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Another disaster for privatisation

IT would be side-splittingly funny if it wasn't so serious to see and hear all the local business people from the Munster-Connacht hinterland of Shannon Airport, as well as the management of many of the foreign corporations based in the region, blathering away on television and radio, "demanding" that the Government, in alliance with Ryanair, "force" Aer Lingus to reverse its decision to move its base from Shannon to Belfast Airport.

These are the same forces that championed the privatisation, and lauded the Government for its tenacity in pursuing it against workers' opposition in the state-owned airline in the first place.

The management's decision is based on the option that would provide the greater return to its shareholders, i.e. produce greater profits. Big business, together with what passes for economic experts and economic journalists in this country, poured scorn on the trade union movement, and the Aer Lingus workers in particular, when they opposed that very same privatisation from the start. They are now demanding that workers use their voting power through their ASOPs (approved share option plans) and that the Government block this transfer of operations.

Ryanair is using its 29 per cent shareholding in Aer Lingus as a means of nobbling a rival airline. It extracted major concessions from the Shannon Airport Authority and had its own plans for developing its own business out of Belfast with its recent announce-



ment that it was planning to develop its services. This was after Aer Lingus announced its decision.

The Aer Lingus management are doing nothing more nor less than what these same business gentlemen do every day. They, like Aer Lingus shareholders, are not in business for the good of their health but to accumulate wealth and make the maximum profit. This is what happens when private interests become the dominant economic interest.

Aer Lingus, like Irish Shipping (closed down), Telecom Éireann (privatised—with the management now wanting the state to buy part of it

back), the Irish Sugar Company (privatised) and the ESB (now being broken into three separate companies and being made ready for privatisation) were developed and built by the Irish state, using capital created by Irish workers to build up essential state industries, because Irish capitalism either hadn't got the capacity or was unwilling to make the long-term investment to develop these vital areas of the economy.

As with Telecom Éireann, the privatisation of Aer Lingus has removed another essential lever that the Government had for encouraging, promoting and ensuring proper regional development.

The public ownership of such vital areas of the economy as transport, telecommunications, energy, scientific research and development and the control and use of natural resources is essential in any modern economy in order to ensure balanced regional development and to maximise the potential for the industrial and infrastructural development of the country in a planned way.

Resistance to the privatisation of the ESB needs to be stepped up and

“ We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality . . . we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.—Senior adviser to George Bush, quoted by Ron Suskind, *New York Times*, 17 October 2004. ”

not confined to whenever the Government makes its policy decision public.

Resistance to privatisation can't be left up to the workers involved in a particular industry facing privatisation, because in many instances these workers are most susceptible to pres-

sure and to the appeal of ASOPs.

Not alone should the labour movement oppose any further privatisation but it is essential that a serious debate be opened up about taking back into public ownership the strategic companies already privatised.

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The credit crisis

Result of a neo-liberal, imperialist trajectory

AUGUST'S financial crisis originated in the United States from the practices of its private financial institutions. These firms have made a heavy entry into the credit sector in recent years, in the housing market but also in consumables, secured by residential mortgages. They have moved into the "lucrative" housing market, which offers a low repayment capacity. ("Nobody wants to lend you money, but we will!")

This activity is financed by reselling to other agencies (private investors or funds, domestic or foreign) the bonds that materialise from the mortgage debt owed by household borrowers. This characteristic explains why the crisis has been exported—notably in Europe—to those who became the buyers of these bonds, and why it is affecting the stock market. In short, these buyers have become substitutes for public agencies, recently nationalised, whose share of the market is in decline. The neo-liberal state has therefore been deprived of a tool for inter-

vening in the mechanisms of the credit sector.



We know that the level of household debt in the United States is gigantic and can therefore see that the situation is not about to discharge itself. It is being claimed that two million of these households will be faced with having their homes seized.

The problem is knowing whether or not the policies combating the effects of the crisis (the contamination of the real economy and other financial institutions) will be able to guarantee what is called a "soft landing."

The figures, as reported in the press, corresponding to the refinancing of banks by the credit they are granted by the Central Bank (the "monetary policy") are often pure fantasy. In the United States the total of these credits has been increased from about \$25 billion to \$50 billion in a matter of days—nothing too spectacular; much more was done for 11 September 2001.

Nevertheless, at the end of the month we saw a second wave of credits, not as strong but longer-lasting, revealing the persistent nature of the crisis, and a second intervention by the European Development Fund, which seemed to have little precedent.

Thursday 6 September saw a new injection of \$30 billion over a period of fifteen days. It smells like something is burning!

The former president of the EDF, Alan Greenspan, made an explosive

statement, comparing the current situation to historically formidable financial crises that have come before it. (He was careful not to include 1929 in his list.) Very shrewd it is of him to know how long it will take to stabilise the markets.

However, it is clear that the US government is completely committed to supporting its economy—which does not mean that it is in control of everything, in particular not international propagation. We're not in 1929 any more.

The situation is complicated, as in any case, financial crisis or not, the US economy is on the brink of a new recession. All possible policy levers have been pulled—a low rate of interest on long-term credit, budgetary deficit, and a weak dollar—though the rates on short-term credits are up again. This will probably not be for very long; but is it enough to avoid the recession?



AMERICAN ADVANTAGE
MORTGAGE COMPANY

In fact the threat of recession and the financial crisis must be seen as two manifestations of the problems attached to the trajectory the US economy has been on since the start of neo-liberalism, now over twenty-five years ago: crazy levels of consumption, a deficit in foreign trade, and investment being financed by the rest of the world—an unprecedented trajectory characteristic of the current neo-liberal, imperialist configuration under the hegemony of the United States; a trajectory that it will take a long time to put right. And there will be a cost. The crisis, and a recession, are just the beginning.



Paisley under pressure

THE decision by Ian Paisley not to stand again as Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church but to retire when the election for the new Moderator takes place is an indication that all is not well between the DUP and the church. The Free Presbyterian Church was founded by Paisley himself more than fifty years ago and was the backbone both of the DUP and of Paisley's power within the DUP. Paisley has chosen to jump rather than be pushed and face the humiliation of a candidate standing against him for leadership of his own church and quite possibly winning.



Paisley's church had its power base mostly in rural communities as well as some towns throughout the North. He built his church and his party on saying *No* to everything: no power-sharing with republicans, no ecumenism, no Popery—no anything that smacked of compromise to his politics or religion. Today Paisley is in government with the arch-enemy, Sinn Féin, and the strains are beginning to tell.

The recent debate in the Assembly on the devolution of taxation powers to the Assembly and Executive opens up a possibility for progressive forces and in

particular the trade union movement. Sinn Féin's proposal that the power to decide and have control over taxes be devolved from London to the Executive had the support of the SDLP and the Alliance Party, while the DUP and UUP opposed it, on the grounds that it would give Sinn Féin an opportunity to implement its "Marxist" policies.

Following a decision by the Minister for the Environment, Arlene Foster (DUP), to favour a proposal by a private developer to build a visitors' centre at the Giant's Causeway, it has emerged that the successful applicant, Seymour Sweeney, is a member of the minister's party. He confirmed that he is a member of the DUP but claimed he had never met or lobbied the minister in relation to building this important infrastructural project.

The minister made her decision to favour private development over an alternative proposal for building a publicly funded complex on this world heritage site. Her decision caused the unionist-dominated Coleraine Borough

Council to unanimously support a motion in early September calling for the planned visitors' centre to be kept in public ownership.

Unionism, and in particular the DUP, which has a strong base in the Protestant section of the working class, is vulnerable on the issue of taxation and cronyism, which provides an opportunity to push for greater fiscal control being devolved to the Assembly. The demand for more fiscal powers would strike a chord with the DUP's popular base and has the potential to develop contradictions between working-class Protestants and those who claim to represent them.



Gilmore: More of the same?

ÉAMON Gilmore, the new leader of the Labour Party, has a big job ahead of him if he is to make that party a serious political force. Much has been written about the future of the Labour Party, both before and since the general election earlier this year, after which Pat Rabbitte resigned, precipitating the election of a new leader.

Gilmore was unopposed for the leadership, as no other candidate wanted to run against him, and he clearly had the support of the old guard of the party. There is a strong feeling throughout the party that there is little energy even for having a contest over who should lead it and over its future direction.

In contrast to Rabbitte—though he came from the same political background, that is, the Workers' Party, then Democratic Left—Gilmore has been a more unifying figure and somewhat less abrasive, though the political trajectory is steadily into mainstream social democracy. If there had been a leadership election, with opposing views, it would at least have helped clarify some of the issues facing the Labour Party.

Instead, what there is of a left wing was not able to muster any support or even pose questions.

The approach of most social-democratic parties in Europe is one of passivity for the mass of working people, treating them as mere voting fodder.

There are certainly many challenges facing Irish workers, and the question is being asked throughout the labour movement: can Gilmore deliver a more vibrant party, with a set of policies distinct from the political parties of the establishment? Or will he, like all previous leaders, resort to soft-sell

policies, reduced to narrow focus groups, looking at branding or re-branding strategies?

Gilmore, like the rest of the parliamentary Labour Party, has a very narrow concept of politics and political struggle. The approach of most social-democratic parties in Europe is one of passivity for the mass of working people, treating them as mere voting fodder. Workers are reduced to mere consumers of politics rather than the force that needs to be mobilised and the basis on which any significant political, social or cultural changes can be wrenched from a moribund system.

For Gilmore to make a difference there needs to be a complete break, not just with the strategies of past leaders of that party but also with the current economic and political orthodoxy of the

Socialist International, particularly the dominant grouping within the European Union. Will the Labour Party take a stand for national democracy and national accountability and oppose the Constitutional Treaty, even if it is renamed "Reform Treaty"?

You can't argue against the privatisation of state companies and state services while supporting EU directives and strategies like the Lisbon Strategy, the Services Directive in relation to goods and services, the opening up of government services to competitive tendering, and the continued use of Shannon Airport by the US war machine, rather than supporting the control and use of our natural resources and supporting the people of Rosport, or campaigning for local democracy with real means and powers.

Although Gilmore has ruled out cooperation with other forces, this is

clearly a signal to Fine Gael that they will not figure in Labour's plans in the immediate future. The potential for developing a progressive coalition of forces lies with closer links and cooperation with Sinn Féin and independent TDs inside the Dáil and with progressive forces outside the parliamentary structures.

Gilmore has unfortunately continued with this talk of the "Labour brand" needing to be updated and developed to meet the needs of "modern Ireland."

Language is an arena of struggle: if we adopt the language of marketing and big business we end up seeing the world through their eyes and seeing solutions based on their values. Each movement or social force has or should have its own language to express what it stands for and what it wants to achieve. If we adopt corporate-speak we

end up turning people into commodities. We become consumers instead of citizens, clients instead of patients, customers as against members of society.

Gilmore's language and, it could be said, his consciousness are colonised by the establishment and the thinking of big business. A first step towards an independent Labour Party would be the adoption of means of communication that challenge the language conditioning, thereby challenging the political conditioning that the establishment imposes on us all.

Time will tell if there is any more substance to Gilmore. The Labour Party's aim of "freedom, equality, community and democracy" will remain nothing more than a marketing sound-bite if that party is unable to break free from the straitjacket of consensus politics.

The Greens begin to pay the price

ÉAMON Ryan TD, Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, stated recently that he was in favour of the Green Party supporting the "Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe" or what will be called the "Reform Treaty."

Ryan has long been a "Europhile," but the Green Party in the past played an important role in defending Irish democracy and military neutrality in the many referendums relating to the construction of very centralised institutions and the deepening integration process that previous treaties facilitated.

The price of governmental office is now being paid by the Greens. Fianna Fáil has succeeded in silencing one of the most vocal critics of the European Union and the policies emanating from it.

John Gormley TD, the newly elected leader of the Green Party, was one of the authors of a minority report that is critical of the EU constitution and exposes the machinations of the pro-constitution forces during and after the convention that drafted the proposed constitution.

It is clear from the reaction of some prominent members of the Green Party, such as Patrica McKenna, a former member of the European Parliament, that over the coming months there will be a serious struggle within that party over support or opposition to

the repackaged constitution, which will be put to the people in a referendum early next year.

Joining the Government has lost the Green Party a lot of credibility among its supporters. With its TDs now throwing in their lot with the Government—supporting the militarisation of the European Union, the revived EU constitution and its reinforcement of neo-liberalism, and the centralisation of power—more and more of the Green Party's members and supporters will be drifting away, with many joining the campaign for a "no" vote.

Making us aware of what is happening in our prisons

ON 18 July this year Dermot Kinlen died at the age of seventy-seven. He was a man of the establishment: grandson of a Circuit Court judge and Redmondite MP, educated at Clongowes Wood and UCD, graduating in modern Irish and European history, called to the Bar in 1952, and appointed a High Court judge on the nomination of the Labour Party. Made a knight commander of the Equestrian Order of St Gregory the Great with Cross by the Pope in 1997, he was also a life member of the Royal Dublin Society and of the Irish Military History Society.

Just the man for the job of Inspector of Prisons; and it seems he was expected to enjoy the perks of the job and not ruffle too many feathers. However, a glance through one of his annual reports will reveal a few surprises. (His last was for the year 2004/05 and can be downloaded from the web site of the Department of Justice at www.justice.ie/en/JELR/4thAnnRpt.pdf/Files

[/4thAnnRpt.pdf](#). It is also available in printed form in the Business Section of the Central Library in the ILAC Centre, Henry Street, Dublin.)

The biggest surprise is that Mr Kinlen clearly took the job seriously and was damning in his criticism of Irish prisons, where vast amounts of public money are spent and no attempt is made to reform prisoners; instead



our prisons are “training grounds for criminality,” and suicide is increasing.

Mr Kinlen wrote his reports in plain English, for the simple reason that he wanted everyone to read them. Surprisingly for such a serious and indeed grim topic, anyone reading this report will find themselves laughing at some of the things he wrote. Here’s a short example from page 44, in the section on “recidivism”:

“It is very difficult and, as the Minister says, regrettable that figures are not available. If there were any underemployed person in the Prison Section of the Department (and there might be!) he or she should be able to work out the number of recidivists in the system. However, they may complain that they are not literate enough and are depending on computers. We know a fortune has been wasted on computers for the prison which are obsolete and have to be scrapped. However, each prisoner has a number and it is recorded. He/she carries that number through life. Surely, even a semiliterate would be able in a very short time to check in each prison how many prisoners had been imprisoned previously.”

Throughout his report he quotes groups and individuals who have many interesting things to say about Irish prisons, on how bad things are at present and in recommending solutions, among them Rick Lines of the Irish Penal Reform Trust (www.iprt.ie) and Dr Ian O’Donnell of UCD, who points out the lack of data and also the

fact that immigrants awaiting deportation are not convicted criminals and therefore should not be held in prisons.

Mr Kinlen also refers to reports made many years ago that drew attention to the same concerns and were evidently ignored. One of these is St Patrick’s Institution for young offenders in Dublin, which a report by Ken Whitaker recommended more than twenty years ago should be closed immediately and no more money wasted on it.

“It was clear that the Minister was merely using St. Patrick’s . . . as a warehouse for young people who learnt the finer points of criminality in St. Patrick’s which almost certainly guaranteed their progression into the ‘university’ of Mountjoy.”

What is most clear from reading the fourth annual report of Mr Kinlen (the first three reports are not on the web site of the Department of Justice, and we made numerous enquiries to TDs and to the department, to no avail) is that the same information and recommendations are made over and over again but are not acted upon.

Part of the problem is that the information in these reports is not made available to the majority of citizens. By and large, the newspapers and television news fail to mediate these reports to their readers and audiences.

Yet this is an issue that concerns us all. Some of us will have had the experience of being jailed ourselves, or at least of visiting a friend or relative in prison. Many of us won’t; but we will

all have been at the receiving end of a robbery or an attack of some kind at some time, and we would prefer to live in a safe society where this would not happen. Closing our eyes to what prisons actually do will not solve anything. As Mr Kinlen says, *“All citizens should be interested for selfish, if for no other reasons, in urgent penal reform.”*

Until we have the facts we cannot be sure of our arguments. By reading this report—which was written for all of us, not just the minister and his civil servants—we can take responsibility for our prison system and examine the recommendations, then lobby our political representatives until what needs to be done is done. That is, after all, what living in a democracy is supposed to be about.

Dermot Kinlen took his job seriously: insisted on having an office and staff, visited all the prisons and made surprise return visits, and liaised with all groups working for prison welfare and reform. His very public row with Michael McDowell over the position of Inspector of Prisons being made a statutory one (which, as he pointed out, it was in the North of Ireland under the terms of the Belfast Agreement) culminated in victory.

The pity is that Mr Kinlen died so shortly afterwards. He set a high standard of diligence and output for his successor. Let’s hope that whoever succeeds him will continue to make us aware of what is happening in our prisons.

[MNM]

Some facts about Irish prisons

- 1,000 people are sent to jail annually for the non-payment of fines.
- Most defaulters are sent to jail for debts of a few hundred euros or less.
- 60 per cent of defaulters are unemployed or on social welfare.
- €3.7 million per annum is spent on keeping defaulters in prison.
- It costs €225 per day to house a prisoner.
- 1 in 4 of the inmates in Mountjoy Prison has a history of mental illness.
- The former Minister for Justice Michael McDowell spent €30 million on consultants in his first eighteen months in office.
- In 2003 the overtime bill for prison officers was €62 million.
- After the closure of several jails, wages continued to be paid to prison staff. In the Curragh, eleven prison officers were paid to guard an empty jail—including overtime.
- €9 million was spent on renovating a unit of St Patrick’s Institution that has never been opened.
- The committee for the prevention of torture recommended that a re-education project, called “Connect,” be expanded. Housed in a Portacabin unit, it had only fourteen places, though ninety people applied. The scheme was not expanded: instead it was curtailed.
- The Dóchas centre for women in Mountjoy cost more than £30 million to build. It is earmarked to be sold, however, along with the rest of the prison, because “the Mountjoy site would be much more valuable if sold in its entirety.”



New O’Riordan letter found

LAST November a letter written by the future general secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland, Michael O’Riordan, was discovered in the archives of the Transport Union of America at New York University.

The 24-page handwritten letter, written in April 1939 (when O’Riordan was a 21-year-old veteran of the Spanish Anti-Fascist War), set out to provide an analysis of Irish history and contemporary politics for his friend and comrade in arms, the New York International Brigader Bill Gandall.

This fascinating document, together with an introduction by Manus O’Riordan, was published in full for the first time in the July 2007 issue of *Irish Political Review*. It is now available on the “Ireland and the Spanish Civil War” web site at www.geocities.com/irelandscw.

A final abandonment of national independence

THE revised EU constitution, whose main elements were agreed at the German-chaired EU summit meeting at the end of June, will take the form of amendments to the two existing treaties, the “Treaty on European Union” and the “Treaty Establishing the European Community.” This will be a change from the proposal to repeal the existing treaties entirely and substitute for them the “Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe,” which was signed in October 2004 but was rejected by French and Dutch voters in the summer of 2005.

The new treaty will be called something different, and the word “constitution” will not occur in either its text or its title. The provisions to give a legal basis to the symbols of EU statehood—the flag, anthem, motto, and annual day—will be dropped, while at the same time the reality of the EU statehood that they symbolise will be brought into being, and the flag, anthem etc. will continue in use anyway, as they have already existed for years without any legal basis.

Some other presentational changes will be made, but the new treaty will be legally as much a constitution as the previous one, for it will constitute or establish for the first time a legally new European Union in the constitutional form of a state, and will make us all real citizens of that state.

This would be the most important step to affect the Irish state since its establishment in 1922. It would be the final abandonment by Fianna Fáil and the principal Irish political parties of all pretence to concern for democracy or national independence, on which their claim to historical legitimacy has rested.

The Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and other EU politicians have admitted frankly that the revised treaty will contain 90 per cent or more of the constitution that French and Dutch voters rejected two years ago. By not calling it a constitution, the EU elite hope that they will be able to avoid referendums and will be able to push it through national parliaments without giving citizens a say.

What it aims to do

The treaty embodying the revised EU constitution (though it will not be called that) would do six important things.

① The new treaty would add to the powers of the Brussels institutions—which already make the majority of our laws—in more than forty new policy areas, including energy, transport, tourism, public services, space, civil and criminal law, civil protection, public health, and budget, while correspondingly reducing the powers of national states, their national parliaments and citizens.

② In making those laws, the new treaty would increase the voting weight of the bigger states and reduce that of smaller states, such as Ireland.

③ It would deprive member-states of the right to have a representative at all times on the European Commission, the body that has the monopoly of proposing European laws. Big states as well as small ones would lose a permanent commissioner; but the economic and political weight of the former makes them inherently better able to defend their interests without such representation.

④ It would contain a mechanism to enable majority voting for European law-making to be extended to new policy areas by agreement among governments, without the need for new treaties or treaty ratification.

⑤ It would make the EU “Charter of Fundamental Rights” legally binding on member-states and their citizens. This would give the twenty-seven judges of the European Court of

Justice in Luxembourg—which has one Irish representative—the final decision on the wide range of human rights matters covered by the charter, as against national constitutions and supreme courts or the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. This would greatly extend the power of the EU court, an institution notorious for “competence creep,” which one of its own judges once characterised as “a court with a mission”—that mission being to extend the powers of the European Union as widely as possible by means of its case law.

The charter would apply in all areas of EU decision-making, which now makes most of our laws. It could lead to uniform standards being imposed throughout the European Union in areas of human rights, where there are significant national differences—for example trial by jury, rules of evidence, censorship laws, conscientious objection to military service, succession rights to property, family law, and the rights of children and the elderly. It could lead to jurisdictional disputes between the EU Court of Justice in Luxembourg and the Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, as the former would have supremacy in the event of any conflict between the two.

Moreover, the constitution would provide that the exercise of the rights and freedoms recognised by the charter could be limited “to meet objectives of general interest recognised by the Union.” This means that the rights set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights would not be fundamental after all but could be varied in the interests of the smooth running of the market. Our rights would no longer be decided by democratic contestation but would become “marketised.”

⑥ The most important thing the new treaty would do would be to give to the new European Union that it would legally establish the constitutional form of a supranational state for the first time, making this new union separate from and superior to its twenty-seven member-states. This would make the European Union like the United States,

“The substance of the Constitution is preserved. That is a fact.”
—Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany

“We have not let a single substantial point of the Constitutional Treaty go.”—José Zapatero, Prime Minister of Spain

“All the earlier proposals will be in the new text but will be hidden or disguised in some way.”—Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, former President of France and chief architect of the original EU Constitution

in that the United States is separate from, and constitutionally superior to, California or New York. We would all be made real citizens of this new EU state, rather than notional or honorary European “citizens,” as at present; for one can only be a citizen of a state.

It is this that gives the new treaty the character of a constitution or basic law for the legally new European Union that it would establish.

The three legal steps to EU statehood

This change would be accomplished by three essential legal steps.

① The first legal step would be for the treaty to give the new European Union for the first time its own legal personality and distinct corporate existence—something that all states possess. This would enable the newly constituted European Union to sign treaties with other states, have its own president, foreign minister (whatever called), diplomatic corps and public prosecutor and to take to itself all the powers and institutions of the existing European Community, which already has legal personality and which now makes most of our laws.

It is important to realise that what is called the European Union at present has no legal personality or corporate existence in its own right, and what is termed EU “citizenship” has no legal content. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as European Union law, only European Community law. That would change with the proposed new treaty.

What we call the European Union now—a name that derives from the Maastricht Treaty on European Union (1992)—is merely a general descriptive term for the various areas of co-operation between its twenty-seven member-states, the area of supranational European law deriving from

our continuing membership of the European Community and the “intergovernmental” areas of foreign, justice and home affairs, where member-states still interact on the basis of retained sovereignty.

② The second legal step would be to abolish this distinction between the supranational “community” and the “intergovernmental” areas of the two existing treaties, the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community. All spheres of public policy would thus come within the scope of supranational EU law-making.

The newly established union would then possess all the essential features of a fully developed state, except the power to impose taxes and the power to take its constituent member-states to war against their will.

③ The third legal step would be to make us all real citizens of this new EU state entity, with the normal citizens’ duties of obedience to its laws and institutions and loyalty to its authority, over and above our obligations to our national constitutions and laws.

Those pushing the EU state-building project hope that voters will not notice the radical character of the proposed changes: after all, does the European Union not exist already, and are we not already EU “citizens”? These familiar terms would continue to be used, as if nothing had changed, though their legal substance would be transformed.

It is a big step to turn the citizens of the twenty-seven member-states into citizens of a supranational United States of Europe that is separate from and superior to their own national states and constitutions. It can be done only by deception and bullying—and above all by avoiding referendums that would enable people to decide such a fundamental constitutional change themselves.

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The strategic deception lies in the elaborate charade of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union (1992) and the new Treaty of European Union, which the proposed Revised Constitutional Treaty in effect would be, though it will be given some spin-doctor’s title such as “Reform Treaty,” to make it easier for the EU elite to get it ratified.

By such sleight of hand we are to be made real citizens of a real European state that is superior to our own national states.

Those pushing the new treaty hope that we will have real obligations of obedience, solidarity and loyalty to the new European Union imposed upon us without our knowing or realising that this is happening. If they succeed we can predict that the popular reaction will be all the more explosive when people realise in time what has been done.

Film review

An indictment of the world’s indifference

Jenin Jenin (2002), directed by Mohammad Bakri

IT’S not often we hear of film censorship nowadays, but this film has been banned in its country of origin and is at present the subject of a court case in Israel.

The Israeli censorship board said it would upset the public and might lead Israelis “to mistakenly think that IDF [Israeli Defence Force] soldiers are systematically and intentionally carrying out war crimes.”

Israeli citizens might think just that if they were to read reports by human rights groups on what happened in the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002; and in fact the decision was made to make

this film because of the UN’s backing down on a planned investigation into the Israeli army’s actions in the area.

The camp’s inhabitants are given a voice, and in relating their accounts of what they lived through their expressions change from grim determination to sorrow and pain at the suffering they endured and witnessed.

A man in his forties declares that they will fight on no matter what the

Israelis do to them. Later he hesitates, then, inhaling deeply on his cigarette, looks down, remembering, and states, as he wipes the tears away: “You know how they hurt us most? It was not destroying the houses with their bulldozers and how they killed so many of us: it was when we could not go to a dying man while he was bleeding to death; it was when we could not return a crying child to his parents . . .” (One

of the accusations levelled at the Israeli forces by human rights groups was that soldiers deliberately held medics back from attending the wounded until they had bled to death.)

The scenes of mountains of rubble in what had been streets were stark. A girl of ten or twelve speaks into the camera with conviction, stating that it is the soldiers who are cowards, even with all their superior military equipment, and that although she had been afraid at first of the sound of the bombs, now she was used to it and she would never be afraid again. "Palestinians will have more children, and we will go on fighting," she declares; but we can see that behind her bravado this is a traumatised child whose faith in goodness has been demolished along with the walls of the destroyed houses. For her there is



no meaning to life but a bitter fight against a mighty enemy, and the bleak and brutal future she faces is an indictment of the world's indifference, which only prolongs and intensifies the conflict.

"Operation Defensive Shield" was the name given to this horror by the IDF, an army that has illegally occupied Palestinian lands for decades; and it was to defend their reputation that five Israeli soldiers took Mohammad Bakri, who directed the film, to court. They accuse him of libellously portraying them in his film as war criminals; this is despite the fact that not one of them is shown in the film, or even mentioned by name.

What comes through strongly from all the people interviewed is the depth to which they feel they have been abandoned by the rest of the world. A man in a busy market-place entertains the crowd with his impromptu stand-up, making a phone call to George Bush and Kofi Annan on his "mobile phone"—his shoe. "What! You couldn't come to Jenin because you couldn't get a plane? You couldn't afford the flight? We could have collected some money for you! We would give you a donkey, or a mule!"



The Arab world also stood by and continues to trade with Israel, and Palestinians know it. The people of Jenin know it. Although the Israeli army and its government continue to deny any wrongdoing, the people of Jenin know what happened, and it will be interesting to see the result of this court case.

In November 2003 the Israeli Supreme Court lifted the ban on *Jenin Jenin*, ruling that Israel's Film Board had infringed on freedom of expression "above and beyond what was necessary." Which is what the whole operation in Jenin seems to have been.

● *Jenin Jenin* is dedicated to Iyad Samudi, the producer of the film, who was shot and killed by Israeli forces on 23 June 2002.

[MNM]

Letter

Biofuel production is destroying traditional communities

THE Swedish Minister for Trade, Sten Tolgfors, who recently attended the "Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil" in Malaysia, calls for the removal of EU biofuel import tariffs from Malaysia and Indonesia. What this really means indirectly is that this EU minister is encouraging the continuous expansion of palm oil plantations, especially by multinational corporations, in both Malaysia and Indonesia, that would include expansion in the brutally colo-

nised West Papua, where the genocide and holocaust of Indigenous West Papuans still continues.

This minister, speaking in such a contradictory language-game, who seems to know much about trade but obviously without a care about our natural environment, since this is not in Europe, does not understand that palm oil expansion usually means a continuous and infinite process, from the logging industry, of destroying our tropical rain-forest reserves and ancestral Indigenous land and forest rights, initially enriching multinational corporations' multi-billion worth of profit.

Then such corporations would continue endlessly towards further multi-billion profit-making industry, that is, by constructing plantations on the same logged rain-forest area, the biggest plantations being palm oil, followed by acacia. (That's what capitalism is fundamentally about: infinite destruction, exploitation and expansion for the sake of maximum power and wealth for the capitalist class, at the cost of extreme suffering and abuses of human and environmental rights of the ordinary class, the natural environment and all its wildlife.)

EU socio-environmentally conscious consumers, the Green and Socialist Parties and NGOs, can help us here in

the "Third World" to struggle, no matter how small, against such injustice, which includes writing, calling up and protesting against their EU officials and politicians who are practising double standards of human rights in the "Third World" (one example being EU officials from the EU Commission in Malaysia charged by traditional Indigenous villagers with complicity with Malaysian logging and plantation corporations in destroying our tropical forest reserves and their ancestral Indigenous land and forest rights); also to indict these EU officials, army and politicians in the European Court of Human Rights or the International Criminal Court in the Hague if found in breach of human and environmental rights in the "Third World."

Only then can humanity hope to achieve true modernity (not capitalist modernity) and social justice and as true human beings, as envisaged enlighteningly by Hegel and Marx.

Noor Aza Othman
Selangor
Malaysia

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▶CPI, PO Box 85, Belfast BT1 1SR

SOCIALIST VOICE

43 East Essex Street · Dublin 2
(01) 6708707

www.comunistpartyofireland.ie