

**FREE!**

# WORKERS SOLIDARITY

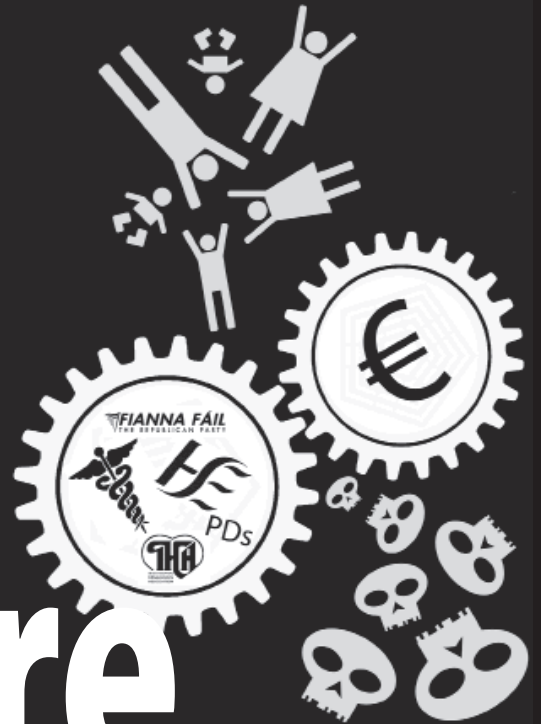
Twenty Four years of Irish Anarchist News

Number 102 March - April 2008



## *It's time to fight for*

# Quality Public Healthcare



The tragedies, the mistakes and the disputes roll on. Mary Harney and the HSE merrily proceed with their agenda of privatisation. They continue to run down the public health service while creating opportunities for profit-driven healthcare, business opportunities for their already rich friends. They ignore the misery and anger of patients and health workers while trying to divert our attention from the real causes of the problems in Irish healthcare.

Advertisements encouraging patients to ask their doctor whether they've washed their hands is their answer to MRSA. A simpler solution for the establishment than actually owning up to the fact that it's the overcrowding (due to a lack of hospital beds) and outsourcing to private cleaning companies that are mainly to blame. Neither is it surprising that junior doctors and nurses might make occasional slips in hygiene given how overworked they are.

Are they even willing to discuss the problems? NO! When Newstalk decided to dedicate themselves to discussing the state of the health service government ministers refused to be interviewed and the HSE pulled its advertising. Cowardice and blackmail is alive and well among the Irish health bureaucracy.

**Continued Inside...**

**March for a Decent Public Health Service  
Saturday March 29th, Parnell Square, Dublin at 3pm**

**NEWSPAPER OF ANARCHISTS IN IRELAND**

# Ireland's Imperial Adventure in Chad

Most people will be aware that Irish troops are being sent to Africa as part of an EU 'peace-keeping' mission to Chad and Central African Republic (CAR), but many will be relatively unaware of the background to the conflict and the reasons for the mission. Chad and Central African Republic are both resource rich (oil, gold and uranium in Chad, gold, diamonds and uranium in CAR) but economically underdeveloped former colonies of France.

Despite 'decolonisation' in the 1960s France has maintained an extremely active role in these countries, installing and deposing tyrants whenever they deem appropriate. For example, France backed CAR's deranged dictator Bokassa until he became too mad to handle whereupon they helped replace him with current favourite Bozize. In Chad, the French backed president Idriss Deby has rewritten the constitution in order to hold onto power indefinitely while banning freedom of speech for the opposition and arresting political opponents; in both countries French troops are fighting on behalf of the government regimes.

The conflict in both countries is highly complex, with military opposition to the French backed regime coming both internally (in Chad, one rebel army is led by a former government minister) and also from across their borders with Sudan. The French ruling class are intervening in order to protect their interests in the area; they make good money by selling weapons and other goods to these countries (French products make up 15% and 18% of total imports for CAR and Chad respectively), but crucially they allow access to valuable strate-



gic resources, particularly uranium which the French are dependent on as an energy source. They aren't willing to take the chance of new regimes emerging which will challenge their cosy relationship with these countries.

But why is the Irish state getting involved? After all, the French have been quite happy to use their own military to fight wars in these countries in the past, so what's different now? The answer is probably more to do with French politics than with our own. Since being elected, French president Sarkozy has pledged to end the longstanding neo-colonial relationship between France and its former possessions in Africa.

For him, sending troops under an EU flag rather than a French one allows him to pretend to honour this commitment while also giving the intervention a thin veneer of respectability. At the same time, the French elite are keen for the EU to start taking a more aggressive role in world politics; the Lisbon Treaty represents

a further step in this road, obliging all EU states to bump up their military spending while committing them to a common defence policy.

Thus, this conflict is a useful test case for the French ruling class to push the military aspect of the EU and get other EU states to row in behind. Such wars are likely to become more and more common in the future. According to an EU policy document\* , as Europe becomes dependent on outside sources for 90% of its energy needs, EU states will have to make military interventions to sustain supply far outside of European borders.

Although this war will benefit European capitalists, it will be fought by the European working class: Polish, French, Irish and Italians will risk their lives in Central Africa for the sake of Brussels fatcats. Irish soldiers can refuse to serve for this mission, and the rest of us should support them in this.

\*European Defence Agency, 'An Initial Long-Term Vision for European Defence Capability and Capacity Needs', 2007

**Informacje i artykuły  
w języku polskim  
dostępne na stronie  
[www.wsm.ie/polska](http://www.wsm.ie/polska)**

# Thinking about anarchism: Freedom, Democracy and Republicanism

For decades they sold the concept of 'freedom' and talked about a 'socialist republic' but now, with Martin McGuinness chuckling around the world with Ian Paisley, it's clear that Sinn Fein's concept of 'freedom' and their supposed vision of a '32-County Socialist Republic' was at best an illusion.

Thousands were killed and injured by those fighting for 'freedom'. But today true freedom remains as far away as ever. As they participate in government in the North and scramble for respectability south of the border, Sinn Fein's claims to provide a radical alternative are shown to be just so much hot air.

The Shinners' stampede to the centre-ground of Irish politics leaves behind a gap to be filled. Over coming years, an important political question for those who want to see a new Ireland built will be what ideas will fill that gap. One possibility will be that people who are attracted to radical politics will look to the so-called 'dissident' republican groupings - groups such as Republican Sinn Fein, the 32 County Sovereignty Movement or the Irish Republican Socialist Party.

## Inevitability?

But what do any of these groups offer in terms of a real vision for change or indeed in terms of democracy and freedom? The answer is very little. Republicanism, as an ideology, will always inevitably lead to the place where Adams and McGuinness find themselves today.

There's nothing new about it - Fianna Fáil did it in the 1920s (they still describe themselves as 'The Republican Party'), The Workers Party Left did it in the 1970s. It's as inevitable as night following day - the limitations of republicanism as an ideology inevitably brings it to the point of compromise.

Any groups which remain wedded to the idea of 'armed struggle' and the right to have a secret army must operate in a rather murky world. It's a world that leaves the majority of supporters reduced to the status of cheerleaders and minders.

Ask any of the many activists who have left Sinn Féin over the last decade or more and they'll tell you that internal democracy was almost non-existent. To question the political direction of the leadership was seen as almost an act of treason. It's inevitable both because of the need for military discipline and because of the authoritarian nature of the political thinking which drives the ideology.

## Democracy

Democracy, that much-abused term, is what sets anarchists apart from this type of politics. When anarchists refer to democracy we mean real democracy - or as it is sometimes called 'direct democracy' or 'participative democracy'. It has little or nothing in common with parliamentary democracy.

Direct democracy is not about choosing who will rule over us. It is instead about discussing the issues that affect our daily lives, about debating the pros and cons of any proposed course of action and about everyone having an equal say in determining what course of action is to be taken. It is about coming up with new ideas, not just giving the nod to a set of proposals already worked out by some group of leaders.

Direct democracy is also about delegation. Popular local assemblies would elect delegates to carry out particular tasks or fulfil particular mandates, if they fail to do this they are immediately recalled and someone else is appointed in their place. Power remains in the hands of the assembly, not the delegate. This delegation would happen on a local, regional, national and even international level.

## Freedom

Anarchists also have a very different concept of what is meant by 'freedom'. When we talk about freedom, we are not referring to the type of 'national freedom' pursued by republicans but individual freedom - the freedom of each individual to live his/her life to its fullest potential. Anarchists want to create a society in which people can realise their full potential as free individuals. This is ultimately one of the most basic premises of anarchist thought.

It is only in a truly socialist society, in which the artificial divisions between us, now based on religion, colour, nationality etc. no longer matter, that this freedom can be attained. It is only if we manage to build a non-hierarchical society without rulers or bosses that that concept of maximum personal freedom can possibly be attained. If we want to get to a free, open and democratic society then we need to put such concepts into practice in our day-to-day lives and political activity.

Reliance on the tactic of armed struggle ultimately leads to the vast majority being mere spectators, providing support - in what has to be an unquestioning way - for what has to be a



secret army. Electioneering is a waste of time given that no parliament will ever be allowed to bring about any meaningful change.

But worse than being a waste of time, both electioneering and armed struggle actually damage the fight for socialism by creating a clientist mentality whereby people sit at home and wait for someone else to sort out their problems rather than taking action themselves. People will only learn to be free by exercising their freedom.

People learn about their own power to change society by participating directly in campaigns which effect their own lives. Direct action transforms those who use it, it is a means of self-liberation because it gives people a glimpse of what is possible, a glimpse of their potential power and when all that power is eventually harnessed we'll be on the road to a truly free society.

**Gregor Kerr**

# Anarchism & the Workers Solidarity Movement

As we go to press, final preparations are being made for the Workers Solidarity Movement's third annual Dublin Anarchist Bookfair on March 15th. From noon to 6pm the Teachers Club at 36 Parnell Square will be full of stalls selling books, pamphlets, DVDs and t-shirts. But it's not all about books.

There will also be thirteen meetings on topics as varied as anarchism for beginners, the health service: incompetence or sabotage, climate change - can this be dealt with in our free market world, Palestine - what can be done by people here, and the struggle for a woman's right to choose in 21st century Ireland. It's all free, more details at [www.wsm.ie/bookfair](http://www.wsm.ie/bookfair).

As the Sunday Times said "if the last two are anything to go by, it'll be amazingly well organised".

February saw many of our newer members meet up at a day long session for discussions about anarchist ideas, why we talk about class, how we fight women's oppression, anarchist organisation, anarchist history, the Spanish Revolution,

Russia: revolution and counter revolution, and practical organising in our unions & communities.

We do regular events like this to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to discuss and learn. In the WSM there are no leaders and led, internal education and debate is vital for any truly democratic organisation that wants to remain that way as it grows.

February also saw the formation of a new WSM branch in Belfast. You can get in touch at [belfastwsm@yahoo.com](mailto:belfastwsm@yahoo.com) or 079 2847 9308.

The WSM stands for a society where production is organised to meet human needs and desires rather than to generate profit for a few. We hold that there should be no limits on human liberty other than respect for the liberty of others. We believe in democracy, in direct democracy. This means everyone being able to have a say in making the decisions that will effect them.

We are an organisation of working class

anarchists who have come together to maximise the impact of anarchist ideas. Pooling the resources of many people allows us to distribute 10,000 copies of this paper every two months, and 1,000 copies of our twice yearly magazine, Red & Black Revolution. It allows us to discuss the best ways to advance working class interests, and prioritise particular activities rather than be so widely dispersed as to have little effect.

Every additional person who joins adds a little bit more to what we can achieve. To find out more you can write to the WSM

WSM,  
P.O. Box 1528,  
Dublin 8;  
or email us at  
[wsm\\_ireland@yahoo.com](mailto:wsm_ireland@yahoo.com).

Slaving your life away just so you can make ends meet; having no say in the major decisions that affect your life; criminal politicians and businessmen plundering the country. Try to do something about it and they'll lock you up. Yes..



Chairman of Louth County Council Cllr Jimmy Mulroy, speaking in a debate about the abuse of workers by some employment agencies, said that while Irish people, "need €12.50 an hour, people from Lithuania are doing very well on €8.50 an hour." Mulroy, the owner of an electrical firm, later defended his remarks, arguing that many migrant workers were "very happy" with lower pay. Fianna Fail head office "disassociated" the party from the councillor's comments, but there was no suggestion of him being disciplined or deselected as a candidate.

Of 60 UK cities, Belfast has the lowest wages, £395.70 a week being the average. 22% of workers are in the 'low pay sector' and 8 of the 10 of the UK's 'economic blackspots' are in Northern Ireland.

Tom Parlon, former PD Minister and current director-general of the Construction Industry Federation, wants a reduction in builders' pay "of up to 30%". The construction industry has a Registered Employment Agreement - which sets legally binding minimum rates of pay and conditions. This multi-millionaire thinks that a worker getting €14.88 an hour should have it cut by almost a third.

There has only been one prosecution in all of the 26 counties in the last two years for paying less than the minimum wage, despite the fact that 296 offences were detected.

# Will the Lisbon Treaty vote change anything?

Last year, the EU Constitution was defeated in referenda in France and the Netherlands. Europe's governments quickly got together and rewrote the constitution as an incredibly complicated list of amendments to existing treaties. Together these amendments make up the "Treaty of Lisbon." Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the president of the Convention on the Future of Europe which did much of the ground work in drafting the constitution, has concluded that "the difference between the original Constitution and the present Lisbon Treaty is one of approach, rather than content".

By redrafting the constitution as amendments to existing treaties, most of Europe's governments were able to avoid holding referendums and instead rely upon the formality of parliamentary approval. Now, the only country to hold a referendum will be Ireland.

The Lisbon treaty will give the EU the right to set policy in a broad range of new areas. It will also redistribute voting and appointment rights among the participating governments in a way that is more closely aligned to each country's population, effectively reducing the Irish government's voice. It will further remove each country's veto over a range of policy areas.

By centralising more functions, and introducing slightly more balanced and efficient decision making, the Lisbon Treaty represents another small step towards a European Super-State. A large number of groups have expressed opposition to the Lisbon treaty on the grounds that the emerging European state erodes Ireland's national sovereignty. While the treaty undoubtedly erodes the Irish government's sovereignty, it is a sovereignty freely surrendered. Not only every government, but every single mainstream political party in the country has supported every single European treaty.

Even those who began as fringe opponents of European integration, such as the Green Party, became supporters as soon as they got a sniff of power. Similarly, throughout Europe, governments of all stripes have repeatedly signed treaties surrendering some of their sovereignty to the EU. If Europe's governments really represent the people, then European integration has their sovereign backing.

Europe's democratic deficit does not lie between the sovereign governments and the super-state; it lies between the people and their governments. The EU is an arrangement between Europe's business and political elite. They negotiate treaties to their mutual satisfaction and nothing trifling like the people's opinions will be allowed get in their way.

When constitutional hindrances force them to have a referendum in some country or other, and they somehow manage to lose, they simply repeat it until they get the right answer, as happened in Ireland when the Treaty of Nice was rejected, or else they redraft the agreements to avoid the vote altogether – as



is now the case with the Lisbon Treaty.

EU treaties, especially Lisbon, are long and complex, and popular knowledge of the intricate workings of EU institutions is almost non-existent. Public debate on the treaties has been singularly bad at informing the public about the realities of the EU – with political leaders choosing to focus on emotive appeals to high-minded ideals rather than the plans for the deregulation of public services or any of the actual contents of treaties.

In such a context, the idea that Europe's governments are expressing the democratic will of their people becomes meaningless. In reality, from its inception, the EU has been driven by Europe's industrialists and their desire for a large tariff-free "common market" for their products.

The Lisbon treaty shows their continuing imprint, with dozens of amendments calling for further 'liberalisation' of markets in goods and services. This is not to say that the European treaties are entirely devoid of social content. The struggles and campaigns of workers throughout Europe have, over the years, compelled Europe's leaders to include a social component in their treaties.

Some of these social elements, such as health and safety and rights-based legislation, have been helpful in workers' campaigns for decent conditions in backward regions such as Ireland. However, in general, the clauses about social matters in EU treaties tend to be assertions of basic rights, at such a level of abstraction that they have little beyond rhetorical value.

The EU treaties are still primarily a rulebook dictating how Eu-

rope's capitalists should act in their dealings with one another. The Workers Solidarity Movement will be campaigning for a No vote in the Lisbon referendum. However, we do not object to the loss of sovereignty that the treaty entails nor do we worry about the Irish government having less voting rights.

We oppose the idea that Europe should be shaped by an unaccountable elite. We reject the idea that Europe should be built as a hyper-competitive capitalist market place. We oppose the attacks on public services implicit in the treaty's calls for liberalisation.

Most of all, we reject the arrogance and contempt that Europe's ruling class shows for the masses, in claiming popular support for their alliances through referenda which serve only as sad caricatures of democratic decision making. However, while a big No vote might indicate that a large number of people are opposed to the arrogance of our political elite, by itself it means little.

The Irish government and EU will figure out a way to get around it. In the long run, in order to oppose the power of Europe's capitalist elite, Europe's people need to organise themselves internationally, through trade unions, political groups and other voluntary organisations. We must provide alternative visions of Europe's future. At the same time as opposing our current leaders, we must try to build a new Europe from below – a genuinely democratic Europe based on socialism, mutual aid and international solidarity.

Chekov Feeney

## Irish Ferries: Exploiting workers and insulting Wilde

When Irish Ferries launched their new €50million vessel in Dublin Port on Tuesday 29th January, 400 guests from the tourism, freight and shipping sectors attended the naming ceremony. How many of them, I wonder, took a moment as they quaffed their champagne and nibbled on their canapés to ponder on the news revealed by International Transport Workers Federation inspector, Ken Fleming, that the workers who would be manning the ferry will be paid as little as €4 per hour?

Workers on the ship are virtual slaves. Just like the workers on the Irish Ferries ships which ply the Ireland – Britain route, the workers on this vessel are not allowed to leave the ships when not on shift, are not allowed to join a trade union and are paid a wage which is less than half the minimum wage in Ireland. Workers on the Ireland – Britain route are known to work 12-hour shifts, seven days a week.

The company can get away with this because the ships are registered abroad and staff are supplied by an agency

believed to be located in Cyprus. In 2006 Irish Ferries sacked its entire Irish workforce of 500 and replaced them with non-union super-exploited immigrant labour. 20 years of social partnership came home to roost as the trade union movement rolled over and allowed it to happen.

In what must rate as one of the sickest ironies ever, Irish Ferries have named their new ship after poet and playwright Oscar Wilde. As someone who throughout his life railed against the injustices of poverty, Wilde must be spinning furiously in his Paris grave. Wilde came from a radical pedigree and his plays satirised and parodied London upper class society. He believed that socialism was the only solution for the endemic poverty which surrounded him (there were 2 million people living in poverty in London at the time).

In 1896 he, along with George Bernard Shaw, signed a petition in support of the Haymarket martyrs (Chicago anarchist trade unionists executed for their role

in the 8-hour day movement). Wilde indeed described himself as "rather more than a Socialist. I am something of an Anarchist, I believe..." In 1891 he wrote 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism' – a brilliant argument for socialism, writing "The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible".

Irish Ferries may be intent on exploiting their workforce and insulting the memory of Oscar Wilde but we could all do worse than take on board Wilde's call to not alone oppose such exploitation but to do something about it. "Disobedience," he wrote, "in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and rebellion."

And on the role of 'agitators', he wrote, "Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people who come down to a perfectly contented class of the community and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is why agitators are so absolutely necessary."

Go sow some discontent!



# They're stealing our history

## Why there is an International Women's Day

Every year we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8th. This goes back to 1910, when an international conference of socialist women decided that 'women the world over set aside a particular day each year to remember women and their struggles.'

The next year it was celebrated in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland where over one million women and men attended rallies. In addition to the right to vote, they demanded the right to have a job outside the home, to vocational training and to an end to discrimination. Over the following years celebrations spread around the world, with trade unions, socialists and anarchists being the organisers.

In 1913, the date was fixed as March 8th to commemorate an important strike by women clothing workers in New York

Unfortunately, recent years have seen the ideas behind March 8th being played down and replaced with a meaningless celebration of 'women'. It's become just another photo opportunity for female politicians, just another greeting card from Hallmark. Another empty event which does nothing to remind us that much of what we enjoy today had to be fought for, and fought for by 'ordinary' women.

Cliona Flanagan

We have no desire to celebrate the likes of Mary Harney, Bairbre deBruin or Hilary Clinton. The women we are inspired by are those ordinary women like ourselves, those who have proved that we can change our world.

We remember the telephonists who went on strike for equal pay, the Dunnes Stores workers who went on strike in support of the anti-apartheid struggle when one was sacked for supporting a trade union boycott of South African produce. We remember the women who have campaigned for contraception and we join with those who are still fighting for abortion rights. International Women's Day is the story of ordinary women as makers of history.

This year WSM members arranged for an Iranian political exile to talk to a Dublin community group about the struggles of women in the Islamic republic and assisted in the organising of a feminist walking tour. In Belfast we helped to show a film about Ethel MacDonald, a Scottish anarchist who was active during the Spanish Revolution. In Cork a meeting was hosted on 'oppression of women and what to do about it'.

## Contacts

### Anarchist Groups

Workers Solidarity Movement  
Publishes this paper  
PO Box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland  
www.wsm.ie  
wsm\_ireland@yahoo.com  
corkwsm@gmail.com  
belfastwsm@gmail.com

Revolutionary Anarcha-Feminist Group  
Anarchist Women  
P.O. Box 10785, Dublin 1  
www.ragdublin.org

Organise!  
PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ  
http://organisereiland.blogspot.com/

**Libertarian Networks**  
Networks and collectives with a libertarian ethos in which anarchists are involved

Indymedia Ireland  
Irish Branch of Global Media Collective  
The place to find Irish campaign news.  
www.indymedia.ie

Revolt Video  
Video Activist Collective  
revoltvideo.blogspot.com

CAZ  
Radical bookshop and social space  
61 Barrack Street, Cork City  
centraladminzone@gmail.com

Seonra Spraoi  
Currently moving location  
www.seonraspraoi.blogspot.com

### Campaign groups

Shell to Sea  
Website of campaign to move Shell's pipeline offshore from Co. Mayo  
www.shelltosea.com

Hands Off the People of Iran  
Network campaigning for solidarity with Iranian trade unions and the women's rights movement. Opposes both the Islamic regime and any Western invasion.  
www.hopoi.org

Choice Ireland  
Pro-choice action group  
choicereiland@gmail.com

Residents Against Racism  
Campaign against racism & deportations  
Meets every Friday at 7pm in the Teachers Club, 36 Parnell Square in Dublin  
www.residentsagainstracism.org

Anarchist Black Cross (Belfast)  
Assisting class war prisoners worldwide

Under the guise of fighting poverty, the 26 county Government are making lone parents poorer. A report published in 2006, ironically entitled 'Proposals for Supporting One Parent Families', set out a new policy.

The primary difference between the existing 'One Parent Family Allowance' and the new 'Parental Allowance' is that while the OPF ends when the parent's youngest child is eighteen, the PA ends when the youngest child turns eight.

This means that the Government will literally force women into the workforce, and will not provide meaningful support for increased childcare and transportation costs. Despite the anti-poverty rhetoric, this is clearly an attack on people's standard of living, single parents will be forced to juggle working (or looking for work), looking after the kids, paying for childcare, transport and essentials, all on a crappy budget of a few hundred euro a week.

This is a perfect example of workfare, a policy direction which tries to force unemployed people into low waged employment; a neat combo to cut the welfare budget and provide business with a steady supply of low wage workers. For this reason, such policies are as much an attack on working people as they are on the unemployed.

www.myspace.com/belfastabc

Anti-War Ireland  
Democratic anti-war organisation with branches in Belfast, Cogh, Cork, Dublin and members elsewhere.  
www.antiwarireland.org

Justice for Terrence WheeLOCK  
Died after being injured in police custody  
087 3219 096  
justice4terrencewheelock@gmail.com



Winter issue with an anarchist analysis of the Irish health service, what's happening in Turkey, a look at 'left communism', community organising, and more. Send €2 for a copy.

...Continued from cover

Meanwhile, the HSE is trying to privatise the ambulance service. Of course, the public ambulance service is seriously under-resourced. The number of ambulances has not increased since 1985, when there were just 20,000 call-outs, one-fifth of what they are today. Another example of how the public health service has been gradually run-down over the past 30 years.

What's the result of this running down and underfunding? Irish respiratory death rates are the second worst in Europe. Similar statistics are available for various cancers and heart disease.

To challenge this privatisation agenda, the Dublin Council of Trade Unions and the ICTU Youth committee have organised a "Campaign for a Decent Public Health Service". Roughly 300 people attended the launch of the campaign in Liberty Hall, Dublin which included moving contributions by Conor MacLiam (the husband of Susie Long) and Janette Byrne (from Patients Together). The aim of the campaign is to bring together health workers and their trade unions, patient groups, hospital campaigners and the general public to demand a civilised health service.

The next step in building the campaign will be a national demonstration to take place on 29th March, assembling at Parnell Square, Dublin at 3pm.

If you can, try and attend this protest. Why? Because it is time to raise one loud voice against the privatisation agenda of this government. Such a voice, fuelled by the anger of thousands of mistreated patients, victims of the two-tier health service, and by the frustra-

**A WSM pamphlet on the health service, "Towards a Cure", can be downloaded from [www.wsm.ie/health](http://www.wsm.ie/health)**

tion of thousands of health workers who try their best in a system that is skewed to favour the rich, can send a very clear message. It can send a message that we will no longer be divided between urban and rural, between patient and doctor. We will stand united and demand change. We will gain confidence in hearing and seeing the collective determination of our fellow patients and fellow workers. This can give us the confidence we will need to build a strong, united and persistent campaign.

Of course, it is not an easy task to build such a campaign. There are a number of fundamentals which need to be met if any campaign is going to be capable of taking on the political elite, as well as the vested interests in the current shambolic system, and fight for free and equal healthcare for all. To be successful the campaign must be:

### Beyond the local

For too long campaigns around the health system have been locally based, attempting to save regional services. The problems in the health service affect working people throughout the country, so a campaign for health reform must be carried out nationwide. Local groups need to organise themselves in every major town, in every county in the country.

### Beyond parliament

And it is only organised workers, both in trade unions and in local communities, that can win such a campaign. No party in government has tackled this issue since the creation of the state. No elected inde-

pendent politician has made much of a difference. And even if they had been willing, they couldn't have. The powerful vested interests, including the health insurance companies, the consultants, the HSE bureaucracy, the royal colleges and medical bodies, have opposed and will oppose the creation of an equitable and accessible system for all. So it is only a strong and united national campaign of trade unions and community groups that can create the required pressure for change and maintain it over a number of years before a comprehensive public health system for all is created.

### Beyond partnership

And let's not be fooled into thinking such a system will be granted through 'social partnership'. An active health campaign of workers should not be frittered away by the union bureaucracy at the "bargaining table" of national agreements. The rich and powerful will not willingly get rid of our apartheid health system.

### Towards a grassroots movement

So let us begin the long process for change. Let us begin to educate ourselves on how the powerful have designed the system to discriminate against working people. Let us collectively come up with the solutions we require. And let us begin to organise, in our workplaces and in our communities, a democratic movement for universal healthcare, from the bottom up.

Alan Ó Murcháin