Workers Solidarity Movement
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Stand up for womens' rights…
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On the 18th of June, we are going to be asked to vote on a 234 page document that most of us won't have seen, and they call this democracy. If you've been reading the papers about the Maastricht Treaty you'll know it deals with Economic Monetary Union and a common defence policy. Maastricht is about closer European integration. And if you've been reading the papers, that's about all you will know about the referendum. Those three phrases keep getting thrown up, with no explanation, no elaboration and then an occasional mention of £6 billion is chucked in to clinch the argument. The impression left in many minds is that Maastricht is very important, very confusing and very boring.

Maastricht is the next step towards closer European integration. Closer European integration is a code for protectionism. If the rules of the 'free market' were applied the EC would be outcompeted by the US and Japan. European capitalist economies are heavily dependant on agriculture and traditional manufacturing industries. Through CAP (the Common Agricultural Policy) subsidies and guaranteed price levels Europe's farmers are protected

against US and Third World competition. Similarly EC subsidies prop up the EC coal, shipbuilding and steel industries.

The main force driving the EC to Maastricht is the decline of EC competitiveness on the world economy and the need therefore for tougher measures to insulate the EC from more dynamic capitalist economies. The reduction in internal border controls, the standardisation of VAT rates, and so on isn't occuring in the interests of 'European harmony', but in the hope that EC countries will increase trade among themselves. They also hope that a unified Euro-economy would be better able to withstand the worst effects of competition from Japan and North America.

Instinctively, many people support the idea of integration, they see it as a move towards a world community, a 'brotherhood of man'. However, the European Community is in many ways a bit of a misnomer, as the EC creates as many divisions as it dissolves. Other economies, particularly those of the Japanese and the Third World are seen as a threat.

"Fortress Europe" seeks to unite the European bosses and workers against the peoples of the rest of the world. Integration means a tightening of immigration controls. Euro-racism is not seen only in the far right parties but also in the rhetoric of many European governments, a la Edith Cresson (the ex-French prime minister who suggested that planes should be chartered to fly immigrants home). Add to this division the internal conflicts within the EC as each country competes against each other for European contracts and foreign investors. Germany, the richest country is viewed with suspicion by the others. Cheaper labour in Greece, Spain and Southern Italy is blamed for loss of jobs in Britain and the northern countries.

Many of the EC's supporters in Ireland point to the liberalisation of social attitudes that has occured through membership. Part of the Maastricht treaty prepares the way for European Monetary Union (EMU). Before this can occur states have to bring their spending, debt and inflation to common levels by cutting public spend-

ing. The sugar coating to this bitter pill is the EC Social Charter also contained in the treaty. What is most notable about the Social Charter is that unlike the economic and defence agreements it is mostly optional.

Industry (but not the workers) is protected by clauses that state the Social Charter directives must avoid imposing administrative, financial and legal burdens on small and medium-sized enterprises in such a way as would hold back their creation and development. So this only applies if it costs little. As it won't be the workers who decide if it's affordable, the Social Charter amounts to little more than an aspiration, which can be easily be ignored.

Those arguing for a YES vote have being trying to do it in such a way as to avoid discussing the mechanisms behind the EC. The line is "if you're not in you can't win". On the most basic level this is a misrepresentation of the case. If any country votes against the treaty, it falls for every country. On another level this argument implies a level of unity or consensus that simply does not exist.

Most countries are looking for exceptions to different bits, for example France and Luxembourg are unhappy about the provision giving all EC citizens the right to vote or stand as candidates in local and European Community elections across the community. England is split on the EMU and has opted out of the Social Charter. More importantly, EMU is dependant on German support, on a German government report due in 1996 on the fitness of countries to enter union. The EC is more like a cattle mart than one big happy family.

On the £6 billion it should be noted that it is depended on two things. Firstly, that on applying, we are actually OKed to receive the money (which is quite likely). Secondly, that the money is there in the first place to give to us. The £6 billion depends on the EC getting agreement on proposals, which involves increasing the overall EC budget by a third, a proposal already rejected by Britain. Finally, and most importantly, its extremely unlikely that this carrot will ever be given to workers. It will go on road building, grants for

rich businesspeople and probably to some of their golf clubs — just as lottery money has.

So what we are being asked is how best to run European capitalism. This is a strange position for socialists to be in. We are opposed to capitalism because it is unfair, authoritarian, unproductive and prone to continual crisis. It is a very uncaring and inefficient way to run society. Yet within this framework we are being asked which way the bosses should go.

If this was all we were being asked, our response would be to ignore the question as irrelevant to us. If somebody is opposed to capital punishment, it is meaningless to ask them should executions be carried out by gun or guillotine. We support solidarity between the international working class. We don't want to tell the bosses how to run capitalism, we want to shut it down.

However the Maastricht treaty in particular covers two other things besides monetary union. It is these that determine how we will vote. These are the questions of European defence and the Protocol.

Armies don't exist to defend populations but rather to defend governments, to defend capital and to defend markets. Wars have an economic base to them, the Gulf War being the most recent example. That Kuwait was involved was a handy coincidence as it helped sell the war as liberation to the populations at home. Much the same situation is occuring in Yugoslavia, with rival armies invading neighbouring regions.

Yet the UN isn't likely to invade because Yugoslavia doesn't contain oil or any necessary commodity. We oppose any country forming a military alliance because we know from what we've seen before that military power is used to protect markets, not a very good reason for dying. Because we oppose any military alliances of capitalist governments we will be voting NO to Maastricht.

The Protocol is an extra addition to the Maastricht Treaty. It simply forbids Irish citizens to appeal to Europe on issues surrounding the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution. When the clinics and

the student unions were taken to court for providing abortion information they both appealed to Europe in order to try to reverse the decision that was made in Ireland. If this protocol is passed the door to Europe will be closed to us on anything to do with the Eighth Amendment.

Remember it is the Eighth Amendment that bans information on abortion. It is the Eighth Amendment that was used to grant an injunction preventing a 14 year old from travelling to Britain. It is because of the Eighth Amendment that Dublin Corporation banned Womens Health books from the libraries. It is because of the Eighth Amendment that Cosmopolitan, Company and other womens' magazines censor the ads. for abortion clinics in their Irish editions. The Maastricht Protocol ensures that none of these issues can be dealt with by Europe.

In a practical sense, this is little loss, as the EC in the past tended not to solve our problems for us. An appeal to Europe rarely results in a positive change for the better on the ground here. The EC does not want to rock the economic boat by enforcing extremely contentious decisions on a conservative country. It is very clear that if we are to win on the abortion issue, we must win it in Ireland. However, that said, in moral terms, the Maastricht Protocol is an addition to all the defeats we have suffered in the last 10 years. It may not be a very important addition, it's not a very major defeat, but every time we loose it makes it more difficult for people to keep on fighting to change Irish society. For this reason we will be voting NO to Maastricht.

Of course, in many ways the most interesting things about the Protocol is its existence at all. When the treaty was first negotiated, no mention of this protocol was made in the Irish media, no discussion, no nothing. If the case of the 14 year old had not arisen it is questionable whether we would be aware of it at all. Yet this was negotiated 'in our interests' by a government which was responding to pressure from someone. And they call this democracy!