

# RESISTANCE

No. 1 · July/August 2007

Irish Socialist Network · [www.irishsocialist.net](http://www.irishsocialist.net)

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## Election shock: Tweedledum wins!

By Colm Breathnach (ISN)

Two major right-wing parties offer more of the same. Three left-of-centre parties offer to prop up the right-wing parties. Is it any wonder that we ended up with...well...more of the same! Coming after a long capitalist boom, it's hardly surprising that many working people voted for the safe bet of Fianna Fáil or the non-alternative of Fine Gael. Fear of a downturn also probably convinced more people to vote for these conservatives. Despite the obvious inequalities of Irish society, people were essentially afraid of losing what little they had gained.

The so-called left parties – Sinn Féin, Labour and the Greens – helped this process along by having almost exactly the same policies as the parties of the right. They did badly because voters opted for the real thing rather than the mini-versions. The only thing that Pat, Gerry and Trevor could offer was the prospect of propping up the conservative parties in government in return for a seat or two at the cabinet table. Not exactly enticing stuff!

The new 'Fianna Fáil-plus' government, will impose the same basic neo-liberal policies, despite

Shannon on their imperial adventures and the privatisation of health, robbery of our natural resources and dependence on multinationals will continue apace.

Sure, elections are not irrelevant: the end of Michael McDowell's reign can only be good news for victims of miscarriages of justice and for asylum seekers. Yes, some power lies in the hands of the suits in Leinster House, but most of it lies in the hands of the O'Learys and O'Reillys. Ultimately, it is their ladders that we must kick away from the lamp post.

This was also a bad election for the radical left. Almost all of the far left candidates saw a drop in their votes, including the sole ISN candidate: John O'Neill in Dublin North West. The loss of Joe Higgins' and Séamas Healy's seats, combined with the failure of others to win new seats, was a big setback for the working class. Even if the smaller parties and independents were squeezed – especially in the 'Enda versus Bertie' atmosphere generated by the pro-capitalist media – the far left cannot entirely

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# Saving the planet? The left and the environment

By Fintan Lane (ISN)

This planet is too important to be left to the Greens.

If anybody was in any doubt about this, it became very clear in June as the Green Party binned many key policies, opted for mercs and perks and entered government with the right-wing, neo-liberal Fianna Fáil and PD parties. Beaming broadly, John Gormley and Eamonn Ryan toddled off to the Park to be anointed as fully fledged members of 'Team Bertie'.

From here on, collective cabinet responsibility kicks in. The Greens will be obliged to defend every nasty policy implemented by the current government, from 'co-location' in the health sector to the building of a motorway through Tara to support for Shell in Mayo. They will remain bit-players, with little influence, but they will defend this right-wing government to the hilt.

In addition, they will be co-equally responsible for the presence of the US military at Shannon airport, a complete u-turn for a party that was once viewed as an intrinsic – albeit moderate and weak-kneed – element of the anti-war movement. As US troops in their tens of thousands trundle through Shannon airport on their way to kill people in the Middle East, it can said, without hesitation, that the Green Party has blood on its hands. It is complicit in Bush's imperial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and provides his war machine with practical assistance.

The Greens, of course, will tell us that they have bigger fish to fry – they have to save the planet...and it seems that Iraq and the people of Finglas and Knocknaheeny are not an especially significant part of this planet. They can continue to die in the here and now at end of a US bullet or on a



public health waiting list.

This is not to say that the issues of climate change and the local environment are unimportant.

Quite the contrary. These are crucial issues that must be addressed by anybody seeking a better world. The environmental movement has done much in the past few decades to alert people

to the importance of a wide range of tasks that currently confront humanity. We cannot continue to live as we do and we must tackle the issue of global warming if we are to avoid well-signposted catastrophes.

However, the Green Party, as a political expression of the environmental movement, is fatally flawed, believing as it does that it can 'save the planet' by making deals with devil – with the social conservatives, neo-liberals and capitalists who believe that the market rules and that big business must always come first. In truth, it is the so-called 'free market' and its promoters who are primarily responsible for the environmental degradation of this planet, and it is the poor and the working people who suffer most from its effects.

The radical left has failed in the past to make environmental concerns a central element in its politics. That must change. A better, collective and egalitarian social world necessitates a sustainable way of living on this small planet of ours. The 'anti-globalisation' movements are imperfect, but they do hint at ways in which the desires for social justice and environmental sustainability can be meshed in non-hierarchical political formations.

For activists on the radical left, mass-based campaigns to protect the environ-

ment, particularly from plundering profit-driven corporations such as Shell and Esso, are as necessary as 'traditional' class conflicts in the fight to construct a better life for everybody. They are part of the same struggle. Ultimately, we need another socio-economic world, another way of doing things, not a Green-tinged government that supports business as usual.

The Green Party, largely middle class in composition and *mentalité*, is clearly unable to see this organic connection with working-class concerns and has become an ineffectual prop in a neo-liberal government. It is now just another establishment party. •

## Welcome to Planet Bertie!

*'The biggest issue I have had to deal with in my first few days of office has been the M3 motorway. I spent all day Friday, right up to 11pm, Saturday morning and even parts of Sunday talking to archaeologists and legal people. I phoned the Attorney General at his home on Saturday. The official legal advice confirms that my hands are tied in this instance, despite what certain opposition parties are claiming.'*

*Ah yes, as Homer Simpson famously said, if something's hard to do, it's not worth trying, despite what 'certain' opposition parties might say. Expect more of the same from Minister Gormley. The Green Party, for example, is now fully backing the government's policy of co-location, the divisive neo-liberal plan to allow private health facilities on the grounds of public hospitals. As for Shannon...ah now, boys and girls, his hands are tied! Sure, tis only a war.*



John Gormley of the Green Party stares into the abyss.

# Standing with Palestine – but how?

By David Landy

Palestine – isolated, imprisoned and denied a right to exist by Israel – desperately needs our solidarity. But we need to ask what kind of solidarity is needed. ‘Critical solidarity’ is a common reaction against 1960s ‘third-worldism’ – when left-wingers in Europe acted as cheerleaders to Third World elites, something that led to such grotesque nonsense as the glorification of Chairman Mao. Instead, it was proposed that Westerners should support liberation movements elsewhere, but feel free to offer friendly and constructive criticism.

It sounds good, but can be tricky when it comes to Palestine because, uniquely, we have an active anti-solidarity movement to deal with – various Zionist and pro-Israel groups. Even if they haven’t convinced anyone that Israel is good, they have convinced many that Palestinians are bad – primitives under the sway of an alien fanatical culture – who we should have nothing to do with. And this is all Zionists need to do: if they make people feel that they should wash their hands of this ugly little matter, Israel gets free rein for its devastation of Palestine.

In this context, any criticism of Palestinians (and there’s no shortage) can feed into Israel’s ongoing war against them. For the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC), the impetus to portray Palestine positively is overwhelming. It is crucial to show that Palestinians are more than victims or terrorists, but subjects in their own right. It may seem obvious that

Palestinians are no less cultured, no less reasonable and a lot more politically savvy about their situation than ourselves, but this message needs to be repeated time and again.

And yet...there’s no escaping the reality that there are problems with Palestine. Taking Hamas as an example, we can argue that it is democratically elected and we can point out that, with their political pragmatism and bedrock nationalism, they are certainly no Al-Qaeda. In fact they’re more like our own Sinn Féin *circa* War of Independence – another party of religious, nationalist, socially-conservative revolutionaries.

The British government demonised Sinn Féin as religious fanatics, psychopathic murderers and so on – the same way that Hamas is demonised now. While socialists have no business in buying into this poison – the propaganda used in all colonial wars – it is still fair to ask if we’d have supported the Sinn Féin of that era any more than Hamas now. Certainly not uncritically.

After all, it’s one thing to respect Palestinians’ different culture and their right not to be dictated to by ourselves. It’s another to say, ‘whatever they do doesn’t matter, their cause is just and we can’t judge them by our own – civilised – standards’. This sounds less like respect, more like patronisation.

One thing that can help us to tread this line is *contact*, so that we build up knowledge and respect for each other. Solidarity groups and Palestinian organisations are

our involvement proved to be minimal.

Though it is no excuse for a poor electoral performance, the ISN has always seen electoral work as a subordinate part of our struggle. The revolutionary transformation of society will not be carried out by an elite *on behalf* of working people but *by* working people themselves through mass struggle. From our foundation, we have refused to accept that salvation lies in the leadership of a vanguard, parliamentary or bureaucratic. Despite the prospect of short-term gain, we have refused to engage in clientelism



desperately trying to establish connections, but it is precisely this contact with the outside world that Israel is choking off. Anyone who invites Palestinians to Ireland knows that all arrangements are provisional – most institutions give up or don’t even bother trying.

It’s easy to go on about other problems with Palestinian solidarity – the growing bias of the media, the fractured nature of the Palestinian leadership, and so on. But, in the end, the difficulty of solidarity work doesn’t make it any less necessary. The spread of anti-Palestinian demonisation in our media, the urgency of opposing Israeli aggression against Palestine (and Lebanon), and the lack of contacts with Palestinians has created a situation where criticism should be put on the back-burner, or at least expressed cautiously. For the moment, it seems that – unfortunately – there’s more important work to be getting on with. •

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## Election shock: Tweedledum wins!

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escape blame for this setback. While conditions were not good for a breakthrough, the loss of support indicates a need for some serious rethinking by radical socialists.

The ISN stood in the election, not because we believe in a parliamentary road to socialism but to take another opportunity among many to engage with people and to try to spread the ideas of radical socialism. To be honest, we have to admit that the impact of

or to hide our commitment to class politics behind populist fronts.

However, sticking to principles is just the first step and we must learn from our mistakes. As a participatory democratic organisation, we do not look for guidance from ‘leaders’, but try to overcome our mistakes and develop new strategies through collective debate and decision making involving the equal participation of all members. Through this process, hopefully we can move forward with others on the left who share our commitment to revolutionary, democratic, class-struggle politics. •

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**ANTI-WAR IRELAND**

A national, democratic, non-hierarchical anti-war organisation in which the ISN participates. Has branches in Dublin, Belfast and Cork, and can be contacted by emailing [info@antiwarireland.org](mailto:info@antiwarireland.org)  
[www.antiwarireland.org](http://www.antiwarireland.org)

**IRELAND PALESTINE SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN**

It is what it says on the tin – a national and very active organisation for Palestine solidarity activists.  
[www.ipsc.ie](http://www.ipsc.ie)

**HANDS OFF THE PEOPLE OF IRAN**

A newly formed campaign that aims to mobilise people in opposition to US plans to attack Iran. Critical of the reactionary Iranian government.  
[www.hopoi.org](http://www.hopoi.org)

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A campaign formed to advocate abortion rights in Ireland. Believes in a woman's right to choose.  
[www.choiceireland.blogspot.com/](http://www.choiceireland.blogspot.com/)

**SHELL TO SEA**

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[www.corribsos.com](http://www.corribsos.com)

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**PSNI**

# Here come the new cops, same as the old cops

By Brendan Harrison (ISN)

When the civil rights marchers set out some 40 years ago, little did they realise that some of the demands for which marched would not have been implemented four decades later. The demand for the reform and disarmament of the RUC is one notable change that is as far away from being granted as it was at the inception of the civil rights movement.

One could argue that while the RUC has had a name change, little else has changed. The newly-named PSNI are far better equipped with the latest weapons and the recent orders for tazer stun-guns that have caused the deaths of more than 25 people in the US says a lot about the likely future direction of the PSNI.

Can anyone justify an armed police service? In the recent past, the PSNI have been quick to use lethal force against so-called 'joy-riders' in County Down. While in pursuit of a 'suspect' in the Oldpark area of North Belfast, a PSNI officer discharged a firearm at a time when large numbers of children were playing. Can this be the norm when children's lives are at risk? Has the 'suspect' no rights? He was only running away.

What happened to the law of 'innocent until proven guilty'? Or was it just a case of old habits dying hard?

And now we learn that the Northern Ireland Office is trying to preserve the repressive powers of the PSNI – by extending 'anti-terrorist' legislation to the whole of the UK. Our cops don't want to lose the power to stop and question people without needing any reason. So, London is drawing up plans to spread those powers UK-wide. According to leading Blairite Hazel Blears: 'What I understand is that the request has come from the Northern Ireland Office because they have the powers, they want to be able to carry on using them, they find them useful.'

If Northern Irish society is to move forward, then the police, as members of that society, must be made aware that they are answerable for any actions they carry out. They are not above the law. There should be no wall of silence to protect them if they break the law. They must be rooted out and the full force of the law must be used against them.

And the job of socialists is to challenge the police, not to support them. •



# The scandal of Shannon warport

By Fintan Lane (ISN)

In late May, during the negotiations for a new government, the independent TD Finian McGrath raised Shannon airport and its use by the US military. McGrath's kite was promptly shot down by Bertie Ahern, who insisted that his government will continue to facilitate George W. Bush's killing machine.



McGrath's reaction? He backed down, declaring that the issue of Irish complicity in the murder of tens of thousands of Afghani and Iraqi children and adults was not...ahem...a 'deal breaker'. The Green Party's negotiators took a similar view, despite their previous high-profile involvement in the anti-war movement, and are now part of the government that rubber-stamps the US military presence.

Certainly, the issue of Ireland's involvement in a vicious imperial war is troubling – like a little boy, somewhere in the background, tugging occasionally at the liberal conscience – but many of our left-leaning Dáil politicians, notably the Greens, have found that they can live with it. They have tussled with their consciences and they have won.

Since at least the summer of 2004, the

anti-war movement in Ireland has been at a low ebb, the mainstream media and Ireland's career politicians have lost interest and what should be judged a scandal of government-toppling proportions – the handing over of an Irish civilian airport to a military engaged in 'pre-emptive' imperialist war – continues almost unhindered. Last year saw just one major anti-war protest at Shannon airport, though local activists staged several smaller actions as well.

Despite the downturn in activism, anti-war sentiment remains very strong in Ireland. Indeed, in April, a Lansdowne Market Research poll, commissioned by the Peace and Neutrality Alliance, indicated that 58% of Irish people are opposed to the US military presence at Shannon. Only 19% support the trafficking of US troops. Such figures come as no surprise to anti-war activists. There is enormous goodwill towards the anti-war movement and most people are instinctively opposed to the warmongering of George W. Bush.

Why then is there a reduced level of

activism on the issue? The answer to this is complex, but a significant element is a pervasive sense that the outcome will be determined primarily by events in Iraq itself. This may be the case. However, international solidarity remains crucial and it is important that ordinary working people in Europe put clear blue water between themselves and their complicit governments.

In Ireland, it is essential that we end the Shannon military stopover *before* the US is forced out of Iraq. If we fail to do this, it is likely that landing facilities will be extended to the US war machine for even more bloody adventures. Indeed, Bush and his cronies are already eyeballing Iran in their push to further extend US geo-political power. If they attack, it is not the reactionary Iranian regime that will suffer; instead, as usual, innocent people will be at the receiving end of US bombs and missiles.

Help to end Irish complicity with mass murder and imperialism by getting involved in the anti-war movement. Join the resistance. •



## Racism and the new immigrants

By Rosanna Flynn

Until about 15 years ago, the only group facing racism in Ireland was the Travelling community. Foreign nationals, mostly tourists or students, were welcomed and treated very well.

Then asylum seekers began to arrive. First came groups of 'programme refugees', for whom a general feeling of goodwill prevailed. As time went on, other, non-programme, asylum seekers began to arrive. There was no problem at first. The main reason for this was that until November 1999, they were all allowed to work.

When this right to work was taken away, the urban myths started and were fuelled by wretched politicians, who cynically spread the belief that

asylum issues, the most numerous complaints that Residents Against Racism receive from refugees are about their desire to work.

Migrant workers are the other group who are demonised for allegedly 'taking our jobs'. In fact, we should thank them for the success of the Celtic Tiger. We need them and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Most stay for a short time – just a few years – almost all do the low-paid or unpleasant work we don't want to do.

Of course, a small number will stay. They may marry Irish people, or decide to make their lives here for other reasons. Fine! Let's not pretend that this has not happened before – from time immemorial. We keep

to the US government on behalf of Irish illegals in the States. Of course, they should be allowed to stay and work there. Does he not see the contradiction in his attitude to non-Irish nationals here at home? Surely they deserve the same opportunities as the illegal Irish in the US.

The new immigration bill, due to come before the Dáil soon, will make a bad situation worse. Among other tough measures, it would take away the rights of non-Europeans to marry without permission from the Department of Justice, and force asylum-seekers into 'holding centres' (prisons) based on the notorious Australian model.

Positive changes would be fairly simple. Let asylum-seekers work. Crack down on rogue employers who pay below

goodwill prevailed. As time went on, other, non-programme, asylum seekers began to arrive. There was no problem at first. The main reason for this was that until November 1999, they were all allowed to work.

When this right to work was taken away, the urban myths started and were fuelled by wretched politicians, who cynically spread and embellished them in order to gain support. Now, we are repeatedly told that asylum seekers are 'bogus', 'spongers', 'illegal aliens', etc., allegedly getting free cars, mobile phones and luxurious accommodation, all at the expense of the Irish taxpayer. In reality, they get €19.10 a week and hosted accommodation with meals provided.

It is no wonder that, aside from

the foreseeable future. Most stay for a short time – just a few years – almost all do the low-paid or unpleasant work we don't want to do.

Of course, a small number will stay. They may marry Irish people, or decide to make their lives here for other reasons. Fine! Let's not pretend that this has not happened before – from time immemorial. We keep hearing about our culture being undermined. Culture develops by new influences being slowly and steadily absorbed and adapted. Otherwise, it stagnates.

Don't be fooled by the 'Immigration Control Platform', or, indeed, by any politicians, would-be politicians, or right-wing journalists who spread vicious lies and distortions. After all, Bertie Ahern has for many years repeatedly grovelled

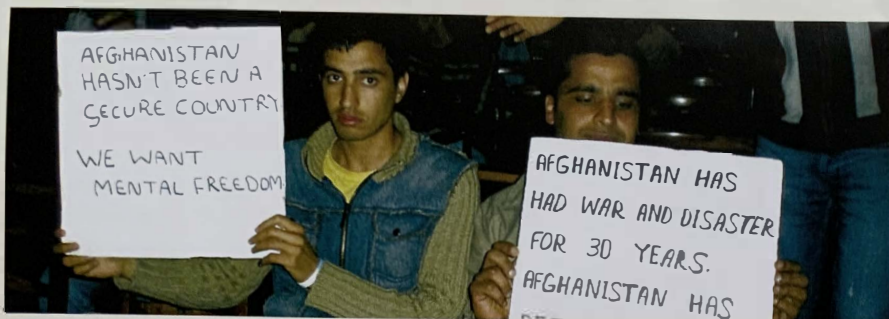
bad situation worse. Among other tough measures, it would take away the rights of non-Europeans to marry without permission from the Department of Justice; and force asylum-seekers into 'holding centres' (prisons) based on the notorious Australian model.

Positive changes would be fairly simple. Let asylum-seekers work. Crack down on rogue employers who pay below the minimum wage. Take asylum out of the hands of politicians and civil servants and set up a new body similar to the Human Rights Commission.

We often hear the phrase 'we should look after our own'. Who are our own? Surely they are members of our own class, whatever their race. Certainly not the fat cats in power – the Tony O'Reillys, Denis O'Briens and Dermot Desmonds of this world. When did successive governments ever look after the poor? Was the health service ever anything but bad? Was there ever good housing policy? These things are not the fault of ethnic minorities.

Let's put the blame where it belongs – on the rotten system. •

*Rosanna Flynn is a leading member of Residents Against Racism.*



## The nurses' dispute and the sell-out of social partnership

*By Stephen Lewis (ISN)*

Several weeks ago, the nurses voted by a narrow margin to end their industrial action. This followed a relentless campaign of vilification by their employer, the government and the bulk of the media. Nonetheless, their willingness to fight and defy the consensus should be an example for all trade unionists.

Their claim for a 35-hour working week dates back to a Labour Court recommendation made 27 years ago, which has still not been implemented by health services management. The 10% pay claim is simply needed to bring nurses' pay back into line with other health workers: this claim has been pursued for almost six years.

During this time, the nurses in the frontline of the dispute have been faced with a sustained attack from all of the so-called 'social partners'.

The media have lazily accepted the outright lies that the HSE has been spinning about the economic facts of this dispute. In the May 2007 edition of the

Irish Nurses' Organisation (INO) magazine, the union had this to say about the HSE's propaganda and spin: 'At the commencement of the recent talks in government buildings they proclaimed that 70% of health expenditure related to pay. We checked those figures against the published public accounts figures for health and, in fact, it turns out that the pay bill for health is a mere 55% of total health expenditure. The Department of Finance, in the talks process, confirmed our calculations as being correct.'

The INO represents the vast majority of nurses – 35,000 in total. The industrial action that was rolled out across the health services by the INO and the PNA has received almost 100% support from the two unions' members. On the other hand, SIPTU (which represents 8,000 nurses) refused to join the industrial action and merely called for the claims to be pursued through the National Implementation Body, a body that was set up within the parameters of Social Partnership (SP).

The INO did not engage in the current SP programme *Towards 2016*, as they felt strongly that the process has not met the needs of its members. In fact, one of the PNA's leaders told delegates last year that, 'the INO and PNA are rejecting the cosy consensus which suggests that individual unions must bury their members' legitimate complaints in the interests of the overall goal of maintaining industrial peace and stability. Industrial peace, under *Sustaining Progress*, was abused by the employers who have now enjoyed a three

year period of it and whose behaviour has worsened considerably during that period.'

The founders of our movement would be spinning in their graves at the total lack of solidarity that SIPTU (and indeed ICTU as a whole) have shown towards the INO and the PNA in their just cause.

That lack of solidarity can be traced back directly to the cosy 'partnership' between the union bureaucracy, the employers and the government.

The leadership of the two unions have accepted a deal that fell short of their justified demands. This shows the need to build grassroots networks of union activists: even when union leaders break with the partnership consensus, we can't rely on them to carry the fight with the determination it needs, unless they feel the breath of their members on their necks opposing any climb-down.

The INO/PNA's dispute is more than simply a claim for a shorter working week and an increase in pay. It directly challenges the neo-liberal consensus that surrounds Social Partnership.

The nurses have tried 'partnership' and it hasn't delivered. They have faced a propaganda war waged by the HSE. They have faced the full ideological weight of the most right-wing Health Minister this country has ever experienced. The nurses have received huge support from patients for their actions.

Their action is also symbolic of what we as socialists value: solidarity and a fighting spirit in the face of adversity. If and when the nurses resume their struggle, it is our duty to stand beside them. •

# An interview with Yassamine Mather of the Hands off the People of Iran Campaign

*Colm Breathnach: What are the main obstacles that workers in Iran face when they organise?*

The main one is that Iranian legislation does not allow any form of organisation except what are called Islamic Shoras. They are tripartite state/employer/worker type organisations that at best smooth over difficult conditions, and at times in the past they have even acted as spies of the government or the employer. Forming any other type of organisation is illegal as you saw from the syndicate of bus workers. There has been a year and a half struggle for the bus workers, with very simple demands: to set up their own independent syndicates.

They went on this huge strike that brought the traffic to a standstill in Tehran and they're still fighting. One of the leaders, Ossanlou, is now out of prison but he's still facing trial, so the actual setting up of any organisations in the open is dangerous. However, the workers have overcome this by setting up two different types of organisations nationally to coordinate their activities and many of these work through the internet, through personal contact and so on. In general, the main problem is having a meeting of various workers to discuss how they are going to organise, even in one industry, because they are illegal and meetings of more than six people are deemed conspiratorial.

*CB: How strong is Ahmadinejad's support amongst the masses?*

I think he was reasonably popular when he was elected but I wouldn't say he was overwhelmingly popular. It was more than him being popular, people were fed up with the other faction because they were making huge fortunes out of corruption and he appeared to be this honest broker. It's now almost two years since his election and none of the promises, such as putting the money from oil on the table of every Iranian, have happened really and so his support is diminishing.

He's re-introduced some very unpopular policies that the Islamic government hadn't imposed since 1980-81, one of them being this strict hijab business, pulling peoples headscarves right down to their eyebrows. Women had got used to wearing quite

## BOOK REVIEW

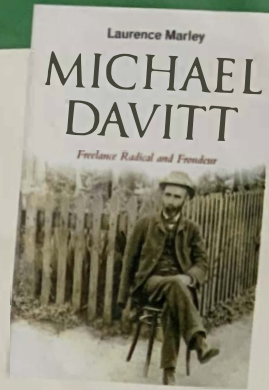
# The politics of Michael Davitt

By *Fintan Lane (ISN)*

Laurence Marley, *Michael Davitt: Freelance Radical and Frondeur* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 314 pages, €45 hardback.

Michael Davitt (1846-1906) is remembered by most people as the leader of the Land League, whose legacy is 'peasant proprietorship' – the fact that Irish farmers now largely own their land rather than rent it from landlords. In fact, unknown to most people, Davitt was a supporter of land nationalisation not peasant proprietorship and he interpreted 'the land for the people' rather differently from Parnell and other social conservatives in the home rule movement. Moreover, on a range of issues, from imperialism to education, Davitt revealed himself as a social radical on the left fringes of the Irish nationalist movement.

Irish socialists, at times, tend to exaggerate the extent of Davitt's radicalism, ignoring, for example, his lack of practical solidarity or empathy with the Left and trade union movement in Ireland, despite his stalwart support for labour in Britain. Davitt was primarily a nationalist and he worried about social movements that could potentially interfere with the struggle for home rule. He was also a strong advocate of 'conciliation boards' to deal with industrial disputes and did not back



strikes or militant trade unionism; in that sense, he was an early supporter of 'social partnership'. He fell out badly with Dublin socialists, such as Adolphus Shields, in the early 1890s because of his failure to associate with the labour movement in Ireland. James Connolly later

rather unkindly described Davitt as a willing tool of home rule social conservatives; this was hyperbole – Davitt was capable of much independent thought and action – but there was a kernel of truth in Connolly's critical remarks.

On other issues, such as anti-Semitism, Davitt was head and shoulders above most of his contemporaries, and he was a staunch defender of the Jewish people at a time of pogroms in Eastern Europe and aggressive harassment in Limerick. Likewise, he supported the Boers against British imperialism, though, in this regard, he completely sidestepped the Boer oppression of the black African population, who he curtly labelled 'savages'.

Laurence Marley's book is an excellent study of the complexity of Davitt's social and political thought. Marley is empathetic, yet aware of Davitt's shortcomings, and consequently this is a clear-headed analysis that allows us a glimpse of the real Michael Davitt. I highly recommend it.

The price, unfortunately, is a bit steep at €45, so one can only hope that a paperback edition will follow. In the meantime, ask your local library to stock a copy. •

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Irish Socialist Network is a radical democratic socialist organisation, committed to the complete abolition of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist society, by which we mean:

- A transformation of power relationships, leading to democratic control of all aspects of society and an end to elite rule.
- Collective ownership and democratic control of all economic structures, wealth and resources, by the working class.
- Equality of all people and an end to all forms of privilege and discrimination.
- Vindication of all human rights: social, political and individual.
- A sustainable society, developing in harmony with the natural environment.

The Irish Socialist Network works to achieve this society on the basis of the following principles:

- Change is brought about by the empowerment of ordinary people not by a revolutionary vanguard or parliamentary elite.
- Openness, equality, internal democracy, consistent activism and a commitment to class politics are essential traits of a socialist organisation.
- Non-dogmatic Marxist thought is essential for analysing society and advancing the struggle for socialism.
- While acknowledging differences, we will work in a non-sectarian manner with, and promote dialogue between, all socialist and progressive organisations.
- A key component of socialism is internationalism in the struggle for justice, equality and the defence of the environment.

Women had got used to wearing quite a relaxed form of hijab and clothes but he's now started a lot of that kind of activity aimed at both women and men. This reintroduction of government intervention in private lives has made him more unpopular.

**CB:** *What's the likely impact of a US attack, even a limited attack, on Iran?* I think any form of attack would be disastrous. The more hard-line sections of the government will use it to increase repression and they've already done so over the last few months. Imagine if there is even a limited military attack, everybody will feel that repression a lot more. Sanctions have already had a terrible effect on inflation and it's the poor who are going to pay for the inflation in Iran. The rich, the people who are supposedly the targets, have already removed their money to wherever the sanctions can't affect them and the people who are going to suffer are the poor. Most people in Iran are united on one thing: they just don't want a military attack, however limited, because they know that this will be used by various other forces for the worst.

**CB:** *What about the situation of women and the struggle for equality in Iran?* The regime has tried to worsen the situation but the women have fought back. There are literally hundreds of women's organisations who meet, because single sex women's meetings are not controversial and the regime didn't realise these people weren't just having tea or coffee, that they were actually discussing things, so there's a rising feminist movement in Iran. It fought the government during the previous administration to relax, not the legislation, but the attacks on the appearance of women.

However, things have got worse in the last few years and there has been a concerted attack against women regarding the hijab but I think women are fighting back against this. Many of the women I am touch with in Iran believe that they have to fight for basic rights that cannot fit within the current state. Some of the young women especially are involved in the student movement, in the workers movement and they are more radical in their demands. Some people say 'oh it's because the Iranian regime, Islamic fundamentalism, can be good for women', but it's actually quite the reverse, these women are fighting against that, that's why they set up their own independent organisations.

For further information on the Hands Off The People of Iran Campaign: [www.hopoi.org](http://www.hopoi.org)  
The full version of this interview can be read on the ISN website: [www.irishsocialist.net](http://www.irishsocialist.net)

# A ROUGH GUIDE TO SOCIALISM

## No.1 – Socialists and elections

By Ed Walsh (ISN)

Irish politicians like to tell people that they're 'non-ideological'. But, often, the most powerful ideologies are the ones we barely even recognise. And the ideology that holds together our political system is a prime example. Over the last couple of months, we've had a fierce bout of indoctrination. Every time a politician has gone on the airwaves, every time a canvasser has knocked on someone's door looking for a vote, they've been hammering home the message.

It goes something like this: we live in a democracy. That means we get to choose people to represent us in the Dáil. We vote for them every few years, because they promise to do certain things. If they don't keep their promises, we can throw them out of office next time.

If you're not happy with the way things are at the moment, that's fine, that's healthy. That's what democracy is all about. But the only way to change it is by voting. You can't take matters into your own hands. That would be undemocratic. You can have all the changes you like, just as long as a majority of voters agree with you.

It all gets repeated so many times, by so many people, it seems like common sense. But how much choice do we really have? And why do so many citizens shrug their shoulders and say 'all politicians are the same'?

For starters, how much power do the TDs we elect to the Dáil really have? The thing that affects people's lives more than anything else is work. Whether or not you have a job, how much you get paid, how long you have to work – these are the things that really matter.

But those decisions lie in the hands of wealthy businessmen, who are elected by nobody. They decide to hire and fire people, to build a factory in one town and not another, to cut the wages of their staff or give themselves a huge pay rise. Nobody has the right to interfere with their decisions. Try acting like a citizen in the place you work, and you'll be shown the door right away.

Politicians still have a lot of power. But the way they use that power is shaped by the society we live in. Money buys influence. Political parties are funded by the rich businessmen who

control the economy. Most newspapers are controlled by the same interests. The pressure for elected governments to satisfy the demands of business is enormous, and it usually delivers the goods. The rest of the population has to get behind them in the queue.

Much of this will come as no great shock to people who keep their eyes open. But what's the alternative? Well, if democracy is such a great idea (and everyone seems to agree), why don't we give it a try, beyond the limited horizons of the Dáil? Democracy should be something people experience every day, in their work-place, in their community. They should be given a say in all the decisions that affect them.

When they choose fellow-citizens to represent them, they should be able to ditch their representatives if they break their promises – not five years down the line, either. And those citizens who put themselves forward for election should be willing to do the job for an average worker's salary, not the bonanzas our TDs award themselves today.

If this sounds ambitious, that's because it is. But just look at the long struggle people fought to get the limited form of democracy we have today. Every step of the way, there were plenty of 'experts' insisting that it was madness to give the vote to workers, or women, or anyone who didn't have a double-barrelled surname.

In the meantime, the only way to counter-balance the power of money is for the people who can't afford lobbyists or big donations to take action themselves. No matter how loudly the establishment commentators shriek that direct action is 'undemocratic', it's the only way to deliver real change. Electing left-wing TDs to the Dáil can be useful – but only if they use it as a platform to promote activism outside parliament. Electoral machines don't change society, mass movements do – 'twas ever thus... •

## JOIN THE RESISTANCE

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We are looking for people to distribute the *Resistance* freesheet throughout Ireland. If you can regularly put copies in a shop (or two) near you, or if you want some copies to give to your friends, then please contact us at [isn.resistance@gmail.com](mailto:isn.resistance@gmail.com)  
Spread the word!



# The scandal of Shamnon warport

By Fintan Lane (ISN)  
In late May, during the negotiations for a new government, the independent TD Finian McGrath raised Shamnon airport and its use by the US military. McGrath's kite was promptly shot down by Bertie Aherne, who insisted that his government will continue to facilitate George W. Bush's killing machine.



McGrath's reaction? He backed down, declaring that the issue of Irish complicity in the murder of tens of thousands of Afghan and Iraqi children and adults was not...a 'deal breaker'. The Green Party's negotiators took a similar view, despite their previous high-profile involvement in the anti-war movement, and are now part of the government that rubber-stamps the US military presence. Certainly, the issue of Ireland's involvement in a vicious imperial war is troubling – like a little biter, somewhere in the background, niggling occasionally at the liberal conscience – but many of our left-leaning Dáil politicians, notably the Greens, have found that they can live with it. They have tussled with their consciences and they have won. Since at least the summer of 2004, the

anti-war movement in Ireland has been at a low ebb, the mainstream media and Ireland's career politicians have lost interest and what should be judged a scandal of government-toppling proportions – the handing over of an Irish civilian airport to a military engaged in 'pre-emptive' imperialist war – continues almost unhindered. Last year saw just one major anti-war protest at Shamnon airport, though local activists staged several smaller actions as well.

Despite the downturn in activism, anti-war sentiment remains very strong in Ireland. Indeed, in April, a Lansdowne Market Research poll, commissioned by the Peace and Neutrality Alliance, indicated that 58% of Irish people are opposed to the US military presence at Shamnon. Only 19% support the trafficking of US troops. Such figures come as no surprise to anti-war activists. There is enormous goodwill towards the anti-war movement and most people are instinctively opposed to the warmongering of George W. Bush.

Why then is there a reduced level of



activism on the issue? The answer to this is complex, but a significant element is a pervasive sense that the outcome will be determined primarily by events in Iraq itself. This may be the case. However, international solidarity remains crucial and it is important that ordinary working people in Europe put clear blue water between themselves and their complicit governments.

In Ireland, it is essential that we end the Shamnon military stopover before the US is forced out of Iraq. If we fail to do this, it is likely that landing facilities will be extended to the US war machine for even more bloody adventures. Indeed, Bush and his cronies are already eyeballing Iran in their push to further extend US geo-political power. If they attack, it is not the reactionary Iranian regime that will suffer; instead, as usual, innocent people will be at the receiving end of US bombs and missiles.

Help to end Irish complicity with mass murder and imperialism by getting involved in the anti-war movement. Join the resistance. \*

# Racism and the new immigrants

By Rosanna Flynn

Until about 15 years ago, the only group facing racism in Ireland was the Travelling community. Foreign nationals, mostly tourists or students, were welcomed and treated very well.

Then asylum seekers began to arrive. First came groups of 'programme refugees', for whom a general feeling of goodwill prevailed. As time went on, however, non-programme, asylum seekers began to arrive. There was no problem at first. The main reason for this was that until November 1999, they were all allowed to work.

When this right to work was taken away, the urban myths started and were fuelled by worried politicians, who cynically spread and embellished them in order to gain support. Now, we are repeatedly told that asylum seekers are 'bogus', 'spongers', 'illegal aliens', etc., allegedly getting free cars, mobile phones and luxurious accommodation, all at the expense of the Irish taxpayer. In reality, they get €19.10 a week and hosted accommodation with meals provided. It is no wonder that, aside from

asylum issues, the most numerous complains that Residents Against Racism receive from refugees are about their desire to work.

Migrant workers are the other group who are demonised for allegedly 'taking our jobs'. In fact, we should thank them for the success of the Celtic Tiger. We need them and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Most stay for a short time – just a few years – almost all the low-paid or unpleasant work we don't want to do.

Of course, a small number will stay. They may marry Irish people, or decide to make their lives here for other reasons. Fine! Let's not pretend that this has not happened before – from time immemorial. We keep hearing about our culture being undermined. Culture develops by new influences being slowly and steadily absorbed and adapted. Otherwise, it stagnates.

Don't be fooled by the 'Immigration Control Platform', or, indeed, by any politicians, would-be politicians, or right-wing journalists who spread vicious lies and distortions. After all, Bertie Aherne has for many years repeatedly grovelled

to the US government on behalf of Irish illegals in the States. Of course, they should be allowed to stay and work there. Does he not see the contradiction in his attitude to non-Irish nationals here at home? Surely they deserve the same opportunities as the illegal Irish in the US.

The new immigration bill, due to come before the Dáil soon, will make bad situations worse. Among other things, it would take away the rights of non-Europeans to marry without permission from the Department of Justice, and force asylum-seekers into 'holding centres' (prisons) based on the notorious Australian model. Positive changes would be fairly simple. Let asylum-seekers work. Crack down on rogue employers who pay below the minimum wage. Take asylum out of the hands of politicians and civil servants and set up a new body similar to the Human Rights Commission.

We often hear the phrase 'we should look after our own'. Who are our own? Surely they are members of our own class, whatever their race. Certainly not the fat cats in power – the Tony O'Reillys, Denis O'Briens and Dermot Desmond's of this world. When did successive governments service ever anything, but bad? Was there ever good housing policy? These things are not the fault of ethnic minorities.

Let's put the blame where it belongs – on the rotten system. \*

Rosanna Flynn is a leading member of Residents Against Racism.



# The nurses' dispute and the sell-out of social partnership

By Stephen Lewis (ISN)

Several weeks ago, the nurses voted by a narrow margin to end their industrial action. This followed a relentless campaign of vilification by their employer, the government and the bulk of the media. Nonetheless, their willingness to fight and defy the consensus should be an example for all trade unionists.

Their claim for a 35-hour working week dates back to a Labour Court recommendation made 27 years ago, which has still not been implemented by health services management. The 10% pay claim is simply needed to bring nurses' pay back into line with other health workers; this claim has been pursued for almost six years.

During this time, the nurses in the frontline of the dispute have been faced with a sustained attack from all of the so-called 'social partners'.

The Irish Nurses' Organisation (INO) magazine, the union had this to say about the HSE's propaganda and spin: 'At the commencement of the recent talks at government buildings they proclaimed that 70% of health expenditure related to pay. We checked those figures against the published public accounts figures for the health and, in fact, it turns out that the health and, in fact, it is a mere 55% of total health expenditure. The Department of Finance, in the talks process, confirmed our calculations as being correct.'

The INO represents the vast majority of nurses – 35,000 in total. The industrial action that was rolled out across the health services by the INO and the PNA has received almost 100% support from the two unions' members. On the other hand, SIFTU (which represents 8,000 nurses) refused to join the industrial action and merely called for the claims to be pursued through the National Implementation Body, a body that was set up within the parameters of Social Partnership (SP).

The INO did not engage in the current SP programme Towards 2016, as they felt strongly that the process has not met the interests of its members. In fact, one of the PNA's leaders told delegates last year that, 'the INO and PNA are rejecting social consensus which suggests that individual unions must bury their members' legitimate complaints in the interests of the overall goal of maintaining industrial peace and stability. Industrial peace, under Sustaining Progress, was abused by the employers who have now enjoyed a three

year period of it and whose behaviour has worsened considerably during that period.' The founders of our movement would be spinning in their graves at the total lack of solidarity that SIFTU (and indeed ICTU as a whole) have shown towards the INO and the PNA in their just cause.

That lack of solidarity can be traced back directly to the cosy 'partnership' between the union bureaucracy, the employers and the government.

The leadership of the two unions have accepted a deal that fell far short of what justified demands. This shows the need to build grassroots networks of union activists: even when union leaders break with the partnership consensus, we can't rely on them to carry the fight with the determination it needs, unless they feel the breath of their members on their necks opposing any climb-down.

The INOPNA's dispute is more than simply a claim for an increase in pay. It directly challenges the neo-liberal consensus that surrounds Social Partnership. The nurses have tried 'partnership' and it hasn't delivered. They have faced a propaganda war waged by the HSE. They have faced the full ideological weight of the most right-wing Health Minister this country has ever experienced. The nurses have received huge support from patients for their actions. Their action is also symbolic of what we as socialists value: solidarity and, if fighting spirit is the face of adversity. If fighting spirit is the face of adversity, it is our duty to stand beside them. \*

# An interview with Yasmine Mather of the Hands Off the People of Iran Campaign

Colin Breathnach: What are the main obstacles that workers in Iran face when they organise?

The main one is that Iranian legislation does not allow any form of organisation except what are called Islamic Shoras. They are tripartite state/employer/worker type organisations that at best smooth over difficult conditions, and at times in the past they have even acted as spies of the government or the shah. Forming any other type of organisation is illegal as you saw from the syndicate of bus workers. There has been a year and a half struggle for the bus workers, with very simple demands: to set up their own independent syndicates.

They went on this huge strike that brought the traffic to a standstill in Tehran and they're still fighting. One of the leaders, Ossalou, is now out of prison but he's still facing trial, so the actual setting up of any organisations in the open is dangerous. However, the workers have overcome this by setting up two different types of organisations nationally to coordinate their activities and many of these work through the internet, through personal contact and so on. In general, the main problem is having a meeting of various workers to discuss how they are going to organise, even in one industry, because they are illegal and meetings of more than six people are deemed conspiratorial.

CB: How strong is Ahmadinejad's support among the masses? I think he was reasonably popular when he was elected but I wouldn't say he was overwhelmingly popular. It was more about him being popular because he was fed up with the other faction because they were making huge fortunes out of corruption and he appeared to be this honest broker. It's now almost two years since his election and none of the promises, such as putting the money from oil on the table for every Iranian, have happened really and so his support is diminishing.

He's re-introduced some very unpopular policies that the Islamic government hadn't imposed since 1980-81, such as the strict hijab business, pulling people's heads-scarves right down to their eyebrows. Women had got used to wearing quite a relaxed form of hijab and clothes but he's now started a lot of that kind of activity aimed at both women and men. This reintroduction of government intervention in private lives has made him more unpopular.

CB: What's the likely impact of a US attack, even a limited attack, on Iran? I think any form of attack would be disastrous. The more hard-line sections of the government will use it to increase repression and they've already done so over the last few months. Imagine if there is even a limited military attack, everybody will feel that repression a lot more. Sanctions have already had a terrible effect on inflation and the poor who are going to pay for the inflation in Iran. The rich, the people who are supposedly the targets, have already removed their money to wherever the sanctions can't affect them and the people who are going to suffer are the poor. Most people in Iran are united on one thing: they just don't want a military attack, however limited, because they know that this will be used by various other forces for the worst.

CB: What about the situation of women and the struggle for equality in Iran? The regime has tried to worsen the situation but the women have fought back. There are literally hundreds of women's organisations who meet, because single sex women's meetings are not controversial and they're not. They don't realise these people weren't just having tea or coffee, that they were sitting discussing things, so there's a fighting the government using the pre-1979 administration to attack, not the legislation, but the attacks on the appearance of women.

However, things have got worse in the last few years and there has been a concerted attack against women regarding the hijab but women are fighting back against this. Many of the women I am touch with in Iran believe that they have to fight for basic rights that cannot fit within the current state. Some of the young women especially in the workers movement, are more radical in their demands. Some people say 'oh it's because the Iranian regime, Islamic fundamentalism, can be good for women', but it's actually quite the opposite, these women are fighting against the patriarchy's way they set up their own independent organisations.

For further information on the Hands Off The People of Iran Campaign, visit our website on the right or on the ISN website: www.irishsocialist.net

# BOOK REVIEW The politics of Michael Davitt

By Fintan Lane (ISN)  
Laurence Marley, Michael Davitt: Freelance Radical and Frondeur (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), 314 pages, €45 hardback.

Michael Davitt (1846-1906) is remembered by most people as the leader of the Land League, whose legacy is 'peasant proprietorship' – the fact that Irish farmers now largely own their land, rather than rent it from landlords. In fact, unknown to most people, Davitt was a supporter of land nationalisation not peasant proprietorship and he interpreted 'the land for the people' rather differently from Parnell and other social conservatives in the home rule movement. Moreover, on a range of issues, from imperialism to education, Davitt revealed himself as a social radical on the left fringes of the Irish nationalist movement.

Irish socialists, at times, tend to exaggerate the extent of Davitt's radicalism, for example, his lack of practical solidarity or empathy with the Land and Trade union movement in Ireland, despite his stalwart support for labour in Britain. Davitt was primarily a nationalist and he worried about social movements that could potentially interfere with the struggle for home rule. He was also a strong advocate of 'conciliation boards' to deal with industrial disputes and did not hack



rather unkindly described Davitt as a willing tool of home rule social conservatives; this was hyperbole – Davitt was capable of much independent thought and action – but there was a kernel of truth in Connolly's critical remarks. On other issues, such as anti-Semitism, Davitt was head and shoulders above most of his contemporaries, and he was a staunch defender of the Jewish people at a time of pogroms in Eastern Europe and aggressive harassment in Limerick. Likewise, he supported the Boers against British imperialism, though, in this regard, he completely sided with the Boer oppression of the black African population, who he curiously labelled 'savages'.

Laurence Marley's book is an excellent study of the complexity of Davitt's social and political thought. Marley is empathetic, yet aware of Davitt's shortcomings, and consequently this is a clear-headed analysis that allows us a glimpse of the real Michael Davitt. I highly recommend it. The price, unfortunately, is a bit steep at €45, so one can only hope that a paperback edition will follow. In the meantime, ask your local library to stock a copy. \*

## WHAT WE STAND FOR

- The Irish Socialist Network is a radical democratic socialist organisation, committed to the complete abolition of capitalism and its replacement by a socialist society, by which we mean:
  - A transformation of power relationships, leading to democratic control of all aspects of society and an end to patriarchy.
  - Collective ownership and democratic control of all economic structures, wealth and resources, by the working class.
  - Equality of all people and an end to all forms of privilege and discrimination.
  - Vindication of all human rights: social, political and individual.
  - A sustainable society, developing in harmony with the natural environment.

The Irish Socialist Network works to achieve this society on the basis of the following principles:

- Change is brought about by the empowerment of ordinary people not by a revolutionary vanguard or parliamentarianism.
- Openness, equality, internal democracy, consistent activism and a commitment to class politics are essential traits of a socialist organisation.
- Non-dogmatic Marxism/leninism is essential for analysing society and advancing the struggle for socialism.
- While acknowledging differences, we will work in a non-sectarian manner with, and promote dialogue between, all socialist and progressive organisations.
- A key component of socialism is internationalism in the struggle for justice, equality and the defence of the environment.

# A ROUGH GUIDE TO SOCIALISM

## No.1 – Socialists and elections

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The Irish politicians like to tell people that they're 'non-ideological'. But, often, the most powerful ideologies are the ones we barely even recognise. And the ideology that holds together our political system is a prime example. Over the last couple of months, we've had a fierce bout of indoctrination. Every time a politician has gone on the airwaves, every time a canvasser has knocked on someone's door looking for a vote, they've been hammering home the message.

It goes something like this: we live in a democracy. That means we get to choose people to represent us in the Dáil. We vote for them every few years, because they promise to do certain things. If they don't 'keep their promises, we can throw them out of office next time.

If you're not happy with the way things are at the moment, that's fine, that's healthy. That's what democracy is all about. But the only way to change it is by voting. You can't take matters into your own hands. That would be undemocratic. You can't do all the changes you like, just as long as a majority of voters agree with you.

It all gets repeated so many times, by so many people, it seems like common sense. But how much choice do we really have? And why do so many citizens shrug their shoulders and say 'all politicians are the same'?

For starters, how much choice do TDs we elect to the Dáil really have? The thing that affects people's lives more than anything else is work. Whether or not you have a job, how much you get paid, how long you have to work – these are the things that really matter.

But those decisions lie in the hands of wealthy businessmen, who are elected by nobody. They have the right to hire and fire people, to build a factory in one town and not another, to cut the wages of their staff or give themselves a huge pay rise. Nobody has the right to interfere with their decisions. Try acting like a citizen in the place you work, and you'll be shown the door right away.

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control the economy. Most newspapers are controlled by the same interests. The pressure for elected governments to satisfy the demands of business is enormous, and it usually delivers the goods. The rest of the population has to get behind them in the queue.

Much of this will come as no great shock to people who have had their eyes open. But what's the alternative? Well, if democracy is such a great idea (and everyone seems to agree), why don't we give it a try, beyond the limited horizons of the Dáil? Democracy should be something people experience every day, in their work-place, in their community. They should be given a say in all the decisions that affect them.

When they choose fellow-citizens to represent them, they should be able to ditch their representatives if they break their promises – not five years down the line, either. And those citizens who put themselves forward for election should be willing to do the job for an average worker's salary, not the bonanzas our TDs award themselves today.

If this sounds ambitious, that's because it is. But just look at the long struggle people fought to get the limited form of democracy we have today. Every step of the way, there were plenty of 'experts' insisting that it was madness to give the vote to workers, or women, or anyone who didn't have a double-barrelled surname.

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**Title:** Resistance, No. 1

**Organisation:** Irish Socialist Network

**Date:** 2007

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