the large farmers staying at home. This is the first referendum in relation to the European Union in which the establishment could not promise a cheque in the post. *They could not buy a “yes” vote.*

Since the result we have had acres of print on the issue; the Government lobby and their cronies in the media have spoken thousands of words. They are attempting to explain away the decision of the people and, more importantly, to explain how to get them to change their minds so they can revisit the issue in a new referendum, without causing major political problems and an even bigger rejection of the treaty next time round.

Some in the political establishment—such as the former Minister for Justice Desmond O'Malley, founder

of the Progressive Democrats—came very close to calling the people stupid, claiming it was a mistake to consult them. It is also claimed that the issues were “far too complicated for people to understand and adjudicate upon.” In summary, the overwhelming chorus from the “yes” side was that the people were “confused” and that the “no” campaign raised many red herrings and misled the electorate.

**It is clear from comments to radio phone-in programmes and letters to newspapers that people had a very clear idea why they voted no.**

There is no doubt that we will be forced to go back to this issue again. It is in the interests of European monopoly capitalism to have the Treaty of Nice adopted: it is a final cornerstone in the construction of the new European superstate.

Of course the Treaty of Nice was about enlargement, but it was also about a lot more: the establishment of greater military co-operation at EU level; the full integration of the Western European Union into

the political structures of the European Union; the political adoption of the “Rapid Reaction Force,” with 60,000 combat troops together with thousands of back-up personnel; the elevated role for the “Political Security Committee,” which would have the power to send the RRF to regions or countries where it felt the European Union's “strategic interests” were threatened—all this

## The Irish people have done a service to democratic forces throughout Europe

“As the separate individual is to the family, so the separate nation is to humanity. The perfect family is that which best draws out the inner powers of the individual; the perfect world is that in which the separate existence of nations is held most sacred. There can be no perfect Europe in which Ireland is denied even the least of its national rights; there can be no worthy Ireland whose children brook tamely such denial. If such denial has been accepted by soulless slaves of politicians, then it must be repudiated by Irish men and women whose souls are still their own.”—**James Connolly** (*Workers' Republic*, 12 February 1916).

without the necessity of consulting the United Nations or receiving its mandate for any actions.

## The people were quite clear about why they voted no

At present the militarisation of the European Union does not threaten or undermine NATO but rather complements it. No doubt the majority of the “combat troops” will come from the poorer present and future EU member-states, particularly those of eastern Europe. The coming together of the member-states in a closer military alliance will provide them with a bigger say at the NATO table and will be a major counterbalance to the United States. Though in the short term this appears to be an attractive proposition, in the long run these two powers have shared interests in the political, economic and strategic spheres. The United States can ignore them as individual states, but together they can have a bigger say.

Brigid Laffan—one of the most Europhile of them all within academia and a leading advocate of the European Movement and “yes” campaigner—in an article in the *Irish Times* attacked the “no” campaign’s criticism of NATO and its protests against increased co-operation with it. This leads us to the conclusion that she and other advocates of the yes vote are indeed in favour of closer links and co-operation with NATO.

On the issue of enlargement, people were also quite clear about why they voted no. It was the possibility of a loss of sovereignty, with more and more powers going to unelected bureaucrats in Brussels, that motivated them. They objected to more power being ceded to the bigger countries, and they objected to the further removal of the national veto over many areas affecting their lives.

When Ireland joined the EEC in 1973 the conditions of entry were less defined and looser than those now being constructed for new applicant countries. They will have to adopt the economic liberalism criteria laid down by the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties and the Single European Act, including the narrow guidelines for state investment and support for state industries and the privatisation of huge swathes of state industries and social and public services.

The cohesion funds are obviously ending. The common agricultural policy is dead: larger production units are now required within capitalist rationalisation. The European Commission believes that industrialised agriculture will provide for cheaper and more cost-effective food production. Down go the 14 million Polish small farmers.

The Irish Government are obviously stunned by the result, and they will take their time before they revisit this issue. The establishment of a “national consultative process” and a debate on the future of Europe is to be welcomed; but it’s a little late in the day. Brussels has

already established the ground rules. Nonetheless this process will give everyone with any reservations about the present and future direction of the European Union an opportunity to engage with the wider public on this vital issue. This must not be allowed to become another talking-shop.

It is also obvious that the establishment would like to simply go through the motions of consulting and listening to the “concerns” of the public. Those who have reservations and concerns must begin now to set out their stall and their alternative views of the European Union. But first of all we must get clarification from the Government on how the consultation with the people will shape Government policy, and how the expression of the people’s rejection of the Treaty of Nice will be reflected in the Government’s approach to its European partners.

What we need to do is set down some basic points from which to work.

Enlargement can go ahead under existing conditions and the Enlargement Declaration attached to the Treaty of Nice. This would allow the candidate countries to participate in the shaping of the future of the European Union.

## The Treaty of Nice must now be abandoned

The European Union must respect the decision of the Irish people and abandon the Treaty of Nice. If one country votes no, then it falls. If they are true to what they claim is the democratic will of the people, *the Government must express the democratic will of the people by using its veto on Nice*. There must now be

- a new treaty that respects the equality of nations and the sovereignty of the people at national level;
- a new treaty that clearly defines the role of the national states and governments vis-à-vis EU institutions;
- “glasnost”—the opening up of all decision-making processes, negotiations and administration of EU institutions to public scrutiny and debate. There can be no closed areas. The public must be consulted at the beginning and during the debates and be the final arbiter on future treaties and the future direction of the European Union.

**It is clear that the people of a number of other EU member-states would reject the Treaty of Nice if given the democratic opportunity of a referendum. The Irish electorate has done a service to democratic forces throughout Europe.**

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**COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND**  
**PÁIRTÍ CUMANNACH NA hÉIREANN**  
43 East Essex Street · Dublin 2  
[www.communistpartyofireland.ie](http://www.communistpartyofireland.ie)