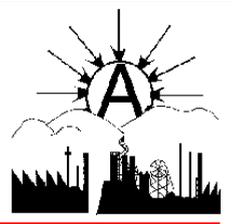


FREE!

WORKERS SOLIDARITY

Twenty three years of Irish Anarchist News

Number 96 March - April 2007



Public Health NOT Private Wealth

We all know that the health service is in a terrible state. Elderly patients on trolleys and in chairs for days while they wait for a bed. Operations cancelled, stressed staff, people having to wait years just to see a consultant.

Why? Ireland is now a wealthy country, there is a lot of cash out there. But, as long as the rich and the politicians have their private hospitals, like the Blackrock Clinic and the Bon Secours in Cork, why should they care about what happens to the rest of us?

If you have private health insurance (or a huge bank balance) you can get treated immediately, and in top-of-the-range facilities. It's not how much you are suffering, just how much cash you have that gets you a bed.

The government continues to give tax breaks and incentives to private hospitals because they are ideologically committed to privatisation – to them profits are more important than healing the sick.

Anarchists stand for a society where people's needs always come first and where the management of the health service would be in the hands of the real experts – the nursing and non-nursing staff who keep everything running. As part



Protesters at Tallaght Hospital

of the struggle for that sort of society we support the communities opposing cutbacks and closures.

We also support the nurses' campaign of industrial action for better pay and shorter hours. Going on strike is rarely an easy decision, for workers like nurses it is particularly difficult. So you can imagine how badly treated they feel when the vote was 96% in favour of strike in the INO and 97% in the PNA.

Their claim is for parity with other health workers, such as those in 'social care' grades. Those workers already have a 35 hour week and earn up to €3,000 more than a nurse or midwife. A victory by nurses would be great for all working people. It would show that the government can be beaten, it would give increased confidence to those fighting for a better public health service, and it would show that "social partnership" is not our only option.

	Sinn Fein <i>Joining PSNI</i>		Abortion Rights <i>Bertie's Lies</i>		Shell To Sea <i>Direct Action</i>
--	---	--	--	--	---

NEWSPAPER OF ANARCHISTS IN IRELAND

Water Tax: Northern parties united in collusion, Communities united in opposition.



It's like the topsy-turvy world of George Orwell's "1984" where politicians engage in "double-speak" by saying they are doing one thing, while in fact doing exactly the opposite.

Nobody could think the Water Charges are a fair way to pay for the upkeep of the dilapidated water and sewage system that the State has neglected for decades. The Anti-Poverty Network has calculated that 37% of the household rates we already pay goes towards their upkeep.

So why this scheme to make working class households pay an extra £120 this year, rising to £340 and higher in 2 years? The answer is New Labour, following their neo-liberal agenda, cooked up the scheme to turn this essential service provision into a money making venture for private business. Just like they did in England, Wales and Scotland, and with disastrous consequences. Just like was tried in the South, but was beaten by a mass non-payment campaign.

Across the North, communities are united in their absolute opposition to the tax. People in their thousands have joined one or other of the community-based campaigns, such as Communities Against the Water Tax and the We Won't Pay campaign, tens of thousands have pledged to refuse to pay.

In February, the Northern Committee of the ICTU (not usually noted for its bold stances) responded to its membership and to overwhelming public pressure and backed the cross-community campaign's calls for non-payment. No one in their right mind would stand in the way of such united opposition, so it stands to reason that "our" political representatives would take up the call of those they claim to represent and endorse a non-payment campaign. Ever since Westminster passed the

legislation to bring-in phase one of this double tax on April 1st, politicians from across the sectarian divide have been grandstanding about the ways in which they have been urging Direct Rule Secretary Peter Hain not to implement it. In fact, all the Assembly Members from all the main parties, SDLP, DUP, SF, UUP have been keen to out-do each other in demonstrating that they are the ones who are the most opposed to the Water Tax while blaming the rest for allowing it to be brought in.

The message from our Assembly members seems to be "if only our own wee Assembly had the power to make such decisions, we wouldn't have allowed it through". But is this the case? What did Assembly members from these four parties have to say about the Water Tax the last time they governed on our behalf?

In May 2002 SDLP Finance Minister Sean Farren and DUP Regional Development Minister Peter Robinson issued a consultation paper on the Blairite Reinvesting Reform Initiative (RRI) (that's water privatisation to you and me) which was approved by all the Ministers of the four-Party Executive. What did this paper have to say about Water Charges? Merely that the RRI "could include water charges as well as revenue from a reformed rating system". Nowhere in this document is there mention of opposition to water charges.

Those who claim to represent our interests haven't been shouting about this fact, nor about the fact that not one of them has endorsed the non-payment campaign. They are too mindful of the groundswell of opposition across the community against this unfair tax to show their true colours.

But can our "representatives" really be trusted to take up the good fight on our behalf, or should we just leave them to do the "yak yaking" while we take action for ourselves and break this tax the only way it is going to be broken? By standing together and refusing to pay.

Shane O'Curry



Non-Payment: the facts

Tens of thousands have signed up already to one or other of the non-payment campaigns. They cannot cut you off for refusing to pay. They cannot force you to pay unless they win a case against you in a small claims court. They can't do this if enough people refuse to pay, it would just take a couple of hundred and tens of thousands have already pledged not to pay. A mass non-payment campaign against the water tax in the South successfully broke the double tax

Spring Clean Shell out of Erris

The Shell to Sea campaign has already kicked back into gear in the new year, motivated that 2007 will finally be the year when Shell is forced to refine the gas offshore. It would be wrong, however, to think that the holiday season has been a quiet, relaxing time for the community of Rosport threatened with the dangerous pipeline.

The last week before Christmas saw a revival in the spirits and confidence of local people, matched by a re-escalation in Garda thuggishness, including further baton charges. On 19th January, 3 local men received heavy blows to the face. In spite of all this, the local people are no longer afraid of the police and their tactics.

Mainstream media attention is predictably gone from Belanaboy and, if you are living elsewhere around the country,

you'd be forgiven for thinking there was little happening on the roads around the Shell Corrib Gas Refinery Site. But, the pickets have continued every day since October 3rd, with numbers on the increase and a renewed sense of the urgent need to halt this project.

The coming months are of particular importance for the campaign. Shell will attempt to remove several hundred thousand cubic metres of peat from the refinery site. It is important to prevent the removal of the peat as stopping the project will become more difficult once construction proper has started.

There are those who emphasise the importance of the coming general election as a means of bringing the issue into the public eye and believe it can be won by exerting pressure on politicians hoping to win seats in the Dail. However, none of

the three biggest parties in the state (Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour) support the Shell to Sea campaign. They comprise 79% of current TDs and are happy to see Shell exploit our natural resources without any benefit to the Irish people.

So, playing the media game (as if the media were on our side!) and holding symbolic protests in order to apply political pressure will do nothing for the aims of Shell to Sea. What is needed is mass direct action rather than merely symbolic protests. We must physically stop the extraction of the peat so that this whole rotten project becomes untenable in its current form.

On February 16th 400 people marched through the area and later that morning about 100 of them returned and invaded the site, stopping work for several hours. This shows what can be done. Imagine what would be possible with much greater numbers.

Alan Morkan

Your Money or Your Life?

In January 2005, Michael X, a courier driver, went to see his GP complaining of recurrent diarrhoea and passing some blood. Following an examination, his GP sent a letter to arrange for an appointment with a gastro-enterologist for specialist assessment. His appointment arrived in the post – he could see the consultant in July, six months later.

He duly attended in July and was told by the specialist he needed urgent hospital investigation. He was given a date for admission three weeks later but a week before this date, his admission was cancelled as there was a bed shortage at the hospital. He was subsequently given a new appointment for late October. However, only two days before this booked admission date, he was again phoned and his appointment cancelled; the reason this time was an outbreak of 'vomiting bug' at the hospital. The secretary who phoned him apologised for the delay.

He was given a new appointment and finally, 11 months after he first sought advice, he had his 20 minute bowel test. Unfortunately, he was diagnosed with cancer of the bowel. (The very thing his GP said he needed to go to hospital to be tested for). He was operated on two days later and made a good recovery. However his diagnosis was complicated by the fact that the cancer had spread beyond the wall of his gut. He remained optimistic but just before Christmas 2006 he became quite ill and had to give up work. He died last month.

It has since emerged that if 'Michael X' had had private insurance he could have seen the consultant within a few weeks of his GP visit in January of 2005. In all probability his cancer would have been caught in time and he would still be alive. It is worth mentioning that he is sadly missed by his wife, three children, and all his friends.

So What Do We Do?

With a general election looming in the Republic, a key issue is likely to be the ongoing problems in the health service. Long waiting lists, a shortage of beds and the persistent threat of catching the MRSA bug, have all contributed to a widespread sense that something is not right. Add to this, the scandals around the Leas Cross nursing home and the Neary case in Drogheda – two widely different cases which nonetheless underline the poor treatment that can sometimes be meted out to vulnerable patients. The



key question is what is to be done and where lies the solution?

One powerful lobby group, aided and abetted by the PD Health Minister, Mary Harney, has been ably promoting the 'private health care' model. Their vision is similar to what's available in the USA, where the quality of health and medical care received is tied closely to the reality of 'what can you pay for'. In other words if you can't afford care, it's 'tough luck'.

As the 'Michael X' case shows we are already somewhat down the road to having this US health care model. Right now "in the Republic" there are two health services in operation. One, provided by the health insurance system (VHI, Quinn-BUPA and Vivas), guarantees immediate and top level care. The second, paid for through our taxes, is also top notch - the problem is accessing it. Long waiting lists, under-funded staffing levels and reduced resources insure long and sometimes tragic delays for patients.

Two Tiers

This Republic's two-tier health system is established government policy, allowing some people to buy their way to the top of the treatment queue. It's a disgrace but it is by no means the end of the story. What is now becoming increasingly obvious is that there is also a government policy to under-fund the public health care system so as to build demand for 'private' health care. Sounds cynical? Look around and

see what's happening. (Eighteen months to get your dodgy knee seen by a specialist in a public clinic. Not happy? The same doctor can see you privately next week!)

Another example of this policy has come to light in the Cork area in the neo-natal care unit. The unit has become the focus of a HSE re-organisation plan which, on face value, looks great: the unit is to be doubled in size to 50 beds, and moved to a new modern location. But there's one problem. Although the unit is doubling in size the staffing levels are not – they're being left as they were! So the nursing staff already completely over-stretched in what is an intensive hands-on job, are now being asked to accept intolerable and potentially dangerous conditions in the name of a 'business plan'.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Across the health service problems abound to do with understaffing, contracting out of work, casualisation and poor pay. Workers are fighting back, particularly in areas that directly concern their own particular sections, but the overall problems facing health workers, as well as the massive problem of access, is not. Health care should be a right, after all, not something to be costed and delivered according to your income.

How can we fight back? The fundamental issue is that the forthcoming general election will have no impact. The present government and

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..



A tax cheating farmer from Dundalk, John Oliver Byrne, who paid up €1.64 million to settle with the Revenue Commissioners got off with a two year suspended jail sentence. He has 157 previous conviction on both sides of the border, including one for a €1.93 million tax fraud in the North. Imagine if the outcry from politicians if poor criminals got off as lightly

The mayor of Las Vegas has proposed moving the city's 14,500 homeless to an abandoned prison 30 miles away. Much more compassionate than.. housing them?

Workers in Goldman Sachs offices in Dublin will be happy to learn that their top bosses in the US are doing alright. Chief Executive Lloyd Blankfein got a pay rise to €41 million, while co-presidents Gary Cohn and Jon Winkelried took home just slightly less, at €40 million each in cash and shares.

Land of the free? A record 7 million people - one in every 32 American adults - were in jail, on probation or on parole at the end of last year, according to figures released by US Justice Department.

the 'government-in-waiting' all accept the

basic two-tier system we now have. Whereas what we need is to get rid of this!

An important first step that could be made is to work towards the coming together of a network of health workers who can link workers struggling in the service across a wide number of areas, sections and issues. Such a network is desperately needed in terms of extending solidarity between workers. But it could also play a big role in laying the basis for the promotion of a model for health care that is a real alternative to the present mess.

Kevin Doyle

Anarchism and the WSM



The Workers Solidarity Movement is 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 6,000 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.

As well as taking part in local and national demonstrations in support of the Rosport residents, about 20 WSM

members participated in the mass trespass of Shell's Mayo construction site on February 16th. This marks a step forward for the Shell To Sea campaign because it recognises that lobbying politicians is not enough, when you are continually lied to or brushed off you have to take action yourself.

And talking of taking action, a loose group of abortion rights activists has come together in Dublin. This arose from a Labour Youth sponsored meeting, where the speakers included Aileen O'Carroll from the WSM and Aoife Cooke from the Revolutionary Anarcha-feminist Group.

The, so far, nameless group includes people from the Labour Party, WSM, Sinn Fein and RAG. It has set itself the job of exposing bogus clinics like the 'Women's Resource Centre' which pretend to offer advice on all options to women with crisis pregnancies, but don't. They lie to women ("it's too early for an abortion", "you will get breast cancer and/or become infertile").

Those anti-choice liars have been getting away with it for too long, the pro-choice movement will be letting women know the truth about them and pointing anyone seeking help towards agencies like the Irish Family Planning Associa-

tion, which do offer genuine non-directive advice about all options.

A new issue of Red & Black Revolution has just been published, with articles on anarchism and the coming elections, a history of the Grassroots Gatherings, the meaning of 'direct action', the Rosport struggle, an interview with Ana Lopez of the International Union of Sex Workers, and more. Pick up a copy from any WSM member, or send €2 to our address and we'll put one in the post for you.

Thinking About Anarchism: Exploitation



Exploitation is an easy enough concept to grasp. It is essentially, when someone does not receive the full returns to their labour. That is when they do not receive the full benefit from their activities.

So, for example, in feudalism one prevalent form of exploitation was what is called *corvée* labour. Under this system the serf would work their land and would live off the returns from that. But they would also have to work a *corvée*; they would have to work the land of the local lord. They would not see any return from this labour. Here we can see the exploitation clearly; The serfs do not receive the full return from their labour. Instead the lord received this return and it was this return that supported the lord economically.

Under slavery again exploitation is clear. Here the return to the slaves labour amounted to whatever their owner decided to give them, the rest went to the owner. And again it was this return that supported the slave-owner economically.

Today under wage-labour again, if we look closely, exploitation is clear to see. The worker receives only the wage, the rest of the return from their labour goes to their bosses.

Now you might say 'Here, hang on a minute, what return from the worker's labour does the boss take?' Well where do you think the bosses' profit comes from? It doesn't simply appear out of the sky. It doesn't simply magically appear in the boss's bank account. It comes from the money that they make from the workers' labour.

Let's think about this a bit. Imagine a company, a chain of massage parlours, with no capital costs, called 'Paula's Parlours'. Paula owns these massage parlours but she doesn't do any massaging, instead she lives off the profit that these parlours make. Where does this profit come from? The profit is equal to the total revenue made from all the massages that happen minus the total cost of all these massages. And what is the cost? It is the wages that Paula has to pay to all the massage therapists that she must employ.



But people are paying for the massage, they are paying for the service provided by the worker, they are paying for the worker's labour. So if the workers received the full return from their labour they would receive the total revenue of all the massages. But they don't because some of the returns from their labour go to their boss Paula, and it is these returns that support Paula economically.

Of course this is a simplified example; there is no firm with zero capital costs and today firms are rarely owned by one person, but can be owned by thousands of shareholders. So I use this example purely for illustrative purposes.

Today, just as in every other class based society, exploitation exists. In fact exploitation is the basis of capitalist society. Think of it, I have just described the essential relationship that defines modern society. Here we have production for profit, with production being controlled by those who own the means of production (the massage parlours), while the vast majority

of society (the wage-workers and those they support), despite creating all the wealth that the capitalists live off, have to get by on a wage equal to only a fraction of what the wealth they produce.

Everyday we are being robbed by the bosses as they steal the returns from our labour. Every penny of profit is stolen. And don't forget it. When you watch the news and hear of Shell's or Microsoft's or Tesco's profits going up or down this quarter, remember these profits are stolen.

What is being described is social larceny. And it's time for us to stand up and end it. It time for us to stand up and take back what's rightfully ours; the wealth that we the workers produce, which is, of course, the wealth of the world. In the words of James Connolly: 'Our Demands Most Modest Are: We Only Want the Earth!'

Oisín Mac Giollamóir

15 Years After the X-Case Bertie Still Lies About Abortion

There will be no change in the law on abortion. A Government spokesman said it had "no plans on the general issue of abortion" despite Bertie Ahern's promise before the last general election that the matter would be addressed.

Speaking after the defeat of his 2002 abortion referendum, he said: "It will be the work of the next government to study and understand the results and implications of this referendum, and to act upon it." And back during the 1992 referendum he said if we didn't vote for the Fianna Fail proposal he would bring in legislation giving effect to the Supreme Court ruling on the X-Case. That would mean being allowed to have an abortion in Ireland, though only if it is necessary to save your life. One more example

of how most politicians behave, say whatever they think we want to hear and then do sod all about it.

In 1991 the government got a High Court injunction preventing a suicidal 14 year old rape victim leaving Ireland to have an abortion. This was the X-Case. Thousands took to the streets. School and college students walked out of classes. This changed everything. For the first time pro-choice forces had come out in big numbers, the country was on their side. The government took fright and the Supreme Court overturned the injunction.

As one of the protest organisers, WSM member Aileen O'Carroll, said at the time "This is not the end of the battle, just the

start. We must not forget, that even if there were legislation, it would not affect the majority of women who currently travel for abortion to England. The legislation being talked about would almost certainly require women to go through complex procedures to "prove" they were suicidal.

Once more it will be doctors and other supposed "experts" who will make the final decision rather than the woman herself. There are large numbers of working class women who have great difficulty raising the money to travel to Britain for an abortion. A "right to choose" for these women will only be meaningful when abortion is available in Ireland as part of the health service".



Fianna Fail to Perform Miracle of Full Employment

Seamus Brennan is a little man in many ways, but one thing he dislikes is not being in the limelight. So in this election year, the Social Affairs minister has decided to drive the last 150,000 people from the live register of the unemployed. Like some figure from the old testament Seamie will perform the miracle of full employment to prove his worth, He will drive the unemployed into the arms of the awaiting super exploitative bosses.

The plan is to force people to train with FAS after three months. The reason for this, as put forth by Pipsqueak, is simple: 'The bigger picture is that for every 1,000 people who go to FAS, something like 40% volunteer to go off the register.' So, what happens to these people when they go off the register? That's not his problem, it's theirs. They get driven into low paid work, most likely work that's minimum wage.

Does this matter to the egotistical minister in his pinstripe suit? Hell no, just look at the bottom line. People are driven off the live register. That's less people to pay social welfare to.

Social Welfare was won by a strong Trade Union movement and now it's under attack by this gobshite. These measures will only have

the effect of creating a pool of desperate labour which is prepared to work for very low wages. Great for firms like Dunnes Stores, Burger King and Champion Sports. Not so good for the rest of us.

Brennan goes on to explain "if 150,000 Polish migrants can get employment, then we have to assume that with additional support and training ...our own 150,000 long-term unemployed can do the same." We see the devastating logic of the Minister's grey matter at work here. Perhaps you can drive them into the construction industry Seamie, where some bosses are getting away with illegally paying Polish & Lithuanian builders as little as €4.31 an hour.

The Social Affairs Minister would do better to concentrate on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development report which has Ireland 17th out of 18 OECD states for rates of poverty. The government want to save some shillings by robbing from the poor, and at the same time they want people to be scared into working for crap wages. When that type of bullyboy job is to be done, Pipsqueak Brennan is top of his class.

D. Freeman

"Partnership" Delivers More Work For Less pay Pay

Irish Universities are increasingly seeing their primary role as being that of a moneymaking corporation rather than centres of education and knowledge. This isn't too good for the vast majority of students but it also is bad news for most of the workers in the colleges as well.



UCD is rebranding itself faster than most universities so perhaps it is no surprise that workers in UCD are finding themselves squeezed. The latest squeeze is in relation to the 3% pay increase we are due under the Towards 2016 national plan. With inflation running at 5.2% you would be surprised to hear that this increase, almost 2% behind inflation is being refused because the union negotiation committees failed to promise enough of a productivity increase!

The idea of having to promise productivity in return for what is in effect a pay cut is a bizarre one but typical of the brave new world of corporate education. The corporate world in the last three decades has seen a massive increase in the gap between what most workers earn and what company CEO's earn. Things are no different higher education where, while refusing that 3% increase for almost all of the workers, the college presidents are looking for a massive increase of €135,000 per year for themselves!

Joe Black

CONTACTS

Anarchist Groups

Workers Solidarity Movement
Anarchist Organisation
Publishes this paper
PO box 1528, Dublin 8, Ireland
www.wsm.ie

wsm_ireland@yahoo.com corkwsm@gmail.com

Organise! Working Class Resistance
Anarchist Organisation
Publishes "Working Class Resistance"
PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ
ww.organisereireland.org

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

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

Barracka Books
Radical Book Store
61 Barrack Street, Cork City

Cork Autonomous Zone
Social Space
61 Barrack St., Cork
centraladminzone@gmail.com

Seomra Spraoi
Dublin Social Centre
www.seomraspraoi.blogspot.com

Activist Groups

Activist groups fighting for social justice

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

Alliance For Choice
Campaign for women's freedom to choose
theallianceforchoice@eircom.net

BODY
Pro Choice Youth Activist Group
choice_ireland@hotmail.com
Louise: 086 329 3741

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

Revolt Video
Video Activist Collective
revoltvideo.blogspot.com

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

Justice for Terrence Wheelock
Died after being injured in Garda custody
087-6221218
larrywheelock@hotmail.com

Red and Black Revolution issue eleven



The Spring issue of the WSM magazine. Articles on sex work, the meaning of 'direct action', Rosspoint, anarchists and the elections, a history of the Grassroots Gatherings, and more. Send €2.00 for a copy

Sinn Fein Learn to Love the Police

There was no surprise when Sinn Fein voted to support the PSNI, the republican leadership does not usually put anything to a vote unless they are already pretty sure of the result. This does not mean they found it easy, it was a bitter pill for them to swallow. The IRA used to shoot cops and the cops used to shoot them. Now they have to ask their supporters to assist the PSNI, even join them.

The same RUC/PSNI been running loyalist death squads, like the UVF one controlled by Mark Haddock in Belfast's Mount Vernon. No matter what spin is put on it, many of the people named in Nuala O'Loan's report are still serving in the PSNI. They passed names of potential victims to UVF and UDA gangs and helped sectarian killers evade arrest. This wasn't about a few "bad apples", it went all the way to the top, right up to Chief Constable. This is the force which Sinn Fein is now supporting.

The republican leadership argue for their opponents to put forward a "realistic alternative". They correctly point out that almost nobody wants a return to "armed struggle". They can also make a case that they have ended the Unionist monopoly of power and even that a united Ireland may well be on the cards in our lifetime.

For them there are only two options: getting into government or going back to the gun and bomb. They have already shared power with unionists in the six counties and want to do so again, they are hoping that the 26 county election will give them enough leverage to replace the PDs as Fianna Fail's coalition partners.

It all makes sense if the question is simply how best to administer the existing system in Ireland, if Sinn Fein's talk of "socialism" is not to be taken too seriously. And why should we take it seriously?

Anyone who has had a child in primary school over the past couple of years has no doubt heard of the 'Tesco Computers for Schools' scheme whereby in return for vouchers collected when you do your shopping, Tesco give 'free' computer equipment to schools. You've probably also heard about Tesco's 'Sport For Schools and Clubs' and SuperValu's 'Kids in Action' schemes. If you've seen the TV ads for the SuperValu version, you'll probably associate SuperValu with healthy, happy kids.

But how 'free' is 'free'? Did you realise that to get a 'free' Gaelic football from SuperValu (retail price €18), you have to collect vouchers equivalent to shopping worth €3,950. In Tesco's scheme, a captain's armband needs €900 worth of shopping. And the figures are even crazier when the computer scheme is analysed. In 2006, to get a 'free' Apple 17inch iMac (online retail price €1,400) required a school community to spend €261,600 at Tesco.

Far from giving anything away for 'free', these companies are exploiting the fact that government funding of education is totally inadequate to promote themselves and are using 'pester power' to divert parents' shopping spend in their direction. It's not unusual to see a poster in the entrance hall of a primary school with a huge Tesco logo and a 'target' for vouchers collected and - in some cases - one could almost imagine an invisible accusing finger pointing at you to say you didn't spend enough money in Tesco this week to help your child's school get 'free' computers.

This creeping commercialisation of Irish primary education (I know it happens at second-level and third-level as well but my experience is of primary) takes other forms as well. Every year for the past 3 - 4 years, pupils in first and second classes have received education packs including badges, stickers, posters and certificates, and featuring a car-



Dissidents protest against Sinn Fein at Bloody Sunday March pic - indymedia

In the Stormont executive Martin McGuinness and Bairbre de Brun happily presided over education and health. They didn't stop hospital cutbacks, reopen closed facilities or end subsidies to private schools. They certainly didn't ask workers to take over the management of their own workplaces. Ending the rule of the billionaires was not on their agenda. Even mere talk of a radically different society was completely non-existent. □

The question is not really about policing, it is about whether Sinn Fein wants to fundamentally change society. They definitely want to get rid of the border, but will their new Ireland be all that different? Will there still be a minority in control of most wealth and the rest of us working for them? Will we still be bossed around? Will we have any more say in the decisions that affect us?

The primary role of any police force is to protect the power and wealth of the ruling class. It's not their only role but it is more important to their paymasters than stamping

out drink driving or catching heroin pushers.

Getting involved in - even if it is more about appearance than substance - the management of policing is getting involved in the management of the present system. Where will SF representatives on policing boards stand on issues of police enforcing deportations of foreigners or injunctions against strikers? Will they turn against those who refuse to pay the new water tax, as the SDLP did with the rent & rates strike against internment in the 1970s? After all, you can't support of the police and, at the same time, be against them doing the job they are paid for!

A new Ireland is possible; one where wealth is used for the benefit of all, where religious bigotry and racism have been uprooted, where liberty is valued, where the motto "from each according to ability, to each according to need" becomes real. That will be harder to achieve than power-sharing between DUP and Sinn Fein politicians, but it will be a hell of a lot more worthwhile. **Joe King**

There's No Such Thing as a 'Free' Computer

toon character Seatbelt Sheriff, from the National Safety Council promoting car safety and seatbelt-wearing.

BUT all of the material also carries the Renault logo and the slogan 'Renault. The safest car you can drive.' The branding of such an important safety message with a corporate logo creates an unfair and unproven association in the minds of children.



In 2003 and 2004, McDonalds teamed up with the GAA to provide primary schools throughout the state with gaelic football and hurling equipment. All of the equipment provided carried the McDonalds logo. At a time when the issue of childhood obesity is being discussed as never before, associating sport with fast food in children's minds beggars belief. In an interview at the time McDonalds Head of Operations was quoted as saying that while the scheme was "...designed to get more children involved in sport... we're here to sell a product..."

It was no coincidence of course that McDonalds sudden interest in getting children involved in sport coincided with a cut in government funding to schools for P.E. equipment. As the scheme's evaluation on the Campaign for Commercial Free Education's website says "In 2002 the Irish government suspended the P.E. equipment grant to schools. The following year P.E. equipment in 3,000 primary schools carried the logo

of the largest fast food retailer in the world. McDonalds were, no doubt, "Lovin' it"..." More and more teachers, parents and schools are objecting to this growing commercialisation and exploitation of schoolchildren. Objections are based on the fact that exploitative advertising should have no place on the school curriculum. Children in a classroom are a captive audience and for commercial

advertising to be presented to them under the cover of education is exploitative and unethical. Many of these schemes also put huge pressure on parents to shop in particular stores. And of course they are obviously discriminatory towards schools in poorer areas. Why should whether or not your child has access to computers in school be dependent on how much money the parents in the school can afford to spend in Tescos? Education is a right which should be available to all children, and its quality should not depend on how much money you spend in a particular shop.

The Campaign for Commercial Free Education was established in 2005 to give a voice to teachers and parents who object to the growing commercialisation of schools. The Campaign's website (www.commercial-freeeducation.com) provides evaluations of various commercial schemes currently operating in Irish schools and information on the issue, as well as support for teachers or parents who wish to take steps to make their schools 'commercial free zones'. □

If you are a teacher or parent who cares about this issue why not visit the website and arm yourself with the information which will empower you to go to your parents' committee or staff meeting and propose that your school join the growing numbers of schools taking a stand on this issue.

Gregor Kerr