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European Union threatens the right to strike

EARLIER this month the European Court of Justice moved to decide in effect whether workers within the European Union have a fundamental right to strike. The court heard two separate test cases on 9 and 10 January brought by the Finnish shipping company Viking Line and the Latvian building firm Laval against trade unionists who dared to take strike action.

Viking Line took legal action against the International Transport Workers' Federation after Finnish seafarers struck when the company tried to register a liner in Estonia to take advantage of 60 per cent lower wages. Laval is claiming that Swedish trade unions broke EU law when they held a strike after the Latvian company brought in lower-paid Latvian workers to build a school in the Swedish town of Vaxholm.

Both cases will determine whether businesses can move to take advantage of cheap eastern European labour without the threat of strike action, and whether EU law overrides national laws that protect workers from exploitation.

It is no coincidence that these cases have been brought after the European Parliament rubberstamped the Services Directive, which is designed to create a single market in services throughout the European Union and to undermine national laws on pay and conditions for workers.

The EU Commissioner for the Internal Market, Charlie McCreevy, has made it clear that the European Commission fully backs the Latvian company and the social dumping that it had created. "If member-states continue

to shield themselves from foreign company takeovers and competition, then I fear that the internal market will begin to dissolve," he said. "The question here is whether or not Sweden has implemented article 49 in the Treaty on Free Movement."

EU institutions have a clear agenda of giving big business the absolute freedom to do what it likes, when it likes, and where it likes, regardless of laws decided by elected national parliaments

Meanwhile—not surprisingly—in a submission to the European Court of Justice the British government claims that collective action, which includes strikes, is not a fundamental EU right, and that rights guaranteeing free movement within the single market are more important.

However, the vice-president of the Swedish trade union confederation,

Wanja Lundby-Wedin, has pointed out that industrial action is, by its very nature, an obstacle to the activities of a company and free movement. "The right to collective action is, together with freedom of association and the right to negotiate and conclude collective agreements, recognised as a fundamental right in international conventions," she said. "As a result, if the European Court of Justice finds that the industrial action taken in Vaxholm is against EU law, it would have serious consequences, and not just for Nordic industrial relations systems. What until now have been regarded as fundamental rights of workers in all democratic states would be undermined in the name of free movement."

For countries such as Finland, Denmark, and Sweden, which have constitutional protection for trade union rights, a ruling in favour of Viking or Laval would make EU law incompatible with their national rules. As a result, the Swedish union federation has stated that it would withdraw support for Swedish membership of the European Union altogether if the court rules against national collective bargaining legislation.

“Hatred or fear of Communism is not a very prevalent feeling where hunger and misery exist, certainly not as prevalent as hatred and fear of hunger and misery themselves can be. The U.S. proclaims itself the defender of freedom. Freedom from what, or for what? It talks about the free peoples of the world. In what sense are they free? Free to work where they want? No, because there are no jobs. Free to live where they want? No, because they haven't even the food for life itself. Free to say what they want? No, because they can't raise their voices in protest against their exploiters without being jailed for Communism. Free to think what they want? No, because they've never even had the opportunity of schooling. Freedom for what? God knows.—Rev. Thomas R. Melville, Guatemala (letter to *Commonweal*, 30 June 1967).”

Even the general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, John Monks, argues that a decision in favour of Viking and Laval would have serious consequences with voters in the Nordic countries. "It would be very, very serious for them. It would tip opinion very much against the EU," he said.

However, the European Union is founded on the so-called "four freedoms"—the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labour (meaning people)—and these are enshrined in all EU Treaties. The discredited EU Constitution also contained these four "freedoms," but not the fundamental

right to take strike action. It did, however, enshrine the right of employers to lock out workers.

It is notable that the use of industrial agreements to implement EU legislation was accepted at the time of Sweden's accession in 1995—as was acknowledged by the European Commission in its submission to the European Court of Justice in January 2006. The Swedish Building Workers' Union confirmed its commitment to "a labour market model based on principles of openness, equality and flexibility. As was made clear to the ECJ today, our overriding aim is to prevent inequality between European workers."

Following the hearing the European Court of Justice decided to defer a ruling in the dispute until later this year. But whatever the outcome of these test cases, EU institutions have a clear agenda of giving big business the absolute freedom to do what it likes, when it likes, and where it likes, regardless of laws decided by elected national parliaments. Moreover, it gives a clear indication of how such obscure and thoroughly anti-democratic EU institutions as the European Court of Justice can decide laws for more than 500 million people without the knowledge of most citizens.

Choice but no choice

THE crisis in the public health system continues to grow and deepen. The solutions presented by this Government, as pushed by Mary Harney as Minister for Health, are exacerbating an already bad situation. Two-and-a-half years in charge of health and her ideological drive to impose private medicine continues.

January started with 320 day patients lying on trolleys in accident and emergency departments and in hospital corridors. The Treatment Purchase Scheme—introduced as a temporary measure—is nothing more than a means of pushing public patients on a conveyor-belt system into the private hospitals and clinics, further enriching private medical corporations and the elite group of consultants.

We ended 2006 with the announcement that the British private health insurer BUPA was pulling out of the Irish health insurance market, because it disagreed with risk equalisation—this despite the fact that it is making 18 per cent profits here in Ireland while in Britain it makes 5 per cent.

BUPA announced that it was withdrawing from Ireland following a High Court decision to uphold the legality of the controversial risk equalisation scheme. This provides that insurance companies with fewer elderly subscribers must compensate other companies that have higher numbers of elderly—and therefore more costly—subscribers.

Under the scheme, BUPA would have to pay its main competitor, VHI, €161 million over three years, during which time its profit would

be an estimated €64 million. BUPA has about 475,000 subscribers. From this month, anyone in Ireland whose policy with the company is due for renewal will have to seek an alternative insurer.

Irish hospitals have now become dangerous places for those who are admitted even for minor operations, because of the spread of the MRSA (drug-resistant) hospital bug. The combination of 100 per cent bed occupancy and the privatisation of cleaning services is leading to a situation where hygiene is being sacrificed.

Cleaning workers are poorly trained or poorly supervised by medical staff to ensure that wards are properly cleaned and sterile. The majority of the cleaners are poorly paid. So the pressure on budgets is forcing more and more subcontracting of services. Cheap is not the same as best.

Harney continues to push to have private hospitals built on the grounds of public hospitals. This will only lead to further pressure on the public health service and further growth of the private health sector, leading inevitably to growing inequality.

Working people should be concerned when we see individuals like the beef baron Larry Goodman being a significant investor in private medicine, in particular the new private hospital in Galway. The first and primary objective of private hospital investors is to get a return on their investment, and preferably a growing return every year.

The ideology of this Government and in particular of the Progressive Democrats has to be confronted head on. Experience has shown that you can't have two parallel systems of health

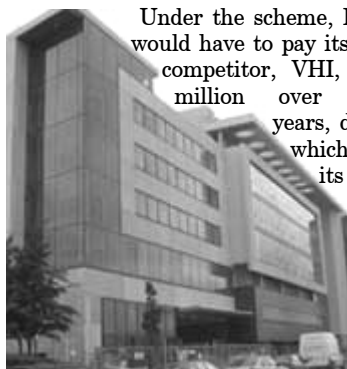
operating, one public and the other private. The most effective and efficient way to provide public health is to have a fully integrated public health service.

The Cuban health service is a model of how to provide a public health service to the mass of the people. The priority is the provision of health, not feeding the bloated profits of drug and medical corporations or an elite of consultants.

The Government, the Minister for Health and media pundits continue to trot out the mantra of "giving people choice." In fact we are not being given a choice but rather inequality. If you can pay you can avail of services that others who can't afford (or who oppose) private medicine have to wait for. If you have the money you can skip the queue and get ahead—not because your need is greater but because your purse is deeper.

This concept of "choice" is just old-fashioned inequality, which is inherent within capitalism. The provision of public health for all was one of the big successes of the struggle by the labour movement over many decades, aided by knowledge of the free universal health care provided by the Soviet Union. It is now being dismantled.

We need a united campaign of all those interested in the provision of public health, to come together to defend and advance public health from the attack by highly organised special-interest groups. The ICTU has a central responsibility for taking a leading role in this. It can unite all the forces committed to public health. In doing so, trade unions would be reconnecting with their own history and roots.



Paisley: a prisoner of history

THE political stalemate in the peace process has continued into the new year. Paisley appears unable to move politically. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has stated that during meetings held between his government and the DUP agreement was reached on the timetable and modus operandi for re-establishing a functioning Northern Assembly and Executive before the March elections, with the devolution of control over policing and justice by May 2008, while the DUP would agree to share government with Sinn Féin.

Paisley has subsequently denied that he made any agreement and now wants Blair to produce the proof of such an agreement, as difficulties and divisions mount within his party.

Sinn Féin has agreed to hold a special ard-fheis to discuss giving support to policing and the PSNI and for full control over policing and the justice system to be devolved to the new Executive in 2008.



The demand by the DUP for Sinn Féin to pledge support for policing and the legal system was only a ruse, in the hope that republicans would split or walk away.

Clearly within the DUP there are deep divisions about the way forward. Paisley and the upper echelons want to do a deal and secure Executive seats, while elements such as William McCrea and Jim Allister are completely opposed to any co-operation with Sinn Féin and continue to raise political demands that Sinn Féin must meet so as to create the "right" conditions for sharing government.

There are no limits to the obstacles that McCrea and others will attempt to raise to block change. Each time Sinn Féin says yes to the various demands raised both by Ulster Unionists and the DUP, elements within both parties dream up new ways to say no. It is a case of raising demands that you hope your enemy won't accept, so you can

walk away with the appearance of being the one who is reasonable.

It is strange and indeed ironic that unionists are so opposed to devolved government with full powers when they had just such an assembly, with similar powers, which they abused for more than fifty years when they operated a virtual one-party statelet. Paisley has built his political party and his career on saying "no." Now that he has assumed the leading voice of unionism he is unable to enforce his "no" on developments.

Unionism, as we have stated many times, is caught up in conditions that have changed. The debate over policing is not really about policing but about unionism having nothing left to offer. Unionism must realise that even if the Assembly and Executive, and the elections in March, are frozen, cross-border economic and political co-operation will continue and can only grow.

Since the beginning of the peace process, unionists—both the DUP and UUP—have raised one obstacle after another—not because they believed they could win but in the hope that republicans would not step forward; their agenda could be delivered by provoking a "no" from republicans. Each time they got a "yes" they scrambled for a new "no" to bring forward.

In the past, in response to the demands of the civil rights movement, unionists responded in the only way they knew, and that was by the use of violence, using the state to block advance. Today they no longer control the levers of government. Their main backers, the British, have other allies in Ireland they wish to work with.

Who will gain most if the impasse over policing can be overcome? There would be a police force that is not controlled exclusively by unionism, policing controlled at the local level, with no involvement in its running by the British. A devolved Assembly and local Executive with maximum economic and political powers will be a significant platform on which to build and from which to push for greater political and economic reintegration on this island.

There is the potential in developing a

political strategy that can make what was the call for a British "declaration of intent" a reality. It is highly unlikely that we will see or hear the British declaring disengagement and the Union Jack being lowered over Stormont. What is essential is that it is secured in real, practical terms, that it is there in substance.

While there is still the potential for forward political momentum, all democratic forces need to find unity of action, both inside and outside the present political structures and any future Assembly and Executive.

The experience of the struggle of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement shows that when we have unity and co-operation among all anti-unionist forces, gains are made and advances secured. Military or political adventurism has shown in the past that it plays into the hands of those opposed to Irish democracy and working-class unity.

Saying "no" is no longer an option for unionists, as the balance of political momentum is not in their favour. Equally, the pressure must be maintained on the British to push ahead with economic and political cross-border co-operation and integration. The potential is there to make Paisley yesterday's man.

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Not such good value

IF you walk into the Penney's (Primark), Tesco or ASDA shop in your nearest shopping centre or main street in Dublin, Belfast, Cork or any Irish city or town you will be dazzled by the range of clothing and other items available, and at very reasonable prices. You might even wonder how they could make them so cheaply.

What lies behind the bright colours and the wide variety of items? Where are they made? What sort of conditions have the workers who make them? What is the reality behind the slick advertisements and the life-style images portrayed?

Garment manufacturing is the main industry in Bangladesh. In 1970 there was only one garment factory in the country; by 1977 the number had risen to 8, but by 1984 it was 587. In 1998 the total was 2,650, and today it is 3,300, employing 1.6 million people (83 per cent of whom are women workers).

76 per cent of Bangladeshi exports are garment-related goods, exported to the United States, Canada, and countries of the European Union and the Caribbean. Recently Bangladesh began small-scale exports to Japan, Australia, and some other countries. The main raw materials for these garments—mainly fabrics—are imported from other countries.

In late 2006 the British campaigning organisation War on Want published a report on the working conditions, including wages, of the many thousands of workers in Bangladesh who work long hours in the factories where these clothes are produced. The conditions these workers experience are not unique but are mirrored in other underdeveloped countries, as well as in China and other Asian countries, by millions of workers.

The report points out that many of these garment workers work between 60 and 90 hours per week. It quotes one worker, Lina, who at twenty-two years of age moved to the capital, Dhaka, as a

skilled machinist, which puts her near the top of the skills pyramid. She makes clothing for Primark (called Penney's in Ireland), ASDA (i.e. Wal-Mart) and Tesco and earns about £17 for a 60 to 90-hour working week. Wages in the Bangladeshi clothing industry were halved in the 1990s, making these workers the cheapest in the world. A significant number of workers earn 5 pence an hour for an 80-hour week.

Sixty workers from six different garment factories in Bangladesh were interviewed. All six factories produce "significant amounts" of clothing for ASDA; four also produce for Tesco and three for Primark. All three of these giant retailers buy tens of millions of pounds' worth of goods manufactured in Bangladesh every year. The managing director of Primark, Arthur Ryan, summed up its buying policy when he was approached by a factory owner with an item costing £5 that would retail at £10. Ryan is reported to have said that he was not interested unless he came back with a product that cost £3 and could retail at £7. "I don't care how you go about it—just do it," he said.

ASDA, Tesco and Primark have all signed a common code of conduct, which states that workers will not be regularly required to work more than 48 hours per week and will be provided with at least one day off for every seven-day period on average. Overtime is to be voluntary and will not exceed twelve hours a week, will not be demanded regularly, and will always be paid at a higher rate.

The investigation for this report showed that in reality working hours in

factories supplying all three retailers far exceed this maximum. In all six factories most workers reported that they work from 12 to 16 hours per day and regularly work 80 hours a week. The minimum found was 10 hours per day, six days per week. Milly, sewing clothes for ASDA and Primark, works up to 16 hours each day. Abdul, who works in a factory supplying ASDA and Tesco, works 60 to 70 hours of overtime every month, while his colleague Rahimul works 90 to 100 hours. Ifat, whose factory supplies all three brands, worked an incredible 140 hours of overtime during August 2006.

Workers are set demanding targets that must be filled before they can leave the factory. Overtime is compulsory, and many of these workers do not even receive the correct payment for the overtime they are forced to work.

When workers work until 10 p.m., completing five hours of extra work, the official record book shows that they have worked only two extra hours. This serves multiple purposes, such as appearing to comply with local labour laws, satisfying foreign buyers about the legitimate use of overtime, and—most importantly—robbing the workers of their hard-earned wages.

This super-exploitation of workers in cramped and overcrowded working conditions has led to a severe decline in health and safety, resulting between February and March 2006 in a number of factories collapsing or going on fire, with the death of hundreds of workers.

Anti-union strategies

Workers have courageously attempted to organise and join trade unions. In one case twenty-two union members at a factory supplying ASDA who demanded their overtime pay were beaten, fired, then imprisoned on trumped-up charges. The workers also claimed that the factory required nineteen-hour shifts, paid no overtime, and denied maternity leave and benefits.

Wal-Mart in the United States has a union-bashing "rapid reaction" team, complete with its own aircraft. As a Wal-Mart spokesperson put it, "While unions may be appropriate for other companies, they have no place at Wal-Mart."



In February 2006 ASDA was fined £850,000 by an employment tribunal for attempting to induce employees to give up their right to collective bargaining. When Tesco advertised for people to manage its new American branch in May 2006 the job specification included “maintaining union-free status” and “union avoidance activities.” Tesco’s retail branch in Thailand, called Tesco Lotus, was unionised only after five years of operation, and since then the union has been under tremendous pressure.

Factory inspectors

These huge retail giants, and others, claim that the factories producing garments for them are regularly inspected, but the report shows how such inspections take place. “Workers get prior notice of social audits and are instructed to lie to the buyers’ representatives about their wages, working hours and other health and safety issues. Social auditors have interviewed only a handful of workers, but all these workers have been coached and intimidated by their managers to ensure they said the right things. As Amin reported, ‘During my interview with the audit team I had to lie as instructed by factory management.’”

This is all for the sake of reassuring western consumers, rather than improving the working conditions of the workers. These inspectors are as useful as our own labour inspectors here in Ireland. A further indicator of how farcical the inspections are is that they do not inspect home workers or sub-contracted work-places.

This is exploitation on a vast scale. The main beneficiaries are the global corporations that make vast profits. We as workers here in the developed

countries benefit by cheap clothing, which takes the pressure off our own limited disposable income, perhaps allowing us the luxury of summer holidays or repayments on a new car, or the little extra for our SSIA savings.

There is no such thing as a free lunch: someone else pays the price further down the food chain. That is the reality of the barbarism of capitalism and its divide-and-rule approach.

Some facts about these three companies

Tesco made a profit of £2.2 billion in 2005—with the highest rate of return coming from its Irish operations. Tesco PLC is one of the three biggest retailers in the world as it expands from its base in Britain. The group had annual sales in 2004/05 of £37.1 billion (€55.65 billion).

Primark is a retail group that operates a total of 160 shops in Britain, Spain, and Ireland (where it trades under the Penney’s name). Primark employs more than 20,000 people. Primark Stores Ltd is a subsidiary of Associated British Foods, which is a “diversified” food, ingredients and retail group with global sales of £6 billion.

Wal-Mart has 6,600 shops in thirteen countries and is the world’s largest retailer, with sales of \$312 billion for the year ending January 2006. Wal-Mart operates in the North of Ireland as ASDA.

What can we do?

■ Write to these corporate giants and ask for an explanation about the working conditions that workers have to endure in the factories that produce clothes for their retail outlets.

■ Try to spend your money in shops that have a more ethical approach to the

goods they sell.

■ Get your union to contact the National Garment Workers’ Federation and the Bangladesh Agricultural Farm Labour Federation to show solidarity and to offer whatever material or moral support they may need to combat these deadly labour practices imposed on garment workers.

Tesco Ireland

Phone 1850 744844

E-mail customer.services@tesco.ie

Primark

PO Box 644

Dublin 1

E-mail enquiries@primark.ie

Angela Spindler

ASDA

Great Wilson Street

Leeds LS11 5AD

England

Phone 0044 113 2435435

National Garment Workers’ Federation

GPO Box No. 864

Dhaka 1000

Bangladesh

Phone 00 880 19 340268

Fax: 00 880 29 562562



A meeting organised by the National Garment Workers’ Federation of Bangladesh

Union-busters of the world, unite?

THE global union-busting industry is now worth several million dollars a year, aiding employers in undermining union strength not only in its traditional stronghold of the United States but also in Canada, Australia, France, Germany, Britain, and Ireland.

Recent research by the London School of Economics shows that union-busting consultants and law firms are no longer merely responding to employers’ demands for their services but are engaged in aggressively creating demand by encouraging managements to avoid the “catastrophe” that is unionisation.

In Britain the Burke Consultancy Group has been involved in several recent campaigns in such companies as T-Mobile, Amazon, Virgin, and Calor Gas. Many unions are not even aware of the presence of these consultants, as they opt to work beneath the radar,

using local management and supervisors to implement their strategies.

In all its campaigns the Burke Group informs clients that it enjoys an international reputation for “eliminating union incursions” (www.tbglabor.com/resources/union_avoidance.aspx). In Ireland some consultants have been active in selling the idea that “most Irish organisations would be far more productive if there was no union in the organisation” (*Industrial Relations News*, May 2005). Additionally, elements of the legal profession have been very quick in carrying out scare-mongering among employers over the

Industrial Relations (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (2004) as providing an alleged “Trojan horse” for union recognition and cultivating an image of “aggressive recognition campaigns” aimed at “helpless” employers.

There is some evidence that these agencies may even be supplanting the role of employers’ organisations in giving advice and practical help during recognition disputes. By developing and popularising effective union-avoidance strategies, consultants and others are making themselves an indispensable component of employers’ anti-union arsenal.

Bono takes the queen's shilling

WHAT is it with middle-aged Irish rock stars that they feel the need to validate their own existence by accepting the title “Sir” from the British state? First we had Bob Geldof, now followed by Bono (Paul Hewson), accepting the “honour” from that high-profile parasite living in Buckingham Palace, operating on behalf of British imperialism.



They follow in the footsteps of “Sir” Tony O’Reilly, owner of the Independent Newspapers Group, a company that has a history that is anti-union, anti-worker, viciously anti-republican, anti-neutrality, pro-EU, pro-Washington, and pro-British. Then there was “Sir” Michael Smurfit, head of the Smurfit Corporation (which has come under severe criticism for its treatment of indigenous peoples in

Latin America).

Have these two individuals been rewarded for their services to rock music? No. For their fashion sense? No. Bob and Bono have been honoured for their services in campaigning to “end world poverty.” As our readers know only too well, world poverty is not ended but in fact increasing. Both Bush and Blair are in charge of countries where poverty is endemic. The likelihood of their seriously wanting to end world poverty, and changing the policies that are responsible for the spread and deepening of poverty globally, are very remote. If Bush won’t end poverty in the United States, he won’t end it in Africa.

We have to ask the question, Has the plethora of rock stars, celebrities and failed politicians added to or stymied the building of the necessary global alliance to struggle against poverty and for fair trade? Or are we cynical in believing that it was just another opportunity for some individuals to re-

invigorate their flagging career, to boost album sales? Or just an opportunity to court further media attention—driven, as most of them appear to be, by an exaggeration of their own self-importance? Is it the case, just like “Big Brother” reality television, that they have to have some dysfunctional Irish clown to perform?

Egos like Bob’s and Bono’s are easily stroked, and their concerns are easily corralled into safe photo-ops and handshakes for the cameras by the agents of global corporations and global imperialism.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the courting of celebrities can be a double-edged sword. They can be the vehicle by which the establishment can manipulate and sidetrack genuine people’s campaigns into a safe cul-de-sac.

As James Connolly wrote, “Yes, ruling by fooling is a great British art—with great Irish fools to practise on.”

READER’S REPLY

Sinn Féin and policing

THE following is a reply to an article in the December issue of *Socialist Voice* on the debate about policing in the North. The writer is an active republican and former member of Sinn Féin. It is our policy to encourage debate among all democratic and progressive opinion in Ireland. If you would like to contribute to this debate please send in your comments. Space is limited to 200 words. We are investigating the possibility of setting up a space on our web site to facilitate debate and the exchange of ideas among left and anti-imperialist forces.

A number of issues arise from the Communist Party’s position on republicans and policing as set out in the December issue of *Socialist Voice*.

The author posed several questions to those republicans opposed to the granting of support for the PSNI in occupied Ireland (and in broader terms An Garda Síochána in the 26 Counties).

As one such republican, I will attempt to address those questions in a personal capacity.

Firstly, regarding the role of MI5 who will soon officially take on intelligence gathering responsibilities in the Six Counties relevant to “national security interests”—i.e. those who pose a threat to the British state in Ireland.

MI5 are needed in Ireland to protect the interests of the British government here and will be controlled by that government (to the extent that MI5 are controlled by anybody other than their own *raison d’être*). The announcement by the British government that MI5 will be taking on primary intelligence gathering responsibilities for republicans from this year onward is an indication that they are as determined as ever to uphold the Six County state.

The recent declaration by Tony Blair that MI5 will have no role in “civic policing” in the North does not affect their prominent role in “non-civic policing.” Indeed, one newspaper has reported that while the proportion of MI5 funding that is spent in the Six Counties has decreased in the last ten years, the actual amount has remained roughly the same.

The author of the December piece also posed the question, “Is there not some logic to the fact that if you are in government you can influence and shape how policing is carried out, that you have to take responsibility in order to ensure change in how policing is carried out?”

Herein lies the problem. Any northern administration that pro-PSNI republicans enter will not be sovereign—ultimate power will continue to lie in Westminster. The British government will retain tax-raising powers in the Six Counties and will thus control allocation of resources.

In matters relating to “national security” (British occupation) the PSNI chief constable will not be accountable to the Policing Board but the British Secretary of State.

Collaboration between the PSNI, MI5 and the British army will continue with local politicians powerless to stop it.

Recognition of the political reality that the PSNI will remain within the framework of the forces of occupation does not mean that you are avoiding or ignoring the issue—it does place an onus on you to develop a political strategy with that reality as your starting point.

Furthermore, the only model of policing on offer is the British model. The classically capitalist model of policing so adept at suppressing working class communities the world over.

Such a model is incapable of dealing with crime and only exacerbates the causes. Any negotiations between republicans and the British that have taken place on the issue will not result in the changing of the model but, at best, the tweaking of it.

What is being asked of republicans is that they take responsibility for the British model of policing in the shape of the PSNI without the power to radically transform it. Such a move would only result in damaging the credibility of the republican message in the communities who will continue to suffer at the hands of an incompetent and hostile police force.

In many instances of political action it's a case of not what you do but why you do it. The Sinn Féin Ard-Chomhairle motion that republicans back An Garda as well as the PSNI without any equivalent Patten type reforms is an indication that a republican endorsement of "law and order" is being sought for all the wrong reasons.

One thing must be made clear. Republican acceptance of the policing structures will not change the working class experience of policing. Anti-social behaviour will not suddenly end. The policing structures will still serve the interests of those they were set up to serve, and that's not the working class.

Any notion that Sinn Féin or anybody else can enter the most reactionary institution of power in the Six Counties

while the British maintain ultimate control and subvert its reason for existing is naïve.

A glance at the South African experience post-apartheid would be a case in point. There, even in the context of democratic sovereignty, the police force has continued to protect the same vested interests in the absence of a radical social and economic programme to truly transform society.

As Karl Marx once stated, "The working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes."

Republicans and socialists must provide the analysis that policing within the framework of the two states in Ireland is incapable of dealing with working class concerns, while providing leadership in their communities against anti-social behaviour.

Of course, the policing issue cannot be dealt with in isolation and must be seen within the overall context of the peace process and attempts to reinvigorate the Good Friday Agreement.

The basis of the GFA is that the resolution of the constitutional question in Ireland is still subject to the "principle of consent" (the unionist veto).

There is little doubt that a republican acceptance of the PSNI is the logical outcome of that agreement.

However, given that the GFA did not change the methodology of how a state is run, the PSNI will continue to uphold the unionist veto and suppress attempts to subvert that veto, with or without Sinn Féin support.

Finally, a question. Is it not possible, given the state that what's labelled the peace process has got itself into, that all of us who seek radical change, including the Communist Party, have squandered the latest opportunity to put an alternative political, social and economic programme to the people of Ireland?

International

The hanging of Saddam

THE political and military crisis facing the occupation forces in Iraq continues to deepen. Bush suffered a significant defeat in the recent mid-term elections, with the result that the two houses of Congress are now in the hands of the Democrats. Time will tell whether that party will rein in Bush or whether they will huff and puff and then fall in and follow the interests of US imperialism.

The hanging of Saddam Hussein after a trial carried out in what was clearly a kangaroo court, under the tutelage of an occupation army, was an affront to all those who suffered greatly at the hands of this person who was a CIA agent and US puppet for many decades. Saddam's execution was as much justice as he himself handed out to his political opponents, whether communist, trade unionist, Kurdish, or Shi'a, during his reign of terror. It is hard to believe that Saddam Hussein could have been hanged and appeared to die with dignity while his executioners taunted and baited him. The nature of the hanging and the religious and political affiliations of those who carried it out, from the Shi'a religious majority and supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr, was deliberately organised to provoke conflict and to reinforce sectarian divisions.

One other outcome of his execution is that it silences any potentially embarrassing revelations about the role of all the western governments in keeping Saddam in power over many decades.

His execution had the hands of the Americans and British all over it.

The response of the Irish Government was as we would expect from a government implicated in the con-

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tinuing occupation of Iraq by the United States: weak and subservient. They condemned the hanging but not the farce that was a trial, organised to secure that very outcome.

The puppet Iraqi government is not master in its own house. It was elected in a way whereby if people did not go out and vote and get their identity papers stamped they would not receive food or other supports. This “democratic” coercion clearly does not reflect what the Iraqi people desire.

Many within the mass media and among the military pundits are only now catching up with those who opposed this war of aggression, when we stated that the war was unwinnable and would lead only to massive loss of life and deep divisions within Iraq and within the region.

It was clear from early on in the occupation of Iraq that the objective was to establish a weakened, divided and compliant state. The capture of British soldiers with a carload of explosives on their way to bomb a mosque in al-Basrah was a significant indicator of

this strategy. British forces subsequently stormed the jail where these soldiers were being held and released them. We know from our own experience in the North of Ireland that the British have used loyalist paramilitaries to carry out assassinations and bombings in order to stir up divisions. We know they even encouraged the bombings in Dublin and Monaghan and political assassinations here in the Republic by loyalists.

They have deliberately provoked conflict between the Sunni and Shi’a religious groups to divide and weaken the resistance against the occupation forces. As in the past, the dominant political, colonial and imperialist powers have exploited religious, racial and tribal differences to secure their interests.

The experience in many colonised countries, including Ireland, is that the colonialists and later the imperialists turned a minority into the new ruling elite, thereby making that minority dependent on the former colonial power in order for them to retain their domin-

ant position. This divide-and-rule approach effectually left politics paralysed while the colonialists still had the real power, just as today they exaggerate the role and influence of the Shi’a religious groups and in particular that of Iran. This ensures the continued compliance of the oil-rich Sunni states, with the United States as their protector.

The Israelis encouraged the emergency of HAMAS to counter Fatah in Palestine, just as the British supported and promoted the religious extremists of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and other Arab states in smashing secular and democratic organisations and individuals.

They have never been afraid of religious extremism: they have simply used it. History has shown that where progressive movements have led the struggle there has been great potential to push religious extremism into the background; but if they fail, the vacuum is filled by others.

“Waist-deep in the Big Muddy”

by Pete Seeger

THIS song by Pete Seeger was planned for the “Smothers Brothers’ Comedy Hour” on American television in 1967, but the television channel CBS objected to Seeger’s references to the “big fool” in the White House. It was finally sung by Seeger on the “Comedy Hour” in 1968 as the finale in a medley of anti-war songs.

It was back in nineteen forty-two;
I was a member of a good platoon.
We were on manoeuvres in-a Loozianna,
One night by the light of the moon.
The captain told us to ford a river,
That’s how it all begun.
We were knee-deep in the Big Muddy,
But the big fool said to push on.

The sergeant said, “Sir, are you sure
This is the best way back to the base?”
“Sergeant, go on! I forded this river
’Bout a mile above this place.
It’ll be a little soggy, but just keep slogging;
We’ll soon be on dry ground.”
We were waist-deep in the Big Muddy,
And the big fool said to push on.

that the water was deeper
Than the place he’d once before been.
Another stream had joined the Big Muddy
’Bout a half mile from where we’d gone.
We were lucky to escape
from the Big Muddy
When the big fool said to push on.

The sergeant said,
“Sir, with all this equipment
No man will be able to swim.”
“Sergeant, don’t be a Nervous Nellie,”
The captain said to him.
“All we need is a little determination;
Men, follow me; I’ll lead on.”
We were neck-deep in the Big Muddy,
And the big fool said to push on.

Well, I’m not going to point any moral;
I’ll leave that for yourself.
Maybe you’re still walking,
you’re still talking;
You’d like to keep your health.
But every time I read the papers
That old feeling comes on:
We’re waist-deep in the Big Muddy,
And the big fool says to push on.

All at once the moon clouded over;
We heard a gurgling cry.
A few seconds later the captain’s helmet
Was all that floated by.
The sergeant said, “Turn around, men!
I’m in charge from now on.”
And we just made it out of the Big Muddy
With the captain dead and gone.

Waist-deep in the Big Muddy,
And the big fool says to push on.
Waist-deep in the Big Muddy,
And the big fool says to push on.
Waist-deep! Neck-deep! Soon even a
Tall man’ll be over his head; we’re
Waist-deep in the Big Muddy,
And the big fool says to push on!

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December: H. Doyle €20; J. Nolan €20; W. Ennis €20; Anon. €10; Connolly Books €50.

We stripped and dived and found his body
Stuck in the old quicksand.
I guess he didn’t know

SOCIALIST VOICE

43 East Essex Street · Dublin 2
(01) 6711943 · cpoi@eircom.net