Socialist Voice

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Why we need a democratically controlled state bank

"A Jewish homeland [in Palestine] will form for England a little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism."
Ronald Storrs (first British governor of Jerusalem), *The Memoirs of Sir Ronald Storrs* (1937).

Eugene McCartan on Why we need a democratically controlled state bank

THE IRISH state sold off 28 per cent of its shares in AIB, sparking a debate about the sale and about what the money raised from the sale should be used for.

But what was missing from the debate was any serious discussion about the democratic control by the people of capital (money), or how the people should actively determine investment priorities.

All "capital" results from human labour. Without human labour, capital would simply not exist. Working people produce all wealth; yet they have no control over it, nor have they any say in how it should be spent in the interests of the common good.

We need a state-owned bank for a number of clear and sensible reasons. Firstly, workers need to remember that all wealth created in society comes from the hands of labour, from workers. All work is skilled: it just depends upon the degree of skill required.

We produce all wealth; but those who own and benefit from our labour are those who own the means of production and the reproduction of wealth: banks and finance houses.

Banks, like every other business, together with their top managers, are motivated by one thing and one thing only: profit, and the more of it the better. It doesn't matter to them how they make profit, or what destruction is caused in the process, as long as they make it, and the shareholders get their yearly dividend and they themselves get fat bonuses.

But with a state-owned bank that is accountable to the people and responsible for ensuring the common good, investment priorities would be different. It would concentrate capital spending (money) in areas where it is most needed by the people, such as building public housing, proper and socially needed infrastructural projects, such as properly funded public transport, and building the necessary schools and hospitals—not because they are profitable but because they are socially necessary for the building of a decent human environment for us all to live in.

A state bank could direct capital (money) at local job creation and developing our fishing industry and our other rich natural resources. The present government and past Irish governments have told us we have to hand over all our valuable natural resources to transnational corporations, because we have no money with which to develop them ourselves. With a state bank we would have the money.

People could move whatever savings they have into a state bank, secure in the knowledge that it is safe, that property speculators, grubby landlords or fly-by-night businesses couldn't get their hands on it, that it would be safe when the next economic and financial crash comes—as it will.

The growing housing and property bubble will burst, and the blowback will be even greater than the one caused by the previous burst.

The trade union movement must block any further sale of the state's control over AIB. It is essential for democracy, and it is essential for people-centred economic and social development.

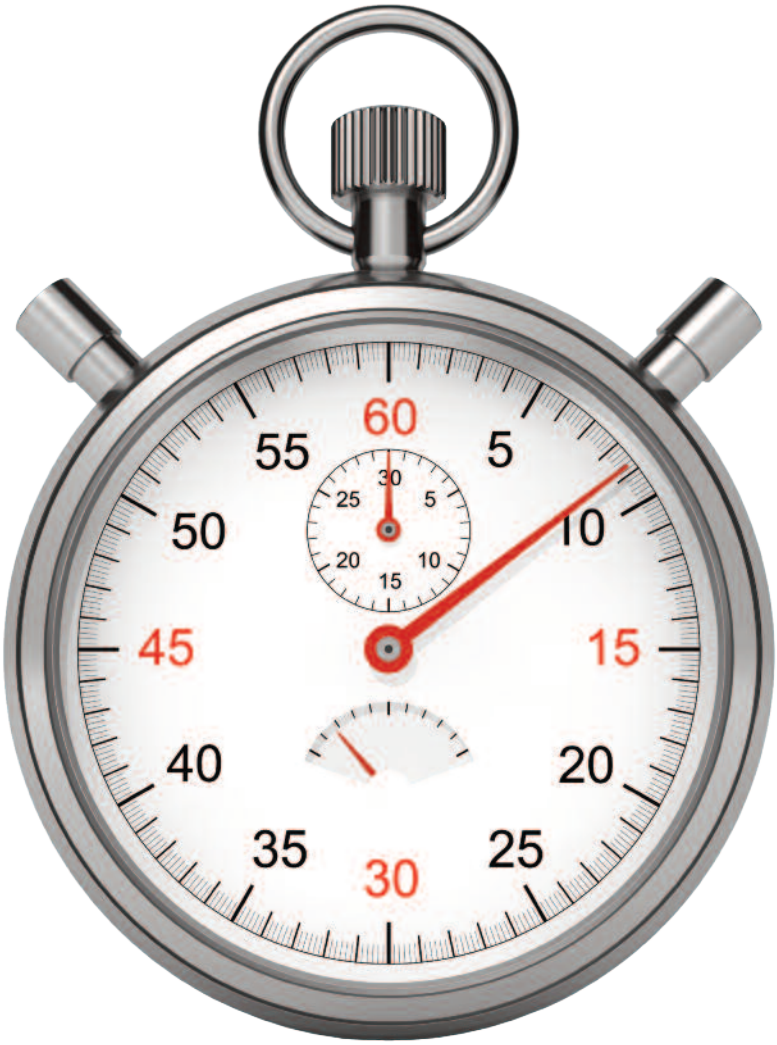
The EU should not decide our fate; instead we need to become masters in our own country, to end the subservience to the EU, to end the domination of big corporate interests.

We have to look more closely at the power structures that affect and control our lives. Whose interests does the state serve, both at the national and the local level?

Whose interests do the main parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and the minor establishment parties serve?

Do they serve working people—the majority—or the vested interests of a minority of wealthy individuals and big business interests?

No—we need a state bank, democratically owned and run by the people for the people, to ensure investment in the common good and not for the greed of the few. ★



Pay cuts by another name

The Public Service Stability Agreement, 2018–2020, prolongs the working day and makes work more intense. The public service, which employs 300,000 workers, may not be seen by those in the private sector as being subject to the same laws of capitalist exploitation as the private sector, but in fact the two are connected. Dan Taraghan reports.

THE CAPITALIST class used the financial crisis to attack the pay and conditions of the public sector and to try to drive a wedge between workers in the public and private sectors. Despite causing the crisis in the first place, capitalists and their neo-liberal propagandists claim that the pay, conditions and (especially) pensions in the public sector caused the crisis.

The attacks on the public sector were a useful diversion for avoiding debate on the whole austerity programme and the distribution of wealth in the country. Weak governments in place since 2007 acquiesced in these attacks, reducing pay, lengthening the working day, and then introducing the so-called FEMPI (Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) legislation.

This agreement locks in that worse pay and conditions. It copperfastens longer working days, career-average pensions, later retirement and lower wages while claiming to restore pay. It does nothing of the sort.

Hours

Following the rejection of Croke Park 2, the Haddington Road Agreement was negotiated. Under the terms of that agreement the working day was increased by an average of 2½ hours a week. This was, in effect, an unpaid prolonging of the working day by 7 per cent, or a decrease in pay by the same amount.

The Public Service Pay Commission, in its report of May 2017, said that because these additional hours were outside the FEMPI legislation it was outside the remit of its report.

There have been 15 million unpaid additional hours throughout the public service. The management side refused to budge on the issue. Why should it, as it had already been voted on under Haddington Road?

The prolongation of the working day is now virtually embedded. The deal offers two options, which make it clear that the additional hours are a pay cut: the option of working the pre-HRA hours with a cut in pay and pension, or sacrificing a portion of holidays above the statutory minimum.

In effect this would be a sacrifice of about 15 days per annum. Therefore you either work the longer working week with unpaid hours or take a pay cut or give up holidays.

Pay and pensions

The whole point of this agreement was to unwind FEMPI and restore pay. It was well emphasised in the media and the report of the Public Service Pay Commission what would be on offer. The gross public-sector pay bill fell by 9 per cent between 2007 and 2016. Average private-sector pay was 3 per cent above 2008 levels by 2016, whereas average public-sector pay was 8 per cent below for the same period.

In effect this deal will restore gross pay figures for 90 per cent of public servants to where they were in 2009 by 2020, for the other 10 per cent by 2020 or 2021. By 2020, 73 per cent of public servants will have had a gain of 7 per cent over present levels. Roughly 25 per cent will exit the FEMPI pension levy.

On the face of it this doesn't appear to be too bad, until you realise that on average the working week is 2½ hours longer, which is equivalent to about a 7 per cent pay cut; so the gain of 7 per cent on the headline figures is not a gain at all.

In fact by 2020 not only will there be no gain but, as average inflation since 2010 has been 0.5 per cent, it is a pay cut on the headline figures. If inflation increases further, there is no provision in the agreement for addressing that issue.

The other major change in unravelling FEMPI occurs in regard to pensions. Under FEMPI there was a "pensions-related deduction," which had absolutely nothing to do with pensions, despite the name. This was a special levy that applied only to public servants. This is now being renamed the "additional pension contribution."

Public servants at present pay €1.2 billion, made up of €500 million in occupational pension contributions and €720 million in pension levy. Post-1995 entrants also pay class A PRSI. Once the pension levy is converted to the additional pension contribution, public servants will be paying 15 per cent plus towards their occupational pensions, without any improvement in pensions.

This additional pension contribution is purely to appease the neo-liberals, who oppose defined-benefit pension schemes. Post-2011 entrants will be on a career-averaging pension scheme, which in practice will be comparable to a defined-contribution scheme.

There are also provisions for the retirement age to be pushed up, so that you keep working until you are entitled to the state retirement pension. In other words, you will be a wage slave for most of your life.

Conclusion

Altogether, this is a bad deal for the working class. The ICTU likes to claim that there is about a 6 per cent dividend in pay and conditions from being a union member. This is undoubtedly true at present. However, this deal does not maintain that position.

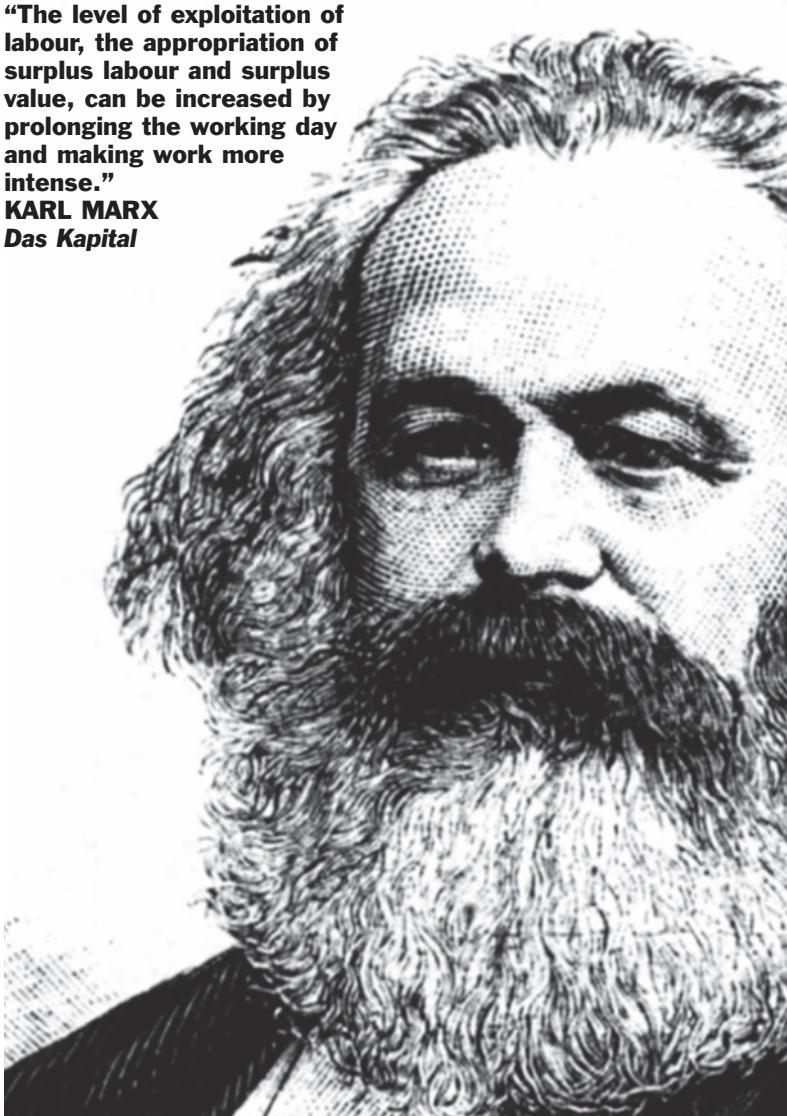
For new entrants to the public sector their pay is on a par with the private sector. The value of the pension scheme has been eroded and is now little different from a defined-contribution scheme in the private sector. Instead of setting a benchmark for private-sector employers, the Government has lowered pay and conditions for its own employees to that of the private sector.

Why, therefore, should people go through the many hurdles in joining the public service when they can get the same pay in the private sector? And why should new entrants join a trade union when union officials negotiate deals like this and try to claim that it restores pay?

There is growing evidence that new entrants to the public sector are not joining a union. The main pitch of the unions to new recruits now is various discounts on financial products. The unions have become complacent. If union membership declines, the management will use this as an excuse to attack unions, as has happened in Britain.

This deal shows that the capitalist class has been successful in undermining and overturning the report of the benchmarking body of 2002. ★

"The level of exploitation of labour, the appropriation of surplus labour and surplus value, can be increased by prolonging the working day and making work more intense."
KARL MARX
Das Kapital



CETA is TTIP by the back door

Jimmy Doran

THE COMPREHENSIVE Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada was agreed and signed last October. It now has to be ratified by all twenty-seven national parliaments before it can be fully implemented.

In the meantime, however, it can be provisionally implemented, which will allow most of the arrangements to be brought into use now; and it's looking increasingly likely that the government is about to do this in the near future, despite the fact that Seanad Éireann has already rejected provisional application.

This means that even if the deal is not ratified eventually we can still be sued for expropriation carried out during the period of provisional implementation.

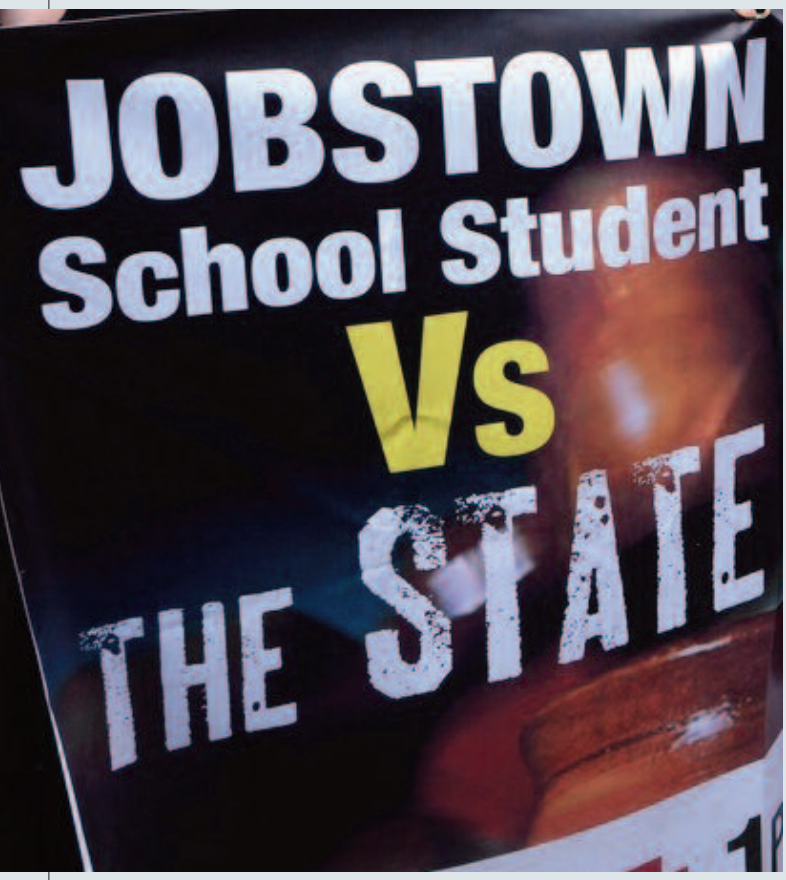
There are multiple reasons why we must rigorously oppose this deal, not least that the main reason for the agreement is to support transnational corporations in their never-ending quest for new markets and increased profits through deregulation and the removal of trade barriers that they see as restricting their potential profits.

This will be done at the expense of workers' and consumers' rights, the environment, health and safety and national sovereignty by rolling back the ability of governments to regulate and make laws in the public interest.

CETA and similar trade agreements are the latest tool in the capitalists' box for expanding the imposition of imperialism globally. The agreement is designed to increase the accumulation of the wealth created by the many for the few by transferring decision-making powers from national parliaments to global corporations in a parallel legal system.

CETA also opens up the entire state sector to competition and privatisation from transnational corporations, unless the government has excluded a specific service; and the Irish government has excluded very few. Everything is up for grabs: health, education, transport, housing, water, to name but a few.

All regulations and standards are now called into question as the two systems are converged. A corporation need only demonstrate a potential loss of



OPINION

The verdict by the courts in the politically motivated trial of the Jobstown Six was warmly welcomed among the many tens of thousands of people who are involved in the Right2Water movement writes Paul Doran

OUR PROTESTS have taken on many forms. In my own area of Clondalkin, for example, a group of women from Rowlagh decided that they had had enough, came together, and formed a group that attracted thousands of neighbours, from all walks of life.

If there was news that builders were coming to install water meters, dozens of activists would gather in a given estate, day or night, to resist their encroachments. Text messages would be spread around, children would be given to grandparents, school runs would be disrupted. Getting youngsters to extracurricular activities would be a secondary consideration, such was the determination to prevent the state from imposing its

future profit to challenge regulatory obstacles, whether reducing or removing regulations governing food safety, health and safety at work, the environment, financial services, data protection, or others.

Canada is the third-largest producer of genetically modified food in the world. This will put huge pressure behind the pro-GMO lobby here.

This agreement is very strong on investors' rights, and they are enforceable, but there are no such arrangements for employment or environmental rights. Everything—collective bargaining, working conditions, labour contracts, minimum wage, sickness and holiday pay, social welfare protection—is open to be challenged.

The parallel legal system known as the investment court system or ICS—in other words, private courts—allows corporations to sue governments for potential loss of profits. This is a direct attack on our sovereignty, as it gives corporations the power to stop governments changing laws or regulations that could affect future profits: for example, raising the minimum wage, or banning zero-hour contracts, or anything else that could be perceived to negatively affect profits.

CETA spells disaster for health and the environment. It creates a nightmare for governments resisting privatisation. Corporations can sue governments to eliminate non-tariff barriers, namely the laws and regulations constructed over decades of struggle to limit corporate power and to support services and policies needed to defend workers, citizens, and the environment.

For decades, organised labour has been fighting purely defensive battles against the neo-liberal trade and investment agenda. Crisis stagnation and the global financial crash will not be reversed through stronger doses of neo-liberalism.

As a result of the "austerity" inflicted on our people, substantial schemes of public investment are now needed to address mass unemployment, inequality, precarious work, disintegrating public services, and climate change. If CETA were introduced, the Government would be precluded from this type of public investment.

This agreement attacks the common good in many ways, purely to bolster the profits of big business. It must be resisted at all costs. It will accelerate the race to the bottom and complete the neo-liberal coup.

And it brings the EU, as its negotiator, into conflict with the Constitution of Ireland:

- article 15.2.1, which vests the sole power to make law in the Oireachtas
- article 34.1, which vests the power to dispense justice in the Irish courts
- article 34.3.2, which makes the High Court and appellate courts the sole courts in which a law may be questioned.

The investor-state mechanism must surely contravene these provisions.

Since the election of Donald Trump, the threat of TTIP has diminished for the time being; but we must not let it come in the back door in the guise of CETA. More than half of all American corporations have a base in Canada, and all they need do is open an office in Canada to facilitate them in their quest for global dominance and come under the CETA deal.

For all those in the North arguing to retain a customs union after Brexit, they might want to rethink this and realise that if a customs union is retained, CETA and all the other trade agreements being negotiated will be part of it. Maybe they will want to jump back over the fence and take up their previous stance against British and European imperialism.

Unless we kick off the yoke of imperialism, Ireland will never have economic independence. If the Six Counties were to be united with the rest of the country, independent from Britain but as part of the EU, we would only have changed one imperialist yoke for another.

If CETA is resisted and not introduced it will provide the people of Europe with a breathing-space before the inevitable next attack by imperialism. This is the nature of the EU: there never can be democracy or economic independence as a member, because its purpose is to represent the interests of the elite at the expense of the working class.

Stopping CETA will only slow down the neo-liberal agenda, not stop it. To break the stranglehold on our people we must leave the EU. Only then can we regain our sovereignty, win back economic independence, and advance our struggle for a socialist republic.

The EU cannot be reformed. It must be dismantled. ★

Jobstown activists vindicated

undemocratic will.

The very fact that, for the first time in many decades, trade unions led from the front in this campaign, organising community groups and holding countless public meetings and political education forums, was the key to its success, giving the struggle a lucid and accessible ideological foundation, alerting the people to the ways in which the state set about undermining the interests of the citizens it supposedly represents.

Through its deployment of its police force, its judicial arm, and a barrage of restrictive, anti-democratic legislation, the state sought to intimidate and ultimately lock up innocent protesters trying to exercise their rights. The name of Joan Burton will be forever etched in our minds as the embodiment of this vicious, "official" response to the water movement, the then leader of a party that showed itself to be more vengeful towards the Irish working class even than its bigger Blueshirt sibling.

The campaign also demonstrated the glaring shortcomings of Dáil Éireann and the political parties within it as vehicles for advancing the cause. Despite having many eloquent opponents to the charges in its ranks, Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin shamefully fluffed his lines over whether he would pay his water bill—a fiasco that cost his party the Tallaght by-election.

What Jobstown represented was just. The Jobstown Six have been put through a political show trial, backed up by crass attempts at deception from gardaí in the witness box. Such fabrications brought back memories of the Sallins train robbery and the Garda's underhand practices at that time.*

Jobstown is not an isolated incident: we must not forget the coming trial of another eleven activists.

Essential to winning the publicity war in the months ahead is reiterating the central demand of the Right2Water campaign: that a referendum must be called to enshrine public ownership of our water resources in the Constitution, lest it be robbed from us by multinational conglomerates that have no interest in providing clean water to our homes and businesses.

Lessons have been learnt along the way, and that is perhaps the most invaluable kind of education we could have: forged in the heat of struggle against a seemingly all-powerful adversary, determined to destroy us at every turn.

To the thousands of men and especially women of Ireland, this writer salutes you and your efforts, and asks you to recall the tireless maxim for the road ahead: "Educate, agitate, organise, to advance the interests of the working class!"

*The Sallins train robbery took place on 31 March 1976 when the Cork to Dublin mail train was robbed near Sallins, Co. Kildare. It was also the period of the "Heavy Gang," when a group of Special Branch detectives systematically engaged in the beating of people in custody, not only suspected republicans but also left, trade union and unemployed activists. ★

Educate, Agitate, Organise.

Eoghan O'Neill

POLITICS IS often about language, and political movements need common language and slogans to act as a solidifier between the aspirations and goals of a movement and the individuals who take part in it.

Although Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party campaign has probably been analysed to death at this stage, it is nonetheless important to show how a simple slogan such as *"For the many, not the few"* can capture the mood of a movement.

Political parties, of course, always have election campaigns and party slogans that try to capture people's imagination and the people's mood: think of Obama's "Hope" and "Change" campaigns, or Trump's *"Make America great again"*—all successful and all used to whip up an army of followers to see them over the post.

Some of these slogans, however, have rung very hollow, as it is the policy decisions that dictate whether things change or are "made great," for the many and not the few.

The British Labour Party's manifesto, though not revolutionary, has shifted some of the empty rhetoric in past campaigns to more tangible and realisable goals that would certainly benefit the working class. Fundamental socialist policies, such as public ownership and control of infrastructure, services and industry and free education and health services, are at the heart of Labour's manifesto, which can't be said for other campaign promises.

That this manifesto resonated with young people in a massive way clearly demonstrates that the mantra of TINA—"There is no alternative"—is not being believed by younger generations, whose material and concrete circumstances are contrary to what they aspire to and believe to be possible. These aspirations are socialist in content but they have yet to garner the revolutionary organisational form, together with a concrete class analysis of the imperialist forces, domestic and global.

The challenge communists face today is to try to convince their allies in the socialist, republican, trade union and community activist movements that the immediate emphasis should not be on parliamentary politics—as Sinn Féin, People Before Profit (SWP) and Solidarity (Socialist Party) seem to think—but rather on building a movement, a workers' and people's alliance, whose roots are in our communities and work-places, in our activist, social, sports and cultural groups.

Our goal should be the satisfaction of the long-term needs of the people, which cannot be met under the existing capitalist system of production and distribution.

How, then, do we sum up in a simple slogan the work that is to be done?

The central and immediate task is to deepen and broaden class politics and education, without which the working class will remain weak and easily pigeon-holed into the "loony left" image it has today, broadcast by our class enemies and accepted by large sections of our own class.

What is needed now is not just words and theory but theory in action and practice by all those who are serious and willing to bring about a just social and democratic system, "for the many and not the few." This needs to be a people's alliance, inclusive of political parties; however, experience has shown that political parties have too often used movements for their own opportunist gains, something that has to be condemned outright and publicly opposed by barring such parties if necessary.

Political schools with workers' education are the key to beginning the advance towards workers' power. There have been great examples recently where this has worked in practice, with the numerous weekend schools organised by the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum, and Trademark's political economy course, as well as others.

Apart from the participative political education on offer, the social aspect of meeting comrades from different political backgrounds adds to the rich educational experience.

There are no shortcuts in building class-consciousness, and at this time it should be the highest priority in the political, trade union and community pillars to begin to forge a new movement of the people's alliance. It will require a massive effort in time and resources, which needs to be sustained over a number of years.

This needs to be established nationally, and continuously. It could be a crucial area where the trade union movement would contribute some of the essential resources, such as finance and premises, required for hosting the educational workshops, helping to bridge the gap between communities and trade unions.

The very foundation of the topics, materials and writers must emphasise the class nature of our society, otherwise the goal of building class-consciousness can never be reached. An all-Ireland workers' educational programme needs to be developed and introduced; however, the work already done by those mentioned above (and others) can be used as a guide or template that can easily be reproduced so as to minimise the delay in getting it out to the communities and to workers.

Theorists and writers such as Marx, Lenin, Connolly, O'Donnell and Greaves, to name but a few, need to be part of the backbone of our working-class theory and study groups.

As the study groups, weekend schools and workshops develop over time, the practical

application of the theory can help in developing and stimulating the campaigns and demands of the working class. Education develops into agitation.

There needs to be a commitment from those within this "people's alliance" to developing a minimum programme to maximise unity, rather than a detailed maximum programme, which would only garner minimum unity and sow division.

We know that the Right2Change policy document can be a good starting-point. From that programme can stem common issues of struggle and campaigns that need solidarity, co-operation, and trust. At the heart of any campaign there needs to be a class analysis and an understanding of the forces and interests at stake. Our goal should always be to strengthen the hand of labour and weaken the hand of capital and imperialism; from there, tactics and strategies can be worked out.

If these types of practice and structure are bypassed, our discipline will never hold, the relationships and connections between the various strands will not take root, trust and solidarity will be impossible to maintain in any meaningful manner, our political education will falter, class-consciousness will not be raised, and eventually and inevitably we will be defeated, as has been the fate of the many attempts by Irish revolutionaries over the centuries.

If we develop these practices and structures, the strength and confidence of the working class will begin to surface. It will empower the working masses, those who by necessity must work to stave off hunger, eviction, and poverty, to genuinely confront those who wish to strip us of our power and daily needs. Only over a period of education, practical application and solidarity work will distinctions and antagonisms between the three pillars begin to dissolve.

This leads to the organisation phase. Once this is set in motion the movement will have a stronger chance electorally and could seek to build a people's alliance electoral platform, which could give a voice to our class within the existing capitalist system; but it should not take precedence over building an anti-imperialist revolutionary movement, as we must always have in our sights the overthrow of the barbaric capitalist system, not simply reforming it.

Ireland's age-old problem has been the failure to weave together the social question and the national question at revolutionary moments, leading to a weakened revolutionary movement, unable to withstand the counter-offensive of its enemy.

We have yet to build a revolutionary movement strong and capable enough to withstand our enemies, foreign and domestic. This is the first step that needs to be addressed, and hence the need for a nationwide workers' political education programme.

The second step, building towards a revolutionary moment, will need the working class, be they communist, socialist, republican, social-democratic, green, or whatever label that is ascribed, to be united against imperialism, whether European, American, or British, and the capitalist exploitative system, where the means of production are in the privileged hands of a tiny minority.

No one party can provide an alternative: the enemy is too strong and has too many weapons in its arsenal. Rather than having an objective of building a new or existing party to take control of government, we need to rebuild the power of the working class to strive to take control of state power.

Without first building the solid class foundations, reforms in the system are all our class can strive for. (The paid-off, opportunist and less class-conscious sections of our class will be content with this.) To avoid this it is imperative that we broaden and build the alliances needed to move towards transformative demands that strengthen labour, build confidence in working-class power, in its own institutions and structures, and move closer to revolutionary conditions and to revolutionary moments, to finally overthrow the class of the exploiters.

The fate of the working class rests with the working class, and on those committed to building a world free from exploitation, misery, plunder, slavery, and destruction of our planet. To sum up in a simple slogan the work that is to be done: *Educate, agitate and organise.* ★

106 ways to continue the assault on our planet

Johnny McGrath

ON 19 JULY THE minister for communications, climate action and the environment, Denis Naughten, and the taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, published their "National Mitigation Plan," containing 106 "actions."

Well, not actions, really—or ideas, or plans: more like a list of 106 things, most of which are merely a continuation of Government, EU, Paris Agreement and World Trade Organization and World Bank policies, including the controversial and completely unsuccessful Emissions Trading Directive (2003), which essentially financialised carbon emissions—the pinnacle of neo-liberal insanity, or what Marxists might call the metabolic rift: that fundamental contradiction between the capital-accumulation process and the environment needed to sustain life itself.

Like most of this "new politics," and new taoiseach, scratch the surface and it's business as usual for people and the environment.

For those interested, the full plan is available at www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/climate-action, with a handy appendix outlining each of the 106 "things."

The stated aim of existing emissions policy from the National Policy Position is to see *"an aggregate reduction in carbon dioxide (CO^2) emissions of at least 80 per cent (compared to 1990 levels) by 2050 across the electricity generation, built environment and transport sectors; and in parallel, an approach to carbon neutrality in the agriculture and land-use sector, including forestry, which does not compromise capacity for sustainable food production."* And the Government states in this 106-point "plan": *"Importantly, the Government recognises that this first Plan does not provide a complete roadmap to achieve the 2050 objective, but begins the process of development of medium to long term mitigation choices for the next and future decades."*

So, while we have an ambition to reduce 80 per cent of emissions to try to tackle the greatest challenge confronting humanity, we really have no actual concrete measures: we *kind* of have a process and a *desire* to try to develop measures at some point before 2050—*hopefully.* Inspiring stuff!

If you can make your way through the points, it is clearly a continuation of light-touch failed regulatory policies, and giving incentives to business through grants and tax cuts, and making citizens pay through taxes and levies, which, as always under this system, will benefit those with money to invest in their home or cars and penalise working people who can't afford to avail of "choices."

Indeed one of the 106 points is the establishment of a "Behavioural Economics Working Group" to consider behavioural change, which will recommend even more grants and incentives.

The biggest polluters—big business in agriculture, energy, and transport—will continue to pollute the most and pay the least, while individuals will be burdened and blamed. As the Canadian environmentalist Ian Angus recently put it, *"and there are about three billion people on this Earth who contribute nothing to global warming, people whose greenhouse gas emissions are essentially zero. And you've got another 2½ billion or more whose emissions are very slight. So it's not about what individuals are doing but what giant corporations are doing. Or the US military and the British military—they have a bigger impact on climate than any million people you would come across."* ★

VENEZUELA REPORTS

Chronicle of a coup foretold?

Seán Edwards in Caracas reports

Yes to the constitution. Photo:teleSUR

PCV demonstration

LATIN AMERICA is the original seat of neo-colonialism. After the wars of liberation from Spanish colonial rule, power did not rest in the hands of those who had fought for it. The new ruling class lost no time in establishing a relationship with Britain, and later with the growing imperialist power of the United States, which came to regard the entire continent as its "back yard."

Many times, the United States has intervened in Latin American states to ensure its continued dominance, even to the extent of installing fascist regimes, as in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil.

So when Hugo Chávez won his spectacular election victory in 1998, with his programme of "Bolivarian Revolution" reasserting Venezuela's sovereignty and independence and promising to use the country's oil wealth for the benefit of the people, it infuriated the Venezuelan right wing and its ally, the United States, which set about organising the coup d'état of 2002.

Although this was defeated by an unprecedented mass mobilisation of the people, at no time has the threat been lifted. The imperialist-oligarchic counter-attack has won victories over weaker opponents in Argentina and Brazil. Venezuela is its principal target.

The Bolivarian Revolution has brought enormous benefits to the people. Misión "Barrio Adentro" (Operation "Into the Neighbourhood") brought medical services to the poor areas, with the participation of Cuban doctors, where Venezuelan doctors had never bothered to go.

Misión Robinson eliminated illiteracy. The Bolivarian University opened up higher education to students from the working class. Most recently the Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela (Great Venezuelan Housing Mission) has housed 1.8 million families from the shanty towns that surround all Venezuelan cities.

Yet with all this massive social investment, and in spite of all its talk of "21st-century socialism," the property and the economic power of the capitalist class has been left untouched.

This class, which for decades enjoyed unrestricted access to Venezuela's oil wealth, without ever developing the economy, and now deeply resents seeing this wealth spent on social projects, continues to invest its profits abroad, with the flight of capital amounting to more than $100 billion since Chávez's election; and its hatred for the government never abated.

The beast is infuriated but is not seriously wounded. The state's own efforts to develop industry or agriculture were also inadequate, to put it mildly.

So, when the price of oil dropped, the Venezuelan economy crashed. As Rocío Maneiro, the Venezuelan ambassador, explained at a meeting in Dublin,

How to improve on a 'perfect' constitution while a fascist throws a petrol bomb at you

from Paul Dobson from Venezuela

THE EVENING Hugo Chávez passed away, in between his tears a friend said to me that now the moment to get stuck in defending this process of changes in Venezuela had come, that now the hard battle was about to begin. And how right he was!

By the time this article is printed, and following President Maduro's master move of convoking it, a new National Constituent Assembly should have been elected and installed to redraw Venezuela's Constitution of 1999. This is no mean feat, as it comes in the midst of yet another wave of right-wing, terrorist action, with strong fascist elements (especially in the logistical, organisational and communication areas), which has left nearly a hundred people dead.

How will the constitution be redrawn? Upon what political lines? Will the terrorists permit the election and the completion of the process? How will this affect the balance of classes and the advance towards socialism?

We are in a period of deepened class confrontation and uncertainty in Venezuela.

The state media have always described the 1999 Constitution as "perfect," "progressive," and "unimprovable." Such descriptions are a better reflection of the fierce nature of the propaganda war than the implacable quality of the 1999 document. We, the communists, always described it as "a great step forward," "progressive" and "hugely important" but lacking in numerous fields, where it "did not go far enough."

Let us hope that this National Constituent Assembly is bold enough to take the drastic steps needed to bring about the structural, political and economic changes the country needs to move out of its present prolonged crisis (of capitalism) in a revolutionary and not a reactionary manner.

We, the communists, are working to bring to the Constituent Assembly the audacious changes that are required in the structure of the state, in the bourgeois electoral model, in the extractionist, parasitic economy that the nation's social programmes rely on, in an antiquated neo-colonial political model, and in addressing a balance of classes that still benefits the bourgeoisie, despite nearly twenty years of "revolution."

However, reformist and reactionary wings within the multi-class governing United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV)—similar to the PSOE in Spain and the Labour Party in Britain—have gained ground in recent years and will be looking for a different, social-democratic model to be defined in the Constitution.

The internal comradely struggle within the Chavista ranks, which includes the PSUV, the communists, and a range of other small groupings, will ultimately determine our future. If we are able to realign the balance of forces in favour of a worker-based, scientifically socialist revolutionary bloc and remove the bourgeois, reformist Chavista elements from significant positions of power,

income from oil dropped from $100 billion to $6 billion.

The weaknesses of the economy were exacerbated by a campaign of economic sabotage, with companies hoarding goods to create shortages for which the government would be blamed, exporting subsidised Venezuelan food to sell it for the full market price over the border in Colombia or Brazil, and speculating in goods and currency.

A combination of all these troubles and its own weaknesses, hesitations, and mistakes, compounded by the loss of Hugo Chávez in March 2013, resulted in a large number of its supporters losing confidence in the government and abstaining from voting in the National Assembly elections in December 2015.

This gave the opposition a majority in the Assembly. Rather than establishing a working relationship with President Maduro, it declared that its only ambition is to remove him—by any means. The constitution, with its separation of powers, does not allow this.

A section of the opposition resorted to organising violent gangs to create as much havoc as possible: blocking roads, attacking government buildings, and assassinating officials, judges, and ordinary citizens, like Orlando Figuera, who was burnt alive.

The aim is to provoke a response from the government that could be used to justify an invasion. This was stated explicitly by an opposition spokesman, Juan Requesens, in an address to Florida International University in the United States.

The government's response has been to organise elections to a National Constituent Assembly, which would have the power to propose amendments to the constitution, which would then be put to a referendum. It is described as a peaceful alternative to violence; the opposition describe it as a move to consolidate the "personal dictatorship" of Nicolás Maduro, and Donald Trump threatens sanctions if the election proceeds, a threat echoed by Federica Mogherini on behalf of the European Union.

The election will take place on 30 July, and the government faces a challenge to win a big turn-out. It must also defeat any effort by the violent gangs to prevent the vote taking place. This may require stronger action than it has been willing to take so far, though military forces will be deployed to protect polling stations.

The opposition organised what they said was a referendum—without the National Electoral Council, the only body in the state authorised to organise voting. They claimed that mote than 7 million people voted to overthrow the president, though there were no safeguards against multiple voting (which has been proved), or multiple counting for that matter. It can't be investigated now: the ballots were destroyed.

This was, of course, reported in the corporate media as a valid vote—unlike the forthcoming election to the Constituent Assembly, which will be conducted in accordance with the highest international standards.

The government of Nicolás Maduro has been unwilling to take strong measures in defence of the economy or in defence of public order and instead endeavoured to engage the opposition in negotiations. However, not even Pope Francis could persuade them to engage in serious discussions. Why should they? They have the full backing of the United States, as expressed by President Obama, who declared Venezuela to be a threat to the United States, an absurd falsehood repeated by President Trump.

They also have the backing of the international corporate media, which would have us believe that the murderous gangs who burn food supplies, burn buses and burn people alive are participating in peaceful demonstrations. The murder of Orlando Figuera, for example, was not reported in the *Irish Times*.

It was against the background of this crisis that the 15th Congress of the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) took place at the end of June. The PCV has many issues with the government of Nicolás Maduro, which has been drifting to the right on many issues, including labour issues (in spite of the existence of very good labour law) and the absence of a programme to establish a genuinely sovereign economy.

Above all, the party believes that peace will be achieved only with the defeat of fascism, not with appeasement. It is angry that the Gran Polo Patriótico, set up to co-ordinate the work of political parties and people's organisations, has been virtually abandoned by the government party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Together with Patria Para Todos (Homeland for All) and other parties and groups, it has established the Anti-Fascist Anti-Imperialist Popular Front. The PSUV is invited to join.

The Communist Party, as always the most determined and resolute in the pursuit of independence, sovereignty, and social progress, insists that victory can be won by building the people's unity and by mobilising all the popular forces, by deepening and advancing the revolution. ★

condemning them to be our allies on common ground such as patriotic, anti-imperialist defence of the nation and no more, then we will have won a major battle for the workers of the cities and the countryside.

However, this struggle is being conducted delicately in parallel with a rearguard action against an advancing far-right assault.

These were among the major threads of debate in the recent 15th Congress of the Communist Party of Venezuela, held in June.

Meanwhile the right-wing opposition continues to advance in what can only be considered successful terms towards their objectives. Following their electoral victory in the National Assembly, they have continued to take advantage of very real failures, inefficiency and corruption within the government to add people from the middle and working classes to their cause. Their hugely successful communication campaign, both within Venezuela and in the international field—often based on halftruths, manipulation, and downright lies—has convinced many Venezuelan workers and small business owners to turn their back on the Chavista project of national liberation and socialism, and has alienated them from their class bases.

Recent terrorist street action, which has been combined with legal manoeuvring, talks, and other, more "civilised" activities by the parties representing these strata of society, has put immense pressure on the government.

The opposition's recent "plebiscite," which the communists described as a "theatrical scam," while not achieving the 7.1 million votes they claimed it did (the unverifiable figure was probably closer to 2 million), was nonetheless a success in the propaganda war. As was the bizarre decision by the High Supreme Court to grant house arrest to one of the fascist leaders of the extremist right-wingers, Leopoldo López, after serving a tiny percentage of his fourteen-year sentence behind bars for his role in the terrorist acts of 2014.

This semi-liberty he now enjoys has only remotivated the right-wingers, who sense a weak government and stride forward in the knowledge that full or partial impunity awaits them should they be caught torching a bus, shooting a civilian, looting a shop, lynching a passer-by, blowing up a power station or oil refinery, extorting businesses, or even throwing a petrol bomb at a public office—all of which, and more, has happened in recent weeks.

The tasks facing President Maduro, the government, its allies, the Constituent Assembly, and us—all the socialists, revolutionaries in the streets, with whom the responsibility ultimately lies—are huge. The repercussions, should we fail to guarantee and firmly advance in the current process of changes, will be fierce and will probably include repression and persecution of both the legal and extra-legal types.

A systematic structural crisis of capitalism is to blame for the economic woes we now face; and the outdated, corrupt, corroded political system put in place to protect the interests of the capitalist class is the root cause of the political crisis we are now confronting.

Hence, in this centenary year of the Great October Revolution, it is fair to say that, when searching for a solution to such problems, only a break with capitalism and a genuine, class-based, scientific, planned, worker-based advance towards socialism can provide the answers. ★

No end to Erdoğan's repression in Turkey

Nuriye Gülmen and Semih Özakça

ALMOST A YEAR after the failed coup of 15 July 2015, the Turkish state has announced the holding of symbolic 'Democracy Watches' both in Turkey's eighty-one provinces and in its foreign missions around the globe. ***Report by Adam Petrossian***

A spokesperson for the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), Mahir Ünal, announced this policy, stating: "We are not searching for democracy in the streets, we are commemorating the heroes of that night who went out into the streets to defend our ideal democracy."

Meanwhile a spokesperson for the office of the Turkish president, İbrahim Kalın, confirmed that President Erdoğan would personally take part in these "democracy watches."

It is bitterly ironic that, in the wake of the coup, attributed to a cadre of followers of the Islamic cleric (and former Erdoğan ally) Fethullah Gülen, the mask of democracy has been used to cover the purge of any elements within Turkish civil society that would oppose the burgeoning power grab of Erdoğan and the AKP. Among those purged from positions are ten thousand academics and teachers. In that number are Nuriye Gülmen and Semih Özakça, who have been on hunger strike for more than 140 days, detained in the living hell of the Turkish prison system after staging a protest against the use of emergency laws to dismiss them, and others, from their posts and demanding rights for those purged.

The two—an academic and a primary school teacher—have been detained and on hunger strike since 9 March 2017, accused of membership of, and propagandising for, the illegal Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), which is considered a terrorist organisation in Turkey, as well as by the United States and the European Union.

The cases of Nuriye Gülmen and Semih Özakça are only two among thousands who have been purged and even detained, accused of sympathy for the Kurdish liberation struggle, support for or membership of a number of illegal socialist organisations or of FETO, the organisation associated with the teachings of Gülen. These cases make it clear that the right to democratic freedom of protest does not fall within the remit of the democracy that is represented by the "Democracy Watches" of Erdoğan and the AKP.

The recent constitutional referendum, which sought to drastically extend the powers of the office of president by removing all checks and balances as well as granting Erdoğan the right to hold office until 2029, was held in a climate of fear and state intimidation, with the same tactics of smearing opponents with allegations of terrorism.

Again, it is clear from this that the Turkish state uses a form of Doublespeak, posing as the defender of a less and less democratic system while opposing and repressing the democratic forces of Kurdish liberation and socialism through draconian measures.

This furious power grab on behalf of Erdoğan even drew some cosmetic criticism from the ruling classes of Turkey's NATO allies, such as Germany and the Netherlands. However, these criticisms were largely based on complaints about Erdoğan's lack of diplomatic decorum, rather than on any real defence of those who the Turkish state routinely oppresses, imprisons, or kills.

In contrast, no such complaints were lodged by the British prime minister, Theresa May, in January when she met Erdoğan to complete the sale of £100 million worth of jet fighters to the Turkish state. Much like British arms sales to the reactionary Saudi regime, British arms sales to Turkey will serve as the bread and butter of British imperial capital, regardless of other financial uncertainties that Britain may face in a post-Brexit future.

However, to diagnose either Erdoğan or the AKP as the disease affecting Turkey, rather than prolonged and apparent symptoms of a long affliction, would be mistaken. Erdoğan and the AKP did not start the bloody persecution of minority groups struggling for the right of self-determination; it did not ban the parties of socialism and the working class; and it did not establish the widespread collusion between the state and fascist terrorist organisations, such as the "Grey Wolves," through a complex deep-state network of actors.

The bogeyman of Turkey's turn towards Islamism under Erdoğan, much feared in the west, has not changed the fact that the previous "secular" governments followed identical programmes of bloody and brutal repression, including those belonging to religious minority groups. The murder of socialists such as İbrahim Kaypakkaya, Mahir Çayan and Deniz Gezmiş happened on the watch of the Kemalist CHP (Republican People's Party). Similarly, some of the bloodiest years of repression of Kurdish socialists occurred under the rule of secular parties.

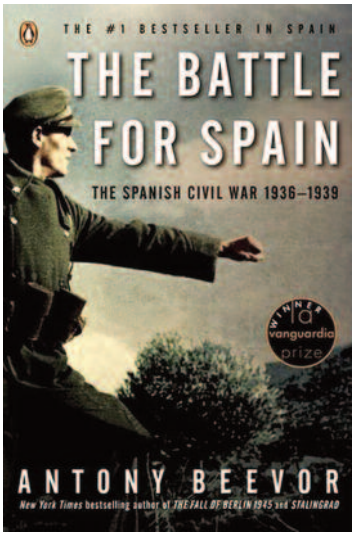
However, the recent actions of Erdoğan and the AKP can be seen as the result of both the re-igniting of the Kurdish liberation struggle since the cancelling of the ceasefire of 2013 between the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK) and the Turkish state in 2015 and the increasing entanglement of the Turkish military in the continuing war in Syria. This grab for unlimited power allows Erdoğan not only to entrench his own position but to maintain the domestic repression of democratic forces such as Kurdish liberation movements and entrench Turkey as a regional military and political power.

The murderous approach of the Turkish state to the democratic forces of Kurdish national liberation has been increasingly evident in recent years. In a report published in February 2017 the United Nations estimated that roughly 1,200 people have been killed in euphemistically named "security operations" by Turkish forces: enforced disappearances, torture, destruction of housing and cultural heritage, incitement to hatred, preventing access to emergency medical aid, food, water and livelihoods, violence against women, and severe curtailment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, as well as political participation.

As well as those killed by Turkish forces, it is estimated that the number of displaced people in the mainly Kurdish regions of south-east Turkey, where these murderous operations are carried out, is between 355,000 and 500,000.

From all this, the path for all progressive-minded socialists is clear: Solidarity with the hunger-strikers and others repressed by the Turkish state! Solidarity with the Kurdish democratic liberation movement! No to state repression under the mask of democracy! ★

An unbalanced history of the Spanish war



Alex Homits

ANTONY BEEVOR'S book on the war in Spain is an excellent starter guide for those with little to no knowledge of the general history of what led up to the war, the main actors, and the consequences.

The book has great photographic references and a plethora of follow-up material for exploring in the index. For this it is commendable.

The author attempts to present the Spanish Civil War as impartially as possible, but unfortunately he cannot hide his disdain or bias against communism and the USSR.

The book begins by laying the foundations of the unstable and uneasy formation of a republican government and a transition to a parliamentary democracy. As can be imagined, this was a turbulent process. The ideas of nationalism, fascism and monarchism were still very prominent both in a European context and in Spain. At this time, two years before the outbreak of the fascist coup, the very liberal social-democratic government attempted basic agrarian land reform. The propaganda that the fascists, and also the Catholic Church hierarchy, spewed out was vicious. Violence instigated by the ruling class attempted to roll back some of the reforms, especially in areas where there was no desire to part with land and hand it over to poor peasants.

'Beevor attempts to paint the republican forces and fascist forces as the same, despite their being qualitatively different from each other...'

We see how the forces of the right mobilised around a conservative, aristocratic concept of a pure Christian Spain and began to plot in secret among most strata of society. Simultaneously we see the UGT (the communist trade union) and the CNT (the anarchist trade union) mobilise their own workers and put forward militaristic rhetoric: they will defend the gains that this moderate move has made. The government collapsed and the right triumphed in the following elections; immediately they began to roll back the minuscule social gains.

The trade unions began a slow and steady fight back through strikes. Similar to the events unfolding in Venezuela, assassinations of prominent trade unionists began to occur. Tit-for-tat confrontation all over Spain began to become more frequent; the new right-wing government had to act.

It drafted legislation in late 1935 for the parliament which they believed would benefit them. To summarise, the legislation made political coalitions dominate the creation of government, even if their win was by the slimmest margin possible. What ensued was the complete polarisation of society, leading up to the 1936 election. Because of the legislation introduced, the parliament now favoured coalitions rather than individual parties, and what occurred from then onwards is the development of a polarised left-right divide.

The election campaign was marked by an increase in militant rhetoric. Beevor states that both sides decided in effect that neither would recognise the outcome if it went against them. In this case he attempts to equalise the two sides, as if they are two sides of the same coin and equally guilty. This is fundamentally how Western historians distort history.

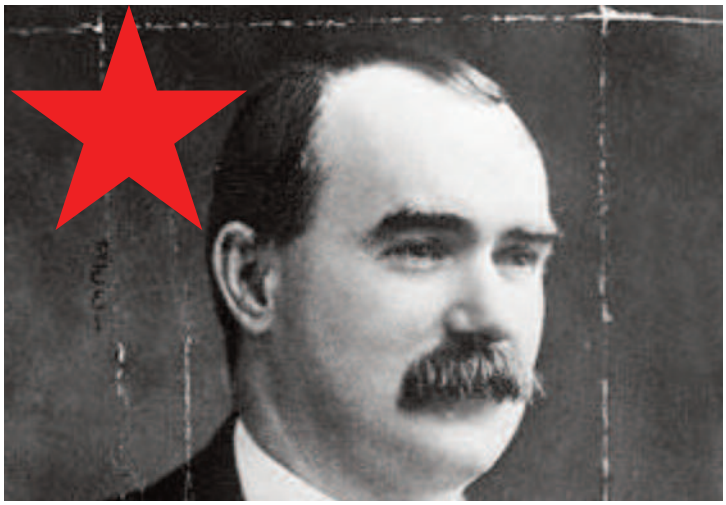
Beevor attempts to paint the republican forces and fascist forces as the same, despite their being qualitatively different from each other in every single way. The republican forces stood for egalitarian values and progressive ideas, including the separation of church and state as well as comprehensive agrarian reform.

Beevor tries to demonise the USSR throughout the book and lay the blame for the fall of the Republic on the shoulders of the USSR, Stalin, and the Communist Party of Spain. For anybody well read on the subject this comes across as massively confusing and ultimately dishonest. It is especially dishonest when the author refers to the role of the Western powers in providing aid for Franco and the nationalists, as well as the huge role the Nazi and fascist governments of Germany and Italy played in technical support and also physical support on the ground.

To conclude, the author provides a generally good overview of the Spanish Civil War. Fundamentally, however, the general thrust of this book is a narrative where there are in effect no objectively established progressive forces and everybody is painted as being guilty. This is highly typical in Western historiography. History is presented without context, and the hegemonic conceptualisations of socialism that exist in the West continue to be regurgitated.

I would recommend reading this book after the reader has already familiarised themselves with the detail of the Spanish Civil War but would not promote it is as an introduction, as it actively distorts history. ★

Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War,*



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The O'Flahertys, Ireland, and the Russian Revolution

Féile na bhFlaitheartach is a distinctive event in the cultural calendar of summer schools. It commemorates the lives of two Aran-born brothers who went into the world with a desire to change it.

Enthusiasts from different countries gather with the Inis Mór (Árainn) community to celebrate the O'Flahertys' contribution to making the world a better place. Féile na bhFlaitheartach takes place on 26 and 27 August 2017 on Inis Mór. Programme details are available from the society's Facebook page and Twitter.

Féile na bhFlaitheartach is now in its fourth year. As always, the festival will take place on the O'Flaherty home island on the last weekend of August. This year's principal theme is the Russian Revolution of 1917, and what it meant to Ireland.

Just how did this historic event, thousands of miles away, affect Ireland and the O'Flaherty brothers? Soviet Russia was the first country to recognise the independence of Ireland in 1918. What did the Irish think of a successful overthrow of Tsarist Russia eighteen months after their own insurrection?

The October 1917 revolution was of untold importance to Tom O'Flaherty, who became passionately involved in the revolutionary movement in the United States, writing a column every day for the daily newspaper of the Communist Party of the USA. Soviet Russia also influenced Liam's understanding of society; and it was the first non-English-speaking country to recognise his writings by translating and publishing his work.

Seán Byers, historian of the Irish communist movement, and Maurice Casey, researcher on the international connections of Irish women radicals during the inter-war period, will address the festival on Saturday 26 August. Their talks are entitled, respectively, "Ireland and the Russian Revolution" and "'To abduct the mistresses of the commissars': The forgotten women who brought Liam O'Flaherty to Soviet Russia."

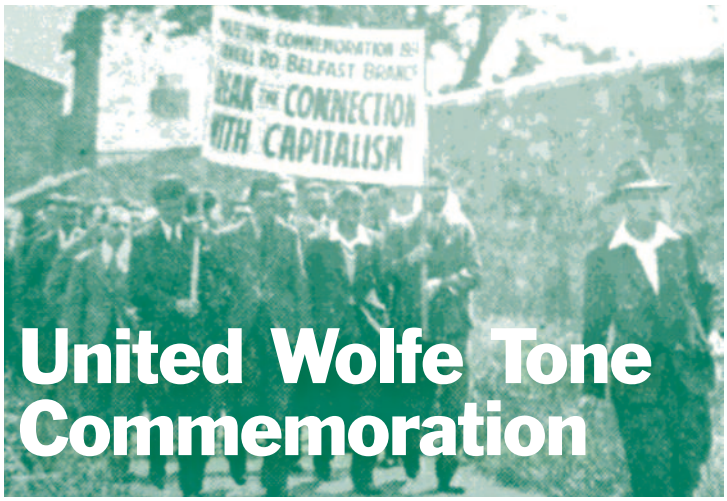
Every year the Féile draws attention to previously unknown and unpublished texts for the pleasure of O'Flaherty fans. This year Máirín Mhic Lochlainn will read Tom O'Flaherty's short story "Bás an Ghainnéid" ("The Death of the Gannet") at the Garden of Remembrance. Liam O'Flaherty's short stories will be the focus of the dramatic evening events, with "An Beo" performed by Aisteoirí Chois Fharraige and "The Touch" read by Fionnghuala Ní Choncheanainn.

The significant question of historical record, how we remember history, will play a part in the Sunday midday event. This ever-popular session of the Féile will have the journalist and broadcaster Seosamh Ó Cuaig in discussion with Jackie Uí Chionna about her book *He Was Galway* (Four Courts Press, 2016) on the life of another man with Aran links, the controversial Galway business magnate and Cumann na nGaedheal TD Máirtín Mór McDonogh.

One important link between Máirtín Mór and the O'Flahertys is that he provided the model for Ramon Mor Costello in Liam O'Flaherty's masterpiece *The House of Gold.* This was the first book banned by the Irish state, in 1929; it was only republished by Nuascéalta in 2013, through the endeavours of the Liam and Tom O'Flaherty Society. ★

■ For further information contact Seosamh Ó Cuaig: ocuaig@hotmail.com.

Members of No2War mounted a demonstration in Bray, Co. Wicklow, on Saturday 22 July against the glorification of war by the Bray Air Show and the participation of foreign air forces, including those that have taken part in attacks on Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria.



United Wolfe Tone Commemoration

UNITY OF OUR PEOPLE, UNITY OF PROGRESSIVE FORCES, UNITY OF OUR COUNTRY

Sunday 20 August, 3 p.m.
Assemble at Sallins, Co. Kildare, 2:30 p.m. Organised by the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum
Oration by John Douglas (general secretary, Mandate)

Families and children welcome; bring a picnic (weather permitting)
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