

Voice

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to vote
"No"

Nice referendum Mark II

NO TO A BOSSES' EUROPE

NO TO NICE

A SECOND referendum on the Nice Treaty is on the way. Despite being rejected once by the electorate, the establishment in this country is trying again to get the result they want.

By Dominic Haugh

"Nice is about enlargement and protecting Ireland's reputation" they cry. If we vote "No" we are bad Europeans and the rest of Europe will say we are being selfish. Realising that they are not being believed, the establishment have now begun to suggest that Ireland will suffer economically if the Nice Treaty is defeated.

The Irish economy is on a downward spiral because of the neo-liberal policies of the establishment parties and the crisis in the world economy caused by global capitalism.

Rejection of the Nice Treaty will not prevent enlargement (confirmed by none other than head of the European Commission Romano Prodi), but will stop the creation of an even more undemocratic and unaccountable EU bureaucracy than now exists.

Ireland is the only country in the EU that is holding a referendum and widespread opposition to the Nice Treaty in other European countries has been prevented from expressing its voice on the issue.

The government is suggesting that the Declaration on Neutrality will alleviate fears about Irish neutrality.

This is being promoted by a government that cannot be trusted. Remember the U-turn on the promise of a referendum on

Partnership for Peace. The Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) that Ireland is now involved in will operate as an arm of NATO (according to Tony Blair) and will engage in acts of military intervention.

Even former Fine Gael leader, John Bruton had to comment: "Peacemaking means imposing, by the use of force, peaceful conditions laid down by the peacemaker. It is very difficult to distinguish that from war making...." Another leading member of Fine Gael, Gay Mitchell, has actually called for Ireland to join NATO.

But there is another agenda which Bertie Ahern and the establishment doesn't talk about. Passing the Nice Treaty allows the unelected EU Commission to negotiate and conclude a deal with the World Trade

Organisation (WTO) on the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS).

The GATS agreement provides for the privatisation of up to 160 public services including, health, education, water, transport, postal services, electricity, libraries etc.

This is part of the real agenda of the Nice Treaty - an agenda in the interests of and for European big business. It is an attack on the public services that ordinary working class people rely on and have struggled for years to defend.

The record of privatised services here and abroad is job losses, poorer services and higher charges. It is not that long ago that the government conned ordinary people into buying Eircom shares.

The Socialist Party advocates a "No" vote in the referendum, but we go further. The European working class must fight the plans of big business. The trade union movement must launch a European-wide campaign to defend jobs and services.

The Socialist Party also calls for a Workers' Charter including a European minimum wage of €1,300 per month, a 35 hour week, European wide pensions and welfare entitlements and the right to join a trade union and to strike.

But we also recognise that these measures can only be guaranteed and protected by removing the capitalist profit system that operates in the interests of big business and replacing it with a democratic socialist society that operates in the interests of all working class people.



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10 REASONS TO VOTE "NO"

1 The Irish people have already said "No"

The Nice Treaty was rejected by the Irish people in a referendum in June 2001. It is totally undemocratic to run the exact same referendum again because the government didn't get the result they wanted.

In recent times this State had two divorce referenda and three abortion referenda. However, the best part of a decade separated the votes, society had moved on and the referendum wordings were quite different. None of these points apply to Nice II, a referendum which shouldn't even be held in the first place.

2 Nice is not necessary for enlargement

Supporters of the Nice Treaty claim that "enlargement", i.e. the entry of 12 East European states to the EU, cannot go ahead without ratification of Nice. This is simply not true. Only last year, EU Commission President Romano Prodi said: "Legally, ratification of the Nice Treaty is not necessary for enlargement. It's without any problem up to 20 members, and those beyond 20 members have only to put in the accession agreement some notes of change, some clause". In other words, five East European states can join the EU tomorrow under the terms of the Amsterdam Treaty and any number of others can join by signing accession agreements as Ireland did in the 1970s.



Wim Duisberg of the ECB.

3 Nice and Eastern Europe – the hidden agenda

While pointing out that Nice is not necessary for enlargement, the Socialist Party also points out that EU membership/Nice will mean something very different for

the peoples of Eastern Europe than that which is being promised them.

EU membership will undermine state-subsidised industry in Eastern Europe and will "open up" their economies to massive privatisation. The result will be



Campaigning against Nice mark I

mass unemployment and lower wages for workers. For big business it will mean super-profits.

The free trade agreements between the US and Mexico were hailed as a form of salvation for Mexican people but the result was a 30% cut in wages for Mexican workers. EU membership/Nice will prepare a similar fate for the workers of Eastern Europe.

This is a major reason why millions of people in Eastern Europe oppose EU membership and why the propaganda of the EU establishment needs to be taken with a pinch of salt.

4 Nice promotes a big business agenda and undermines workers' rights

The Treaty calls for "the achievement of uniformity in measures of liberalisation", code for privatisation, redundancies and extra charges. It allows the unelected European Commission to negotiate with the World Trade Organisation on the proposed General Agreement on Trade in Services which promotes "liberalisation" in 160 service sectors including water, energy, telecoms and postal services.

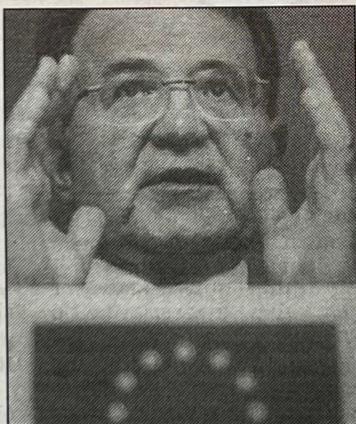
This will mean privatisation on a grand scale and increased charges such as the return of water charges and student fees. Privatisation alone will mean massive job losses (4,000 jobs are currently being axed at Aer Lingus and the ESB to prepare for privatisation) and state assets built up over decades with taxpayers' money being sold off to big business for a song.

5 Nice advances plans for a European army

The Nice Treaty creates an EU Common Foreign and Security Policy Committee to oversee the plans for an EU Rapid Reaction Force (RRF). The RRF is a de facto European army with 60,000 troops and equipment "compatible" with NATO equipment.

The RRF will not exist to defend the interests of ordinary Europeans but rather the interests of European big business. The EU establishment hope that the RRF will allow them "intervene" on the world stage as Bush is planning to do in Iraq.

Don't just take our word for it. Former EU Commission President Jacques Delors said that a European army was necessary for the "resource wars of the 21st century". Current EU Commission President Romano Prodi asked: "Are we all clear that we want to build something that can aspire to be a world power?"



European Commission President Romano Prodi.

6 Nice promotes a European arms industry

By furthering plans for the RRF, Nice advances the development of a European arms industry. A European army will mean huge increases in arms spending. This will mean less cash for Europe's health and education services and more for Europe's 40 big arms companies who made €55 million profits in 1998 alone.

In 2001, the Irish government spent €570 million on 400 Mowag armoured personnel carriers. This money could have been used to build 4,500 local authority houses. Nice gives the green light to more of this madness.

7 The government's "Declaration of Neutrality" is a joke

The government's "declaration of neutrality" has no legal standing whatsoever. In the light of points five and six above it is only a joke. Far more to the point are the words of Javier Solana, Secretary General of the Council of the EU, who stated: "Neutrality is a concept of the past". This has been the case for quite some time now for Ireland's capitalist establishment whose real commitment to "neutrality" is clearly shown by their willingness to allow Shannon Airport to be used to refuel US warplanes that will be used to murder thousands of Iraqi civilians in the not-too-distant future.

8 Nice gives more control to the big states

Nice changes the "balance of power" within the EU in favour of the big states. Under the terms of the Treaty, the big six states will now be able to outvote the other 21. Any three of the big six will be able to block proposals from the rest of the 27. There are to be 30 new issues on which a unanimous vote is no longer needed. This will make it easier to push through policies which undermine the rights and conditions of ordinary people.

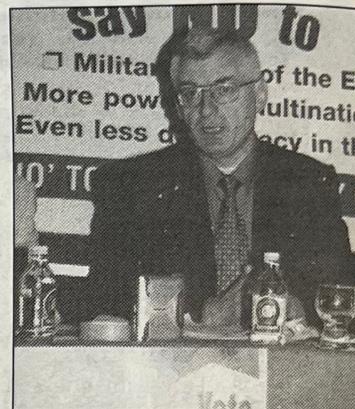
Again, don't just take our word for it. Even the Portuguese Prime Minister was forced to describe this shift in the EU balance of forces as "an institutional coup d'etat."

9 Bloody the government's nose – start the fightback!

The FF/PD government is a staunchly anti-working class government, committed to making ordinary people pay for the crisis in the capitalist economy. A defeat for them in the Nice Referendum



The government is going all out to get the result it wants on Nice.



Joe Higgins, Socialist Party TD, speaking against Nice Treaty

will severely weaken the government and lessen their ability to attack our living standards.

A defeat at the polls for the Nice Referendum will not in itself stop privatisation, job losses, service charges or price hikes. However, it would show mass opposition to these policies and encourage working class people to fight them. A defeat for Nice can mark the beginnings of an organised fightback by working class people against this government and their right-wing policies.

10 Be a good European

Millions of workers, students, unemployed people, and ordinary people generally all over Europe are opposed to the policies of neoliberalism and militarism advanced by the Nice Treaty. These millions of people have been denied the right to vote on the Nice Treaty by their own pro-capitalist governments.

If the Irish people vote "No" to Nice for a second time, we will indeed be "letting down" one Europe – the Europe of the millionaires. However, we will be championing the cause of another Europe – the Europe of these millions. And, after all, the future belongs to the millions, not to the millionaires.

The expansion of the EU into Eastern and Central Europe is being used by the government as a major argument to support the Nice Treaty. EU entry is hailed as a solution to the massive unemployment and poverty in the region – by the ruling classes of Western Europe, that is. But how come then that a growing majority of the population in the applicant countries is opposed to joining the EU? The *Voice* contacted PAUL NEWBERY in Warsaw, Poland to report on what EU entry would really mean:

The reality of EU enlargement

THE MARKET reforms in Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe, far from being a lifeline for these countries, have spelled disaster for millions of ordinary people in the region.

Wide layers of workers and farm workers have been impoverished as a result of the closure of factories and state farms. Unemployment in Poland is now almost 18%.

At the same time the welfare state has been destroyed. Over 80% of all those unemployed have no right to benefits. A few years ago the health service and the pension system were reformed according to the recommendations of the EU. As a result, access to health care for ordinary workers is severely restricted.

EU membership will not guarantee a decent future for the former Eastern Bloc countries. The European Union is built on the same policies and economic premises as the neo-liberal policies which have brought disaster on Poland.

But will Poland gain extra

funds from joining the European Union? A recent report of the European Union revealed that in 2004 the Czech Republic will pay to the EU budget 185 million euro more than it will receive.

Between 2004 and 2006, the new member states of the former Eastern Bloc will receive only a fraction of the agricultural subsidies that farmers from other EU countries will get. At the same time East European farmers are expected to compete on an equal basis with the rest of the EU! This just goes to show that the idea of a unified market and free competition is nothing but a myth.

The real aim of EU enlargement is to completely open up the markets of the former Eastern Bloc countries to the bosses. It will give them the power to dictate economic policy and eliminate competition. They intend to close down or reduce production in many industries in Poland such as sugar production, steel and mining.

In other industries the EU will use the pretext of European Union norms and standards to



severely restrict access of Polish producers to EU markets.

Opposition to European Union in Poland stands at about 50%. In the last few months a propaganda

campaign has started in the media in support of European Union membership in order to prepare the ground for a successful referendum on the issue in

Poland next year. Enormous amounts of EU money have been spent on this. So far only pro-European arguments have been aired.

A European "superstate"?

An unstable institution

The Nice Treaty is part of an offensive of offensive of de-regulation, privatisation, attacks on wages, living standards and public services. The Nice Treaty is about a process towards an EU superstate. The powerful section of the ruling class that are backing it want one superstate with one currency, one army, one government. The ruling classes of Europe have been compelled again and again to compete with the economic, political and military strength of Japan and particularly the US.

By Robert Connolly

Take for example the situation at the moment in relation to Iraq. The EU elites, particularly the German and French ruling classes, are not interested in the "moral" issues of whether there should be a military invasion of Iraq, they are uneasy about the "unilateral" approach of US imperialism.

They want an EU army to boost their prestige, their profits, their power and influence on the world stage. The process of militarisation signifies the capitalists' desire for a European military superpower that can intervene globally and in its "spheres of influence" including Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

However, the road to this EU superstate is strewn with signifi-

cant obstacles.

The "big three" of Germany, France and Italy account for 70% of euro-zone GDP and Germany and France dominate the EU politically.

Because of this, the British ruling class is constantly striving to counterbalance its role in the EU with a strong political and military relationship with the US. Behind the talk of "political integration", there is the reality of conflicting interests between different states and groups of states within the EU.

Political contradictions

Economic co-operation and integration is one thing but political integration is another. Europe is a collection of competing nation states with separate territorial and political structures. In a serious economic, political and social crisis the ruling classes of Europe would put their own "national" self interests above those of their European competitors.

There is a growing mood of discontent among large numbers of working class people across Europe against the EU. In the future, if such moods increased and boiled over onto the streets in a way that threatened to topple governments, Bertie Ahern, Silvio Berlusconi and the rest of

them would not think twice about the "united states of Europe", they would save their own skins.

Economic integration

Overall economic growth in Europe in the last 15-20 years has been at best sluggish. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the annual growth rate in Europe averaged 4.8% in the 1960s, 3% in the 1970s, 2.4% in the 1980s and 1.8% in the 1990s. Economic integration is an attempt to stabilise currencies and break down barriers to economic growth.

The 1999 launch of the Euro came at a favourable time with the tail-end of the US boom and stable currency markets. The global economic situation has deteriorated since then.

It is now clear that the "convergence criteria" deadline was reached because many countries engaged in some creative accounting. They lied and bluffed to create a false "euro-phoria" which has now evaporated. Under these convergence criteria, EU governments cannot use up more than 3% of their GDP on public spending. Portugal has already broken the rules in 2001 by reaching 4.1% and now Germany, France and Italy are at risk of breaking the rules they themselves insisted on enforcing.

The European Central Bank

(ECB) sets the same interest rate for all the countries – a "one size fits all" policy. The inability of governments to control their monetary policy can cause serious problems in an economic crisis. The pressures of "national interests" would reassert themselves with a vengeance. Succession by a number of smaller countries does not mean that the Euro would collapse completely. However if a number of the smaller member states pulled out, it would damage the Euro on the global stage and cause severe upheavals in other EU countries.

Cut backs

Terminology like "convergence criteria" might seem abstract but the results of this situation are very real. The Irish government, along with all others, has come under severe pressure to drastically cut public spending.

Irish capitalism is caught in a pincer between a slowing economy caused by the US slump on one side and the EU bureaucrats on the other. The result is cuts in healthcare, education and various other areas. This situation is stretching working class people's patience to the limit, our healthcare service is a shambles. If you're on the waiting lists - it's far from abstract.

The "benefits" of being in the EU

Ireland is an export orientated low-wage economy on the periphery of Europe, we account for 1% of euro-zone GDP. Consumer strikes this year in Greece and the Netherlands were organised to protest against the "artificial inflation" of the Euro – or just plain profiteering as it should be called.

The Nice Treaty and the Euro rip-off is forcing many working class people in Ireland also, to think more about some of the so called "benefits" of being in the EU.

Undoubtedly, the structural funds from the EU did help to give some momentum to the Celtic Tiger boom in the early 90s, but it was only one of several factors and it was not a main cause of the boom. Now the boom is over but the rapacious appetites of the multi-nationals have not gone away. They want to swoop in and buy up public services in Ireland.

The Nice Treaty is full of "benefits" for the vultures of privatisation. The agenda of Nice and of the EU generally is a capitalist agenda, it's not in the interests of working class people in Ireland, in other EU countries or in Eastern Europe and that is why it must be opposed.

Workers' struggle can defeat the neo-liberal agenda

For a socialist Europe

"IRELAND IS holding up the show" is one of the constant refrains of the political establishment in their effort to railroad a "Yes" vote in Nice II, the implication being that the rest of the EU have endorsed it.

However, a closer examination of events in Europe this year will show that while only in Ireland are we given the opportunity to reject the bosses' agenda for Europe at the ballot box, workers elsewhere have been rejecting the same agenda on the streets.

IN ITALY a general strike and a series of regional strikes involving 13 million workers have already taken place to oppose the repeal of a law that prevents people being sacked at a whim by their employers. Berlusconi and the employers have thus far dug their heels in and another general strike is on the cards for October.

In Spain, a general strike in July coincided with an EU summit in Seville. ten million workers closed down the country to demonstrate their opposition to attacks on welfare rights. A quarter of a million workers and youth took to the streets of Seville two days later to show their opposition to measures that were being discussed by European heads of state to close the borders even more tightly to refugees and asylum seekers.

General strikes have taken place in Greece over pension rights and Portugal over low pay. The UK and Germany have had sectoral strikes each involving more than a

million workers, again over the issue of low pay.

In their drive to maintain profits and low taxes, the political representatives of big business throughout the EU want to harmonize their attacks on workers, unemployed, pensioners, asylum seekers and students under the guise of "convergence criteria" and European Central Bank regulations. The reality is they are trying to bring workers' rights and services across the EU down to the lowest possible "standard".

A workers' charter

That is why the Socialist Party is counterposing this agenda with examples of workers' rights that exist in various European countries - the €1,300 minimum wage in Luxemburg, 15 months maternity leave (to be split between both parents) in Sweden, job protection in Italy, etc. We argue that if they can exist in one European country today, they should become immediately



Ten million workers went on strike in Spain against attacks on unemployment benefits on 20 June.

diately the standard across the EU.

The fact that Nice stands for exactly the opposite exposes the real agenda of big business EU - at the start of the 21st century we are back to defending the rights that our parents and grandparents have won through 150 years of struggle before us.

A workers' charter is only an indication of what is taken away from us for the benefit and greed of big business. Unfortunately, all over Europe the so-called Labour parties are instrumental in executing the neo-liberal policies. New working class parties need to be built across Europe, which are committed to fighting the EU's neo-liberal agenda and defending the interests of ordinary people.

Europe is the wealthiest continent on earth. It has a well developed industry, a long tradition of public services and highly developed technology at its disposal. Yet, at this stage these resources are under control of big business and their associates, whose aim is to make a maximum profit out of any operation they run, without any accountability for what they do with the money.

Let's open the books, abolish the

"business secrets" - where have all the massive profits gone, what are the plans for the future: investment, job re-location, the environmental effects of production etc? It would prove that many companies that are now threatened with cut backs and closure are perfectly viable. The government should take them over and confiscate the assets of companies that black-mail workers and jeopardise the future of communities, be it through taking away their livelihood or through environmental pollution.

A socialist programme

The billions of euros and the underused resources that are now wasted could be used to provide a living minimum wage, a shorter working week without loss of pay, work for all and employment protection rights. It could be invested in services such as in-work and community childcare, local clinics, community centres, etc. It would provide the basis for a programme of public housing and a massive investment to provide free health care and education.

But in order to redirect these

massive profits to the good of the communities, we can't rely on the people who control them at present. Our workers' charter alone shows that capitalism and its drive for profit will only pay up under the massive pressure of workers' struggle and will try to regain their profit the minute the struggle is over.

Major companies should be taken into public ownership and democratically run and controlled by the people who work there and the communities - in other words, redistribute the wealth and use the present resources in the interests of the majority and according to a democratic plan.

The fight to defeat Nice should be linked to a struggle for a workers' charter. That struggle has to be waged on an all-European basis.

A European-wide 24 hour general strike would give big business a firm warning that they won't get away with their neo-liberal agenda. More importantly, it would also put on the cards an offensive and a political struggle by workers to challenge the rule of big business and to work towards a united socialist states of Europe.



13 million Italian workers took on Berlusconi earlier this year. To be continued...

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