Socialist Voice

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"Most Americans would be amazed to learn that US Special Operations Forces have been deployed to three-quarters of the nations on the planet."—**William Hartung**, director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy, quoted in the *Nation* (New York), 14 December 2017.

The Imperial Cup Final

EU v UK?

Let's make no mistake about it: despite the merry-go-round of posturing in the Brexit negotiations, it is and always was two imperial powers locked in a phoney war of position; and the concerns of Irish citizens are of little interest to either Britain or the European Union.

Jimmy Doran writes *Page 2*

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EU v UK

The interests of the British working class are also irrelevant, as both sides of the imperialist coin will always defend big-business interests, the interests of capital, in their own regions above all else.

Despite all the talk about Britain's border—soon to be Britain's and the EU's border—in Ireland, neither Dublin nor Belfast will have any say in the final decision, which will be made in Brussels, despite guarantees being declared by all and sundry.

Surely at this stage the reality that the EU doesn't have friends, only interests, must be sinking in. One need only look at the EU's decision to force the Irish people to pay off 42 per cent of all European private banking debt, despite having less than 2 per cent of its population, or any of a number of anti-worker judgements made in the EU Court. The EU will always act in the interests of big monopoly businesses.

Arlene Foster and her constituents need to realise that Britain's business interests come first, not a tiny colony to the west that has little to contribute any more in the form of commerce. It is purely a nostalgic trinket of the British Empire, though nevertheless still useful as a military base for NATO, guarding Britain's "back door," and a launch pad for their partner in the "special relationship" that is American imperialism.

The imperial mentality was on display last month when Britain's secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, referred to the North as "the colony" and insisted on the right of the colonial overlord, Theresa May, to travel anywhere in her dominion whenever she wished.

Margaret Thatcher famously once said that Belfast was as British as Finchley; but those who cling to this belief need only look at the average industrial wage in Britain, compared with the North: £26,700 in Britain, £21,800 in the North. So they should think again about whose interests the British rule in—certainly not the working class of the Six Counties.

They would do better to look south, despite all its faults under capitalism. The average industrial wage in the South is €37,000, which amounts to £32,600—substantially higher than both the North and British rates, as is the minimum wage.

Strengthening links between North and South is in the best interests of all workers in our country. It is not an easy task when the leader of unionism looks on an Irish Language Act as "like feeding a crocodile, it will always come back for more"—the old colonial mentality exposed once again. Unionism fears equality more than anything, because with it comes the loss of power, the power they have held onto and abused since partition. Unionism and democracy are incompatible.

Unionism, like the EU, does nothing for the working class. This is the time for working people to join together and fight back against the triple lock of imperialism—British, European, and the real masters, American imperialism—that have together prevented our people reaching their full potential.

The working class, from Belfast to Cork, needs to move on to struggle for and find solutions that suit our class and put our class interests first. As we know from long and bitter experience, if you separate the social (class) question from the national question, or the national question from the social (class) question, it has ended in defeat for working-class forces. Only the working class can cast off the imperial yoke and build a socialist Ireland, a workers' republic for us all to share equally. ★

How do you solve a problem like unionism?

It was said of the Bourbons after the Restoration in 1814 that they had forgotten nothing and learnt nothing. **Tommy McKearney** reports on unionism's dilemmas

SOMETHING SIMILAR may well be said about the DUP in particular and unionism in general.

HAVING SEEN its regional parliament collapse yet again in early 2017, and largely as a result of their own ineptitude, they have now contrived to prevent its reconvening any time soon. By focusing on an Irish Language Act, Sinn Féin had asked for a gesture rather than a compromise. Suffering from what can only be described as acute political myopia, unionism brushed aside a reasonable offer and ensured that Stormont would remain in suspension.

According to the usually well-informed Denis Bradley, writing recently in the *Irish Times*, Sinn Féin had agreed that Arlene Foster would remain as first minister, that there would be no agreement to liberalise legislation on civil marriage or abortion, and that the petition of concern would remain virtually unchanged.[1]

Going by this as yet unchallenged assessment, it would appear that the DUP was emerging practically unscathed from the Renewable Heat Initiative scandal. After all, RHI was a costly fiasco of the DUP's own making, about which even Eileen Paisley said that Foster should have stood aside.

Having secured what promised to be a favourable outcome under difficult circumstance, it was obvious that some reasonable ground would have had to be conceded across the table—in this case a modest demand in relation to cultural recognition. Without the minimal concession of an Irish Language Act, Mary Lou McDonald and Michelle O'Neill would have left the negotiations empty-handed and unable to sell the deal to their rank and file. Unionist negotiators undoubtedly were aware of this yet chose to collapse the talks rather than risk alienating reactionary sections of their electorate.

The dilemma for unionism, however, is not so much that its political leadership is incompetent but that, as a whole, unionism is so determined not to give an inch. As a consequence, it cannot deliver on a programme that would amount to an act of enlightened self-interest.

This position is not tenable in the long run. With a large and growing minority that is, at best, indifferent to the very existence of the six-county state, intransigence is no longer a viable policy. Common sense would dictate that this estranged section of the population needs persuading if it is to tolerate the status quo into the future. As the *News Letter's* political correspondent, Sam McBride, wrote a short time back, "the loss of Unionism's Stormont majority and the growing Catholic population meant that for the Union to survive they [unionists] will have to make Northern Ireland a comfortable place for cultural nationalists . . ."[2]

However, history and longing for a past that never was as rosy in reality as in nostalgia-coloured musings prevent many unionists from recognising this reality. In the absence of that all-important consensus about its governance, Northern Ireland remains a failed and decaying political entity.

In spite of this, efforts are being made to convince the Northern public that the Stormont Assembly might have some meaningful authority if the institutions were up and running. Hardly an evening goes by without one of the Belfast broadcasters carrying a story about how the absence of a local administration is hindering efforts to activate and deliver on some much-needed public service.

South of the border the scene is little different, as Government ministers speak anxiously about the need to restore devolved institutions—some even going so far as to claim that this would allow the North to have a say in the Brexit deliberations, conveniently overlooking the fact that London has given no consideration whatsoever to the North's Remain vote during the referendum.

In reality, the North's Assembly has very limited power, as it is deprived of fiscal authority by central government in London. Stormont is awarded an annual block grant by the British exchequer and cannot deviate from this amount. Even when it is sitting, ministers in the Executive are usually directed by their senior civil servants on how and where to allocate funds.

Moreover, if we are to believe the testimony of various witnesses at the RHI inquiry, ministers, including the aforementioned Arlene Foster, are not always aware of the details of their department's expenditure.[3] In other words, it is difficult to know exactly what impact having devolved institutions has, as Britain sets the budget and senior civil servants in effect determine its allocation.

The Stormont assembly, nevertheless, does have some capabilities that, if utilised, would make a difference for working people. One such "devolved power" available to the local administration is control over industrial relations legislation. This would mean, for example, that in the Six Counties zero-hour contracts could be outlawed, an end put to the scam whereby employees are illegally designated as self-employed, and the introduction of a realistic minimum wage.

Disappointingly, Sinn Féin did not focus on areas such as these and instead chose to make the introduction of an Irish Language Act a cornerstone of their negotiation. Let us be clear, though, that this is not a criticism of the party's position on the language. There is an unanswerable case to be made for such legislation, and only ignorance, coupled with opportunism, prevented it happening. Nevertheless, in the light of the failed and failing nature of the Northern state and its uncertain future, it would surely be prudent to adopt a strategy highlighting a progressive republican agenda.

Unionism has traditionally sought to argue that any dilution of the link with Britain would lead to the creation of an intolerable climate for its supporters on this island. A century ago it was a claim that home rule would mean Rome rule; now it is an assertion that Ulster unionists would be culturally swamped and thus disfranchised. No matter how unfounded these claims may be, reactionary scaremongers find them convenient, because by their nature they are vague, ill-defined, and therefore difficult to refute.

On the other hand, a package demanding sufficient fiscal authority to implement a public housing programme, an improved local NHS, an end to the privatisation of essential services and meaningful rights for workers would have forced unionist naysayers onto different ground. This might not have led to a restored Stormont Assembly; it would, though, have outlined a progressive path for the future and left the DUP Bourbons trying to remember why exactly they wish to hold on to a failed state. ★

1 Denis Bradley, "How do you solve a problem like unionism? Unionism's usual 'no' response will not serve it well in coming to terms with what lies ahead," *Irish Times,* 21 February 2018.
2 Sam McBride, "Shambolic DUP talks tactics dismay key figures—and weaken the leader," *News Letter,* 24 February 2018.
3 Conor Macauley, "RHI Inquiry: Foster not told of hike in RHI costs," BBC Northern Ireland, 7 December 2017.

What is going on in the housing market?

Dáithí Ó hAirtrí

MARX'S THEORIES are the key to understanding the Irish housing crisis. It may seem that the situation we find ourselves in is a uniquely modern one, but nothing could be further from the truth.

What has happened is a gradual shift from battles at the "point of production" (where value is created, i.e. where workers might be on an assembly line) to the "point of realisation," where that value is realised (i.e. in a sales environment).

So we are moving to a point where the greater part of struggle is in warehouses fulfilling Amazon orders, on shop floors, or in offices, rather than in factories—our usual understanding of a front-line battle, and the type that communists are most familiar with.

The charge is often made against Marx by anti-communists that he didn't anticipate a "service economy." Well, you might get that impression if you only read volume 1 of Capital. But volumes 2 and 3 deal with this "point of realisation" struggle, where the working class is more distant, or abstracted, from the coal face. But that doesn't mean the struggle has ended.

One of Marx's most complicated theories is that of "ground rent." It deals with how the landlord class must compete with the capitalist class for the spoils extracted from the working class.

A capitalist earns their money through ownership of the means of production. The worker creates value, and the capitalist realises that value, paying the worker a certain fraction in the form of wages. The difference between the value realised and wages is the capitalist's profit.

However, a landowner is paid "rent" merely for owning land. The landowner did not create the land, usually acquired the land through inheritance or credit, and spends next to no labour on its upkeep. It is a completely unproductive and parasitic existence.

We can see this tension between the two classes in the transnationals that are worried about rising rent costs for their workers in Dublin. They really do not care about the welfare of their workers. The increase in rent increases the wage absolutely necessary to the wage worker, which will decrease the share of profits left in the hands of the capitalist.

Struggle in the work-place hasn't gone away

Nicola Lawlor

STRUGGLE AND resistance in the work-place is more common than many think. If we think of resistance or conflict between capital and labour in work-places as only industrial disputes it is a pretty dismal picture.

We see the headline disputes of workers collectively organised in unions fighting for better pay, or better job security, or to protect working conditions. We have seen big disputes fought by such unions as Mandate, SIPTU and the NBRU over the last few years.

Struggle organised collectively and strategically by unions is the more advanced form of workers' struggle, with most chance of success. But many other forms of resistance and struggle exist, which can often go unnoticed.

Every day all over this country workers resist, argue, make fun of, grouse about, take individual cases, march into the bosses' offices, send e-mail, ignore instructions, sabotage, and much more, which are all forms of resistance or struggle. Because they tend not to make headlines, and because they are more often than not unorganised and non-union, it can create an illusion of workers having given up and accepted the status quo. This isn't the case.

The conflict that exists in every work-place today is about the same core issues as it was a hundred years ago; it just takes place through different mediums of control. Bosses still want to maximise profits over wages; they still want to extend the working day as long as they can; and they still want workers to do more during the working day. This creates conflict in the work-place over (1) wages v. profits, (2) working time v. private (living or family) time, and (3) the speed or pressure of demands placed on workers during the day.

But the line between capitalist and landowner is not a distinct one. Often the capitalist will own the land and factory their business operates in; or many of the petit-bourgeoisie will own rental properties in the same way that they might have a share portfolio. The developer class are also capitalists who deal directly in land.

So what we see most often is an alliance of capitalists and landowners against the working class. This is most often seen in a form of "rent-seeking," where investors seek above-average returns for unproductive activity.

What we have in Ireland at the moment is an economy that is based on rent-seeking. It is based on accountancy practices that reward transnationals for faux-activity here, for tax purposes, but do not bring any productive benefit to Irish society.

It is based on holders of "hard money," including the political class, looking for investment opportunities. These holders of hard money are egged on by banks, which give cheap credit in return for guaranteed returns on future rents—and rent increases.

It is also based on asset speculation, mostly through housing appreciation. With the state's bail-out of banks and the mass procurement by NAMA of failing developers' gambles, we have created a state that is dependent on increases in property values to try to minimise the cost to the exchequer of the costly bail-outs.

These interests are necessarily anti-worker. As we saw the American stock market crash on inflation worries, on the fear that workers' wage demands would reduce the capitalists' level of profit and the purchasing power of hard money, the ruling class cannot address the housing issue without coming into conflict with the investor class.

The same "hard money" holders who were afraid that their capital accumulation would be hit by pay increases in the United States are afraid that their 7 per cent yearly rent increases would be hit by falling rents or rent caps.

Any solution to Ireland's housing crisis would require a massive shift in society. Public housing for all would provide that shift. *"It is not that the solution of the housing question simultaneously solves the social question, but that only by the solution of the social question, that is, by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, is the solution of the housing question made possible."*—Frederick Engels. ★

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Wages

Most work-places now, certainly non-union ones, operate highly individualised, divisive performance-related pay structures, where workers are performance-rated against their colleagues and against objectives imposed on them by the management, and also benchmarked externally against "market" rates for the role they are in.

This is all done by Human Resources Departments behind closed doors and communicated to employees confidentially, not to be discussed. This is a mechanism of control over workers as well as control over wages.

But even in these situations of massive power imbalance, workers resist. They compare notes with their colleagues (breaching the confidentiality imposed on them). They may appeal their rating to try to get more out of it. They may start looking for work elsewhere. They may say "to hell with it" and slow down or reduce the quality of their work. They may lash their employer out of it on glass-door web sites. They may write graffiti on the toilet door.

Whatever the form, most workers don't like the lack of control, and don't like the imbalance in power between capital and labour in the work-place.

Working time

The conflict created over working time is on the rise and is increasingly quoted by employees in surveys as a major source of discontent. It is less the formal extension of the working day or working hours and more the informal staying late, coming in on weekends, or, most often, the logging in to iphones, tablets or laptops in the evenings to answer the constant flow of e-mail while trying to enjoy their free time or time with their families.

This encroachment into social or family time does lead to burn-out and may well be the health and safety issue of this decade for many workers. And employees do react. Unfortunately this form of extension of the day can be extremely pervasive, as employers offer the latest smartphones and devices to their staff, creating the conflicting tensions of flexibility and autonomy with captivity and enslavement in the workers' life.

The most desperate reaction is for workers to "go sick" as a result of actual burn-out or just in a kind of "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going to take it any more" moment.

Working demands

Not content with extending the day unpaid into personal time, employers increasingly demand more from workers during working time. Previously, and still for some occupations, this was done through speeding up an assembly line or process, but more frequently now this is done through "stretching" performance management objectives or changing the goalposts of one's objectives.

For many workers in office or technology roles, performance management is the modern form of scientific management, through which employers monitor, measure, control and rate employees' work. But again employees often rebel. They learn how to game the numerical systems, and do it. They appeal against unachievable objectives or unfair ratings.

These forms of resistance may often be individualised and uncoordinated, but they are resistance nonetheless. The conflict and struggle in the work-place hasn't gone away, and unions must organise workers on the three main points of conflict: wages, working time, and labour process. ★

Worker self-directed enterprises

Are they a road to socialism? asks Niall Cullinane

READERS OF *Socialist Voice* may be familiar with the idea of worker self-directed enterprises, or WSDEs. The idea is promoted in the United States, particularly by the Marxian economist Richard Wolff.

Those who are not acquainted with the logic behind WSDE might be well served by engaging with this topic, as it potentially offers a strategy for advancing workers' class interests. Furthermore, WSDE theory raises important issues about our understanding of planning, markets, ownership and the state in useful, if somewhat simple and schematic, terms.

WSDE also suggests a potential transition away from capitalism towards socialism that, although not orthodox within our traditional canon, is worth considering.

Some of what follows is well known to readers of *Socialist Voice*, but some additional points are worth considering.

In capitalism, as readers will know, private owners establish enterprises and select their directors, who decide what, how and where to produce, and what to do with the income received from selling the output. Put in simple terms, this small class of people, the shareholders (to different degrees of magnitude) and the boards of directors they select make economic decisions for their benefit.

The collection and concentration of profit in the hands of this relatively small class in turn enables significant, disproportionate but not total political power in the wider society. The majority who do the productive work remain outside the decision-making about what to produce, how to produce it, and what to do with the proceeds of their labour.

We already know the dysfunctional consequences of this economic structure, so we have little need to regurgitate this here (nor do we need to deal with the clichéd objection that significant sections of workers are already "capitalists," given that their pensions are aggregated in funds that purchase corporate shares).

In contrast, WSDE presents a scenario whereby workers take command of their existing or new individual enterprises to which they contribute their labour. Workers at the company level would democratically produce, distribute and control their product and its realised profits at the point of origin in the enterprise.

'WSDE theory operates on the assumption that capitalism is defined by the ownership, organisation and control of production.'

Several consequences are implied by this simple conception. Each WSDE seems to be an autonomous actor, and there seems to be a free market in the entry of WSDEs. There is democratic planning within the firm, in what to produce, how to produce it, and what to do with the proceeds (it is not dictated to by, say, the state planners). The revolution here is that the planning is democratic at the micro level. Planning already occurs within capitalist enterprises (often at the global level), but it is not democratic.

Accounts of WSDE are somewhat underdeveloped on the following matter, but the output of WSDE continues to be produced and distributed on the basis of market supply and demand. WSDE theory operates on the assumption that capitalism is defined by the ownership, organisation and control of production. Markets (like planning) are purely exchange mechanisms and can occur under different types of ownership.

In the case of certain commodities, markets can be a more efficient distributive mechanism than macro forms of central planning. Central planners may be very good at determining a country's electricity needs or transport-infrastructural requirements and can plan accordingly. They may be useless, however, at determining social preferences for particular types of consumer goods, for example (of course whether many consumer goods are socially useful is a complex point that cannot be answered here).

WSDEs operate like a type of market micro-socialism (micro in the sense that socialised ownership is emphasised at the company level). Market socialism was experimented with—to varying degrees of internal work-place democracy—in Hungary and Yugoslavia. The evidence suggests mixed success, various trade-offs, and limitations. Inevitably, given the reliance on market co-ordination, there may arise some income inequality, inflation, falling real wages, and unemployment.

Of course such problems may be moderated by tripartite regulatory influence involving WSDE producers, consumers (citizens), and the central or regional state actors—for example price or income controls and working-time management—to ensure full employment.

There is also the potential for anti-social behaviour on the part of some WSDEs: charging monopoly prices, internal degradation of their democratic structure, or malign political influence. This might be a problem where WSDEs get too big, although constraining organisational size might mean forgoing economies of scale.

Ultimately, WSDE theory argues that socialists need to recognise that the standard emphasis on macro level institutional change from private to social ownership of productive assets ("public ownership of the means of production") and from markets to planning "for the benefit of the whole people" is insufficient conceptually and strategically. It pays far too little attention to transformations at the micro level and especially inside enterprises. The socialisation of enterprises, above all, means changing their internal organisation.

The reorganisation of production in WSDE theory is claimed to provide the conditions whereby the state becomes subordinate to WSDEs (there is not much in WSDE theory about capturing or transmogrifying the state, a standard concern of Marxism-Leninism, for example). It simply holds that state revenue would come to depend on what workers give the state out of the income of WSDE. Instead of capitalists financing or controlling the state (or both), democratic WSDE would gain that crucial position. Of course this hypothesis is silent about the influence of international non-WSDE actors that might hold government debt (a complication we can leave to one side for now).

'WSDEs operate like a type of market micro-socialism (micro in the sense that socialised ownership is emphasised at the company level)'

WSDE theory, while

to socialism may well display comparable fits and starts: only a caricature of a socialist believes we can "overthrow" capitalism by a one-off revolutionary decree. WSDE theory implies that WSDEs will co-exist with capitalist firms and a state that is subject to continuous class struggle until one side commands enough resources to dominate the other. Indeed there may never be an end-state "pure socialism": rather a dynamic scenario may exist comprising mixtures of WSDE, capitalist firms, and so on.

Some questions to consider. Does WSDE theory imply that communists should turn their attention to advancing the accumulation of autonomous WSDE experiments at the micro level? Can autonomous zones of WSDE operate within a wider sea of capitalism?

For example, unless banks were subject to either state-monopoly socialisation or micro-level WSDE transitions, would the WSDE sector be squeezed out by self-preserving capitalist financiers who would, for class (political/social/economic) reasons, seek to avoid, or sabotage, such experiments?

Similar issues arise with WSDE supply chains. Should communists give priority to a political struggle directed at state influence and a simultaneous campaign to promote WSDE? If emphasis is unduly on the former, will not attempts to acquire state influence be undermined by the normal routine of capitalist-owned firms with the incentives and resources (material, ideological etc.) seeking to prevent such influence from taking root?

Alternatively, if the priority is WSDE, does this risk inevitable encirclement by hostile state and capitalist forces, or does this create autonomous zones of

level, for example (i.e. institutions that accommodate and moderate capitalist power but do not challenge it), might be better spent on promoting and building successful WSDEs (institutions that eliminate capitalist power at the individual micro level)? Or perhaps trade unions (along with parties of our type) are one vehicle for the promotion of WSDE?

For comrades not familiar with the topic in full it might be worth considering the references below, which are relatively affordable and probably available from Connolly Books and other left-wing booksellers. ★

R. D. Wolff, *Democracy at Work*, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012.
R. D. Wolff, "Part IV" in *Capitalism's Crisis Deepens,* Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.

"Strong women"

Deirdre Uí Bhrógáin

THE TERM "strong women" has been niggling at me for some time, but I had mixed feelings about it, as it appeared to be setting an example for women to assert themselves and be strong; and what can be wrong with that?

But one must look critically at these fashionable social media hypes in more detail to see if they will help women generally in their campaign for human rights and equality around the world.

My criticism is that the term comes from elite women in the film, music and business world, congratulating each other for doing well themselves, and this has long been promoted by the media and their publicists. And, however well-intentioned a few of them may be, they will not bring real change to most women in the world. It is also a fact that most of them come from the elite class already.

The mass following of celebrities promoted on social media and through magazines and newspapers is to get women to buy consumer goods.

How many of the world's working women can aspire to be actors, or singers, or run successful businesses? To see articles in women's magazines every month relentlessly promoting women starting a new business or succeeding in a film or music career is to distract from what makes a "strong woman."

What has happened to articles on other women who do difficult work, or are courageous, or work for the good of others? Well, they do not feature in this relentless pushing of elitism.

In fact the world is full of strong women, women working in harsh conditions for their families, such as factory and farm workers in Asia, Africa, and South America, who do back-breaking work for long hours in horrible conditions, and then go home and work just as hard to provide for their families.

Where do we hear of the women working to protect their environment against predatory capitalist companies? Or the women in war-torn countries bearing up despite mass killing and the destruction of their whole world?

What about the women fighting for better working and living conditions in the so-called developed world, fighting a battle against capitalism's dismantling of workers' conditions and social services? We do not hear of their brave struggles in social media or on television, or in newspapers or magazines.

These are the ones who encourage other women to be brave, to join trade unions, and to stand up for a decent life. Together women are strong, even if some are less well, or less able than others.

I don't see any articles about leading trade union women, health professionals and academics who promote a better society. Instead these face a hostile press, and hostile lackey interviewers who know where their interests lie.

The most obnoxious use of the "strong woman" meme is the promotion of women in politics being a good example that will change things for the better. The idea that more women in governments will be a great thing without regard to what those women are promoting is dangerous. In fact this demand is the opposite to being good for women, as it lumps them all together, while men are looked at for their policies.

That is not to say that I am not critical of the imbalance, but it must be done in the interests of working women and men.

Even feminists such as Mary Beard, professor of classics at Cambridge, editor, writer, and long-time campaigner for women's rights, has fallen into this trap. She recently interviewed Hillary Clinton as a "strong woman"! Hillary Clinton is a mass murderer, having ordered and supervised wars in so many countries it is hard to keep count of them; and the video of her jubilation at the murder of Saddam Hussein would make your blood run cold.

Even Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir and Indira Gandhi are held up to be models of strong women to this day, despite their legacy of destroying the lives of their own people, not to mention the destruction of wars initiated by them.

And of course we have our own strong women: Margaret Heffernan of Dunne's Stores, Deirdre Foley, destroyer of Clery's, Patricia Callan, anti-worker spokesperson for the Small Firms Association, to name but a few; and our former minister for social protection, Joan Burton, who was anything but a protector of women: in fact she ruined the hopes of getting a decent pension for thousands of women.

International Women's Day has been hijacked by elite women who lunch, and women's organisations that have sold out to a comfy life in cahoots with the Government. So it is time to rescue it and rebrand it as International Working Women's Day, and of course encompassing all working women, wherever they work. ★

International Working Women's Day
Standing shoulder to shoulder with our class

Laura Duggan

ON 22 FEBRUARY this year the Feminist Ire blog published an open letter to the organisers of the "We Need to Talk" tour. The letter is well written, and solid in its argument, and highlights the ideological divide in modern feminism.

The "We Need to Talk" tour organisers are known for pushing a transphobic agenda (largely aimed at Trans women)[1] and their opposition to the proposed amendments to the Gender Recognition Act in Britain. The signatories of the letter make it clear that there is no room for this style of feminist politics in Ireland.

There have been a number of fault lines in feminist circles for years, and Trans rights are just one of the more visible and vitriolic ones. The divide runs deep and places Trans women themselves in the centre of a very bitter fight over the legitimacy of their identities.

Trans-exclusionary (or gender-critical) radical feminists (TERFs) make the argument that the proposed amendment to the Gender Recognition Act, which will allow people to self-declare their gender, will mean that men will use it as a way of invading women's spaces, either by outright falsely claiming to be women or through the guise of "mentally ill claims of perceived womanhood." This system of self-declaration has been used in Ireland since 2015 and, to quote the open letter, "the sky has not fallen. Cis women have not lost anything."[2]

A criticism often thrown at feminist politics is that it engages with an individualist approach to politics rather than a class perspective; but that view is one that is formed by people who are not engaging in feminist action on the ground. It is the same view that is presented by the media and greedily consumed by those wishing to dismiss feminist politics as somehow less deserving of attention or lacking in theory or development.

We can see the same issues that arise in the media presenting liberal feminism as the only version of feminism, mirrored in the assumed voice of the trans community. Jennifer Lawrence and gender pay inequality in Hollywood are not any more representative of the working-class feminist movement than Caitlyn Jenner of the Kardashian clan, with her middle-class, right-wing views of the working-class trans experience.

Many TERFs claim that trans women do not share the experience of oppression that is part and parcel of existing as a woman in a patriarchal society. This analysis assumes a shared experience of all (cis) women by virtue of their birth, their sex alone. To think a working-class woman would have more in common with a cis middle-class woman, as opposed to a fellow-working-class trans woman, because one has a set of ovaries, is a total and utter failure of class analysis. It also negates women who do not conform to their concept of the typical female experience—having ovaries, womb, etc., along with menstruation and childbirth.

A working-class trans woman and a working-class cis woman will always have more in common with each other than with Hillary Clinton, no matter how different their experiences of womanhood have been. Trans women are more likely to suffer discrimination in the work-place, when it comes to finding accommodation, and on the street. This discrimination is not a separate struggle but one that is compounded by class divisions in society and by misogyny.

'A working-class trans woman and a working-class cis woman will always have more in common with each other than with Hillary Clinton, no matter how different their experiences of womanhood have been.'

Trans and feminist activists campaign on the issues that affect them and their communities as a result of their class, be it in the need for public housing, repeal, decent pay and hours, or state child care. They are also the issues that disproportionately affect them as a result of their gender and trans status.

To dismiss trans activists' fight for recognition of their gender pushes these women even closer to the periphery as well as displaying cultural and political trans/misogyny that dismisses and belittles their work in all fields. We either stand shoulder to shoulder with our class in all their progressive causes or our solidarity rings hollow and false.

Greetings on this International Working Women's Day to all women involved in class struggle—

As we go marching, marching, we're standing proud and tall.

The rising of the women means the rising of us all.

No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil where one reposes,

but a sharing of life's glories, bread and roses, bread and roses. ★

1 Transgender (often abbreviated to trans) people have a gender identity or gender expression that differs from their assigned sex.

2 Cisgender (often abbreviated to cis) is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth.

Shattering the illusion

Eoghan O'Neill

THE JANUARY issue of *Socialist Voice* had an article by me entitled "The wage system and the capitalist illusion." A worker being told they are getting their equivalent wage relating to their work is being held captive by an illusion that in reality leads to a non-equivalent exchange, which is what the capitalist pays to the worker in the form of wages and what they keep as profits: the surplus value.

The capitalist pays the worker a wage out of their profits, categorised as an expense; yet it is the worker who generates the total value for the owner in the first place. It's at the expense of the worker that the capitalist accumulates profits and wealth.

It's like a baker baking a cake in an oven that they don't own. The proceeds go to the owner, who then decides what size slice is given back to the baker. What they give to the baker is only a portion of what the baker actually created.

This shows in simple terms the fact that wealth is created by labour, but the product belongs to the capitalist; and through the laws, customs and standards of the capitalist private-ownership system this wealth is appropriated and then divided. The relative strength of labour will determine what portion of the wealth they created they are able to keep.

If someone is making a profit, then someone else is not getting their equivalent or fair share for the work they have done. As is in the case of the baker, the cake being the total value, the capitalist creates special categories for appropriating and distributing the total value of the item produced: the cake. It is they who get to make the accountancy decisions, cutting up the cake. Both have contributed, but only one has put their labour to work to create the finished product, and only one gets to direct the distribution of its total value.

The baker receives a slice for all the work they did, knowing full well that they created the cake but equally knowing that without the means of baking there wouldn't be a cake. The baker is rarely if ever given enough pay to be able to purchase their own oven and materials, for if they did, the owner would become redundant; and so the baker remains dependent on the owner for their means of subsistence.

We must remember that all the baker needs is access to an oven and the materials for creating the cake. Who owns them has no bearing on the actual production process, only on the distribution of the total value of the product after the process is complete.

You hear the argument that the owner pays for all the means and objects of labour—the kitchen, the oven, the utensils, the ingredients, etc.—so the product should belong to them. However, the owner is only able to purchase these, and therefore to maintain the worker's dependence on them, because of the very fact that their exchange of labour to wages is non-equivalent, an exploitation of the worker in the first place.

It is the exploitation that has already taken place that allows the owner to purchase the materials and objects of production that are used, in the present and the future!

In reality, all workers require is access to the means of production to create the products that fulfil the needs, wants and desires of citizens. All subsidiary acts related to the product, such as managing, distribution, marketing, etc., stem from the work done in the actual production process. If every worker had access to their means of production, production would take place, because needs are a must. Who controls, owns, directs and distributes those means and objects of labour can vary. In other words, there is no innate need or natural law for private-ownership structures, only a desire by those who want to maintain their privileges, who will utilise any and all resources to maintain that privilege.

We are told that the entrepreneur takes the means of production—land, labour, and capital—and through innovative design and development sets about creating jobs, creating an enterprise. We are told that the level of wealth held by those who own the majority share of private enterprise receive it through hard work and dedication. They say that they have "earned" it. These people are so good at their "work" that, according to the Oxfam Wealth Report, "it takes just four days for a CEO from one of the top five global fashion brands to earn what a Bangladeshi garment worker will earn in her lifetime." It wouldn't be lost on any of these CEOs that in

an exchange of equivalents this would be impossible.

All things being equal, we make exchanges that we consider to be fair. You go to work and you earn a wage or income, and with that you set about your expenditure, which is related to the level of income. This in turn influences decisions on where you live, what you eat, where you shop, what car you drive or how you commute, where you holiday, what you purchase, etc. You consider this to be a fair exchange and may never question the system that exists.

However, as already discussed, something entirely different takes place within the exchange between a worker and their boss that has a real effect on these decisions. It defines the level of wealth not only between citizens but also between countries. The uneven distribution of wealth is reliant on it.

In mainstream economics it is explained that the employer makes marginal decisions on a variety of things—what price to sell at, what quantities to produce, whether to hire another worker, the level of wages and benefits paid out, the duration of the contract, etc.—which ultimately are ways of controlling the return of maximum profit. However, the idea of profit maximisation is not natural: it isn't there from time immemorial; it is an idea of the capitalist ruling class, just like private ownership, whose interest it is to see profits increase.

It is the ideas of the ruling class that penetrate every household, that are ingrained in our education system, our culture and our values that would have a majority of citizens support or tolerate, on the local and the national level, the idea of privileged wealth.

When you hear that a CEO or senior executive "earns" millions or even billions, a simple form of reasoning should tear down that particular argument. You can quickly realise that their earnings do not equate to the work that they have done but to other sources of income, such as dividends, interest, rent, or illegal means.

This is not earned through work but through the privilege of ownership, and it is this that defines the class relationship, as all value is manifested in the product but is transferred to the owner. If they are employed their salaries will of course be extravagant; but becoming a billionaire does not depend on the level of skill or talent you possess and put to work but on the level of shares you own—i.e. your relationship to the ownership of the means of production. To be a hard worker doesn't necessarily pay; evidently being a capitalist in a capitalist system does.

What is it about maximising profit that is so appealing and a "must" for the owners and beneficiaries of production? In practical terms, there are human relationships involved in every production process, between the workers, the management, and the owners. The boss explains to the worker that the business is run on margins, and so in order for the business to be viable they offer a certain wage package, which the worker can agree to. These margins are immaterial, fictional lines built into the capitalist mode of operations, like the lines on a road: they create a structure that workers abide by. The marginal decisions dictate to the worker the share of wealth that is kept by labour and that which is taken by capital.

The marginal decisions are what cause machines and automation to replace workers; the marginal decisions decide whether to move from one continent to another. It is also the marginal decisions that promote discrimination, harassment, abuse and the exploitation of workers in many industries and especially in low-wage, low-regulation countries.

However, all these marginal decisions, which are at the discretion of the owners, are based not on the welfare of the work force or society in general but on accumulating capital and maximising profit. Marginal decisions become systematic imperatives to remain part of the capitalist class.

For the capitalist, if you do not grow you die; so in order to survive you must maximise profit, while at the same time impoverishing billions of people. According to Oxfam's Wealth Report, "eighty two per cent of the wealth generated last year went to the richest one per cent of the global population, while the 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world saw no increase in their wealth."

Clearly wealth is being generated, but it is not being distributed. It seems evident that this system is outdated, redundant, and fit for the rubbish heap of history; for we must no longer be complicit in its inequalities, wars, and suicidal destruction of the planet and the human race.

What maintains the system is the idea that private ownership of the means of production and distribution is the best way to meet the needs, wants and desires of society. The imperialist powers of the United States, European Union and Britain finance, train and support the right-wing nationalist, extremist, racist and fascist forces, both overtly and covertly, right around the globe, in every continent.

The most advanced sections of the working class are targeted, their world view reviled and attacked, and leaders murdered by the ruling class and their paid lackeys. It is they who seek permanent war and domination.

We can no longer wait for an "inevitable," we must directly and politically engage in the class war by agitating, organising and educating our class. Campaigns are essential, but without building an organisation that will politically and ideologically challenge the power of capital our complicity in our own exploitation, the gross exploitation of other nations and the decay of our planet, will continue.

It is this privilege of the ruling class, enshrined in law and maintained by the state apparatus, that ensures that the owners' infinite drive towards profit remains clear, even if rights, justice, democracy, sovereignty and the environment all become, like labour, another expense.

Let them not fool you. We are not an expense, to be squeezed at any given moment. We are the total value, the sum of all the productive processes. It is we who should be giving those who are not involved in the productive process the subsistence level of wages!

The value system needs to be inverted, where the majority of wealth goes to the mass of workers who produce the goods for consumption, rather than the other way round. If that were the case, poverty would be 99 per cent eradicated. It would be easy for us then to take that minority, the 1 per cent, and send them on job training schemes, where they can take a variety of courses to ease them back into society!

Finally, to shatter the illusion means to be conscious of the fact that we can change and dismantle the rights, laws, institutions and foreign policies that protect the privileges of the capitalist class and their means of accumulating wealth. We can replace them with institutions of our own that are in our interest, along with all people and all nations with whom we exchange equivalents, to ensure the survival of the planet and all living species.

I think giving the last word to Marx on this subject is appropriate, as it is his work that has inspired and led the era of socialist revolution. That era is still with us, albeit at a low ebb, so we must hasten the task of bringing the era to an end—the end of the capitalist barbarous system—by joining in the ranks of the organised class-conscious workers' movement.

Marx wrote in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: "In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure, and to which correspond definite forms of consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life.

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development, of the productive forces, these relations turn into their fetters.

"Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead, sooner or later, to the transformation of the whole, immense, superstructure." ★

A crucial election in Venezuela

Seán Edwards

THERE IS no doubt that Venezuela is the main target of the United States in Latin America, which it sees as the principal obstacle to its domination of the continent—its God-given right, as stated by numerous presidents, from Monroe to Reagan, Obama, and Trump.

Of all the countries of America, none was more securely tied to the United States, up to 1998, when Hugo Chávez was elected on a programme of independence, sovereignty, and social progress, which he called the Bolivarian Revolution.

Venezuela in 1998, thanks to its oil wealth, was the richest country in South America, with a poverty-stricken majority and an absurdly wealthy upper class. President Chávez resolved to use the oil wealth in the interests of the mass of the people, thereby earning the hatred of the upper class and of the United States, expressed in the failed coup d'état of 2002.

Chávez was elected again and again. However, in spite of his socialist rhetoric, "21st-century socialism," in spite of his huge popular support, he never attacked the economic power of the capitalist class. Venezuela remains a capitalist state.

The United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) is an all-class alliance, and the bourgeois members have a considerable influence. Bolivarian businessmen do quite well, availing of profitable business and contracts with the state or the state oil company, PDVSA. A further weakness is that Venezuela's long tradition of bureaucracy and corruption has not gone away, and continues to infect the state apparatus.

A great strength of the movement has been the enormous personality of Hugo Chávez. His death in 2013 was a cruel blow.

With Chávez gone, the opposition and the US government intensified their attacks on the government and its supporters. When Maduro narrowly won the presidential election, the far right cried "fraud" and proceeded to organise a campaign of street violence and assassinations, with the aim of deposing Maduro, resulting in forty-three deaths. The right-wing politician Leopoldo López was sentenced to fourteen years' imprisonment for directing this violence. The international corporate media regard him, of course, as a political prisoner.

Alongside this, and far more

Where is China heading?

Graham Harrington

ONE OF The lessons of the fall of the Soviet Union is that Marxists should seek to look critically at states that are attempting to build socialism, while also not being over-simplistic.

Most views of China today write the country off as simply selling out and having fully embraced capitalism, without an attempt at understanding the complex historical development of China since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. Indeed with China as a global power, the need to understand it is becoming more and more important.

The immense historical achievements of socialism in China speak for themselves: defeating Japanese imperialism and the nationalists led by Chiang Kai-Shek, the eradication of illiteracy, the immense progress in the standing of women, the massive public health service and education programmes, public works schemes, along with the electrification of the countryside.

Without going too far into the political issues that engulfed China in the later years of Mao and after his death in 1976, China began a massive transformation subsequently. It faced many problems arising from the attempt to construct a socialist, industrial country in a nation with a small working class. The Communist Party decided that, in order to reach socialism, the market would be used to stimulate growth, allowing for a build-up of industry. This growth would then allow the state to build what the party calls a "moderately prosperous society," which would eventually take China into the early stages of socialism.

This is the basic Communist Party position. Much as the Nordic countries applied concessions under a capitalist government in order to strengthen the capitalist system the Chinese Communist Party is doing to build socialism.

Since these policies began to be applied in China it has achieved growth rates in the double digits. According to the World Bank's East Asia and Pacific Update of 2007, China's "rapid growth over the last 20 years has reduced poverty and improved living standards on a scale and at a pace unequalled in history." Indeed one can say that the Chinese Communist Party is the world's most successful wealth-creator.

It is often thought that these achievements—impressive by any account—are the result of the introduction of the market economy. However, the

effective, has been the economic war against Venezuela. Businesses, especially the big monopolies, like the food importers Polar, create shortages by stockpiling goods, or by exporting subsidised Venezuelan food to Colombia, by undermining the Venezuelan currency, causing hyper-inflation. This has been compounded by the lack of resolute action by the government in its own defence, and by its sheer incompetence. Many people lost confidence in President Maduro and stayed away from the polls in the election for the National Assembly in 2015, with the result that the opposition won a majority.

In the Assembly they declared they would get rid of Maduro in three months. Indeed they could talk about nothing else. This is not possible under the constitution. There is a constitutional way—it involves collecting signatures—but they ruined it by including dead people in the list. They weakened their position even more by refusing to accept a judgement of the Supreme Court concerning electoral malpractice by three deputies, whose election it did not recognise. Consequently, the court suspended the powers of the Assembly.

A new campaign of street violence was initiated. Gangs set up burning barricades in the street, and attacked public buildings, including a maternity hospital, which they tried to set on fire—they failed, but the building had to be evacuated. A young man suspected of being a Chavista, Orlando Figuera, was doused with petrol and burnt to death (not reported in the *Irish Times**). More than a hundred people lost their lives as a result of this campaign. Amazingly, those who organised and paid for it have not been arrested, though they are well known.

Once again the economic war is more effective in attacking Venezuela. The shortages and the inflation are inflicting real hardship on the people, along with the economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union—hardship that is widely reported in the media but blamed on the government. (The *Irish Times* takes its copy from the *New York Times*.)

Also, the collapse in the price of oil hit Venezuela especially hard, exposing many economic and political weaknesses that had not been dealt with when the price was high.

The constitution provides for the election of a "Constituent Assembly," with powers to propose changes in the constitution. President Maduro decreed that such a body be elected. The opposition refused to participate in this election, but it was endorsed by over eight million votes—more than enough to win an election. This was followed by two more electoral victories, including 18 out of 23 state governors and a big majority of local mayors. Obviously, many of those who stayed away from the Assembly election in 2015 came out to vote this time.

Once elected, the Constituent Assembly turned out to be a big disappointment, bureaucratic and unimaginative. The widespread discontent among Chavistas at the government's performance is not reflected there: it reflects the view that the PSUV has a monopoly of Chavismo, that it is the only revolutionary party.

The Communist Party of Venezuela has expressed many criticisms of the government: its failure to combat effectively the attacks on the country, the treatment of workers employed by the state, and the subcontracting of work to private employers by the state and the oil company. *"The government of President Nicolás Maduro has not developed, let alone executed, policies or plans that represent a revolutionary solution to the Venezuelan capitalist crisis, limiting itself to managing the crisis without affecting the power of capital."*

Along with the Homeland for All party and other left groups, the Communist Party formed the Anti-Fascist Anti-Imperialist Popular Front to fight the oligarchic enemy at home and the imperialist enemy abroad.

President Maduro's efforts to make a deal with the opposition have failed repeatedly. They had actually reached a deal about the conduct of the presidential election in their talks in the Dominican Republic when, following a phone call from President Santos of Colombia, they got up and walked away. Rex Tillerson, secretary of state of the USA, was in Colombia at the time.

The election will go ahead on 22 April, in the form almost agreed to, but the main opposition parties have refused to participate. (One of their number, Henry Falcón, has broken ranks and announced his candidacy.)

The Communist Party, faced with the necessity of defeating the opposition on the one hand and its serious criticism of Maduro's government on the other, called a national conference of the party to consider its candidacy in the election—that is, whether to support the re-election of Maduro or nominate another candidate. The conference adjourned to enable talks with the PSUV to take place, and when it re-convened it took the decision to support Maduro, on the basis of an agreed joint statement. Homeland for All took the same decision.

So the coalition that supported Hugo Chávez from 1998 has been reconvened, at least for the election—an election that they have to win. ★

*See Abby Martin's report at https://venezuelanalysis.com/video/13239. Venezuela Analysis also has some good reports from Paul Dobson, Rachel Boothroyd, and Lucas Koerner.

"commanding heights" of the economy in China are still state-owned. China's banking, power and energy, transport and communications industries and much of its heavy industry are all under the control of the state. The state also has maintained control of land, meaning that private investors will have to come to an accommodation with the state in order to use Chinese land.

More than half the economy is under public ownership, taking the form of state-owned enterprises, with the state also owning shares in most private companies. Under the law, any private enterprise, foreign or domestic, that employs more than a hundred workers must recognise trade unions, and allow the Communist Party to have a work-place branch.

This has not been so smooth in practice, as large transnationals in particular bribe some officials to allow them to operate without concern for workers' rights. This is part of the reason for Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive, which is directed at all levels of the party.

The Communist Party has tight control over state power. To see evidence of how state power is used in China one need only look at China's response to the financial crisis of a decade ago. While the capitalist states turned to putting the burden of the crisis on workers, using it as an excuse for privatisations and an assault on workers' conditions, the response in China was very different.

The state launched a massive public-spending programme in order to keep the economy stimulated. Most of the multi-billion-dollar programme dealt with expanding public transport, especially railways, as well as energy projects, particularly renewable energy.

For example, the Xinyu plant now produces a quarter of the world's solar panels. Houses were constructed, with subsidised rents, the state pension was increased, and more funds were put into education and the health service. Significantly, workers' pay was increased. Chinese banks, publicly owned, paid for 40 per cent of the programme, through low-interest loans to state and private enterprises.

Since then the state-owned enterprises have earned nearly 70 per cent of the profit share, almost $200 billion. Some private enterprises that have been unproductive have been nationalised, with their profits going to the people.

Of course there are also many contradictions in China. It is unlikely that the system will be able to replicate its success after the next inevitable crisis of capitalism, and already growth has begun to slow down. While Chinese trade unions have almost 250 million members, and labour legislation is generally improving, many problems exist in relation to workers' conditions.

However, it would be incorrect to say that the whole country is simply one big sweatshop. As the Chinese Communist Party, of over 85 million members, prepares to guide China into what it sees as the "primary stage of socialism," we should approach things with an open mind. ★

Continuing a glorious tradition

Jenny Farrell

ONE OF the tragedies that befell Ireland after its partial independence was that the aspirations for this newly liberated state were almost immediately replaced, as Liam O'Flaherty put it, by the "tyranny of the Irish Church and its associate parasites, the upstart bourgeoisie, the last posthumous child from the wrinkled womb of European capitalism."

O'Flaherty's novels of the 1920s describe this betrayal and its impact on the people of Ireland. His were among the first books to be banned by the state.

Frustration generated by unofficial, low-key censorship has also been the fate of Tomás Mac Síomóin. Yet his literary output is remarkable: poetry, short stories, novels, and translations of world literature. Disgusted at the abandonment by modern Ireland, Mac Síomóin left Ireland, like so many writers before him. He began to translate his own work into English to reach a broader audience: his collection of short stories, *The Diary of an Ant,* the novels *The Cartographer's Apprentice* and *Is Stacey Pregnant?* Two books, the non-fiction exploration of the Irish post-colonial psyche, *The Broken Harp*, and a brilliant rewriting of Swift, *An Immodest Proposal,* he wrote directly in English.

Mac Síomóin is an internationalist and has deep regard for social revolutionaries, both in his native Ireland and abroad. He has translated Mayakovsky into Irish, he has written a novel set in revolutionary nineteenth-century Cuba while living in contemporary Cuba. He has translated the *Communist Manifesto* into Irish.

The plot of Mac Síomóin's first and longest novel, the untranslated *Ag Altóir an Diabhail: Striptease Spioradálta Bheartla B (At the Devil's altar: The spiritual striptease of Beartla B)*, develops in a rural lunatic asylum, where an inmate (Everyman) is driven to madness by his failure to solve the enigma of woman, in this case the cyborg Juliet. The tawdry illusions cloaking the idyllic valley where the asylum is located—essentially contemporary Ireland—are peeled off, one by one.

Mac Síomóin presents readers with imprisoned people. In *The Cartographer's Apprentice* they are confined to a certain space and time, which is governed by a menacing theocracy. In *Is Stacey Pregnant?* the prison is a traffic jam, with no escape, ending in sinister disappearances of people, engineered by a new-old breed of Orwellian pigs. Inhuman machinations, willingness to sacrifice people, denial of dignity, lurk everywhere.

Such dystopia has its firm and growing roots in our 21st-century normality. Yes, it may strike the reader as extreme, but it serves perfectly the purpose of highlighting the true and unmasked nature of our times.

Tomás Mac Síomóin continues a glorious tradition. The generation before him produced authors with a social conscience and political understanding, writing in Irish. Among these are such outstanding political activists as O'Flaherty and Mac Grianna, members of the CPI; Ó Conaire, former IRA member, trade union activist, and socialist; Pearse, cultural nationalist and leader of a military uprising against British imperialism in 1916; Ó Cadhain, an IRA member, socialist, and political prisoner.

Tomás Mac Síomóin, who turned eighty on 19 February, has stood firm against those who would rather that he wrote of thatched-cottage idylls or middle-class, mid-Atlantic, mid-life crises. He shows us the world as it is and invites the reader to see it as incommensurate with humanity's ideal. In order to change the world one must first understand it. As Liam O'Flaherty wrote,

"And the censorship of literature was imposed, lest men like me could teach the Irish masses that contact with dung is demoralizing, that ignorance is ignoble and that poverty, instead of being a passport to Heaven, makes this pretty earth a monotonous Hell." ★

For a fuller tribute to Tomás Mac Síomóin go to www.communistpartyofireland.ie/c-TMS.html.

The storm is breaking!

MAXIM GORKY was born 150 years ago this month. His works remain widespread on all continents and contribute to the consolidation of proletarian class-consciousness.
Gorky's socialist-realist method is his ground-breaking world literary achievement. His books, stories and plays continue to be a touchstone and benchmark for socialist writers all over the world. We wish to pay tribute to him by printing here a poem for which he became famous.

"Storm Petrel" (1901)

High above the silvery ocean winds are gathering the storm-clouds, and between the clouds and ocean proudly wheels the Stormy Petrel, like a streak of sable lightning.

Now his wing the wave caresses, now he rises like an arrow, cleaving clouds and crying fiercely, while the clouds detect a rapture in the bird's courageous crying.

In that crying sounds a craving for the tempest! Sounds the flaming of his passion, of his anger, of his confidence in triumph.

The gulls are moaning in their terror—moaning, darting o'er the waters, and would gladly hide their horror in the inky depths of ocean.

And the grebes are also moaning. Not for them the nameless rapture of the struggle. They are frightened by the crashing of the thunder.

And the foolish penguins cower in the crevices of rocks, while alone the Stormy Petrel proudly wheels above the ocean, o'er the silver-frothing waters.

Ever lower, ever blacker, sink the storm-clouds to the sea, and the singing waves are mounting in their yearning toward the thunder.

Strikes the thunder. Now the waters fiercely battle with the winds. And the winds in fury seize them in unbreakable embrace, hurtling down the emerald masses to be shattered on the cliffs.

Like a streak of sable lightning wheels and cries the Stormy Petrel, piercing storm-clouds like an arrow, cutting swiftly through the waters.

He is coursing like a Demon, the black Demon of the tempest, ever laughing, ever sobbing—he is laughing at the storm-clouds, he is sobbing with his rapture.

In the crashing of the thunder, the wise Demon hears a murmur of exhaustion. And he knows the storm will die and the sun will be triumphant; the sun will always be triumphant!

The waters roar. The thunder crashes. Livid lightning flares in storm-clouds high above the seething ocean, and the flaming darts are captured and extinguished by the waters, while the serpentine reflections writhe, expiring, in the deep.

It's the storm! The storm is breaking!

Still the valiant Stormy Petrel proudly wheels among the lightning, o'er the roaring, raging ocean, and his cry resounds exultant, like a prophecy of triumph—

Let it break in all its fury! ★

Source: M. Gorky, *Selected Short Stories*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1955. On-line version: Maxim Gorky Internet Archive (www.marxists.org), 2002

Rural Ireland and the broadband scandal

Seosamh Ó Cuaig

THE BROADBAND scandal highlights once again the dire need for a strong, authentic independent political voice for rural Ireland.

The treacherous policy of privatising Telecom has resulted in the fact that Eir is now owned by a French billionaire and that the Government is left with just one bidder to provide broadband for over half a million houses in the rural areas.

According to the Fianna Fáil TD Timmy Dooley, this is akin to a farmer going to the fair with a bullock and knowing that only one buyer awaits him.

Of course Timmy Dooley forgot to mention that the national sabotage of privatising Telecom was implemented by Fianna Fáil under the baleful influence of the Progressive Democrats and guided by the neo-liberal policies of the European Union.

Rural Ireland must fight back this time or remain forever silent.

By Rural Ireland I mean all the areas outside the cities, as outlined in the CEDRA Report, which was chaired by Pat Spillane.

The five cities have less than a third of the population of the Republic.

Rural Ireland fighting back does not mean an attack on the cities. Balanced sustainable countrywide development is in the interest of city-dwellers too. In order to get that we must wring concessions from a system which is unduly centred on Dublin city.

In fact our country is the most centralised state in all of Europe. Consequently our local government system is a joke and a fig leaf.

In April of last year Paddy McGuinness highlighted the problem we face when he announced he would not be seeking reappointment to the chair of the Western Development Commission after spending four years in the post. "I believe strongly that there is absolutely no commitment at either political or administrative level to balanced regional development, nor is there any worthwhile plan to address rural decline," he said.

I can understand his frustration. I spent two terms as an independent on Galway County Council and three terms on the Board of Údarás na Gaeltachta, as well as being a member of the Western Regional Authority and of the Border, Midland and Western Assembly. Early on I realised that most of our efforts were in vain. Indeed at one meeting of the Western Regional Authority I suggested that we all resign together to expose the whole charade.

Pessimists amongst us say that the power is in Dublin and that we can do nothing about it. Yes, but the balance of power could be in rural Ireland.

Without succumbing in any way to the politics of the Democratic Unionist Party, we should take a leaf from their book as regards tactics.

Imagine if we organised a Rural People's Movement and got ten teachtaí Dála elected on a carefully crafted rural platform. The days of majority government in Ireland are gone. Our ten TDs could be the king-makers after the next election.

Interested in this idea? Please contact me by e-mail: ocuaig@hotmail.com. ★

LETTERS

Electoral politics

Comrade,
I would like to comment on the article "Time for Change" by Comrade Jimmy Doran in the January issue of the *Socialist Voice*. Comrade Doran correctly states that we are in "a battle to lay bare the class nature of society as it exists today." However, his analysis of how we should campaign to raise working-class consciousness espouses a position which could be perceived as being closer to anarchism than to Marxism.

He rejects any role for electoral politics and states that even the election of a progressive left government would not lead to any real change. He seems to suggest that because the vast majority of TDs elected since the foundation of the state have supported capitalism, we should have no truck with electoral politics. I would like to remind Comrade Doran that Lenin, in his work *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder,* dealt with this issue when he wrote:

"Even if only a fairly large *minority* of the industrial workers . . . follow the lead of the Catholic clergy—and a similar minority of rural workers follow the landowners and kulaks (Grossbauern)—it *undoubtedly* signifies that parliamentarianism in Germany has not yet politically outlived itself, that participation in parliamentary elections and in the struggle on the parliamentary rostrum is *obligatory* on the party of the revolutionary proletariat *specifically* for the purpose of educating the backward strata of *its own class* . . . Whilst you lack the strength to do away with bourgeois parliaments and every other type of reactionary institution, you *must* work within them because *it is there* that you will still find workers who are duped . . ."

A majority of the southern working class look to the Dáil for a solution to their problems, so can a revolutionary party afford to ignore parliamentary politics as a field of activity? Comrade Doran states those who vote in elections, even those who vote for change, want the system to remain the same. Even if that was true, how can we expect people to look for a socialist alternative to capitalism if we do not put forward such an alternative to them.

Comrade Doran correctly states that all gains made by the working class under capitalism are temporary. He cites the Right to Water and public housing campaigns as examples which can bring about qualitative changes. However, on their own they do not bring the struggle for socialism any nearer. Those sections of the capitalist class who want to own Irish Water and the landlord class will lose out and be weakened, but capitalism as a system can live and indeed prosper with a state monopoly in water as in the past they benefited from state-owned transport and power providers.

Such campaigns are important as is work within the Trade Union movement. However it cannot be a case of either these or electoral politics. Real transformation will only come about when the working class capture political power, and participation in parliamentary elections has a role to play in any such strategy.

Comradely greetings,
Jimmy Corcoran

Clarification
Socialist Voice Editorial Board

In the February edition of *Socialist Voice* we published a discussion article headed "Beyond the National Health Service." The article raised questions about the character of health systems under imperialist and capitalist conditions, in particular the British NHS, and what a health system in the interests of the Irish people might look like—taking socialist Cuba as inspiration.

As intended, the article has prompted discussion about a crucial area of struggle for the Irish working class. The Communist Party of Ireland welcomes that discussion but wishes to make clear what CPI policy is in this area.

At its 25th National Congress in December 2017 the political resolution adopted called unequivocally for "a National Health Service for the whole of Ireland. This means a restructuring of the health service in the South and a defence of the NHS in the North."

The congress also committed the CPI wholeheartedly "to unite our people in Northern Ireland and beyond on the basis of a programme against austerity, against the destruction of the NHS, education cuts, and the destruction of public services and the welfare state." ★

What a parcel of rogues in a nation!

On 3 February a NATO submarine, part of the Dutch fleet, docked in Cork Harbour. While it was moored there, a Dutch seaman stood "guard" on the submarine, brazenly brandishing an automatic weapon. This was an exact repeat of a similar incident in 2017.

The Gardaí refused to intervene, and the media ignored the episode, as did local politicians.

Peace activists surmise that the Dutch submarine was involved in a NATO mission.

It would be pointless to suggest that this was an infringement of "Irish neutrality." How can Ireland claim to be neutral when it has been an accessory to US wars since 2001 by means of Shannon Airport and Irish airspace?

And the Government's signing up to the EU's bellicose Permanent Structured Cooperation in Security and Defence, earmarking Irish special forces for a role in an EU battle group, shows that we are militarily aligned. John Halligan's announcement that the Irish state will finance transnational arms companies under the guise of space exploration is another signal that the Irish establishment is fully embracing imperialism.

What a parcel of rogues in a nation!

Centuries of colonial subjugation surely should compel us to oppose the imperial oppression of other countries and peoples. Initiating small peace groups up and down the country would be a beginning. ★

Join the fight for socialism

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