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**"I remember that some time ago President de Valera made a speech which was applauded by all the communistic, liberal, pinkish papers in Europe . . . He actually implied criticism of the Nazi government in Germany and their treatment of Jews . . ." — Desmond Fitzgerald (Cumann na nGaedheal, later Fine Gael), Dáil Éireann, 19 February 1937.**

# The EU's crisis of legitimacy

The European Union's crisis of legitimacy continues to develop, as do the attempts by those elements that call themselves the "liberal centre"—that is, those political parties and the economic interests they serve that are central to the EU's further integration and are attempting to use that crisis to mask their agenda. **Eugene McCartan** Page 2


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## The EU's crisis of legitimacy

Towards the end of June, José Manuel Villegas, general secretary of the Spanish liberal party Ciudadanos (Citizens), and Christophe Castaner, executive officer of Emmanuel Macron's party La République en Marche (the Republic on the Move), announced their intention of creating a common platform for the next EU Parliament elections, whose goal would be "to go beyond the right and left divide." They want to rebrand the debate, opposing "progressives" to "populists," and to "deeply" reform the EU.

Macron won the French general election by a similar stroke, posing himself as the only force capable of defeating the populism of La Pen and the hard right. Of course the forces of the right, together with the rump of the discredited French Socialist Party, rallied behind Macron—not only to defeat La Pen but to secure a majority in the French parliament so as to push forward their real agenda, which is to attack the French working class.

This is what has happened. French workers have come under sustained attack. Many of the advances won by French workers over many decades have been taken back with the stroke of a pen. Privatisation and the commodification of public services continue to gather pace.

French workers need all our solidarity as they continue to resist.

Macron dressed himself as the defender of democracy, but his party is in fact the cutting edge for an assault on democracy. Were the many advances in their economic and social conditions that workers won not advances for democracy?

This new development in French strategy could lead to the creation of a common platform in the next EU Parliament. This new platform would be open to parties from other European countries, with people close to the former Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi reportedly in discussions with Ciudadanos and La République en Marche.

One of the proposals being pushed by Macron is the establishment of an EU finance minister, to whom all other national finance ministers would be subordinate. This proposal, if adopted, would further weaken the capacity of people to change or influence economic policies and would strengthen the power of lobbyists from financial and business corporations, further subverting the democratic will of the people.

The political establishments throughout the EU want to further undermine workers' rights and advances and to restrict our capacity to fight back. It's just old wine in new bottles, but a poisoned cocktail nevertheless. They will use the threat of the crisis of legitimacy, as exposed by the populist right, to further consolidate the centralising structure.★

# ANALYSIS

## Ominous messages for Ireland's ruling class

**ECONOMY**

**Tommy McKearney**

**WHILE SPEAKING recently in Germany, the left-leaning economist and former Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis described Ireland as a tax haven, "free-riding" on the rest of Europe.**

Coincidentally, within a few days of his address to the IFO Institute for Economic Research in Munich[1] two of Europe's most powerful right-wing finance ministers launched a proposal to harmonise corporate tax among EU member-states. Olaf Scholz of Germany and his French counterpart, Bruno Le Maire, agreed to open discussions throughout the EU on legislating for this measure.

These are ominous messages for Ireland's neo-liberal ruling class.

It would be difficult for anyone to deny that there is a long-held and across-the-board consensus that Ireland's corporate tax rate is seen as a problem by many in the European Union. The Irish establishment may take some temporary consolation from the fact that at present each state's tax rates are deemed to be a domestic matter, and moreover that Ireland is protected by its ability to veto any attempt to change this situation.

Nevertheless there is no guarantee that, in the face of strong opposition, this position is sustainable in the long term, particularly in the event of a global economic crisis. Just think how the Irish state rolled over in 2010 when ordered by Brussels not to "burn the bondholders."

Just how precarious the Republic's tax take is may be judged by reflecting on a few statistics.[2] Corporation tax accounts for about 16 per cent of the state's total income. Last year it gathered approximately €3.2 billion in corporation tax from a mere ten companies, most of which are American transnationals.

This concentration of companies with their head office in the United States adds to the problem mentioned above—a difficulty that is exacerbated by the Trump government's dramatic slashing of corporation tax, coupled with rising tensions over protectionist trade policies.

The Republic's ruling elite is subjecting the people of the country to the risks inherent in an economic high-wire act, with no obvious fall-back position. In the event of an economic crisis the Republic has few conventional free-market options. Caught in the euro zone, it cannot use the devaluation route. While it is committed to the EU's Stability and Growth Pact, deficit funding is severely restricted, while state aid to sustain employment has long been forbidden by EU competition law.

On the other hand, the received wisdom now being promoted by the establishment media is that the Republic is in rude economic health. Clearly this is a tendentious analysis, concentrating on selective and free-market-enhancing statistics. The one-sided story is of falling unemployment, a favourable balance of payments, and a manageable budget deficit.

All of which, of course, ignores a decline in workers' terms and conditions, increased homelessness, a fractured health service, and growing inequality. Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties the status quo appears secure for the time being.

Problems will arise when (and with capitalism it is always when) the next economic crisis arrives; and, in the light of the factors mentioned above, that may not be too far distant. Interestingly, the managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Christine Lagarde, was in little doubt about this eventuality on her recent visit to Dublin.

Constrained by adherence to EU treaties, the Republic's establishment would face serious challenges if they are to retain control of the economy and, by extension, their power and privilege. Let's be clear, though: the ruling class will battle tenaciously to hold on to its position.

In this respect the omens are worrying. Throughout Europe there is a repositioning of the neo-liberal right as it sets itself out as the only effective foil to the far right or fascism. To an extent, the neo-Thatcherite Emmanuel Macron typifies this tendency. Personalities aside, though, a similar trend is becoming increasingly evident in Germany and the Netherlands and in what is loosely referred to as the modern Hanseatic League, of which—despite our location—Ireland appears to be a member.[3]

The members of this latter group, in the words of the *Financial Times*, "share a common outlook on many economic questions, favouring dynamic competition on the single market, and stressing the need for national budgetary responsibility within the eurozone . . ."

It hardly requires a great stretch of the imagination to guess how those in Ireland who

# IRELAND'S CRISIS

subscribe to this latest version of capitalism will react in an economic crisis. There will be another and deeper reduction in workers' incomes, a slashing of every aspect of the social wage—all done while telling us that it's for our own good, and that their commitment to liberal values is keeping the continent's fascist beast from our shores.

In tandem with this trend in neo-liberalism is the continuing degeneration of social democracy. The German Social Democratic Party and the French Socialist Party are now bywords for unprincipled opportunism. Meanwhile the erstwhile radicals of SYRIZA have recently entered into an agreement with Cyprus and Israel that brings together companies from those countries active in the arms industry.[4] While it is unlikely that Ireland's centrist social democrats would go so far as to aid and abet the Israeli arms industry, their position in relation to other important political and economic questions is ambivalent to the point of being frightening.

As always, it is important that working people do not fall into the Mr Micawber trap of hoping for something to turn up. Having a passive response is to have no response. There are options, and they have to be explored and acted upon. Think of the remarkable resistance to the proposed imposition of water charges or, more recently, the positive actions of grass-roots GAA supporters in defence of the oppressed people of Palestine.

In this country we have progressive trade union activists; there are individuals and communities anxious to struggle for a decent and better future; and we have a rich tradition of resistance to exploitation. What we now require is unity of purpose and action, not jut to defend our gains but to strive for a workers' republic. Karl Kautsky's observation that we face either a transition to socialism or regression to barbarism remains as true today as when he wrote those words.★

**1** According to the influential *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, this is Germany's most influential economic research institute.
**2** Eoin Burke-Kennedy, "Shock to Ireland's corporation tax base 'inevitable'," *Irish Times*, 16 May 2018.
**3** Jim Brunsden and Michael Acton, "The Hanseatic League 2.0," *Financial Times*, 7 November 2017.
**4** *Morning Star*, 23 June 2018.

## Ireland more deeply enmeshed in imperialism

**FOREIGN POLICY**

**Eugene McCartan**

**A NUMBER OF events in late June must raise serious concerns regarding the direction in which this state and its political establishment are going, and wish to bring us.**

Firstly there is the appointment of a former deputy chief constable of the PSNI as commissioner of the Garda Síochána. Relatives for Justice have pointed out that Drew Harris *"has at every opportunity sought to thwart families' search for truth and accountability when the state has killed people . . . He was publicly criticised by the former Garda Commissioner for his evidence at the Smithwick tribunal who famously cited his evidence as being 'nonsense on stilts.'"*

His appointment as head of the Garda Síochána speaks volumes about the lack of commitment by this state to getting at the truth or securing justice for the many victims of British state-directed killings, both in the Six Counties and those murdered here in this state, for example in the Dublin and Monaghan bombings.

It is just another example, following the agreement on "permanent structured co-operation" (PESCO) with EU and NATO states, of how enmeshed this state is in the imperialist strategies of the United States, Britain, and the EU.

The subservience of this strategy of alignment with imperialism was further illustrated in a speech by the tánaiste and minister for foreign affairs, Simon Coveney, on 25 June at a meeting of the EU's Foreign Affairs Committee. He was quoted in a press statement by his department as saying that this state is playing "an important and central role" in influencing and shaping EU foreign policy and in its "engagement in the Horn of Africa/Red Sea region," as well as in Jordan.

The EU Global Strategy, launched in June 2016, is aimed at strengthening links with NATO, with increased military spending by EU member-states.

But Ireland's "important and central role" exists only in Coveney's imagination. The Irish state has *no* influence on the strategic decisions of the European Union.

The secretary-general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, was unambiguous in his comments. Speaking after a joint NATO-EU summit meeting in early June, he stated that both organisations are co-operating in the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean, and that NATO is providing help to the EU's "Operation Sophia" in the Mediterranean, with ten ships and maritime surveillance aircraft now in the region.

Stoltenberg emphasised that NATO and the EU are also co-operating on "military mobility, infrastructure, [and] legal hurdles, to make sure that we are able to move forces quickly through Europe if needed." This would lead one to believe that Shannon Airport is an essential military "asset" for NATO, and not just for the United States.

Speaking about NATO-EU co-operation in the western Balkans, Stoltenberg said: "We have been working together there for many, many years. And it is really encouraging to see that there is progress, there is some hope." He went further, stating that he was "confident that when the NATO leaders meet at the Summit next month [July] in Brussels they will decide to open accession talks with the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia."

Hence the recognition by Greece of the Yugoslav republic of Macedonia as "Northern Macedonia" in mid-June, with NATO and the EU getting all the ducks in a row.

This state and the Irish establishment have long since given up military neutrality, seeing it as an obstacle to their full participation in imperialism's global military and political strategy. Fine Gael in particular, but also Fianna Fáil and the liberal elite and "intelligentsia," have been engaged in a constant battle against what they see as backward Irish "nationalism." The past is the past, and we must look to the future, and shape that future within the European Union and within imperialism.

This evolving realignment of the economic, political and military interests and priorities of this state drives a coach and horses through the policy of those who advocate "constructive engagement" with the European Union, who claim that "reform" is possible from within.

Once again the national question raises its head. We must look to the prediction of James Connolly. Raising the Green Flag over a building or seeking ministerial office has meant very little. Without national independence and sovereignty—the very tools required for changing the real material conditions in the lives of working people—imperialism will still rule us and decide our fate.★

# Trade unions must make no excuses

CLASS COLLABORATION

Laura Duggan

**INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS law often works on the assumption that both sides of a dispute are reasonable entities: employers won't exploit or take advantage of their workers, and in return the workers won't ask for "too much"; and, just in case, we have trade unions to try to keep the playing-pitch level.**

Given this premise, it is easy to see why some trade unions can feel obliged to take a conciliatory tone about "excessive" industrial action. The broad trade union support (officials, not necessarily workers) for the introduction of the Industrial Relations Act in 1990 to "ban ridiculous strikes" is one such example.

Trade unions are pressured by political parties that they align with, by unfair media bias and a fear of losing public support to back laws that restrict their own power. They need to be seen as reasonable and willing to play ball by the rules. That these rules are written by, and for the benefit of, the capitalist class is somehow beside the point. And even where the union movement has strength, this strength is still justified on the bosses' terms.

In 1977 Québec introduced anti-scab laws that prohibit employers under picket or who have locked out their employees from hiring temporary replacement workers—scabs. Articles 109.1 to 109.3 of the Québec Labour Code states that employers can replace striking workers only with

# What is the Industrial Relations Act?

CLASS LAW

Jimmy Doran

**THE INDUSTRIAL Relations Act (1990) was introduced on 18 July 1990, replacing the Trade Disputes Act (1906), the main principle of which was that anything done in a trade dispute, provided it was not illegal in itself, would be free from criminal and civil liability.**

The 1990 act was introduced as a control mechanism on trade unions. It was a response to equivalent legislation being introduced in Britain because of increasing levels of industrial unrest and strikes, as dissatisfaction rose during the 1970s and 80s when the post-war gains made by workers under social democracy were slashed. Unions were being softened as they became cosy with the state under "social partnership," and allowed it to be introduced with a minimum of fuss.

Among some unions there were serious issues with many parts of the act, covering political strikes, secondary pickets, individual workers' rights, and the change in requirements covering strike ballots; but the act was passed and accepted. Reassurances and guarantees were given by the then minister for labour, Bertie Ahern (a former union official), who was regarded as a friend and sympathetic to workers' rights. This has not proved to be the case, as his guarantees have proved to be about as reliable as his memory over his financial affairs.

The act introduced many changes to the accepted norms of industrial relations up to that time.

The definition of a worker was very loose and left self-employed and contract workers vulnerable, with the "gig economy" and bogus self-employment on the rise. This is something that has huge implications today.

In single-worker disputes the individual worker is very vulnerable, as all agreed procedures must be exhausted before action is taken. So the issue has to be dealt with first by a rights commissioner, the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Relations Commission before collective action is taken. This could take months, if not years; and there will be no guarantee of reinstatement at the end.

This leads to individual workers being at a huge disadvantage, which strikes at the very heart of the trade union principle of "an injury to one is an injury to all."

Political strikes are banned. This would rule out tax marches. It would rule illegal the strike by the ten brave workers in Dunne's Stores who stood up to the South African apartheid regime by not handling South African goods in 1984. (Even Ben Dunne has said of this strike that, on reflection, you cannot defend the indefensible.) It rules out a similar action against Israeli products today.

The CIE companies are very vulnerable in this regard, as during the dispute in 2015 over the selling off of 10 per cent of the service to private operators the implication by the Government was that this was deemed a

management personnel working in strike-bound establishments who were hired before the beginning of the strike.

These measures were introduced with the twin goals of preventing violence and making labour conflicts shorter. The trade union movements of Québec, British Columbia and Ontario,* where these laws have been in force, still make these arguments to defend the legislation. Shorter and less frequent strikes means that strikes have less of an economic impact, and that total productivity, the holy grail of capitalism, isn't harmed too greatly. However, studies have shown that strikes have, generally, not been shortened.

One study in particular, by the American researchers Peter Cramton, Morley Gunderson and Joseph Tracy,† shows that the prohibition on the hiring of replacement workers is actually associated with more frequent and longer strikes. In fact it increases the probability that a strike will occur, and that it will last longer, contradicting the trade union movement's earnest claims.

So why are these strikes lasting longer?

The blame for strikes in this study (and similar ones) always rests with the workers, as if industrial action is taken in a bubble and not brought about by employers' actions, or lack thereof. A demand for an increase in wages is treated as the whim of stroppy workers, refusing to get along, instead of being demanded as a result of increased company profit, an increased work load, or a necessity to keep up with inflation.

When industrial action is framed as an action that unions and workers should feel guilt over, it nullifies the central role that business-owners play. It is not the unions or the workers who protract these disputes when anti-scab laws are in effect but the employers themselves. Employers know that when they have no ability to sidestep the striking workers by bringing in scabs, any concession they make to these workers will not be one they can take back with any ease.

Class conflict that develops the consciousness of workers brings out the worst instincts of the capitalist too and shows the true relationship of worker and boss. It is naïve of unions to pin their defence of the laws that benefit their members on the measure of fewer days lost to strikes when the capitalists can prove this wrong by embracing their own unwillingness to negotiate.

By appealing to capitalist arguments of productivity to justify workers' actions they acquiesce in a capitalist world view, a world view that is an anathema to the trade union movement.

Bizarrely, another rarely mentioned but more important effect of the anti-scab legislation is the one it has on real wages. The same study finds that the ban on replacement workers leads to an increase in real wages of 2 per cent per year, on average. The authors estimate that the greater wage gains exceed the losses made by union members in terms of additional strike days. This should be the union's argument, not a defence but an acknowledgement that the gains a strong working-class movement can make by protecting themselves are in excess of their cost.

Union numbers are in steady decline, and there are many reasons for this: the face of work is changing, precariousness is commonplace, and the job for life is dead. But this should not be new or unfamiliar territory for trade unions aware of their own history. Job security is relatively recent, and it was not a gift from the employers but one that union members won through struggle.

It seems to the lay person that unions, as behemoth, faceless organisations, often have more in common with the bosses than with the workers they claim to represent; and it isn't such an absurd view when the unions have begun using the bosses' ideas and the bosses' language. Wouldn't it be expected that they will eventually share the bosses' disgust?

The ill-used excuse that a trade union is only as good as its members rings false when it is the place of the union to educate and empower its membership to become a more militant and class-conscious one. To be effective, trade unions must make no excuses for the actions of their members but defend them and have no shame for the reasons they do it, even if it means rewriting the rules.★

* Ontario rescinded the anti-scab law in 1992 in favour of a prohibition on the use of professional strike-breakers.
† Peter Cramton, Morley Gunderson and Joseph S. Tracy, "Impacts of strike replacement bans in Canada," *Labour Law Journal*, vol. 50 (1999).

IMAGE LEFT: Now he understands the game (from *Solidarity,* 11 November 1916)

political issue. With more of this coming down the line in the three CIE companies, it is an industrial minefield. It will also have huge implications for the ESB and all state-sector workers as the spectre of privatisation hovers over Ireland.

Secondary picketing and support strikes are also banned. During the Bus Éireann dispute recently it was the secondary picketing on Dublin Bus and Irish Rail depots that eventually forced the company to the negotiating table; but this was illegal and could have been very expensive for the trade unions involved.

A secret ballot of all members must be carried out before a strike can take place, and seven days' notice must be given to the employer involved. The executive of the union has the final say on whether a strike is to go ahead in the case of a majority vote in favour, but there is no similar authority where a minority vote for strike.

Some industrial disputes require immediate action and can't wait for the seven days' notice required. This could happen in the case of a health and safety issue, when immediate action might be needed in the interests of workers' safety. The recent situation with Clery's department store required immediate action, but this was not available to the workers in question.

Sit-ins are also illegal.

These are all weapons whose use (or even the threat of their use) workers no longer have available to them. This weakens workers' power and strengthens employers.

Judicial interpretation of what is a strike and what is a legal ballot or dispute are the essence of the 1990 act. The possibilities for litigation are endless. The decision is put in the hands of the judiciary, who have never been friends of workers. Strikes and industrial action can be delayed for weeks, which allows employers to take action to lessen the effect of the strike.

There is a willingness and an ability by employers to sue unions and officials for loss of income caused by industrial action, which has been made possible under the 1990 act. Under the 1906 act this was not possible, as unions were deemed exempt from such action. This is a huge weakening of the labour movement.

Trade unions act to promote values of social solidarity and to provide a check on the socially corrosive effects of the markets and individualism. The 1990 act is the worst dilution of workers' rights in the history of this state. It facilities employers and gives them the power to question how ballots are carried out. A ballot was purely an internal matter for a trade union, but not according to the 1990 act.

In a survey in 1997 of union officials, 73 per cent said that the 1990 act was a mistake that should not have been accepted in its present form.

With pay and conditions under attack, rising inequality, and poverty at crisis levels, for workers to defend themselves in this neo-liberal climate we need to repeal the 1990 act and to strengthen workers' power, and bring a bit of pride and solidarity back among workers if the trade union movement is to survive.

People in struggle gain class-consciousness from that struggle. It's time for the trade union movement to fight back against the class war being waged against us. To do this we need to tip the balance of power from capital to labour. The first step is to repeal the 1990 act, and the equivalent anti-union legislation in the North.

Unions must become radical or become redundant.★

# The wrong people are in the boats

The crisis of the capitalist economic system continues to grow, and the imposition of limited tariffs on steel imports etc. by the USA is just another symptom of this deepening crisis. The reaction of the liberal establishment in the European Union shows clearly its weakness in relation to the dominant economic, military and political role of the USA.

**Eugene McCartan** reports

**WORKERS HAVE been told that our world is now governed by a "rules-based system"; that is why we needed to have TTIP and CETA, to cement this system. As the crisis deepens, the fair-weather strategy of free trade is coming under pressure, and states revert to competitive economic measures, such as protective tariffs.**

It's not all due to an erratic Trump, however erratic he may be. The tension between the EU and the United States is palpable, and the alliance is under strain.

The action of Trump was to tear up the rulebook because it does not suit the interests of a significant sector of American capital. We have been led to believe for decades in globalisation, neo-liberalism, "rules-based systems"; and much of the liberal left has bought in to this language and strategy, unable to see what it really is: a strategy for controlling global markets and resources, for protecting the profits of transnational corporations.

The United States is still the global imperial power—economically, militarily, and thereby politically. The EU's imposition of tariffs on a few

motorbikes is more a reflection of its own weakness. Its response for some time has been to call for greater centralisation and concentration of power within the EU institutions, as it needs to be able to assert itself and defend and expand its interests and even challenge the global strategy of the United States. Hence the need to further centralise decision-making on economic and fiscal strategy.

It also explains the growing militarisation of the EU itself, and the push for greater national spending on armaments, building up the independent EU military structures and capacity.

The present struggle is not due to the actions of an eccentric individual but rather to real economic forces that are at play, which express themselves in the tariff war. Workers need to remember that the United States and the EU have no problems imposing trade and other restrictions against countries on which they wish to force political and economic regime change and compliance, such as Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela. Tariffs are simply economic weapons for advancing strategic goals.

The steady growth of China, economically and politically, presents great challenges to the western imperial powers. The present tensions reflect the struggle for profitability and monopolisation. This can only lead to greater global competition between the two main imperial power blocs, the United States and the European Union, over control and influence on global territory and resources.

Nothing happens under capitalism that is not driven by profit and the accumulation and concentration of wealth.

At the time of the abolition of the Soviet Union, Marxist theory would have expected heightened rivalry and competition between the imperial countries and blocs. The existential necessity of opposing socialism forced the imperial powers to put aside their own intra-imperial divisions and competition in order to present a united front against the Soviet Union. It is interesting, and a little surprising, that this unity has lasted almost thirty years, since 1991; but it may finally be unravelling under the pressure of continuous economic crisis and stagnation.

If so, this will create a more dangerous world, with increased open competition between blocs based round the United States, the European Union, Russia, and China. In time an African bloc could also emerge as a power—though the destruction wrought by Western imperialism is so great that any such development seems a long way off.

The wars in the Middle East and North Africa show that economic competition and the pursuit of spheres of influence have the potential to lead to new horrors and catastrophes for the peoples of the world.

The EU is faced with what it calls a sea of "illegal economic migrants"; this in turn has provoked a reaction among a significant section of workers within the EU member-states.

Merkel wanted to retain open borders and for all migrants to be allowed into the EU. This is what German and other monopoly interests require: they need a constant flow of cheap labour.

Germany, like other EU member-states, faces a long-term and significant problem regarding population growth or stagnation. The general trend is towards a declining birth rate among indigenous populations, and migrants are needed to fill certain areas of economic activity.

This has created internal economic pressures and facilitated a race to the bottom within the EU itself; this in turn has provoked a political and cultural reaction in EU countries, which is the breeding-ground for racist and neo-fascist forces, the reserve army of capital.

The EU is exploiting these forces for its own ends and as a pretext for a further concentration of power, while workers throughout the EU are experiencing continuing attacks by national governments—directed by and operating within EU treaty obligations—on the social and economic gains made by them over many decades. Their eyes have been refocused to see migrants as the problem, not the system itself.

Some have indeed begun to see the EU, or aspects of the EU, as the source of their problems, while others remain diverted from that target.

The EU has been very effective in this strategy of misdirecting working people and equally in making use of the situation of thousands of people fleeing wars inflicted upon them by the United States and the EU itself, and their allies, throughout the Middle East.

So far they have successfully disguised the effect of EU policies imposed on the countries and peoples of Africa through the "European partnership agreements."

In the United States, workers only see illegal economic migrants from Mexico and Central America—not the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) both on American workers and on the workers, the peasants and the poor south of the border.

Nor do they recognise the role being played by American monopolies, which have shifted production to Mexico, establishing factories run on slave wages and dreadful and dangerous working conditions, while the forces of imperialism get away scot-free.

If we look at the consequences of EU trading practices for Africa, the following picture emerges.

Africa is rich in raw materials: gold, platinum, diamonds, uranium, tantalite, copper, oil, natural gas, precious woods, cocoa, coffee, and many others.

These resources were once directly controlled and exploited by the old European colonial powers, through brutal repression; today that dependence relationship is through European neo-colonialism, in collaboration with the African elite in power at the local level.

They have constructed a low-cost local work force; and the EU controls both the internal markets of African countries and their international markets, creating different layers and levels of dependence.

The EU demands open access for its goods and services, while restructuring the local economy, both manufacturing and agriculture, to make both subservient to the needs of the EU.

It is estimated that about a hundred companies listed on the London Stock Exchange—British and others—exploit the mineral resources of thirty-seven sub-Saharan African countries, with a value of more than $1,000 billion.

France controls the monetary system of fourteen African ex-colonies by means of the the CFA franc (originally the initials for the "French African Colonies," now recycled as the "African Financial Community").

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To preserve parity with the euro, these fourteen African countries are obliged to pay the French treasury half their monetary reserves.

In Côte d'Ivoire, French companies control the greater part of the commercialisation of cocoa, of which the country is the world's main producer; the small local producers are left with less than 5 per cent of the value of the end product, thereby forcing many to live in dire poverty.

EU aid accounts for more than half its global aid.

€21 billion in development aid was provided to Africa in 2016 by the EU and its member-states.

- EU companies in 2015 had invested €32 billion in Africa.
- €3.35 billion was allocated to the European Fund for Sustainable Development on the African continent.
- Seven EU civilian and military missions are operating in sub-Saharan Africa.

The western media (including the Irish media), and some aid organisations, ignore the real effect of neo-colonialism on the people of Africa. African countries are presented as corrupt (many are, but who corrupts them, and who benefits?) or are economically mismanaged and exist purely on foreign hand-outs.

The real picture is that African countries in fact pay foreign countries a net annual forfeit of about $58 billion.

The social consequences are devastating.

In sub-Saharan Africa, where the population is greater than 1 billion people, of whom 60 per cent are children and young people up to the age of twenty-four, about two-thirds of the people live in poverty; of these, about 40 per cent—approximately 400 million people—live in conditions of extreme poverty

This is the real existing EU policy in relation to Africa—not the slick PR peddled by Brussels and swallowed by liberals and much of the left.

The flow of people from the south is the direct result of two interconnected factors: wars and economic neo-colonialism. The numerous wars now raging are the result of imperialism's seeking of hegemony in resources, territory, and people.

Where they have secured a politically compliant national ruling elite in Africa they have used trade to batter down local barriers, taking control and dominating local economies and, most importantly, natural resources.

The local elite cream off some of the largesse and stick it in Swiss bank accounts, thereby making it available for further speculation by global finance houses, or they engage in property speculation in London, Paris, and elsewhere.

The millions of people displaced as a direct result of the policies and practices of imperialism in Africa, Asia and the Middle East are overwhelmingly concentrated within their own countries or neighbouring ones. The minority who travel to the West in search of a safer and better life for themselves and their children are treated with contempt and further cruelty. The message is: "You are not wanted here." The EU engages in harsh exclusionary practices that its own liberal elite would denounce as racist, populist and nativist if they were carried out by the Trump regime.

Imagine if the imperialist government in Washington paid billions of dollars to Mexico to stop the flow of migrants; proposed setting up detention centres for migrants in Central American countries, south of their borders; pushed back boats attempting to land in the Gulf of Mexico; and verbally and legally attacked NGOs assisting migrants. (Leo Varadkar joined EU leaders and governments in this at the end of June.) Hypocrisy and double standards have never given the European powers any pause for thought.

The seeming contradiction between the need of ageing EU countries for immigrant labour and their anti-immigrant rhetoric and practices can be explained by the combination of policies the imperialist EU countries are pursuing: economic exploitation of Africa and other countries through the imposition of unfair trade and investment terms; wars in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia for influence, hegemony, and control; the scapegoating of immigrants to cover their domestic economic and "austerity" policies; the downward pressure on wages that immigrant labour exerts; and a lingering post-colonial disdain for the "inferior" peoples and races of the global South, which leads to a welcome

# OPINION

# Border poll

**Graham Harrington**

With demographic change, Brexit, and a deadlocked Northern Ireland Assembly, the call for a border poll has been raised more and more often.

Under the terms of the Belfast Agreement, a border poll is the only way partition can be ended. It can be allowed to happen only if the British secretary of state allows it to, if the British government believes it is likely to result in a vote to end the division of Ireland. Should it pass, there would then have to be a referendum in the South to allow it go through.

The struggle for an end to partition has always been a democratic one. Ireland was partitioned not because it suited the needs of the Irish people but because it suited the British state and ruling class. The British state has always relied on exploiting artificial divisions among the Irish people, divisions that they nurtured and have fostered ever since.

In the North, the Orange state discriminated against Catholics and relied on sectarianism to split the labour movement, keeping the industrial north-east safe for British imperialism and preventing all-Ireland development.

In the South, the weak capitalist class that took power in the counter-revolution that established the Irish Free State became dependent on the stronger finance capital of Britain and, later, the European Union. To put the anti-democratic nature of partition into perspective, the last time the Irish people voted as one in an election was in 1918, a century ago.

The result has been two anti-democratic entities that have

only for the "right" kind of immigrant. Any contradiction will almost certainly be resolved in the long run by economic necessity.

Imperialism, monopoly capitalism, exports capital in search of investment opportunity and profit wherever it can find it. This is the hard economic driving factor behind all the policy and practices of the imperial powers. Until we confront and defeat imperialism at home it will be the working class of Europe, America and elsewhere, and the ordinary people of the world, who will suffer the consequences of the appropriation and accumulation of wealth by monopoly capital.

Western governments and global monopolies are in a win-win situation, while the people of Africa are trapped in poverty. Where else is there for many of them to go, other than travel north to Europe, because they know that is where the stolen wealth of their country has been shipped to?

The boats making the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea carrying desperate people are going in the wrong direction, and filled with the wrong people. It's the rich and powerful who need to be put on the boats and made to scrape a living working long hours on low wages.

Until workers realise this, nothing will change. ★

# Against all odds

## AID TO SYRIA

When global authorities, including the United Nations, insisted that it was impossible, because of dangerous conditions and sanctions, to provide aid to the people of war-torn Syria, a group of courageous people from Switzerland achieved the "impossible." The following is an extract from a report written by Eva Heizmann and Markus Heizmann on their three journeys to bring vitally needed goods to people in devastated villages and towns in Syria.

**FOR DECADES we have been dealing theoretically and practically with the subject of colonialism, imperialism, and the struggle against these phenomena. Therefore it is not surprising that we never assumed that Syria was, or ever has been, in a civil war. Nevertheless, and against all facts, they still talk in the mainstream media of a "civil war" in Syria. So that's not true. Syria, the Syrian people, suffer under attacks coming from abroad.**

**Thanks to our comrades in Vienna, we got in touch with a priest of the Melkite Church in Syria. Even though this priest lives in Austria, as a Syrian he has a strong connection with Syria. He organised transport for charity goods to people in need in Syria.**

**Those were the days when the war against the Syrian Arabic Republic was at its peak. We are talking about the years 2013–15.**

**As a result of our meetings with this Melkite priest we asked the local priest in our home town in Switzerland if he could send some money to those who do that kind of work. It turned out that the Catholic community of our village decided to send, on their own initiative, a shipping container filled with charity goods, such as clothes—winter clothes in particular—shoes, tools, and so on. We had a list of items that were needed. On another list were the prohibited items, such as medical drugs, liquids, food, and other vital goods.**

**The group that organised the project received a lot of solidarity, far beyond the village. In the end we have sent not just one container but six of them to Syria.**

**Nuns and monks from the monastery of Mar Yakoub, in the hills between Damascus and Homs, took responsibility for the distribution of these goods. This is how we got in touch with the Melkite community there, with Abbot Father Daniel and Mother Superior Agnes. Some of you may have heard of them.★**

***Eva and Markus will be at Connolly House (43 East Essex Street), Dublin, on Saturday 21 July, at 2:30 p.m., when they will present a full account, together with a documentary film, of their amazing journeys to Syria in 2016, 2017, and 2018.***

been a cold house for workers, for women, for the poor and most of our people, Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter alike. The working class in the Six Counties is reliant on the benevolence of the British Parliament for any political change, whether it be on abortion reform or economic issues. This is despite not one Tory or Labour MP being elected in any part of Ireland. Voters in the North can change the party, but the policy remains the same, Assembly or no Assembly.

Workers in Britain suffer too, with a Conservative government kept in power by the DUP, a party they did not vote for. As Karl Marx said, "the nation that oppresses another nation forges its own chains."

Therefore a united independent Ireland is not only a victory for Irish workers but an internationalist victory. This is why it would be a defeat if the struggle against partition and against British imperialism were to be diverted away from independence and into the arms of the EU, swapping one oppressive flag for another.

A united Ireland will not be a readymade socialist republic. A call for a Yes vote in a border poll will have to be accompanied by a struggle for an entirely new republic, not simply a 32-county version of the Southern state as it stands but something entirely new. And in this struggle, labour must not wait.

You cannot build socialism while in the vice-grip of imperialist domination. An independent Ireland can only be established through a united Ireland. In the struggle for this, there must be a debate among our class on what sort of Ireland we want to see.

This does not mean taking an ultra-left position that a border poll would only divide our class further. Our class is already divided, both by partition and by sectarianism in the North, with the very understanding of the state very different according to where you grew up.

It is not probable that a border poll will be held soon, and even if it did a united Ireland is still a long way off. How quickly it can come will be dependent on the ability of socialist republicans and the serious left to create the political conditions that can bring about change. A good start will be the actual raising of the debate, as it seems that many on the left are content to ignore the issue, hoping it will go away.

If it is believed that a border poll cannot produce the answer, then this would mean that the Belfast Agreement has become useless; but unless there is a concrete alternative we can only play the hand we have been dealt. It's not likely that those from a Protestant working-class background will be inspired by simply joining the Southern state, with everything else remaining the same, minus, perhaps the National Health Service. It's the task of the serious left to struggle for something better to offer.

A 32-county independent and sovereign republic with all-Ireland economic planning, a public housing system, a public health system, the provision of free, safe and legal abortion, the right of refugees and all citizens to work, separation of church and state, with decision-making power being vested in the people, not in unelected bureaucrats in Brussels, Washington, or London—in short, a workers' republic—has to be the objective. ★

# Marxism in the 21st century

Two hundred years after the birth of Marx, looking back from our 21st-century vantage point into the middle of the nineteenth century, **Jenny Farrell** asks, How useful is Marxism as a tool for understanding society today?

**Marxism possesses a core of theoretical knowledge**, which includes Marx's critique of political economy, the labour theory of value, base and superstructure, the theory of ideology, the insight that all history since the end of primitive society has been a history of class societies and class struggle, the theory of imperialism as developed by Lenin and Luxemburg, Bukharin's theory of fascism as unrestrained capitalism, knowledge in the area of culture and the arts, etc. New developments require further expansion, a deepening of existing insight, or developing new fields.

Marxism is a world view where **political movement and theory** meet. Its purpose is to interpret the world *and* to change it. Marxism as a world view rests on science, philosophy, and art.

The inclusion of art as a form of understanding of the world is an extension to the traditional Marxist view, realising, for example, that Shakespeare presented on stage a profound awareness of the essential forces of capitalist society at his time, including its potential for barbarism. Brecht applied Marxist insight in his poetry and plays, adding the twentieth-century experience. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o presents the African experience from a Marxist viewpoint.

All three writers perceive the forces at play in their societies, envisage a more humane world, and show how society must be changed to achieve this.

## DIALECTICS IS CENTRAL TO MARXISM

Dialectics means that all aspects of life, of society, constantly develop and are therefore not static or unchangeable. Dialectical development means that movement is not simple and linear: it can go backwards as well as forward, with conflicting, at times opposing, forces at play. Dialectics enables us to grasp a changing reality. A look at the evolution of humankind, and of society over the millennia,

> "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

illustrates this. And, of course, evolution has not stopped.

Human understanding itself is always tied to a given moment in history. Bourgeois society took centuries to succeed feudalism; and a series of revolutions, beginning in the fourteenth century, was finally completed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The concept of **utopia,** as described by Thomas Metscher, is an expansion of traditional Marxism as a form of thinking about what is *historically possible, a plan for a desirable society* at a specific time. Utopian thinking is necessary for people to gain a viewpoint for focused action: to understand how society must change to become more humane, and how to create a world that is appropriate to us as humans.

The idea that the unchangeable human condition is to be aggressive, greedy and destructive is unhistorical, generalising one aspect of human behaviour within class society to be true for all humans at all times, and thereby preventing the understanding of *necessary and possible change.*

**Political ethics** is equally central to Metscher's concept of *integrative Marxism*. It criticises prevailing social norms and establishes more humane ones. Jointly with the concept of utopia, it refers to a possible and humane world where kindness, peace and solidarity prevail—a world free from fear and misery.

**Communism** means solidarity and a peaceful world; the transformation of the bourgeois constitutional state into a universal constitutional society; the abolition of economic, social and cultural oppression; the abolition of poverty; the equitable distribution of social wealth; and the preservation of nature as the habitat of humankind. In this sense communism is a concrete utopia, and *working to create conditions that are commensurate with humanity is the meaning of life.*

## RELIGION AND MARXISM

As a scientific theory, Marxism cannot claim absolute knowledge. If it did it would deny historical change and the fact that understanding itself is historical. Marxism would turn into a closed theory, a quasi-religion. Historical limits to knowledge leave room for individual beliefs. Religious people can be Marxists—indeed their faith may motivate political action.

Marxism is a tool for understanding and acting in the world to achieve an existence based on human equality, true economic and political democracy. All forces committed to this goal should join together. Given the enemy's superiority, imperialist capital and its political agencies, *the political alliance of all anti-imperialist forces is a prerequisite for resistance.* Religions must be judged according to their role in the global anti-imperialist struggle. On the side of the anti-imperialist coalition they are welcome partners, on the side of imperialism they are our opponents. The question is how religion contributes to liberation.

## MARXISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE

Law in class society is primarily class law. However, law is an achievement of civilisation: as human rights, international law, civil rights, the rule of law in constitutional states. Fundamental rights are eroded at all levels today, despite assertions of freedom and democracy.

For example, laws are imposed to undermine national independence by the Brussels bureaucracy in the interests of monopoly capital towards a federal EU superstate. The euro is a weapon for usurping economic independence and sovereignty.

The struggle for emancipation today has become a struggle to defend and build upon constitutional democracy.

## THE STRUGGLE TO IMPLEMENT MARXIST IDEALS

Social achievements since the Second World War are being rolled back by neo-liberal attacks on social welfare, health services, education, and pay and working conditions. The erosion of social achievements gained especially in the former socialist countries, and also by labour governments throughout Europe, will gain momentum if its causes persist.

The reasons lie in the dominant production, property and power relations. In this "epoch of wars and revolutions," monopoly capital merges with financial capital, seeking a system of global domination. Imperialism is capable of an unimaginable acceleration of technological advance: high-tech production at present, the projected invention of trans-human intelligences designed to replace humans.

Correspondingly, it represents in its internal cultural constitution the re-barbarisation of human civilisation in an equally unimaginable measure counterposed to that technological progress.

The struggle for a humane society is a long-term one and is based on democratic revolution: a fundamental transformation of the systems of production and power within a constitutional democracy. The basis for this is the fight against neo-liberalism, the socialisation of monopoly property—financial capital, social control of basic economic relations, defence of the sovereign nation-state through the development of the constitutional state beyond its class limitations, leading to the development of an economically and politically democratic socialist constitutional society. Developments in Nyerere's Tanzania, in Cuba and Venezuela are examples. This is a huge undertaking. *Yet, it is the existing possibility for political action here and today.*

The struggle on legal and constitutional matters (from public services and reproductive rights to national sovereignty) is a precondition for anti-capitalist revolution. Indeed the revolution has begun with this struggle.

Capital will not leave the stage of world history without a fight. Born "dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt," it will not leave the world differently. In the meantime the maximising of profits at *any* cost, with perpetual wars, the erosion of democracy, and environmental destruction, could take humankind into the abyss.

Today, after two world wars and European fascism, we are moving towards a new peak. The fight for peace is now about nothing less than the survival of humankind. Peace is the central issue of our time. We have a world to gain. ★

*This article is based on the ideas of the Marxist philosopher Thomas Metscher, as expounded in his interview "Courage is needed in times of defeat."*

**at www.communistpartyofireland.ie/c-metscher.html.*

# Fórsa's first strike

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS

Dan Taraghan

**FÓRSA, THE biggest public-sector union, is in existence since January 2018, but already workers' rights are under attack.**

**The CEO of Roscommon County Council launched the attack on the issue of flex time. This is not a simple local issue but a challenge to trade unions and workers' rights in the most unionised work force in the country.**

The misinformation campaign has already begun among right-wing commentators, who seek to misrepresent the situation. We have Brenda Power in the *Sunday Times* (24 June), in an article headed "Flexitime is just bending the rules," bending the facts. She states that trade unions claim that "workers should be allowed to work flex hours whenever they wish to build up extra time off—adding almost a fortnight to their annual leave. But management in Roscommon is ending a 20 year practice whereby according to county manager Eugene Cummins, staff were working hours 'without permission or purpose' in order to bank some free time. This head on crash has been a long time coming."

According to this version, the workers are

# Who will fight fascism?

▲ Soviet sniper Lyudmila Pavlichenko was credited with killing 309 fascist invaders

running Roscommon County Council, and only the brave manager is standing up to them. This will be reassuring for the coffee-table Dublin 4 bourgeoisie who populate RTE chat shows and the bourgeois media.

She is totally incorrect. But before dealing with the specifics it is worth looking at the origins of flexi time. It goes back to the 1960s and the Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm aerospace company in Munich. The company employed an office and R&D staff of about three thousand. These workers had fixed starting and finishing times: the classic 9 to 5. This created bottlenecks, with everyone trying to start at the same time. Some people were late starting, others left early to avoid bottlenecks on exit.

This mess affected productivity and morale, and meant lost time for everyone. The management decided to deal with the problem by doing some research. This led to a situation whereby the starting time was staggered, so that instead of everyone starting at 9 a.m. they could start at any time between 8 and 10. Likewise, finishing time was changed from, say, 5 p.m. to any time between 4 and 6 p.m. There was also a core time of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., which everyone worked, and flexible lunch breaks between 12 (noon) and 2 p.m. Workers could take a lunch break of a minimum of 30 minutes up to a maximum of 2 hours.

You still worked the due hours per day, but now you could work a shorter or longer day some days, so long as you worked the required hours in a month.

As an incentive, workers were able to build up a bank of hours, which they could carry forward and take as flexi leave in the next flex period.

These are all the essential ingredients that are used everywhere that has flexi schemes. They were developed by the private sector to address particular problems of time management. They have shown themselves to be useful to both private and public-sector employers and employees up until now.

In an economy approaching full employment but with a widespread use of zero-hour contracts, it is inevitable that the bourgeoisie will attack anything favourable to workers. This attack is deliberately designed to undermine unions in a highly unionised sector.

Brenda Power is wrong in her claims. First off, flexi can be built up and carried forward. This does not happen willy-nilly. In order to build up hours you have to work the required 7½-hour day first, and that is exclusive of lunch break. Only then can you start to accumulate time, and that is within the constraint of when the flexi hours end. If the spread is 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. and you start at 8 and take an hour for lunch, it will be 4:30 before you can start accumulating hours. There is also a cap, usually of 11½ hours, on what you could accumulate in any one period.

Nor can you take flexi leave when you feel like it: it has to be approved by a line manager. In areas such as motor tax there would be rotas, so that there is always cover at lunch time, and offices can be kept open to give service to the public.

The whole operation of flexi time, core hours etc. is enshrined in agreements between managements and unions and more recently in agreements such as Haddington Road and the recent Stability Agreement with the Government. Up to now the county manager of Co. Roscommon has lost every case before the Labour Court, and he is obviously in breach of these rulings and national agreements such as Haddington Road and the Public Stability Agreement.

The silence of Government ministers is deafening. Eugene Cummins should be dismissed, but he is obviously serving his masters too well.

By the time this article appears in July, workers in Co. Roscommon will be on their third strike day. Mandate has also started industrial action against Lloyd's Pharmacy, seeking, among other things, the end of zero-hour contracts. ★

## FASCISM

**Dáithí O hAirtri**

**WITH THE Trump government in the United States turning an already opaque and Kafkaesque machinery of violence against the marginalised into a more overt American fascism, and the rise of the far right throughout Europe, mechanisms of resistance have to be considered.**

It is tempting to give in to the myth of the Second World War as a noble war against fascism, but the reality is that the countries on the Allied side fought to preserve a very specific set of interests. Britain's national myth-making sees modern right-wingers (and some left-wingers) imagine a world where Britain stood alone against Nazi Germany; but the reality is that the USSR's Great Patriotic War saw much higher casualties, and the remembrance of Britain as unique serves a very specific set of interests.

Such myth-making also ignores the role of empire in the Second World War. The fixation on the European battles ignores Britain's role in North Africa in particular—a battle that was primarily required by the needs of English imperialists to maintain their dominance.

Such points are not made to diminish or minimise the losses of British forces in defeating Hitler—which, it goes without saying, was a good thing—but instead to point out that the British forces (and the American and indeed Soviet forces) were not solely motivated by a nebulous idea of "good" but were reacting within a situation where a complex interrelation of interests saw them combat fascism.

This point is important because it underlines one thing: that it cannot be relied on to happen again.

Indeed the myth-making of the Second World War is now employed in a reactionary form. Witness Tommy Robinson's goons making Nazi salutes in London as they declare their aim to "take their country back." This kind of bungled and incoherent world view is just a more vulgar form of the sort of state racism that is embodied by Theresa May's Conservative Party, whose "hostile environment" policy only came under scrutiny when it came up against another exercise in national myth-making, the horrific treatment of the Windrush immigrants (the name given to a large group who arrived in England from Jamaica in 1948 on the troopship *Empire Windrush*).

But such a fixation misses the terrible treatment of thousands of other human beings who were not fortunate enough to be part of a generation that caught the national imagination. In France, Emmanuel Macron recently used a remembrance service for the French Resistance to chastise a student for singing "The International" and for not addressing him by his formal title—the vulgar mask of neo-liberalism slipping for a moment to show the authoritarianism hidden underneath.

So what is the answer to the rising tide of the far right? Well, in order for the social conditions to exist where opposing fascism is reflexive we need to build socialist organisation. Fascism is just the degenerate form of capitalism, the fear of a populace that can envisage no alternative asking for a paternal hand to "control the market" and stifle the cycle of boom and bust, which it blames on the sedition of some immigrant or deviant Other.

But it's obvious that markets cannot do anything but boom and bust; and therefore fascism is merely the great sleight of hand of capitalism, offering the nation control of its destiny but instead only handing the bourgeoisie total social domination. Therefore it is only socialism that can truly fight fascism, as socialism is in every way antithetical to it.

We see already with Fine Gael's alliance in the EU Parliament with the right-wing Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz) that neo-liberalism has no issue with doing deals with fascists. "Fortress Europe" is the European liberals' and right's attempt to pander to base xenophobia to protect their real prize: the European Union itself.

It is for this reason that socialists should have two aims: firstly, to organise in the grass roots to defend people in our communities from fascist violence and to oppose their marches and events, but equally importantly socialism needs state power if it is to resist the march of fascism. That should be the real lesson of the Second World War. ★

# Emily Brontë, Heathcliff, and the nature of class society

Jenny Farrell

## 30 July 2018 is the 200th anniversary of Emily Brontë's birth. Her singular novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), challenges class society in an amazing way.

In the mid-1840s England was in the throes of the Industrial Revolution, as described by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845). Growing up, the Brontë siblings saw the devastation of hand-workers, especially the handloom weavers in their region, and large-scale impoverishment. Their home lay near the Yorkshire mill towns, badly hit by the Hungry Forties. Their adult lives coincided with struggles against the Corn Laws, factory reform, strikes and the height of Chartism, famine in Ireland. All this affected the Brontës' writings, in one way or another.

*Wuthering Heights* shocked the Victorian reader, as it still does today. It tells the story of Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, a destitute, probably Irish child brought home by Mr Earnshaw from Liverpool. A deep bond develops between the children. The tomboy Catherine is expressly not the Victorian idea of a female. Earnshaw protects Heathcliff and insists that he be treated as a family equal. Catherine's elder brother, Hindley, detests Heathcliff and torments him. After Earnshaw dies, this increases.

Catherine and Heathcliff, however, remain inseparable. In a crucial episode they roam towards Thrushcross Grange, home of the Linton family, the largest capitalist landowners nearby. The Victorian mansion is expensively furnished. When the Lintons see the two onlookers outside they let the bulldog loose on them.

Heathcliff is dismissed, whereas Catherine, deemed respectable, is treated for her wounds. She returns home a young lady. Not surprisingly for the reader, Edgar Linton asks Catherine to marry him. Her acceptance signifies Catherine's betrayal of Heathcliff, of their absolute loyalty, their classless relationship. It triggers the tragedy.

Heathcliff, devastated, leaves Wuthering Heights, not to return for three years, after which he has acquired money and an understanding of law. He plans to beat class society at its own game. He gambles with Hindley, taking his property. He marries Isabella Linton in order to gain Linton property. He treats Isabella brutally, as just what she is in English law: his property. Isabella's brother Edgar disowns her, literally. The institution of the Victorian family as a harbour of humanity is shattered at every level.

Heathcliff becomes master of Wuthering Heights and, many years after Catherine's death, forces a marriage between his weakling son, Linton, and Catherine's daughter, Cathy, again to acquire Linton property. With this action Heathcliff parodies, in a grotesque way, Catherine's class marriage to Edgar. Everything is turned into its monstrous extreme.

Heathcliff works, lives and eats together with his servants, without great class distinction. There are no frills, no pretences of kindness. Heathcliff's tenants are treated roughly. Women coming to the house, such as Isabella and later Cathy Linton, are stripped of their property, by marriage, and of their class comforts. They work for their living.

Hareton, Hindley's son, is not educated and cannot read or write. Why educate a farm worker? Heathcliff has pared down all his dealings to the bare face of class law. There is no humanity. It is only in this stark, unmasked form that readers realise that this is the true nature of their own society. It is hyperbole, yes, but for that reason all the more effective in revealing the essence.

Heathcliff comes to mind in today's world as the ruling class increasingly reveals its profound barbarity. There is less and less pretence of culture and humanity. Education and health are businesses, the state extracts itself progressively from a duty of care. Politicians set ever-decreasing value on a shallow veneer of humanity. We are seeing the beast for what it is, perhaps most grotesquely in Donald Trump but certainly not only in him.

The difference is that Heathcliff cannot reach personal fulfilment by living this way. He wreaks revenge on the class system, but the price is his own humanity, indeed his life. Class society is the root cause of Heathcliff's inhumanity.

Emily Brontë's unreliable narrators, Lockwood and Nelly Dean, also resonate today. They dupe the reader through their Victorian class lens. Readers cannot believe everything they say, must read between the lines, presume they are dealing with half-truths, omissions, and fake news.

Heathcliff responds humanely only when he is with Catherine, and in his torment after she dies. The reader's lasting impression is the tragedy of Catherine and Heathcliff, whose absolute freedom from all dictates of hierarchy and class is the essence of their relationship. It reaches into a time when unequal gender difference is replaced by an equality of personhood.

In her implied utopian vision Emily Brontë anticipates a humane society, unrestrained by the class laws Heathcliff reveals to be brutally inhumane. If the meaning of life is to create conditions that are commensurate with humanity, then Emily Brontë's remarkable novel highlights this. Her dream is yet to be achieved. ★

IMAGE LEFT: Apparently the only undisputed picture of Emily Brontë (from a painting by her brother, Branwell Brontë)

A new edition of *The Life and Times of James Connolly* by C Desmond Greaves will be launched on 5 June.

The book is the standard by which other accounts of the Irish revolutionary's days are measured.

This new edition, edited by Greaves' literary executor, Anthony Coughlan, is published in a partnership of the Connolly Association, Connolly Books and Manifesto Press.

A new global readership committed afresh to the cause of Irish national independence will find it a vital tool in understanding the relationship between working class political power and the role of the working class in the struggle for national independence.

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# EVENTS

**Connolly Conversations**
Saturday 7 July, 12:00 (noon)
*The state: Its role today?*
Saturday 14 July, 12:00 (noon)
*Imperialism—more than just tanks*
Saturday 21 July, 12:00 (noon)
*The politics and strategy of the CPI*
James Connolly House (43 East Essex Street), Dublin

Friday 3 August, 6:30 p.m.
**Madge Davison Memorial Lecture**
**The killing of Irish neutrality: The evidence** Speaker: Niall Farrell (PRO, Galway Alliance Against War)
St Mary's College (Falls Road), Belfast

Saturday 21 July
**Demonstrate against the Bray War Show** Assemble at Bray DART Station, 2 p.m.

Sunday 19 August
**United Wolfe Tone Commemoration**
Bodenstown (Co. Kildare)
Oration by Jimmy Doran
Bus leaving from Custom House Quay, Dublin, 12:00 (noon)
Fare €10 :: Booking on line at https://www.connollybooks.org/Bodenstown_Bus_Ticket/p4147702_18879017.aspx
Assemble at Sallins 3 p.m.

*Organised by the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum* forumodonnell@gmail.com

25–26 August 2018
**Féile na bhFlaitheartach, 2018**
Árainn, Co. Galway

Saturday 25 August, 12:30 p.m.
**Opening of Féile by Kathleen McMahon**
Address by Declan Kiberd (professor of Irish studies and professor of English and Irish language and literature at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana): The social background to the writing of Liam O'Flaherty's short stories, including reference to the short stories of Tom O'Flaherty.
Kilmurvey House

4 p.m. Fionnghuala Ní Choncheanainn reads a short story by Tom O'Flaherty.
Garden of Remembrance, Gort na gCapall

4:30 p.m. Walk from the O'Flaherty homestead to Scoil Fhearann an Choirce, the school the brothers attended, by the back roads used by them

8:30 p.m. Aisteoirí Chois Fharraige perform An American Wake, based on "Going Into Exile" by Liam O'Flaherty, with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Inis Mhóir and Aisteoirí Chois Fharraige, including local musicians and singers
Halla, Cill Rónáin

Sunday, 26 August, 12:30 p.m.
A celebration of Máirtín Ó Direáin (with reference to Liam O'Flaherty) on the 30th anniversary of Ó Direáin's death. Led by Síobhra Aiken, lecturer in Irish, NUIG, and hosted by Seosamh Ó Cuaig, journalist and film maker.
Tí Joe Mac, Cill Rónáin,

## Ireland's Basque refugees

**REFUGEES**

A very interesting talk on Ireland's Basque refugees during the Spanish Civil War was given by the political activist Stewart Reddin at the Ubh café in Droichead Nua (Newbridge), Co. Kildare, on Saturday 16 June, as part of June Fest.

The café was packed for the talk, with part of the audience having to stand on the stairs.

Stewart told the extraordinary story of Ireland's Basque refugees and of one man in particular, Iker Gallastegi. He survived two dictatorships, lived in Mexico as a child refugee just months after being born, and returned home at the age of five only to be forced to flee again as a ten-year-old following the fascist bombing of Gernika.

He lived in Ireland as a refugee from 1937 up to the 1950s, where he attended school in the Ráth Cairn district of Co. Meath and became an Irish speaker. He studied in UCD before returning home to fight in the Basque struggle against Franco's fascist regime.

Iker died peacefully at his home in Algorta on 12 February 2018 at the age of ninety-one. ★


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