Socialist Voice

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Communist Party of Ireland
Páirtí Cumannach na hÉireann
Partisan Patriotic Internationalist
Number 152 October 2017 €1.50
www.communistpartyofireland.ie

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Brexit who decides?

As the Brexit discussions between Britain and the European Union continue, the true nature of the EU becomes clearer by the day. The EU has been weakened, and its class character revealed. The subservient nature of the Irish establishment, and how little influence they have at the European level, is also being exposed and brought into the public glare, despite the efforts of the media to conceal this. **Jimmy Doran** reports *Page 2*

EIGHTH AMENDEMENT

AMY MORAN

SINCE THE introduction of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution in 1983, pregnant people have been denied reproductive autonomy in Ireland. Despite sustained pressure on the state to abandon this edifice of inequality, successive governments have resisted change. *Amy Moran reports*

Now the majority of people in Ireland, North and South, favour the abandonment of the Eighth Amendment and the provision of free, safe and legal abortion access for all those residing in Ireland, north and south.

Because of the groundswell of pro-choice activism over the past few years, the state has been forced to concede, and Leo Varadkar has announced that there will be a referendum on the question of the Eighth Amendment some time in 2018. This is a victory for pro-choice activists, demonstrative of our collaborative strength and ability to drive change.

However, now is not the time for complacency. In order to get the best deal for all pregnant people, we must press for equal access to abortion, regardless of circumstances. The state must make provision for an abortion service that is accessible to all. Anything less than free, safe and legal abortion would only continue discrimination against the most oppressed members of Irish society.

Historically, the state has demonstrated a clear resolve to maintain economic barriers to abortion access. Although travelling to access is an option, travel is only available to those who have the means to do so.

Over the past decade, the number of people in Ireland in low-paid and insecure jobs has escalated. The rise of precarious labour and unemployment has made instability a perpetual presence in the lives of an increasing number of people in Ireland. For many people in low-paid jobs, the cost of travelling abroad to access abortion is simply too much to afford. Doubly, for those unemployed the prospect of accessing abortion abroad is too heavy an economic burden.

Many in these circumstances who want to access termination take safe, but criminalised, pills. However, the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act means that those who take these pills are at risk of a fourteen-year prison sentence. Here, the state has demonstrated its clear resolve to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our society are unable to exercise reproductive choice. Those who can go abroad, can. Those who can't are forced to run the very real risk of a prison sentence.

Now that the majority of people agree that the Eighth Amendment should be repealed, there are many competing visions of what a potential future abortion service in Ireland should look like. We want to ensure that working-class, unemployed and migrant pregnant people can access the best deal. In order to fully break with the current inequality of abortion access in Ireland, which is engendered by the callous nature of free-market capitalism, we need to abolish the Eighth Amendment.

In addition to this, we must ensure that what follows is the provision of a service that is equalised. First and foremost, abortion access must be free and equally accessible to all, regardless of their personal situation.

Abortion is a personal choice. We believe in the ability of individuals to make their own reproductive choices. Only following the repeal of the Eighth Amendment and the provision of free abortion access can all people in Ireland exercise their autonomy and make those choices for themselves.

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Wherever the economic and political borders end up after Brexit, it will be the ruling class of Britain and Germany that decide, and it will be in their own class interests. Dublin will have little say, and the Assembly in Belfast even less. British big-business interests will be king; and, despite what Arlene Foster might think, the big-house unionists in Cos. Fermanagh and Tyrone will have little influence either. They were and are good for maintaining the Union but are irrelevant when talking about British capitalist class interests.

The EU is designed for the benefit of big business and for its interests alone, to the detriment of the working class. It was set up to build a capitalist United States of Europe, to rebuild the European industrial monopolies after the Second World War, and to transfer power from national parliaments to a supranational European entity, so restricting the ability of states to make laws and direct policy decisions in their own interests.

The EU was deliberately designed to strengthen the European monopolies, the ruling class of the member-states, and to marginalise the citizens. This has been achieved over the years through the plethora of treaties and, more recently, trade agreements, such as CETA and TTIP, that have been imposed on our people.

These agreements are constructed to restrict and reduce the ability of working people to effect change in the economic and social policies imposed on them and to further erode democracy and accountability at the national level. Along with the institutions of the EU, they are major weapons in the class war.

At the end of the war there was a kind of truce between capital and labour. Capital needed the working class for rebuilding its industrial base; it also needed to defend and protect European capitalist interests from the challenge posed by the rise of socialism as it efficiently and quickly rebuilt itself after the war. Socialism was now seen as a real and viable alternative. This had to be stopped, at all costs, to keep the elite of Europe in their position of power and privilege. Their imperial project of globalisation, neo-liberalism and a race to the bottom in workers' rights was all the time being designed and planned in the background.

Since the defeat and overthrow of socialism in Europe, coupled with the completion of the rebuilding of the infrastructure and industrial base, capital no longer feels the need to accommodate workers. This has led to workers' rights being savagely attacked all around Europe and austerity being imposed on our people to pay the debts of finance capital.

We need only look at the decisions made in the EU Court of Justice, in the Luxembourg, Laval and Vaxholm judgements, coupled with all the anti-union laws that have been introduced. These have had a serious effect on workers' rights. The judgements have given priority to the market over workers' rights, and the anti-union laws have most certainly tipped the balance of power from labour to capital.

Now the people of Britain have voted to leave the EU—despite the best efforts of big business, the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and others to get the people to vote to remain. We here in Ireland need to show solidarity with the British working class and all those who continue to push for a full exit from the EU and to campaign for a left-alternative exit. If this happens it may be the spark that lights the flame for an Irish exit.

We need to rid ourselves of the dominance of our imperial masters in Britain and Europe and to build the unity of our people and country. Only then will we be on the road to economic independence, which will allow us to achieve the socialist republic that James Connolly fought and died for and finally have freedom and independence for all our people, Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter.

Thoughts on the privatisation of Dublin bus routes

Kieran Larkin

On the 10th of August the National Transport Authority announced that Dublin Bus had lost a tenth of its bus routes to a private operator. Go-Ahead, a British company, has secured the tender to take over twenty-four bus routes.

The routes in question are suburban orbital, running north and south of the city, none of them running into the city centre.

During the announcement the chief executive of the NTA, Anne Graham, made an extraordinary statement. The deal did "not represent a privatisation of the service. Nothing was being sold and the services are being deregulated."

This statement beggars belief. Do they think the public are idiots? When a tenth of the routes are being transferred from a publicly owned company to a privately owned one, clearly a certain level of privatisation is taking place.

All parties were keen to stress that 90 per cent of the routes remained in public ownership, that no further privatisation was planned for the future, that this was not a race to the bottom. These statements are complete and utter falsehoods.

Be under no illusion: this is the start of what will be a sustained government plan to privatise all areas of public transport—another naked manifestation of the neo-liberal polices that successive governments have sought to implement.

They will attempt, no doubt, to implement the salami-slicer method that other countries have so successfully employed. The method is as simple as it is devilishly effective. More and more of the profitable routes are sold off to private operators, while the public transport company is left with the less profitable routes. The government meanwhile continues to reduce the subvention paid to the public company (already one of the lowest in Europe), until it can no longer afford to run the routes effectively, and hey presto! the remaining routes are tendered to private companies. And public transport is no longer publicly owned.

In the coming months and years we can expect a continued and assiduous attack on public transport. The government and vested interests will parrot the usual neo-liberal claptrap about greater efficiency, more frequent routes, cheaper fares, and so on—all of which is the most complete and total lies.

The truth about privatising public transport is that services get worse. These are private companies; the primary motive is profit. This leads them to cut corners and to siphon profits away instead of reinvesting them.

The truth is that privatisation creates a divided and disconnected society. Typically, fares increase after privatisation. Private operators will cherry-pick the most profitable routes. This means that it's the most vulnerable and marginalised who bear the brunt of these changes. They often find that either they can't afford to use public transport or, even if they can, that the route has been closed down, as it is not profitable enough.

The horizons of the world diminish, and opportunity, already in the distance, retreats a little further.

The truth is that private operators cannot be held accountable by the public. There is little transparency, public accountability, or scrutiny. Contracts are agreed by the companies and the government behind closed doors. If the company continually fails to provide a service, the public have no recourse. They are virtually powerless to effect change.

The truth is that it doesn't have to be this way. Not only can the privatisation of public transport be stopped, it can be rolled back.

The success of the Right to Water campaign has shown what can be done. By employing a similar strategy of mass demonstrations, public disobedience and positive pressure on elected representatives we can demand and obtain a referendum that would guarantee that all public services, not only transport, remain in public ownership and can never be changed without the consent of the people.

The stakes are high. We must take action now, or future generations will be left counting the cost of our failure.

Dump the bin charges!

EVER SINCE the privatisation of bin collection, the collectors have been looking at ways to increase their profits. This is what privatisation is about: nothing to do with recycling, efficiency, or the environment; all about maximising profits. It's called capitalism.

The best way to reduce waste is to produce less waste. Tons of unnecessary packaging are produced each year, for one purpose: to make the product more attractive, so the producers can sell more to make more profit.

What if all this excessive packaging damages the environment? They can tell us we need to recycle; and to encourage our irresponsible citizens to do this, bin charges are necessary.

Our citizens want to reuse, recycle and protect our environment for future generations but are stopped by the interests of big business. There was not enough profit in glass bottles—they lasted too long—so the plastic bottle was introduced; and they want us to pay to take it away!

Big business will stop at nothing to increase profits. Waste collectors in Co. Donegal and elsewhere have been found guilty of illegal dumping on a number of occasions.

Workers' health and safety is practically non-existent, as they run after the bin lorries on busy city streets to meet their targets. And all for poverty wages.

Waste collection must be remunicipalised to remove the profit element from something as important as the environment. The polluters—the ones who produce unnecessary waste—must pay. The cost of bin collections is part of the social contract between citizen and state and should be paid for through progressive taxation.

The right to a referendum

Jimmy Doran

FINE GAEL has reneged on holding a referendum on the ownership and management of our water. This has been done with the collusion of Fianna Fáil and some of the independents—despite their pontifications on how water charges were a "red line" in the deal that was done with Fine Gael after the last election.

Once the question of water charges was taken up in the Dáil they did what they always do: they set up a committee to discuss and debate the question so that it would be lost in the swamp of our so-called democracy. Until they got in they would sign or agree to anything; in this case they promised a referendum, but the chances of it being held are slim to never.

The aim always was to muddy the waters, to take the issue out of the headlines and kick it down the road. This demonstrates the lack of democracy in our political system; it also shows the contempt that these parties have for the people's views.

It puts beyond doubt that there are no fundamental differences between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and that when needed they will always be, as they have always been, propped up and kept in office by the Labour Party, the Green Party, and independents. All these politicians ever do is act in their own interests and in the interests of their controllers in big business and the Golden Circle.

No to a united Ireland under

Eoghan O'Neill

CAN A strategy for a united Ireland within the EU be a realistic goal while maintaining the three core tenets of socialism and republicanism, namely independence, sovereignty, and democracy?

Not for the first time in *Socialist Voice* is it argued that, far from being the saviour and moderniser of the Republic, the EU has stripped away our independence, our sovereignty and our democracy, through the adoption of the euro, the EU-directed and government-imposed austerity, and the neo-liberal privatisation agenda of the undemocratic, unelected EU Commission.

We must be alert to this reality and be cautious of those proposing a united Ireland within the EU.

What needs to be struggled for, what all republicans, socialists and communists have fought for down through the centuries, from Tone to Connolly, was an *independent* united Ireland. We must not be led down a path that seeks only to unite Ireland but maintains its dependence and servitude within an imperialist construct.

From the Treaty of Rome to the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU journey has been a course of eroding people's democratic, independent and sovereign rights and depositing power and wealth with finance houses, big business, unelected bureaucrats, and industrial lobbyists.

The notion that Ireland can be united and independent while remaining in the EU is false!

The adoption of the euro in place of our own currency attacked our independence; we are dependent and at the mercy of the EU Central Bank. We only need to look at the causes of Ireland's financial crisis and at the source that gave rise to the property boom and bust. Ireland's adoption of the euro and the opening up of cheap money for Irish banks profoundly altered the scale and magnitude of the bust and the bail-out. Real interest rates halved overnight, while exchange rate risk was removed.

The European banking system, united under the power and controlling influence of the large EU states, Germany and France, facilitated the initial influx of credit into peripheral countries, such as Ireland. This suited the bloated German economy; however, it unleashed a lending and debt spree in Ireland, which today is still felt with the bitter reality in our housing crisis and homelessness epidemic and the debt burden—some 42 per cent of all of Europe's debt. While we remain with the euro we will be passive victims of the diktats of the core EU member-states, leaving ourselves at risk from another boom-and-bust cycle.

Our island economy is unique. We have unique and rich resources, which we have never been able to fully develop and expand because of imperialist domination. Monetary policy and the ability of a nation to set interest rates and to print money to suit its particular economic needs is fundamentally linked to independence.

The ideology and adoption of the euro is a general strategy of European imperialism's attempt to shift power and wealth away from labour and towards capital, and from peripheral to core European states. It has done this by ratifying treaty after treaty to shift the ability of states to control and direct the levers of monetary control.

We must not, therefore, seek to unite our country under the euro but set about breaking with the euro to form an independent all-Ireland currency.

The idea that Ireland can be labelled "sovereign" under EU-directed austerity is farcical. EU-led austerity has stripped us of any semblance of being a sovereign nation while our country's budgets are determined in Brussels. The euro inflamed Ireland's debt crisis, and the the aftermath is the government's inability to have sovereign control over its policy choices, meaning that from now on, burdened by debt, Ireland in the EU will never be sovereign, and a repudiation of the debt would never be tolerated.

The EU, from its inception, was never for the sovereignty of nations and their freedom to live peacefully in a post-war world: it was for

The Peadar O'Donnell Forum in Belfast

THE PEADAR O'DONNELL Socialist Republican Forum has held another successful weekend political school, this time in Belfast, from the 22nd to the 24th of September.

The weekend opened with a public meeting on "Brexit and the Irish working class." Brexit has split much of the left and sections of the republican movement.

The speakers were Gerry Carroll, elected MLA for West Belfast, Patricia McKenna, former Green Party MEP, and Jimmy Doran, Dublin District chairperson, CPI.

Gerry Carroll outlined why the People Before Profit alliance supported the Leave campaign and why people, and in particular workers, need to mobilise to push forward their demands as negotiations get under way.

Patricia McKenna, who was elected to the EU Parliament for two terms, drew upon her knowledge and experience of the EU and its institutions. She stated that it was simply not possible to reform the EU, to "challenge it from within." Policies and goals are determined by the treaties already adopted, and it would need the consent of the other member-states to change anything. What has been created is in fact a blocking minority.

Jimmy Doran drew attention to the class nature of the EU, to the role of powerful employers' institutions, to the imperialist nature of the EU itself and the fact that it is part of the global apparatus of capitalist domination of countries and people. He also stressed the importance of an Irish withdrawal and of opposition to any hard border imposed on the Irish people by the EU and the British government.

Saturday opened with a talk on imperialism, its nature and how it developed, given by a member of the CPI. It was pointed out that imperialism is not just old-fashioned colonialism but is a qualitatively new development, a consequence of the concentration and monopolisation developed for capitalism itself as an economic system. This session, like the others, was followed by workshops, with participants breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the topic in more depth.

The second session was on workers' rights in the European Union. Mel Corry spoke, and the session was chaired by Ernest Walker. Mel outlined the role of the EU regarding the attacks on workers' rights, and pointed out that many of the rights secured by workers were won at the national level after a long struggle and bitter industrial disputes. Nothing has ever been given to workers, only what they fought for themselves.

r imperialism

pooling the resources of the remnants of continental Europe's destroyed economies; it was for creating a buffer and an ideological challenge to the expanding socialist current and the communist spectre sweeping Europe and elsewhere around the globe.

Fundamentally, the EU is for accumulating the wealth, power and influence of capital and its benefactors—the owners of capital and their lackeys—just as the British empire essentially did in the centuries before it.

Being a member of the EU and the euro zone does not allow for a country to remain sovereign. The rules and laws that govern member-states cannot be overruled by a democratically elected government seeking alternatives to austerity. This was clearly shown with SYRIZA in Greece and in that party's capitulation to the EU's demand for austerity.

The framework and ideology of the EU is the rule of capital over labour—the working people. This was demonstrated in the bank bail-out and the resulting accumulation of what is now sovereign debt. The irony is that the only thing that remains sovereign is our national debt, of which we still owe more than €200 billion.

Our budgets are scrutinised in Brussels before they go to a vote in Dáil Éireann. We have to ask, Is this sovereignty?

If we wanted to build a national health service, free at the point of admission, it would not be allowed, as it contradicts EU neo-liberal economic policy. We ask again, Is this sovereignty?

If we wanted to reverse the ever-encroaching privatisation of public assets and services we would be stopped, as TTIP and CETA demonstrate that control and ownership of our assets is the main agenda of capital in the Western world. We ask, Is this sovereignty?

The EU offers no sanctuary, no respite from imperial domination—on the contrary, it further brings us into the fold of imperialism's tottering system. We cannot be a sovereign country under any imperialist apparatus, be it British, European, or American. We must not attempt to pull the wool over our people's eyes, claiming that uniting Ireland under the EU would bring us our sovereignty among the nations of the earth.

The idea that Ireland can be labelled democratic when the majority of our laws are drafted by the EU Commission is fantasy. The Commission—the unelected economic and political policy-makers of Europe—have removed democratic accountability and decision-making, whereby we have been bound into a policy straitjacket.

The very meaning of the word democracy—rule or power of the people—cannot be ascribed to a country whose rules are made by foreign bodies, which are unelected and which represent, in the main, the interests of big business. It is not uncommon for the Commission to adopt policy papers drafted by these large corporate bodies, whose lobbyists have unique and privileged access to members of the Commission.

Who can the citizens of a country hold to account when policy is directed from outside the state? What happens when a government is removed from office only to be replaced by another party that cannot implement a radical shift in policy choice? You simply get more of the same: more debt, more austerity, more pain and suffering for ordinary working people.

Our centuries-long domination by foreign powers has forged a particular style of gombeen political class, who will say and do anything to appease their imperial masters; and unless there is real opposition to imperialism, the gombeen culture in our politics will remain, and the next batch of career politicians will take office and it will be business as usual, boys.

A united Ireland under the dictatorship of the EU Commission would not be the united Ireland that Tone, Connolly and all the fallen heroes of Éirinn fought for. A united Ireland without democratic control and accountability is not a republic that we should strive for. In the context of Brexit, to campaign for a united Ireland under the pretext of the Six Counties rejoining the EU shows the lack of ideological opposition to imperialism.

Without a united Ireland, a socialist republic can never be attained, and so we must remain steadfast in our resolve to end partition. It will be the hard task of all anti-imperialists to debate, discuss and bring forward a vision that can strive for both unity and independence for all the people of Ireland—Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter.

If we wish to campaign for a united Ireland, then let us campaign for a break with all imperialist unions, and let's not fool ourselves, and others, that we could ever become a united, sovereign, independent and democratic republic within the European Union.

It would be wise to remember Connolly's famous statement that without setting about building the socialist republic all our efforts would be in vain. However, our new master would not be Britain but the EU; the EU would still rule us, in fact we would recede further into the past, if a united Ireland within the EU is all that we strive for.

The scope broadened out to discuss the role of trade unions, particularly in the north of Ireland, and how socialists and republicans need to be involved in them. Some of those at the Forum offered the view that trade unions needed to allow space for people to express views regarding national unity; it was felt that not allowing political opinions to be expressed closed trade unions off from a large section of the population. It also gives the impression that the constitutional status quo was a fixed position for trade unions.

On Saturday afternoon there was a presentation on "Poverty, austerity and class struggle" by Dessie Donnelly (PPI), chaired by Lynda Walker. The speaker outlined the strategy of his organisations for building people-led campaigns against attacks on welfare, such as housing benefits. They took a more direct-action approach, exposing the anti-people ideology and the hostility of the state towards working people.

The final session of the day was a presentation on "Where does class and state power rest in the north of Ireland in the aftermath of the Belfast Agreement?" The speaker was Tommy McKearney, a member of the Steering Committee of the Forum. He outlined the class nature of power in our society. Despite many changes—for the most part cosmetic—there is a growing sectarian element in politics, some of it arising directly from the institutional structures brought about by the Belfast Agreement. Real power, and in particular state power, remains firmly in the hands of the British ruling class.

The final event of the weekend was a public meeting on the Sunday morning dealing with Venezuela. The theme was "Defending Venezuela." There was a presentation by Marcos José García Figueredo, first secretary of the Venezuelan embassy in London, and the meeting was chaired by Seán Edwards, who had just returned from Caracas, having attended an international conference of solidarity with the people of Venezuela.

The Venezuelan speaker outlined the present difficult situation in the country and especially the destabilising role that the United States is playing, in alliance with the right-wing opposition. He stressed the importance of the National Constituent Assembly and how the elections had galvanised millions of working people.

This event was organised to show that anti-imperialism does not stop at one's own border, and how essential anti-imperialism is for working people and all those struggling to build a new society and oppose exploitation.

This Forum weekend showed the importance of these gatherings, bringing diverse forces together to share experiences. While there is still a certain reluctance to engage among some republicans and left elements, nevertheless what has been achieved so far has proved very useful. The Forum continues to provide a space for republicans and socialists to come together for discussion and debate.

The next crisis – when, not if

Tommy McKearney

WE CANNOT ignore the recent election result in Germany. What happens in the most powerful and influential state in Europe west of Russia must interest us all, as inevitably it will have an impact in Ireland and elsewhere.

Moreover, while the electoral success of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) has to be a cause for concern, it is important to delve deeper into the outcome and in particular to ask why left-wing parties failed to do better.

It is always risky to speculate too much about voters' intentions, but it appears likely that a greater proportion of AFD's new votes came not through defectors from Merkel's Christian Democratic Union but from people who had previously voted for the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Of great significance in all this is the damaging role played by social democracy in undermining credibility in a genuine left alternative and therefore, in effect, creating space for fascism.

Such has been the presence and profiling of Angela Merkel that many people outside Germany are unaware that her deputy, before this election, was Sigmar Gabriel of the SPD, and that Merkel headed a grand coalition that included the German Social Democrats.

The SPD, now under the leadership of the hapless Martin Schulz, strongly supports NATO, advocates strengthening the euro zone, demands the implementation of trade deals such as CETA and TTIP, and is happy to endorse increased state surveillance. Not surprisingly, in the days before the latest election Berlin's *Guardian*-like newspaper, *Die Taz*, stated that the rise in support for AFD was due not so much to the fact that it was offering an alternative as that the SPD was providing working people with no alternative at all.

There was, of course, the more radical Left Party, Die Linke, which managed to get less than 10 per cent of the vote. In itself that is worrying, although not impossible to explain. Parliamentary politics give a distinct advantage to incumbents from well-established parties, and Die Linke was formed a mere ten years ago.

There is also the influence, whether directly or indirectly, of powerful and well-resourced free-market agencies designed to influence and manage public opinion. This is often a subtle process aimed at defining and regulating the left-leaning opposition as much as promoting their choice for government. We are familiar in Ireland, for example, with the process of promoting the so-called acceptable face of social democracy, as represented by the Labour Party, over the disparaged if not actually demonised street-level political activists.

Nevertheless, weaknesses of the left cannot be attributed entirely to right-wing machinations. Nor indeed can their failings be easily rectified by rewriting a programme or churning out more strident left-wing rhetoric. It is equally dangerous to fall into the position now apparently being adopted by Angela Merkel of "listening to the concerns of those who voted for the far right." Undoubtedly migration was an issue in this election, but on the other hand there have been several waves of migration to Germany over recent decades without causing the far right to surge in such numbers.

The point about the German election is not that the working class did not have a choice of opting for a left-of-centre programme. Die Linke at least provided an option, but the ruling class has still been able to hold a majority within the electorate. To an extent this is due to the fact that 20 per cent of working people in Germany continue to vote for the social democrats. Whether they do so through tradition or in the vain hope that they might improve is impossible to ascertain, but what their vote certainly does is undermine the possibility of forging a powerful workers' movement.

There are echoes of this phenomenon throughout Europe and in the United States. At the moment, capitalism is neither in full-blown crisis nor, on the other hand, sufficiently vibrant to provide the type of productivity gains that allow it to maintain, much less improve, conditions for the entire population. The working out of this is often a fractured working class with significant disparities in income and prospects between various sections.

Politically, this has allowed conservative parties, under various labels, to maintain control over the administrative apparatus of government in many states. Typically their message is the same: things may be tough, they say, but the situation is gradually improving, and don't rock the boat or conditions will get much worse.

For many people who have seen how rapidly economies throughout Europe and the United States went into turmoil after 2008 there is understandably a reluctance to ignore the seductively crafted propaganda from the right-wing media and risk their precarious position. This is especially so for those who have modestly paying work and dread the thought of being without a job. It is, after all, almost two centuries since Frederick Engels identified the role played by the fear of unemployment in containing working-class radicalism.[1]

However, this situation of relative stability cannot continue indefinitely. Marxists have long identified the cyclical nature of crisis within capitalism. Now, however, they are joined by others. According to leading free-market economists, globalisation has not only made other economic crises inevitable but it is accelerating their regularity. Quoting (appropriately enough) from a report by Jim Reid of Deutsche Bank, John Authers of the *Financial Times* reported that the next crisis is coming and there is little that the capitalist

world can do to prevent it.[2]

According to the bank's experts, there are so many possible triggers for an economic crisis within capitalism that one of them is bound to cause a calamity. In their opinion, the only question now is when, not if, this happens.

Depending on the nature and severity of the anticipated downturn, there is every possibility that Germany will not escape the economic fall-out, as it did after 2008. This is not an issue of only academic interest to Ireland. With ever-increasing pressure from capital's ruling elite for still greater EU integration, what happens in Germany has consequences for the rest of Europe.

There are few easy answers to this conundrum. We are aware of the response from the now emboldened far right and its cousins in the conservative parties. What, though, will the vacillating SPD do in such a situation? One thing we do know is that no answers are to be found in tinkering with capitalism through the politics of social democracy. The only sure method of ending capitalist crises and the dangerous reactionary elements it brings in its wake is to end capitalism definitively and replace it with a humane socialist society.

1 Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845).
2 John Authers, "The next crisis is coming and investors need to prepare," *Financial Times*, 23 September 2017.

COMMUNISTS

Avante!

Laura Duggan

THE AVANTE Festival of the Portuguese Communist Party goes from strength to strength. Held every year in the first weekend of September, it is named for the party's newspaper, *Avante! (Forward!)*.

The festival has been running for forty-one years, mostly consecutive, except for 1987, when as a result of anti-communist sentiment they could not secure festival grounds. To avoid this happening again, the PCP organised a mass fund-raising event and successfully bought grounds. The festival grounds have been expanded on since, most recently in 2016 for the fortieth Festival.

Unlike similar festivals, Avante is not sponsored and has not needed to compromise on its message. Ticket prices are kept low, so it remains accessible, and all work during the setting up, running and dismantling of the festival is carried out by members and friends of the party. It is a huge undertaking, but each year they have more volunteers and a larger event as a result.

The festival's purpose is highlighted by the typical Portuguese Communist Youth (JCP) chants that echoed around the debate square during the opening address: "This is how we show our strength!" But it's not just an opportunity for the PCP to show its strength to an audience of international guests: it's also an opportunity to reaffirm links and show solidarity.

Over the course of three days, dozens of acts perform on several stages—imagine Electric Picnic if it had been taken over by communists—each stage and surrounding areas acting like self-contained festivals in their own right. There is also a traditional stage where those attending can take part in group dances, and newcomers are patiently taught a few steps; a sports area, where you can compete in and learn street games; a book festival, where all the works printed by the PCP and friendly publishers are available.

Each of the regions of Portugal have their own stages and areas as well as immigrant, emigrant, international, youth, women's and children's areas, meaning a person can tour the cuisine, music and dialects of all of Portugal without ever leaving the grounds. The aim is to celebrate the differences but focus on the commonalities that unite them.

The organisation of each area, while led by the Festival planning committee, is actively managed by party members from that area. For example, the Youth City stage performers are selected from all over Portugal through a Battle of the Bands competition held in each region and organised by the JCP in that area, through schools and community youth groups.

Avante is overtly political: debates are billed as highly as the musical acts, and just as well attended.

Each debating floor is dedicated to the issues of the day: Brexit in the international area, student fees in the Youth City, and Relevance of the October Revolution in the main debating square. There were also exhibitions on music, with tours and talks by musicians, a public art gallery and stands and stalls around the October Revolution exhibition, on the history of the PCP, including a clandestine printing press.

The PCP is not secretive about its history or the reasons they hold a festival. They want to celebrate their ascent from an underground organisation during the dictatorship to that of a party capable of holding their own in council elections.

The festival grounds were littered with murals dedicated to the party and all the iterations it has gone through.

The festival and the PCP continue to go from strength to strength, and the name of the festival says it all: Avante!

A legacy of struggle for humanity

Jenny Farrell

KÄTHE KOLLWITZ, whose work is on exhibition for the first time in the National Gallery of Ireland, was one of Germany's greatest artists and sculptors. She stands tall among anti-war artists and champions of the dispossessed of our time.

Kollwitz broke completely with bourgeois aesthetics and made the subjugated, humiliated working class her sole artistic subject. In her work she expresses eloquently the force, the resistance and the humanity of this class. Very often she focuses on individuals, or small groups, who exemplify the fate of thousands, balancing their misery with dignity and human kindness.

This year is the 150th anniversary of the birth of Käthe Schmidt in Kaliningrad, daughter of a bricklayer who recognised his daughter's artistic talent early on. Barred, as a woman, from studying art in her home town, she moved to Berlin and Munich to pursue her education. There she met radical artists of her time and married the socialist Karl Kollwitz, a medical doctor who lived among and treated the poor of Berlin. Together they lived in the then impoverished working-class (and now gentrified) Prenzlauer Berg district for most of their lives. Here she gave birth to two sons and created her substantial œuvre.

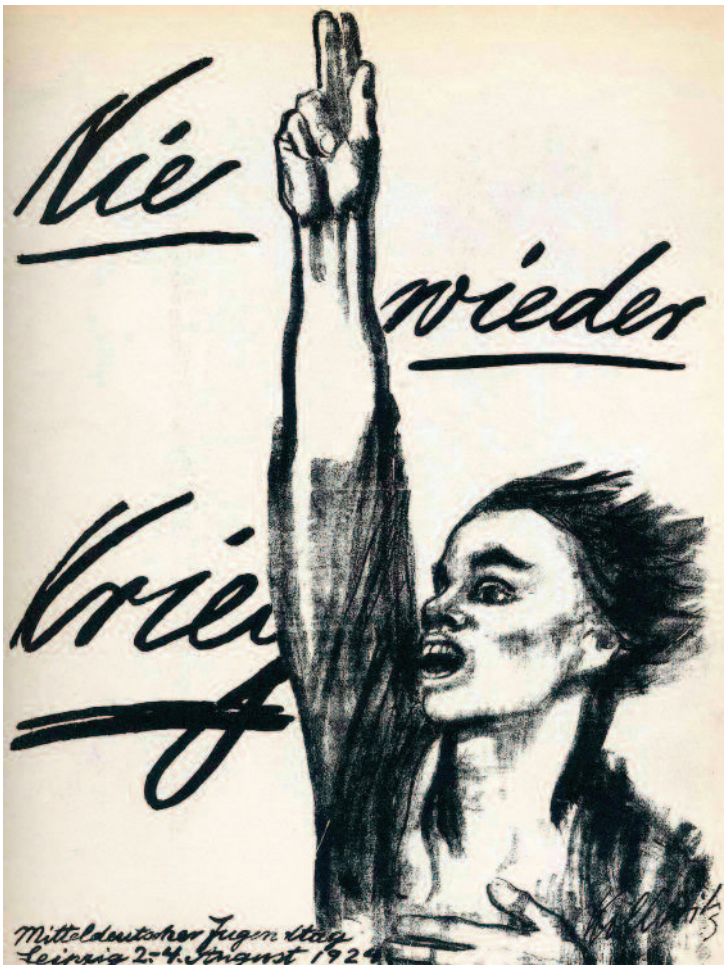
Kollwitz's breakthrough work, which defined her artistic signature, was the cycle *The Weavers*, inspired by witnessing in 1894 the premiere of Gerhart Hauptmann's drama of the same name, about the uprising of Silesian weavers in 1844. Over and above connecting present misery with that of the past, Kollwitz focuses on resistance against social injustice.

Reflecting on this early experience, Kollwitz noted in her autobiography that the play, research and work on the weavers' rising was a crucial event in her artistic development. The cycle consists of three lithographs (*Poverty, Death*, and *Conspiracy)* and three etchings (*March of the Weavers, Riot,* and *The End). The Weavers* became Kollwitz's most well-known work.

Stirred by her working-class surroundings and involvement, Kollwitz's second cycle, *The Peasant War*, going back to the German uprising of the 1520s, also centres on the rebellion of the exploited and suppressed against social injustice. It is worked in a variety of techniques—etchings, aquatint, and soft ground—and is counted among Kollwitz's greatest achievements: *Ploughing, Raped, Sharpening the Scythe, Arming in the Vault, Outbreak, After the Battle,* and *The Prisoners*.

After the Battle depicts a mother's night-time search through the dead, looking for her son.

Loss and grieving became a central theme in Kollwitz's work after the death of her son Peter in the early days of the First World War. From now on, mothers protecting their children, fighting for their survival, grieving their death, are an ever-present motif in Kollwitz's work. She conveys a profound sense of unspeakable tragedy and of human responsibility to fight against death-spawning militarism and war. The people,



▲ **Never Again War (1924)**

▲ **The Survivors (1923) From the cycle War: The Volunteers (1921–22)**

▲ ***In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht* (1920)**
The assassination in January 1919 by right-wing militias of Karl Liebknecht—sole German parliamentarian to vote against further war loans in the summer of 1914—occasioned her famous woodcut In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht. It is a moving tribute to this communist leader, mourned by the people he represented, who pay their final respects in a shocked yet gentle fashion.

▲ **From the cycle War: The Volunteers (1921–22)**

far left **Käthe Kollwitz**
top left **City Shelter**
top right **Last lithograph: Seed Corn Must Not Be Ground (1942)**

the victims, are also those in whom humanity is found and the only source of resistance.

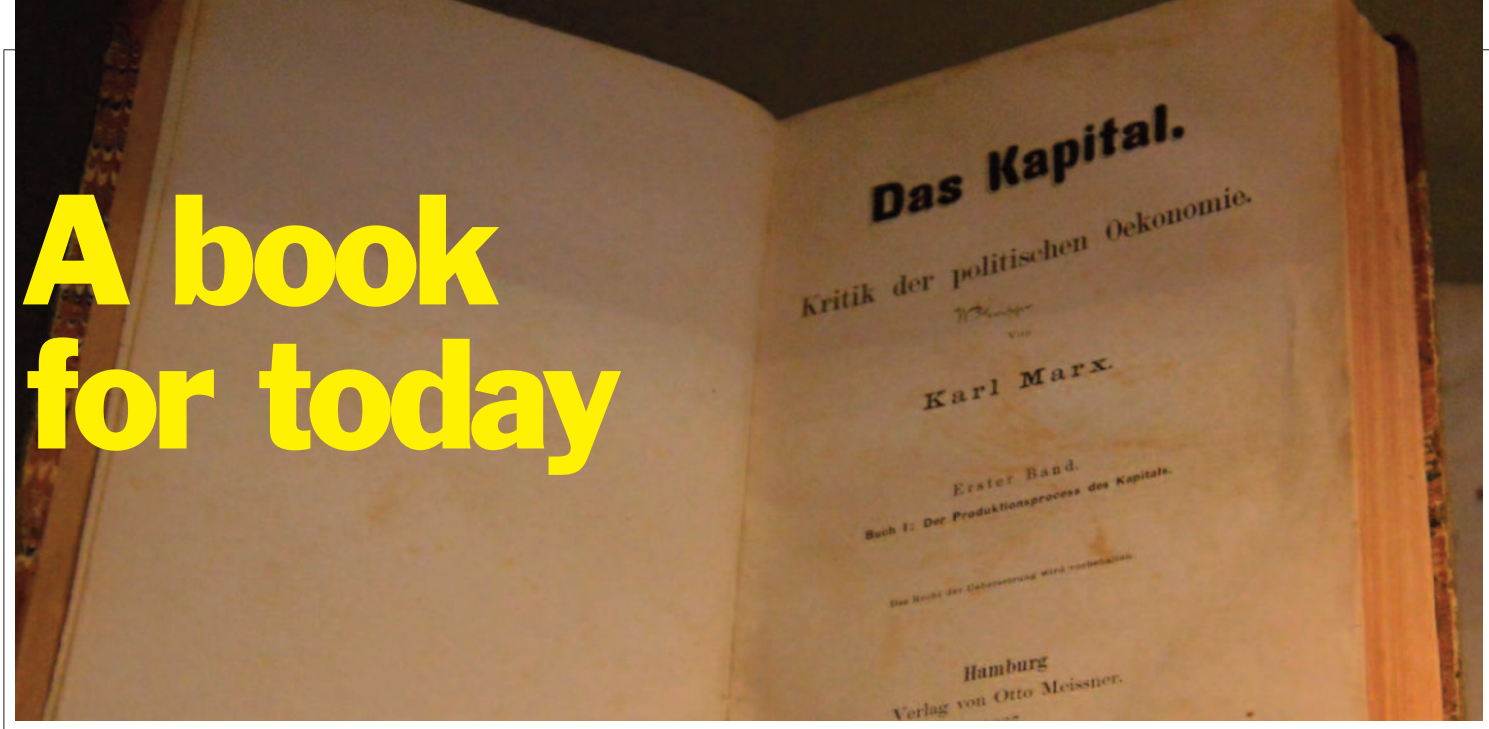
In 1919 Käthe Kollwitz began work on the woodcut cycle *War*, responding to the tragedies of the Great War. Seven images reflect her unspeakable pain. Stark, large-format woodcuts feature the anguish of war; among them a mother sacrifices her infant (*The Sacrifice*). In *The Volunteers* she depicts her son Peter beside *Death*, who leads a group of young men to war in a frenzied procession. Once again eliminating specific references to time or place, Kollwitz created a universal condemnation of such slaughter.

In 1924 Kollwitz created her three most famous posters: *Germany's Children Starving, Bread*, and *Never Again War*. After the Nazis' rise to power in the mid-1930s Kollwitz completed her last great cycle of eight lithographs, *Death.*

More heartbreak was wrought on her in 1942 when her grandson Peter fell victim to Hitler's war. This death came after that of her husband, Karl, who had died of illness in 1940.

Käthe Kollwitz died a few days before the end of the Second World War, on 22 April 1945. She has left us with unforgettable images of the horrific events and epic struggles of her lifetime. Kollwitz's images remain profound indictments of a social system that perpetuates such social injustice and crimes against humanity.

A book for today



Tomás Mac Síomóin

SEPTEMBER 2017 is the 150th anniversary of the publication of the first volume of *Das Kapital (Capital)*, the central work of Karl Marx (1818–1883) and the book that most influenced social and political thinking ever since. It has especial relevance today, describing, as it does, the labour relations of a capitalism that is reverting to the nineteenth-century forms described by Marx.

The sale of *Capital* increased markedly in his native Germany and elsewhere in 2008 with the emergence of international capitalism's latest crisis.

Capital is a dense and difficult read for most people. The more accessible *Communist Manifesto*, jointly written with Frederick Engels (1820–1895) in 1848, is a propagandist tract for educating workers involved in class struggle. *Capital* has a more ambitious aim: to expose the inner workings of *capital*ism.

Marx decided that this needed a rigorous approach, like those of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, rather than that of utopian socialist texts, such as those of Robert Owen or Henri de Saint-Simon. *Capital* was his weapon for attacking the bourgeoisie, exposing how one part of the population exploits another.

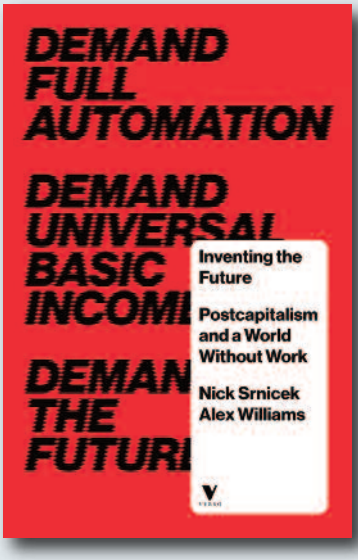
As most workers were ill-prepared for understanding *Capital*, Karl Kautsky (immortalised by Lenin as "the Renegade Kautsky") presented Marx's principal ideas in a more accessible form in *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx* (1887). This interpretation of Marx, along with the Manifesto, hegemonised the working-class movement during its Second International phase (1889–1914) and became the doctrine of contemporary social-democratic parties, the Third International (1919–1943), and the Soviet Union.

Marx himself never mentioned "historical materialism," nor "dialectical materialism," both posterior constructs of Engels and others, who tried to offer the working class Marx's achievement in a more digestible form.

Capital contains elements that don't cohere fully and that depend on understanding the historical context in which they were written. This happens in other areas of investigation. Einstein presented his theory of special relativity in 1905 and his theory of general relativity in 1915; in between he published texts that failed to resolve problems raised by his concept of special relativity.

Nobody today would try to vindicate those early failures. But the criteria to be met in order to achieve consensus in the social sciences, to which *Capital* belongs, are epistemologically far looser than in the physical sciences. However, Engels held that, "as Darwin had discovered

Inventing the future



IN A PENETRATING and timely critique of the failures of the Western left Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams offer – in *Inventing the Future, Post capitalism and a World Without Work* – an intriguing hypothesis for creating a society where the drudgery of work has been virtually abolished.

The basic premise of Srnicek and Williams is that, with more technology—particularly "open source" technology—the "boring" and "demeaning" work performed by wage-earners under capitalism can be abolished and more time can be freed for human enrichment.[1]

And while this position is something of a novelty among the so-called left, it isn't really all that new. Srnicek and Williams's utopian "demand" for "full automation" is reminiscent of the Italian futurist movement of the early twentieth century, which rested on an idealistic understanding of technology, as if technology were a power in and of itself, divorced from the relations of production from which it emerged.

This naïve view follows suit with a long tradition of bourgeois positivist miscalculations that laud technology as it holds independent metaphysical properties that deterministically lead to improvements in human conditions, regardless of the system in which it is situated.

But if the twentieth century has established any single historical "fact" it must be that the liberal positivists—from those who cheered the development of the internal combustion engine (and the subsequent mechanisation of warfare) to the development of the nuclear bomb (which, it was thought by physicists working on the Manhattan Project, would bring an end to all warfare)—grossly miscalculated the role of technology in bourgeois society.

Technology comes into existence and functions as a tool of the dominant class; this understanding is a basic feature of Marxist thought. But, in spite of Srnicek and Williams's auspicious criticisms of neo-liberalism, their prescription for "post-capitalist" reform is essentially the same as the neo-

the laws that govern the development of organic nature, Marx discovered the laws that govern the development of human history."

Darwin's influence, allied to Hegel's theory of historical development, suggested to Marx a historical scheme to which, in theory, every society conformed. Feudalism would be followed by capitalism, which evolves into socialism.

The later Marx was to modify this schema. In the 1870s, studying the social evolution of "backward societies," he offered the opinion that this could never be understood through the "universal passport of a general historical-philosophical theory, whose supreme virtue resides in its being suprahistorical." He thus amended the "laws" of historical development that Engels had systematised as historical materialism.

As the 1917 revolution occurred in an almost feudal Russia, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) called it a "revolution against *Capital*." He wrote: "*Capital* was, in Russia, a book of the bourgeoisie since it . . . initiated a capitalist era, not one in which the proletariat seized power." The Bolshevik revolution "rejected Marx when it showed that the canons of historical materialism are not as firm as one . . . had thought."

What Gramsci really showed is that orthodox Marxism belongs, epistemologically speaking, to social science, where total consensus is impossible.

In both *Capital* and the *Communist Manifesto* the struggle between two basic classes, capitalist and worker, underlies historical development, as if the structure created by the economic system exists first, and then real people, who "make their own history, but not as they will it under circumstances chosen by them, but under circumstances they encounter directly, but which exist as a legacy of the past," occupy it. Therefore class is the only objective reality which varies according to the development of the productive forces.

In his analysis of the *coup d'état* of Louis Bonaparte in 1851, however, Marx diagnosed a much more complex network of social groupings. Thence, according to Lenin, social classes are also social constructs that depend on practical politics and not simply gaps in the relations of production.

However, the Marx of *Capital* believed that capitalism's dynamic involved the destruction of all social classes except those of the workers and capitalists. According to him, the complexity of real life is simplified by the development of capitalism itself, which gradually augments the number of workers as it reduces simultaneously the number of capitalists.

This idea, taken up later by Kautsky, had to deal with capitalism's transformations at the end of the nineteenth century and the appearance of the middle classes. This debate is crucial to understanding contemporary social phenomena and politics.

Marx's writings skirt the environmental and feminist questions. While some contemporary Marxists assign him such sensibilities, both he and Engels were men of their time, with almost inevitable patriarchal tics. To get a Marxist view on environmental and feminist concerns, the reader must consult the work of modern Marxists, who bring new sensibilities and information to bear on their work. Another notable lacuna persists: a convincing left analysis of nationalism and a tendency of many socialists to conflate it always with regressive political tendencies.

However, *Capital* is a necessary corrective to an intellectual drift that vitiates contemporary Marxist analysis: the tendency to ignore material and economic considerations in political analysis. The founders of "scientific socialism" centred their attention on political economy and its economic base; most twentieth-century researchers concentrated almost exclusively on superstructural matters, especially cultural questions.

The tone of these studies drifted from an optimism based on the assumed validity of Marx's initial conception of history to a pessimism deriving from the failure of brute facts to conform to his original scheme. Also, the fact that the original Marxist intellectuals were political leaders but increasingly, from the 1920s onwards, were academics led to a disconnect between the organised working class and the former.

Finally, the welfare state, born of a compromise between capital and labour, caused many working-class activists to question the need for socialism.

So, in the post-war years, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall, few wanted to study *Capital*. The book appeared to have little relevance to everyday life, appearing to describe a crude nineteenth-century capitalism.

But today, *Capital* describes a capitalism in which labour relations revert to those of the nineteenth century, thus bearing out Marx's prognosis. Company restructurings implicate thousands of workers internationally; the global economic and environmental crises deepen; and the depredations of financial *capital*ism take various forms.

So, while *Capital* may not be the key that opens all doors, by teaching us the basics of class and social inequality it is simply the best guide to understanding the world we live in, and the politics needed to change it.

liberal remedy for, say, poverty and conditions in Africa: get the people more gadgets, more spending money, then bring them into the political fold, and the rest will more or less work itself out.

But will access to technological education and the devices themselves be free and universal? And who's to regulate how all this free technology will be managed? Will the military not take advantage of it on behalf of their capitalist masters?

These are just some of the problems with the thesis of *Inventing the Future* (not to mention the issue of resource sustainability: after all, imagine how much energy and raw material would be required to automate all work).

To achieve their vision of a "post-work" society the authors argue that the left must begin by "building power." However, Srnircek and Williams offer very little on how to "build power," and go so far as to misrepresent how power has been built historically: "Every successful movement has been the result, not of a single organisational type, but of a broad ecology of organizations." This statement is particularly problematic, in that the authors provide no metrics for defining "successful movements." After all, nowhere in the world has any movement achieved the authors' stated "demands" so far. So what is meant by "successful"?

Moreover, contrary to the authors' claim, most revolutionary movements that achieved their goal of obtaining power often began as very small, tightly knit and exceedingly disciplined groups operating within very specific organisational frameworks. The authors merely pay lip service to strategy while evading the heart of the issue almost entirely, making their calls for building power trite and cliché-ridden.[2]

Those determined to resist human degradation and war should be concentrating not on abolishing "work" but on confronting an exploitative system by empowering workers' democracy. To achieve this, we don't (necessarily) need more technology; rather, we need to begin with democratic control over existing technologies—which will continue to be an elusive goal without correcting the idealist, reactive (rather than proactive) nature of the left after its historic ideological shift away from Marx's emphasis on scientific analysis (i.e. scientific socialism).

A failure to utilise the methods of scientific critique will continue to lead the left into the traps of utopian idealism, like those put forward in Inventing the Future—a utopianism that ends in defeat and demoralisation, because of its advocates' failure to grasp the history and basic functions of material reality, from which the rudiments of all effective strategies must be derived.

1 Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 1.
2 *Inventing the Future*, p. 163.

▲ Monseñor Romero: Open to Those Who Suffer, by the renowned Salvadoran artist Fernando Llort

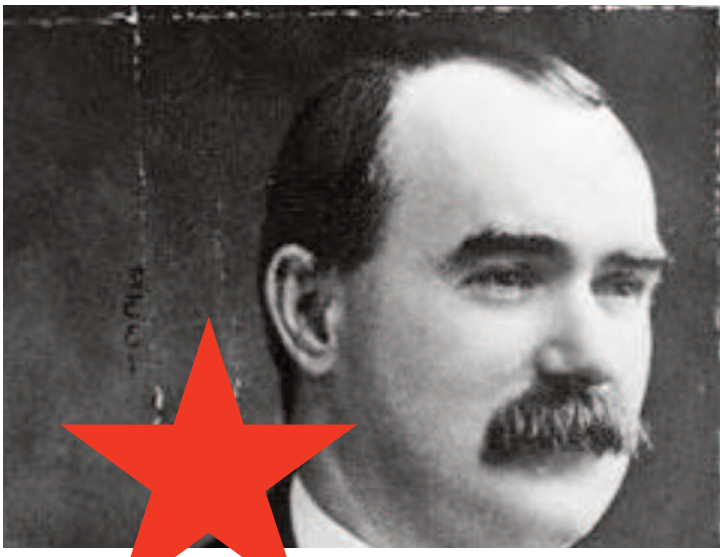
Standing in front of a mural of Oscar Romero

Translated by Gabriel Rosenstock

Táim im' sheasamh os comhair múrphictiúr d'Oscar Romero
Deirtear go bhfuil deich milliún duine neamhurchóideach
Maraithe ag na Meiriceánaigh ó dheireadh an Dara Cogadh
Domhanda
Caithfidh go bhfuil dearmad déanta acu
ar an tSalvadóir, Nicearagua agus Guatamala
Is cuimhin le gach éinne Dachau
Cé a chuimhníonn ar El Mozote?

I'm standing in front of a mural
Of Oscar Romero
They say America killed ten million innocents
Since the end of World War II
They must have forgotten
About El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala
Everyone remembers Dachau
Who remembers El Mozote?

The Peter Daly commemoration, honouring a local man who fought and died with the International Brigades in defence of the Spanish Republic, took place on Saturday 9 September in Monagear, Co. Wexford.



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