

Catalyst

100,000 March Against War.



February 15th saw an international day of protest without any precedent in history. 100,000 people marched in Dublin. 1.5m in London, 2m in Rome, 250,000 in Melbourne, 100,000 in San Francisco. CNN estimated a total of 110m worldwide. There was even a protest in Antarctica.

No previous war has seen such a colossal movement of opposition from the very beginning. In August 1914, the people of Europe rushed into war with grins on their faces. In the sixties, the first protests against the invasion of Vietnam attracted a few dozen New Yorkers. There has never been such a decisive rejection of war in the history of mankind.

So how did our rulers respond? How about this from Tony Blair: "I do not seek unpopularity as a badge of honour. But sometimes it is the price of leadership and the cost of conviction." Now, many leaders have been willing to accept unpopularity as the price for acting according to their convictions; a certain Iraqi statesman springs to mind. But it's not an option open to democrats, who are accountable to the people, not to their own consciences (if you please).

Is This What Democracy looks Like?

reasonable honesty: they've openly rejected democracy. Not in so many words, of course, but reading their statements attentively can leave us with no other conclusion. One of the most frequently heard arguments was this: we live in a representative democracy, not a direct one. Politicians have the right to make decisions they believe to be in the national interest.

It's no wonder the world is in such a mess when basic democratic ideas can be misrepresented so blatantly. In a representative democracies, people promise to do certain things to the best of their abilities; people vote for them accordingly and they have a mandate. If they break this mandate, they are no longer legitimate representatives of the popular will. Politicians don't have the right to do whatever the hell they like when in power; that's not democracy, just an elected monarchy. This should be the ABC of any civilised society, but it's obviously foreign to anyone in positions of power.

Since none of the politicians supporting Bush mentioned Iraq in their electoral campaigns, they have no mandate. But voting isn't the only way of expressing your opinion; eighteenth-century republicans like Jefferson and Paine weren't playing games when they established freedom of speech and freedom of assembly as basic democratic rights. Exercising these rights, through opinion polls and mass protests, the people of Ireland, Britain, Italy and elsewhere have made their views crystal clear: no war, no way.

One audacious argument was offered to get Blair and Bush out of this hash: apparently, as men with a strong Christian faith, they believe themselves to be accountable to a higher power. Now, this sort of logic may well be enshrined in the Iranian constitution, but its place in a secular democracy is questionable to say the least (God seems to have spoken anyway, and he's against the war, at least if the Pope is to be believed, or the Archbishop of Canterbury). There's only one way of looking at the situation: any politician who continues to support war is an avowed enemy of democracy, in any meaningful sense of the term.

Neutral Me Arse.

knew it or not. But the Taoiseach's usual brand of cheerful dishonesty wasn't up for the task. Mary Harney then joined in; once experts had deciphered her shrill bark, it emerged that she had accused the anti-war campaigners of being anti-American, anti-European and anti-United Nations. Wow, all three? It's really just another way of saying that we all hate humanity and everything that is sweet and pure in this world, like flowers, kittens, children and the Bush administration.

Harney's juvenile rage at the sight of people who don't venerate American capitalism with the same primitive fervour she can muster betrayed her own contempt for democracy. As we've already mentioned, in a democratic society, citizens have the right to promote political ideas by exercising their rights to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. But according to Harney, the Irish Anti-War Movement, PANA, and the NGO Peace Alliance were trying to "infect the mainstream with their extremist ideas". So a sceptical view of American foreign policy is to be equated with syphilis or AIDS? There are, of course, many precedents for this sort of language, but none of them would be pleasant for Harney to recall.

Bertie, at least, gave a frank admission that US investment was a significant factor in deciding which way to leap. Now that the government has stated it openly, it's time to deal with this argument. First of all, if we cave in to economic blackmail now, where do we draw the line? What if they demand we join NATO? And it's not just a foreign policy issue. If any Irish government enforces trade-union recognition on foreign companies, as it certainly should, will the threat of shutting down factories be enough to force a climb-down?

Secondly, shifting investment from one country to another is not as easy as moving pieces on a chessboard. You have to build a factory, set

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up equipment, train workers and put infrastructure in place. That all costs money. US multinationals are in this country because they can make more profit here than anywhere else (remember, Intel is a business, not a job-creation agency). The chances are, they'll stay in Ireland as long as that remains the case; when things change, of course, they'll move abroad no matter how loyal our government has been to Uncle Sam. In any case, US investment has been a mixed blessing. It's left us totally exposed to downturns in the US economy beyond our control. If we need low-wage, non-union jobs, there's plenty of Irish businessmen willing to oblige.

The truth is, Bertie Ahern and Mary Harney look to Washington for ideology, not investment. Criticising Bush would be as painful for them as it would be for Desmond Connell to denounce the Pope. This is why they won't breathe a word of protest, unless we force them too.

The Liberation Of Iraq



In a last, desperate throw of the dice, the pro-war camp has taken to wheeling Iraqi exiles who support war out to perform in the media.

There are many Iraqi dissidents who, out of a combination of naivety and desperation, want a US invasion of their country in the hope that democracy might be the result (equally, there are many who oppose war). Unlike most supporters of Bush's war, they have made great sacrifices for their beliefs and have not forgotten the shameful complicity of the west with the Iraqi regime. They have the right to be taken seriously, unlike their erstwhile comrades. But their views are still mistaken. An article in the London Observer, the day after the protests, showed why.

Kanan Makiya is an well-known Iraqi opposition activist, living in the US, who is high on Saddam's death list. For many years, he has put his faith in America as the power to liberate his country, and has launched virulent attacks on other Arab intellectuals such as Edward Said, who have continued to take a more sceptical view of the US government. As he puts it, "We Iraqis hoped and said to our Arab brethren, over and over again, that American mistakes of the past did not have to be repeated in the future. Were we wrong?"

Unfortunately, yes. "The US is on the verge of committing itself to a post-Saddam plan for a military government in Baghdad with Americans appointed to head Iraqi ministries, and American soldiers to patrol the streets of Iraqi cities. The plan further envisages the appointment of an unknown number of Iraqi quislings palatable to the Arab countries of the Gulf and Saudi Arabia as a council of advisers to this military government. The plan reverses a decade-long moral and financial commitment by the US to the Iraqi opposition, and is guaranteed to turn that opposition from the close ally it has always been during the 1990s into an opponent of the United States on the streets of Baghdad the day after liberation.

"Its driving force is appeasement of the existing bankrupt Arab order, and ultimately the retention under a different guise of the repressive institutions of the Baath and the army. Hence its point of departure is, and has got to be, use of direct military rule to deny Iraqis their legitimate right to self-determine their future. In particular it is a plan designed to humiliate the Kurdish people of Iraq and their experiment of self-rule in Northern Iraq of the last 10 years, an experiment made possible by the protections granted to the Kurds by the United States itself. That protection is about to be lifted with the entry into northern Iraq of much-feared Turkish troops (apparently not under American command), infamous throughout the region for their decades-long hostility to Kurdish aspirations."

There you have it, from an Iraqi who still describes George Bush as "the President who so clearly wants to see a democratic Iraq" and takes a few swipes at the anti-war movement. Let nobody say they didn't anticipate that "the government of the United States is about to betray, as it has done so many times in the past, those core values of self-determination and individual liberty." Iraq may achieve liberation; we should all hope so. But the US military will do nothing to help its people achieve this goal.



Appeasement: Myth and Reality



The Murdoch/O'Reilly press in this country have wheeled out a colourful array of characters to abuse peace campaigners. Ex-Stalinist Eoghan Harris, "comedian" Brendan O'Connor, and Ruth Dudley Edwards, hagiographer of the Orange Order, have all bellowed about "appeasement" of the Iraqi regime. Since their employers are merely an off-shoot of the British Tory press, in terms of ownership and ideology, perhaps we should recall an notable incident of appeasement, in the true sense of the term. In March 1990, the British journalist Farzad Bazoft, who worked for the Observer, was executed for spying in Iraq. He had been trying to report from the scene of an explosion at a weapons factory outside Baghdad. He was arrested by the secret police, tortured and hanged. It was very embarrassing for the British government; in those glory days before the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein was a valuable customer

of the arms industry in the UK.

Happily, the Tory media came to the rescue. The Sun carried a front-page head-line "HANGED MAN WAS A ROBBER" (MI5 was the source for this one). The Express claimed that Bazoft was an agent of Mossad, the Israeli secret police. But the most memorable contribution came from the Telegraph. Under the heading "How Innocence can equal Guilt", its editorial explained that "a group of journalists were to have visited the site with the permission of the Iraqi government. Permission was then withdrawn. Mr Bazoft decided to go anyway. How was this any different from spying? ... In these circumstances the investigative journalist takes on the role of spy."

So the same people now clamouring for war were at one time prepared to endorse the murder of one of their fellow journalists for doing his job in order to defend the profits of British Aerospace and protect Thatcher from embarrassment. And they call us appeasers. As someone remarked when Henry Kissinger won the Nobel Peace Prize, satire is dead, it just can't match reality.

Where Now For The Anti-War Movement?



The US media did its best to ignore the protests.

The Italian state broadcaster refused to show the Rome protest live so as not to "place undue pressure on politicians". But for the most part media dishonesty was more insidious. Many journalists worked hard to give the impression that most people who marched were unblemished by "extremism". Support for the French position on war is deemed to be the standard view.

This is a clever move, and one that holds dangers for opponents of war, if we fall for it. Chirac is a notorious crook, motivated far more by French commercial interests in Iraq than by principled opposition to war. French governments have a long and bloody record of war-mongering when it suits their interests. This is a point that's already been exploited by intelligent figures in the Bush administration such as Richard Perle. Chirac and his gang should be no more welcome in the anti-imperialist camp than Bin Laden and Al-Queda.

We have to go beyond vague humanitarian concerns and put forward a detailed critique of American policy if we're going to build from the success of February 15th. Although it may defy conventional wisdom, the radical argument against war is much stronger than the moderate one. As Tony Blair might have put it, it's time to build a movement that's tough on war, tough on the causes of war.

Chase The Fascists Out.

The holocaust denier 'David Noone', who possibly also operates under the name of Brian Wallace was escorted off UCD campus by an assortment of UCD activists on February 27th. The Holocaust denier was spotted distributing revisionist literature and fascist recruitment posters on campus. Immediately the activist who spotted him gathered others from an anti war stall taking place and by phone. The fascist was then duly escorted out of the arts block, and told to leave the campus. Noone made attempts to engage the students in debate, relishing the idea that we would organise a debate for him in the college! The students were having none of that and surrounded him outside and then began to walk him off campus.

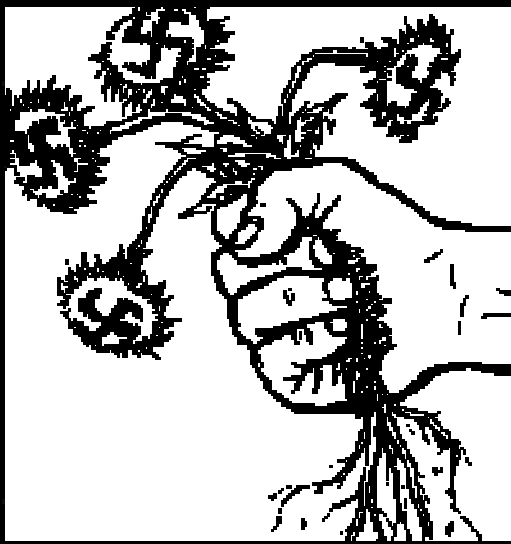
Noone hesitated and was advised to move off. Providing ample time to take photos of him, enabling further tracking of his attempts to organise. As he was being escorted to the bus stop he appealed to college services to intervene. The students outlined their opposition to his presence on campus and told services to take him out of the college, or they would do it for them. After threatening the activists with the seizure of their student cards, and in order to diffuse what could potentially have turned into a violent confrontation they obliged. The activists followed closely behind to ensure he was removed and saw him off at the bus stop.

It's been little over a month since UCD campus was plagued with a racist assault, and the confrontational vox pop in the university Observer which asked the question 'which ethnic minority do you hate the most?'. The ensuing controversy resulted in a motion of condemnation at Student Union Council and the subsequent sacking of the papers editor.

But the long term damage of the papers actions are only being felt on campus now, as UCD has clearly become a target for fascists who believe the potentially racist atmosphere fostered by the University Observer provides a recruiting ground for their organisations. This is the third time that literature denying the holocaust and attempting to recruit has been distributed around campus.

Noone describes himself as being from the Revisionist Education Organisation and claims the support of a number of students in the UCD Science faculty. While being escorted off, he did make an attempt to ring people to meet him on campus, who these individuals are, if they exist has yet to be found out. His website links to openly Nazi organisations like the American Stormfront. On the bulletin boards of one of the fascist websites he links to, Noone describes how after some success in University College Cork he is now targeting UCD and Trinity, in an effort to create a base for revisionism in Dublin, he has appealed to other fascists to help him in distributing material on campus.

As Noone was being escorted off, some students watching the spectacle unfold, accused the activists of denying him his freedom of speech and democratic right to self expression. The issue at hand here has very little to do with freedom of speech. Adolf Hitler himself said that the only way to stop the rise of the German Nazi party was to stop it organising, and on this point alone we agree with him. Fascists are not interested in freedom of speech, they seek to proliferate their ideology using that freedom as a pretext, then to organise into groups with others like themselves to smash the very freedoms they previously appealed to. Once organised, and once they have the numbers political debate is not an issue, as has happened abroad they will physically attack anyone disagreeing with them. It is now the job of anti-fascists to organise against this threat and make UCD a no go area for the fascists. While groups from outside of UCD are not allowed to distribute literature on campus and are removed by the college, activists should not depend upon this as a bulwark against the far right on campus, such measures can equally be used against anti-fascists and the left in general. If Noone does organise and get the support of students on campus, then there is nothing the internal bureaucracy of UCD can do to stop far right students organising. The job is going to have to fall to anti-fascists to organise and oppose the far right. In the next few weeks the students involved in this confrontation will be organising a meeting to outline why fascists should not be allowed to organise and to set up an anti fascist network within the college which can mobilise at a moments notice to ensure our colleges remain free from nazism and hate mongers. **If you are a student in UCD and want to get involved in this campaign, then contact antrophe@hotmail.com.**



**PULL 'EM UP NOW
BEFORE THEY TAKE ROOT**



Students Dragged Off Streets...

But Where's The Vanguard?

On February 5th about 5,000 students gathered in Mount Joy Square to take part in USI's second only demonstration against the threatened reintroduction of tuition fees in Dublin. At the last USI demonstration, the USI leadership co-operated with the police to move students off the streets and into a police pen. While it was the police who placed a truck between students and the Dail a number of months ago, at this demonstration, when students rushed up Molesworth Street those who had placed the obstacles in our way were our very own leadership. The Campaign for Free Education had leafleted the march all day outlining the need for a shift away from the rhetoric and posturing of the current USI leadership towards real resistance to educational inequality. The last time we gathered outside government buildings to oppose fees, we were told to go home and write letters to our local TD, as a result the march barely made the news. Posing in mass photo opportunities, rhetoric and individual letters of opposition collapse in the face of the governments plans for our education system. A history of those who made their point respectably and went home has yet to be written. To really stop the reintroduction of fees we have to stop only embarrassing the government every few months on the news, and we must begin to harass them into taking action to remedy the inadequacies and inequalities of our education system. We must shift focus away from responding to their agenda, and force them to respond to ours, an agenda where educational opportunity is not mitigated by your economical and social background. While the USI leadership was giving their speeches and urging us to visit some website that took 6 months to set up, CFE were organising for direct action. Over 200 students joined the CFE block in charging past cops and barricades and occupying the road in front of the Dail for over 2 hours. While CFE has stood by USI and defeated a disaffiliation referendum in UCD, USI showed no desire to stand by the CFE and completely dis-

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tanced itself from our 'unofficial' action. The cops threatened students with prosecution under the public order act, but a mass decision was made not to move, the police then dragged the students off the street.

This is the second time that the CFE has succeeded in mobilising students in direct action at national demonstrations, despite the usual problems of communication this action saw the successful co-operation of students from UCD, Maynooth and Galway. There is now a need to spread the ideas behind the CFE out of UCD to other campuses, so we can begin the national process of moving the student movement away from the shallow protests of our leaders, towards real grass roots resistance against educational inequality.

At the first USI demo, members of the SWP stood around talking about direct action, then disappeared off to have a 'mass occupation' of Trinity College, while the CFE were occupying the department of transport. At the USI demo on the 5th, calls of 'no to fees, no to war' were heard wafting across Mount Joy Square, where there was the 'pathetic' sight of a bunch of SWSS-ies marching around aimlessly, they'd lost the main demo, having arrived late. After quickly informing their man on the megaphone of the CFE bloc on the demo, he showed no interest., I ran to join in the mass occupation of O'Connell Bridge, leaving the vanguard to bewilder passers-by as they marched politely along the foot path. That was all I saw of them all day, until two SWP full timers arrived over two hours late, with bundles of papers, leaflets and placards, they looked a bit taken aback when they saw the blockade. While they were off probably giving out about how USI had operated and 'bourgeois legalities', students with the CFE at the heart, were waging war on two fronts, like any good grass roots rank and file union movement, in the space of two hours they had confronted and fought both the USI leadership and fallen victim to 'bourgeois legalities' being dragged off the streets by those 'bodies of armed men' the Leninists are always warning us about at meetings. It seems that all year we've been forced to ask ourselves where the hell are the vanguard? We usually find that they are off taking about revolution while the rest of us are actively creating it, on whatever small scale we sow the seeds. In one rather hilarious incident earlier in the year, the SWP were holding a weekly meeting while 300 students were dramatically blockading the education minister in the UCD Vet Building. The SWP are fond of creating a distance between themselves and the Stalinists by using Paris '68 as an illustration of how the Communist Party had become a spent revolutionary force, ideologically and in practice, by diverting struggle and containing it in the ballot box. These episodes described above strike me like a minor detail from '68, where the Communist Party was revolutionary only in name, no where to be seen supporting the barricades. Today the SWP remains revolutionary only in name, the sooner we become aware of this the better.

Socialist Alternative members have been instrumental in the creation of the Campaign for Free Education, however, we find no need to broadcast this fact far and wide by showing up at demos with placards and hoping students will take them. Maybe Leninists think that the battle of ideas can be won by trying to outdo other groups in terms of how many placards they can foist on unsuspecting students. We however don't. Attempts to be seen to be in control and leading demonstrations do little more than disempower and alienate students from campaigns, if you criticise USI and others for turning demonstrations into mass photo opportunities, then please stop doing this yourselves. No matter how many people are holding your placards in photographs, this changes nothing. Fundamentally the Campaign for Free Education plays an emancipatory role in the student movement, it has engaged more and more students in actions against the government, empowering them to create change themselves and not wait for official representatives and the usual vanguards of the left to show up with papers and placards and do this for them. Ideologically, this is something both the SP (who have played a genuine enough role in CFE) and the SWP seek to do. We all know that no one can liberate the working class but the class itself, and just because some of the vanguard claim to be 'mass workers' parties doesn't necessarily mean they are the class. Revolutionaries, should seek to work within campaigns and the class, building confidence and intervening to push those movements in a genuinely socialist direction by engaging in debate, not by claiming or seizing leadership, but by creating a leadership of ideas.

The ideal situation for the UCD SU elections would have been for the Campaign for Free Education to nominate from within itself as a student movement, a slate for the SU positions. The CFE had 76% support a number of months ago, and such a slate would have perhaps carried some of this with them, it would have been a direct outgrowth of the student body, and have represented a genuine 'reclaiming of the union.' However, we arrived back after Christmas to find that SYUCD had decided that it would go alone and seek the support of students in the election, a party political decision so fair enough, but from the perspective of really building and sustaining a movement a huge fucking cock up. Declaring themselves for election over 8 weeks in advance of any nomination deadline, they switched focus away from the method of engaging the government through mobilisations of students, and once again we returned to that world

of student politics, hacks pitted against hacks, individuals who represent no one versus individuals representing none. That mindset, the idea of the union as a playground for hacks was being shattered by reaching outside the existing body of activists and involving students was replaced with election fever. Someone once said 'an ounce of struggle is worth a tonne of votes', but SYUCD felt differently and decided to place themselves ahead of the emerging grass roots student movement, in the expectation that we would all run to bask in the sunshine of their leadership. When calls are made for left unity we should ask ourselves-unity on whose terms? Those who constantly seek to put themselves artificially at the head of the movement?

Radical student unions cannot exist where there is no radical student body. To move towards an activist based student union willing to take stands for students, rather than remaining neutral, making finances available to grass roots initiatives-those running for office in USI will have to come from a student movement which does not wholly exist here yet. Our job as students is to create such a movement here.

The CFE was consciously set up with the immediate aim of mobilising students and involving them collectively in building mass resistance to not just a rise in registration fees, but against educational inequality. In terms of public discourse, the issue facing the student movement at the moment is not the 69% increase, this is just a symptom of a wider problem. The government has long since shifted debate, it has covered itself in the language of social inclusion, a stance which has contributed to the idea of students as some selfish middle class elite out to safe guard our own privileged existence in campuses which remain no go areas for a vast majority of young people.

For this reason activism cannot and must not exist in a vacuum. In order for the activist strategy to foster change it must exist outside the actual event. What we are fighting for must be bigger than what we place ourselves in immediate opposition to, this means realising what the whole picture is before focussing on the smaller. Approaching things from the bottom up, instead of seeking to chip away at the symptoms.



Get Active.

Socialist Alternative members are active in the following campaigning groups.

Campaign For Free Education.

Building grass roots resistance to educational inequality. www.freeeducation.cjb.net. Contact 085 719 8001

UCD Anti-deportation Campaign.

Campaigning against state racism and deportations of asylum seekers. Contact Donal at 086 309 5663.

Global Action.

UCD activist group raising consciousness and taking action on issues of environmental destruction, heritage, war and neo-liberalism. Contact 085 721 6815.

CarrickMindere.

Defending our heritage in Carrickmines castle against the proposed motorway which seeks to level it. www.carrickminescastle.org and 087 962 7243

socialist alternative

<http://www.socialistalternative.cjb.net>