

Forward Issue 5

CHILDCARE NEEDS CARING FOR!

The increased role of women in the labour force in Ireland over the last 20 years has created a new industry, a new business, and a new requirement for society. Childcare, the paid care of children by people other than their immediate family, has been part of and subject to the changes in Irish society and is increasingly a crucial industry demanding our attention, concern and care. Over 70000 workers are involved in caring for over 70000 children in a number of different settings and private enterprises. Many of these workers are unqualified and inexperienced due to the lack of legislation and protection covering this sector. Our children are the future of our country, therefore it is imperative that they receive adequate and appropriate care and education to ensure that they grow to become well-balanced individuals. Early education is the first step towards achieving this goal. "By spending itself [society] for the benefit of its children, the human race ensures the progressive development of all." J. Connolly. *The Re-conquest of Ireland*.

The area of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Ireland is governed not by the Department of Education as one may assume but by the Department of Health. The main legislation in the area of ECCE is the Early Education (Pre-school) Regulations 1996. These regulations give health and safety guidelines, including staff:child ratios. Other than that there is little or no written legislation on the subject in this country. Although there are many courses available, many staff working in the early education sector remain unqualified. This is due to the lack of legal requirement for childcare staff to have qualifications. This, coupled with the fact that the sector consists of a predominantly young, female workforce paves the way for employers to pay low wages, and provide poor working conditions in an often exhaustive job. A child care worker can expect to work a minimum of 40 hours a week, often up to 50 hours a week, in a job that requires maximum energy levels and patience, as well as full concentration at all times. The physical strain from repetitive lifting, and bending can take its toll on a young person, particularly if they have not been trained in manual handling and lifting. All this for less than €400 a week!

Union density in Ireland is at an all time low and needs immediate action. Childcare is one such area that unions have neglected to penetrate. Women in the sector and in unions need to push their agenda for the benefit of workers and society as a whole, they may find the male dominated unions slow to respond unless pressured. Unions can provide security, solidarity and ultimately a better working environment for the thousands employed in childcare. They are vital to forcing regulation and legislation for the benefit of the workers.

The latest budget is an example of the current global trend to apply market solutions to all problem areas, often where common sense would dictate otherwise. The current budget gives financial help and incentive to private, profit orientated, crèches in the hope that they will provide better childcare facilities and educational centres. Is this best for society, for our children, for our future? Serious debate has been lacking and is badly needed. A business' primary function is to make profit. Its decisions would be primarily based upon their relationship to profit not to the well being of our children and those workers who care for our children. These workers need to be well trained, well looked after, in a good secure working environment and have input into the running of the facilities. The current trend towards profit orientated childcare and education puts our children's upbringing at the mercy of the market.

An alternative focus is possible and advisable. A state-led push to community run facilities can bring a more dynamic, healthy and rational approach to childcare. Community run facilities have the advantage of location, that is you children being cared for near where you live. They provide employment and training for young people in the area. They bring a neighbourly spirit to the community and peace of mind over your children's care. They can be child focused rather than profit focused, being state funded. They enable the kids form societal relationships from an early age with

other children as well as with adults from their neighbourhood. All in all they can provide a healthier educational upbringing for our children in what is their, and therefore our, most important years.

However these changes will not come willingly from the government. The state has already shown its lack of commitment and care in this area. Parents and childcare workers will have to lobby, organise and demand changes to improve the current system. The greater battle of the level of ideological control the market has achieved must also be tackled and, as in almost every area of society, a long hard struggle is ahead of us but when it comes to our children's health no struggle is too hard.

N. Leamy.

Ireland: The island of rich and poor!

Ireland is held up by many economists and politicians globally as the model way to develop. A new god was needed and this was found in the Irish 'Celtic Tiger'. A glance at statistics show Ireland as having one of the highest GDP per capita in the world and this is constantly reported and shoved down our throat by FF and government supporters as evidence of their great success. In many ways these economists are telling the truth Ireland is the model neo-liberal economy, we are the shining example of capitalist development, and we show what capitalist prosperity and success really means.

22.6% of the Irish population are 'functionally illiterate' and our life expectancy is one of the lowest in the OECD countries at 76.9 years compared to 80 in Sweden, 79.2 in Spain and 78.9 in Norway. We only spend 4.9% of GDP on healthcare, while Germany spends 8.1%, Sweden 7.5%, and France 7.3%. Worse than this is recent reports on poverty levels in this country. The definition of poverty set by the EU is those who earn less than 60% of average income. In 1998 it was found 19.8% of the Irish people lived in poverty, this has grown significantly to 22.7% in 2003, that is one in five households now live in poverty! On a table of percentage population at risk of poverty in the EU, Ireland ranks TOP! Those least at risk are Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia, three former socialist countries! The income gap in this country is now also very significant and constantly growing. In 2003 the top 10% of the population received the same share of total income as the bottom 50%.

Where is the money and prosperity of this wonder economy? It goes to the elite in Ireland and the elite in the US, the elite of the world. Ireland is the world's largest receiver of foreign direct investment (FDI) that is multi nationals like Shell, Intel and Dell. Ireland's economy is the most dependant on foreign investment in the world. FDI represented 71% of capital formation in 2002, and the US were the majority of that. And we wonder why we didn't kick the 'yanks' out of Shannon!! The profits from these multinationals are repatriated, that is returned, to the country of origin of the FDI. While of course this investment provides employment, it is a highly unstable form and not a long-term model for development. It leads to the exploitation of Ireland's resources, both natural and labour, in the interest of profits that leave the country. The needs of MNC'S become the dominant priority, for example the recent disgrace of Shell risking Irish health and land to save 500 Million.

This is the Ireland created by the 'Celtic Tiger' and the capitalist mode of development. It is not the Ireland fought for in 1798, or 1916. And it is not the Ireland desired by the Irish, revealed in the recent TASC survey where equality is first on our list and the free market last! We must continue the struggle for a better and more equal society locally and

globally, which can only be achieved through the progress of working class freedom. The measure of a society is the measure of freedom of its lowest class.

Policy changes are needed to build up Ireland's indigenous industry and to maximise the use of our resources for us. These changes cannot come about in the context of the EU and the global market economy and so a battle on the political front for democracy and sovereignty is needed.

Democracy in Ireland.

TASC, Think Tank for Social Change, a liberal democratic group have recently compiled an interesting report on democracy in Ireland. Most importantly this report contains a survey carried out by the group on how Irish people see democracy in this country and also the type of Ireland they wish to see. The results paint a picture very different to the reality of contemporary Ireland. The summary of the report can be read on www.tascnet.ie.

The report starts by stating *“Irish people have a strongly egalitarian concept of democracy. A more equal society is seen as the single most important issue for Ireland today. There is overwhelming support for the enforcement of social and employment-related rights through Irish law.”* This in the light of the appalling treatment of Irish Ferries workers highlights immediately our democratic deficiency.

People believe in democracy and our confidence in their ability to lead this country however they largely believe this is not the current situation. They believe political activism is a waste of time and that the business sector is by far the most represented sector in the Dail, to our detriment. This certainly seems to correlate with reality given the scandal after scandal of Irish politicians. Nothing surprising here then.

The gender issue also appeared significant, again with few surprises. Women are as likely to be active in politics as men however men are more represented in the Dail, in actual figures and in interests.

But by far the most important finding of this report was the Irish people's perspectives on democracy. *“As would be expected, social class is a major determinant of satisfaction.”* The report found those from the upper class were much more satisfied with democracy than those from the working class. Well this is understandable given their business interests are most represented in the Dail!

“This [report] provides evidence of strong public support for a more just society over the primacy of the free market alone. A more equal society is the single most important aspect of democracy for all social classes except the highest socio-economic grouping.”

38% of those surveyed chose equality as the most important feature of democracy, while only 5% chose the market economy. This is a striking contrast to most 'democratic scholars' or media experts who place the market economy as the central point of democracy. It seems the Irish people disagree with our Minister for Equality Michael McDowell who places the primacy of the market ahead of the well being of the Irish people. *“A dynamic liberal economy of ours demands flexibility and inequality in some respects to function.”* (McDowell 2004). Strong and stable government and rule of law came next, followed by voting in elections, with the free market economy propping up the end.

Finally of important interest in this report is the role and power that we understand the media to have in this country. Around the world, from Venezuela to the US to Iraq, important questions are being asked about the media, its

ownership and its responsibilities. According to this report we see the media as having most impact upon our everyday lives, ahead of the Dail, ahead of the government, ahead of county councils. This is an important finding as the question must be asked in who's interest does the media work? In the interest of fairness and justice or in the interest of business and the state, who are so clearly tied up? Can a democracy properly function with a media system tied to business?

This report confirms the CYM's believe that the Irish people want a real democracy, one where we are free to work out our own salvation and our own future. The only people standing in the way of this are the wealthy elite, those in power. Ireland is an island divided by class interests and it is an island that will be united by class interests too, the interests of the ordinary people, that of equality.

The 1916 Proclamation stated 90 years ago,

"The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities of all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past."

This is the Ireland wanted today as it was wanted 90 years ago. This is the Ireland still to be fought for. This is the Ireland the CYM fights for.

Cutting Our Education

Despite the fact that the UK [British] economy has never been wealthier the New Labour Government has announced massive and unprecedented cuts in the education and library services for the north of Ireland. The policies being implemented by a government whose declared priority was 'education, education, education' will mean that this year alone funding cuts will amount to £40 million. These cuts are set to continue for the next 3 years meaning around £120 million will be taken out of our most valuable public service. Despite this the Education Minister Angela Smith felt able to declare on BBC Newsline that "There is no crisis in education"!

The library service, which has for years suffered from under funding, has again been targeted and now faces further reduced services, redundancies and closures.

Another key area that will be badly hit by these cuts is Special Educational Needs. This is an area of increasing importance within our education system as more and more children are being diagnosed with learning difficulties. Reductions in numbers of Outreach Support workers and educational Psychologists mean it will take much longer to get a child a Statement of special needs and therefore longer to receive the support they need. An important aspect of special needs education is the support provided to pupils and teachers through Classroom Assistants. The funding cuts are resulting in the public service unions getting notice of redundancies day and daily as hundreds of classroom assistants are set to lose their jobs.

Other areas that will be affected include transport, crossing patrols, school kitchens and maintenance. All of this will mean job losses and also raise question with regards to health and safety of children as they travel to school and during the school day.

The damaging implications of these cuts will be wide ranging and will likely leave Education and Library boards unable to deliver targets set by government resulting in a drop in standards at our school with increased pressure on teaching staff, pupils and parents.

Education sector trade unions have been running a campaign of resistance including strike action. This campaign has generated wide community support. Even the media have been largely sympathetic to the actions of the unions

With 30% of the population here officially classed as functionally illiterate these cuts will result in a worsening of this shocking figure. The idea that a Labour Government would impose such cuts indicates just how far Tony Blair and his clique have moved from the fundamental principles of the Labour movement.

The government would like to blame the need for cuts in education and other attacks on public services on mismanagement of public funds; this is incorrect and doesn't take into account the reality of the situation. While the treasury wages an illegitimate war on Iraq they tell us that there is no money to educate our children.

Since New Labour have come to power there has been an endless list of attacks on jobs and services here. Water Privatisation, the Health service, attacks on public service workers, reductions in manufacturing, attacks on the Civil Service and now drastic cuts in education are just some examples of how people here are suffering at the hands of a right wing New Labour leadership, determined to destroy long fought for employment rights and privatise publicly owned services. In England we are seeing the beginning of the privatisation of the education system with the introduction of privately sponsored City Academies and policies such as top-up fees have put third level education well beyond the reach of many working class young people.

All of these issues raise the wider question about how we bring the Labour Party back to its traditional historical role of representing working people. The more immediate question for people here is how we deal with the inherent and detrimental effects of the continuing suspension of Stormont. What is obvious though is that while we are being run by unaccountable and detached direct rule ministers people here will find it difficult to oppose the major social and economic threats posed by New Labour.

People should begin by demanding a return of the Stormont assembly and lobby political representative in order to defend themselves from the undermining of the public services. This week Angela Smith was forced by the threat of strike action to offer more money to fund our education system. However this will only arrest the problem temporarily the same issues will be raised again next year. People should continue to fight to defend our education system and support the actions of public service workers. Socialists and Trade Unionists have been fighting since the 19th century for an effective and free education for all and this fight must continue and be extended to all sections of our community.

Rising Youth – Bringing the Radical Democratic Socialist Values of 1916 to the Youth of Ireland.

The political values of a future just society will have at their core the principals of self-determination, independence and equality. These are to be found in the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic. The vision contained within this historic document remains as significant to day as when first published at the beginning of Easter week 1916. The Proclamation asserts that “The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens ... cherishing all the children of the nation equally.” Who can legitimately claim that these objectives

have been achieved? In fact statistics show (CORI reports) we have been moving away from this vision of Ireland with increasing levels of inequality and poverty, with some of the worst levels in the 'developed' world.

We urge the people of Ireland to reflect seriously on the values and goals of 1916 and how they contrast sharply with the records of successive governments and administrations on this island. We urge the people of Ireland to become active agents for social change.

In particular we appeal to the youth of Ireland to reflect on the state of society today and the fact that apathy and hopelessness seems to be the order of the day. Drugs and depression have deeply infected the culture of our youth. As young people we need to understand our past, take nothing for granted and work to build a society where every person is of value and worth, and not just the amount we have in our pocket!

Rising Youth is a campaign of progressively minded young democrats, communists, republicans and socialists formed to bring the message of 1916 back to the youth of Ireland. It holds the view that organised youth needs to be involved if we are to realise a future society based upon the principles of justice and equality, of rights and duties. We must ultimately rely upon ourselves to deliver these changes.

This vision of a Republic is based upon the recognition that peace, security, and the democratic life of the whole nation are dependant upon human rights – civil, political, economic and social. Freedom is nothing if it does not embrace these rights. Parity of esteem, equality of treatment and real economic justice must be guaranteed for all on this island. Ireland has the wealth and resources to create a society that would be a shining example to the whole world of what is possible, and join other nations in this noble project. All that is needed is the collective political will.

We, in Rising Youth, are confident that more and more individuals, political parties and civil society groups will join forces to collectively pursue the realisation of the democratic objectives contained within the 1916 Proclamation.

risingyouth@dublin.ie

Rising Youth National Committee.

Know Your Rights Campaign Update.

Last Spring the Connolly Youth Movement began its Know Your Rights Campaign. The CYM believed the increasing attacks upon ordinary people by business and their partners the government warranted a renewed look at unions and their role in Irish society. Know Your Rights, a campaign to increase young people's awareness of their employment conditions, was the CYM's first step in this much larger and needed project.

This campaign published leaflets that were distributed widely around the country, through union connections, our membership and university campus'. The leaflet was well received and prompted much enquiry and investigation into the actual legal requirements of business, of which sadly there is very little. Loopholes for business abound in such a seemingly simple regulation as minimum wage. Sometimes only up to 70% of the legal minimum wage need be met. And this is the legal way to dodge paying it!!! Gama etc. shows us how willing business is to go the illegal route.

The CYM aims to continue this campaign into 2006 and possibly beyond. The ideology of the state and corporate business needs to be tackled, as does their allies and the disseminators of much of the nonsense about unions the mainstream media. Unions need to be seen as playing a positive role in the development of this country, as they have

done – minimum wage, 5 day week, maternity leave, holiday pay etc. The CYM believes that by concentrating upon the youth of Ireland we can play a significant role in brightening the future of ordinary workers and their families in this country.

Unions and their leadership have come under attack from both the right and left of the political spectrum, often warranted. The CYM, however, believes much of the moaning from the left about ‘reformist bureaucrats’ and terrible leadership is a pointless exercise. Union leaders will not fight as long as there is no fighting spirit in their unions. When there is a fighting spirit they will either represent or be swept aside, the latter is of course preferable! Our goal is to build consciousness in young workers in their own abilities and strengths and in doing so building union activists and leaders of a fighting kind, ones fit to carry on the mantle of Larkin and Connolly.

The recent Irish Ferries dispute once again highlights the aggressive nature of capital’s offensive upon the gains made by the labour movement here in Ireland. Workers rights are being eroded by the European Union, by our reliance upon foreign direct investment, by the sectarian divisions in the North, ultimately by the lack of democracy across this island. The Know Your Rights Campaign is inherently connected to the larger struggle for democracy, sovereignty and independence, a struggle that falls upon the broad shoulders of the ordinary people on this island.

Leader of SINALTRAINAL Assassinated in Colombia

LUCIANO ENRIQUE ROMERO MOLINA, leader of SINALTRAINAL, was assassinated late 2005. He was last seen by a family member at about 9:00 PM driving a Spring taxi on September 10th in the city of Valledupar. He was later found tied and clear signs of torture with about 40 stab wounds

Luciano Romero who was 45 years old is survived by his partner and 4 children, he worked in the Ciclac-Nestle factory in the city of Valledupar where he was fired on October 22, 2002 due to an allegation that he engaged in an illegal strike which was really a protest meeting.

Luciano had received numerous death threats, forcing him on various occasions he had to leave Valledupar for his own safety. He sought refuge in Spain in a program of protection and solidarity. He was the union’s delegate to the Political Prisoners Solidarity Committee in which he carried out solidarity and humanitarian activities for political detainees.

This horrendous crime, is part of an ever growing list of assassinated Colombian trade union leaders is part of the strategy of State Terrorism and the persecution which is carried out to protect the interests of corporations in order to exterminate the labour movement.

SINALTRAINAL has called for stepped up support and solidarity and asking organisations and individuals to send letters and e-mails of protest condemning the government of Alvaro Uribe Velez and its deceptive Peace dialog with paramilitary groups that continues to massacre the defenceless population and under the law of Justice and Peace they will be recognized as legal by the state which is nothing more than a pardon.

Send protest letters to:

Álvaro Uribe Vélez

Presidente de la República de Colombia

Carrera 8 No 7 -26 Palacio de Nariño,

Bogotá D. C.,

Colombia, South America

Telefax: (57) 1 5662071, E-mail: auribe@presidencia.gov.co

COLOMBIA: KILLER COLA!

Coca-Cola's main Latin American bottler, Panamco, is on trial in the US for hiring right-wing paramilitaries to kill and intimidate union leaders in Colombia. SINALTRAINAL union leaders and organizers have been subject to a gruesome cycle of violence unleashed by Colombian paramilitary forces in complicity with the Coca-Cola's Colombian bottling subsidiary.

Since 1989, eight union leaders from Coca-Cola bottling plants have been murdered by paramilitary forces, some of them even attacked within their factory's gates.

Workers have also reported being intimidated with threats of violence, kidnapped, tortured, and unlawfully detained by members of the paramilitary working with the blessing of, or in collaboration with, company management.

www.killercoke.org

Bertolt Brecht - Solidarity Song

Peoples of the world, together
Join to serve the common cause!
So it feeds us all for ever
See to it that it's now yours.

Forward, without forgetting
Where our strength can be seen now to be!
When starving or when eating
Forward, not forgetting
Our solidarity!

Black or white or brown or yellow
Leave your old disputes behind.
Once start talking with your fellow
Men, you'll soon be of one mind.

Forward, without forgetting
Where our strength can be seen now to be!
When starving or when eating
Forward, not forgetting

Our solidarity!

If we want to make this certain
We'll need you and your support.
It's yourselves you'll be deserting
if you rat your own sort.

Forward, without forgetting
Where our strength can be seen now to be!
When starving or when eating
Forward, not forgetting
Our solidarity!

All the gang of those who rule us
Hope our quarrels never stop
Helping them to split and fool us
So they can remain on top.

Forward, without forgetting
Where our strength can be seen now to be!
When starving or when eating
Forward, not forgetting
Our solidarity!

Workers of the world, uniting
That's the way to lose your chains.
Mighty regiments now are fighting
That no tyranny remains!

Forward, without forgetting
Till the concrete question is hurled
When starving or when eating:
Whose tomorrow is tomorrow?
And whose world is the world?