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"The idea of global leadership is almost part of the American foreign policy DNA . . . The United States has positioned itself not simply as ***a*** leader but as **the** leader."
Henry Kissinger (former US secretary of state and national security adviser), 30 June 2017.

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Time to think about withdrawal

As negotiations for Britain's withdrawal from the European Union begin **Eugene McCartan** analyses the consequences for Ireland

Formal negotiation began on 19 June, though no doubt there has been a lot of behind-the-scenes activity since the referendum result was announced in June 2016. The British state and ruling elements will have been working away at seeing how to thwart the will of the people, as expressed in the referendum. The dominant elements of the City of London—banks and finance houses—will be working to ensure that their interests are to the fore and are the dominant interests at the negotiating table.

WHAT ABOUT the interests of the Irish people, north and south? Who will represent them at these vital talks? Where will the interests of working people in Ireland—or working people in Britain, for that matter—be taken into account?

Since the signing of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union exists as a separate legal entity, over and above, and superior to, the constituent states. The EU Commission will be at the table to represent the interests of the EU, that is, the interests of big corporations and European banks and finance houses. The people of Ireland, north or south, will have no direct say in these negotiations, or in the final outcome, despite the impact on our people.

Even if it goes to a vote in the EU institutions, the Irish government has only 0.9 per cent of a vote. The Irish will not be present at negotiations, as these will be conducted on behalf of the EU-27 by Michel Barnier and his staff; nor are we permitted to conduct negotiations with the British ourselves, as that would be against Brussels rules. So much for all the guff about a special deal: not if it doesn't suit the Germans.

The primary interest of the British state is and will be to protect and advance the interests of big corporations, banks, and finance house. The needs of the working people of Britain will be well down the agenda, as will those of the Irish people, if they feature at all.

Before the formal negotiations opened, the Irish government made some noises regarding the special historical relationship between the British and Irish states. Others, such as Sinn Féin, raised the possibility of some vague "dangers" to the Belfast Agreement resulting from Brexit.

The government also made some noises about the common travel arrangement between the two states—the historical safety valve for this state in jettisoning the unemployed and the poor to Britain.

The Irish government also wanted some vague recognition that at some future date, if the possibility of national reunification was to become a reality, they would have the same mechanism as was used by the West German government when it annexed the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), which was a separate state and outside the EU at the time.

While this new-found interest in national unity is to be welcomed, it is more an indication of how powerless

and removed they are from the centre of power and influence within the EU and of their inability and unwillingness to defend the interests of the people of this country. It was instead a pretence that they have real and meaningful influence at the EU level, that they are "real players."

We know this to be untrue from very bitter experience regarding the bank debt, when the Irish state in 2011 was forced by the EU to take responsibility for 42 per cent of all EU banking debt—in effect to save the euro from collapse. This exposed the spineless parasites that the Irish establishment are, and how subservient is their role and relationship with the EU.

'The primary interest of the British state is and will be to protect and advance the interests of big corporations, banks, and finance house. The needs of the working people of Britain will be well down the agenda, as will those of the Irish people, if they feature at all'

The same thing applies to the proposal for a "special relationship" within the EU for the North of Ireland. This also is devoid of any reality or any clear understanding of the nature of the EU itself. Sinn Féin will shortly be in an administration-sharing Executive with the DUP—yet the DUP is in favour of Brexit, while Sinn Féin advocates remaining within the EU.

What lies exposed is the almost complete lack of influence by both political institutions, Dáil Éireann and the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the hollowness of their claim to speak for the people of our country.

The future relationship of the British state with the EU will be decided by London. What the DUP says or thinks, even with its "special relationship" with the present British Tory government, will have little if any influence on the Brexit negotiations, never mind Sinn Féin. This will inevitably put pressure on the DUP and Sinn Féin to come up with a joint position on the future relations between North and South.

The Irish government is the only possible voice that has the potential to advance the interests of the people of this country. It could give leadership and direction to all our people, north and south, if it wished to do so.

This government cannot be allowed to sit on its hands or to hide behind the EU negotiating team, hoping that they will represent the interests of the Irish people. Experience tells us otherwise. The Irish government must be forced to act as a sovereign government and take independent political action to advance the interests of the Irish people. If it cannot open up independent negotiations and do a deal with the British state that suits the people of all of Ireland, then once again the question of membership of the EU has to be raised.

It also drives a coach and horses through Sinn Féin's strategy of "critical engagement" with the EU in the hope of changing it from within.

We believe that Ireland can be much more than a playground for big business. There are four strategic areas where North and South can benefit from a merger of resources, infrastructure, and services: there is potential new revenue from pursuing an independent path in (1) fishing and farming, (2) nationalising our oil and gas, (3) building a renewable power industry, and (4) repudiating the bank debt.

These can become the pillars on which to build and develop our economy in other areas. The injection of revenue into the economy from each of these pillars would have a much higher probability of expanding the economy, as these sectors use a high proportion of native materials, which feeds into knock-on industries, as opposed to foreign direct investment.

This would require a radical government committed to strengthening, deepening and expanding political and economic democracy in the hands of working people.

We have very valuable fishing resources that can and should be managed and developed on an all-Ireland basis. The development of an all-Ireland economy is clearly more beneficial to all our people. Developing an all-Ireland agro-business makes greater sense now than ever. Developing and sharing common health and education services and transport infrastructure is also in the interests of all our people.

The possibilities for progressive economic co-operation can only become more difficult if the Republic remains within the EU and the North is outside. This will become even more complicated, and virtually impossible, when Britain leaves the EU and the Irish state remains within it.

The contradiction for the DUP resulting from Brexit can only become more acute as agriculture, cross-border trade and capital flows begin to have an impact on an already weak and dependent economy.

The economic border between Britain and the EU is most likely to be drawn down the middle of the Irish Sea. While they may have secured a billion pounds of additional funds (one-tenth of the current budget), the long-term economic development and the possibility of dynamic and potential growth lie in the building of an all-Ireland economy—not in a race to the bottom in corporation tax, nor in a base for global corporate money-laundering.

Further problems and the cementing of partition may well come about as the EU, driven by Germany, continues to forge ever greater military co-operation and convergence between member-states, with the EU increasingly asserting itself as a global economic and military power. We will have the North of Ireland in the nuclear-armed NATO while the Republic will be more and more entangled in the increasingly militarised EU.

Brexit has brought into sharper focus than ever the forced partition of our country and the fostered divisions among our people, and exposed the deep legacy of British imperial strategic interests. As it was in 1921, when partition was imposed, today the interests of our people, north and south, will be secondary to British economic, political and strategic interests and now to those of the EU itself. We are mere pawns on the imperial chess board.

The Irish government has the opportunity and the responsibility to speak for and represent all the people of Ireland, to reflect the opinions and interests of both Dáil Éireann and the Northern Ireland Executive, by opening up separate and independent negotiations with the British government regarding co-operation, trade relations and travel between our two peoples outside of, independent of and, if necessary, despite the EU.

The defence of popular sovereignty and democracy is a crucial argument in the struggle for national unity and against continued membership of the European Union. ★

MONEY, BANKING, POWER

Eclipse of the Sun (1926)
George Grosz

Jimmy Doran

THE BANKING system has totally changed since the time when banks took in deposits, paid interest on this money, and then lent it out at a higher rate of interest to others.

This model did not create enough profit for banks, and has not been used for many years. Banks now rely on commercial borrowing, inter-bank lending and the support of the Central Bank to balance the books from day to day. No longer are loans that are given out matched by deposits: the ratio between loans and deposits, known as the leverage rate, can be as high as 50:1. The thinking behind this is that the massive profit made on these loans outweighs any risk of defaulting loans.

'It makes absolutely no commercial or social sense to sell AIB to private capital for a one-off payment that won't even cover the losses'

How does this work, and what are the implications for the economy, society, and the state?

If, for example, borrower A borrows €100 million, the bank deposits €100 million in A's account on the strength of their collateral or business plan, thus putting €100 million into the economy. This also gives the bank an asset, plus the interest that will be paid on it over the period of the loan—typically three times the value of the loan. This loan can be held by the bank or sold on to another financial institution.

So, with the stroke of a pen, €500 million of new money is put into the economy. This demonstrates the power that banks have. Banks decide who gets loans, and what they are used for. They are the main source of new money being put into the economy, which stimulates growth and the direction of new investments.

In this example, borrower A now has €100 million to spend on whatever they got the loan approval for—we'll say to build a factory for manufacturing corn flakes. This will provide, say, fifty jobs for a year to build the factory and a hundred jobs permanently in the factory on completion.

There will be spin-off jobs in the wider economy as well. It is estimated that for every three permanent jobs created there is on average one more created indirectly elsewhere in the economy. These workers and their families benefit from the wages earned; the state benefits from taxes paid by them and by the employer and on the profit created by the goods produced by the workers.

The factory-owner benefits most, as they get all the surplus or profit left over, which will provide them and their family with a life of luxury. If the factory was making a small profit of 10 per cent a year, the workers would have created enough surplus value in ten years to own the factory in its entirety. If it were a 20 per cent profit, this period would be five years.

This demonstrates clearly who creates the wealth in this society; but, unfortunately, this wealth is accumulated by the few and not by the many who create it.

Society also benefits from having a new brand of corn flakes to choose from. This has little or no social value; but the bank's only purpose is to make a profit, so it is irrelevant to it what is being produced. It could very well be weapons of mass destruction, greenhouse gases, or cigarettes.

In Ireland, as a result of the global financial crash, Allied Irish Bank was taken into state ownership, but the state has now begun selling it off in batches. The first batch, of 28.7 per cent, was sold at the end of last month for €3.4 billion. It made a profit in 2016 of just under €2 billion, and that is likely to increase in the coming years. It has already paid dividends to the state of €6.6 billion.

In 2008 AIB was bailed out to the tune of €20.6 billion. The bank still owes the state about €14 billion, which, going on the dividends and profit it is making, will be paid off sooner rather than later; and so we would have had a very profitable national bank owned by the state—that is, by you and me.

The state is selling AIB in batches of 25 per cent to anyone who has a minimum of €10,000 to invest. (The average amount purchased by private investors was €46,000.) This makes sure that the working class are excluded from this particular gravy train. It is an opportunity for the few and not the many, who are the ones who paid and are paying the bank's debts through increased taxes and savage cuts to public services.

It makes absolutely no commercial or social sense to sell AIB to private capital for a one-off payment that won't even cover the losses. As a result of the first tranche being sold, the state will already be down approximately half a billion in lost profit share at the end of the year.

When private capital gets its hands on the bank, the profit, dividends, executive pay, bonuses and pensions for the golden circle will be king. There is no doubt that the first thing they will do will be to remove the cap on executives' pay and bonuses. It is estimated that the profit will be exempt from taxes for approximately thirty years, because of losses incurred during the financial crash, and this is being promoted to prospective investors as another reason to buy shares.

AIB should be kept in public ownership as a National Development Bank, working in the interests of the people and not with the sole purpose of making maximum profit.

Michael Noonan claims that state-owned banks don't work. This is untrue, as state-run banks work very well and are very profitable in Frankfurt, Paris, and Zürich, to name but a few.

If we were to keep the bank in state ownership it would set the bar for the other banks, and would provide competition in the market that for once would benefit the customer and not big business. It would stabilise the banking system by providing certainty, and would be able to borrow money commercially at better interest rates, as there is less risk if the state is involved. These lower interest rates can be passed on to citizens and small businesses in the form of cheaper loans.

The other benefit is that now the state would have the power to decide who gets loans, and for what purpose; so instead of forty-seven types of corn flakes we can have new businesses that provide real jobs, that produce goods that actually benefit the community, such as treatment for diseases, and increase and improve the services and infrastructure available to citizens.

The sale of AIB to financial capital serves only that class and abandons the citizens to the neo-liberal scrap heap of low-paid, precarious work and inadequate housing, health services, education, and all the things that should be a right for our people.

It is time that decisions that affect the people and the country were removed from our gombeen political class and their paymasters in big business and the EU and put under democratic public control. Maybe then we could start to build the Republic that the men and women of 1916 fought so bravely for. ★

End the carnival of failure

Tommy McKearney

ALMOST LOST amid the frantic scrutinising of the £1 billion bribe offered by Theresa May to the Democratic Unionist Party in order to keep a minority Tory government in power was a statement of intent in relation to British foreign policy objectives.

Along with the financial package for the North, both parties agreed to make a commitment to NATO that the Tory government would spend 2 per cent of GDP on the armed forces

To put this in context we must compare it with the DUP's pay-off, because 2 per cent of British GDP for 2016 would amount to more than £37 billion.[1] In a nutshell, the British ruling class is content to pay a relatively modest price in order to protect and maintain its imperial interests while allowing the ten Northern MPs to feel self-satisfied.

That the DUP thinks it has secured a historic deal for Ulster unionism should come as no surprise. After all, several leading members of this party believe that the earth was created over a seven-day period 4,652 years ago.

Undoubtedly, while additional expenditure will be welcome in an area of high deprivation, this money will not be a panacea for the North's lengthy list of problems. Take the region's health service as just one example: it has been run down for many years, and, as the BBC's Northern Ireland health correspondent, Marie-Louise Connelly, pointed out, the extra money offered will only allow the service some breathing space.[2] This new money could be used up quickly, she said, just tackling hospital waiting-lists alone.

Of course this is before the inevitable disputes arise over where the money is to be spent. Interestingly, the only infrastructure project to be specified is the York Street intersection in Belfast, which happens to be in the constituency of the DUP negotiator Nigel Dodds.

This deal will prove to be a mixed blessing for the DUP as it finds its London triumph to be temporary. While the pot of money puts Sinn Féin on the back foot in the short term, it will prove damaging for the DUP's long-term aim of maintaining the union with Britain. The Conservative Party has little or no interest in the people of Northern Ireland and views the arrangement with Arlene Foster's party as a necessary political expedient in order to implement its wider policies.

In time, the DUP will come to be little more than a party of crackpots (the *Daily Mirror's* description), endorsing imperialist aggression and helping perpetuate neo-liberal economics damaging to working-class communities.

This is unlikely to cause the party much damage in its electoral heartlands. However, it will not endear it to its republican and nationalist neighbours in the six counties, or to the British working class. Moreover, by lining up beside the Conservatives and making a unilateral financial arrangement for Northern Ireland, Foster has created divisions between her party and the Scots, Welsh and northern English. As the *Guardian* said in a recent analysis, "this weakens the internal solidarity of the UK."

This is an unwelcome observation for the DUP but one that is nevertheless accurate. Moreover, it not only weakens solidarity within the United Kingdom but undermines the political entity that is Northern Ireland. Twice this year the electorate has gone to the polls, and on both occasions it has given an ominous verdict on the future stability and longevity of the six counties.

Time to scrap the Leaving Certificate

Graham Harrington

IF THE Irish education system is the "murder machine" that Patrick Pearse described, then the Leaving Certificate is the murder weapon.

The Leaving Cert system ensures that the potential career and life of the pupil is dependent on a single memory test.

There is little actual education in the period coming up to the exams, with teachers rushing to get through modules.

For example in English, probably the most important subject, poetry is taught in an over-simplified format, with the teacher getting through complex poems with a few sound bites that can be used to impress the examiner, rather than any meaningful discussion on the content.

There's a sort of lottery over what poet will come up in the exam, so pupils, under pressure with their work load, will try to guess what poets to study. The whole system is based on a sort of guesswork, with the final result being based on what quotations the candidate remembers on the day, rather than anything based on intelligence or proper understanding.

Most pupils, of course, forget everything once they finish the exam, making the entire thing pointless.

There is no room for any education about things the pupils are interested in. If it isn't in the curriculum, it isn't covered; and even if it is it's done broadly and in a very simplified way. If a pupil wants to study something they find interesting but the subject has no chance of coming up in the exam, they are actively discouraged from pursuing it, even if the topic is relevant.

It goes without saying that political economy, politics of any kind or anything else that doesn't fit into the neat and narrow curriculum isn't covered. Pupils have no power over what they learn. This isn't the fault of the teachers: if they do something mad like teaching the pupils what they want, their points in the exam will drop, which is what a teacher's success is measured by—not by what

The assembly elections in March resulted in overtly unionist parties losing an absolute majority in Stormont, for the first time in its history. This has to be qualified by recognising that the balance of power at the devolved-government level remained with parties that support the union. Nevertheless the lesson was clear: old certainties about the status quo are no longer quite so secure. Even the *Financial Times* published a front-page article in April referring to the potential for a united Ireland.[3]

Three months later the British general election provided further evidence of the shifting sands. While almost all eyes have been on the DUP and its new-found bargaining position vis-à-vis Westminster, less attention was paid to the implication of Sinn Féin's result. Seven of the North's eighteen Westminster constituencies returned abstentionist candidates, mandated to boycott central government in London.

It is over-simplistic to dismiss this outcome simply as the result of a sectarian head count. In several constituencies, such as Foyle (Derry) and West Belfast, where abstentionist MPs were returned, the nationalist majority was sufficiently large to make the contest a straight fight between Sinn Féin abstentionists and parties committed to taking their seats. Clearly this is not an outcome as momentous as the 1918 general election, yet it should not be dismissed as insignificant when 30 per cent of the North's electorate vote to boycott central government.

As a consequence, Sinn Féin will face something of a dilemma if it attempts to form an administration in Stormont with the DUP. How can Michelle O'Neill argue that a British government, supported by the DUP, can meet the demand of the Belfast Agreement that London maintain rigorous impartiality in relation to all matters in the North? Even the Tory bigwig Chris Patten said it would be "difficult for the UK government to show neutrality" when it has done a close political deal with the DUP.[4]

This problem will only be compounded by the fact that many Sinn Féin supporters have now opted to boycott Parliament as well.

In the absence of widespread consensus concerning governance of the area, it is difficult to see how the failed political entity that is Northern Ireland can endure in the long run in the face of changing demographics at home and a disdainful population in Britain.

What has to be avoided, however, is falling into the trap of engaging in the politics of sectarian head-counting, or advocating the nationalist objective of politically uniting Ireland without changing the present economic fundamentals. A workers' republic is the only realistic option for bringing about a united working class throughout Ireland. To make this more than a cliché, though, it is necessary for socialists to be honest about where the present situation will lead, transparent in our analysis of what is needed, and frank about our ambition to create a workers' state.

All the while socialists must search for means of struggle that will transform Irish society, north and south, in a progressive direction. With Stormont possibly collapsing once again, there is both the need and the opportunity to create a vehicle capable of identifying the issues on which a successful campaign for a socialist transformation can be built. State-funded public housing, a secure health service, proper care for the elderly, workers' rights and a decent public transport system are all issues that urgently need addressing.

Nor should we ignore the misappropriation of 2 per cent of GDP that will be used to pay for imperialist aggression and the slaughter that inevitably follows in its wake.

Above all, we need to state the obvious. The northern Irish state has failed entirely, and the southern Irish state as at present constituted has failed the working class. Time to end the carnival of failure and set our compass for a workers' republic! ★

1 Office for National Statistics, "Gross domestic product: Chained volume measures . . ." at http://bit.ly/2qjehdh.
2 BBC News, "DUP-Tory deal secures extra spending in Northern Ireland" (www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-40402352).
3 Alex Barker, Arthur Beesley, and Vincent Boland, "EU signal over a united Ireland stokes fear of post-Brexit UK," *Financial Times*, 28 June 2017 (http://on.ft.com/2t4ZNzK).
4 BBC News, "DUP-Tory deal 'may make peace process difficult'—Patten," 28 June 2017 (www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-40429507).

they teach, or how they open their pupils' minds, or encouraging them to think independently.

The entire system is geared towards training people to be disciplined, not to ask questions, and be an asset to capitalism. Courses on business studies are always encouraged; but there is no Leaving Cert subject covering democracy, or anything encouraging participation in one's community.

History, for example, is very much concentrated on the "great man" view of historical change, rather than on people's history. Those who think differently from the simplistic textbook history are penalised, with assessment being based on how well the pupil can regurgitate the official history.

Elitism plays a major role in the system, as it always does in institutions in a class society, with pupils from a working-class background more likely to drop out and never take the final exams at all. Nothing exists to prevent this. In fact the system doesn't mind, as these pupils are seen to be poor performers who will only get low points anyway.

Those who do take the Leaving Cert exam are not provided with any additional support that their more privileged classmates can avail of. The parents of those pupils can afford to get them grinds and so on, which can compensate for lower ability, which means that the Leaving Cert is much easier if you come from a more upper-class background, regardless of your ability.

To make this more entrenched, universities and colleges tend to have a select group of schools that they deem appropriate to take new entrants from.

The culture among schools in working-class areas tends to discourage intelligent pupils from pursuing high-level courses at third level and instead encourages them to take up a trade or a labour-intensive career, even if they are fully capable of a professional occupation.

This is all to say nothing about the inherent failure of a system that bases itself on rewarding the regurgitation of years of material in two weeks of exams; or the mental health problems associated with it.

The alternative is to put education at the centre of the education system, as obvious as this sounds. ★

A vindication of protest

Graham Skehan

AS WE receive the verdict that the six accused in the Jobstown case have been fully acquitted, it is time to examine the role of the Gardaí in the policing of left-wing politics.

I mean "policing" in two senses here: the first, a literal sense—dawn raids, brutality on marches, etc.—but also in a more figurative sense, delineating the terms of what kind of politics is acceptable in Ireland.

Policing organisations have a shady history internationally, with the American footballer Colin Kaepernick recently castigated by reactionary forces for his astute observation that the US police force has its origins in slave-catching patrols.

Our own force's history can be neatly summed up in the fact that the barrack square at Templemore is named after Eoin O'Duffy, the fascist fantasist and Blueshirt paterfamilias—and second commissioner of the force.

So then, what of the role of the Garda Síochána in policing the terms of debate? This happens in two modes, the first through actual or threat of violence. If you look at how student protests in the immediate aftermath of the credit crunch were policed, violence was normal and instigated by police actors. This has a two-pronged effect: the first to dissuade people from participating in this form of democratic street protest by making it dangerous to do so, and secondly by creating a propaganda effect, where violence is blamed on protesters in an attempt to delegitimise their message. This was especially evident in Rossport, where Garda violence was the norm, but it was also used as an excuse to ignore the "crazy" activists, who had "brought it on themselves."

Then there is the police infiltration of left-wing groups. The "Spy Cops" saga—which has still not come to an end—saw the British police deceive activists (including Irish activists in our sovereign republic) into sexual relationships in the interests of intelligence-gathering. That is rape, and it is indefensible. But that is only the most extreme example.

After SYRIZA's win in Greece, and in the warm afterglow where most of the Irish left still believed they were anything other than opportunists, there was a public meeting in East Wall with Greek activists. The Special Branch were at hand to take the names of those attending. Again, this is about policing the possible. Even the potential of a radical politics in Greece was seen as "subversive"—and such a thing migrating over here was a threat, to be policed.

This is before we get into the long history of police infiltration of the Irish left, the internment of left activists or anyone with ties to the republican movement, and the litany of sins of the Irish establishment against the left. Jim Gralton being deported from his own country for his politics is perhaps the most egregious example, but there have been many more Graltons, who have had to leave their home towns, were denied work, or were subject to police harassment. Irish anti-leftism might never have reached a McCarthyite level, but it was at least as insidious and pernicious.

Such a thing has not gone away. Merely look at Clare Daly TD being stopped for driving under the influence of alcohol and this information being leaked to the media instantly, and with record numbers of gardaí accessing the PULSE system to rubberneck. That she was found not guilty is immaterial (a trend I will return to later).

But such open hostility is not limited to the Gardaí. When a bench warrant was issued for Deputy Daly over a speeding ticket, it shows the open disdain among the judiciary for "troublemakers." When you live or die by upholding the rule of state power, it is inevitable that an attack on that power becomes an attack on you.

And that is the important point to make. We must be wary of falling into conspiratorial nonsense.

All the points raised so far have been factual, brought together only by their common thread: being anti-left. From here on it will be a bit more speculative; but I'm not suggesting that any one person is orchestrating a particular targeted campaign against the left, or that any of these events are being ordered by any group. But all these individual acts of anti-leftism add up to give a picture of a whole.

The point I am trying to make is that the culture and the make-up of the establishment institutions necessarily tend towards attacking left activists. There is no conspiracy needed: it is a natural result of their history and structures. We are subject to the whims of the ideological state apparatus, and we should always remember that. In defending themselves, and acting in their own self-interests, those self-interests align to kick the left.

So, in the case of Jobstown, what can we learn? It is perhaps the most illuminating case with regard to the Irish establishment's innate anti-leftism that we could hope for. My own opinion, though I am open to being proved wrong on this, is that all the different elements in this case—political parties, media, legal establishment, and Gardaí—operated independently, by which I mean there was no overt collusion between forces. It was merely a happy coincidence that all the instances of politically motivated attacks against their perceived enemies dovetailed so nicely into attacking the working-class movement

Firstly, the political parties: they all have an innate interest in keeping politics solidly within the Oireachtas; any challenge to that monopoly on power is a threat. So the flexing of left muscle over the water charges is something that they felt must be dealt

with. This is why the discipline was so forthcoming over Jobstown.

Most pointed was Willie O'Dea in the aftermath of the "not guilty" verdict, speaking to the *Irish Daily Mail* about the decision not to basically criminalise protest: "It would create apprehension in any politician who in future would be a member of a Government that is trying to implement an unpopular policy." Framing this as if it were a bad thing is a very telling statement.

Similarly, the media enjoy politics as a Punch and Judy show. Parliamentary sketches, gossip, personality politics—these things enable the ideology of the actions taken by our right-wing polity to be ignored. It is telling that the greatest sin a politician can commit is being rude. It's all a happy game between pals.

'Jobstown was an affront to the very foundational tenets of the media establishment. It was working-class people (and Paul Murphy) finding a voice and taking power outside where political correspondents can expense their drinks'

Coupled with the very particular socio-economic make-up of the Irish media landscape, Jobstown was an affront to the very foundational tenets of the media establishment. It was working-class people (and Paul Murphy) finding a voice and taking power outside where political correspondents can expense their drinks.

Yes, it was vulgar; yes, it was furious; but if you think that years of grinding austerity was not violence and that someone throwing a water balloon is, then your conception of violence is obscene.

So then we come to the Gardaí. As I outlined above, there is a spine of anti-leftism that runs through the Gardaí. From their training in how to handle protests to the entire ideology of the force since its inception, and the natural role of all police agents as the enforcers of the state monopoly on violence and the protection of property rights, the gardaí have a particular ideological bent.

It is for this reason that I don't believe we should support gardaí in having trade union rights, or support them if they strike for better pay or conditions. The gardaí being lumped in with "workers" is a right-wing conception of labour.

The labour movement is built on solidarity: an attack on one is an attack on all of us. The Gardaí will be called in to break strikes: they will not strike in solidarity with anyone else; and, furthermore, the ideological make-up of their members precludes class-consciousness.

It's no surprise that the police unions in the United States were some of the first to endorse Trump; in Greece the Golden Dawn draws much of its support from the security services; and the Venezuelan opposition lauds fascist vigilantes drawn from former security forces. Through training, and in the natural fulfilment of their stated position, policing and security services act as state agents in the service of capital. And this is all evidenced by the Jobstown trial.

Why, firstly, was the decision made to pursue a charge of false imprisonment rather than any public-order charge? Is it because having such a judgement against protest would make life a bit easier for gardaí? make violence at marches even easier to get away with? make even more forms of protest easy to discredit? We will never know. But the Gardaí submit the evidence to the DPP's office, which is no doubt stocked full of ambitious people, looking for a big win. Maybe a route into a handy appointment later, so you don't want to let the political bigwigs down, they might notice you.

Couple this with the middle class's visceral hatred of protesters, the disdain you can feel drip from every broadsheet column or current affairs programme, and you can easily understand how we ended up where we are. The fact that a boy, fifteen years old at the time of the protest, was convicted by a judge shows that the case could have succeeded but for the existence of the jury in this case. That is how complete the ideological blinkers and class hatred are at all levels.

So to return to the evidence in Jobstown. There is the possibility of a conspiracy within the Gardaí. Some 180 Garda statements were taken on the day, and many are similar, raising similar—false—claims that were then parroted by media and politicians. This is how the operation worked. While there is no direct proof of gardaí colluding to submit similar statements, or the coaching of garda witnesses, this is very similar to how the Hillsborough statements were altered to portray a certain, ideological, picture which was then fed to the press.

To examine one such claim as an example, the claim that Paul Murphy said into the megaphone, "Will we keep her [Burton] here all night?" This claim was made by three gardaí in evidence at the trial: Superintendent Daniel Flavin, Inspector Derek Maguire, and Sergeant Michael Phelan. All three made extremely similar claims and definitively stated that they heard Murphy utter these words. However, this was conclusively proved not to be true by video evidence presented by the defence.

How is it possible that three gardaí, of varying ranks, could all have the same false memory? It is very peculiar. And while there is no evidence that these men knowingly gave false evidence, the fact that their testimony differs so sharply from the video recordings does question the credence to be given to Garda evidence in the many thousands of trials every year where there is no such video evidence to counterbalance.

Because of the innate nature of the Garda Síochána, the anti-leftism that seems rampant, culturally, throughout the force, and the fact that it would be a good strategic move to disrupt the seemingly symbiotic relationship between police, establishment parties, and the media, I believe the CPI should support any call for an inquiry into the Gardaí with regard to Jobstown. There are questions to be answered with regard to the evidence given by gardaí in this case, such as why the false imprisonment charge was selected, and many others.

But, even more importantly, we must fight back against continuing attempts to criminalise protest and left activism. Josepha Madigan TD (Fine Gael) wants to make commenting on trials on social media a criminal offence. This is clearly as a result of not getting the result she wanted in Jobstown. There is no evidence to suggest that any juror was swayed by a tweet.

Others have suggested that the rise of social media should mean the end of trial by jury. This follows a pattern of the establishment of the Special Criminal Court, which was founded because of sympathetic jurors not giving the "right" verdict in cases involving republicans, more than any genuine concern over the intimidation of juries or the like.

That illiberal regime has been expanded now to encompass gangland. The further expansion of serious non-jury trials is something that should be resisted—because history tells us what happens when institutions get to ride roughshod over the left. Juries are not perfect, but, as Jobstown teaches us, they at least give us some possibility of a victory.

The Jobstown result is a vindication of protest and activism but it also exposes deep fault lines in the Irish state—fault lines that we must attack if we are ever to progress class-consciousness in this country. ★

A crucial moment for Venezuela

Robert Navan

THE EXTREME violence being perpetrated by groups connected to the right-wing opposition in Venezuela has now seen the death toll rise to over eighty. Public and community property, particularly projects associated with gains made by the revolution, has borne the brunt of the assaults, and millions of dollars of damage has been done. Today (1 July) brings news of fifty tons of food destined for poor families being torched by these hooligans.

Comrade Seán Edwards, who is in Caracas for the congress of the Communist Party of Venezuela, found himself caught up in one of these violent incidents. Here is his description of what happened (30 June) and some of his views:

> I was a witness just now to one of the *guarimbista* [barricader] escapades. I went on a day trip from Merida this morning. There was a lovely group on the bus, all Venezuelan, apart from one Colombian and myself. We went far up the mountains to see a very picturesque lake. With all the stops it was about 8:15 p.m. as we approached Merida, a few kilometres away.
> The road in front was on fire with burning tyres. By 10:30 p.m. the flames had died down, leaving a space on the right for our bus, and the driver went for it. Something was thrown at the bus, but we got through and drove into town without further incident.
> The first sign of a policeman I saw was when we were leaving the scene—typical of the very inadequate response of the government. Yes, Maduro bears a lot of responsibility: he announces stronger action but doesn't actually do it. The group who carried out this act of vandalism was not large: a couple of stout policemen and a platoon of soldiers could have dealt with them very quickly. If anyone tried that kind of thing in England or France, for example, they would most likely be shot.
> I think Maduro is worried about the campaign in the corporate media, that he does not take on these groups. The gangs are growing in their effrontery. I'm sure you know about the death of Orlando Figuera: he was burnt alive, and the perpetrators have not been caught.
> Two more young men were set alight with petrol as they were returning home from a party. Their home was in a new block of housing built by the Misión Venezuela Vivienda, which houses people from the poorer barrios. Their address was enough to condemn them in the diseased minds of their assailants.

▲ Demonstrators scuffle with security forces during an opposition rally in Caracas, Venezuela

The worldwide disinformation campaign rarely if ever mentions the innocent bystanders who have been killed, or even the deliberate targeting of supporters of the revolution, such as the two that Seán mentions. In Ireland we even have a bogus human rights group called Venezuelan Community in Ireland, who have tried to close down information meetings if the views expressed did not concur with their own—a normal tactic of the "democratic" opposition in Venezuela.

This is once again a very crucial moment for Venezuela, Latin America, and probably the world, as right-wing forces feel emboldened by the election of Donald Trump. ★

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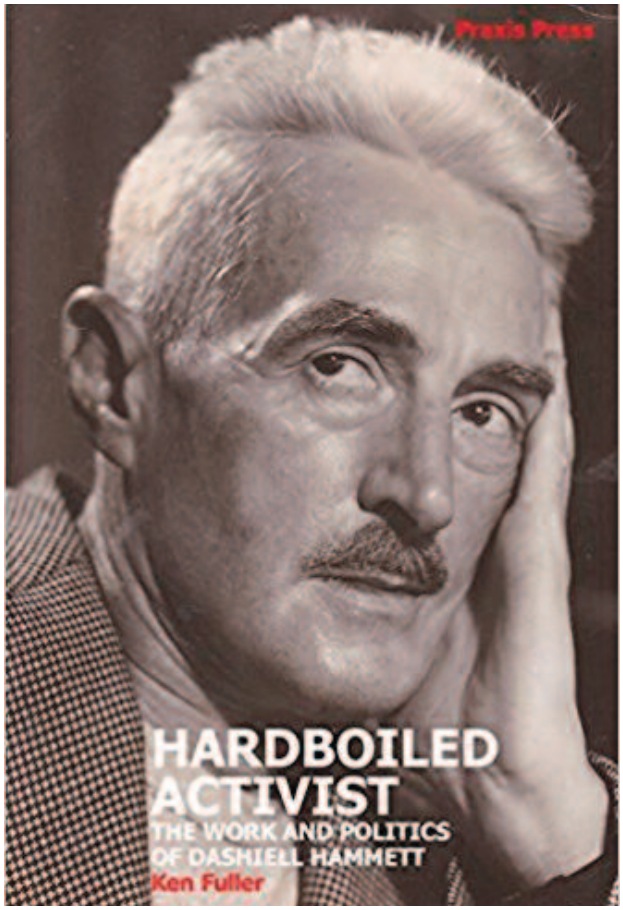

Over-boiled biography of a hard-boiled writer

David Mulligan

SPENDTHRIFT, DRUNKARD, womaniser, Pinkerton strike-breaker, crime novelist, Hollywood screenwriter and ultimately communist activist, the subject of Ken Fuller's recently published *Hardboiled Activist: The Work and Politics of Dashiell Hammett* offers the biographer reams of material.

■ Ken Fuller, *Hardboiled Activist: The Work and Politics of Dashiell Hammett* (London: Praxis Press, 2017)

Born in 1894 in New York, Samuel Dashiell Hammett would go on to become one of the more interesting, if more enigmatic, writers in the United States during the early twentieth century, who, from unlikely beginnings, went on to become president of the communist-aligned League of American Writers.

Leaving school and taking to drink at a young age (in common with many working-class writers of the period), the young Hammett was an unlikely prospect for Marxist beliefs, taking a job with the infamous Pinkerton's National Detective Agency as a strike-breaker. Hammett at the time had few qualms about the work and would draw on his experiences when he began writing short stories for pulp magazines, becoming a pioneer of the hard-boiled detective story, which took the mystery novel out of the quaint British study of Mr Holmes to the harsh, bitter streets of the American city.

Hammett quickly established himself in the field and, despite aspirations to more serious literature, was soon adapting his work for the big screen in Hollywood. His novels *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Thin Man* would become huge hits, with Humphrey Bogart playing the no-nonsense private detective Sam Spade in the former.

Hammett's life up to this point had been one of nihilism and cynicism, as reflected in his writing, and the vast sums he earned from Hollywood were soon squandered on booze and prostitutes—the latter despite his relationship with his long-term partner, Lillian Hellman, who later became a renowned playwright. At this stage Hammett's writing was beginning to dry up, and as his despair deepened he even considered suicide. These were perhaps his darkest days.

After this depression, in or around 1937, Hammett would discover Marxism and may (or may not) have joined the Communist Party of the USA. This new purpose in his life, after his writing career dwindled to a close, saw Hammett become a prominent activist and president of the influential League of American Writers. He would stand by his political beliefs until his death, in 1961, despite the McCarthy era persecution he suffered at the hands of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and the Internal Revenue Service.

Such is the man Ken Fuller attempts to unravel in *Hardboiled Activist*; and although the book begins with a passable account of Hammett's intriguing life, the rest of the book fails to hold the reader's interest. The middle section is almost entirely taken up with tiresome and needlessly detailed synopses of virtually all Hammett's written work. Fuller's thesis is that—contrary to the belief of many of Hammett's biographers—his work does not reflect his budding Marxism but rather was written before the development of his political views.

While these chapters do offer a convincing argument for this point, they are also, unfortunately, likely to turn off any prospective readers of Hammett's work, as they unforgivingly reveal the various plot twists and surprise endings that mark the detective writer's work.

The book does pick up in the latter half, where Fuller discusses Hammett's political views and activities, including his various dealings with the US government, the highlight of which is probably the following anecdote from Hammett's testimony before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. When asked by the red-baiting Senator Joe McCarthy whether if he were in charge of fighting the spread of communism he would "purchase the works of some 75 Communists and distribute their works throughout the world," Hammett replied that if he were fighting communism he would not give the people any books at all.

Despite this brief revival, the book ends on a poor note, with a closing chapter about the end of Hammett's writing career, which reads more like an appendix to a work than a chapter in a biography.

Ultimately, while Fuller does a good job of putting Hammett's work and life into its proper historical context, any reader not yet familiar with Hammett would be better served by reading the man's work itself. ★

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The "unreliable narrator" goes to Russia

Jenny Farrell

LIAM O'FLAHERTY'S lifetime coincides with momentous events: the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the emerging Irish state. He wrote the first Irish anti-war novel, wrote of resistance during the famine, and produced the first novel in the state to be banned.

Satire is something O'Flaherty excelled at. About the time he travelled to Russia, and wrote *I Went to Russia*, he produced two other pieces of highly satirical writing: *A Tourist's Guide to Ireland* (1929) and the virtually unknown *A Cure for Unemployment* (1931).

▲ *The Kooperatsiya* (co-operation), which navigated the London–Leningrad route in 1930

O'Flaherty left London for the USSR on a Soviet ship on 23 April 1930. From the first paragraph he says he "set out to join the great horde of . . . liars who have been flooding the book markets of the world . . . with books about the Bolsheviks." From that moment, O'Flaherty employs an *unreliable* narrator, a "gentleman" with socialist leanings.

Diplomatic relations between Britain and the USSR were newly re-established after collapsing in May 1924. The first five-year plan was propelling the USSR into becoming a leading industrial state. Stalin was in power.

O'Flaherty's narrator is "here in Russia, where the greatest experiment in social equality ever made by man is in full force." He lampoons the Russians' enthusiasm for their revolution and yet expresses appreciation of social progress, while O'Flaherty satirically undermines his speaker. He presents him as torn between enthusiasm and bewilderment when faced with the realities of Soviet socialism:

> I was surprised to find two separate modes of thought working simultaneously . . . One mode was antagonistic to Russia and to Bolshevism. It wished to take me home at once . . . The other . . . suggested I should . . . become an adventurer in the Soviet Army.

As the narrator awakes the next day, "reality struck me with unpleasant force and I longed for home." Such ironic destabilising repeatedly removes apparent terra firma from under the reader.

Another example of the narrator's ambiguity is towards women. While he frequently expresses male-chauvinist views, he also acknowledges the emergence of a new kind of woman.

> Dunya was the first real Russian peasant I had ever seen . . . I saw a difference between her and our own peasants which made me see the real basis of Bolshevik power. The woman's brow bore no trace of the fear that is constant in the faces of our peasants. Fear of God, fear of the lord, fear of the government, fear of the earth? She had somehow become free and she was aware of the fact.

The speaker ponders the Western stereotype of communism: loss of individuality. Yet O'Flaherty describes the beauty of life in its individual, living detail as his narrator travels. We find it in the description of Dunya or of the Chief Engineer, "a Cossack," in whom he recognises a "hereditary horseman."

The speaker meets both people on the ship that takes him from London to Leningrad. This ship becomes a symbol for the revolution. Not only Dunya and the Engineer impress our Western traveller but also the equality he encounters:

> they all talked and laughed as they ate. Among them were engineers, mates, electricians, wireless operators, all bronzed, powerfully built, healthy. No two faces belonged to a single type. Some were Jews. Others were Slavs. There was a Cossack and a Lithuanian and a Tatar from Tiflis [Tbilisi]. But they had a common vitality, a common exuberance . . .

The third mate is a woman. Not all of them are communists: the Cossack admits he "fought against them." There is no difference in status, and a visit to a Norwegian ship proves the enormous social difference between these two societies.

The speaker disembarks in Leningrad, takes the train to Moscow, meets people who show him around, and visits his publishers. Here O'Flaherty greatly satirises his narrator's perception of Soviet society and people, by feeding all the Western expectations. However, a fear expressed by some Russians of police surveillance is not satirised, simply recorded. Also, there is fear of war.

Near the book's end, the narrator flees from the literati to find real Soviet life:

> I hid myself from all my intellectual friends and went among the masses, as the Communists say; but as I did not speak the language, I was severely handicapped. I learnt the utter idiocy of those ladies and gentlemen, who attempt to write books . . . after a nodding acquaintance.

This statement and the frequent assertion that he is here to write "a Book of Lies" satirically subvert the apparent purpose of the book.

O'Flaherty concludes with an uproarious list of things his speaker claims he did:

> I played the accordion at dances in private rooms and at factory outings. I went on a binge with an ex-prince, who had become a journalist, with a popular Soviet novelist who had been a Cossack, with a Kulak, with cab drivers, with odds and ends of humanity to be met in public houses and at street corners.

This book is a double satire based on an unreliable narrator. With the benefit of hindsight we see its tragic background. The Russians' fear of surveillance had a very real cause. The expected war took place, at great cost to the Soviet people. However, the speaker's anti-Jewish stereotypes not only contradict O'Flaherty's encompassing vision of human beauty but make for difficult reading and in their own way become part of the tragic backdrop. ★