



All children are equal—but some are more equal than others.

This appears to be the philosophy of Michael McDowell who wants deny citizenship rights to many children whose parents are not Irish.

But millions of Irish people have travelled to the United States and their children have received citizenship there.

In this devastating attack on McDowell's proposal, KIERAN ALLEN shows how immigrants are scapegoated for the failures of the right wing parties.

Through a meticulous marshalling of evidence, he shows that the problems in Irish society do not stem from immigrants or single parents but the from 'spongers' at the top.

# Citizenship and Racism:

## The case against McDowell's Referendum

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by Kieran Allen

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PO Box 1648 Dublin 8

**Kieran Allen** is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology in UCD.

He is the author of the *Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership, Fianna Fail and Irish Labour, The Politics of James Connolly* and (with Colin Coulter) *The Irish Republic, the United States and the Iraq War*.

He is a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party.

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Introduction:

## **McDowell discovers too many black babies**

The Irish Constitution has one progressive article. Article 2 states that:

“It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation.”

It means that citizenship and the rights that go with it are bestowed on anyone who is born here. This open definition of citizenship came as part of a referendum on the Belfast Agreement. In return for dropping the older territorial claim to Northern Ireland, the Irish government declared that anyone who was born on the whole island of Ireland could be a citizen.

But Justice Minister Michael McDowell has discovered a problem. He claims it gives foreign mothers an incentive to give birth here, causing a crisis in the maternity hospitals. Like a tabloid editor he has coined a new phrase—‘citizenship tourism’.

McDowell tried to enlist the support of the Masters of Dublin’s three maternity hospitals for a proposed referendum.

‘They pleaded with me to do something to change the law in relation to this. They didn’t ask for additional resources, they were asking me to change the law’ he said!

But the Minister may have been a little economical with the truth.

Two of the Masters, Dr Daly and Dr Michael Geary, issued a statement stating that ‘at no time had they pleaded for a referendum’ and that, in fact, they had highlighted the need for more resources. Dr Sean Daly even said they were being used as ‘scapegoats’?

These doctors do not hold particularly liberal left views. In 2001, for example, they supported the government’s amendment to the constitution which would have specifically forbidden abortion for women who were suicidal and imposed 12 year sentences on anyone who helped to procure them an abortion.

Yet even they wanted to distance themselves from the Justice Minister

Michael McDowell wants to bring in changes to Article 9 of the constitution so that it modifies Article 2. This article would give the Dail the right to decide on nationality. His aim is to restrict citizenship to people who have parents who are already Irish or who have been here legally for three out of last four years.

The referendum can only open a deep sore of racism in Irish society. Outside of the extreme right, few politicians openly talk in a racist language. Instead they use coded messages. McDowell’s discovery of a so-called crisis in the maternity wards will be taken by many as code for ‘there are too many black babies here’.

Older Irish people were brought up on racist stereotypes about missionaries converting the ‘black babies’ of Africa. Their images of black people were inspired by fear and awe. In Clare Boylan’s novel *Black Baby*, she recalls how

The Irish always had an intense sentimental preoccupation with distant pagans... it was the dusky heathen who stirred the infant imagination. There was romance in these stories and terror too, for the missionary fell prey to foul disease, to the leopard’s tooth and the cannibals’ pot. Children loved to hear such tales and were schooled early to sacrifice for God’s unchosen. ‘Penny for the black baby’ was one of the first phrases learnt. There was as much pleasure in putting a penny in the mission box, with its nodding black head on

top, as spending it on an orange.<sup>3</sup>

These older notions can mix in with other racist fears about the fertility of black women producing more children and 'taking over'.

Of course, the sophisticated barrister Michael McDowell will never make such comments. But the coded words spoken on television will get a different spin on the doorsteps. And the vile forms of racism which are stirred up can only encourage others to take more direct action.

In a similar fashion, Ian Paisley's ranting about Catholics encouraged loyalist thugery—even while the good doctor washed his hands of 'all violence'.

Racist attacks are already on the rise in Ireland. Muslim women get attacked for wearing the veil. Black women are insulted just for being pregnant. In one survey, women reported that 'their babies had been spat upon by local children or called "black monkeys" and that coins were thrown at them from passing cars'.<sup>4</sup>

A recent Amnesty International survey showed that seventy nine percent of individuals from black or minority groups, have experienced racism or discrimination. More than a third experienced open racist abuse frequently and another third occasionally.<sup>5</sup>

In 2002, the Fianna Fail TD Noel O'Flynn looked like losing his seat and played the race card. He claimed that the country was in crisis over the asylum seekers and described them as 'the spongers, the freeloaders, the people screwing the system'.<sup>6</sup> Despite getting newspaper headlines for his statement, O'Flynn was neither disciplined nor expelled from Fianna Fail.

Soon after these comments, Ireland had its first racial murder when a young Chinese student, Zhao Liu Tao, was killed in Dublin. The opportunist ranting of politicians can give a ready made excuse for racist thugs.

Michael McDowell's scare story about foreign women creating chaos in the maternity wards is another example of the Noel O'Flynn approach to politics. McDowell knows that his government is deeply unpopular. Sinn Fein and Labour pose a challenge in working class housing estates, so McDowell is using the referendum as a 'trap-door' to undermine their support.

But people will suffer from this cynical manoeuvre. There are tens of thousands of immigrants in Ireland who work and contribute to this society. McDowell's referendum will create an atmosphere where they are treated with suspicion and made to feel under attack.

1: Liam Reid 'Masters deny seeking change of status on non-nationals' *Irish Times* 16 March 2004

2: *ibid*

3: Quoted in B. Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) p. 16.

4: J Murphy-Lawless and P. Kennedy. *The Maternity Care Needs of Refugee and Asylum Seeking Women* (Women's Health Unit, Northern Area Health Board, 2000) p. 104-105.

5: E. O Mahony, S. Loyal and A. Mulcahy, *Racism in Ireland: The Views of Black and Ethnic Minorities* (Dublin: Amnesty International, 2001)

6: 'Fianna Fail TD attacks "freeloader" asylum seekers' *Irish Times* 29 January 2002

## Chapter 1:

# Is there a crisis in the maternity services?

Michael McDowell's claim that foreign women are clogging up the maternity wards is absurd because Irish birth rates have fallen dramatically.

The number of births averaged close to 70,000 per year in the ten year period 1971-1981. But in the inter-censal period 1991-1996, this had fallen to close to 50,000 per year.

Irish fertility rates have been dropping more dramatically than most other countries in Europe.

One study put it like this:

'If the 1961 total marital fertility rates endured, there would have been 95,600 births to married couples in 1991 instead of 43,155—a decline of almost 55 percent in thirty years.'<sup>1</sup>

Table 1 illustrates the pattern of Irish birth rates from 1951-2000 and the total number of live births in each of the selected years. Birth rates are measured as the number of births per thousand of the population. The table shows that there has been a long term decline in the birth rate because Irish women are having fewer children. The obvious reason is that they use contraception on a wide scale.

Table 1:  
Birth Rate: Births per 1,000 of population in Ireland for selected years

Year	Birth Rate	Total Live Births
1951	21.2	62,878
1961	21.2	59,825
1971	22.7	67,551
1981	21.0	72,158
1982	20.3	70,843
1986	17.4	61,620
1990	15.1	53,044
1992	14.4	51,089
1994	13.4	47,928
1996	14.0	50,665
1998	14.5	53,551
2000	14.3	54,239

Source: P. Kennedy, *Maternity in Ireland*, (Dublin: Liffey Press) p. 80

The actual numbers of births fluctuate a little more. Here we see that the numbers fall consistently from the early 1980s until the mid nineties. Then there is a rise. This rise in the total numbers of births tended to reflect changing economic circumstances. But even with the rise in births since the Celtic Tiger days, there were still 17,919 thousand more births in 1981 than in 2000

So how could there be a crisis?

The most recent report of the Central Statistics Offices tried to make a future projection of Irish birth rates.

It stated that even if there was a 'combination of continuing immigration and 'high fertility' this would lead to the annual average number of births increasing to reach 63,000 per year in the period 2006-2011.<sup>2</sup> These assumptions were at the higher range. A different assumption at a lower range put the number of births at just 47,500.

So again where is the coming crisis?

If there are problems in the maternity services, it is mainly because of the government's policies.

One of their strategies has been to centralise medical services and cut back on local services. So the increase in births in Holles St is not simply the result of Ireland having more immigrants or Irish people having more children. It is also a reflection of the closure of maternity hospitals such as those in St James and Loughlinstown. Similarly the increased numbers of births in the Rotunda and Lourdes hospitals reflects the closures of hospitals in Dundalk and Monaghan.

Currently, 40 percent of all births take place in just three hospitals—the Coombe, the National Maternity Hospital (Holles St) and the Rotunda.<sup>3</sup>

The current policy of the Department of Health is to close even more maternity hospitals. Ennis hospital, for example, is scheduled to close its maternity ward.

The policy of closing maternity hospitals has already created an outcry—particularly after the death of a premature baby, Bronagh Livingstone, in Monaghan in 2002.

In this scandalous case, Denise Livingstone was turned away from Monaghan General Hospital because of the withdrawal of maternity services and sent to Cavan without any nurse accompanying her. In a tragic incident, she lost her baby as a result.

These problems in the maternity services are not due to 'foreigners'—but to the home grown policies of governments who regard spending on health as a burden on the profits of their wealthy friends.

The medical establishment and the government have also discouraged the practice of home births. The particular skills of the (mainly female) midwives are being rendered less important than the (mainly male) obstetricians. So there is an increased medicalisation and active management of births by hospitals. In 1969, for example, 4 percent of births were home births but by 1994 this had fallen to only 0.4 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The overall result is that more women are being pressurised to have their babies in larger more centralised hospitals. Again, this policy has nothing to do with immigrant women coming here and taking up beds in the maternity wards.

The other reason there is a problem in the maternity services has been because of government cutbacks. The overall income of the National Maternity Hospital in Holles St, fell from €5,726,000 in 2001 to €5,132,000 in 2002. The hospital cut back on medicines, heating, bedding appliances, medical and nursing staff. Again none of this was due to 'foreign women'—but native born politicians.

As in every other aspect of Irish life, politicians want to scapegoat 'non-nationals' because their own policies lead to a run down in public services. Once this is understood it is easy to deal with the myths being spun by the Department of Justice.

They say, for example, that the referendum is for the good of immigrant women themselves because it will discourage them coming here to present for birth at the last moment.

But there are already International Air Transport Association guidelines which prevent women who are seven months pregnant getting on planes. If McDowell was so concerned about these women causing harm to themselves or their babies, why would he not seek to enforce these guidelines?

The Department of Justice claims there is a wide scale practice of 'citizenship tourism'. The term 'citizenship tourism' assumes that most 'non-nationals' give birth in Ireland to gain citizenship.

But the majority of 'non-nationals' have little interest in Irish citizenship. They already have most of the rights awarded to Irish citizens by virtue of belonging to the EU. The Central Statistics Population and Migration Estimates up to April 2000 indicate that only 12 percent of migrants came from outside the EU and the USA.<sup>5</sup>

Up to 1999, 55 percent of all migrants coming to Ireland were Irish! In subsequent years this has dropped to around 40 percent.

If Michael McDowell were consistent he would claim that the 'crisis' in the maternity service is caused by returning Irish people who have not paid taxes here for years or decades.

Even he does not make this ridiculous argument. Yet far more Irish people have returned to Ireland after years abroad than all the non-EU migrants!

Ireland has become a multi-cultural society after immigrants came here during the Celtic Tiger years. Due to the novelty of immigration, sections of Irish society originally associated anyone with a dark skin as a refugee or asylum seeker. But asylum seekers are a minority amongst migrants, constituting only about 10 percent of the overall immigrant population since 1995.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike asylum seekers who are not allowed to work, most other migrants work here legally. The last census showed that six percent of the population are classified as non-nationals. As these migrants are usually of the working age group, they pay a higher proportion of their income in tax than other sections. If they have children here, it is simply because like everyone else they decided this was the right time for them.

Why should they not have the same rights as Irish people who emigrated to the US and then had children there?

Even if we take Michael McDowell's contention in his own terms, it does not make sense. A mere 2,585 asylum seekers—and that is often both parents—were given leave to remain in Ireland between 1996 and 2001 because they were the parents of Irish children.<sup>7</sup>

McDowell's implication that most or all of this grouping had children deliberately to gain Irish citizenship is deeply offensive. Like most other people they had many and varied reasons for having children. But how could this small grouping—whatever their reasons for having children—be bringing about a crisis in Ireland's maternity services?

Far from non-nationals being a drain on the health service, the reality is that it could not run without migrant workers.

The cutbacks in nurse training in the 1990s, has meant that the Irish health service relies on 5,000 Filipino nurses just to stay open. Approximately 3,600 non-consultant hospital doctors are also employed in the health service. Of this number approximately 1,600 are temporary registered doctors who come from outside the European Union.

Until recently, the government did not allow this workforce to bring their spouses into Ireland to live with them. They had to finally relent when many of the Filipino nurses threatened to move to countries that would treat them better. But now McDowell is trying again to discriminate against them by not allowing their children the same rights as others who are born here.

When Irish women go to maternity hospitals they are often cared for by Filipino nurses, Indian doctors, Canadian radiographers. But Michael McDowell wants to blame these same people if they have a baby here. These 'non-nationals' are supposed to be causing a crisis in the very health service that could not run without them!

This citizenship referendum is absurd. Its only purpose is to strengthen a system of institutional discrimination already being built up against immigrants here.

1: D. Courtney 'Demographic Structure and Change' in P. Clancy, S. Drudy, K. Lynch and L. O. Dowd, (eds) *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives* (Dublin: IPA, 1995) p. 54

2: Central Statistics Office, *Vital Statistics on Population* (Dublin: CSO 2003) p. 28

3: P. Kennedy, *Maternity Services in Ireland* (Dublin: Liffey Press 2002) p. 87

4: *ibid.* p. 85

5: P. Mac Einri, *Immigration into Ireland: Trends, Policy Responses, Outlook* (<http://migration.ucc.ie/irelandfirstreport.htm>)

6: *ibid.*

7: T. Ward, *Immigration and Residency in Ireland* (Dublin: City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee)

## Chapter 2: Who is a citizen?

Nearly 40 million Americans claim Irish descent. But if Michael McDowell pushes through his notion of citizenship based on 'blood', an extraordinary situation will emerge.

If you are born in Boston and both your parents lived in America for all their lives, you could still claim an Irish passport as long as you have an Irish grandmother. All you do is go to the Irish embassy and put your name on the Foreign Births Register. The embassy will give you a certificate which entitles you to an Irish passport.

But if you are born in Dublin and your parents have paid taxes to the Irish government, you could be denied.

If the amendment to Article 9 is passed, McDowell will implement a new Irish Nationality and Citizenship Bill. This will restrict citizenship to those who have one Irish or British parent or to those who have been legally here for three of the last four years. The latter clause is deceptive. It excludes those who came here to study and those applied for asylum. It also excludes anyone who fell foul of the very restrictive work permit regulations.

The Department of Justice also says that 'there will be provision to deal with the question of schemes for investment-based citizenship'.<sup>1</sup> So once again there will be a different rule for the children of the wealthy.

All of this raises some interesting questions—why have British parents more right to get their child an Irish passport than a Romanian? What have the Romanians ever done to us? Why has a person who had an Irish grandmother and who leaves the post-apartheid South Africa more of a right to get their child an Irish passport than the child of a South African who works here?

The main reason for this absurd situation, are coded understandings.

Citizenship by blood is seen as a defence against a multi-cultural society. If you are born in Dublin, there is a chance your parents came from Nigeria and so you are excluded.

But if you are born in Boston and can trace a link to an Irish grandmother, the chances are that you are white.

In a capitalist society, citizenship conveys certain rights. Consider for example the simple journey from Dublin to Paris. The Irish passport holder merely gets on the plane and views the journey as no more serious than previous generations viewed a trip from Dublin to Cork.

But for the individual who is born and reared in Dublin but who is denied a passport, the trip becomes a nightmare.

Before entering France, they will have to produce a) a photo ID; b) €35; c) a re-entry visa to Ireland; d) a residence permit in Ireland; e) a Garda Immigration card; f) travel insurance; g) confirmation of hotel booking; h) a bank statement; i) a letter from their employer; j) two pay slips. In addition they will have to take time of work to queue at the French embassy and the Department of Justice's Immigration and Citizenship Division at Burgh Quay in Dublin, all of which could take up to about eight hours.

Critiques of unequal societies begin with an understanding that no one should have privileges because of an 'accident of birth'. Once you understand the idea of an 'acci-

dent of birth' you know it is not fate or the will of God that assigns privileged positions in the world.

## Citizenship and Passports

McDowell says that the referendum is necessary to defend 'the integrity of Irish citizenship law'<sup>2</sup>. But the only people who complained about the citizenship law before Michael McDowell were the far right Immigrant Control Platform.

The government claims that we are out of step with other EU countries in granting citizenship to people born here. But we are not 'out of step' with the United States, Canada, New Zealand, most of Latin America and the Caribbean. More than 40 other countries give citizenship to those born there.

Citizenship laws in the EU are in a mess—because they are geared to keeping people out and creating a fortress Europe. There is nothing remotely progressive about them—and Ireland is not obliged to copy them.

The notion of citizenship rests on a belief that one acquires certain rights and obligations by virtue of being a member of a particular nation. Others who are not part of this nation are excluded from some or all of these rights.

It is sometimes claimed that the idea of citizenship 'had its roots in Greek thought and practice'<sup>3</sup>. A thin thread is then supposed to connect this classical tradition to the medieval concept of the city burgher. According to Max Weber, the Western European cities were unique in conferring on city dwellers unique rights<sup>4</sup>. Ultimately these traditions from Ancient Greece to medieval Europe are said to lay the basis for the modern idea of citizenship.

There are two problems with this idea of an unbroken Western tradition. First, there was no real concept of a nation state before modern capitalism. The landmass of Europe up to the nineteenth century was broken into small principalities where people were rooted to the soil and tied to particular lords. Second, in Ancient Greece and medieval Europe, the 'citizens' were confined to relatively small groups of property owners. It is only after the American and French revolutions that there developed an idea that all citizens are equal before the law—even if those laws can be undermined and bent by the private power of wealth.

Citizenship and passports arose with the emergence of modern capitalism—and will, hopefully, disappear with the ending of that system. They are not an unchanging part of human existence.

Prior to the great revolutions, which ushered in the modern age, people were given different legal rights according to which rank they had in society. They were seen as 'subjects' of a particular monarch who, in turn, gave out varying levels of rights to the different ranks of the population.

Passports barely existed and they had an entirely different meaning to today. They were much more rudimentary and were designed to prevent people moving about *within* a country or region. The main target was the 'masterless rabble' who might enter a new parish and become a 'burden' on the poor relief there. 'Foreigners' were defined as people who came from outside a particular area. So, for example, the French National Assembly heard in 1790 that there were a 'great many foreign mendicants' taking advantage of the poor relief in Paris. The term, however, referred to French people from outside the city.

Capitalism needed a free labour force that was uprooted from the soil and free to move about and be hired by factory owners. It had to break down all the local barriers

and the petty rules established by the aristocrats. It needed to abolish privilege based on blood and replaced it with privilege based on money. So for all these reasons, its early ideologues created the idea of citizen rights based on adherence to the nation. The idea of the citizen was to replace the subject who was under the thumb of this or that lord. One of the first great documents of the modern age comes from the French Revolution and is called a Declaration of the Rights of Man *and the Citizen*.

At first, capitalism was revolutionary—compared to the previous age of feudalism. Its early supporters railed against passports as an obstacle to human liberty. Here for example is one of the *cahiers*—declarations—from the parish of Neuilly-sur-Marne in early 1789:

As every man is equal before God and every sojourner in this life must be left undisturbed in his legitimate possessions, especially in his natural and political life, it is the wish of this assembly that individual liberty be guaranteed to all the French, and therefore that each must be free to move about, within and outside the Kingdom, without permission, *passports or other formalities that hamper the liberty of the citizen* (emphasis added).<sup>5</sup>

Citizenship itself was not defined by blood or any other mystical line of descent. The French constitution of 1793 virtually gave citizenship to foreigners—as long as they supported the ideals of the revolution.<sup>6</sup> It was much later before the state managed to create a distinct nation of French citizens who were different to foreigners.

Even then, for most of the nineteenth century, passports were an irrelevancy. By the early twentieth century, one expert on passports could write:

Most modern states have with few exceptions abolished their passport laws or at least neutralized them through non-enforcement...[Foreigners] are no longer viewed by states with suspicion and mistrust but rather, in recognition of the tremendous value that can be derived from trade and exchange, welcomed with open arms and, for this reason, hindrances removed from their path to the greatest extent possible.<sup>7</sup>

Arthur Cooper was a minor British cleric who made a name for himself as travel writer after walking around Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. He noted that a passport was helpful but only for such edifying activities as visiting private art galleries, or collecting money from a local post office. He made no mention of immigration controls—for the simple reason that there were none. He also reported on a remark from the Spanish counsel who told him that 'a passport was as much out of date as a blunderbuss'.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the passport made a comeback. The occasion was the carnage of World War I—the century's first 'total war' when the civilian population was the target of bombings, mass conscription and propaganda to raise or undermine their morale. Each nation state drew the boundaries of its own citizenry tighter—stamped them with passports and carried through the 'revolution in identity papers'. Most countries passed a version of the British Aliens Restriction Act 1914 that rigorously controlled embarkation of 'non-nationals'.

It took an imperialist war to link citizenship to the carrying of a passport. Henceforth the worse fate for any human was to be on the planet without a passport.

The most remarkable thing about capitalism is that it creates amazing possibilities. Unlike any previous society, we can communicate with people all over the world. We can listen to their music, feel their suffering during natural calamities and join their celebrations. Yet in other ways, the world goes backwards.

Just as under feudalism the 'masterless men' had to carry documents which noted their

rank and their relative degree of rights, so too under modern society does the passport act as ticket which controls movement and doles out various levels of rights.

A US or EU passport is at the top of the hierarchy while a Nigerian or African passport is at the bottom. The old feudal prejudices about the 'masterless men' becoming a burden on poor relief is now dressed in the new language of 'welfare scroungers'. But ultimately, as the early French revolutionaries understood, it is all about restricting human liberty.

Worse, the whole thing is mystified beyond belief. In the early days of modern industrial societies, there was often some recognition that citizenship came through an accident of birth. If you were born and brought up in a particular country, you eventually got the passport. Citizenship was often based on the *jus soli*—as the legal experts put it—on soil, on where you were born.

But later during the age of empire and national chauvinism, there was a greater emphasis on the *jus sanguinis*—citizenship based on blood. When Germany was united as a state in 1866, it was carried out by the Prussian aristocracy from above. Unlike the French revolution, citizenship was deemed to be a privilege granted through blood.

These hangovers from the past mean today that a Russian who never left their country but can show German descent can get a German passport—but a Turkish worker who has lived, paid taxes and swore to be a good citizen of Germany is still denied citizenship. If his or her child is born in Germany, that child will not get a passport—unless one parent is German and they swear before the age of 23 to have left behind their Turkish nationality.

Ireland does not often show the world a progressive face. But one of the ironies of partition was that citizenship was never defined in the 1937 Constitution. De Valera believed that the nation had not emerged fully and contented himself with a territorial claim over Northern Ireland. The shifting needs of our rulers led them to drop that claim as part of the Belfast agreement. But, to appease Northern nationalists, they agreed to copper-fasten the right of anyone born in Belfast or Derry to Irish citizenship by introducing the new Article 2 of the Constitution. They did not figure out the wider consequences at the time—and are now frightened the measure could lead to a more multicultural society.

Hence the moves to bring Ireland into line with the more restricted history of passports being issued through the bloodline of parents. It will be claimed that this is the more 'modern', more 'European' way of organising citizenship. But, as we have seen, it arises from the legacy of the worst side of European history—that of war chauvinism and mysticism about blood lines.

1: Department of Justice, *Citizenship Referendum: The Government's Proposals* (Dublin: Department of Justice 2004) p. 7.

2: M. Brennock, 'McDowell changes argument on referendum' *Irish Times* 8 April 2004.

3: G. Delanty, *Citizenship in a Global Age* (Buckingham: Open University Press 2000) p. 11.

4: M. Weber, *Economy and Society* Vol 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) Chapter 16.

5: J. Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000) p. 22.

6: S. Castles, *Ethnicity and Globalisation* (London; Sage 2000) p. 190.

7: Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport* p. 111.

8: M. Haynes, 'Setting the limits to Europe as an 'Imagined Community'' in G. Dale and M. Cole (eds) *The European Union and Migrant Labour* (Oxford: Berg, 1999) p. 28.

## Chapter 3:

# Racist myths and spongers

A survey of people in inner city Dublin conducted in the summer of 1998, found that 57 percent of people believed that refugees were coming to Ireland to exploit the social welfare system. Three quarters of people believed that Ireland was experiencing a 'flood' of refugees.<sup>1</sup>

The whole issue of immigration is surrounded by myths. These myths do not develop purely because people are uneducated or prejudiced. If the beliefs are so widespread, it cannot be caused by individual intolerance. The myths come from the corporate media and establishment politicians who have a vested interest in defining immigrants as 'scroungers' to deflect attention from themselves.

To take an example. Denis O'Brien, Dermot Desmond, John Magnier, J.P. MacManus, and Tony O'Reilly are probably some of the wealthiest people in Ireland. Yet each of them claims to be tax exiles. In other words, their official residence lies outside Ireland and they cannot stay in Ireland for more than 183 days a year or 280 days over two years.

There is no monitoring of their movements to see if they abide by this. This is in sharp contrast to the scrutiny imposed on anyone who claims social welfare. (There is also, by the way, no official figures on the exact number of people who have been recognised as tax exiles.)

The status of being a tax exile brings extraordinary privileges. Let's take one name from our list above—Denis O'Brien. He made a staggering €292 million profit from the sale of Esat Telecom to BT. Esat Telecom only became a valuable company because it was awarded a mobile phone licence by disgraced minister Michael Lowry. It might be argued that some of these huge profits should have gone back to Irish society. But, by claiming to reside in the Algarve area of Portugal as a tax exile, O'Brien saved himself €51 million in capital gains tax. These taxes could have gone to build schools or hospitals.

The political establishment and the corporate media support this sort of freeloading. In fact, the main newspaper group in Ireland, the Independent News and Media holdings is run by one such tax exile, Tony (or Sir Anthony, as his papers call him) O'Reilly. It is in the direct and immediate interest of this newspaper magnate, that other groups are described as spongers.

Independent News and Media holdings controls outright the *Irish Independent*, *Sunday Independent* and *Evening Herald* newspapers and it holds a 50 percent stake in the *Star*. These, co-incidentally, are some of the main newspapers that promote an image of refugees as 'welfare scroungers', 'bogus' and coming here in 'floods'.

What appears as individual common sense about refugees is, in fact, the manufactured product of a newspaper industry with vested interests in protecting their owners.

## The Myths

**There are too many refugees in Ireland. There are floods of them coming every day. We are only a small country—they should go elsewhere.**

In 1995, just over one thousand asylum applications were made. Since then the numbers increased by between one and two thousand a year. This rose to 11,634 in 2002 but the numbers have fallen since.

But this is a drop in the ocean of the number of asylum seekers and refugees in the world. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, there are 22.3 million 'people of concern' on the planet. One of the biggest groups, seven million, are 'internally displaced people'—that is refugees within their own countries.

Many of the rest become refugees in neighbouring poorer countries. Only one million get to make an asylum application. And even from within this limited pool, tiny numbers come to Ireland.

Take, for example, asylum seekers from Afghanistan. In the first nine months of 2001, 26,045 Afghans sought asylum in Europe—but Ireland only received a mere 25?

In general, Ireland takes in only 1.5 percent of all asylum applications to Europe. The majority go to countries like Germany, Britain or Netherlands. Because Ireland has a relatively small population, in the EU we end up in the middle range of the ratios of asylum seekers to population. There is one asylum seeker in Ireland for every 721 people—compared to one to 343 in the Netherlands, one to 460 in Belgium, one to 586 in Austria and one to 676 in Sweden.<sup>3</sup>

**These asylum seekers are all bogus. The government figures show that 90 percent have their applications turned down. They pretend to flee oppression but they are really illegal economic migrants.**

The highest number of asylum application in Ireland come from two countries—Nigeria and Romania. Both these countries have been placed on a 'white list' by the Irish government.

There is a presumption that no serious oppression exists there and so special agreements have been concluded with their governments to facilitate deportations back to these countries.

Civil rights groups in both Ireland and Nigeria have condemned this agreement—because there are many good reasons to flee Nigeria. According to the most recent Amnesty International report hundreds have died in inter-communal violence in Lagos, the Delta region, Plateau, Kaduna and other states. There are also reports that armed gangs, especially in the south and south east of the country, were responsible for torture, unlawful detention and inhuman treatment. Some of these vigilante groups are tacitly or officially endorsed by the state.<sup>4</sup>

A previous report noted that 'Killings and ill-treatment by security forces since May 1999 were not subject to independent investigation.'<sup>5</sup>

In Romania, there is systematic oppression and racist abuse of the Roma people. Half a million Roma people were gassed in the Nazi concentration camps. They also suffer continued racist abuse throughout Eastern Europe today. The Centre for Roma Rights reports regular fire-bombings of gypsy villages, police beatings, torture and pervasive discrimination against gypsies throughout Romanian society.

Yet the oppression in Nigeria and Romania is not recognised by Department of Justice officials and the presumption is that applications from these areas must be automatically bogus. Many immigration officers are retired Gardai or former civil servants. They receive no training in human rights practices. Increasingly, they are using the 'manifestly unfounded' procedure on a very broad range of cases to speed up the hearings and turn applications down.<sup>6</sup>

The charge that they are all 'economic migrants' is a bit ironic coming from Irish government officials. In 1990, there were 130,000 illegal Irish migrants in the United States. Five years previously, the current Taoiseach Bertie Ahern called for an amnesty for them

and condemned the then government for not putting enough pressure on US authorities?

**Asylum seekers get special treatment above and beyond what other people on social welfare get. They get special grants to help them cope.**

Quite the opposite. Asylum seekers have been removed from the normal welfare system since November 1999 when the government brought in its 'dispersal and direct provision' policy. Under this, asylum seekers have been sent to temporary communal accommodation in 84 different centres in 24 counties. Many of these centres are run by hangers on of FF or the PDs.

After getting their three meals, the asylum seekers are forced to live on an income of €19.10 a week and €8.55 for each child. The numbers in these centres range from 24 to 400. Asylum seekers experience a lack of privacy and are forced to eat meals which differ greatly from those they were used to.

A report on direct provision centres in Cork found them to be overcrowded, the quality of food provided was poor, and there was a lack of play and homework space for children.<sup>8</sup>

Quite rightly no Irish social welfare recipient would endure this treatment and no homeless person could be expected to swap a life on the streets for this type of near imprisonment.

**Immigrants are taking houses from others on the council waiting lists. They are also forcing up the price of houses and the rents for private accommodation.**

Asylum seekers are not entitled to go on housing lists—until they get refugee status. Most other immigrants work on a work permit system which does not allow them to stay long term—so again the vast majority would not be on housing lists.

The lack of social housing stems from government policies. According to ESRI sociologist Tony Fahey, only 2,100 social houses were built each year in the decade of the nineties. It should have been 10,000.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, the government has consistently fallen short of its own targets on social housing—due to cutbacks. In the National Development Plan it promised to build 8,000 units a year for 4 years. Because of cutbacks, they only hit about half of the target each year.

So immigrants cannot be blamed for the fact that there are 50,000 households on the housing waiting lists.

Similarly, immigrants cannot be held responsible for the rise in the cost of houses. The main problem here is the price of building land. At the start of the Celtic Tiger years, land accounted for between 10-15 percent of the price of the average house. Now it has reached between 40-50 percent.

The governments' policy of relying on market forces is to blame. In 1973, the Kenny Report—devised by a conservative judge—recommended that speculators be forced to sell land at agricultural prices. But nothing was done. Instead, successive governments gave the speculators a free hand.

In Dublin, land that is re-zoned for housing sells at about €1.5 million an acre. Figures for 1999, issued by the Construction Industry Federation, showed that landowners in the Dublin area made close to €1.1 billion. These profits went to a small number of people. A study by Tom McEnaney, in *Business and Finance* magazine showed that just eight developers controlled 'the vast majority of building land in Dublin'

The eight people were :

- Gerry Gannon, who had a land bank of 800 acres, mostly around Malahide and Howth.
- Michael Cotter, of Park Homes.
- Mickey Whelan, of Maplewood Homes.
- Michael and Tom Bailey, of the Flood Tribunal fame.
- Joe O Reilly and Brian Wallace, of Castlethorn Developments.
- Joe Moran, of Manor Park Homes and Zoc Developments.

These eight men have more effect on the price of building land than relatively poor immigrants who come into Ireland. If the government wanted to reduce the price of houses, it would do something to break their grip.

**The immigrants are taking up beds in our hospitals. They are causing the waiting lists to grow longer.**

Wrong target again. The problems in the Irish health system stem from a brutal policy of slashing hospital beds. At one point in the late eighties, Ireland topped the OECD record for cuts in admissions to acute hospital beds.

In addition, there is a two tier system of health care. If you have a fat cheque book, you get better and quicker treatment—if not, you wait longer. This suits consultants who earn huge fees from private medical care. In 2002, they were getting an average income of €280,000 from their public and private practices.<sup>10</sup>

But it does not suit the majority. A recent Eastern Health Board survey found that the average waiting time for private patients in public hospitals was 3.4 months, whereas the average waiting time for public patients was 6.7 months.<sup>11</sup>

The right wing parties have consistently refused to abolish private medicine in public hospitals—and so treat people on the basis of suffering rather than money.

Instead they cynically lied to electors. Just before an election on May 2002, Fianna Fail promised they would ‘end waiting lists in our hospitals within two years’. Yet there are still 27,212 people on waiting lists—and even this is an underestimate because you have to first get an appointment with a consultant and then wait three months before even getting on the waiting list!

Once again, the problem does not lie with immigrants—but with our home-grown right wing parties that have deliberately run down the public services.

1: V. Brown, ‘The “flow” is only a trickle’ *Irish Times* 22 November 2000.

2: M. Woods and N. Humphries, *Seeking Asylum in Ireland: Statistical Update* (Dublin: Social Science Research Centre 2001) p. 10-11.

3: P. Mac Einri, *Irish Migration in the 1990s—an Overview in Charts* (<http://migration.ucc.ie/irishmigrationinthe1990scharts.htm>).

4: *Amnesty International Report 2003—Nigeria*. (<http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/nga-summary-eng>).

5: Quoted in Vincent Browne ‘Clamour over asylum is racist’ *Irish Times* 29 August 2001.

6: S. Loyal, ‘Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state’ in C. Coulter and S. Coleman, *The End of Irish History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) p. 78-79.

7: M. Donohue and N. Haughey ‘Aherne’s asylum seeker remarks sparks concern’ *Irish Times* 14 March 2000.

8: Aoife Collins *The Needs of Asylum Seekers in Cork* (Cork: NASC, Irish Immigrant Support Centre 2002).

9: E. Oliver, ‘Call for Massive increase in Social Housing’ *Irish Times* 1 October 1999.

10: M. Wren, *Unhealthy State: Anatomy of a Sick Society* (Dublin: New Island 2003) p. 168.

11: *ibid* p. 147.

## Chapter 4:

# Why right-wing parties are racist

Jackie Healy Rae T.D. for South Kerry has little time for asylum seekers. He defended comments by his son that the vast majority were ‘freeloaders, blackguards and hoodlums’ and claimed there were 80,000 of them in the country, most of whom had arrived on the back of a lorry.

Bizarre nonsense, you might think. But two months earlier, the same Jackie Healy Rae wrote a letter on a behalf of a constituent wishing to accommodate asylum seekers.<sup>1</sup> Why, he must have thought, should racism stand in the way of money making?

Jackie Healy Rae is almost a caricature of himself. But he illustrates something quiet important about right wing politicians. They want to both whip up racism—and then use immigrants for their economic advantage.

This helps explain a central puzzle. Why does such a pro-business politician like Michael McDowell put so much effort into constructing a system of institutional racism?

The Progressive Democrats are close to the employers organisation, IBEC. IBEC has repeatedly said that it wants more immigrants in Ireland to deal with labour shortages. The National Development Plan confirmed this when it noted that almost 200,000 migrants would be required by 2006. Yet here we have Michael McDowell, the most pro-capitalist politician in Ireland, creating fears about black babies in Irish maternity wards!

The answer lies in the manner in which modern right wing parties use racism for political and economic advantage. There are three main areas from which they seek to use immigrants and the racist political capital they make from them.

## The psychological wage

The black writer Dubois pointed out that racism can offer a ‘psychological wage’ to white workers. As suffering grew in their own lives because of the greed of their employers, they could compensate themselves by thinking that they at least were part of a ‘superior’ nation and culture. To see how this works, you need only briefly look at the relationship between American workers and the political system in recent years.

Since the early 1970s, the American dream has died for many. The average real wages of production and non-supervisory private sector workers actually decreased between 1973 and 1993. Even a college degree is no longer a ticket out. College graduates ‘have been losing ground at the same rate as workers with less education’, reports the Economic Policy Institutes, *The State of Working America 1994-1995*.<sup>2</sup> Economic survival depends on both parents working. Stress, longer hours and low fringe benefits are the experience of the majority.

All this is occurring in a society that is the most unequal in all of human history. Real wages fell by 15 percent in the period 1973-1993 even though there was positive productivity growth. Paul Krugman, a well known economist from Princeton, noted ‘Economic history offers no example of a country that experienced long-term productivity growth without a roughly equal rise in real wages.’<sup>3</sup> In 1991, the average Chief Executive Officer earned as much as 113 workers, but in 2001 he was earning as much as 449 workers.<sup>4</sup>

The elite ruled at one stage by offering the crumbs—by giving reforms, hopes, aspira-

tions for a better life to the majority. Not any more. The future generation of American workers—like European workers—can no longer realistically expect that their sons or daughters will fare better than themselves.

So right wing politicians who promote such inequalities shift to scapegoating minorities as a fundamental political method. Their strategy is to keep the population fragmented and in a state of fear, envy and inner-directed anger. They use the corporate media to blare out headlines about ‘welfare spongers’ or criminal and terrorist conspiracies. A false unity is projected between *We* (taxpayers, ‘middle-class’, ‘law abiding workers’) and *Them* (the ‘spongers’, ‘welfare cheats’, the internal enemy).

The US right wing commentator, Kevin Phillips has called this the ‘politics of frustration’ and noted that there has been a ‘radicalisation of the unusually non-ideological mid-section of the population because of cultural and economic trauma’<sup>5</sup>

The radicalisation has occurred principally around race. One result is a widescale imprisonment of black people. Two million people are imprisoned in American as a direct result of the right wing campaigns on law and order—and many are black.

Michael Mc Dowell and Fianna Fail know that the traditional basis of right wing politics in the South is crumbling. In the past Fianna Fail posed as ‘the plain people of Ireland’. They were the mirror image of the Unionist Party—defending a Catholic Parliament for a Catholic people. They originally promised to challenge the legacy of colonial rule and bring about a better Ireland where, as De Valera put it, workers would not ‘merely be wage slaves spending their lives to make money for somebody else’<sup>6</sup>

Today, this has changed. Fianna Fail and the PDs are the parties of Michael O Leary, Dermot Desmond and Tony O Reilly. The bedrock of their economic policies is cutting taxes on wealth. Today the banks pay a lower proportion of tax on their profits than PAYE workers do on their wages. The continued links between FF and the Catholic church has led them to indemnify it against compensation charges from victims of child abuse. At least €500 million in taxpayers money will be used to shore up the property of the Bishops.

Just as in America, inequalities have grown in Ireland on a scale not dreamt of by previous generations. The Celtic Tiger era saw a huge transfer of wealth—from the working population to the rich. Between 1987 and 1997, the share of the economy going to wages, pensions and social security fell from 41 percent to 31 percent while the share of the economy going to holders of capital increased by an equivalent 10 percent. Today Ireland is the most unequal country in Europe and second only to the United States in the OECD.<sup>7</sup>

Ireland is also the most globalised economy in the world—and the ruling elite run it to suit the multi-national corporations. Companies pay the lowest level of taxes on profits in the EU, social security costs are low, capital gains taxes are low—it is an Atlantic tax haven for the wealthy. The reverse side of this is that public services have been run down—and now face wholesale privatisation. There are terrible waiting lists in the hospitals; child care costs are the dearest in the EU primary schools are underfunded; and the social housing building programme is wholly inadequate.

Faced with the anger against blatant corruption and greed, the right wing parties turn to open racism to shore up their position. Ultimately McDowell’s campaign against immigrants provides an ideological smokescreen for the corporate rich.

### Indentured Labour

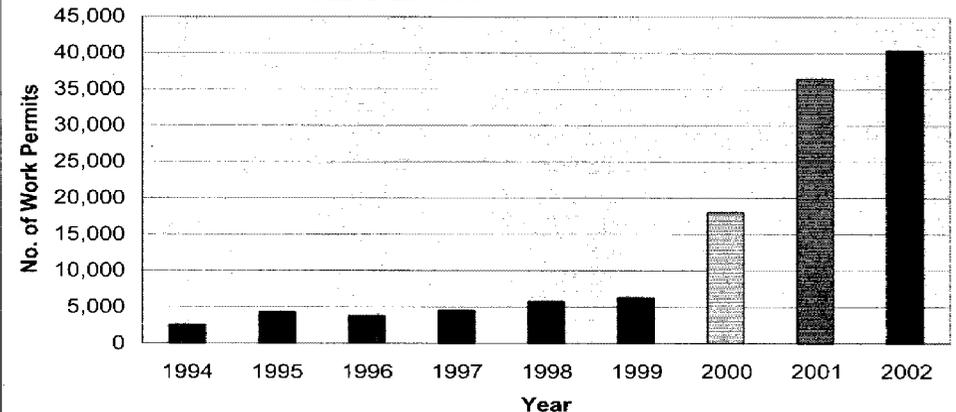
The other way right wing parties use racism is by creating conditions for the increased

exploitation of a section of workers. Their aim is to create a ‘super-flexible workforce’ that is at the beck and call of employers. A by-product is the deliberate creation of divisions inside the labour movement.

Immigration to Ireland has happened quickly and dramatically. Since the Celtic Tiger boom, about 47,000 people enter the country each year—many of them returned Irish migrants. One writer has estimated that it is the equivalent of three million entering the USA.<sup>8</sup>

Right wing politicians want to regulate this immigration to gain extra advantages for their wealthy friends. The main mechanism has been the work permit system. Table 2 shows the huge expansion of this system, with a 600 percent increase since 1999.

**Table 2: Work Permits 1993-2002**



Source: Immigrant Council of Ireland, *Labour Migration into Ireland* (Dublin: IMC 2003)

The work permit system is modelled on the contract labour system that was devised by the big industrial powers after WW2. In the US, there was a *bracero* programme in the fifties (from the Spanish word for day labourer) whereby nearly half a million Mexicans were recruited to work on farms in the south western states. In Switzerland, large scale recruitment of foreign workers took place between 1945 and 1974. It was organised on a ‘rotation’ principle—workers were to stay only a few years and were forbidden to change jobs or bring in their families.

The most famous case has been the German guest worker system. Here employers requiring labour paid a fee to the Federal Labour Office, which selected workers, checking their health, skills and police records. The ‘guest workers’ were only supposed to stay a short time. They were to be recruited, utilised and sent away again as the employers required.

A more recent example has been the contract labour system in the Gulf and in Asia.

Contract labour systems are based on the idea that immigration is temporary. However in all the above cases, the temporary nature of the contract labour system broke down. The Turkish migrants who came to Germany from the sixties as ‘guest’ workers are still there. The Mexican population of the US has exploded. Even after the Asian Tiger collapsed in 1997, the threats to stage mass deportations of all migrants came to nothing. Modern capitalism needs and relies on immigrants everywhere.

Fianna Fail and the PDs know that immigration is here to stay but they pretend it is temporary in order to organise the super-exploitation of workers.

The migrants mainly work in the service industries—which are often run by Irish employers. The work permit system gives them huge power to enforce low wages and long hours on migrants.

In particular cases, the employers will use the lower legal status of migrants to weaken union organisation. In the building industry, the Construction Industry Federation, for example, responded to rising militancy by bringing in more migrants. They saw them as indentured labourers who could be forced to accept reduced safety standards and lower conditions.

The employers use the racist measures that discriminate against migrants to create a super-flexible workforce. Year long work permits mean that migrants do not build up rights under the Redundancy Acts. Being held under the thumb of the employer, they can be pushed into displaying forms of ‘flexibility’ that other workers might reject.

McDowell’s system of institutional racism therefore benefits the class he represents.

### The War on Terrorism

The world’s ruling classes forge alliances between themselves within a wider system of imperialism. From 1945 to 1989, the dominant Western Alliance was forged in opposition to the perceived Cold War threat of ‘communism’. Throughout the Western world, populations were told that they needed the protection of the US.

Since the collapse the Berlin Wall, political alliances within the global elite are being re-structured around the so-called ‘war on terrorism’. This involves ‘preventative warfare’ against ‘rogue states’—which do not accept the dictates of the Pentagon. But one consequence of this re-structuring has been a crackdown on ethnic minorities who are suspected of not being totally loyal to Western values.

Fianna Fail and the PDs are supporters of Bush’s ‘war on terrorism’. Nearly 14,000 US troops pass through Shannon each month on their way back and forth to occupied Iraq.

One consequence of this war is new attacks on ethnic groups, particularly those from a Muslim background. As in other EU states, Ireland is increasing the monitoring and surveillance of ethnic minorities. This is evident most dramatically in the recent Immigration Act of 2004 which has been condemned by the Irish Council of Civil Liberties and the Irish Refugee Council as a ‘draconian piece of legislation’<sup>9</sup>

The Immigration Act is modelled on the British wartime Aliens Act and treats immigrants as if they are suspects in the ‘war on terrorism’. It contains a provision for compulsory health screening at ports of entry. It draws up a register for non-nationals and makes it an offence for non-nationals who are landlords not to report others who have not signed this register. It requires non-nationals to report to an immigration officer within 48 hours if they change address. It requires Irish citizens to report any non-national who has been in their household for more than three months.

These uses of racism show the appalling consequence that follow from neo-liberal economic policies. On one hand, racism is used to transform migrants into a super exploited flexible workforce. But when these minorities justifiably react against this discrimination, they are treated as suspect communities who refuse to fully ‘integrate’ into Irish society. This in turn is used by the corporate press to construct an ‘internal enemy’ and to cry out for support for ‘strong’ right wing politicians.

Michael McDowell’s referendum is typical then of the right wing populist tactics that have been pioneered by politicians such as Schwarzenegger in California or Aznar in



Anti Deportation protest in Dublin

Spain. They breed in a climate of fear. But implicitly these politicians also display their fear of their own ‘native’ population. Understanding how racist tactics spring out of the politics of late capitalism is the key to defeating them. But first let’s look at how Fortress Ireland works.

- 1: T. Wyndam-Smith, ‘A Study of Political Leadership and Asylum Seekers in Ireland’ M.A. Peace and Development Studies University of Limerick 2002 (<http://migration.ucc.ie/immigration/ts/chapter-six.htm>)
- 2: Quoted H. Sklar, ‘The Snake Oil of Scapegoating’ *Z Magazine* May 1995
- 3: Quoted in R. Pollin, *Contours of Descent* (London: Verso 2003) p 44
- 4: *ibid* p 9
- 5: H. Sklar, ‘The Snake Oil of Scapegoating’ *Z Magazine* May 1995
- 6: *Dail Debates*, Vol 31 Col 597, 26 October 1927.
- 7: D. O Hearn ‘Macro-economic policy in the Celtic Tiger: A Critical Assessment in C. Coulter and S. Coleman (eds) *The End of Irish History* (Manchester: MUP 2003) p. 47.
- 8: Immigrant Council of Ireland, *Labour Migration into Ireland* (Dublin: IMC 2003) p. 5.
- 9: ICCL and Irish Refugee Council, *Joint Response to Immigration Bill 2004* (<http://www.iccl.ie/minorities/race/o4-billjresponse.html>)

## Chapter 5:

# Fortress Ireland: How institutionalised racism works

In 1997, a comfortable Dublin barrister saw a three or four hundred strong queue of refugees and asylum seekers outside the Department of Justice. He noted they had stood there for hours because they were soaked to the skins from the rain—even the children and babies. He was so outraged that he contacted a press photographer and wrote an article telling how his ‘blood boiled’ at the discriminatory treatment meted out to these people.

Today that same barrister, Michael McDowell, is running the Department of Justice.<sup>1</sup> And the queues are still there. They may not be directly outside his office because they have moved to the Immigration and Citizen Division. There, almost every morning, hundreds of people form a line around the old Irish Press building in Bugh Quay. They start at 5 am or 6 am lining up looking for visas, permits—all sorts of papers just to live in Ireland.

Welcome to fortress Ireland.

The vast majority of Irish people abhor racism. Despite sickening racist stories in the tabloid press, there are scores of refugee support groups all around the country. In Dun Laoghaire, for example, local people got together to help asylum seekers through the maze of bureaucracy they faced on arrival. In Limerick, Doras offers support. In Tramore, people demonstrated when one asylum seeker was threatened with deportation.

However, at the top of Irish society, there has historically been a deep, institutionalised discrimination that the Department of Justice plays a pivotal role in organising.

Historically, this was directed at travellers. They were refused halting sites and pressurised to conform to the norms of the settled society.

Until the passing of the Refugee Act in 1996, the main piece of legislation governing non-Irish people was the Aliens Act of 1935. This required people to report regularly to the oddly named Aliens Office. Immigrants were regarded with suspicion. The unholy alliance of state officials and church prelates reserved a special hatred for Jews. Even after the Holocaust, it was state policy only to admit ‘Christian Jews’—or more precisely Jews who had converted to Catholicism—to Ireland.<sup>2</sup>

The Irish revolution, which promised not only freedom from the British Empire but a better life for all, was a disappointment. The mass of people were left with the bitter comfort that they were the most Catholic nation on earth—with little to disturb the tranquility of their own conformism. Foreigners were regarded with suspicion and immigration was ruled out. Even with fears of a declining population, the Bishop of Cork, Dr Lucey could proclaim: ‘Population increase can come about through an increase in the birth rate or a diminution or cessation of emigration—immigration we rule out’.<sup>3</sup>

The demand that Ireland be kept homogenous and Catholic often brought misery to those unfortunate refugees who made it here. The 500 Hungarians who came after the failed revolt of 1956 in Hungary, were detained in military camps until most subsequently fled the country. As late as 1992, when 27 Kurds tried to get asylum in Ireland, they were ‘helped’ back onto planes by Gardai at Shannon airport. Ireland only ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees in November 2000.

This backward outlook has, however, now been replaced by a much more insidious form of institutionalised racism. The state recognises there are immigrants in its midst but it seeks to categorise each incoming group according to a hierarchy of restricted rights that increasingly moves away from the rights bestowed on Irish citizens.

At the bottom of the pile are the asylum seekers who have come to Ireland after 10 April 2000. These are not entitled to work or avail of a FAS course or receive social welfare. They are subject to the policy of dispersal and direct provision

Slightly better off are asylum seekers who came here before April 2000. If they applied before 26 July 1999, they have established a right to work and get a medical card. They can get first and second level education but are excluded from third level. However, ultimately, they are at the mercy of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal.

One more step up the ladder are a small number who are known as convention and programme refugees. These have gotten through the procedures, are recognised as refugees, and have rights to enter employment and have access to higher education.

Asylum seekers are the main target of the racist scapegoating and are subject to considerable humiliation by the Irish state. It has become the quasi-official policy to keep out as many as possible as they are deemed to be ‘a burden on society’.

So in 2003, 4,827 people were refused leave to enter Ireland by immigration officials who have little knowledge of the political situation in a variety of oppressive countries. The government has refused to accept an EU grant to establish an independent monitoring unit to examine its procedures at the airports. If such a study took place, it would show there is a near automatic policy of stopping black people and subjecting them to more intense scrutiny than others at immigration entry points.

Applications for asylum are often heard by retired gardai or civil servants who have deeply conservative attitudes. Questions are framed to catch out would be refugees and there is an overwhelming suspicion that virtually all are bogus. The result is that a mere 2 percent of applicants get full refugee status in the first instance.<sup>4</sup> On appeal the numbers go up to 14 percent because they can get access to legal representation.

Overall, Ireland’s recognition rate for refugee is much lower than the rest of Europe—even though other EU states also employ anti-asylum seeker rhetoric. Irish recognition rates at 5 percent are less than half the EU average in contrast to other countries such as France or Denmark, which are 15 percent and 17 percent respectively.<sup>5</sup>

Even when applicants are refused in other countries, asylum seekers are often offered ‘leave to remain on humanitarian grounds’. However, this is hardly used in Ireland with a mere 18 people getting this in 2000.

Contrary to media impressions, asylum seekers represent only a small proportion of the growing number of immigrants coming to Ireland. The majority who arrive come to work. However, they do so under terrible conditions that deprive them of significant rights.

### The Guest Worker System

The Celtic Tiger boom produced an insatiable appetite for workers. Ireland moved from having one of the lowest number of married women in the workforce to a participation rate that began to match the average for the EU. And, crucially, it changed from a country of emigration to actively looking for immigrants. The main reason for the change was that the Irish labour force expanded from one million to one and a half million.

To meet this need, the Irish state has devised a hugely restrictive work permit system that gives employers a much greater hold over a sizeable group of workers. It is based on the

same hierarchy of privileges as we have seen above.

At the top of the list are EU nationals and Swiss citizens who do not require a work permit. They can move freely from job to job. But in a recent move, they have been deprived of the right to gain social welfare for three years. This makes them more beholden to their employers as they are more frightened of losing their jobs.

Workers from Eastern Europe join this club on May 1st but the government is reserving the right to impose work permits on them for seven years if labour market conditions change.

The greatest discrimination is reserved for non-EU workers. These are divided into two categories, dependent on their relative use to Irish capitalism.

High-skilled workers such as information technology professionals are in shorter supply in the global economy and so they get more rights in the pecking order. They enter Ireland under a work visa system, which they hold themselves. They can move around and change jobs. However, the visa only lasts for two years. They can apply to have their families join them—but it is not guaranteed.

So, for example, Valentine is a construction engineer from Romania. His wife, Natalia, was allowed to join him after six months. However, when they applied to let their two daughters aged 14 and 9 to come for school education, they were refused. The reason stated was that they had not shown their daughters would return to their home country and so 'may overstay following their proposed visit'<sup>6</sup>

Less skilled workers are treated even worse. These form the vast majority of immigrants and enter Ireland through a work permit system. The work permit is held by the employer and lasts for only one year. The worker has to stay with that employer and must first leave the country before they can apply for a new permit. It costs €500 to obtain the permit and the cost is not supposed to be passed on to the employee. However, under the surface, a far more appalling system has evolved.

Workers apply for the permit often through a recruitment agency. They can pay this recruitment agency anything from €1000-2000 for the privilege of getting the permit. Here is one case, which illustrates the system—it concerns two Russians, Yuri and Oxana:

It took an entire year to save the money needed to pay the agent. They believed that it was worth it, as they would earn three times their Russian salary in Ireland. The agency offered to organise accommodation for the couple and to link them up with employers. An agent met them at the airport and took them to accommodation. The house where they are staying is overcrowded, damp and has no heating. For this substandard accommodation, they pay €120 each per week. The agent placed them in jobs where they earned €160 a week. This is less than the minimum wage. Other workers are paid €300 per week for the same job. Yuri and Oxana have to work a lot of overtime to meet their basic needs.<sup>7</sup>

This arms length system used by employers has become common in the meat industry, in market gardening and in construction. The nod and wink culture means that the Irish state can claim that there are no legal abuses. However, the abuses are built into a system because the worker becomes a bonded employee of their employer through the work permit system.

Employers can make illegal deduction from salaries, knowing that the worker is dependent on them to renew the permit. They can force them to do jobs that are dirtier and more dangerous than the original job they applied for. They can put them on a 'training programme' to avoid payment of the minimum wage when there is no real training. In the meat industry, it is common to put new employees on these programmes even when, in

one instance, they had 27 years experience.<sup>8</sup> Immigrants can only get an unlimited employment permit if they stay with the same employer for five years and promise to stay with them in the future.

The huge power that the work permit system gives to employers makes women workers particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment. Here is one account from an Immigrant Council of Ireland report:

Aisha is from Sri Lanka. She found her employer very strange and tried to make sure she was never alone with him. However, her boss often found opportunities to get Aisha on her own. At these times, he would make requests for sexual favours. Each week, when she went to collect her wages, he subjected Aisha to unsolicited kisses before he would hand over her pay. These experiences proved deeply traumatic for her. Eventually the stress of being constantly vigilant became too great and Aisha left her job. She is afraid to seek redress, even though her friends from work will give evidence, she is terrified of her employer. When Aisha left her job he told her, the moment she exposes him, he is going to send her back.<sup>9</sup>

Formally, anyone on a work permit is entitled to normal labour rights. However, there are only 17 inspectors to monitor the whole country. The government knows that wide scale abuses are occurring—yet they do nothing because the system suits their wealthy friends.

They are more interested in intimidating immigrants to cow them into a second and third class position in Irish society.

1: F. O Toole, 'McDowell buries better instincts' *Irish Times* 5 November 2002

2: See B. Fanning, *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland* (Manchester: MUP 2002) Chapter 4.

3: Quoted in P. Mac Einri, 'Some Recent Demographic Developments in Ireland' (Migration Studies Centre, UCC <http://migration.ucc.ie/etudesirlandais.htm>)

4: M. Woods and N. Humphries, *Seeking Asylum in Ireland* (Dublin: Socials Science Research Centre UCD, 2001) p. 12.

5: *Ibid* p. 15.

6: Immigration Council of Ireland, *Labour Migration into Ireland* (Dublin: IMC 2003) p. 38.

7: *Ibid* p. 30.

8: *ibid* p. 33.

9: *ibid* p. 43.

## Chapter 6:

# Where does racism come from?

The Irish government did not invent racism. They drew on ideas that have long been around in Western society. But where did the idea come from that people with black or brown skins can be treated differently?

It certainly is not a 'natural' or an eternal idea for all time. One study of ancient times, from example, concluded that: 'The Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and early Christians were free of the curse of acute colour consciousness, attended by all the raw passions and social problems that cluster around it.'<sup>1</sup>

The ancient world was effectively colour blind. There was certainly a horrific class system based on slavery but people were not designated as naturally inferior because of their colour. Here is how Frank Snowden summarises the experience:

In the ancient world there were prolonged black-white contacts, from an early date; first encounters with blacks frequently involved soldiers or mercenaries; initial favourable impressions of blacks were explained and amplified, generation after generation, by poets, historians and philosophers ... Both blacks and whites were slaves, but black and slave were not synonymous; black émigrés were not excluded from opportunities available to others of alien extraction, nor were they handicapped in fundamental social relations—they were physically and culturally assimilated; in science, philosophy and religion, colour was not the basis of a widely accepted theory concerning the inferiority of blacks?

In many pre-modern societies there were fears about outsiders or strangers. Jewish people, for example, were targets for abuse in many European countries. However, it was never thought that they were naturally inferior because of some inherent characteristic such as skin colour. One way of escaping anti-Semitism was to convert to Christianity. But in a modern racist society such as Nazi Germany, this was not possible because it was assumed there was something inherent and biologically inferior about Jews.

Modern racism emerged about three hundred years ago. Prior to the end of the seventeenth century, for example, the word 'race' (Italian 'razza', Spanish 'raza', French 'race') when applied to human beings usually referred to their descent from a given family or lineage.<sup>3</sup> It was only later in that century the word 'race' was used to develop a biological classification based on the human physiognomy. However, initially these physical attributes were not linked to notions of inferiority.

The turning point came through the intersection of capitalism with slavery. Capitalism was born through revolutions against the older feudal society. The fight against kings and aristocrats was often conducted in the name of liberty. Against special privileges, based on blood, the ideologues of the Enlightenment proclaimed the idea of an equality of opportunity. In a whole series of great battles from the Dutch struggle for independence, to the English Civil war which destroyed the idea of an absolute monarchy, to the American Revolution which established a constitution and a Bill of Rights, to the most radical moment of all in the French Revolution, the idea of privilege based on blood was eventually destroyed.

The rallying cry was the idea of government by consent of the majority. This meant that everyone had rights which they in turn delegated to a legitimate authority through a social contract. Here for example is Colonel Rainsborough speaking in the famous Putney debates in 1647 where Cromwell was in the chair:

The poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and for truly sir, I

think it is clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought by his own consent to put himself under that government.<sup>4</sup>

A century later it was Thomas Paine who became the voice of the emerging bourgeois democracy when his book *Common Sense* sold over 100,000 copies in a matter of months—at a time when 5,000 copies made you an immensely popular author. Paine summed up his values thus: 'Of more worth is one honest man to society and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived.'<sup>5</sup>

The idea of democracy was of course limited. Women were still regarded as second class. There were also often property qualifications. Nevertheless there was an emerging idea that humans were born free and could only be governed with their consent.

Yet, there was a central contradiction at the heart of these democratic ideals. Slavery played a huge role in the accumulation of the early wealth of the capitalist system. Between 1662 and 1807, over 3.4 million slaves were taken

by British ships from Africa to the Caribbean and America. Many of these slaves worked in the cotton plantations in the Southern states of America. This in turn supplied raw materials for the cotton mills, which virtually became the symbols of England's industrial revolution. One writer summed it up thus:

Almost the whole of the increment to non-bullion trade between Europe and the New World from 1600 to 1800 depended directly and indirectly on the exchange of tropical foodstuffs, tobacco and industrial raw materials cultivated basically with slave labour and exchanges for manufactured goods and commercial services produced by Europeans.<sup>6</sup>

The contradiction between proclaiming human rights and relying on slavery emerged in many of the great figures of the new liberal era. George Washington, the US president spoke of the inalienable rights to liberty—but he was a slave owner. John Locke, is the key philosopher on government by consent—but he held shares in the slave ship. Or the radical American democrat, Thomas Jefferson

believed that all men were entitled to life and liberty regardless of their abilities, yet he tracked down those slaves who had the courage to take their rights by running away. He believed that slavery was morally and politically wrong, but still he wrote a slave code for his state and opposed a national attempt in 1819 to limit the further expansion of the institution. He believed that one hour of slavery was worse than ages of British oppression, yet he was able to discuss the matter of slave breeding in much the same terms that one would use when speaking of the propagation of dogs and horses.<sup>7</sup>

The ideology of modern society stressed liberty and freedom—but significant groupings within it drew their sustenance and wealth from slavery. The only way these two poles could be reconciled was by somehow excluding black people from the definition of full humanity. This approach had already begun in the Caribbean when the slave owners claimed that the black 'race' had descended from Han—and so were less than human



Protest following racist murder in Dublin

figures. It developed into the theory of polygenesis—the plural origins of mankind—which linked racial features to notions of inferiority.

By the 19th century, this emerging racism developed a more ‘scientific form’. With the ideology of Social Darwinism, humanity was conceived of as a chain of being—with different levels of humanity developing out of the process of evolution. The white European male was at the top of the chain, coming out victorious through the ‘survival of the fittest’. Others, including the Irish, who suffered the calamities of famine, defeat in wars or slavery were placed further down because they had lost out. And at the very bottom was the black population of the ‘dark continent’.

Racism as a specific ideology which defined people as inherently inferior because of their skin colour was born with modern capitalism. It provided the means by which the ideology of government by consent was made entirely irrelevant to black people. If human rights were supposed to be universal, then it was convenient that blacks were defined as not quite human—as more child-like or even descended from a different branch of humanity. The image of black people as happy, shiftless, lazy, docile and ignorant became the poison from which racist ideas subsequently grew.

These ideas received an enormous boost during the era of colonialism. The conquest and plunder of vast swathes of the globe by the imperialist powers was justified because the conquered people were either ‘biologically inferior’ or were in, Rudyard Kipling’s words, ‘half devil and half child’. The white man had to take on himself the ‘burden’ of leading them. But there was no hiding their contempt. Here is one example of this outlook, which mixes disgust with a sense of smug satisfaction:

But I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don’t believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only many more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rules than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful: if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except tanned by exposure are as white as ours.<sup>8</sup>

This is the English writer Charles Kingsley in letter a to his wife—and he is talking about the Irish! Note the odd reason for his disgust—if they were black, their colonisation would present little problem but their white skins made him uncomfortable.

The racist ideas, which derived from the era of slavery and imperialism, are deeply embedded in Western culture. They operate to this day at many levels. Whenever there is a plane crash or calamity in America, there is newsreel footage. When it happens in Africa or India—they don’t even get names—unless they are Western tourists caught up in it.

When US politicians are asked why are they still on Iraq, they often claim that it is not yet ready for democracy and if they left there would be civil war. This is almost exactly the same rationale for Britain staying in India for so long.

Throughout the western world black people are celebrated as footballers, musicians and athletes—but they rarely get to manage football clubs or be recognised as writers, philosophers or mathematicians.

Subtly and insidiously, there is an idea that ‘we’—meaning EU citizens—have something to protect and defend against the ‘hordes’ and ‘floods’ of Africans who want to take from us.

However, racism is not simply a hangover from the past. If that were the case it might be easily eliminated through education combined with ‘race relations’ laws which prevent hate speech and intolerance. Racism, however, also feeds off the competition for scarce resources which is imposed on workers.

Capitalism brings workers together in large workplaces and forces them to operate collectively to defend their interests. But it also pits workers against each other—by competing for better jobs or better pay. One of the ways it does this historically is by stoking up resentment between indigenous workers and new groups of migrants.

Immigrants are often forced to work for less pay and conditions. This is precisely what happened to the Irish when they emigrated in their tens of thousands to Britain from the late nineteenth century onwards. Their poverty meant that they were used to break strikes or to work for vastly inferior conditions compared to British workers. This provoked outrage leading to ‘anti-Paddy’ or ‘anti-Mick’ riots.

Karl Marx explained the dynamic:

The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker because he sees in him a competitor who lowers his standard of life. Compared with the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the *ruling nation* and for this very reason he makes himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists *against* Ireland and thus strengthen their domination *over himself*. His attitude is much the same as that of the ‘poor whites’ towards the ‘niggers’ in the former slave states of the American Union.

This antagonism is artificially sustained and intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling class.

*This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret which enables the capitalist class to maintain its power, as this class is perfectly aware.*<sup>9</sup>

Marx’s point was that the rulers had a continuing interest in creating division between workers. Racist ideas strengthened the power of the big corporations. Through fostering divisions, it made it impossible to organise properly against the employers—and thus all suffered.

The solution came when Irish migrant workers were organised into unions and joined the fight for better conditions. Their experience of oppression often meant that they became the best fighters and local leaders of many British unions. This did not mean that racism was completely eradicated—it would still require a political fight within the labour movement to challenge support for imperialism.

Nevertheless the point is still relevant for today. Modern capitalism has the same interest in stoking up racism as it had in the nineteenth century. And workers have a common interest in fighting it. That starts by breaking from the myths that stoke up fears about immigrants.

1: F. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press: 1983) p. 108.

2: *ibid*

3: A. Eide, ‘Racial and ethnic discrimination in Europe: Past, present and future’ in D. Joly, (ed.) *Scapegoats and Social Actors* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press 1998) p. 16.

4: Quoted in G. Novack, *Democracy and Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971) p. 65.

5: Quoted in E. Countryman, *Americans* (London: I.B. Taurus 1996) p. 56.

6: K. P. O’Brien, ‘European industrialisation: from voyages of discovery to the industrial revolution’ in H. Pohl (eds) *The European Discovery of the World and its Economic Effects on Pre-Industrial Society 1500-1800* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 1990) p165

7: Quoted in C.C.O Brien, ‘Thomas Jefferson: Radical and Racist’ in *The Atlantic Monthly* Oct 1996 Vol 278 No 4: pp 59-74

8: Quoted in C. Husband, *Race in Britain* (London: Hutchinson 1982) p. 12.

9: K. Marx, ‘Marx to Meyer and Moot, 9 April 1870’ in *The First International and After* (Hammondsworth: Penguin 1974) p. 169.

## Chapter 7: Why close the borders?

In 1999, a dilapidated freighter from Indonesia was intercepted off Australia with migrants on board. In the two weeks preceding it, seven boats had landed with about 450 passengers in total. Australia's Minister of Immigration, Philip Ruddock, discovered a calamity. 'It was a national emergency several weeks ago. Its gone up something like 10 points of the Richter scale since then.'<sup>1</sup>

This type of hysteria about immigration leads to a loss of resources and lives. Each year \$2 billion is spent on protecting the US-Mexico border. About 6,000 immigration officials monitor it and there is a 50 mile long metal barrier. Patrol boats, checkpoints and thousands of officials are also deployed to protect Fortress Europe.

But it does not stop people coming—it only means that more people die trying to get in. When UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson visited the US-Mexican border in 1999, she was told that one person died almost every day trying to cross it. They died through drowning, dehydration in deserts or suffocation in boots of cars.<sup>2</sup> The Moroccan Workers Association in Spain estimates that between 1995 and 2000 about 3,000 drowned trying to enter Spain.<sup>3</sup>

The human tragedy of Fortress Europe was seen in Wexford in December 2001 when eight Turkish asylum seekers were found dead in a freight container. The group had spent 53 hours in the almost airless 40 foot container on a ferry. Also in the container was a consignment of office furniture.

These tragedies have raised the question: why do we need all these border controls? After all we are supposed to live in a globalised world. Companies can move around the world at will, so why cannot human beings move to get jobs?

Migration has always been a feature of human life. From 1840 to 1930, around 50 million Indians and Chinese went to California, South East Asia, the Caribbean and Africa to work in mines, build roads and farm. Between 1800 and 1930, 70 million Europeans moved to the Americas, Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

However despite these great movements the vast majority of people still prefer to remain in their own countries. About 150 million people—or just 3 percent of the world's population—are foreign born, living outside their country of origin. Each year they are joined by a few million more—but despite all the talk of globalisation, the vast majority of humanity tends to stay put.

The biggest form of migration occurs between rural areas and cities. People regularly move from desperately poor rural areas to take up slightly better paid jobs in the cities. They may live in shacks; they may survive in the black economy; or they may strike it lucky and get half decent job—but in general they find it better than staying on the land. In 1960, only 22 percent of the world's population lived in cities. By 2025, it is estimated that it will reach 60 percent.

Few people argue for controls of this pattern of migration. There is little talk of hordes of rural folk coming to take jobs, social welfare and houses from city dwellers. Most people understand that the huge expansion of a city like Dublin is often inked to a rise in jobs, and pay levels for everyone.

What is the difference then when migrants move between countries? After all, as we have seen, passports and immigration controls are a relatively new invention. This ques-

tion is usually put down by an overwhelming barrage of prejudice, stoked up by the corporate media. Immigrants according to the myth are poor, famished and come in hordes to steal jobs, scrounge off welfare, and weaken 'our' national culture. Yet the facts do not support any of these charges.

Immigrants, firstly, do not tend to come from the poorest sections of society. To migrate you need money and qualifications that allow you to sell something in a more industrialised society. If people moved simply because of poverty, millions would be on the move tomorrow. In reality, those who migrate are usually those with a little more resources and often higher education qualifications.

One of the areas in India which has produced one of the largest groups of emigrants is Jullundur, in the Punjab. But the Punjab is a comparatively rich province and Jullundur is one of the richest areas within it.

Migrants increasingly take up jobs as nannies in many Western countries. But contrary to myth, these nannies are often highly educated. Many teachers, for example, leave the Philippines—and work as nannies in developed countries. A recent survey in Argentina found that two thirds of domestic servants had a post-secondary school education.<sup>4</sup> A high proportion of asylum seekers, in particular, tend to have university qualifications. Research by the British Home Office found that one third of those accepted as refugees had university degrees, or post-graduate or professional qualifications.<sup>5</sup>

It is a myth, then, to think that if immigration controls were dropped in the morning, countries would be 'flooded' with millions of poor migrants. The plain fact is that the vast majority of the world's population resist moving!

Migrants tends to move to countries where the economy is booming or to regions within countries where there is growth. So the Asian Tigers and countries like Ireland and Spain which used to export people—start to receive emigrants when they enter a sustained boom. Conversely, the greatest form of immigration control is economic depression or mass unemployment.

When migrants arrive, they help to create jobs—rather than 'steal them'. How else can we explain how the wealthiest country in the world, the US, was originally a land of immigrants? The US has doubled in population over the last century, yet the country has become wealthier and wealthier. In Asia, the country with the highest proportion of immigrants is Singapore—making up almost one quarter of the workforce. Yet it is also one of the richest countries in the region. Similarly in Europe, the country with the highest influx of immigrants is Germany. Immigration is so crucial to the German economy that the government has proposed a new scheme to bring in 30,000 more non-EU computer professionals.

Even where is a sudden big influx of immigrants, there is no evidence that they 'steal' existing jobs and so create unemployment for locals.

In April 1980, Fidel Castro allowed people to leave Cuba through the port of Mariel and about 125,000 people set off for Florida. This 'Mariel flow' increased the labour force in Florida by about 7 percent—yet there was no effect on unemployment or wages among the local population.

In March 1962, 900,000 French people left Algeria after independence. There was a brief rise in unemployment in the South of France where they settled. But within a year it had declined to 4 percent—the same as the national average.

In 1977-78, huge numbers fled Portugal's former colonies in Africa and returned to their 'homeland'. The numbers were equivalent to 5 percent of Portugal's population. Again

there was no increase in unemployment.

By contrast when people flee a country, there is no evidence that it increases jobs and conditions for the people who stayed. Between 1946 and 1961, a staggering 531,255 people left Ireland. The situation was so bad, that reputedly, the *Irish Press* ran a headline: 'Would the last person leaving, turn out the light'. This mass exodus did not lead to better conditions for those remaining—poverty, low wages and mass unemployment continued as the norm.

The same pattern appeared in a more concentrated form in East Germany. In the ten years after re-unification, 2 million people left East Germany and moved west in search of work. But even though the labour force shrunk by a third, one million East Germans remained out of work.

When millions leave a country, it does not mean there are more jobs and better conditions for those who remain. Similarly, when a country receives many migrants, it does not mean that there are less jobs or lower wages. The main reason is that the labour market fluctuates with the business cycle of the economy—not with flows of migrants.

Migrants tend to come in two groupings. Some are highly skilled professionals and are in short supply in many economies. The majority, though, are pushed into the '3-D jobs'—'dirty, dangerous and difficult' work. Across the developed world, millions of jobs as office cleaners, fruit pickers, canteen staff and construction workers are undertaken by migrants.

In industrialised societies, rising education levels is the norm. Third level education in some form—whether university, further education college or getting a post leaving cert qualification is increasingly common. This has meant that huge sections of the native population are not willing to take on the 3-D jobs that migrants take. In the late 1970s, a government report showed that for every 150 jobs made vacant by immigrant workers in France, the native unemployed would refuse all but 13.<sup>6</sup>

Economies could not function without people willing to take on these jobs. The migrants who do the 3-D jobs become 'complementary' to jobs undertaken by the rest of the population. Migrants have helped to create a huge garment industry in Los Angeles—not just because they took on the hard work but also because they helped to expand the complementary jobs of designers, specialist producers of buttons, zips and fabric treatments for the native born workforce. As one writer put it, 'insofar as skilled and unskilled are complementary factors, a shortage of one will reduce the productivity of the other'.<sup>7</sup>

There is little evidence immigrants tend to depress wages. As we have seen they normally take on jobs native born workers do not do—and so there is no direct competition for wages. Studies in the US, have shown that the only groups that tend to lose out slightly on wages are often the previous groups of immigrants. And this happens because many of these are not unionised.

It is also a myth that immigrants take more from the welfare state than they contribute. Immigrants tend to be of working age and therefore tend to pay taxes and social welfare contributions. In Australia it was found that the younger immigrants take less in social welfare than the Australian born and only catch up in later years. In Britain it was found that immigrants contribute about 10 percent more in taxes and social insurance than they take back in welfare.<sup>8</sup> Many undocumented immigrants pay taxes—and can claim hardly any social welfare for fear of coming to the attention of the authorities. One study estimated that they are paying five to ten times more in taxes than they are consuming in welfare benefits.<sup>9</sup>

One of the crucial ways that immigrants benefit a country is by reducing the dependen-

cy ratio. This refers to the proportion of the working population compared to the non-working population of children and older people. Continuing education and longer life expectancy means that the dependency ratio is rising in the developed world. One medium term projection is that the number of dependents per 100 adults will rise by a half, from around 61 in 1998 to 92 in 2050.<sup>10</sup>

Right wing experts make much of a pension 'time bomb' that is supposed to be ticking away. It has become the main justification for increasing both the working age to 65 and beyond and also moving to 'defined contribution' pension funds. These mean that employers do not have to guarantee a fixed benefit. Most of these arguments deliberately underestimate how rising productivity means that the average worker of today can support far more older people than they did a decade or so ago.

But even if we were to take the arguments at face value, there is a simple and obvious solution—let in more immigrants. The UN Population Division has made rough estimates for how many immigrants would be needed over the next 50 years to offset the effects of falling birth rates and ageing. They project that to maintain the present support ratio in the EU, 13.5 million immigrants would be needed.<sup>11</sup>

Immigration is a fact of life in the modern world. No matter how many border patrols, computer monitors or guards there are, a small minority of the world's population will move. This minority bring huge benefits to countries they enter. If there are losers, it is the poorer countries they left behind. These put valuable resources into their education when they were young—and sometimes into their health care when they return. Stripped of all the myths, the hysteria that created fortress Europe is based simply on racist fears.

Ireland was once justifiably labelled 'the human resource warehouse of Europe'.<sup>12</sup> It ill behoves us today to join the panic over migrants. Facing up to the reality of immigration and pressing for a dismantling the border controls would be far more appropriate.

1: N. Harris, *Thinking the Unthinkable* (London: IB Taurus 2002) p.43.

2: *ibid* p..xix.

3: P. Stalker, *The No Nonsense Guide to International Immigration* (London: Verso 2001) p.131.

4: *ibid* p.76.

5: *ibid* p.76.

6: Harris, *Thinking the Unthinkable* p. 63.

7: *ibid* p. 59.

8: P. Stalker, *The No Nonsense Guide to International Immigration* (London: Verso 2001) p. 85.

9: *ibid* p. 83.

10: R. Blackburn, *Banking on Death* (London: Verso 2002) p. 20.

11: Stalker, *International Migration*, p. 93.

12: R. King, I. Shuttleworth and J. Walsh 'Ireland: The Human Resource Warehouse of Europe' in P. Rees, J. Sitwell, A. Convey and M. Kupiszewskie (eds.) *Population Migration in the European Union* (Chichester: John Wiley 1996).

## Chapter 8: Fighting Racism

An oppressed minority is being created in Ireland through the work permit system, the denial of rights of asylum seekers and the monitoring and surveillance of 'non-nationals'. The referendum to deny citizenship to people born here is another brick in this wall. The question is: what strategies are best employed to combat this discrimination?

One approach is to enter a 'partnership' with the government to combat overt expressions of racism. Social partnership has become one of the main mechanisms to connect Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the government. So there are partnership structures for all sorts of groups—from antipoverty groups and gay organisations to disability campaigners. These groups claim that they can enter a dialogue with the state and become lobbyists on the 'inside track'.

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism is the partnership body that reaches out to anti-racists. It sees racism as based on 'false beliefs'. It wants to encourage 'interaction, understanding, equality and respect' between ethnic groups. And to achieve this it wants a partnership which brings together key representatives of the government and the NGOs.

The problem is many NGOs have become dependent on government funding. They can be pressurised to moderate their opposition to government policies. After the first Nice treaty referendum, NGOs who campaigned against it came under some pressure from the Standards in Public Office Commission about their funding. In reality social partnership is more about control than dialogue.

Racism does not just come from individual 'false beliefs'. It cannot be simply overcome by 'interaction' between different people and the media portraying positive images of black people. Activities such Soccer against Racism or multi-cultural evenings in local communities are indeed enormously beneficial and do help break down individual prejudice.

But reliance on them as a strategy cannot work because racism is created by the very structures of our society. Racism has been systematically fostered by the Irish state and the employers. As we have seen, the state's policy of categorising and dispensing lesser social rights according to whether people are asylum seekers, work permit holders or citizens creates institutional discrimination. These divisions directly benefit employers by creating a super-flexible workforce. The political establishment also gain by deflecting attention from the real 'spongers' in society.

So when the NCCRI organises an anti-racism day at the workplace, the employers organisation IBEC endorses it—precisely because they know it is mere window dressing and will nothing to dismantle the work permit system.

A related approach to the partnership strategy, comes from the Labour Party. They condemn the policies of FF/PDs but also accept there is a 'problem' with immigration. When Justice Minister McDowell announced his referendum, Labour Party leader Pat Rabbitte, said his party would 'consider the proposals in as non-partisan a way as possible' if the referendum was not run at the same time as the EU and local elections. The issue seemed to be more the timing than the racist nature of the proposal.

A Labour Party document *Ending the Chaos: A Rational Approach to Asylum and Immigration* adopts a similar approach—as the title indicates. It wants an 'intelligent'



Anti Racist protest in Belfast

immigration system where a maximum number of immigrants from favoured nations are allowed to enter Ireland each year on a 'green card' system. These immigrants would be assessed on their knowledge of English and there would then be a streamlining of the refugee system 'up to and including deportation where it is appropriate'?

By defining 'irrational' immigration rather than institutional racism as the problem, the Labour Party appears defensive. Moreover, because the party organises primarily around elections, they often retreat further and pander to racist arguments. So during the elections in 1997, for example, the Labour TD Joe Costello called for 'a crackdown' on 'welfare fraudsters traveling between here and Britain' and warned of increased tension between 'the public' and 'the international community'.

The Blair government in Britain shows the weakness of Labour policies. They began by looking for a more rational and 'humane' immigration system and an 'ethical' foreign policy. But since then they have introduced draconian measures to undermine the civil rights of the Muslim community. They keep asylum seekers in detention and demand that immigrants have a proficiency in the English language and British culture. Like McDowell, they scream about 'welfare tourism' and so create an atmosphere in which fascist British National Party can grow.

A second approach to fighting racism comes from a diametrically opposite position. This assumes that white workers benefit from racism. They are supposed to get certain privileges from the oppression of the Third World and so cannot be relied on to combat racism. The only groups that can lead fight against racism are 'autonomous' organisa-

tions of black people or immigrants.

Some white workers may certainly believe they are superior to blacks—but do they really benefit from this? White workers in southern states of America have often held racist views—but they earn lower wages than their black counterparts in New York or Chicago. Al Szymanski, a US sociologist, found that white workers were better off the narrower the gap was between their wages and those of blacks. Writing of the southern states he noted that,

The more intense racial discrimination is, the lower are the white earnings because of the intermediate variable of working class solidarity—in other words, racism economically disadvantages white workers because it weakens trade union organisation by undermining solidarity between black and white workers.<sup>4</sup>

A similar situation applies in Northern Ireland. Many Protestant workers were convinced that Catholics were inferior or shifty and disloyal. Yet the irony is that these sectarian ideas have worked directly against the interest of Protestant workers. By weakening working class organisation and solidarity, wages in Northern Ireland have fallen far below those of both Britain and the Republic.

There is no evidence that white workers in Europe benefit from the oppression of developing countries. They do not get a share in the vast profits that are extracted by the banks from Africa debt crisis. Moreover, the IMF and the World Banks are run by elite bureaucrats who promote the same sort of attacks on workers in both the developing and developed worlds. They use Structural Adjustment Programmes to enforce privatisation and ‘user fees’ to make Africans pay for education and health. But same policies are also applied in the West.

Finally, an ‘autonomist’ approach which argues that black people must organise by themselves to fight racism is ultimately self defeating because it contains no strategy to win over the majority. It also fails to address the question of the class divisions within the immigrant communities. All immigrant populations produce a layer of wealthy people who ‘service’ their own ‘community’ and seek to become leaders over it. In the name of multi-culturalism, they seek to carve out their own space within a racist society—stressing their cultural differences but accepting the dictates of profits and exploitation

The best way to combat racism is summed up in the slogan ‘Black and White, Unite and Fight’.

All workers, immigrant and native, suffer because of the vast amounts of ‘corporate welfare’ and tax cuts which are awarded to a tiny elite. These policies lead to a run down in public services and more stealth taxes. Instead of competing at the bottom, anti-racists should focus anger on the ‘spongers’ at the top. The more we challenge the rich, the less need there is to see who got on the waiting lists ahead of anyone else. There won’t be hospital waiting lists if we made the tax exiles pay up!

By contrast racism breeds with demoralisation and powerlessness. There is huge anger in Irish society about corruption. The unions have not given this anger a focus—even though delegates at the conferences of all main union, SIPTU, ATGWU, IMPACT called for days of action to press for the jailing of corrupt politicians’. By creating an impression that nothing can be done about corruption at the top, the union leaders help turn workers in on each other and so this increases the temptation to lash out at immigrants.

Lord Acton coined the famous phrase ‘Power Corrupts—absolutely power corrupts absolutely’. But the truth is the other way around: Powerlessness corrupts—and absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely. A worker who feels part of a strong movement that challenges the rich will develop broader horizons and a spirit of generosity. One who

feels threatened and weak, will lash out.

This is not to imply that racism will be defeated solely by unity on economic issues. It will take a political fight and socialist organisation to defeat the daily diet of scapegoating. Two arguments particular are vital.

One is a motto of the rising anti-capitalist movement—open the borders. This movement was born amidst the huge protests in Seattle when it united sections of US labour, the anti-sweatshop movements and campaigners against Third World Debt. Instead of relying on the traditional strategy of US—protectionism to save jobs—there was a recognition that the best hope was an internationalist strategy which forged unity across the globe. This understanding may be fleeting—but the spark that was lit in Seattle can still ignite.

We live in a world where capital scours the globe in search of profit. It respects no borders and pits each state into a ‘race to the bottom’. States offer inducements to multinationals to come to their territory. In such a global economy, immigration is a fact of life. Pretending to outlaw it, make it ‘more rational’, limiting the numbers is like promising there won’t be sex before marriage—or that it will happen in small doses and be strictly controlled. Instead of allowing states to control immigration to create a guest worker system, we have every interest in seeing all immigrants get their full legal rights—able to combat the system wherever they live.

Second, racism and empire are inextricably linked. Since the end of the cold war, Islam has been presented as the new enemy of the West, replacing ‘communism’. Bush’s occupation of Iraq is fought under a banner of putting down the ‘fundamentalists’ and bringing US style democracy to the Middle East. This form of colonial superiority translates easily into attacks on Muslims who wear the hijab—the traditional head dress—and views all Muslims as potential terrorists.

We need to challenge this Islamophobia. People have a right to resist empire—and as the Irish experience shows, often do so under all sorts of banners which mix religion and politics. We need a global anti-war movement to force the US empire out of Iraq. Such an outcome, bringing with it a Vietnam style defeat of US imperialism would bring huge benefits to all the world’s poor because behind the World Bank and IMF stand the might of US military power.

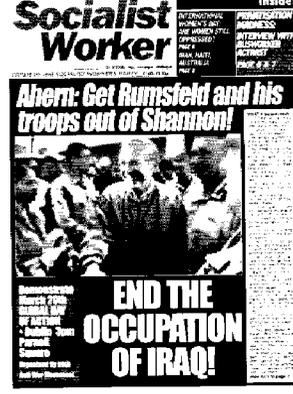
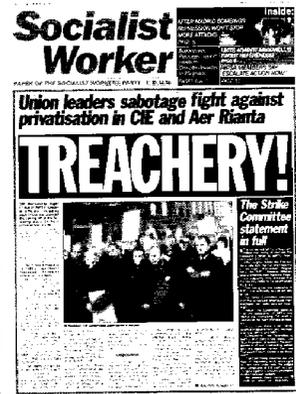
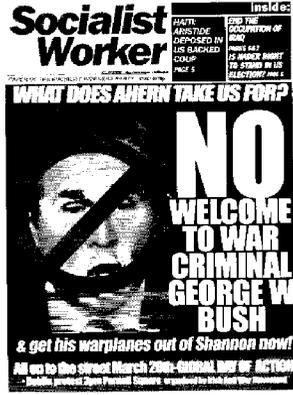
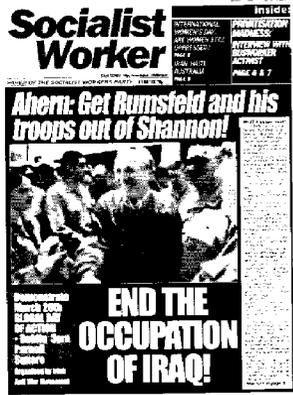
We can live in a society where there is an exciting flowering of different dresses, foods and cultures. We can abolish passports, work permits, border check points. But we can only do this by uprooting the system of capitalism which has created all these relics. A socialist society will not only tackle the extremes of poverty and wealth—it will also vastly increase the scope of human liberty. Not only will it abolish extremes of wealth and poverty, it will give people the right to move around this planet freely. And that is an eminently good reason to get active and to organise.

1: M. Brennock, ‘Coalition Determined on citizenship poll’ *Irish Times* 12th March 2004

2: Labour Party, *Ending the Chaos: A Rational approach to asylum and immigration* (Dublin: Labour Party November 2000) p 3

3: *Irish Times* 24 May 1997

4: A. Szymanski, ‘Racial Discrimination and White Gain’ *American Sociological Review*, 41(1976) pp 409-412



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