

LEFT TRIBUNE

A young woman with long, straight, dark hair is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. She is wearing a dark brown, short-sleeved t-shirt. A small, colorful badge is pinned to her chest, partially obscured by the text. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

**SACKED FOR
WEARING A
BADGE**

www.LabourYouth.ie

A People's History Against Coke: Even Better Than The Real Thing

Dermot Looney writes about the struggle for justice against the
Coca Cola Corporate Empire

The US military-industrial complex, it's a wonder that we ever envisaged it as a project with far more humanitarian goals.

The net has revealed to us not only Homer Simpson's vision (what "some nerd thought about Star Trek"), but opened incredible possibilities for global mass projects, ranging from p2p filesharing to the range of independent news centres.

Wikipedia –<http://en.wikipedia.org> – is just one example of how a corporate-driven media has been subverted to a community project of immense proportions. Four years on, the English language version, which now boasts almost a million articles, stands as a remarkable achievement in co-operative and free production outside the control of the market.

Wikipedia's main asset – its openness to the entire world to edit – is also its main downfall. Thus you have all kinds of "edit wars" and attempts to undermine the neutral point of view ethos of the encyclopaedia. The article on my own alma mater plays host to such battles, but their subject is one which might surprise – the ban on the sale of Coke products in UCD Students' Union outlets.

Not everyone has been involved in the Killer Coke campaign, or knows of its origins, so here's a quick timeline to recap.

1994-2002 – at least eight workers at Coca-Cola bottling plants in Colombia, and one of their wives, are murdered for attempts to unionise the workforce. The manager of one plant says that he will "exterminate" the union. The attacks had been going on since the late 1980's but began to crystallise in the mid-1990's.

In 1996 Isidro Gil, a union leader is also murdered by the paramilitaries. The paramilitaries returned to the plant two days later and threatened to kill the entire workforce if they stayed in the union. Unionless, these workers were eventually sacked and replaced by much cheaper labour.

Gil's union, SINALTRAINAL, are in touch with Coca-Cola's HQ in Atlanta, Georgia at this stage to seek their intervention, but Coke continue to remain complicit. Hundreds more workers and family members have been kidnapped, tortured or intimidated.



Labour Youth protesting outside Coke Head Office Ireland

2003 – SINALTRAINAL's campaign against Coca-Cola steps up a gear, with legal action in the US and Colombia beginning to embarrass the corporate giant. In retaliation, Juan Carlos Galvis, a vice-president of SINALTRAINAL, is attacked by more hired goons.

Coca-Cola, benefiting economically from the systematic campaign of murder and intimidation, continue to deny everything.

Enter the most unlikely of saviours – a few thousand students at a university hardly noted for its radicalism ('til then, at least). A speculative campaign to stop the sale of Coke products in SU shops is launched by a small and disparate group of UCD students.

The response by the student body, the collective shop owners, is overwhelming and the referendum to ban the sale and cut all links with Coca-Cola passes by a mere 57 votes. UCD had become the first institution in the world to implement an effective boycott, with the headlines as much international as they were national.

Coca-Cola rolled out its massive PR machine to Ireland but failed miserably to convince anyone but themselves that what was going on in Colombia was above board and besides, had nothing to do with them. However, a second referendum, held two months later,

was a disaster for the pro-Coke campaign, with the margin of victory increasing tenfold for those in favour of the boycott.

Since then the campaign has grown internationally. Recently New York University and Michigan University have removed all Coke products from their campuses.

Several municipalities in Italy banned the Olympic torch from passing through in protest at its sponsorship by Coke

Campaigners in the UK are getting closer to winning a boycott of Coke in the National Union of Students. This would lead to 200 colleges boycotting the multinational corporation.

In Colombia news of the boycott has made it to the front page of El Tiempo (Colombia's only national daily paper) while there has been an increasing level of media coverage particularly in the U.S. and in business publications. The boycott now seems unstoppable and the campaign in Ireland is being intensified as we get closer to a victory for the right to join a union.

For more info see: www.killercoke.org

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The Left Tribune is the official publication of Labour Youth. The views expressed in the Left Tribune are those of the contributors and are not necessarily shared by Labour Youth

Store Wars

David Morris writes about the disgraceful sacking of a Dunnes Stores worker



Joanne Delaney was sacked by Dunnes stores in November 2005 for wearing her union badge on her uniform. With more than four years service in the Ashleaf store in Crumlin on the south side of Dublin, the 22 year-old MANDATE shop steward received a letter on the 29th of November 2005 informing her that she had been dismissed by the company. Dunnes Stores has accused her of not complying with company policy in relation to the wearing of her union badge on her uniform, despite the fact that there is nothing in the policy about wearing a union badge.

Joanne had been suspended by a manager at the store since 18th October for refusing to remove the Mandate Trade Union badge from her uniform. Joanne was advised to attend a disciplinary meeting at 6.00p.m. on Friday, 21st October. However, the meeting was can-

celled due to the fact that she was accompanied by her Union Representative. The Company has continually denied Joanne the right to Union representation at meetings with management.

“Dunnes Stores have a reputation as a company that is at odds with its employees on a regular basis”

People might express shock at such a draconian measure, however in the case of Dunnes Stores this incident is nothing new. In the 1980's Dunnes stores was subject to one of the longest running industrial disputes in modern Irish history, for three years employees at a Dunnes outlet in Dublin City Centre went on strike in support of their colleague who was dismissed for refusing to handle South

African produce. The Anti-Apartheid strike attracted international headlines and became a focal point for the struggle against Apartheid. The company was also involved in a national strike that shut its stores throughout the summer of 1995.

It is hardly surprising therefore that Dunnes have refused to sit down with Joanne and an official from her trade union, Mandate to discuss the situation. Joanne is clearly held in high regard by her fellow workers at the Ashleaf store, at just 22 years of age they appointed her as their shop steward. The actions of Dunnes Stores management show their complete disregard for the basic rights of their workers and, more importantly, it shows a total disregard for social partnership.

The public will be angered by the disgraceful behaviour of Dunnes Stores management and will want to show their solidarity with her. The best way to do this is to visit the Labour Youth website and send a message to Dunnes Stores, or drop into your local store and make a complaint to the management. Nothing short of a full apology and re-instatement must be accepted in this case. Joanne's case has already received international attention. In the House of Commons, British Labour M.P. Sharon Hodgson has tabled a motion condemning the company, whilst the company has received thousands of emails from the public.

Dunnes Stores must not be allowed to get away with their actions. The mistreatment of Joanne Delaney if allowed to go unchecked will threaten the basic rights of all workers and is a perfect example of how 'An injury to one is an injury to all'. The only way to protect yourself against exploitation and intimidation in the workplace is to join a trade union.

So what now for a post Sharon Israel ?

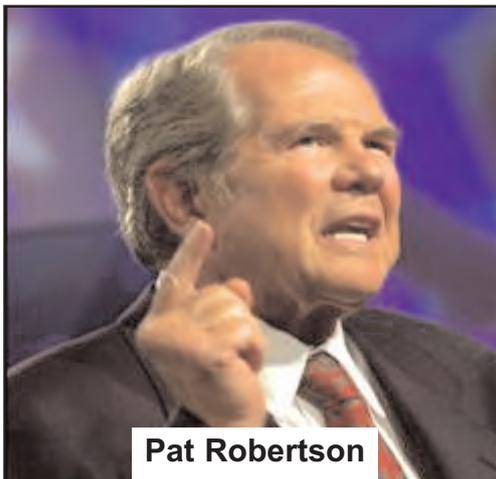


Ariel Sharon

Sinead Commons writes about the dawn of a more polarised political situation in the middle east

In the days since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's massive cerebral hemorrhagic stroke on 4 January 2006, political pundits and journalists across the world have been asserting that this major incident has thrown the future of any movement towards peace with the Palestinians into serious question especially since Hamas' election victory three weeks later. Some commentators have also described the ailing prime minister as the best peacemaker Israel ever created since its founding days in 1948 - even more so than the late Yitzhak Rabin, who himself was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994, for his role in the creation of the Oslo Accords, along with Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat.

Sharon is seen in a different light by the different sects of the population. Leaders of the Muslim world except Syria and Egypt are keeping quiet about his illness. Syria and Egypt signed the pact with Israel in respect of the US brokered peace process in the Middle East. So, the statesmen of these two countries are telephoning the present PM of Israel and wishing the quick recovery of Ariel Sharon. Other corners evaluate Sharon in different ways. The evacuated Israelis consider it a divine retribution according to pundits like American fundamentalist Christian Pat Robertson.



Pat Robertson

He thinks that God is giving Sharon punishment for his sins and will punish him more. But Sharon is an icon in the eyes of most of the Israelis. He has tried to ensure security and superiority of Israelis over the Arabs. He has left no stone unturned to ensure their peace, prosperity and security at the cost of hundreds of lives and demolishing the homes of Palestinians. Sharon was obsessed with wanton killing of Palestinian boys, girls, children, young and old. He demolished offices of Yasser Arafat. He killed Ahmed Yassin, an old and physically crippled leader of the Palestine nation. He took perverse pleasure in killing the Palestinians.

The sudden illness of Sharon, who has been viewed as the best chance for peace with the Palestinians after the successful pullout from Gaza last summer, will now cast a shadow over the Middle East peace prospects in the upcoming Israeli general elections due on March 28. In the upcoming elections, acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, now head of Kadima, will run against left-leaning Amir Peretz of Labour and Binyamin Netanyahu of Likud on the right.

Sharon was struck down at a point in which he had become the uniquely indispensable man of Israeli politics. Many of those who had despised him earlier as bloodthirsty now admire his ability to rally the Israeli public behind withdrawal. His acceptance of the idea of a Palestinian state was also a change. Many who were planning to vote for him would never have thought of doing so a few years earlier. Many of those who had supported him for decades openly prayed for his death.

No one really knows what he would have done after the elections. Some felt that his dream was to use his unparalleled clout in Israeli society to help create borders that the two sides could live with, even if they might not sign a peace treaty. His reputation for strength and willingness to use force helped convince many Israelis that they could safely withdraw from Gaza and perhaps parts of the West Bank in the future.

with the sense of security that Sharon did. Thus, the new prime minister, who will very likely be Ehud Olmert, Sharon's closest political ally in the last few years, might find it difficult to carry out Sharon's intentions, even if he knows what they are.

For the moment Sharon's associates have set aside their concerns to pace hospital corridors waiting for the results of this battle for life. But a prolonged wait leads to an uncomfortable predicament in the short life, so full of embarrassing quandaries, that is ours. You cannot wish for the waiting period to end for that is tantamount to wishing that the patient would hurry up and die. But you cannot keep your daily affairs on hold indefinitely. The living must look after themselves. As for the near-living, that, apparently, is the job of the press and in



Members of Hamas celebrating election victory

Israel journalists are paid handsomely for monitoring every breath and every tremor of the man in the hospital room.

The United States will almost certainly miss Sharon. His experience and, his willingness to bow to American strategic goals, gave Washington a sense that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would not blow up. His successors are not hotheads, but their ability to deal with the situation on their own is not clear. Their ability to forge a peace settlement in the region was not helped by the election of the militant group Hamas into power in Palestine. The quest for peace in west Asia has never appeared so rudderless in a long time. In this new era of a militant Palestinian government and a leaderless Israel it seems that this generation will have a hard time trying to move forward to an era of stability and security for all.

Left Tide Sweeping South America

Donal O'Liathain examines the rise of the left in South America in recent years

After the military dictatorships of the 70's, the economic severity of the 80's and the disastrous privatisation of the 90's, Latin America has rediscovered its social roots. With a revolutionary tradition second to none, Latin America's history is full of movements demanding justice and freedom. From Allende to Bolivar, from Castro all the way to the Zapatistas the left have always acted as 'Libertadores' for the people of Latin America.

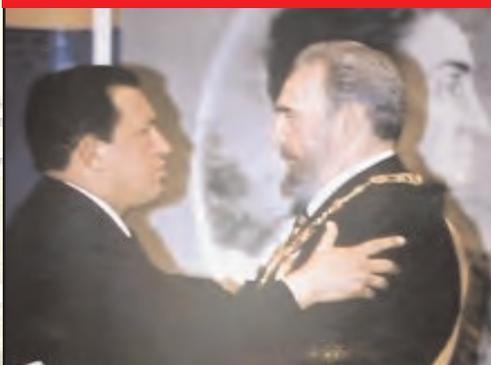
It's not unfair to say that today there's a specter haunting America, but it's not the specter of Osama Bin Laden, Islamic fighters nor the specter of environmental destruction, but rather the specter of (and the dawning reality that is) a truly left-wing Latin America.

The elections of Evo Morales in Bolivia, Chilean Socialist Michelle Bachelet, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Uruguayan President Tabare Vasquez and President of Argentina Nestor Kirchner, all added to Hugo Chavez's increased popularity, can in no way be interpreted as anything other than real triumphs of the Left. Millions of indigenous people as well as Mestizo's, millions of workers as well as farmers have benefited from the new left sweeping throughout Latin America.

Of course the greatest possibility yet for Latin America will come about if the left's series of victories is part of a trend that includes a win for López Obrador in the upcoming Mexican elections.

While the U.S. is forced to tolerate Chávez as long as he keeps the oil flowing, a López Obrador victory in Mexico

South America's red revolutionaries:



Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro



Evo Morales



Michelle Bachelet

next year would set off plenty of alarm bells in Washington. Not only could Obrador reverse Vicente Fox's policy of 'Free Trade' with the 'gringos' but he could also reach out to Chávez, Lula, Castro, Kirchner and Vázquez and form a new continental alliance. If he wins and if he sticks to his convictions, the Neo-Cons and Neo-Liberals will then be faced with four leftwing hemispheric powerhouses: Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. That's over 14 million 331 thousand and 5 hundred square kilometers (that's well over 170 times the size of Ireland).

The nightmare scenario for Bush and his team would then be Chávez inviting López Obrador and Mexico's state owned oil company, Pemex, into a cooperative arrangement with the Venezuelan leader's oiltrading bloc, "Petrosur," which already includes Argentina and Uruguay. Given that Mexico and Venezuela are two of the U.S.'s top four sources of foreign oil imports (behind Saudi Arabia and Canada), a combined Obrador-Chávez alliance would account for upwards of a quarter of all U.S. petroleum imports.

But things could get worse for Bush. Perhaps the next step would be a single South American currency modeled on the euro? If López Obrador wins, that possibility could be on the cards and certainly Chávez –notwithstanding Washington's fear of another debilitating blow against the dollar, as happened with the advent of the euro – will continue pushing for it.

So, with a growing continental alliance and a political stance markedly different from that being fielded by the U.S., the power being wielded in the New World may become that bit more balanced. Lets hope so. After all, Bush's nightmares are our dreams.

Ireland's Mental Health Crisis

Anna Coleman writes about the appalling state of mental health services in Ireland and the governments lack of action on the matter

Our country is currently experiencing a crisis in the area of mental health. Notwithstanding the passing of The Mental Health Act, 2001, government measures in attempting to remedy this occurrence have proved a case of too little, too late. The origins of this crisis lie in the government's narrow focus on finance and economic growth and our increasingly consumerist culture. Social and community structures are breaking down, resulting in increased individualism and subsequent loneliness and desperation.

The evidence of this can be found in spiralling rates of suicide and depression in this country. Suicide constitutes a third of all deaths amongst 15-24 year olds in Ireland. We have the fifth highest youth suicide rate in the EU, the second for the suicide of young males. There has been an increase of 8% in suicide rates since 1990, while there has been a 70% increase in young male suicide. The National Parasuicide Registry has estimated 11, 000 cases of self harm every year, most of these occurring in young females aged 15-19 years old. Approximately 300,000 people in Ireland have suffered from depression at some stage in their lives. These frightening statistics, while known to the government, are not being adequately addressed. Twenty years ago, spending on mental health accounted for 12% of the total health budget. It now accounts for a paltry 6.8%. This is in no way proportional to fact that mental health disability constitutes over 20% of all health related disability.

Recent promises, most notably made by the Tanaiste Mary Harney, are difficult to swallow when we consider that previous policy entitled 'Planning For The Future', 1984, contains many proposals that were never by the government. Mary Harney announced towards the end of 2005 that she wished to raise the percentage of trained crisis nurses in hospitals from 5 to 90%. This, while sounding impressive, was failed to be backed up fully by specif-

ic funding and implementation proposals. Another campaign proposed by Harney, would aim to target youth. This campaign would be carried out through the use of popular mediums such as texting and email. This is another sad example of the government's refusal to deal with this issue in a direct and interpersonal manner, which would of course require greater funding.

Also proposed was The National Suicide



Mary Harney has not done enough to curb this crisis

Prevention Strategy but it looks as if this is also to be grossly under funded, when considered in proportion of the crisis at stake and when looking at the overall health budget. These announcements are obviously being made to allay fears of an increasingly aware public, two thirds of which in a recent survey, carried out by Mental Health Ireland, stated that they felt there were not sufficient mental health services in this country.

The increased individualism in this country can also be viewed with respect to this issue, in the context of the stigmatisation of the mentally ill. The importance placed on the success of the individual serves to isolate the individual who is ill or who is perceived to not to be 'functioning' in our successful society. This problem is combined with the fact that there have not

been sufficient awareness campaigns run by the government that would serve to destigmatise the mentally ill. Another survey carried out by Mental Health Ireland showed that of the respondents involved, one fifth believed mental health facilities 'downgraded' their neighbourhood, 18% believed people held the right to exclude the mentally ill from their neighbourhood and nearly one tenth would not wish to live next door to someone who is mentally ill. These results denote a desperate need for further education of the public with regard to the mentally ill.

Labour policy in relation to these matters can be seen in light of a document entitled 'Changing Our Mindset', issued by Liz Mc Manus, TD, which shows disgust at the fact that mental health is receiving a smaller and smaller share of a cake that is not big enough to begin with, under-funded, unequally distributed, understaffed, lacking in essential specialist services, in short as neglected and ignored as of its clients'. Mc Manus also notes that The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 12, ratified by Ireland states that 'All persons have the right to the best available mental health care'.

Labour Youth are in agreement with the above opinions. The National Youth Conference in November saw a motion being passed which mandated the policy development officer and working group to work on policy to promote positive mental health in our youth, concentrating on 1st, 2nd and 3rd level institutions. The conference also mandated the campaigns officer and working group to launch a mental health and suicide prevention campaign that will be in concordance with this policy.

Labour Youth will do its best to ensure this is an effective campaign that will call for an end to the pervasive stigmatisation of the mentally ill, and also which will aim to support, inform and educate our youth.

Serotax: 'The Wonder Drug'

Ciaragh O'Neill writes about the need for strict controls on anti-depressant drugs in Ireland

The chances are that you or someone you know is taking Seroxat. Prescribed for everything from anxiety to depression it has fast become one of the most popular SSRI's (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) on the market.

Seroxat is Ireland's most popular anti-depressant, but its popularity here is nothing compared to its popularity in the U.S. In the States Seroxat is known as Paxil and due to loopholes in licensing laws it can be advertised directly to the public. In 2000 GlaxoSmithKline (Seroxat's manufacturer) spent approximately \$90 million on advertising for the drug, Glaxo reported \$2bn in profit from Paxil.

The reason behind Seroxat's success is licensing. Seroxat has been licensed to treat more conditions than any other drug; it's even licensed to treat some conditions that haven't been internationally recognised yet like Generalised Anxiety Disorder.

However these 'wonder drugs' have a darker side that revealed itself as prescriptions increased in the '90's. The most common reported symptoms dealing with Seroxat withdrawal include heightened anxiety, dizziness, and loss of balance, electric shock sensations, violent mood swings and vivid nightmares. Dr. Alistair Benbow, head of European Clinical Psychiatry for GlaxoSmithKline says that Seroxat is a "well tolerated medicine that has been used extensively around the world over the last ten years".

However, this assertion is proved weak when you consider the mounting evidence against Seroxat. In 1998 Toby Tobin decided to sue GlaxoSmithKline after his father-in-law Donald Schell killed himself, his wife, his daughter and his granddaughter in Gillette, Wyoming. Schell had previously shown no indications of a violent personality; he had been mildly depressed but not suicidal for the previous ten years. Schell had taken just two Seroxat (Paxil) tablets before these tragic events occurred. GlaxoSmithKline were found to be negligent in failing to provide information to Doctors about the possible side affects of Seroxat (Paxil), and



"approximately 350 children and adolescents under the age of 18, in Ireland are currently being treated with Seroxat"

were ordered to pay \$6 million in compensation. It was revealed during the course of the trial that GlaxoSmithKline had hidden clinical trials, which showed that around one in four healthy volunteers suffered the sort of mental turmoil that Schell suffered.

Since 1991 Seroxat has been licensed to treat depressive illness. In 2003 the Irish Medicines Board issued a warning that the drug Seroxat should not be used to treat anyone under the age of 18 as it appeared to raise the incidence of suicide and self harm in children and adolescents, and had no benefit in the treatment of depressive illness. A clinical trial was also carried out in which children with depressive illness were prescribed either Seroxat or a placebo. The results of the survey were remarkable; it was found that Seroxat had no greater effect in the treatment of depressive illness than the placebo. The survey also revealed that the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviour was greater with Seroxat than the placebo. Yet due to loopholes in the drug licensing laws Seroxat can still be prescribed by Doctors to people under the age of 18 if the

Doctors deem it appropriate. The European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMA) has also reviewed the drug and determined that patients with a history of suicidal behaviour or thoughts are at a greater risk of suicidal attempts during treatment with Seroxat. Yet still approximately 350 children and adolescents under the age of 18, in Ireland are currently being treated with Seroxat.

Another research group in Sweden ran a similar trial and found that among 916 on the drug seven-attempted suicide compared to just one in a placebo group.

Why do so many Doctors continue to prescribe the drug in vast quantities, especially to children and adolescents?

GlaxoSmithKline has never had the best reputation for marketing ethics. Glaxo was investigated in 1995 for allegedly bribing health ministry officials. Dr. Reccha, the spokesman for GlaxoSmithKline in Italy responded with the comment "Glaxo is a leader in the world pharmaceutical market. We do not need to do anything here that we do not do in other European countries" Similar investigations are underway in the America where GlaxoSmithKline are charged with bribery and corruption. Allegations include gifts ranging from free holidays abroad to cash payments up to \$26,873. Although no formal charges have been brought officials believe that as many as 3000 Doctors and Sales Rep's are involved. In Germany 3,500 Doctors are being investigated for alleged undue financial advantages and corruption. The District Attorney's Office in Munich started to investigate GlaxoSmithKline after a reported increase in their marketing activities. GlaxoSmithKline had invited hospital doctors and their spouses to conferences abroad with 5800 payments of EUR 25,000 were paid to doctors to cover 'travel costs'. Other gifts including books, computers and donations were given to Doctors. In one case at the launch of GlaxoSmithKline's ACE inhibitor drug doctors were invited to travel to the World Cup and to a nearby Formula One race.

One wonders whether GlaxoSmithKline's aggressive marketing tactics can be linked to the ongoing prescription of their drug Seroxat despite repeated health warnings.

Politics Beyond Parliament: The Power Of Ideas

Carl Fox asks: Does local politics get in the way of debates on the real issues that Ireland has to deal with?



Student activist Enda Duffy leads a protest on grants through DunLaoghaire / Rathdown County Council building

Irish politics suffers from a rather serious and debilitating confusion. As a state, we seem to be unable to distinguish between which issues are local, and which are national. I've no idea who said that all politics is local, but I'd like to give the individual in question a good shake. This kind of thinking has been holding our political development back for generations.

In this country, local government is a joke. Very few people take it at all seriously and it's commonly seen as a training ground for a run at the Dáil. This is neither the case, nor how things should be. Local government exists for a very specific reason, namely, and forgive me if you saw this coming from the start, the governance of local issues. That's its remit, that's why it's there. Unfortunately, the tendency is for everyone to simply ignore it and go straight to the local TD with any problem.

If a concerned citizen needs a third speed bump on the road, or the sink fixed, or possibly someone to water the flowers then it's his/her representative in the national parliament that gets a call. Now, generally all a TD can do is to refer the matter to the city or county council via a question, or pass it off to a colleague on said council. With the end of the dual mandate, TDs have no real power to get a playground built or a new set of traffic lights installed. However, the perception still persists that they're the only ones who can, and we continue to elect politicians on the basis of what they'll do for us, and the local area.

The whole country seems to be missing the point of having a national parliament at all. They're all there to discuss issues of national significance, and make decisions based on the good of the nation as a whole. Questions about how we want our society to proceed have

national answers. Education, job creation, standards of employment and so on are not challenges that we can deal with on a unitary level, in a fragmented way. We need to untie the hands of our representatives and we need to learn to take a broader view of politics and re-evaluate what it is that we want to get out of democratic elections.

“Youth politics can be the grounding that gives future leaders the imagination to take this country away from the all too pervasive culture of locality and blinkered self-interest”

This is where youth politics and involvement with political parties in college should prove invaluable. There seems always to exist a certain suspicion of mainstream political activism, in that participants are often seen as enhancing their CVs and looking to further their own ambitions. And it's amazing how easily people are turned off political discussion by mistrust of motives and personalities.

Whether you agree with them or not, college political parties are providing an almost unique facility, they're offering to debate and argue theory and practice in a way that's not constricted by the unfortunate realities of electoral politics. You're not their constituents and they aren't expected to appease you. When college branches and youth organisations talk about things like social policy and economic theory they're discussing the national concerns that we don't generally see TDs coming to us on the doorsteps about.

Don't treat on-campus political activity as merely an extension of political parties. There's a fundamental difference in the essence and character, a difference that needs to spread outwards. It's not just the level of idealism, it's the freedom to pursue national, and even supra-national, objectives without the hindrance of immersion in the nitty-gritty of local affairs.

I think everyone who's involved in politics at almost any level regularly feels the temptation to go Athenian on the silent, apathetic majority, and if you've read this far then I see no reason to restrain myself this time. A democracy is as strong, or as real, as the amount of participation by the citizenry, and the depth and breadth of its understanding. There has to be a responsibility to engage with the political process and how this takes place is crucial to the development of politics in Ireland and further afield.

Youth politics can be the grounding that gives future leaders the imagination to take this country away from the all-too pervasive culture of locality and blinkered self-interest. It is capable of producing generations of politicians prepared to make the structural changes necessary. It can also be a way for us all to raise consciousness of the national issues that get swept under the carpet by the fuss made over their counterparts that, while important, are simply too confined and insular to impinge on a national legislature.

Early involvement at a theoretical level may not seem practical or useful to many. However, it is one established and straightforward way to broaden the scope of our collective view of government, and hopefully a way to instil a radically new approach to the use of the colossal amount of energy and activity expended on politics in this country.

Social Partnership Sham

Patrick Nulty writes about the flaws of the current form of social partnership which lead to the Irish ferries dispute

Last November at Labour Youth's national conference delegates voted overwhelmingly to campaign for an end to the social partnership model in Ireland. This position has been adopted within the context of some of the most despicable attacks on workers' rights over recent months, including the intimidation of GAMA workers, those in Irish Ferries, and by the Minister for the Environment Noel Dempsey against the CWU (Communications Workers Union) before Christmas.

There now exists a real debate among Trade Unionists and throughout the political left about the nature of modern industrial relations and contemporary trade union activism. This article will outline briefly some of the key philosophical, economic and practical arguments against social partnership.

Proponents of the social partnership model argue that it provides unions with an important voice in the development of public policy. However, in practice this is simply not the case. Despite the various pay agreements over the last decade the Fianna Fail/PD coalition has pursued a vicious policy of neo-liberal reforms within the economy. This has included reductions in capital taxation, privatisation of public companies and an increase in social inequality throughout our society.

The Heritage Foundation, a right-wing American 'think tank,' now ranks Ireland as the third most liberal economy in the world. This is hardly surprising when one notes that spending on social protection as a percentage of GDP declined from 18% to 14% between 1990 and 2002. Also, according to the Joint report on Social Inclusion published in 2004, one fifth of all Irish households live in relative poverty which was the highest level in the European Union. Thus, inequality has increased rapidly despite social partnership.

In practice, social partnership locks unions into national agreements which grant workers only moderate pay increases regardless of the rapid increase in economic productivity in the economy. Successive national agreements have facilitated a drop in the value of real wages relative to profits and output by about 20%. Such a position does not serve the interests of union members and undermines the ability of unions to protect the needs of their members and encourage new members to join.



Irish Ferries Protest in the ill treatment of Irish Ferry workers

The liberalisation of the global economy poses a genuine threat to the pay and conditions of workers. Over recent years the nature of employment has become insecure with unsociable working hours and a growth in short term contract staff. If this attack on employment standards is to be challenged and defeated unions must adopt a stronger stance in dealing with employers.

“The liberalisation of the global economy poses a genuine threat to the pay and conditions of workers”

Unions must resist "restructuring" – in reality a code for job losses – within companies, stagnation of basic pay and the undermining of workers' terms of employment. In the face of such opportunism on the part of employers it will be necessary to utilise the strike weapon more often and more effectively. The trade union movement must take a leadership role in resisting and ultimately defeating the neoliberal agenda. The first step in this struggle is the abandonment of social partnership.

As the labour force in Ireland becomes more diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity and age profile it is critical that unions prioritise organisation and recruitment of new members into the trade union movement. Migrant workers' in particular are vulnerable to exploitation and intimidation and it is a crucial task for unions to challenge such discrimination.

By removing the chains that social partnership entails, unions will be able to increase activity within workplaces and show workers who are not yet in the union movement the benefit and importance of collective action by workers. Furthermore, despite the rhetoric of liberalism, national agreements have failed to eliminate the imbalance in earnings between men and women at work. Only a strong independent union movement can forcibly challenge such discrimination at a national level and within individual workplaces.

In conclusion, there is clear evidence which shows that during social partnership wealth has become more unequally distributed within our society, not less so. Unions should now abandon this failed process. "Partnership" has facilitated a decline in the living standards, working conditions and job security of workers while at the same time serving the interests of the privileged elite in our society.

The focus should now shift towards reasserting the historic role of the labour movement in fighting exploitation and laissez-faire capitalism. Unions must unite to defend working conditions and demand better pay. The objective of the labour movement ought not to be about reaching a dishonourable compromise with the forces of global capital but rather to seek to challenge the present economic orthodoxy and encourage workers to gain control of their own economic activities. Doing so will go a long way towards building a society based on a radical egalitarianism in which poverty, social exclusion and discrimination are eradicated.

CLLR. GER NASH

Once an activist in Labour Youth, Ger Nash is one of the Labour Party's most popular and talented councillors at the tender age of 30. He talks to Jonathan McDade about his experiences with Labour Youth



Why did you join Labour Youth?

I had been involved in my local branch in Drogheda for as long as I could remember. I was delivering leaflets, putting up posters and so on from an early age, and started canvassing for the Party when I was old enough to do so. Although my family has a history of membership of the Party, there was absolutely no compulsion or obligation to join. I became actively involved in Labour Youth when I entered UCD in 1993. I was privileged to be elected Chairperson of the UCD branch, and to have served as National Secretary of Labour Youth and to have represented Labour Youth on the Party's General Council during my college days.

Why do you think young people turn out in such low numbers during election time?

There is a real problem associated with low voter turnout amongst younger citizens. One can understand why there is a critically low level of disengagement given that the profession, process and practice of politics has been severely damaged by the actions of a number of corrupt high-profile public representatives. The whole image and perception of politics and politicians has been undermined, to the extent that substantial numbers of citizens increasingly see the whole system as an irrelevance, and politicians as irritants almost.

There is also a problem with the way in which politicians and political parties (in general) communicate to younger sections of the electorate. Large sections of the electorate, not just younger people, but significantly huge swathes of marginalized urban areas which have experienced high levels of social and economic deprivation and have been 'left behind' record worryingly low levels of participation in the electoral process. In this respect, and in regard to encouraging more young people to engage in the process of voting, politicians and



political parties need to take a serious look at ourselves and the framework within which we operate.

The Labour Party in particular I think has a responsibility to change the discourse and to work better to communicate in an open, honest and relevant fashion with young people. The huge increase in membership and activism in Labour Youth in recent times nails the lie that in general younger people aren't interested in politics, and this is an encouraging sign for the future of the Party, and for the body politic. In addition, I have always maintained that the best way in which to encourage greater engagement with younger people is to ensure that that section of society is properly represented in decision-making, whether that be in community-based organizations, local authorities or indeed Dáil Éireann.

Labour Youth opposes the pre election pact with the Fine Gael. What is your opinion on the pre election pact?

It would be fair to say that I had initial reservations in relation to this issue, but I'm now convinced that the Party Leader's position subsequently adopted by Conference is the correct one. Now, the people of Ireland have been presented with two clear options, and we have been totally honest in the way that this has been presented to the public. It's a brave step by the Leadership and I believe it has been vindicated, and will be vindicated. There are bound to be tensions between us and Fine Gael from a policy point of view and on a range of other levels, but this is simply a fact of life. Arguments that we would suffer in the polls because of the decision to develop a putative alliance with FG have not been borne out in recent opinion polls.

Does it worry you that the average age of the Labour Party parliamentarians is higher than all the other parties?

It doesn't keep me awake at night, if that's what you're asking? Sure, we do have the highest average age in terms of Dáil representation, but with that, comes invaluable experience. We have some of the best, and most committed TD's of our Party, and of this I am proud. The average age of our Parliamentary Party will be significantly reduced in the next Dáil when one considers that, for example, I believe we have a very real prospect of regaining our seat in Louth and there are people of the calibre and youth of Dominic Hannigan, Ivana Bacik, Aidan Culhane, Sean Sherlock, and Senators Michael McCarthy and Joanna Tuffy among others looking odds on to make a breakthrough. I firmly believe that no other Party can boast this level of quality in respect of the next generation of parliamentarians.

What have you learned in Labour Youth that has helped you in your political career thus far?

I learned a number of important things through my involvement with Labour Youth. The organisation provided me with the opportunity to learn about the structures of the Party and it certainly helped me to develop a keener sense of the minutiae of politics, and campaigning. Because of the genuine respect in which senior figures in the Party have held Labour Youth in recent years, membership also provides the opportunity to get to know these people and learn from them, and to develop positive relationships at a young age. I would encourage any younger members of the Party to become involved in Labour Youth.

Did you have ambitions of running in a General Election when you first joined Labour Youth?

No, well before that! Seriously though, I always had an interest in getting elected to Drogheda Borough Council and Louth County Council which I have managed to do in the last seven and a half years, and I told myself I would assess the situation in terms of running in a gen-

eral election after a period of time had elapsed. It would be fair to say it is something that I had given consideration to, but not in any great detail when I first joined Labour Youth.

Some feel that the Labour Party does not do enough to support or encourage young members in selection conventions. What are your feelings on that issue?

Well, a member is a member, irrespective of whether they belong to a certain section, and irrespective of their age. Remember, the only people who can select a candidate at a convention are the members. Everyone is equal before a convention. I honestly believe that the best way to organise selection conventions is for the local members, the people who know the constituency and the field of candidates best, to be left alone to make a decision. It's a 'no-win' situation for the Party if it is seen to be getting involved in or attempting to direct members at a convention to take a certain course of action. It's not necessarily support in a convention scenario that should be provided for younger members, but support in their political development along the way and this is done through Labour Youth both formally and informally.

What advice would you give to Labour Youth members who want to contest selection conventions for the next local elections?

Start working now. Build up a track-record of work in your branch, your constituency council and in your constituency/electoral area and work to ensure that you gain the respect and confidence of those who will be working alongside you on your campaign and in your subsequent work as a public representative. It is important to make your intentions clear at the outset, and familiarize yourself with local issues. Identify three to four issues and steadily increase this. Develop relationships with your local media and local Council officials. Work on those issues, and try to demonstrate your ability to do a job by getting results - it may be an issue in relation to a bus-shelter, a local football pitch, a school or whatever. With a track record of work behind you, you could be viewed in your organisation and in your community as a Councillor 'in-waiting' and someone who is hard-working and committed, someone who they can entrust their vote to with confidence on polling day.

What is your favourite film?

- The Life of Brian!

What is your favourite book?

- 1984, George Orwell

What is your favourite album?

- The Stone Roses (The Stone Roses)

Person you most admire?

- Paul Doolin - he won the FAI Cup for the Drogis!

If you could be a minister of any department, what would it be?

- Environment, Heritage and Local Government, then Foreign Affairs.



Labour wins key position in International Union of Socialist Youth

Labour Youth endorsed candidate Yvonne O Callaghan was recently elected as full time Secretary General of the International Union of Socialist Youth (IUSY). The election took place at the IUSY Congress in Denmark. With 143 member organizations in 100 countries around the world IUSY is the largest youth political movement in the world. Yvonne is a long term trade union and political activist since 1995 from her student days with the Irish Nurses Organisation (INO). She served as an INO shop steward during the nationwide nurse's strike in 2000. Since 2001 she has worked as the international youth coordinator in the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU) in 2001.

The IUSY Congress also passed a motion from the Colombian Young Liberals which was amended by Labour Youth fully supporting the Sinaltrainal Coke workers in Colombia who face intimidation from paramilitaries for joining a union.

Yvonne received a strong backing from all delegates and faced no opposition. She will be the first Irish person to sit on the Presidium of the Socialist International as part of her role and this is a major step forward for the Labour Party internationally.

Rosspport Solidarity Camp



Rosspport Solidarity Camp re-opening

The Rosspport Solidarity Camp is re-opening for the 2006 "construction season" - late Spring, Summer, early Autumn. The camp is looking for more people to come to Rosspport, be it for 3 days, 3 weeks, or 3 months. All are welcome, you don't need to be an "expert", everyone can take part in this.

Last summer members of the camp helped to:

- * block and protect the land in Rosspport from any encroachment by Shell.
- * guard, picket and blockade the Shell compound in Rosspport, as do the local people at the proposed refinery site 10km inland at Bellanaboy.
- * be a focus, an info point and a venue for visitors who come to find out more about what's going on and/or to stay.
- * support the families of The Rosspport Five

Contact Details for the Camp:

E-mail rossportsolidaritycamp@gmail.com

Phone: 097 20944 or 086 3201612

Visit us at: www.LabourYouth.ie

UPCOMING EVENTS

International Women's Day - March 8th: "Is Feminism Dead"
7 pm Wynns Hotel, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin. All welcome
Speakers: Níav Keating, Ailbhe Smyth, Liz Mc Manus T.D

Labour Party Conference - April 1st, The Helix, DCU

IUSY Summer World Festival - Alicante, Spain: 18 - 23 July 2006

Is it Too Late to Save the Earth?

Jonathan McDade writes about the very visible evidence of global warming in recent years

In my short life I have noticed how much Ireland's climate has changed since I was a child. Winters seem less cold, spring-time comes earlier, and on average I would say that the temperature is much milder year round. MET Eireann certainly sees it this way. The reason for this change in our climate is global warming. We all know that emissions from cars and chimneys are causing this green house effect. However, we are living in a world where more countries, such as China and India, are rapidly becoming more industrialized. On top of that, the United States is guzzling and demanding more fuel to keep up with demand. Frightening isn't it? Imagine how drastic the situation will be in ten years if this keeps up. For anyone who doubts this, 2005 was a year of environmental infamy.

2005 was the hottest year on record for the northern hemisphere of the planet. It now seems that the speculative theories of global warming are now a reality that future generations will have to live and die with. The average temperature during 2005 in the Northern Hemisphere was 0.65C above the average for 1961-1990, a conventional baseline against which scientists compare temperatures.

Not only that, but the devastating signs of global warming are already part of the planet's activity. The ocean's temperature's are rising, sea levels are going up, longer heat waves are more frequent, glaciers are melting, diseases are spreading more rapidly, droughts are more common, and we are more vulnerable than ever to floods and hurricanes. We are now living in a world that seems to be at the

mercy of nature itself.

Many people have fallen victim to the effects of global warming. The unfortunate victims of the hurricanes that have swept through the Gulf of Mexico over the past couple of summers immediately springs to mind. There have been many more tragic events that have taken so many lives. In 2004, thousands of people died in the sweltering



Hurricanes like Katrina will become more dangerous and frequent

heat wave that gripped Europe. Many more people have died in other global warming related disasters such brush fires, landslides, and flooding.

It almost seems like Mother Nature seems to be taking out her frustration on the species, which has been destroying it for centuries. In 2005 the human race has never had to endure such punishment. Earthquakes, floods, heat waves, big chills, and hurricanes are Mother Nature's defense



Melting arctic ice

mechanisms that are now the norm of our existence on this planet. Whilst you could say that this only natural because of how much the human race has offset the balance of life on Earth or you could argue that this goes much deeper. That nature itself is directly punishing

us for what we have done, giving us a warning of what is to come if we continue to fail this planet. Whatever way you think, we have a serious problem on our hands and time is running out before the damage we cause can be reversed.

The Kyoto accord was a step in the right direction but the United States, which produces 25 percent of the world's toxic emissions, did not sign it. Nor did China and India (two emerging industrial superpowers). Its perplexing that the bible bashing Baptist, George W. Bush would not try to conserve and protect the home that 'God' made for us to live in.

I cannot help but feel a little bit helpless. So what can be done to stem the tide of pollution and curb our destructive actions upon the Earth? Recycling and conserving energy is a start. However if you want to tackle the systematic problem of the way Ireland's environment is being abused you must go for the jugular. It's the politicians that have the power to change things but unfortunately our Environment Minister is not one of the environmental revolutionaries that we need. Ignorance is the enemy in which he personifies so removing him from office is a must.

The sooner Dick Roche and the entire government is out of office, the sooner the rot will stop. Challenge those token environmentalists in the political establishment and ask why does Ireland have such appalling environmental standards compared to our economically less well off European neighbours? That is the first step and if countries with equally ignorant political leaders get taken on then our grandchildren might, just might have a future.

20 Hottest years on record

1. 2005
2. 1998
3. 2002
4. 2003
5. 2004
6. 2001
7. 1997
8. 1990
9. 1995
10. 1999
11. 2000
12. 1991
13. 1987
14. 1988
15. 1994
16. 1983
17. 1996
18. 1944
19. 1989
20. 1992