

SOCIALIST VOICE

Monthly publication of Dublin District, Communist Party of Ireland

No. 54

January–February 2009

€1

More of the same

THE new year started much as the old year finished, with the economic forecast looking pretty bleak. The Government bank guarantee has not had the desired effect, with bank shares dropping to less than the price of a bar of chocolate. The bail-out and bringing into state ownership of Anglo-Irish Bank was a measure of desperation by a Government that has no clear idea of the extent of the growing economic crisis enveloping our country.

Unemployment is now about 8 per cent, according to figures for December issued by the Central Statistics Office. FÁS is predicting that unemployment will increase to 12 per cent by this time next year.

In December the Economic and Social Research Institute predicted that unemployment would rise to 10 per cent in 2009, while some establishment economists are predicting that it will be 15 per cent by January 2010. This would mean 420,000 people on the dole, compared with approximately 300,000 last December.

The building industry bosses are predicting that their industry, worth €38 billion in 2007, or 24 per cent of gross national product, may well fall by more than a half, to as low as €14 billion, by the end of 2010. Direct employment in the industry is expected to fall from 255,000 in late 2008 to 135,000 by the end of 2010.

Brian Cowen has acknowledged that the Government is going to have to find €15 billion in cuts over the next five years, beginning with €2 billion to reduce this year's estimated deficit of €20 billion. The Government is borrowing nearly €50 million a week to fill in the hole in revenue to meet current spending targets.

It has just emerged that another massive bill in the form of grants owing to farmers for the farm environment improvement scheme, totalling €400 million, is now due. This was not



acknowledged in the budget, nor had the Minister for Finance alluded to it.

The nationalisation of Anglo-Irish Bank is not for rescuing working people's savings but rather for bailing out the big investors in the bank, who were getting a big return from the massive speculative investments financed by the bank being made by some of the biggest property-developers, many of whom are providing the money to keep Fianna Fáil going.

These profiteers speculated not only on the Irish property market but right across the world, from Shanghai to New York. Irish workers are now being asked to go guarantor for these speculative debts. Public money is being used to bail out the property speculators, the big depositors in the bank, and Fianna Fáil, which politically represents them.

Two of the directors of Anglo-Irish Bank between them borrowed more than €170 million, with the bank's auditors, its board of directors, the Banking Regulator and the Revenue Commissioners all blindly unaware of such a

major hole in the borrowing side of the ledger. The top brass of this bank clearly saw the bank as a personal piggy-bank for dipping into when they needed money.

Not one person has been investigated, few if any questions have been asked, and all is sweetness and light. Irish workers will pick up the bill.

The remaining banks now totter on the brink, as they are unable or unwilling to come clean on the extent of toxic debt on their books. Sections of the establishment want the now state-owned Anglo-Irish Bank to be turned into a toxic bank and for all the toxic loans from Irish financial institutions to be dumped there.

What the politicians, bankers and speculators want is to shed their responsibilities regarding the massive debts

In this issue

- **DELL man walking** p. 2
- **Global Europe (part 2)** p. 3
- **A state bank is the only solution to the housing crisis** p. 5
- **American workers need our support** p. 7
- **Gaza massacre a crime against humanity** p. 8
- **Latin American news** p. 9
- **The Hegemony of English** p. 10

The market is following natural laws of economics and there is no reason why both prosperity and the market should not continue for years at this high level or even higher.—*World Almanac* (Wall Street, New York), 1929.

and to place them firmly on the back of the Irish state, and so on Irish workers. The Golden Circle have circled the wagons to ensure that their wealth is protected.

As the banks gear up to shed hundreds if not thousands of jobs, the flight of transnational corporations continues, with the announcement that Dell is to shift part of its manufacturing and assembly to Poland and to lay off hundreds of workers. Waterford Wedgwood is to close, with hundreds of skilled jobs being lost as glass production shifts to the Czech Republic.

A similar story is repeated throughout the North of Ireland, with job losses announced daily.

For nearly four decades the Irish political establishment has actively ceded more and more power and control over vast areas of public policy, in particular in relation to economic controls, to the EEC and European Union.

The only policy options open to the Government are to control public spending by cutting both the numbers employed in the public sector and their wages, reducing the terms and conditions of the remaining public-sector workers, or options in relation to taxation, as we have relinquished control over fiscal policy, interest rates, and the value of the currency—all determined by the European Central Bank, which in turn is controlled and its policy shaped by the needs and interests of the big powers at the heart of the European Union, in particular Germany.

There has been a determined and orchestrated campaign in the establishment media—in newspapers, on radio and on television—to assert that there is no other way forward. Without a doubt the Government and employers are massaging the budgetary figures to paint the picture as bleak as possible in order to secure the maximum conces-

sion from workers and their unions.

The Government and the employers' organisations in using the mass media are attempting to use the crisis to achieve a number of strategic goals: (1) to undermine existing wage levels, (2) to radically reverse the terms and conditions of workers in both the public and the private sector, (3) to undermine and if possible to break and divide the trade union movement, using public-sector against private-sector workers, (4) to reduce and reverse the advances made in relation to the provision of public services, and (5) to manipulate public opinion into accepting that an assault on state benefits is necessary.

We have to resist each and every attempt by this Government and the rich cabal of the Golden Circle in their efforts to make workers pay for the growing crisis. The defence of the public sector is the defence of gains fought for and hard won by generations of workers.

DELL man walking

THE 1,900 workers in Dell—the latest innocent victims of mobile capital and disposable labour—might be interested in findings by the Harvard economist Richard Freeman. He calculates that over the last twenty years the work force available to global capital has doubled. Indeed its size has tripled since 1980. This is due to workers from the former USSR, eastern Europe and China joining in the global labour market. The remaining increase came from population growth in countries that were already part of the capitalist system in 1980.

Marx notes that capitalists are already a “class for themselves,” as they are aware of their common interests. Workers, however, are only a “class in themselves,” in that—despite their common conditions—they do not see their common interests. Capitalist society reinforces this fragmentation of collective thinking by convincing workers that they are not workers but company associates, part of the Dell team, consumers, taxpayers—anything

you're having yourself as long as it's not called the working class.

Transnational corporations (acting-for-themselves) want to be able to move around the globe so they can avoid, evade, undercut, lay off and pollute at will in pursuit of profits. They move jobs to countries with fewer, weaker or non-existent labour and environmental standards. Governments fall over themselves to promote this practice by offering grants and tax subsidies out of public

funds so that the transnational will park its profit-exporting entity in their state for the foreseeable future. When the transnational inevitably proposes moving on, the local business community will call for a further lowering of labour and environmental standards to encourage it to stay a little longer.

These vested interests, which act in a manner akin to remora fish, will say (if challenged) that they are speaking on behalf of the endangered work force. The unsolicited representation of these vested interests masquerades as moral principles. Yet it is no substitute for democratically elected governments and independent trade unions standing up to these corporations.

Capitalists (who, according to Marx, are merely “capital personified”) have increased their ability to play one country off against another. The result is that the pretence that parliamentary democracy controls economics is further exposed. Our present system allows capitalists to move “their” property around the globe without concern for the impact on workers and society. Work forces are cast aside, regardless of their past loyalty and productivity.

What is required to combat capitalism is a strengthening of democratic control over capital at the local, national and international levels, not a lowering



Where Dell employees won't be going on their holidays: Wailea beach and resort, Hawai'i, owned by Michael Dell of Dell Computers

of wages to please capital. Some would say that such a move would challenge the notion of individual property rights. Tell that to a Dell worker whose individual property right to “their” job has been subject to a compulsory purchase order, with the sale and the price previously decided in some foreign board room, without the job-seller’s knowledge, participation, or approval.

Individual property rights emerged in the time of Aristotle and were even applied to wives and slaves. Today such a concept, that one individual could own another, is relegated to the criminal underworld or to feudal societies. Yet in today’s society we witness the increasing patenting of animal species, seeds, and plants, such as the extracts from the neem tree. Capitalists, and their mouth-pieces in the media, will proclaim that this is necessary in the “free” market.

Property rights and their markets ought to be subservient to society. This is the mechanism for a correctly functioning democracy. The notion that an adult spending about five minutes in a polling station every five years—or about one hour of their life—constitutes

democracy needs to be challenged. Democracy has to be extended to all aspects of people’s lives: the work-place, the community, education, health, etc.

Students of theoretical economics are familiar with the notion of the capitalist free market with its so-called invisible hand continuously readjusting prices and costs to equilibrium. The only other fraternity that require the notion of an invisible hand are pickpockets.

However, an invisible hand has been historically used by free-marketers to keep democracy out of the market. The result is that a global coup d’état has occurred that benefits those that are powerful in the market at the expense of the weaker sections. The global purchaser of labour never had it so good.

As for alternatives, regulating capitalism is an oxymoron. You cannot constrain a system that is more powerful than its constraints. Regulations that were designed to buttress up capital since its previous crisis in the 1930s were pared away at alarming speed since the 1970s. Ever since, individual capitalists have lobbied against

these regulations, avoided them through loopholes, evaded them illegally, had them superficially enforced, and ensured that violations were seldom punished and if so lightly. Therefore, a new raft of regulations or amended old ones will suffer the same systemic resistance, avoidance and evasion as before. And those who engage in such practices will have the financial resources, as before, to do so.

A system designed to champion individualism as its cornerstone is not a sustainable long-term solution for the planet and its inhabitants. The entire capitalist system needs to be turned on its head. Production of the necessary goods and services for society needs to be controlled by the many, not the few.

Dell workers around the world have more in common with each other than they have with the people who decide to either hire or fire them. Dell workers have more in common with other workers than they have with the people who allow, call for and promote capital in its personified form to act as a class-for-itself against the rest of society.

[JC]

“Global Europe”: An open door for big-business lobbyists

THE European Commission obviously listened carefully to the demands of large EU corporations, and the final Global Europe Communication has a clear focus on FTAs (free-trade agreements). It establishes criteria for choosing new FTA “partners,” including market potential (economic size and growth), the level of protection against EU export interests (the less protection, the greater the benefits), and whether they are negotiating with the European Union’s main competitors.

The European Trade Union Confederation warned that the Global Europe strategy said “nothing about the price the EU would have to pay to achieve further market opening in third countries through these new FTAs, in particular in the sensitive sectors of services,” and it called for a broader Europe-wide debate, expressing its “dis-agreement with the proposed general re-orientation of European trade policy in favour of an extremely aggressive liberalisation agenda in developing countries.”

As the ETUC points out, to obtain its negotiating goals with third countries the European Union will be forced to open up its markets in exchange and might arrange deals that are politically difficult to sell at home. For this reason the Commission enlisted the support of business. In a meeting between the Director-General for Trade, David O’Sullivan, and Business Europe, O’Sullivan “called on business to make itself heard in relation to the content of future FTAs, in particular with respect to ensuring that commercial interests

were fully served and the cost to pay in terms of market access of any other objective.”

Trade unions’ and NGOs’ concerns have gone unheard, apart from some rhetorical references to sustainable development

Trade unions’ and NGOs’ concerns have gone unheard, apart from some rhetorical references to sustainable development in the final communication.

Although only consulted superficially within the Civil Society Dialogue, several NGOs (FOEE, WWF and Action Aid) raised “questions on the sustainable development and the lack of development dimension of the paper.” The Commission replied that “this paper did not aim to address specifically these issues.”

An ambitious big-business agenda

Big-business interests have used the Global Europe strategy to push through their ambitions for the liberalisation of investment, services and public procurement and the stronger enforcement of intellectual property rights. Issues that have proved difficult to negotiate at the World Trade Organisation are seen as having a better chance if the European Union throws its weight behind a bilateral deal, or through trade diplomacy.

Developing countries have every reason to resist, as such deals hamper their own developmental efforts and ruin local business. This is an extremely aggressive agenda that pays little more than lip service to development. The EU plan to use free-trade deals to force concessions on issues that developing countries have repeatedly rejected at the WTO will undermine multilateralism and increase poverty and inequality.

Enforcing tougher intellectual-property rights will threaten access to medicines in many developing countries,

will deny many subsistence farmers the right to own seeds, and will impede domestic businesses from copying the technologies that could help their own development. Deregulating investment, which has been an essential point for Business Europe, will deprive countries of the right to make sure that foreign corporations bring something positive to their countries.

According to the *Financial Times*, the Commission is already pursuing agreements on investment in its negotiations for FTAs with India and south Korea. The liberalisation of the services sector was high on the agenda not just for Business Europe but also for the European Services Forum, which includes the largest EU service corporations, such as Deutsche Bank, Goldman Sachs, British Telecom, and Telefónica.

The ESF has managed to make the worldwide liberalisation of services a priority in the Global Europe Strategy, despite it being overlooked in the 2005 Issues Paper on Trade and Competitiveness. The ESF told the Director-General for Trade at a meeting in January 2006 that it did "not welcome the content of the paper because the service sector has not been included at a sufficient level."

Hammering home the message

They hammered home that message in meetings and in letters, and the message got through. Both the draft (June 2006) and the final version (October 2006) of the Global Europe communication stress the importance of the service industry in the EU economy and the need to open up markets.

Available information on the current negotiations with ASEAN, India, south Korea, Central America and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), as well as "economic partnership agreements" with former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, show that the Commission is arm-twisting countries to get them to open their service sectors.

Large EU corporations have also been lobbying for an EU trade policy that helps them secure unlimited access to raw materials around the world. They are worried about the increasing consumption of raw materials by industry in China, India and Brazil and other so-called emerging economies.

The Commission is now preparing a comprehensive strategy to help EU transnationals by ring-fencing and limiting as much as possible the exceptional conditions in which countries can impose measures restricting exports of raw materials.

According to Peter Mandelson, provisions for banning restrictions on access to raw materials have been introduced in free-trade agreements with Chile and Mexico, and the Commission is now trying to include them in negotiations

going on at present with India and south Korea.

Mandelson added that countries should not impose restrictions on trade in raw materials, not even to tackle such problems as the strengthening of infant industry, ensuring government revenue from commodity exports, or restricting trade in environmentally sensitive goods, such as timber.

The Commission is also pressing African and other developing countries to accept its policy regarding raw materials.

Corporate grip on the implementation of Global Europe

The privileged access and undue influence of Business Europe and other large corporate interests is still continuing through the implementation phase of Global Europe. There is evidence, for instance, of how the Directorate-General for Trade shares its insights on the current free-trade agreement negotiations with Business Europe, while refusing to give similar insights to other groups or citizens.

For example, Business Europe met the Director-General for Trade, David O'Sullivan, and the Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry, Günter Verheugen, in July 2007 to discuss bilateral relations with China and Russia. In its short report of the meeting, Business Europe noted that O'Sullivan had emphasised "the importance of strengthening dialogue with Business Europe to exchange views on negotiations with India, Korea and ASEAN as well as negotiations with China on the new partnership agreements."

A strategy for market access

Business Europe has also been given access and opportunities to influence the implementation of the new market access strategy, which establishes a partnership between the Commission, member-states and business for dismantling "barriers" encountered by corporations exporting to third markets.

It facilitates the continuous input of business into decisions over priorities. "Barriers" include restrictions on trade in raw materials, environmental and social regulations, inadequate protection for intellectual property rights, and restrictive government procurement rules.

Business Europe acknowledged the helpful approach of the Commission and Peter Mandelson. "The European Commission has been very efficient in putting into place the right channels . . . Individual barriers to trade and investment were raised at the highest level during official visits of third countries."

Philippe de Buck of Business Europe

added: "When the revised strategy was launched, I asked Commissioner Mandelson to act more often as the EU Ambassador for Market Access around the world. I think he was pleased with his new title. At least he took his 'new duty' very seriously."

Negotiations on free-trade agreements

- Negotiations with India, south Korea and ASEAN countries were begun in 2007.
- Negotiations with Central America and the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) were begun in 2006.
- Negotiations with the Common Market of the South ("Mercosur") began in 2000 but are now stalled.
- Negotiations with the Gulf Cooperation Council were reopened in 2002.
- In 2002 the European Union opened negotiations for "economic partnership agreements" with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries to replace the Cotonou Agreement.

Before the moratorium on new free-trade agreements was agreed in 1999, the European Union had concluded (or was negotiating) a number of bilateral and regional agreements in which political motivations played a large role, including agreements with EFTA countries, agreements with the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly ("Euromed"), association agreements (including free-trade agreements) with Chile and Mexico, agreement with South Africa, and a customs union with Turkey.

To be continued.

Read more at Corporate Europe Observatory (www.corporateeurope.org).

CONNOLLY BOOKS

*Established 1942
Dublin's oldest radical
bookshop*

- ★ Irish history
- ★ Current affairs
- ★ Marxist classics
- ★ Trade union affairs
- ★ Environmental issues
- ★ Philosophy
- ★ Radical periodicals

CONNOLLY BOOKS
43 East Essex Street
Dublin 2
(01) 6708707
connollybooks@eircom.net

A state bank is the only solution to the housing crisis

THE latest statement by the chairperson of the Housing Committee of Dublin City Council, Eric Byrne (Labour Party), about the number of empty affordable houses not being taken up by buyers in Dublin, and his response to the proposal that they be used to house people on the waiting list, demonstrates how far this capitalist system is removed from meeting the needs of the people.

Byrne's response was that if these houses were given to people on the housing list, those who had already bought houses through the affordable-housing scheme might sue the city council, and the council could face a backlash generally from those who have bought private housing.

The degree to which society has been corrupted in its thinking about how people are to live and how we should share the planet with our fellow human beings is evident most clearly in housing policy in Ireland. This is divided sharply on class lines, and has also been reflected in taxation policy for decades.

Dublin City Council has €200 million in housing stock that has not been sold and is costing €333,000 a month in bridging loans and fees. Offers made to approved applicants are being rejected at a rate of up to 80 per cent since September last.

Forty-three per cent failed to reply, 20 per cent said that the cost was too high, and many others said that the location was a problem. According to the council, the main reason they are not being bought is that they are not much cheaper now than private housing, and the council has a claw-back clause for use if an affordable dwelling is sold on within twenty years.

This brings up the question of how people think of housing. Do they want a place in which to live securely, or do they want to think of their home as an investment? This is so dominated by a

private-property ethos, and so deeply is this rooted, that discrimination against those who are not house-owners should be listed along with the other legally defined forms of discrimination.

To suggest that someone could sue the city council if they rented the housing to people on the housing list is abominable. If such an unlikely event were to occur, legislation could be immediately enacted to protect the public authority. Dublin City Council is quite capable of asserting its authority, though only when it is directed against deprived people.

Are they not afraid of being sued by the people conned into leaving city-centre public housing on promises of renovation by so-called public-private partnership deals that have collapsed? Are they not afraid of being sued by the people who were forcibly removed from communities in the inner city over the years, to housing estates far outside the city, with no facilities, instead of renovating the housing stock in the city?

What they have been doing is facilitating their relatives and friends in the building industry—the same ones that have now bankrupted the country.

Seventeen per cent of total housing stock was vacant in October 2008; and some economists say it is nearer to 20 per cent. Fifty-one per cent of new house purchases were for second homes last year. And to say "second homes" is understating the inequality, as some people have five, ten and more houses

and apartments. Forty per cent of rental accommodation was vacant last November. Around the country there are partially built houses and apartments, abandoned by speculator-builders.

All this is the result of greedy speculators and Government tax policy favouring holiday homes and the landlord class, and of course their building-industry friends. The result is a physical environment that is cheap and shoddy and will be a future nightmare.

In Dublin, most of the second homes are for renting, and many are for the elite for staying in Dublin for football matches, parties, and meetings. Many are TDs and their families and pals; so do we really expect these people to care about the housing lists?

It is well known that the housing boom resulted in low-quality housing being built by people who don't care how other people live, in most cases standard apartments with minimal space, no facilities, no storage, no sound-proofing, and no local amenities. By contrast, the standard of newly built social and affordable housing has risen quite substantially. However, they have put many of these developments in remote, inaccessible places; hence the high rate of refusals, because of lack of amenities and the cost of travelling.

When will this country rise above its ingrained hostile housing attitudes on grounds of class and begin to realise the value of integration, with mixed housing rather than social exclusion?

An effort was made by the Government a few years ago to change this mentality, by requiring that 20 per cent of housing development be set aside for social and affordable housing; but it fell at the first sign of opposition. This 20 per cent was agreed with the developers at a discounted price. The Government then passed on the names of approved applicants to the developer; but if the developer didn't sell them, the council had to buy them.

This worked until the private market collapsed and the council had to buy them; and now they say that they can't afford to keep this housing stock, as the loans are costing too much to repay. So they are going to be sold off, at massive discounts, to private buyers.

The attacks on public services are always on the grounds of staff costs and



the cost of public services; but no economist points at the bureaucracy of housing for the benefit of private property. Dublin City Council buys houses from developers at excessive prices, pays massive loans to banks, and pays service charges to other Government departments and private management companies, while all along it could build the houses directly, borrow from a non-profit financial institution, and rent directly to the people.

A radical change in housing policy is the answer. This is where a state bank is the real alternative; and instead of the Government propping up rogue banks with billions of euros it could serve all the Government's financial needs, secure our pension funds, hold our savings, give low-interest loans to other public agencies, such as for housing, and provide loans for local government. Credit unions and trade unions would know that their funds would be safe, unlike what is now happening to them.

Are we going to allow publicly funded housing to be handed over to speculators rather than earn money for local councils and the Government? Workers are being called on to do their "national duty" and accept cuts in pay, while the shareholders of the banks are so afraid of any Government control that they are selling their shares even when they know this would ruin the bank, with shares now hovering at 33 to 47 cents instead of €22 to €23 in 2007.

These are the people who we are supposed to look up to as leaders of the country, and whose view on how a society should run are an example. These are the speculators who describe falling house prices as a *bad* thing, with the news media continually reporting on falling house prices as a calamity.

Falling house prices are a good thing for anyone needing housing! "Negative equity" is the buzzword. For those who have a home of their own it should be seen in a proper light as a home, and not an investment opportunity.

A change in mentality about what is important to us as a society is needed. Unfortunately, because of corruption and speculation, average house prices rose from €62,000 in 1997 to €229,000 in 2006 (the 1997 price already double what it should cost), and as a result many people have unsustainable loan repayments, and now many are unemployed as well.

A state bank, to which loans could be transferred and arrangements made in cases of difficulty, is the answer. The fact that a system of exorbitant house prices and bad housing policy has been operating for so long, causing many people to

lose value on their houses, does not mean that a corrective policy cannot be undertaken. That is like saying that no social progress can be made because people previously have been damaged and it would be unfair in comparison with those who are now protected.

The immediate solution is to use existing public housing for people on the housing list, and for the unions to fight against any public housing stock being handed to private speculators. The ICTU, SIPTU and Focus Ireland in a joint pre-budget statement called on the



Government to build 18,000 housing units in 2009, at an estimated cost of €4 billion. They need to keep the pressure up and defend our public housing stock.

The solution offered at the meeting of Dublin City Council on 20 January is a sop to stop criticism and opposition by proposing a completely wrong short-

term solution. They are setting up a scheme with yet another Government department (Department of the Environment and Local Government) to temporarily house people on the housing list in these unsold houses—but only until they can be sold.

One small example of where money can be found is that instead of paying €392 million to private landlords in rent subsidies for exorbitant rents last year, and more than €14 million paid in mortgage interest supplement, use this money for the public housing programme. A new tax on second houses would either bring in extra revenue or cause more houses to be sold, so making house prices lower and more accessible to people generally, and would reduce the total of 56,000 people on housing lists.

As money is being thrown around so liberally to banks and financial robbers, this money would be better spent in buying suitable empty houses at discount prices for the state, and offering loans for public housing that reflect the real cost of construction.

However, as with other reforms, a solution is limited that does not include industrial development outside Dublin, reform of urban land prices, and the curtailment of financial predators by offering state and county council alternatives.

[DUB]

Dublin City Council deliberately dismantling public housing

IN St Bricin's Park in Oxmantown, Dublin, a publicly owned sheltered housing enclave of houses and flats in a quiet leafy park, twenty-two flats are empty.

The flats and houses are being deliberately allowed to run down, because Dublin City Council wants to sell them, and wants to sub-contract the upkeep and management of those that are for sheltered accommodation to a private operator, Circle Management.

This is a microcosm of the Government's policy on housing, and a repetition of the giving up of inner-city public housing in pleasant areas to greedy speculators. Despite very strong local opposition and support from progressive local councillors, people are being bullied into submission.

On 19 December the city manager, John Tierney, wrote to all employees of the city council announcing cost-cutting and demanding extra productivity. On all sides, public services are being dismantled piecemeal, so that the big picture is not seen until it is too late.

Given the huge waiting-list for housing, how can the council justify empty flats? With the ready availability of building workers, these flats could be upgraded in three months.

Instead they are wheeler-dealing with private management companies to see how best they can bully and con the residents into giving up their right to public housing and to the protection of public authorities, instead of being fleeced by robber "entrepreneurs."

These residents are a vibrant community and have a close community spirit, and they need our support.

[BE]

American workers need our support

BARACK Obama, the new President of the United States, has taken up office on a wave of Euphoria. His election campaign and media sound-bites certainly struck a chord among the people of the United States, who desire and hunger for a complete change of direction, not just from the discredited Bush regime but from previous regimes over many decades.

Obama's appeal is that he appears to many millions of citizens to be fresh, untainted by the old corrupt politics of Washington and the powerful economic forces that control politics and the institutions of the state. He made a deliberate play for the people, making a virtue of the fact that he was an outsider, a man of the people, the only candidate opposed to the Democratic Party establishment—in fact an anti-establishment politician.

His appeal was one of unity—national unity to rally all the political forces of the country in its hour of need as the economic crisis deepens. He appealed to workers and employers to come together to share the burden, and called for the unity of black, white and brown. Certainly unity of the people is essential if progress is to be made, no matter what country you live and struggle in.

But as the Obama election campaign gathered pace, his steady movement to the right was discernible. Setting out his political pitch to secure the nomination, addressing working people, youth and women, ensured a flow of money into his campaign coffers in the form of small donations; but towards the end his rhetoric softened, and the corporate donations began to flow in thick and fast.

Obama is a clever and very articulate establishment politician. He has touched and expressed what many people feel is wrong with the United States but are not too sure how it should be fixed. He manufactured his coalition well, appearing to be both anti-establishment and pro-establishment simultaneously.

Before his inauguration and since, he has appointed to his government people very much from the political class of Washington. There is no-one around the cabinet table who fundamentally challenges the status quo. This is not some closet radical conspiracy.

There is a strong influence of zionism and a very pro-Israel feel to the senior people around him. There can be no doubt that the Israeli invasion of Gaza

was given the go-ahead by Obama and his advisers. They set out the time scale for how long the Israeli government had to complete its task.



There have always been two main currents in the American establishment. One believed that American strategic political, economic and military interests could be protected and enhanced only by American military might and which intervened accordingly around the globe. (Bush was not an aberration.) The other current believed that they should use their economic muscle and their control over global financial and regulatory bodies to achieve the same goal but, if required, would use a combination of both. This was most recently reflected in the policies of the Clinton government.

Some of Obama's closest and most senior advisers are from the Clinton period. One of the most ideologically driven from the hard right is the Polish-American Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the chief Cold War ideologues of the Reagan regime. One certainly needs to take a second look when such individuals are in a position of influence, or when Henry Kissinger endorses and welcomes a candidate's election.

If Obama was serious about making changes in how the United States relates to the rest of the world, or about a more equitable society, then a more rigorous clean-out and the appointment

of new blood would have been a signal. This does not appear to be the case.

His presidential orders in relation to abortion and stem-cell research are important in themselves and are welcome. Many in the corporate and the scientific worlds saw Bush's restrictions as a throwback to a more backward period. And certainly the closing down of the Guantánamo torture camp is to be welcomed as a small but important step forward. The question, however, is whether he will outlaw all the methods of torture instituted by the Bush government.

Obama may personally be a decent individual, but he has surrounded himself with as dangerous a parcel of rogues as is to be found in any cabinet or collection of advisers. One of the great dangers of this new cabal in the White House is that they may appear to be less threatening, and the simple fact that Obama is not Bush may lull progressive forces into a false sense of a new dawn. As US forces slink out of Iraq, battered and beaten, Obama wishes to continue the war of occupation in Afghanistan and the bombing raids into Pakistan.

While Bush was busy with his "war on terror," the oppressed masses in what they arrogantly call their own back yard have been busily removing one pro-US regime after another. Given the make-up of the Obama cabinet, the transformation now under way in Latin America will increasingly become the focus of this "new" regime in Washington.

For Obama to convince the majority of the people of the world that the United States has put old ways behind it and that it has truly moved in a different direction, a lot more is required of him before he earns that trust. The establishment in Europe and all those forces in the mass media that support the US position but under Bush were too embarrassed have been able to step back out into the light and bask in the reflected glory of Obama's election.

Now is the time for progressive forces to rally and to show their support to progressive forces within the United States itself. They will need our support if they are to push Obama to deliver on his free-flowing rhetoric and to resist corporate America's grab for the public purse.

The world badly needs a progressive US president. The jury is a long way from giving a positive verdict on the new tenant in the White House while the representatives of the financial-military-industrial complex guard the doors.

Democracy in action

"I am the commander, see? I do not need to explain why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the President. Maybe somebody needs to explain to me why they say something, but I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation."—George Bush, quoted by Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (2002).

"I'll run the country as I see fit."—Brian Cowen, Dáil Éireann, 27 January 2009.

Gaza massacre a crime against humanity

IT is difficult to find words to describe the barbarous attack launched by the Israeli military on Gaza on 27 December. What the Israeli media call an “operation” can only be defined as a massacre. At the time of writing, about a thousand people have died, a third of them children. More than two thousand children have been injured, many of them horribly mutilated. Decent people of all backgrounds the world over are horrified and are demanding an end to the killing.

The Israelis are implementing a policy of taking no prisoners, attacking targets regardless of “collateral damage” to civilians, using Palestinian families as shields, bombarding densely populated areas, and using illegal weapons, such as phosphorus bombs.

Massacres of civilian populations are not unknown, even in the twenty-first century; but what is different here is not only the scale of the slaughter but the fact that it is so public, and that there is not an iota of shame on the part of the perpetrators. Mass-murdering armies usually deny their crimes, or claim that they were a “mistake” or an “accident” or the work of a maverick commander. The Israeli “Defence Force” is proud of its work. This is possible only because of the racism that is endemic in Israeli society. The ratio of about a hundred Palestinian lives for every Israeli life lost since 27 December seems to raise no eyebrows in the Israeli state, except among a small and brave minority.

The immediate task is to stop the savagery and to organise the broadest possible support towards that end.

• **Raise your voice in public and in private and protest against the Israeli campaign of death and destruction.** Express your horror at the attacks on homes, schools, hospitals, shopping centres, places of worship, and public buildings. Demand the opening of the borders to allow emergency aid in and to permit the exit of seriously wounded patients to hospitals abroad.

• **Contact local TDs and MEPs.** Support the positive humanitarian

position shown by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin TD, and go on to demand that the Israeli ambassador be asked to leave. Insist also that the EU trade agreement with Israel be suspended. Support the ICTU’s call for economic sanctions against Israel.

• **Boycott Israeli goods.** In particular look at the labels on fruit, vegetables, and herbs. (It says something about Irish agriculture that the potatoes in many supermarkets are Israeli!) Let the management of the shop know that you are boycotting Israeli goods.

• **Insist that the process of prosecution be initiated to bring Israeli political and military leaders to trial for their crimes.**

The people of Gaza—1½ million of them, tightly packed in an area about half the size of County Louth—are among the most defenceless people in the world. The present onslaught has been carefully planned over the past three years. During that period Israel besieged the enclave, allowed minimal access to outsiders, and only permitted inadequate supplies on an unpredictable day-to-day basis.

The present atrocity is only one stage in a long conflict that will end only when the Palestinians’ right to self-determination and democracy is recognised and the Israeli state is divested of its racist and sectarian essence. The people of Gaza are mostly the survivors and the offspring of the populations of west and south Palestine who were “ethnically cleansed” in 1948. Most of them have never seen the outside world,

except on television.

The Gaza Strip, as it became known, was administered by Egypt between 1948 and 1967. Essential services, including schools, were run by the UN Works and Relief Agency.

The West Bank and Gaza were occupied by Israel after the 1967 war. As occupations go, it was particularly vicious. There has been no economic development in Gaza in particular, and most adults are unemployed. During the same period the misnamed Israeli Defence Force launched numerous attacks on the area, including both “targeted assassinations” and acts of sheer terrorism against the population. Israel withdrew its land forces and eight thousand Zionist colonists from Gaza in August 2005, partly because of local resistance and partly to facilitate the consolidation and expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank, where an influx of twelve thousand additional planters followed the Gaza withdrawal.

When the result of the Palestinian general election of January 2006 was not to the liking of the occupying power, the European Union—egged on by Israel and the United States—withdrew funding from the Palestinian Authority, which resulted in teachers, doctors and other public servants having to work for nothing. The machinations that followed created a partition within a partition, whereby Gaza was isolated politically as well as physically from the West Bank. All exits from the Strip were sealed. The description of Gaza as a prison became more apt than ever.

Three years of this ghetto-like existence left the people of Gaza a soft target for the onslaught of the last three weeks. The daily pictures of corpses and destruction have been a cause of celebration in most Israeli circles and by Zionist supporters abroad. But cheer as they may, the world has seen the true face of Zionism, an ideology that is beyond reason, humanitarianism, morality, and law.

[CDF]

Get the latest news and information . . .

- Connolly Youth Movement: www.cym.ie
- Cuba Support Group: www.cubasupport.com
- International Brigade Commemoration Committee:
homepage.ntlworld.com/e-mckinley/ibcc.html
- Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.ipsc.ie
- James Connolly Education Trust: www.iol.ie/~sob/jcet
- Latin America Solidarity Centre: www.lasc.ie
- Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA): www.pana.ie
- People’s Movement: www.people.ie
- Progressive Film Club: www.progressivefilmclub.ie

For the latest political news and information about coming events visit www.comunistpartyofireland.ie

Latin American news

Guatemalans march for peace

On Saturday 10 January, Guatemalan social, humanitarian and religious groups organised a march for peace and against poverty. The march, which was called for by the Catholic Church, was described by the director of the Human Rights Legal Action Centre, Mario Minera, as an opportunity to call for an end to domestic violence and insecurity. "The call exceeds all barriers of beliefs, and brings everyone to the same height because of the urgent need for state action to respect the right to life."

The national march, which culminated in a rally at the Constitution Plaza, called for action to deal with the high poverty levels in Guatemala. Demonstrators also demanded action to stop the violence that led to an average of eighteen murders a day in 2008.

Venezuela expels Israeli Ambassador

On Tuesday 6 January, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela expelled Israel's ambassador from the country, in response to the Israeli military offensive in Gaza. The decision of Chávez is the strongest by any country with official relations with Israel.

On Venezuelan state television, just

before the expulsion, Chávez posed the question, "How far will this barbarism go?" while adding that "the President of Israel should be taken before an international court, together with the President of the United States, if the world had any conscience."

Chávez has long supported the Palestinian people and their right to sovereignty, while being critical of Israeli policies in the Middle East. He has been especially critical during this present conflict, going as far as to call the Israeli government a "genocidal government." The Venezuelan Minister for Justice, Tarek El Aissami, said, "Our revolution is also a revolution for a free Palestine!"

Bolivian socialists hold seventh congress

In the city of Oruro in Bolivia on 10 January almost five thousand delegates from the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) held their seventh congress, to discuss and debate strategies for consolidating and continuing the social transformations being implemented in Bolivia over the last three years.

Attending the Congress were Evo Morales, social leaders, and legislators. Being discussed were the country's present political situation and the new

constitution that was expected to be approved by referendum on 25 January (as it was).

A MAS deputy, Jorge Silva, said that one of the main issues of the forum would be the struggle against corruption and bureaucracy. Another delegate, Alberto Luis Aguilar, hoped that the three-day congress would establish actions to boost the economy, continue the projects in motion, and increase the political awareness of the people. He also stated that when the congress closed, its delegates would boost, "with wisdom and dedication, the Revolution started in January 2006."

Sandinistas continue social projects in Nicaragua

In Nicaragua the Sandinista government has announced that it is nearing its target of complete freedom from illiteracy by 2009. According to the Minister for Education, Miguel de Castilla, the plan is to declare all the country's departments to be illiteracy-free by late July. Once Nicaragua has achieved this goal, the country will be the fourth member of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) to be declared illiteracy-free (after Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia). At present Nicaragua has only 7 per cent illiteracy, which is a record for the region. This is thanks to the implementation of the National "From Martí to Fidel" Literacy Campaign, alongside other initiatives based on the Cuban method of Yo Si Puedo (Yes, I Can).

Guatemala holds Non-Aligned meeting on women



From 21 to 24 January, Guatemala hosted the Second Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on women. The meeting followed up compliance with the UN Millennium Development Goals on the eradication of poverty, access to education, gender equality, and the improvement of mothers' health. Sandra Moran, a representative of the Collective of Social Organisations, said: "It is very important that a group such as NAM analyses women's issues at the world and

Bob Doyle 1916-2009



It was with great sadness that we learnt of the death in London of Bob Doyle, who was an active participant in the Spanish Anti-Fascist War, 1936-39, and the last surviving member of the Connolly Column of the International Brigade.

Bob was born in North King Street, Dublin, where he grew up in a family of five children. In his adult life his commitment to world peace and social justice was an example to all. Right up to his death Bob travelled throughout Ireland and Europe, speaking at many meetings so as to inform and inspire the younger generation to honour the International Brigaders and to stand up for social justice and world peace. He remained a committed anti-fascist, peace activist and communist to the end and was active in politics up to a very short time before his death. He lived his long life without regrets. He recorded his life's work in a wonderful autobiography, *Brigadista: An Irishman's Fight Against Fascism*.

We offer our sympathy to his family, and we salute his memory.

regional levels.” She also noted that the peace agreements signed twelve years ago gave Guatemalan women political grounds for organising, defending their rights, and demanding respect for them. However, violence, injustice and dis-

crimination against indigenous people persists in the country.

According to Norma Cruz of Fundación Sobrevivientes, the country is nowhere close to complying with the Millennium Development Goals,

especially because of the high levels of poverty and violence. For these reasons it is very important that Guatemala was chosen to host this meeting.

[JM]

Books

The hegemony of English

Donaldo Macedo, with Panayota Gounari and Bessie Dendrinou, *The Hegemony of English* (Series in Critical Narrative), Boulder (Colo.): Paradigm, 2003; ISBN 978-1-59451-000-7; 978-1-59451-001-4 (paperback).

The Hegemony of English is a timely Marxist-Gramscian response both to the language issue in the multilingual United States and to the worldwide hegemony of neo-liberal ideology. Its critique of measures proposed by the “English Only” movement—which proposes eliminating all non-English-language schoolroom activity and thence the USA’s minority languages—will be familiar to those acquainted with language discourse in Ireland.

Language is seen by the authors as being not only “simple communication” but rather as a repository of historical experience from “how speakers organize and build their world, develop an understanding of social reality, and come to regard some things as valuable and others as worthless.” To adopt the colonising or dominant language is to accept in large measure the history, cultural terms of reference and general ethos implicit in it—and to reject one’s own essential heritage and history.

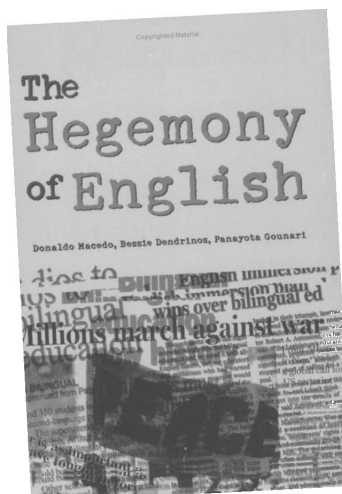
The effects of such loss are spelled out by Pierre Bourdieu: “We accept the present as given, bereft of historicity. Because we have so little comprehension of our past, we have no appreciation of its meaningful inter-relation with the present.”

The adoption of English, far from being a value-free act, “imposes upon the subordinate speakers a feeling of subordination, as their life experience, history, and language are ignored, if not sacrificed. One can safely argue that English today represents a tool, par excellence, for cultural invasion, with its monopoly of the internet, international commerce, the dissemination of the celluloid culture, and its role in the Disneyfication of world cultures.”

The book draws attention to an aspect of language that is a bugbear for social and cultural activists the world over. “Those who are able to gain control over meanings and conventions of discourse are also able to promote their views of the world, their norms, their values, and ultimately their interests.” Hence “an understanding of the nature and functions of language is crucial in order to locate areas of public life and institutions that reproduce the

so-called legitimate language . . . Jürgen Habermas urges us to extend our critique . . . to those areas of life in which power is hidden behind the amiable countenance of cultural familiarity.”

Such an interrogation constitutes the highly valuable final chapter of this book, in which the development of neo-liberal hegemony, with its accompanying deformation of ordinary language, is traced from its Chicago roots to its current entronement as the



embodiment of common sense.

Attention is drawn to the ability of neo-liberal discourse to sidestep criticism by redefining meaning. By redefining “truth” in terms of operationalist quantifiers, say “freedom” as “free market,” “democracy” as “free movement of capital” (and nary a peep about human rights), we note redefinitions that have sunk deep into contemporary (and dehistoricised) consciousness.

Hence “what we are witnessing is a hypnosis of dissident discourses, a ‘crisis of critique,’ that is, a degradation, trivialization and closure of meanings that shut down any and all questions. At the same time, language is redefined with a view to suffocating dissent and endorsing the dominant market discourse . . . Neoliberal politics pretends to provide the answers for concepts and ideas that should remain perpetually open and be constantly questioned and redefined if they are to con-

tribute to a vital political culture and a process of democratization. Nothing is more threatening to a democracy and the political existence of its citizens than the illusion that all questions have been answered, that there are no meanings to struggle over, [that] words are transparent and speak for themselves.”

So, the misery that lies behind rationally ordered columns of statistics is no longer relevant. Such anguish, stifled by the “statisticisation” and “de-ethicisation” of American society, detailed in *The Hegemony of English*, are duplicated in all societies infected by the neo-liberal virus, such as Ireland.

This book helps us to get a handle on the ideological immobility of the “hypnotised” left, too scared to stray outside the bounds of conventional “common sense” and to push, for example (to name but one), for replacement of the present inept—if not criminal—banking set-up with a publicly responsible National Development Bank.

Now that the economic base of neo-liberalism is disintegrating, and its post-modernist superstructure is already in disarray, it is time for the left to break the neo-liberal spell and demonstrate that there are other ways and that the language of critique and intervention can help to build a social alternative to the now redundant neo-liberal order.

The ever-prescient Fidel Castro proclaimed eight years ago: “The market will dry up some day for the industry of lies; it is drying up already. If you really delve into the truth, you will realise that the political conception of imperialism, as well as the neo-liberal economic order and globalisation process imposed on the world, is orphaned and defenceless when it comes to ideas and ethics. It is in this field that the main struggle of our times will be decided. And the final result of this battle, with no possible alternative, will be on the side of truth, and thus on the side of humanity.”

[TMS]

SOCIALIST VOICE

43 East Essex Street • Dublin 2
(01) 6708707

www.comunistpartyofireland.ie