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"The liberal class functions in a traditional capitalist democracy as a safety valve. It lets off enough steam to keep the system intact. It makes piecemeal and incremental reform possible . . . The liberal class is permitted to decry the worst excesses of power and champion basic human rights while at the same time endowing systems of power with a morality and virtue it does not possess."
Chris Hedges (American minister, activist, and writer).

Transport war declared

As we go to press, the Bus Éireann dispute is becoming more serious by the day. The word on the ground is that the Expressway service will be closed down within a fortnight, with the intention of forcing the remaining workers to accept savage cuts to pay and conditions. **Jimmy Doran** *reports on page 2*

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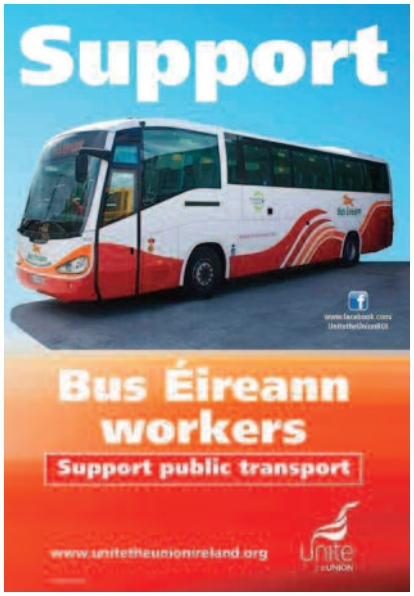
▲ Busworkers rally



CONTINUED FROM COVER

Transport war declared

Bus Éireann workers have mounted pickets on all depots, as the management left them with no other option when they attempted to force cuts to pay and conditions without agreement.

This is now a transport war, as the management have fired a salvo into the workers' ranks. The gloves are off; workers will not give up their hard-won terms and conditions without an equivalent fight to retain them.

There is a long tradition of struggle by transport workers for their rights, going right back to the 1913 lockout and beyond. This dispute is now a lockout as the management try to impose change without agreement, and the main shareholder, the minister for transport, Shane Ross, refuses to engage.

It is not acceptable that a state-owned company would be run as a cheap, no-frills, poorly paid business—quite the opposite, in fact: they should be setting the standard for good business and employment practice.

When Ray Hernan, former director of finance at the notorious Ryanair, was parachuted into the job of CEO last January the plan for Bus Éireann became very clear. It was a race to the bottom. Rural transport services would be slashed. The social contract between citizen and state was to be ripped up along with the terms and conditions of the employees.

If this were achieved, Bus Éireann would be ripe for a quick sale to the highest bidder, or, more likely, to the flavour of the month in the Golden Circle, who could sell it on in a few years to international capital at a massive profit.

The workers and their unions have said No and are now on all-out indefinite strike. Ray Hernan is about to realise that he is not in Ryanair now: he is in a company where all workers are organised in trade unions, and that when they say No it means No. There will be no return to work on his terms.

Bus Éireann has been underfunded for decades by successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael-Labour governments: in fact the state subvention it receives today is a fifth less than it was eight years ago.

The recession was not wasted either: it was used in all three CIE companies as an excuse to slash and burn workers' pay and conditions over the last decade. This is a carefully planned financial crisis; it did not happen overnight.

Trade unions and their members have had a number of significant victories over the last year, not least in transport services, with Luas and Dublin Bus securing substantial pay increases, along with the Gardaí, fire brigades, and manufacturing. Both the public sector and private sector are gaining confidence and regaining some of the ground lost during austerity.

It is not part of the establishment's plan to have a strong and confident trade union movement; but the citizens have seen through the lie that was austerity. Ordinary people reject the narrative bandied about by politicians, business, economists and the establishment media of the necessity for cuts, privatisation, and the general push towards a low-pay economy.

Bus Éireann workers have not had a pay increase for nine years and are now long overdue a pay increase—not a reduction. These workers are entitled to decency in their terms of employment. It is not up to bus workers to subsidise poorly funded public transport through pay cuts.

This is an attack on the entire working class. If they get away with their plans in Bus Éireann it will be a turning-point in workers' rights and for everyone.

Once again the reports from the picket lines of the support from ordinary people is fantastic, despite the inconvenience the dispute is causing. People know that this battle is for workers' rights in every industry and to save the rural transport system from the destruction that privatisation would cause.

It is complete nonsense that the main shareholder, the minister for transport, is refusing to come to the negotiating table. He must engage in intensive negotiations to lead to an agreeable conclusion to this dispute. A sectoral employment order has to be agreed for transport workers to stop the race to the bottom. Existing levels of service to rural Ireland have to be maintained, as a minimum. A complete review of funding needs to be carried out.

The people of rural Ireland are not second-class citizens and are entitled to a properly funded first-class rural transport system. Rural Ireland is under attack from all angles with the closure of post offices, bank branches, and Garda stations. Now more than ever they need a proper transport system to allow them to fulfil their daily needs.

Solidarity with the workers and their unions! ★

Political statement

National Executive Committee
Communist Party of Ireland
11 March 2017

The National Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Ireland, meeting over the weekend of 11 March, evaluated the political challenges facing the people at both the national and the international level at the present time.

The recent elections to the Belfast Assembly highlighted a number of features. Unionism lost ground, and we witnessed the near-collapse of the old Ulster Unionist Party, with the DUP losing seats but remaining the largest party and Sinn Féin significantly improving its position. Clearly "liberal" unionism is fragmenting, and a significant number have shifted to the Alliance Party. The DUP is no longer able to use the "petition of concern" that it has used time and again to block progressive legislative change, as in the case of marriage equality.

There was little progress in developing a progressive bloc of forces at this time. The election also saw Sinn Féin's further retreat from its previous anti-EU policy. It is now further dressing up its position, even claiming that the EU could be the vehicle for bringing about national unity, arguing that this imperialist bloc is somehow more progressive than British imperialism.

The Irish government has also been attempting to hide its own impotence, using references to national unity and the defence of the Belfast Agreement to exaggerate its possible role and to express its concerns regarding the wider economic and political consequences flowing from Brexit. A misconception is being peddled by the Irish government that being part of the 27-member EU negotiating with the the British government will grant Ireland any meaningful influence over the working out of the final arrangement. In fact the interests of the Irish people, north and south, are peripheral to the negotiations between Britain and the EU.

Ireland's working people, north and south, cannot afford to wait passively for the neo-liberals of the EU to impose their deal but must instead develop their own demands and fight for them in this situation, and do so in their own class interests.

It is crucial that alternative voices and demands are heard and presented. There is a need for working people to develop an alternative way forward, a strategy that puts working people's interests first, a strategy that has the potential to unite people rather than deepen existing divisions or open up new ones.

Internationally, the situation continues to grow more unstable as the crisis of the system continues to deepen. Imperialism continues its violence and aggression against the people, destroying and blighting the lives of tens of millions of working people, destabilising whole regions in its global strategy of domination.

Donald Trump continues the same polices at the global level as his predecessors, while at home state pressure intensifies upon vulnerable migrant workers. Trump is merely more open and brutal in the expression of his policies. It is still not clear at this point to what extent there is a fissure or fracture within the ruling forces in the United States.

Some of these same tensions also lie at the heart of the Brexit vote in Britain. The European Union itself is showing increasing signs of crisis and confusion concerning the possible outcome of the British state leaving the EU. A political crisis is developing out of the growing economic and financial instability beginning to grip the core EU states.

The growth in the far right—the reserve army of imperialism—may well continue to develop as the dominant elements of the left throughout the EU continue to ignore the national democratic and sovereign demands sought by large sections of the European working class at the national level.

The party also evaluated the level of working-class militancy as expressed in the struggle of retail workers in Tesco and the public transport workers. It is clear that there is widespread support among working people for these groups of workers in their just struggle. This needs to be built upon and developed into a wider fight back. This public support was an essential factor in pushing the companies involved back to the negotiating table.

Employers and the state are continuing their offensive to break trade unions and trade unionism. This needs to be resisted not only by the trade unions involved but by the whole of the labour movement. It is also clear that the deregulation of transport is designed to break the transport workers and their trade union, to facilitate the race to the bottom in the terms and conditions of all transport workers.

The party publicly congratulates the mobilisation of women to mark and celebrate International Women's Day and congratulates the role played by communist activists in the very successful week-long events in Belfast. The CPI also welcomes the great turn-out of thousands of mainly young women in Dublin and other towns and cities to demand the repeal of the 8th Amendment. There is now a clear coalition of democratic opinion that wishes to see the 8th Amendment removed from the constitution, and not some sort of amendment to the amendment.

The continuing exposure of the role played by both state and religious institutions in the wholesale abuse of women and children has shown, once again, the profundity of the words of James Connolly, that the partition of Ireland would lead to a carnival of reaction. It once again exposes the war of the church and state against the poor, at the bidding of the ruling class, to intimidate and discipline the working class.

The party endorses the call for the maximum mobilisation of workers on Saturday 8 April to push forward their demand regarding water charges and the demand for a constitutional amendment to ensure the people's ownership of their water resources. We need to keep up the pressure to ensure that there is no retreat in this struggle.

The party calls upon its members and supporters to actively promote and encourage working people to attend the forthcoming series of national public meetings on the theme "Brexit: A view from the left," with comrades from the Communist Party of Britain taking part in this crucial and central debate.★

A state that has lost its way

What on earth is going on in the Republic of Ireland—or, more to the point, what form of governance is operating in that 26-county state?

Tommy McKearney reports

REFLECT FOR a moment on some of the issues undermining the well-being of society. A banking collapse that first resulted in a massive debilitating debt being loaded onto the public, that was then followed with a NAMA fire-sale of Irish assets, allowing foreign vulture funds to make enormous profits. Then there is a serious homelessness crisis, demanding a major public house-building programme that the Government refuses to embark on, in spite of historically low borrowing rates.

Follow that with a health service in disarray, and add in the confusion surrounding how best to address Brexit. And of course we have the seemingly endless series of controversies involving the Gardaí.

The Dáil is apparently unable to deal directly or decisively with these issues, any one of which would create questions about the Government's competence but taken together undermine its very authority. In place of a confident and capable Government we find it reacting ineptly to the politics of the latest scandal, resulting in yet another commission of inquiry.

A recent article in the *Irish Times* reported that twelve such tribunals and commissions of investigation are under way at present, and the number is due to grow. Moreover, we have a lame-duck Taoiseach whose departure date appears to be receding with every passing day.

The situation is so serious that it reminds one of the tongue-in-cheek comment made by Brendan Behan when he suggested apologising to the British and asking them to come back and govern us from Dublin.

Let us be clear, though: this is not running with the old imperialist slander that the Irish are incapable of self-government. The problem rests with the present Government, the main opposition party, and even the nature of the governing institutions. Together they have surrendered economic sovereignty, and demonstrate an alarming lack of ability to confront powerful interest groups—and we're not referring to the trade union movement, with which they are clearly all too happy to do battle.

In a nutshell, there is an absence of direction of governance in the Republic, epitomised by the series of scandals that have taken place within the Garda Síochána. Everybody is aware of the apparently endless revelations of incompetence, extending in some cases to corruption, within the police force of the Republic. Matters that would give rise to enormous concern in any state appear to be entirely beyond the remit of the government to rectify. Under circumstances that demand a root-and-branch change of Garda management, the Fine Gael-led government is reluctant to tackle the force's hierarchy and initiate reform.

Nor is Fianna Fáil, the largest opposition party, anxious to bring the issue to a head. Mícheál Martin is

asking the commissioner to consider her position; but will he withdraw support from the coalition if O'Sullivan and her senior officers are not replaced with a competent authority?

The policing fiasco is symptomatic of a wider and more general malaise within the Irish political system. Having surrendered economic sovereignty to the EU and global finance houses, the Republic's political ruling class has gradually lost its ability to chart its own path, and this failing eddies across much of its actions. While adept at holding on to office, they have nevertheless lost their way and are bereft of any clear idea about how to steer the state independently—as distinct from responding to pressure from agencies over which working people have little or no influence. In essence, this amounts to a loss of republican sovereignty.

> '... the Irish ruling class is not so much in crisis as unable to deal effectively with a crisis.'

This is evident over a range of issues but is particularly obvious in relation to the state's implementation of the European Union's neo-liberal agenda. Among many self-inflicted injuries arising from membership of the EU there is the surrender of natural resources, participation in the euro zone, and capitulation in 2010 to the EU Central Bank. Now we are learning of threats from the EU commissioner for the environment, Karmenu Vella (conveyed conveniently in a letter to a Fine Gael member of the EU Parliament, Brian Hayes) that the EU is still demanding that we pay additional water charges, in spite of the fact that a majority of TDs claim they are opposed to doing so.

The answer to the lack of meaningful sovereignty is not simply changing the faces in the Dáil. The immediate cause of the difficulty lies in blind adherence to market-driven neo-liberalism. Dublin governments are forced to rule against state intervention in finance, housing, health, and transport, insisting that the market must decide. Nor is this list finite, as practically all other areas are under review for privatisation.

This arrangement benefits the ruling class, who adhere to the policies of deregulation demanded by free-market capitalism, and do so at the expense of working people.

The problem is compounded by the nature of the Republic's governing institutions. Without lapsing into juvenile ultra-leftism, our representative bourgeois democracy, regulated through pro-establishment media, suffers inadequacies. While the ability to periodically select or reject a government is a precious right, its value is diluted by the power and influence of media that all too often set the parameters of discussion and debate, the most recent example being the coverage of Bus Éireann workers on strike. Instead of focusing on the need for a comprehensive public transport service, reportage concentrated on the inconvenience to travellers while failing to mention the long-term consequences of a purely profit-driven network. The result has been to provide a smokescreen for the unmentionable Shane Ross, allowing him to escape responsibility for degrading a vital service.

Clearly there is a need to improve on the quality of our democracy in order to ensure that the working class is not further disadvantaged. We have seen over the recent past how a popular mass movement such as the anti-water tax campaign has influenced politics in the Republic. It is necessary to draw lessons from this example and create structures that would facilitate similar intervention in other areas.

Organised labour has the ICTU, through which trade unions find a platform for meeting and discussing issues of mutual importance. Wider society might well consider establishing something similar that would mobilise popular support on matters of real importance to working people.

Incapable of dealing decisively with a range of important issues, the Irish ruling class is not so much in crisis as unable to deal effectively with a crisis. They may remain in place for a time, but in the event of another economic downturn or crash they will fail again.

It is important therefore that the working class have a coherent structure around which to rally. With the centenary of the first Dáil approaching, it must surely be worth considering convening a People's Assembly to do just that. ★

Our sovereignty challenged

Statement by the Communist Party of Ireland 26 March 2017

The opinion expressed by the European Union commissioner for the environment, Karmenu Vella, that the proposal by Fianna Fáil to impose fines on those wasting water would be insufficient to comply with EU law, and that it would not be in line with the EU Water Framework Directive, is a direct challenge to the sovereignty and democracy of this state.

That is all it is: an opinion, with no legal standing, which no doubt Fine Gael will try to hide behind.

The Irish people have already given their opinion in relation to water charges and the ownership of water. Hundreds of thousands around the country have marched, blocked the installing of water meters, refused to pay, and gave their vote to a majority of members of the current Dáil who have pledged to oppose water charges and to put public ownership of water in the Constitution of Ireland.

The Communist Party of Ireland for a very long time was a lone voice, consistently drawing attention to the dangers posed to the democracy and sovereignty of this state by the European Union. The Irish establishment has only exercised sovereignty when it was in the interests of the Irish elite, or in the interests of transnational corporations, such as Google, or of the European Union. They willingly took responsibility for the odious bank debt, they took control of all the liabilities of reckless banking and property speculators, as it suited their class interest and rule here, in conjunction with the European Union.

NAMA has been used once again to enrich the Golden Circle, while the number of those who need housing grows and grows.

The working people of Ireland require an honest and principled position of defence of Irish sovereignty and democracy against the EU.

We need to make the Right2Water protest on 8 April as big as possible. Working people must make their voice heard in the corridors of power, in both Dáil Éireann and Brussels. The will of the people must be sovereign, and our demands, as expressed both in the streets and in the ballot box, must be respected and implemented.

If we leave the future of water in the committee rooms and corridors of Dáil Éireann, the Irish establishment, as they have always done, will buckle to the demands and priorities of the European Union.★

EUROPEAN UNION

Successful Brexit speaking tour

***Socialist Voice* reporter**

THE WEEK before the British prime minister, Theresa May, triggered article 50 for Britain to leave the European Union, the CPI hosted a delegation from the Communist Party of Britain for a national speaking tour around Ireland.

Meetings took place in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Monaghan, Newry, and Belfast. The meeting in Monaghan was sponsored by the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum, while the Newry meeting was hosted by the Newry Branch of Unite in the Community.

The tour was a great success, providing an opportunity for Irish audiences to hear at first hand about the struggle the CPB has been engaged in, both leading up to the referendum last year and in the strategy and demands of the party now that article 50 has been triggered.

Rob Griffiths, general secretary, and Nick Wright, member of the Executive Committee, spoke on behalf of the CPB at the various meetings. Both dealt with the historical position of the left in Britain. The left, including the communist movement and most social democrats, opposed the setting up of the Common Market. Over the decades almost all social democrats and a significant number of European communist parties took up a position of acceptance of the EU, sowing confusion among the working class and playing no small part in allowing the right to appear to be the champions of democracy and sovereignty and of the interests of workers, who were so badly hit by the austerity policies and treaty obligation of the EU.

Before the referendum, media coverage of the anti-EU position was given over entirely to right-wing Tory and Blairite personalities. The left-wing case for leaving had to be made, and so the CPB helped to form the Left Leave or Lexit campaign, and had some success in getting support and making its case. As well as the Communist Party the Left Leave campaign included the Indian Workers' Association of Great Britain, the Bangladeshi Workers' Council of Britain, Counterfire, the Socialist Workers' Party and Labour Leave as well as a number of trade unions: the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), the railway workers' union (ASLEF), and the Bakers', Food and Allied Workers' Union.

Call to action The CPI calls on all citizens to take part in the final push to defeat water charges by joining in the Right2Water national demonstration in Dublin on the 8 April.

This was despite the fact that the union leadership and a majority of unions, together with the Parliamentary Labour Party, gave unquestioning support to Remain. Even Jeremy Corbyn was pressured into going against his lifetime opposition to EU membership.

In the referendum, huge swathes of Labour Party voters voted to leave. Opinion polls also suggest that a majority of Plaid Cymru supporters and as much as a third of SNP voters are seriously critical of the EU.

Neo-liberalism is entrenched in the EU structures and laws, severely limiting workers' rights. The Lisbon Treaty provides for deep intervention in the labour market, in effect labour deregulation, giving precedence to the market over workers' rights and curtailing the capacity of working people to change or influence economic and social policies at the national level.

Rob dealt with the role of the EU Central Bank and its boast that it is independent, which in fact means that it is subject to no outside control whatever, is above democratic control or any accountability to the people. The EU and ECB have imposed austerity on member-states, particularly on the weakest ones. After the financial crisis of 2008, debtor-countries were forced to repay the debts of their banks, resulting in huge unemployment and misery.

The mainstream of the ruling class, including the City of London, was vigorously in favour of Remain. It is extremely important that the working class in Britain should now organise and mobilise to present and fight for its own demands over the course of the Brexit negotiations. Working people cannot sit back and allow the British ruling class to decide their fate.

The meetings were also addressed by speakers from the CPI and other progressive organisations and individuals. These speakers made the case for an Irish withdrawal from the European Union and the need to campaign against any EU-imposed border in our country.

The general secretary of the CPI, Eugene McCartan, stated at the Dublin meeting: "The Irish government has been knocking on doors to give the impression that they have a seat at the table when it comes to the forthcoming negotiations between Britain and the European Union, after Britain triggers article 50 in the next week or so. Given our historical experience with the imposition of the unjust and odious bank debt on our people, and the programme of austerity as imposed by the European Union, working-class voices now need to be heard loud and clear."

Speakers also described how marginal the people of the Six Counties are in the whole Brexit process now under way, making it clear that Britain will decide what is in its own strategic interests, with little regard for the views of the people.

The question of the euro was raised, and why the option of a break from it was a necessary and central demand at this time. Speakers emphasised that the euro is a mechanism of control by the dominant economic powers, in particular Germany, and especially over the heavily indebted peripheral states.

Eugene McCartan addressed those within the labour and republican movements who still harbour illusions regarding the EU. "Strengthening the European Union and the euro will not bring about a solidarity that has never existed but will reinforce the prevalence of the interests of the main powers of the European Union."

The visit was a great success and shows the importance of providing a platform for progressive voices from Britain and ensuring that, as the negotiation triggered by article 50 begins, these voices are heard by the widest possible audience here in Ireland over the coming months and years.

The CPI has for many years been a critical voice against the EU, against the constant hollowing out of the democracy and sovereignty of the Irish people by the Irish state and the Irish ruling class. It is not possible to understand what the European Union is or what its role and function are if we ignore class and the question of whose class interests it serves.★

Jimmy Doran

It is essential that we have a good turn-out to get water charges abolished once and for all and to force the Government to give the people a referendum to have the public ownership and management of our water enshrined in the constitution.

The battle is not won yet. Fine Gael are not going to give in without a fight. Their most recent attempt is in the form of a letter to a Fine Gael member of the EU Parliament, Brian Hayes, from a member of the EU Commission, Karmenu Vella, expressing doubts that the proposal to impose fines on those wasting water would comply with EU law. The letter goes on to say that Ireland could not revert to the previous practice, that is, paying for water through general taxation.

This exposes the undemocratic nature of the European Union and the lack of sovereignty that Ireland has as a member. It drives the Irish establishment up against its EU masters, and exposes the difficulty the people's demands create for the Government

This letter from the EU Commission must not be meekly accepted by the gombeenmen in Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, which is their usual form with all matters relating to the EU.

First and foremost, this is just the opinion of an unelected EU bureaucrat. It is not a fact, a law, a decree, or anything else: just an opinion. It should be treated with the contempt that it deserves. It must not be used as an excuse for introducing a charge for the "wilful waste of water," as proposed by Fine Gael.

We know all too well that if this was allowed to slip in, the "fair usage" level would be whittled away to such a level that it would amount to water charges being introduced through the back door.

We will not accept either Fine Gael or their masters in the EU undermining the will of the citizens of Ireland. It's time that the establishment faced up to the reality that they have tried every trick in the book to encourage, to cajole and to bully people into paying water charges, and have failed; so they have wasted well in excess of €1 billion of much-needed taxpayers' money.

There will be no compromise. We demand:

- **the abolition of domestic water charges**
- **a constitutional referendum on the public ownership and management of water**
- **an end to the installing of water meters.**

So let's all join together on 8 April for the final push and show the establishment that we are not about to give up or to walk away with anything less than a victory. ★

Moving beyond social democracy's decay towards the alternative

Following the Second World War, social democracy and social-democratic parties saw an upsurge of support for the policies they were proposing. **Eoghan O'Neill** argues that social democracy as an ideology had also abandoned the idea of class struggle and socialism at that time, and ever since, preferring to work within the confines of the capitalist organisation of society.

Capitalism, specifically German capitalism, had been defeated by the Soviet Union and the other allies. The continent of Europe lay in ruins. To avoid class-consciousness and revolutionary struggle from breaking out in the years following the war, the United States set about subsidising the rebuilding of Europe along capitalist lines.

This scheme—the Marshall Plan—secured the support of western European governments for the emerging new superpower, the United States. The peoples of Europe, however, having witnessed the enormous military feats of the Soviet Union, and becoming aware of the social advances instituted within socialist states, would not be content with the old order. This led to demands for social policies in health, education, housing, welfare, development and many more progressive demands that were guaranteed in socialist countries.

The post-war period is said to have been the golden age of capitalism, but it was also the golden age of social democracy. This was the point when the world capitalist system was weakest and organised labour strongest, when a third of all countries were either socialist or moving towards socialism. In capitalist countries—including, to an extent, Ireland—public health systems were founded and housing projects developed, trade unions expanded, infrastructure was built on a mass scale, and improvements in science and technology flourished, with large investments in research and development and capital investment in equipment, machinery, buildings, and factories, which drove forward the social means and modes of production.

From a capitalist standpoint, however, these developments were not sustainable, as this whole period (1950s to early 70s) was an attack, though perhaps not concentrated, on the capitalist mode of production, i.e. the private ownership of the means of production and its ability to extract profit from living labour power.

The retaliation by the capitalist class cannot be overstated In their quest to regain their former share of wealth, the owners of capital, beginning in the mid-70s, set about the new developments in imperialism that have been the subject of a number of articles in *Socialist Voice* of late.

Put bluntly, the more the capitalists pay labour in wages, the less profit they make, and vice versa. In this simple exposition, "outsourcing", foreign direct investment and arm's length production was an inevitable necessity in developed capitalist countries in order to

(1) undermine the labour force nationally by creating unemployment and increasing competition among workers,

(2) undermine the power of labour by attacking and removing well-organised and militant, labour-intensive industries, such as mining and car manufacturing, and

(3) undermine the ideology of state-owned and state-run industries and services, by way of de-funding, with a view to opening up industries and services to competition, thereby promoting and supporting a privatisation agenda, now being aggressively pursued around the globe.

The effect of this strategy has been that in the imperialist states where this was taking place, wages, economic growth and capital investment declined or stagnated, yet the wealth being created—or, more correctly, being captured—increased.

Ireland was a net beneficiary of this strategy. Having abandoned the policy of developing its own indigenous industrial base in the late 1950s, it opted to open its gates to foreign investment, becoming one of the most open economies in the world. Yet what we had to give up was our economic and political sovereignty and independence.

In a previous issue (December 2016) Eoghan M. Ó Néill wrote about the "slow death of social democracy." Social democracy, as an ideology of the ruling class, was always going to be only a temporary alignment, a useful tool for neutralising organised militant labour, for appeasing the demands of working people, at a time when the imperialist states faced a real global threat in the form of the Soviet Union and other socialist and national liberation forces.

Conservative as well as social-democratic parties bankrolled their own economies' level of consumption by leaving the gold standard and increasing the money supply, thereby making use of private debt as a means of growth. All the while, social-democratic forces stood idly by or, in some instances, accelerated this neo-liberal agenda.

Far left
Soviet victory in Berlin
Centre
French miners on strike 1948
Right
'We want coal. We want bread'. 1947 protest

Social democracy, as an ideology of working and progressive people, is not equipped with the tools for sustaining the long-term needs of the majority of people, because fundamentally it is not an ideology of the working class: it is an ideology of the weakest parts of both the ruling class and the working class. Its motto ought to be "Reformation in capitulation."

Those who profess to be social-democratic will not engage in class struggle but only in narrow sectional or rights issues, and so they only sow confusion and illusions among the working class, as well-intentioned as those struggles may be. In the global context it is a liberal ideology of beggar thy neighbour, because it does not hold the whole capitalist system to account for the ills and crises of countries but focuses its attention on specific crises within countries.

At best, social democracy, its followers, its parties and ideologues lack a class-consciousness and therefore lack a cohesive answer to the imperialist onslaught. At worst, it is an insidious force, like a parasite working inside a host; it weakens the unity, solidarity and ideology of the working class.

The existing political party systems in all western "democracies" have been cartelised, whereby the policy difference between parties is negligible, ensuring the longevity of parties. We have multi-party states but with no policy choices. One only needs to look at the revival of Fianna Fáil to see this phenomenon.

We are witnessing attempts to break the cartel parties and present new alternatives. However, the trajectory over the past thirty years has been to diminish the levers and the effectiveness of parties in national governments, thanks to the various international treaties and the privatising and outsourcing of vital services and industries, thereby dismantling democratic accountability and value.

Opposition parties that criticise sitting governments for the policy choices and present themselves as real alternatives but fail to challenge the fundamental barrier to alternatives—the imperialist triad of the European Union, the United States, and Britain—are only engaged in a democratic façade and by degrees will find themselves subsumed into the party cartel.

Parties in opposition or that present themselves as alternatives without presenting a coherent critique of the nature of the EU and imperialism, whose control and interests have superseded that of national governments, or, worse, that put forward populist or racist policies, only pay lip service to the real issue.

Without this critique, no viable alternative can be presented to the people, no matter how much talk there is of working-class solidarity, revolution and socialism during and between election times.

Electoral politics is at the core of the prevailing concept of democracy here in Ireland and elsewhere. The problem with presenting alternatives during election campaigns is that parties use elections as their means of growing and furthering themselves as parties, and they hope that by having a large party they can effect the alternative changes in government.

This, from the point of view of a working-class strategy, has proved to be folly, and continuing to present this to the working class will do more harm than good in the long run. One only needs to look at experience in the Latin American countries, in Venezuela for example, in Greece with SYRIZA, or even the once-mass French and Italian communist parties, to realise this. Control of government is useless without state power in the long run.

State power can only be realised when the means of production and the mode of production are in public ownership. The state is an instrument of class power, and so for the working class to maintain its power and ensure its class interests—in guaranteeing work, housing, health, education, culture, recreation, welfare, and environmental protection and sustainability—the state and all the powers of the state must be employed in the interests of the working class, over and above an individual's right to the private ownership of the means of production.

What is needed now is not to restrict the ambitions of the working class to mere electoralism, and the inevitable opportunism, splitting, and capitulation that comes with this, but to begin a long-term strategic plan to educate and organise the working class and its allies. Without an analysis of class, the state and imperialism and an understanding of the historical significance of the first socialist states, formed in the twentieth century, we will inevitably end up capitulating to the capitalist and imperialist forces at home and abroad, as so many have done.

Now more than ever there is an urgent need to build a movement of solidarity between the trade unions and communities and to put into action the building of the people's resistance and alliances. Through the continued, conscious political development and education of the working class our class will eventually come to the inevitable conclusion that to effect real change a real alternative must be presented.

This is why the CPI holds that to promote the idea of socialism and the taking of state power, rather than just taking government control, the working class needs to build and develop its democratic structures, its militant capacity and its ideological framework and to be encouraged by the successes of what working-class power can achieve and has achieved.★

In defence of identity politics

David Hartery

ONE OF the seemingly constant debates on the modern left is between those concerned with what is termed "class first" politics and those concerned with what is termed "identity politics." Such a split risks both alienating a new generation of left activists and also dooming an older generation of activists to having their contributions forgotten or condemned.

The first issue with the "class first" designation is one of category. Does "class first" mean that we should ignore the contribution of the generations of female, LGBT, non-white or non-European Marxists who have provided this movement with so much, both in theory and action? No, and of course that seems absurd. But it does point out the false dichotomy that exists. Just as we must understand imperialism through a complementary class lens, we must also understand identity politics through that prism.

Take Bolivarianism. Is that an identity politics? I suppose the argument could be made. But the crux of Bolivarianism is an alignment of South American identity against imperial forces. It is grounded, both in theory and in history, as a counterpoint to imperial hegemony. That rigorous grounding in material reality is what is valuable about the movement. As such, we can imagine identity politics as a dialectic. This is what can save us from idealism.

And that is the point that must always be kept in mind. Class is a locus of oppression, and perhaps the defining one, but it is only one of many interlocking loci of oppression. That should not seem controversial to any Marxist. The Black American singer Paul Robeson (left) said in 1957: "In the Soviet Union I felt like a person for the first time." Cuban socialism, and South American socialism more generally, has a great history of supporting indigenous and black rights. And, after a troubled history on the issue, Havana's CENESEX stresses the acceptance of sexual diversity, far in excess of what supposedly liberal post-Marriage Equality Ireland teaches its population.

These achievements all come from one place; we must bear in mind where those loci of oppression flow from: capitalism.

We can accept that things like gender or race are social constructs, but in order to look at that construction

Vulture funds being enriched by NAMA

Sebastian Müller

IN THE wake of the 2008 financial crisis the Government was faced with several political and economic choices in the face of a failing financial sector. As is well known, the Government at the time (and also the two subsequent Governments) pursued a conscious strategy of bailing out the banking industry at the expense of the Irish people. The bank guarantee, the recapitalisation of the major banks and the consecutive austerity budgets have all been enacted at the behest of finance capital, the European Union, and the capitalist class generally.

A vital component of the Government's plan over the past decade has been to remove non-performing assets from the private sector while simultaneously re-inflating the housing bubble to raise property prices (most blatantly with the 2017 budget, which saw some houses increase in value by as much as €45,000 in a matter of hours after its announcement). This strategy had the dual advantage of serving the needs of finance capital in Ireland while also appealing to a squeezed middle class terrified of the spectre of negative equity, a fear that the establishment media in Ireland did much to generate in the immediate aftermath of the collapse in the housing market.

One essential element of the Government's toolkit over this period has been the National Asset Management Agency, established in late 2009. One of the least transparent aspects of the Government's response to the crisis, NAMA originally took over a nominal €74.2 billion in bad or non-performing loans from five major banks, at a cost of about €32 billion. What NAMA has done with these 12,000 loans from only 780 debtors has largely remained unknown; but now a new report prepared by the economist Jim Power sheds some light on the question.

The report, which examines eleven transactions conducted by NAMA over the period 2009–2016, finds that it has grossly mismanaged and undersold its assets, to the benefit of private companies and vulture funds, in some cases egregiously so. One Dublin property was sold for a paltry €1.3 million by NAMA before being sold on

materially we must look at the material forces that have led to those identities forming as they have done.

Racism, in its current cultural manifestation, has a particular ideological and material origin. Codified in the Enlightenment by the European bourgeoisie, it provided the intellectual and popular cover for the slave trade (and the subsequent ability of the capitalist class to draw from a massive pool of slave labour), as well as wider discrimination and imperial plunder. We only have to look at how reactionary forces use racism to justify their illegal and immoral actions in the Middle East today to see how imperialism ably employs discrimination for its ends.

Sexism—as well as the wider policing of sexual politics—draws from a need to subordinate women into reproductive and non-waged labour. Instrumentalising people into productive units, to provide care and then a new generation of labourers, was the driving moral force behind the systems of control that were instituted by religious and cultural leaders in the service of capital. Any deviation from these prescribed social roles was punished—by incarceration, sterilisation, or exile.

However, opposition to these issues is not unusual for any Marxist. So where does this split come from?

Well, it comes from a decided non-materialism among certain people who claim "identity politics." The Democratic Party in the United States is a particular offender for this. Typified by the kind of "lean-in" feminism espoused by Sheryl Sandberg, it's a mistake to look at this form of activism as "leftism" at all. It is merely a continuation of a tradition of bourgeois feminism, and not any new departure for the "new left."

While social-democratic forces might increasingly be using the vernacular and clothing of leftism so as to appear "radical," their approach to analysis belies their liberal-social democratic tendencies. These forces mistake tokenistic and purely identitarian wins for progress and have no rigorous grounding in material reality. For such people, ensuring that all private prisons had female CEOs would be a victory. Such idealism is anathema to any left struggle.

So, then, power, and class power, must be integral to any left critique of identity. But this is not incompatible with "intersectionality," as the left "identity politics" is more commonly known.

Through analysing power we can easily understand how identitarian concerns fit within the wider Marxist ideology. Take the transgender community, for example. Trans people suffer from much higher rates of poverty and suicide than non-trans people. This is clearly a class issue: the internalised rules of social control, used to segment and order society in the interests of capital, discipline this community in a way that is harmful and often lethal.

The struggles of the Black community in America are well known to everyone. People like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr knew that struggle could not be divorced from the anti-poverty struggle. Again, any emancipation for people of colour in the United States must go in tandem with increased popular control of the economy. It is a class issue.

In Ireland, reproductive rights and control over their body are particularly denied to poor people and asylum-seekers. They cannot travel to obtain access to abortion, because of financial or legal barriers. This is a class issue.

Women are paid less for the same work and do not get recognition, or wages, for the vast amounts of labour they are condemned to when reduced to their social role of "care-giver" in the home. This is a class issue.

The same is true of so many marginalised and oppressed communities and "identities." Intersectionality, when properly formulated, shows that we must understand our class's relationship with capital, but we must also understand other individuals' interaction with capital—and the society that has been deformed by that capital.

"Identities" may be socially constructed, but their performance is tinged with a particular character because of their position within the material forces that operate on all of us.

Should socialism be achieved, the logic driving such identity construction would disappear overnight, but it is not guaranteed that the identities or prejudices would. It is important, therefore, to include the struggle against them in any left struggle.★

within the year for €13 million—a gain of 1,000 per cent for the private investors.

In another example a property at Sir John Rogerson's Quay in Dublin was sold by NAMA for €7½ million before being turned over two years later for €10 million more than the price paid to the state.

Even prime real estate, such as New Century House in the Financial Services Centre in Dublin, was sold to private investors for €28 million in September 2013 and was then sold on for a staggering €47 million just six months later.

As a result of these bargain-basement sell-offs, NAMA hopes to achieve a maximum surplus of €2.3 billion on its €31.8 billion worth of assets over a period of eleven years, or what amounts to a dismal 0.65 per cent return per annum.

By way of comparison, in the eleven sales analysed in the report the private purchasers of NAMA assets resold them for an uplift of 47 per cent over a period of two to three years. Even the €2.3 billion return expected is wholly dwarfed by the more than €40 billion not recovered from the original nominal €74.2 billion in loans taken over, not to mention the enormous and odious bank bail-outs and guarantees.

Meanwhile the brutal consequences of the Government's strategy are being felt in the housing sector, where a collapse in housing construction from a peak of 90,000 units per year before the crash to a bare 15,000 in 2016 has seen an explosion in rental prices and a shocking increase in the number of people without a home. While it is estimated that 30,000 housing units will be required each year for the next decade to meet demand, the Government has done little to attain such a figures, instead hoping that an artificial shortage will further inflate the new property bubble, further enriching the owner class.

It remains as clear as ever that NAMA has not been managed in the public interest and has instead served only to enrich vulture funds and developers at the expense of the majority of Irish people.★

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Haiti's Hibernian haven

Robert Navan

REFLECTING ON his country and its problems, the nineteenth-century Mexican president Porfirio Díaz is credited with the remark "Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States."

Haiti is certainly suffering from the latter part of this curse, particularly in the last few decades. Throw in the not-so-benign "assistance" of the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States, and earthquakes seem like the least of Haiti's problems.

Haiti won its independence in 1804 after defeating Napoleon's armies, establishing the world's first black republic. In 1825 the French king, Charles X, demanded that Haiti pay an "independence debt" to compensate the former colonists for the slaves who had won their freedom. With warships stationed along the coast to back its demand, France insisted that Haiti pay its former coloniser 150 million gold francs—ten times the fledgling state's total annual revenue. It took Haiti until 1947 to pay off this debt and its associated interest.

The US-backed Duvaliers, father (Papa Doc) and son (Baby Doc), ruled Haiti continuously from 1957 to 1981. Their brutality shocked even their American sponsors. Baby Doc fled Haiti in a US Air Force plane in 1985 following a rebellion. Since then the United States has interfered in every election in Haiti, even to the extent of supporting the coup that overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Haiti's first democratically elected president.

Following pressure from the United States, Fanmi Lavalas, Haiti's largest political party and a supporter of Aristide, was illegally excluded from the country's Senate elections in 2009. Hillary Clinton, as Secretary of State—despite warnings from forty-five members of the US Congress—supported what were generally seen as illegal and flawed presidential and general elections in Haiti in 2010.

In 2010 UN peacekeeping troops from Nepal introduced cholera to Haiti, leading to the death of more than 6,000 people and the infecting of 440,000 more in a mere ten months. More than two hundred UN soldiers in Haiti have been withdrawn to their home countries following allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct, mainly involving under-age girls. A UN investigation found that, "in exchange for sex, the children received small amounts of money, food, and sometimes mobile phones."

The UN mission in Haiti has absolutely no legitimacy and is purely there at the behest of the United States, after the Bush government orchestrated a coup in 2004 against Haiti's democratically elected president.

Then there is American "assistance" to Haiti. Wikileaks has revealed that in 2008 a former US ambassador to Haiti, Janet Sanderson, described the UN mission as "an indispensable tool in realizing core US government policy interests in Haiti."

The Clintons, Bill and Hillary, are examples of US "interests" in Haiti. Bill Clinton has served as UN special envoy for Haiti since 2009. Hillary Clinton's involvement began before the 2010 earthquake, and the country soon became the centrepiece of State Department policy under her leadership. In 2009 she worked with

Letter from Cuba
Ethical and moral contamination

Seán Joseph Clancy

AT 6 P.M. ON what is generally good enough weekday children's television in Cuba there is a popular superhero series called "The Flash," aimed at an audience primarily in the 6–12 age range.

It is made in North America and shown here with English subtitles. Because of very high literacy rates, dubbing is thankfully not necessary, nor is it very common in any of the Cuban television genres.

In what I, as a revolutionary parent, inspired by the beauty of what José Martí believed, consider was a grossly offensive—and by no means unique or casual—act of cultural counter-revolution, the subtitled translation of, for example, age-appropriate verbal exchanges between characters on last night's episode, such as "I screwed up" or "Oh, no," read in Spanish as "I just shit all over that" (cago por encima) and "Oh, shit" (mierda) . . .

That such a thing could occur on the Fidel-inspired manifestation of an educational channel (Canal Educativo 1) is so far beyond ironic that it is hard not to simply smile, or to sigh in fatalistic resignation at an unstoppable avalanche and silently surrender to an unwelcome but higher power.

I'm not quite there, though not beyond the smile, yet . . .

The fact that these vulgar and inappropriate expressions were manipulations that did not remotely represent a true translation from the original material, which of itself warranted no such concerns, raises questions as important as, or more important than, the obvious "who allows the broadcasting of this kind of thing on children's television?"

In a nation dealing daily with what is a scenario of chronic domestic economic unmanageability, anarchy, and chaos, a savage and debilitating illegal blockade by the United States and a range of other not insignificant human-made and natural obstacles, a few profanities uttered in a script by a second-rate Batman early on a Thursday evening might not seem worthy of a second thought.

However, one must first accept that only someone who has lived or lives here (and, sadly, what is a national reality is ever more exaggerated in the particular area where I live) could even remotely understand the extent to which the moral fibre of the nation was ripped to shreds by the so-called "special period" that followed the collapse of the socialist bloc and the grave consequences that we here still live daily.

It was Chernobylesque; and the economic, social, ethical and moral contamination that seeped into the very fabric of what had been previously a relatively moral, sane and decent civil society has created horrible mutations that make everyday life in Cuba frustrating, sad, difficult,

the Haitian elite and American transnationals, such as Hanes and Levi, to block an increase in the legal minimum wage (from 27 to 61 cents an hour) which had been passed by the Haitian parliament. She succeeded, using pressure from the US State Department on the Haitian government, in lowering the rate to 31 cents an hour.

An early Clinton "initiative" was the building of a factory to produce sweatshirts. An investigation by the American television channel ABC News found that this factory—paying its workers a wage of $3 a day—was built with $400 million of global aid. It is owned by a South Korean firm that became a donor to the Clinton Foundation.

After the 2010 earthquake $13.3 billion (£10.9 billion) was pledged by international donors for Haiti's recovery. Bill Clinton was appointed joint chairman of the "Interim Haiti Recovery Commission," along with the Haitian prime minister, Jean-Max Bellerive. Nearly 90 per cent of the money collected went to organisations outside Haiti; the bulk of it went to UN agencies, international aid groups, private contractors, and donor countries' own civilian and military agencies.

Associated Press documented in January 2010 the fact that 33 cents of each American dollar for Haiti was in fact given directly back to the United States as reimbursement for the US military sent to Haiti. The country was actually invoiced for American soldiers sent to hand out bottled water and keep order on the streets of the capital city, Port-au-Prince. The Associated Press report found that less than 1 cent out of each dollar of American aid went to the government of Haiti.

Up to 2015 Haitians were still protesting outside the offices of the Clinton Foundation in New York, claiming that the Clintons mismanaged hundreds of millions in American taxpayers' money through the "Reconstruction Commission." A close friend of the Clintons, the Irish businessman Denis O'Brien, has chaired the Haiti Action Network since 2009. This organisation is connected to the Clinton Global Initiative.

The American Red Cross is also in the dock over Haiti. In 2011 it received half a billion dollars in donations for building new houses in one of Haiti's poorest areas. This area, called Campeche, was one of the worst-hit by the earthquake. As late as 2015 not one permanent dwelling had been built. Up to today only six permanent houses have been identified as built by Red Cross money; but $125 million has disappeared in Red Cross expenses.

Haiti, in spite of (or maybe because of) this American and European "assistance," remains one of the poorest countries in the world. There are only ninety miles of sea between Cuba and Haiti, but the countries are a million miles apart as far as health, education and living standards are concerned. Haiti remains one of the strongest arguments against Cuba adopting a western-imposed development model.

In a piece of irony worthy of Jonathan Swift, an organisation in Ireland called Haven organises a Haiti Week. Ireland's "great and good" get to flash their wealth at "charitable" events such as the Gala Concert, held this year in the Dublin Convention Centre. A highlight of the week is the Haiti Ball, held this year on 21 January in the Intercontinental Hotel. To quote their publicity for the event, "a standout moment of each year's event comes with the presentation of the William Jefferson Clinton Goodwill for Haiti Award."

Haven describes itself as an Irish NGO that is committed to empowering the people of Haiti to build a strong and sustainable livelihood. One might ask who has been most empowered. Was it ordinary Haitians, or the not-so-ordinary Clintons?★

Picture: Haitians gathered in front of the Clinton Foundation to protest against former Clinton's role as head of the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission

infuriating and depressing beyond belief by times.

Having such a vile, venomous and bitter enemy lying offshore in wait to pounce, means that there are valid reasons not to go into specific details here about even many of the more mundane or everyday manifestations of this toxic radiation. Giving an enemy ammunition to kill something that needs to be fixed from within would be as unwise as silently allowing certain things to pass unchallenged.

Excessive, highly aggressive and overtly sexualised bad language has become the norm here. One hears it everywhere. I hear waiters, doctors, judges, tax inspectors, vets, farmers, scientists, politicians, military officials in and out of uniform, teachers, bank workers, carpenters, taxi-drivers, lawyers, sculptors and almost everyone else under forty years of age I come into contact with use the most extreme expressions in their everyday professional, social and personal discourses without any self-awareness of how abnormal this would be considered elsewhere, or without the raising of an eyebrow from their audiences, who equally respond in kind.

And I really do mean the most extreme.

I personally use bad language more frequently than I should. But I don't want my six-year-old son swearing freely, or thinking that it is normal to do so everywhere and anywhere.

And I don't want him being subtly seduced into believing that—even if they originally entered the Cuban reality through very real crisis-induced desperation—that it has become normal or acceptable to lie, cheat, manipulate, defraud, pilfer, undermine or thieve in order to get what you want.

All of these form part of the everyday discourse here and often make life truly miserable.

I consider and experience all as representations of as grave a threat to the integrity, viability and ultimate survival of the Revolutionary Project here as anything our imperialist foe has overtly or covertly endeavoured to do. Socialism is thus betrayed.

If Uncle Sam had made the advances here that the internal and often subtle social, economic, moral, financial and personal counter-revolution has, Cuba would have been sipping Starbucks lattes, munching Dunkin' Donuts, reintroducing rampant poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition for the "good of the economy," and profiteering from the misery of our noble Palestinian brothers and sisters, many moons ago.

Mischievously inserted vulgarities on children's television are the thin edge of a very broad sword.

They are also such a savage affront to the very essence of a beautiful legacy we have been left to aspire to by Martí, Fidel and a multitude of regional revolutionary giants and to the love I feel for my own beautiful son, that a brute like me will never convey in words why they induce such a profound and worrisome sadness . . .★

Guernica

Jenny Farrell

THERE ARE a handful of pictures that may be said to be almost universally known. They include Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, and Picasso's *Guernica*.

Eighty years ago, on 26 April 1937, the small Basque town of Guernica was annihilated by German bombers. Picasso heard of this act of terror on 28 April and began initial sketches in response to this atrocity on 1 May. It became the painting Guernica.

Despite its familiarity, or perhaps because of it, it is interesting to take a closer look at this iconic painting and to discover more about what is says exactly, and why it has the effect it has on the viewer.

The title is as terror-filled as the images displayed. In February 1936 the Popular Front had won the democratic elections in Spain. In July, a putsch by fascist generals took place under the leadership of Franco, supported by Hitler, Mussolini, and international capital. A three-year civil war was unleashed, which ended in the crushing defeat of Spanish democracy.

Picasso had been commissioned in January 1937 to produce a mural-sized painting for the Spanish pavilion at the Paris International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life. At a time when the Second World War had already begun in Spain, the German and Soviet pavilions stood across from each other on the exhibition grounds—the German eagle facing the hammer and sickle. The Spanish pavilion aimed to highlight the just cause of the Spanish Republic and to call for international support. It too represented the forces of humanity and culture against fascist barbarism. Picasso's *Guernica* was exhibited in the open lobby.

Picasso began work on this painting in May 1937 and installed it in Paris in mid-June.

To understand the painting requires a degree of effort in deciphering the abstract images. In its formal composition Picasso combines the Christian triptych (traditionally an altarpiece depicting Christ's suffering on the cross on a large central panel, flanked by two narrower wings) with the classical Greek triangular pediment (a sculptured gable). In this way Picasso's combination distils high points of European culture and uses them against barbarism.

The painting shows two animals and five people. All of these have symbolic functions. The bull and the horse are traditional symbols of Spanish popular culture, classical mythology, indeed any farming or nomadic cultures breeding horses and bulls. The clearest symbolic figures aside from these are the torch-bearer and the pietà.

In the painting there are two sources of light: the torch and the electric bulb or sun, positioned in the top centre of the picture. The woman carrying the flame associates the entire tradition of Enlightenment humanism to this day, albeit here illuminating the perversion of humanism—the destruction of life. The light-bearing woman is closely linked to liberty in the visual arts as well as in literature. One example is the Statue of Liberty in New York, based on the Roman goddess Libertas. Another famous case in point is Delacroix's famous French Revolution painting of Liberty Leading the People.

Turning to the electric bulb/sun, the cult of light is associated with Apollo in Greek mythology, and in Christian culture light traditionally represents God.

These two sources of light more or less at the top centre of the painting shed a triangle of light on what lies beneath: a scene of horrendous human pain and destruction. If you imagine lines drawn down from the flame to shape a triangle with the base of the painting you have the pediment of the classical temple, coinciding with the central panel of the triptych.

What does the light illuminate? From right to left—this is the movement of the picture—a half-clothed woman is fleeing from a burning town. A human is trapped in the flames, screaming, about to be consumed. At the centre is the horse, fatally stabbed by a dagger in its back, writhing in mortal anguish. Underfoot are dismembered human body parts: an arm grasping a broken sword beside the faint outline of a flower; another arm is stretched out in agony beside a severed head, engraved with horror. The outstretched hand reaches into the left corner of the painting and shows the effort made to protect the dead baby held by its grief-stricken mother.

Thinking of the painting as a triptych, the wailing mother and the burning person are in the wings, to either side of the centre panel. Both these

Pablo Picasso
Guernica 1937

characters and the horse are shown screaming, protesting and resisting in the moment of their destruction.

The powerful head of a female torch-bearer, representing reason, civilisation, and a democratic world public, sweeps through the picture from the right. She is witness, both seeing and revealing the horrors of *Guernica*. She embodies life, energy, and hope.

Hovering over the mother in the left wing is the bull, a deep source of hope and resistance. The animal is not wounded, though its eyes and mouth express sadness and anger. It represents the power of indestructible, life-giving nature. Since ancient times the bull has connotations of fertility. It represents the innate power of the people.

The horse, with its stricken head, is at the centre of the triangular pediment and the triptych structure, just below the light. The horse has special significance in this painting: it distils the suffering of the people and becomes the essence of this. The horse's head heightens the agony, the elegiac tone of the entire picture, becomes its symbol.

The horse, in its anguish, is positioned in between the torch-bearer and the bull, reason and nature, which, combined, guarantee the regeneration of life. The frail but visible flower beside the fallen soldier also symbolises rebirth. The combined power of reason and nature engender optimism for new life, resistance and struggle to overcome such destruction.

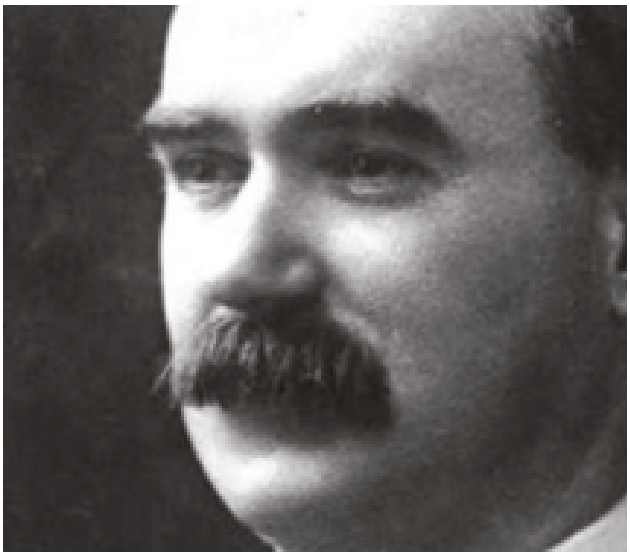
The movement of the head of reason is towards the bull. As the head is without a body, such merging is almost certainly part of the painting's projected intention. Another factor that suggests the necessary joining of torch-bearer and bull, of head and heart, of reason and body, is that these two figures, alone in the painting, are not physically tormented in the same way as the humans are. The bull is distressed and the torch-bearer horrified; together they embody ground for hope, for anger, the will to resist and fight back, for renewal.

Looking at the "language" of the painting, its form, the question arises: How can such horror be depicted appropriately? Is it possible to express profound and utter destruction in a naturalistic, "beautiful" way? This painting is in black and white, creating a level of abstraction for the viewer on the one hand, adding the suggestion of a torn newspaper photograph on the other. The effect is distancing. The viewer is not drawn in, doesn't totally identify with the images, but is put into a position of observer, thinking about what is presented.

The size of the painting also acts to physically distance the onlooker: it is 3.5 metres (11 ft 5 in.) tall and 7.8 metres (25 ft 6 in.) wide and cannot be seen properly close up: the observer needs to stand at a distance to take in the whole, and make an effort to understand. Grasping the message of the work parallels the effort to understand history. It isn't presented beautifully on a plate but needs to be grappled with.

As indicated, the characters displayed are representative. They depict the collective experience of the Spanish people and, beyond that, of the human race in a world at war. This is *the* mother mourning her child, *the* person fleeing from a burning city, *the* human consumed by its flames, *the* fallen soldier, *the* world in flames. The composition furthermore suggests both indoors and outdoors, thereby making it a more universal space. Thus the painting becomes a comprehensive statement against the inhumanity of war. It is both a condemnation and an appeal to fight for peace.

And so, as we remember the fascist attack on a small Basque town, as we remember and mourn its dead, our awareness of the continuing wars, continuing crimes against humanity, human suffering and horror, perpetuated by the very same imperialist greed and inhumanity, is heightened when looking at Picasso's masterpiece.★



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OBITUARY

Eoghan M. Ó Néill 1958–2017

AT THE END of March the Communist Party of Ireland lost a very valuable comrade, Eoghan M. Ó Néill. Eoghan was a genuine revolutionary, a very humble, kind, generous and cultured person, one who was always willing to pass on his knowledge and experience, in particular to young people.

We express our deepest sympathy to Eoghan's wife, Paula, to his children, Áine, Calliam, Tuireann, and Cian, to his mother, sisters, and brothers.

Eoghan was an art tutor and an accomplished artist and sculptor as well as a working-class political writer, thinker, and educator. He had recently completed the CPI pamphlet *Trading Away Democracy: How TTIP and Other Trade Agreements Will Destroy People's Rights*. He made a major contribution to developing our political theory in new directions in a non-dogmatic way. He encouraged young as well as older comrades to question everything and to creatively apply Marxism.

He contributed to two very important political questions that the CPI is now engaged in discussing: firstly, the question of a radical "transformative strategy" that could open up areas of struggle that could help to build the class-consciousness that is necessary for advancing towards socialism; secondly, applying the ideas of a radical transformative strategy to the housing crisis under conditions of contemporary monopoly capitalism. He had just finished a fine piece of research on the housing crisis, entitled *"The Right to a Secure Home."*

Eoghan played an active role in the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum and was responsible for much of the educational content of its weekend schools. Eoghan saw the central importance of education. At the funeral service were many comrades from the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum, some of whom travelled from around the country, north and south, from Cos. Fermanagh, Tyrone, Donegal, Armagh, Monaghan, Cavan, Kildare and Carlow as well as from Belfast.

Eoghan had developed an educator's training programme in the Paulo Freire teaching method for activists within the Forum to use within their local communities, attempting to build grass-roots political education.

Many of his comrades from the CPI also travelled to say goodbye and to mark his life and his contribution. The large attendance at his funeral was testimony to the respect in which he was was held by many people.

Eoghan first joined the CPI nearly two decades ago, helping to establish our paper, *Socialist Voice*. Even after he left the party, for family reasons, he kept in touch over the years. In the last couple of years he came back into active involvement in the work of the party.

Eoghan was a highly valued member of the CPI who worked tirelessly for the party and for the Irish working class. He was only fifty-nine but had given a lot—and had much more to give—to the cause of the Irish working class. His monthly contribution *to Socialist Voice* was a must-read article of quality and depth, always presenting arguments backed by facts and concrete experience of the class.

He was also preparing an exhibition, both political and cultural, to mark the hundredth anniversary of the Russian Revolution.

Eoghan will be deeply missed by his many friends and comrades. He left his mark on those who worked alongside him, a true working-class leader and educator. We dip our banners in his memory.★

A missed opportunity

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

A meeting to mark the anniversary of the establishment of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association will be held in the Linen Hall Library, 17 Donegall Square, North, Belfast, on Saturday 8 April at 1:30 p.m.

The speakers will be Anthony Coughlan, associate professor emeritus, Trinity College, Dublin, and Kevin McCorry, former organiser of NICRA.

NICRA was unique as a political movement in the Northern Ireland experience. It was not a political party—indeed all shades of Northern political opinion were represented on its first executive: liberal, labour, nationalist, republican, communist, and trade unionist. A Young Unionist was co-opted at its formal launch. The Cameron Commission described it as "novel." Its demand was for equal treatment for nationalists and unionists within the existing constitution.

Successive British governments in London ignored the abuses of the unionist majority-rule regime in Britain's "political slum." Marches sponsored by NICRA exposed these practices to the.

The Northern Ireland premier, Terence O'Neill, was forced to concede in principle all NICRA's demands, though it would take years for some of them to work through, and no attempt was made towards a comprehensive gesture to remove the grievances that brought people onto the streets.

By 1971 the civil rights movement was virtually sidelined. British, Irish and international public opinion now saw the northern problem as one of "containing IRA violence" rather than establishing a regime of equality.

The political framework established by the 1998 Belfast Agreement is in some ways a return to the values of the civil rights movement. But can it lead to a coming together of the northern communities on the basis of real equality and make possible progress that was the NICRA's aspirations?

Only time will tell.

This event is organised by the Annual Desmond Greaves School. Now in its twenty-ninth year, the school provides a forum for political discussion. The 2017 school will be held on 8, 9 and 10 September in the Pearse Centre, 27 Pearse Street, Dublin.