Socialist Voice

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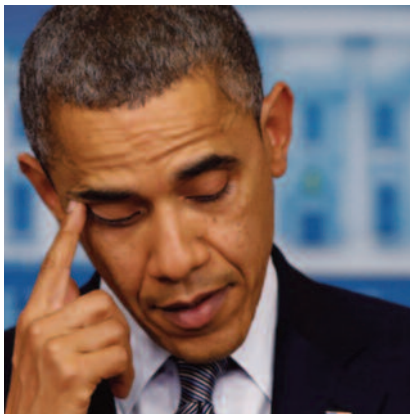
Solidarity with the Tesco workers

Mandate and its members are under attack from Tesco, the most profitable retailer in the country. The company has declared that pre-1996 employee contracts are outdated and wants to cut the pay and working conditions of these workers, despite a Labour Court recommendation being rejected by 97 per cent of the workers. **Jimmy Doran** reports PAGE 2

STOP PRESS

Bus Éireann strike

Bus Éireann has given in to the pressure of workers, as it realised how the strike was growing and the huge effect it was having on its business. Passengers and the community supported the strike, and the company was losing the propaganda war. People are beginning to see through "austerity" in all its forms.



"When 95 per cent of our potential customers live abroad, we must be sure that we are writing the rules for the global economy . . ."
Barack Obama (message to US Congress, 16 April 2015).

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CONTINUED FROM COVER

Tesco makes a profit of €250 million a year in Ireland. If the 250 pre-1996 workers who remain in the company's employment were to accept the cuts to pay and conditions proposed by the company, it would increase its profits by something in the region of €300,000 to €400,000 per year.

The company has already paid €90 million in redundancy packages to the 900 workers in this grade who were encouraged and cajoled into leaving on "voluntary severance packages." On the first day of the strike, Tesco paid tens of thousands for full-page advertisements in most of the national newspapers to put forward its position, and this is continuing.

The youngest of the 250 remaining workers are over forty years of age and will retire naturally over the coming years. This raises the question, Why would Tesco spend all this money—and attract all the bad publicity to its business—to increase its profit by a relatively tiny amount?

There's a lot more to this strike than meets the eye. It can't just be greed. There is obviously another reason why the pre-1996 workers are the battleground Tesco has picked.

The real target is the union

Tesco wants to break the tradition of union membership. If it achieves this, the pay and conditions of the remaining workers will come under attack. Without union support, the workers would be completely vulnerable. It would mean an end to full-time contracts. They would become minimum-hours contracts, and pay rates would go through the floor. It would be back to the days of the hiring-fair, with the workers at the beck and call of the employer for every hour of work allocated in a week.

Tesco says the pre-1996 contracts are "old-fashioned." They were negotiated by the union, which always tries for the best deal for the members, the traditional "fair day's pay for a fair day's work." If Tesco wants to change that to the greatest amount of work for the smallest amount of pay, in order to maximise profits, to enable bosses and shareholders to live a life of luxury on the backs of the workers—well, that really is old-fashioned. Mediaeval, in fact.

The days when workers can be bullied into accepting cuts to pay and conditions are quickly disappearing as workers awaken to the corporate scam that was "austerity." Cuts to pay and conditions will not be facilitated by retail workers, transport workers, nurses, teachers or gardaí so as to expand corporate profits or to contribute to the servicing of private banking debt.

Tesco is not allowing strikers to picket the entrances to their shops, so picketers are forced outside to the main shopping-centre entrances. Obviously this is damaging the small businesses that share the premises. And there's no doubt that Tesco will be all too happy to pounce on the opportunity to swallow these small businesses into its own if they fail, and then try to blame the strikers. That's what corporations do.

The cutting of pay for many of these workers will result in them being paid by the taxpayer, as many of them will qualify for family income support, because they fall through the threshold. And meanwhile the profits of Tesco soar.

Solidarity with the shop workers! Once again they have shown their bravery against the odds, as the Dunne's Stores workers did in the 1980s when they stood up against apartheid in South Africa.

Tesco has underestimated the bravery and determination of its workers. It needs to remember the words of Terence MacSwiney, that it's not those who can inflict the most but those who can suffer the most who will be victorious.

Our class needs a strong labour movement

Tommy McKearney

DO YOU recall the old Joe Hill song "The Preacher and the Slave," which included the great line "Work and pray, live on hay, You'll get pie in the sky when you die"? The song was composed over a century ago, and some may believe that harsh working conditions are a thing of the past. For those who think that, we now have a different, more enlightened type of capitalist employer.

Then consider a recent posting in the "situations vacant" columns of a rural newspaper. The advertisement read:

> . . . we currently require a pool of casual staff that may be called upon at short notice to work in various roles that arise within our health foods, bakery, dairy, and retail departments. It is important that applicants are flexible in their approach to their hours of work, as these roles will involve weekdays, evenings, weekend and night shifts.

This employer is based in Co. Armagh but advertised for workers in Co. Monaghan—proof, if it were needed, that neo-liberalism and exploitation of the working class transcend partition.

As this advertisement was appearing, workers in the local Tesco branch in Monaghan were preparing to strike for one of the most basic of rights: to have a long-standing contract observed by the management.

Moreover, as Mandate members were getting ready to take action, the media were reporting Bus Éireann's decision to cut its employees' terms and conditions while also closing important bus services between rural Ireland and Dublin. And all the while the minister with responsibility, the otherwise stridently verbose Shane Ross, was insisting that public transport in the Republic should be regulated by purely commercial considerations.

It would appear that Ross's only contribution to the provision of a public good is to remind us of James Connolly's observation that governments in capitalist society are but committees of the rich to manage the affairs of the capitalist class. Because, while the actions of Tesco and Bus Éireann are at present in the public eye, they are merely examples of an overarching campaign, backed by the state, to push down workers' wages and undermine their terms and conditions in the work-place. Similar practices are commonplace throughout the manufacturing, retail and service sectors, while this type of pressure is

also being felt by middle-ranking professionals.

In spite of this, the Fine Gael-led coalition continues with its self-congratulatory line that, under the leadership of Enda Kenny and his accomplices, the Republic has experienced an economic recovery. They point to a recent report from the Central Statistics Office showing that the unemployment rate for January 2017 fell to 7.1 per cent from 7.2 per cent in December 2016.

What the government's spin doctors failed to say, though, is that the CSO also reported that, despite growth in employment, more than 100,000 people are working part-time,[1] because they can't find full-time jobs. And, ominously, Ireland's rate of low-paid employment is among the highest in the European Union. Moreover, privatisation in industries such as housing, health and care for the elderly, and the less visible but still onerous costs to parents of educating children, have all undermined the social wage.

Against this backdrop, the balance of power on the shop floor has continued to move towards the employer. A striking member of Mandate told me that the Tesco management had threatened workers on short-term contracts that if they took part in the strike their contracts would not be renewed. Don't forget either that many employers in the retail trade refuse union recognition altogether.

What we are experiencing in Ireland (and it is happening north and south) is part of a global phenomenon as capital responds to the 2008 financial crisis. As *Socialist Voice* has repeatedly stated, the ruling class is taking advantage of the situation to strengthen its grip over the economy and society through the imposition of what is euphemistically called "austerity." Nor should we be so naïve as to believe that this is happening by accident. Well-funded and corporate-supported schools of business studies are everywhere producing management cadres indoctrinated with a philosophy that a writer in the *Financial Times* recently described as hyena capitalism.

To counteract this continuing offensive on the working class it is essential that organised labour is equipped with countervailing power. However, the capitalist ruling class everywhere has ruthlessly and indeed scientifically employed globalisation and contemporary technology to weaken the labour movement. The ease with which capital and labour can be migrated from country to country has intimidated many working people. As a result, trade union density in Ireland is falling in the private sector, and while it is still significant in the public sector all too often the struggle there is defensive.

Put bluntly, as organised labour is at present structured, it is experiencing increasing difficulty in finding the necessary leverage to hold its own, let alone win intensive industrial disputes; and, worst of all, the bosses know this.

Nevertheless, organised labour does have influence, and demonstrated this through the water tax protests, where it was the key in the mobilising of tens of thousands. Also worth noting is that falling sales in Tesco during the recent strike show that a sizeable section of the public supported the workers' action and refused to pass the pickets.

The trade union movement has to bring this asset to bear on all situations; and therein lies an avenue that must surely be pursued. The working class needs a strong labour movement, just as organised labour needs the active support of communities outside the work-place. There has to be a recognition within working-class communities that issues such as that of Tesco and Bus Éireann workers are matters of concern to all and must be actively supported by all.

Achieving this will demand effort, and not just by trade union officials but by all left-wing activists. One suggestion would be to encourage a review of organised labour's relationship with the wider community and how this can be improved and strengthened. There already exists a considerable body of research dealing with this issue and the concept of "community unionism" in general.[2] Such material could provide a basis for initial discussion, and indeed some of our unions have already made tentative steps in this direction.

However, more must be done to harness people-power in the struggle to ensure that the balance of power swings back towards organised labour; and it's a responsibility that all on the left must share.

1 *Employment Monitor* (Social Justice Ireland), no. 3, January 2017, p. 2, at http://bit.ly/2lZXdtu.

2 Just one example among others: Jane Holgate, *Trade Union Involvement in Broad-Based Community Organising: A Comparative Study of London, Sydney and Seattle* (University of Leeds, Working Paper no. 14), at http://bit.ly/2mDmSVJ.

BREXIT

the view from the left

Implications and opporrtunity for Ireland

PUBLIC MEETINGS

DUBLIN **Monday 20 March, 8pm**
Rob Griffiths *general secretary Communist Party of Britain*
Eugene McCartan
general secretary Communist Party of Ireland
Chairperson: Therese Moloney *trade union activist*
Unite Hall, 55 Middle Abbey Street
Sponsored by Communist Party of Ireland

GALWAY **Tuesday 21 March, 7:30pm**
Rob Griffiths
general secretary, Communist Party of Britain
Eoin Ó Murchú *broadcaster*
Chairperson: Seosamh Ó Cuaig
Richardson's, Eyre Square
Sponsored by the James Connolly Forum

MONAGHAN **Wednesday 22 March, 7pm**
Robert Griffiths
general secretary Communist Party of Britain
Tommy McKearney *writer and political activist*
Chairperson: José Antonio Gutierréz
Four Seasons Hotel
Sponsored by the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republic Forum

BELFAST **24 March 2017 7pm**
Rob Griffiths
general secretary, Communist Party of Britain
Kerry Fleck *Communist Party of Ireland*
Chairperson: Lynda Walker
Communist Party of Ireland
Ramada Encore Hotel, 20 Talbot Street, Belfast BT1 2LD
Sponsored by Communist Party of Ireland

The unfulfilled promise of the Fenian Proclamation

The centenary year of the 1916 Rising, for all its symbolic importance, can be best seen as a staging-post in the long struggle to build a social movement that is capable of transforming Irish society writes **Sean Byers**

THE CENTENARY year of the 1916 Rising, for all its symbolic importance, can perhaps be best seen as a staging-post in the long struggle to build a social movement that is capable of transforming Irish society.

The political establishment is wounded, but not fatally so, while the economic class that has positioned itself as an intermediary between foreign capital and Irish assets continues to thrive under the protection of the state.

Just as neo-liberalism asserted itself over the course of a generation, elevating capitalism to a dominant set of values and a cultural logic, becoming the new common sense, so it appears that we must embrace the task of developing an alternative programme and progressive political consciousness over a period of ten, fifteen, even twenty years if necessary.

The new year brings fresh challenges and a new round of commemorations, most notably the 150th anniversary of the Fenian Rising on 5 March and the centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution. For many on the socialist and republican left, the former will no doubt serve as a reminder of the unfulfilled promise of the 1867 Fenian Proclamation, a document that surpasses the 1916 Proclamation in its radical content yet has gone neglected by contemporary political movements that would lay claim to the Fenian tradition.

The 1916 Proclamation, though a useful tool for working-class politicisation and populist mobilisation against the establishment, is too easily employed in the service of a "one-nation" form of republicanism that masks a number of important tensions and contradictions. The document issued by the first Provisional Government of the Irish Republic, by contrast, is unapologetic in pursuing revolutionary socialist and radical republican objectives, leaving no room for ambiguity. While the former provides the framework for a minimum programme, the latter encourages discussion on a set of policies or demands that would constitute a maximum or transformative programme.

In the 1867 Proclamation the Fenians are explicitly secular, eschewing the 1916 Proclamation's mystical overtones and appeals to religious solidarity, "in favour of absolute liberty of conscience, and complete separation of Church and State." This fundamental principle of republicanism would imply a number of provisions supported by the progressive left but that sections of the mainstream republican movement have proved unwilling or unable to endorse, for example an end to state funding for faith schools in favour of the establishment of non-denominational or secular schools, and the introduction of evidence-based legislation and policies that grant full bodily autonomy to women in both states.

"THE IRISH REPUBLIC."

THE following extraordinary document has been forwarded, "with the compliments of the government of the Irish republic," to several newspapers for publication. It is printed on a large placard, which bears no printer's name. Immediately before the signature there is a rude woodcut of a harp:—

"I. R.—Proclamation!—The Irish People to the World. We have suffered centuries of outrage, enforced poverty, and bitter misery. Our rights and liberties have been trampled on by an alien aristocracy, who, treating us as foes, usurped our lands and drew away from our unfortunate country all material riches. The real owners of the soil were removed to make room for cattle, and driven across the ocean to seek the means of living, and the political rights denied them at home; while our men of thought and action were condemned to loss of life and liberty. But we never lost the memory and hope of national existence. We appealed in vain to the reason and sense of justice of the dominant powers. Our mildest remonstrances were met with sneers and contempt. Our appeals to arms were always unsuccessful. Today, having no honourable alternative left, we again appeal to force as our last resource. We accept the conditions of appeal, manfully deeming it better to die in the struggle for freedom than to continue an existence of utter serfdom. All men are born with equal rights, and in associating together to protect one another and share public burthens, justice demands that such associations should rest upon a basis which maintains equality instead of destroying it. We therefore declare that, unable longer to endure the curse of monarchical government, we aim at founding a republic based on universal suffrage, which shall secure to all the intrinsic value of their labour. The soil of Ireland, at present in the possession of an oligarchy, belongs to us, the Irish people, and to us it must be restored. We declare also in favour of absolute liberty of conscience, and the complete separation of Church and State. We appeal to the Highest Tribunal for evidence of the justice of our cause. History bears testimony to the intensity of our sufferings, and we declare, in the face of our brethren, that we intend no war against the peop'e of England—our war is against the aristoc ratic locusts, whether English or Irish, who have eaten the verdure of our fields—against the aristocratic leeches who drain alike our blood and theirs. Republicans of the entire world, our cause is your cause. Our enemy is your enemy. Let your hearts be with us. As for you, workmen of England, it is not only your hearts we wish, but your arms. Remember the starvation and degradation brought to your firesides by the oppression of labour. Remember the past, look well to the future, and avenge yourselves by giving liberty to your children in the coming struggle for human freedom. Herewith we proclaim the Irish Republic.

"THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT."

▲ Contemporary report of the 1867 Proclamation
Above right: Republican Bond issued in the USA

The Fenian movement organised on both sides of the Atlantic and drew inspiration and practical support from British and Continental European socialists. This cross-pollination of people and ideas meant a rejection of the notion, implicit in the 1916 Proclamation, that the republican struggle was one of Irish against English. Instead, recognising the philosophical universalism of republicanism, the Fenian Proclamation appeals to "Republicans of the entire world! Our cause is your cause. Our enemy is your enemy." It declares war on the "aristocratic locusts, whether English or Irish, who have eaten the verdure of our fields—against the aristocratic leeches who drain alike our fields and theirs," and expresses common cause with the English working class: "As for you, workmen of England, it is not only your hearts we wish, but your arms."

Arguably, then, it would be in line with the Fenians' support for Chartism to recognise the National Health Service and the welfare state as major achievements of the British working class, claim them as our own, and use them as tools for engaging with the radical Protestant tradition of dissent that exists within the labour movement—all while retaining the right to analyse, critique and resist imperialism.

Finally, the 1867 Proclamation makes a number of references to material conditions, class conflict and economic justice that were later abandoned by the authors of the 1916 Proclamation in favour of the limited promise of social and political equality. In it the Fenians record their disgust at "the starvation and degradation brought to your firesides by the oppression of labour" and pledge to "secure to all the intrinsic value of their labour." Thanks to their European socialist connections, the Fenians recognised the primacy of the battle between labour and capital and understood the fundamental contradiction between them.

This analysis in turn carries any number of implications for present-day republicans who are about to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Fenian rebellion. Ireland, north and south, is beset with problems that are a symptom of capital's temporary defeat of labour over the past thirty years: obscene and rising levels of income and wealth inequality; large-scale tax avoidance, facilitated by the indigenous middleman class; a homelessness crisis; the underfunding and creeping privatisation of the health service; the commodification of all that remains in public ownership; and the almost complete erosion of workers' rights and protections—to name but a few. In these circumstances there can be no justification for easy cohabitation with capital or its political representatives, including Fianna Fáil and the DUP.

Where "one-nation" republicanism focuses on social and political equality, we must also articulate the demand and political strategy for achieving economic equality. Where the leaders of "one-nation" republicanism speak the language of compromise and cross-class alliances, between the exploited and those who would exploit them, it is our duty to remind the grass roots of those movements of the neo-liberal experience in Ireland and stress the importance of class struggle in shifting the balance of power back to citizens. This is the best way in which we can honour and renew the Fenian tradition.

The two conditions that could have helped the Fenians grow into a mass movement—a developed Irish working class and a serious socialist influence—were both absent in 1867. It can be argued that we are closer to achieving those conditions. One measure of our progress will be the extent to which we engage seriously in the coming months with the ideas espoused by the Fenians.

The taxman cometh!

Gabriel Rosenstock translates and introduces a poem by George Mackay Brown

The Marxist scholar George Thomson (1903–1987) was drawn to the culture and language of the Blasket Islands and had a warm friendship with one of its fine memoirists, Muiris Ó Súilleabháin. What Thomson saw among the Blasket Islanders was a civilisation that contained remnants of an older society, one that existed before the notion of private property came about, a community oblivious to the state and all its machinations.

There were many such peripheral societies among the islands of Europe, far from the madding crowd. The poet George Mackay Brown (1921–1996) recorded, in poetry and prose, the traditional life of Orkney and the daily rituals that he loved. Capitalist materialism to him was "a useless utilitarian faith, without beauty or mystery."

His poem "Taxman"—a mere eight lines—sends a shiver up the spine.

Fear Cánach

Seacht speal ina luí in aghaidh an bhalla.
Féasóg ar fhéasóg órga
An t-ualach deireanacha eorna
Ag longadán tríd an gclós.
An corc á bhaint as buidéil leanna ag béithe.
Fidil is cosa ag bogadh le chéile.
Ansin idir coinleach is fraoch
Marcach ar séirse.

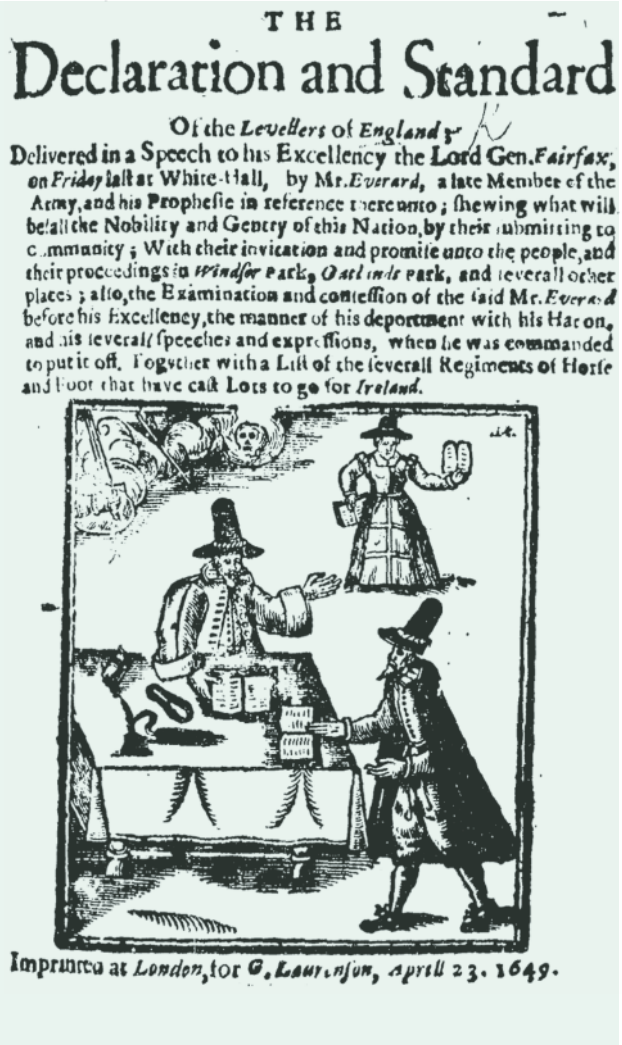
Taxman

Seven scythes leaned at the wall.
Beard upon golden beard
The last barley load
Swayed through the yard.
The girls uncorked the ale.
Fiddle and feet moved together.
Then between stubble and heather
A horseman rode.

Early English communists

Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers

Every so often we look back at individuals in history—not because they made history but because history made them. Their struggle in the cause of liberation from the injustices of property-driven class society provides us with a sense of continuity, direction, and hope **writes Jenny Farrell**



THE

Declaration and Standard

Of the *Levellers* of *England*;

Delivered in a Speech to his Excellency the Lord Gen. *Fairfax*, on *Friday* last at White-Hall, by Mr. *Everard*, a late Member of the Army, and his Prophesie in reference thereunto; shewing what will befall the Nobility and Gentry of this Nation, by their submitting to Community; With their invitation and promise unto the people, and their proceedings in *Windsor* Park, *Oatlands* Park, and severall other places; also, the Examination and confession of the said Mr. *Everard* before his Excellency, the manner of his deportment with his Hat on, and his severall speeches and expressions, when he was commanded to put it off. Together with a List of the severall Regiments of Horse and Foot that have cast Lots to go for *Ireland*.

Imprinted at *London*, for G. Laurenson, April 23. 1649.

ALMOST FROM its inception, bourgeois society exhibited its potential for bloodshed and violence as well as for a vision of a society of equals. The bourgeois revolution in England in 1640–1660 brought to power the bourgeoisie for the first time in history. At this time, an egalitarian force also appeared as a small social reality. Among these, the Diggers were the most radical, and their most prominent representative was Gerrard Winstanley.

Winstanley was born in Wigan, Lancashire, in 1609 into a well-to-do middle-class family and started out in life as a merchant-tailor in London. He went bankrupt in the early 1640s and moved to Surrey, working as a hired labourer.

This was a time of great upheaval; the King was beheaded in January 1649. During this period there were high hopes for radical social change. Winstanley began writing political pamphlets, in which he anticipates socialist principles.

It seemed that perhaps the world really could be turned upside down, property rights abolished, and a society established in which all people shared in the common wealth.

In April 1649 Winstanley turned theory into practice and led a group, who called themselves "Diggers," in a take-over of a few acres of common ground on St George's Hill in Surrey. They established a commune and renamed it George Hill, as the Diggers repudiated the saints of the established church. In fact Winstanley rationalises and democratises God ("I am made to change the name from God to reason"). He denied the existence of a god or the Devil, of Heaven or Hell, or life after death. The accusation of atheism did not worry him.

Another Digger community was set up in nearby Cobham Heath, and about fifty families joined the settlement. Representatives of Winstanley's commune made contact with other Digger communities and groups of sympathisers in the spring of 1650.

This rapid spread of the movement provoked a hostile reaction. Landowners became alarmed. Soldiers were sent. Landowners and their gangs attacked the commune, plundered it, and sued the offending peasants. The court, whose jury consisted exclusively of property-owners, forbade the Diggers to speak, and condemned them to pay a huge sum in court costs. As they were unable to pay, their property was seized.

After this the community moved to Cobham Heath. However, only a year after setting up their commune the Diggers' huts were burned down and their crops destroyed, the communists attacked and locked up. Other Digger communities were treated in a similar way. The movement was virtually suppressed by the end of 1650.

Winstanley continued to fight the Digger cause in writing, giving hope to other Digger communities. One title encapsulates his stand programmatically: *A Vindication of Those Whose Endeavors Is Only to Make the Earth a Common Treasury, Called Diggers.* The phrase referring to the earth as a "common treasury" appears repeatedly in Winstanley's writings. It captures the very heart of the matter: property.

In 1652 Winstanley published perhaps his most significant pamphlet, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*, in which he outlines, in the language of the people, his vision of a future society, without the private ownership of the means of production, without the exploitation of labour, without money and markets. In contrast to other *utopian* writings, Winstanley did not conceive of his project as a "nowhere," an imaginary, better future world (the Greek term utopia means "no place"): his vision is intended for the here and now, and created by peaceful means.

His programme included common ownership of the means of production, private ownership of house and home, marriage for love, and monogamy. It further stipulates equal educational opportunities for all, the equal duty and right to work up to the age of forty, and the abolition of wage labour, money, and commodity production. Other facets are a monopoly of foreign trade, the distribution of products according to need, and no professional rulers or priests.

After this publication Winstanley chose the exile of silence. Increasing conservatism under Oliver Cromwell and the Restoration period led to the re-establishment of the monarchy in 1660 and destroyed all hope of a fundamental, radical change of class society.

Gerrard Winstanley died in 1676. The property-owning middle classes had emerged as the victors of the bourgeois revolution. However, the demand for complete emancipation from the tyranny of property had been articulated and lived by Diggers: "There cannot be universal liberty, till a universal community is established."

EUapproves controversial trade deal

Eoghan M. Ó Néill

THE EU PARLIAMENT has passed the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada, and the elements of the controversial deal may now be provisionally implemented within the month.

CETA contains almost everything that the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Partnership Agreement (TTIP) threatened.CETA was negotiated not by the national parliaments of EU member-states but in secrecy by unaccountable EU bureaucrats. The role of national governments was to rubberstamp the final agreement—something that the Irish government has been more than happy to do.

CETA will have an impact on vast areas of our lives, including our environmental protections, our health and education services, and our public housing. It will limit the extent to which the Dáil may legislate. Yet the government has not informed the Irish people of the provisions of CETA, nor will it allow the people any say in its agreement or implementation, let alone an informed one.

The minister for jobs, Richard Bruton, has stated in the Dáil that it is the Oireachtas that will decide on CETA, not the Irish people. "Once it is completed, it will have to be ratified by the parties involved, including all twenty-eight EU member-states. In Ireland's case this will mean a decision of the houses of the Oireachtas."

Although CETA is an agreement between Canada and the EU, in fact more than 80 per cent of American transnational corporations will have access to European markets through CETA, by virtue of having an office in Canada. CETA was one half of a dual package, the other being TTIP, a proposed agreement between the EU and the United States. However, TTIP is in difficulties, and the election of Trump and his protectionist policies now puts this deal in doubt.

The difficulty for EU countries is that TTIP would allow them access to American markets. Without TTIP, EU countries will not have the same favourable conditions of access to American markets as those enjoyed by American corporations under CETA. This will enhance US hegemony over Europe.

CETA will bring in the feared quasi-legal corporate tribunals. Staffed by corporate lawyers, these tribunals will adjudicate on actions brought by North American transnationals against EU member-states if they believe that any law, regulation or action taken by a member-state threatens their profits, or potential profits. If found "guilty" the member-state could be fined billions of euros. The prospect of being hauled before these tribunals is enough to cause any EU member-state to be circumspect about any regulation it wishes to introduce, whether it is on health, the environment, or the work-place.

CETA is the mechanism by which global financial capital will open up European public services, including Ireland's. Global financial capital has targeted public services as new profit-generating markets. Housing, education and health will all be made available for capitalist penetration. In regard to housing, for example, CETA will have an impact in a number of ways. There will be a reduction in consumer rights and protection, and a reduction of standards in construction materials, in financial and mortgage services, and in environmental standards.

The resulting race to the bottom will be copperfastened by the commercial tribunals. Should a North American corporation buy land in a development area, and should the local authority decide to increase the proportion of social housing in the area, or reduce the density of commercial buildings, or decide to create green spaces—or do anything that the American corporation can argue would affect its profits or potential profits—the local authority could find itself hauled before the commercial tribunal.

This has serious implications for democracy. It could mean that urban development and planning could be constrained by fear of the impact it might have on the profits of a North American corporation. Power will be transferred from the local authority and its electorate to the corporation.

Furthermore, CETA will force the EU to impose standards acceptable to North American corporations on all member-states. This will do two things: it will strengthen the hegemony of the EU Commission and the EU Central Bank over member-states, and it will strengthen North American hegemony in Europe.

The Irish government has been an enthusiastic supporter of CETA, as have the Labour Party and Fianna Fáil. When the government had the opportunity to protect public services from the ravages of CETA, it refused to do so. It could have listed for exemption the public services that it wished to protect; it chose not to protect any.

This is in keeping with the state's running down of all public services as it prepares them for privatisation. Already we have witnessed the refusal of the present and previous governments to build an adequate supply of public housing. Instead they have been subsidising the private rental sector by transferring people from the housing waiting-lists to private-sector landlords.

Similar things are happening in health, where private health companies have been used—at public expense—to take up those on hospital waiting-lists.

The government argues that we have the highest expenditure on health in Europe, but that is only if you count what we pay to the private health industry. If this is taken out of the equation, our public health spending is among the lowest in Europe.

The ratification of CETA prises open our public services for those whose priority is profit, rather than need. The government will facilitate this. Its subservience to the EU (as witnessed in accepting the lion's share of EU speculators' debt) and its economic dependence on foreign transnational corporations for our economic base has left it unwilling and unable to resist the capitalist onslaught on our public services and standard of living that CETA will bring.

The battle for Spain thunders on

Harry Owens

PEADAR O'DONNELL recalled how the Spanish Anti-Fascist War looked to Irish eyes:

I went to Spain last July with a party who planned a holiday in a land with a likelihood of sun . . . I walked into a civil war in Achill just as I walked into one in Spain, and it was the same civil war . . . A picture of Achill is a picture of Spain," [the uproar of which] "rekindled the antagonisms of our own civil war . . . Fishermen in Achill held a steadier light to the events in Spain than the intellectuals in our universities, because they remembered that men like themselves beyond there were struggling strongly amid the uproar.[1]

Among the war's many dramatic events there is one episode that has remained vivid in the minds of those who look back on that hopeful struggle for democracy when "the Devil's Decade" (to quote the title of Claud Cockburn's book on the period[2]) turned ever darker. This was the three weeks in February 1937 when Franco tried to cut off beleaguered Madrid from supplies by controlling the road to Valencia.

The battle in the valley of the River Jarama became significant because of its length, the size of the forces engaged on both sides and the tenacity of the fighting and as the first battle where the hastily organised new army of the Republic, composed mainly of trade union and political parties' militias, held its ground in open country against the professional army of the rebel generals and their fascist allies.[3]

As at Madrid the previous November, the Republic's newly trained soldiers were helped here at crucial points by the growing battalions of volunteers from fifty-three countries in the International Brigades, being hastily organised by the Comintern in bases around La Mancha.

Up to this point the key to Franco's string of successes, which brought him from Morocco to the suburbs of Madrid, had been the veteran Army of Africa, composed of the Spanish Foreign Legion and the Moroccan Regulares. With their experience of the savage colonial wars of Spanish Morocco and their mobility in battle, and backed by German and Italian infantry, tanks, artillery, and planes, they had seemed invincible until their failure to take Madrid from the south-west before Christmas.

Franco now aimed to sweep south of the city, through Arganda and Chinchón, then swing north to Alcalá de Henares and link up with Mussolini's forces coming down from Sigüenza and together take Madrid from the rear. This would bring international recognition for the junta of generals, and isolate the Republican government in Valencia.

Winston Churchill had written in August 1936 that the "reverberations of the Spanish upheaval extend far beyond the boundaries of the Peninsula. Causes are at stake which in varying degrees disturb the people of every land."[4] But with a Franco victory, the lesson for democrats and left-wingers around the world would become simple: as was seen elsewhere in the Europe of the 1930s, there would be no hope of resisting the onward march of fascism.

The rebels' professional army and their German and Italian allies could resume the mobility that had been their key to victory by avoiding strongly defended urban areas. Madrid, that worldwide beacon of popular resistance, would be starved into submission, and the process of "cleansing Spain" would end democracy's attempts to reform its feudal social system. Spain would instead return to being—as Churchill had described it in September 1936—"the most backward country in Europe; her people miserably poor."[5]

The battle was decided at a couple of vital points, and these were the three days when the British Battalion, with its Irish volunteers, held the line at its southern end, and the later series of suicidal attacks with the American Lincoln battalion, including its Irish company, against the Pingarrón heights, which in effect ended the battle. The British battalion's 400 men who had held "Suicide Hill" had been reduced to 125 on their first day, while the 400 Lincolns sent into the cross-fire of machine-guns at Pingarrón lost 120 dead and 175 wounded by 27 February.[6] But the lines held then remained as the front lines till the war's end.

A historian sympathetic to Franco wrote that the British battalion had stopped Franco's best troops in a day's work that counts among the most impressive achievements of modern warfare, and their "conduct—especially on 12 February—represents the greatest single contribution to the victory of Jarama, and thus to the survival of Madrid."[7]

Churchill had commented when that war began that "the obvious interest of Britain and France is a liberal Spain restoring under a stable and tolerant

government freedom and prosperity to all its people. That we can scarcely hope will come in our time."[8] Yet when this did in fact come about it was under the Republican government of Juan Negrín, which published the thirteen points of its war aims, restoring the rights of private property and religion and severely moderating left-wing aspirations, with the support of the Communist Party of Spain, so as to align Republican Spain with the conservative French and British leaders in facing up to fascist dictators.

But those leaders chose to maintain their one-sided non-intervention system, which ensured a Franco victory, leaving France facing fascism on three fronts as the Second World War broke out. Writing forty years later, Claud Cockburn reckoned that "a triumph of the Left in Spain would have thrown such a scare into the British and French upper classes that they'd have seen Hitler as their sole salvation." He saw that the Spanish people were fighting in self-defence; they had experience of their ruling class in power. But their leaders had a fatal delusion: that the British and French democracies had to help them if it came to the worst.[9]

What we are observing throughout this period is the reluctance of the Western elite to consider Hitler a threat to their own class and therefore to what they saw as "their" countries. They would decide that they had to fight only when Hitler had been allowed to swallow almost all of central Europe, and yet demanded more. Then the Spanish Popular Front, which had combined Marxists, socialists and liberals to fight the authoritarian right, would be finally replicated in the alliance of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union against fascism.

But delaying that essential step came at the cost of the mass of graves littering Europe, from the Urals to the cities of Britain itself. While veterans of Spain's war led the resistance to Nazi occupation in Europe, and liberated entire French towns, even leading the liberation of Paris, they were normally denied front-line service in American and British forces as "premature anti-fascists," in an indication of the Cold War policies to come.

The effect of that struggle of the Spanish people, and the feelings of those who came to join them, remained firm throughout the decades after the Second World War, so that when I first began to read accounts of this in the 1960s the name of Madrid still rang out as a symbol of a people's fight for liberty with a clarity that surprised and held one's attention.

Surviving volunteers felt the strength of that war's impact. "Never again will men of every creed and tongue go to war with the ideals with which volunteers went to Spain," wrote John Basset. "It was indeed a time of hope, when a man with a rifle had some power to divert the tide of human affairs." T. A. R. Hyndman felt that life might leave unseen scars, on the mind, in the heart. "If this is true, my scar is Spain." While burying an anarchist he'd known in a Spanish hospital "I threw some wild flowers on to the coffin before the diggers covered it with earth. Alongside the driver we trotted back. 'A friend of yours?' he asked. 'Yes,' I said, 'a friend.' I could have added—of yours also."[10]

When the French veteran Paul Richard died he asked for only one flag by his coffin, that of the Spanish Republic. "Spain," he had said, "was the best thing I did in my life"[11]—the very words that the last Irish veteran, Bob Doyle, also chose when summing up his life of union and political struggles in his television programme "Rebel Without a Pause."

Lenin is often credited with the saying "If you want to know why something happened, ask: who *benefits*?" But there is another question, one that helps us understand why people decide to act in response to an event: *Who pays for it?* Those who went to Spain knew who would pay for the generals' rebellion against the Republic, which is why they went.

Far left
Memorial to fallen comrades
Centre left
International Brigaders at Jarama
Centre right
Bob Doyle mural
Right
International Brigade flag

1 Peadar O'Donnell, *Salud! An Irishman in Spain*, London: Methuen, 1937, p. 10, 12.
2 Claud Cockburn, *The Devil's Decade*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1973.
3 Enrique Líster, *Nuestra Guerra: Memorias de un Luchador,* Guadalajara: Silente Memoria Histórica, 2007, p. 156.
4 Winston Churchill, *Step by Step: Political Writings, 1936–1939*, London: Odhams, 1939 (reprinted 1949), p. 40.
5 Winston Churchill, *Step by Step: Political Writings, 1936–1939*, London: Odhams, 1939 (reprinted 1949), p. 52.
6 Tom Wintringham, *English Captain*, London: Penguin, 1939, p. 93, 124.
7 R. A. Stradling, *The Irish and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939: Crusades in Conflict*, Manchester: Mandolin, 1999, p. 166.
8 Winston Churchill, *Step by Step: Political Writings, 1936–1939*, London: Odhams, 1939 (reprinted 1949), p. 40.
9 Philip Toynbee (ed.), *Distant Drum: Reflections on the Spanish Civil War*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1976, p. 40, 47, 48.
10 Philip Toynbee (ed.), *Distant Drum: Reflections on the Spanish Civil War, London*: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1976, p. 129, 130, 136.
11 Rémi Skoutelsky, *L'Espoir Guidait Leurs Pas*, Paris: Grasset, 1998, p. 324.

▲ Cuban health professionals graduate

Cuba walks the talk

Tomás Mac Síomóin

THE ROLE of Cuba in curbing the spread of the Ebola virus in west Africa is internationally recognised—albeit grudgingly by the United States. The central role of Cuban and Cuban-trained medical personnel in helping victims of the 21st-century earthquakes in Haïti has been less publicised. The doctors attending the protesters fighting against the profanation by an oil company of their sacred lands at Standing Rock, North Dakota, are mainly Afro-American graduates of Cuba's famous Latin American Medical School, the Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina.

These are a few examples of Cuba's unmatched and continuing internationalist commitment in the area of community-based health care—where "community," as understood by socialist Cuba, transcends national boundaries.

Two big storms prompted the creation of ELAM in Havana in 1998. Hurricanes George and Mitch had torn through the Caribbean and Central America, leaving 30,000 people dead and 2½ million homeless. Cuban medical personnel who volunteered to help were horrified to find whole communities with no health service, rural hospitals shut for lack of staff, and high infant mortality rates. Where would the trained personnel needed to take over from the Cubans come from? Where would they train?

President Fidel Castro, always alert to the internationalist vocation of the Cuban Revolution, came up with the solution. Following his directions, the premises of a former naval academy in the Santa Fe district of Havana was turned over to the Ministry of Health. Tuition, room and board and small scholarships were offered to hundreds of students from countries hardest hit by the storms.

The first students were ninety-seven Nicaraguans, in March 1999. Soon governments throughout the Americas sought scholarships for their own students. Hundreds of scholarships were granted to young people in the United States, mainly Afro-American and indigenous people.

Today ELAM claims 23,000 graduates from eighty-three countries in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Enrolment has grown to encompass 123 countries. More than half the students are young women.

As prospective Third World students are not always academically prepared for six years of medical training through Spanish, an intensive pre-medical course introduces them to the physical and biological sciences, with Spanish an integral part of the curriculum.

ELAM is now the largest medical school in the world. It trains physicians for peoples most in need, including the billion who have never seen a doctor, who live and die in poverty. Students come from the world's most underdeveloped regions to become the excellent doctors their communities desperately need. They commit themselves to practising their expertise and carrying their medicine to their place of origin, where not many doctors go: poverty-stricken and often dangerous, drug-infested regions where armed gangs and gun-law rule.

These doctors are transforming access to health services and the way medicine itself is learnt and practised, and so they are pioneers in the battle for universal health coverage.

Thousands of community health projects prove the mettle of ELAM graduates. Honduran graduates organised for their communities their country's first indigenous hospital. Helped by an architect, residents built it themselves, from the ground up. Receiving its first patients in December 2007, it has had almost a million visits since then. The Honduran government lauds the hospital as a model of rural public health.

Why have so many countries asked for these ELAM scholarships? The world needs between 4 and 7 million health workers just to meet basic needs; and the problem is everywhere. Doctors tend to be concentrated in cities, where half the world's people live, not in shanty towns or rural areas, where the other half subsists. The "developed world" accentuates the problem. The United States, for example, is the main importer of doctors from developing countries; the health of populations abandoned by these medical professionals loses out.

Cuba's own excellent health record, the product of strong primary care, attracts students. *The Lancet*, the prestigious British medical journal, places Cuba among the best-performing middle-income countries in health. Save the Children says Cuba has the lowest infant mortality in the Americas (the United States included). The life expectancy of Cubans matches that of the United States, though Cuban health spending per person is one-twentieth of that of the latter.

I can attest, from personal experience, to the efficiency and quality of Cuban primary care.

The fact that all health and dental services in socialist Cuba are readily available and absolutely free should be of interest in a neo-liberal Ireland, a much richer country, where primary medical care is expensive, the cost of specialist care beyond the reach of most, and hospitals are all too often overcrowded and understaffed.

Socialist Cuba clearly teaches us some important lessons.

Letter from Trinidad de Cuba

Seán Joseph Clancy

MICHAEL D represented Ireland well during his recent four-day official visit to Cuba. He arrived on St Valentine's Day, having been to both Colombia and Peru. All three are countries close to our president's heart, and exchanges with his counterparts in the latter two will have been more meaningful and informed than they might have come to expect from European officials, who generally blindly toe the NATO and US line and swap ephemeral platitudes, unlikely to rattle a status quo that literally leaves children starving to death in two of the most unequal and corrupt rich countries on Earth.

How gloriously different things are in this proud, insular Caribbean bastion of revolutionary socialism!

Even though Michael D had twice previously met and talked briefly to President Raúl Castro—at Nelson Mandela's funeral and at an international conference—and the "diplomatic chemistry" between them had been described as good, the fact that their amicable meeting in Havana lasted for more than four hours was noted by many on both sides, and most certainly in other quarters also.

Gaillimh abú!

Protocol had dictated that the official invitation from Cuba had to be extended to the Irish government—as opposed to the head of state—which meant that the president and his staff were accompanied by officials from a Department of Foreign Affairs that had recently made abundantly clear its rejection of Michael D's reasonable and balanced views on Cuba.

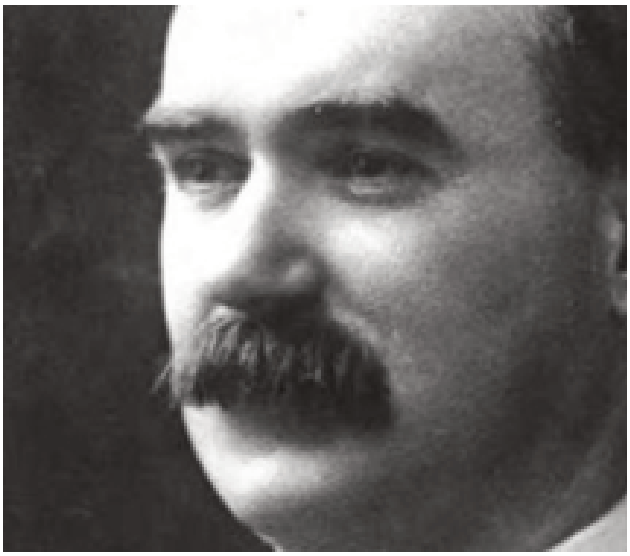
There were no obvious signs of tension between the two establishment camps, though there was at times a somewhat condescending attitude to the mannerisms and the intellectualism of the president on the part of Dublin civil servants and their Blueshirt-inclined political superiors.

The Irish ambassador and her staff, being based in Mexico, must have found elements of the traditional Cuban bureaucracy and apparent indifference quite terrifying by times in their endeavours to organise the visit; yet in fairness it must be said that they did a great job, and something essentially warm, hospitable and Irish permeated the official events and functions.

Michael D was well matched, and was accompanied to many of these, by Cuba's tall, bearded and pony-tailed minister of culture, the poet, intellectual and political heavyweight Abel Prieto, who seemed to particularly relish the concert of traditional Irish music and dancing in Havana's beautiful Teatro Martí. Two Cuban uilleann pipers, and the perfect rendition of a sean-nós lament in Irish by a young Cuban woman, added to a great session that ended with a standing ovation and a fitting encore.

It was nice to see the best of what we are, where we have come from and what we as a nation aspire to become eloquently transmitted and represented by our head of state and fine exponents of our literature, music, dances, language, and history.

In the face of the shameful and pitiful gombeen greed and ignorance passed off as representing who we are on the international stage by our crooked band of fraudsters and thieves, which must have poor Paddy Kavanagh still twisting restlessly in his tomb, this four-day respite in Havana served as a timely reminder that Irish men and women are of a robust, true and noble stock, very much needed in these days of the global epidemic of post-Trumpwin stress disorder (about which more from Cuba anon).



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An imagined history

Dan Taraghan

LAST YEAR *Socialist Voice* published a brief outline of a lecture by Dr Helga Woggon on Winnie Carney, aide-de-camp to James Connolly during the 1916 Rising. In January 1917 Allison Murphy, a former Belfast teacher, produced a book, *Winnie and George: An Unlikely Union*. The blurb on the back of the book states: "It is a powerful lesson in how love, once discovered, can be greater than the sum of all our divisions."

Winnie Carney was a soldier in the Irish Citizen Army, a republican, and a socialist. Her husband, George McBride, was a unionist and also a socialist. Winnie was a Roman Catholic and George a member of the Church of Ireland.

One objective of this book seems to be to show that two people from different backgrounds can overcome sectarianism, accept their differences, and live happily together. However, there is nothing unique to Northern Ireland about this. Throughout the world people of different backgrounds and faiths enter into loving relationships, despite family and social objections. In fact it has happened throughout history.

The other objective of the book was to fulfil the wish of the author's mother-in-law that the story of George and Winnie be told in a readable manner.

On a first view the book seems like a conventional history book, with index, appendixes, bibliography, and references. However, on pages 12 and 13 the author makes it clear that, although the major events happened and the people referred to in the book were real, "it has been necessary to create some scenes and dialogue." Dialogue that is not referenced was "imagined." It soon becomes obvious that a substantial amount of the book, if not most of it, has been imagined.

In the real world, Winnie Carney was ten years older than George McBride. They first met when both were adults and members of the Labour Party. She was thirty-seven and he was in his twenties. Winnie died at the age of 55, after fifteen years of marriage. George was a widower at the age of 45, and did not remarry. He died at the age of 90.

The meeting of Winnie and George is in chapter 21, which begins on page 233 (out of a 28-chapter book of 290 pages before appendixes). The author cleverly overcomes this detail by using her imagination. In chapter 2, as the *Titanic* is being launched, James Connolly turns up, accompanied by Winnie. He delivers a speech to the workers watching the launch. The teenage George sees Winnie, and the implication is that he was smitten at least twelve years before actually meeting her. There is no evidence for this, but it links the two.

This romantic link is then reinforced by nearly every chapter on Winnie, being followed by a chapter on George, until we finally arrive at their actual meeting in chapter 21. In other words, an impression is given that they had a connection from 1912, which is pure fiction.

As well as this, the text is riddled with scenes where Winnie's or George's feelings and reactions are described, despite the fact that the author never seems to have met either of them and does not give any basis for her imaginings.

The other story behind the main story is that Allison Murphy is married to the son of Rita Murphy. Rita was a nurse in the nursing home where George lived for the final years of his life. The nursing home was for former Ulster Volunteers, and the accommodation seems to have been of barrack-room standard. Rita had been born and reared as a Roman Catholic but eloped as a young woman to marry a soldier just back from Burma. She was disowned by her father. She had her daughter baptised in the Church of Ireland, and presumably her son also, and attended the Church of Ireland herself. It is therefore highly probable that she would have had a bond with George in his later years. The author does not seem to have formally interviewed her mother-in-law for the book, and Rita is now deceased.

The book does not add anything new to the Winnie Carney story. The factual parts are based on other people's research or on records that are available to the public. Winnie Carney continued her political activity after the Rising, including aiding Republican prisoners and their families and participating in the Labour Party, the Republican Congress, and the Socialist Party. She was regarded as a threat by the British state and was subject to harassment. The fact that she met a companion from a unionist background and lived happily with him for fifteen years was incidental to most of her life. Both herself and George may have had more in common than separated them. To try to portray her life as a romantic love story trivialises her in many ways.

Allison Murphy, *Winnie and George: An Unlikely Union*, Dublin: Mercier Press, 2017.