Socialist Voice

SV

Communist Party of Ireland
Páirtí Cumannach na hÉireann
Partisan Patriotic Internationalist
Number 163 September 2018 €1.50
www.communistpartyofireland.ie

IN THIS ISSUE

Workers in struggle Page 2
Union strategy and the law Page 4
Against social partnership Page 6
EU myths and Greek reality Page 8
Bodenstown commemoration Page 10
Sovereignty and nation Page 10
Pensions/Mental health Page 12
CINEMA Policing/Fascism Page 14
Victor Jara sings on Page 16

"People reared in workhouses . . . are no great acquisition to the community and they have no ideas whatsoever of civic responsibilities. As a rule their highest aim is to live at the expense of the ratepayers. Consequently, it would be a decided gain if they all took it into their heads to emigrate." **W. T. Cosgrave** (founder-member of Fine Gael, future taoiseach), May 1921.

A summer of change

This summer has indeed been very different from summers of the past—and it wasn't just the long period of hot weather. **Jimmy Doran** on the rising tide of anger at homelessness and austerity.

There has been a sustained period of civil disobedience by ordinary citizens, who have been marginalised by high rents and low pay as a result of the neo-liberal policies of the Fine Gael government, propped up by Fianna Fáil and a number of independent TDs.

It exploded onto social media in the last week of July when the armed Special Response Unit of the Garda Síochána was used to evict a number of Connolly Youth Movement activists from two houses that they had been squatting in in Cork.

The CYM have been squatting in another premises for well over a year, and continue to do so. This has brought their activity into the public glare, thanks to the over-the-top methods used by the state in the eviction of these young people.

They have been squatting in these buildings to publicise the housing crisis and to raise the demand for universally accessible public housing to be made available to all citizens as a right, with rents linked to income.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

ISSN 0791-5217

9 770791 521008 09

Socialist Voice
43 East Essex Street
Dublin D02 XH96
(01) 6708707

WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Following this, a coalition of housing activist groups occupied a number of houses in Summer Hill Parade in Dublin, also to highlight the housing crisis and to demand the building of public housing. These houses are owned by a slum landlord, who had them split into multiple flats, with up to eight people sharing one room and with bunk beds to sleep on.

The houses had been closed down several months ago because these conditions breached fire regulations. The landlord eventually got the tenants evicted from the premises—but not before they occupied the Department of Housing in the Custom House, demanding to meet the minister for housing, Eoghan Murphy.

Eventually they were given a date for meeting the minister the following week, as he was away enjoying his holidays. They then ended the occupation of the Custom House and returned to Summer Hill.

An injunction against the Summer Hill occupation was obtained by the property-owner, so they left the premises in Summer Hill Parade and immediately occupied another vacant house, in North Frederick Street.

At the time of writing they are under threat of eviction here also. They say that if they are evicted from here they will just take over another vacant house, and continue to do this until the state gives in to their demands.

Such is the anger felt by ordinary working people as a result of the housing emergency.

There was a time when one person working was able to provide a modest life for a family. This ended about thirty years ago, since when it has been essential to have two wages coming in to provide food and shelter for an average family.

Citizens are beginning to realise that this is no longer possible. Owning a home is a thing of the past, even with two wages.

According to the 2016 census, private rental accommodation is now the main type of tenure in our cities and towns, for the first time in the history of the country. And overcrowding has increased, also for the first time in more than fifty years, or since the tenements were cleared.

Thus was the housing crisis being brought to centre stage by a citizens' protest.

Communities Against Low Pay

The next significant event was the formation of a group called Communities Against Low Pay. This is a grass-roots community organisation who say they are fed up with the poverty wages being offered by hugely profitable companies, and they are planning a national campaign to publicise it.

An emboldened people are now linking low pay and high rents as the root of the problem, as the gap between rich and poor explodes.

The first actions CALP have carried out were a number of vigils in support of the striking workers in Lloyd's Pharmacy. They were able to hold vigils where striking workers are forbidden to picket, and successfully turned the tables on the restrictions imposed by the Industrial Relations Act (1990). A number of Lloyd's branches were empty of customers as citizens backed the workers and not the employers, who pay poverty wages and won't recognise their union.

These demonstrations have been held at numerous Lloyd's branches and have been receiving overwhelming support from ordinary citizens, who are now in large numbers refusing to do business with Lloyd's Pharmacy. The company has refused to implement the recommendations of the Workplace Relations Commission, and continues to refuse to recognise their employees' trade union, Mandate, as the representative body for their workers.

Defending the public bus service

The next thing to hit the headlines was the National Transport Authority's top-down plan called "Bus Connects," which is a total change in the way the public bus service would be operated in Dublin. Not only is this a reduction in service to the citizens but many people believe it is just an Expressway to privatisation.

Public meetings have been held by many local communities around the city, filled to capacity, such is the anger of citizens, who are very much against the proposed changes to their public transport service.

No more!

These events are unprecedented and reflect the growing anger of the people against Government policy. The Government is seen to be totally out of touch with the hardship being suffered by the community. But people are getting up off their knees. They realise that they have power and that they can effect change when they stick together and fight back.

The summer of 2018 looks like a starting-point from where the ordinary people of Ireland finally rejected the establishment narrative and at long last gained the confidence to stand up and say, No more!★

Lloyd's Pharmacy: Fighting for union recognition

Mandate has called on Lloyd's Pharmacy to respect its employees' right to trade union representation before the management does even more damage to the business.

The union responded to a press statement issued by the company to correct serious flaws in its presentation of what is happening and to expose the company's in-house union and its bogus ballot.

Mandate represents 270 workers in Lloyd's Pharmacy (35 per cent of the eligible membership), all of whom opted to be represented by an independent trade union.

The union lodged a pay and benefits claim with Lloyd's in February 2017. At first the company agreed to attend a hearing at the Workplace Relations Commission, and at its request the union agreed to a delay in proceedings. But the company then immediately set about establishing an internal company-controlled body, called the "Colleague Representative Committee," to avoid dealing with an independent trade union.

The company admitted to the Labour Court that it financed this body to the tune of €10,000 last year.

The two ballots organised by the management were tainted, as the company allowed members of the senior management, and up to seventy members of the head office staff, who would not be affected by the proposals, to ballot on them, while denying the opportunity to a number of employees who would be affected by the proposals.

No member of the staff opted to join the bogus union: the senior management imposed this body on the workers. It has never had democratic elections: the committee was selected by the senior management.

To participate in the two ballots, employees had to provide their name and their staff identification number, meaning that the vote was not anonymous.

The first ballot was passed with 51 per cent in favour (six votes in the difference); the second ballot was passed by 52 per cent in favour (33 votes in the difference). Employees have told Mandate that they felt intimidated not only into voting but into voting in a particular way.

Lloyd's are incorrect in stating that the deal "has been endorsed by the majority of staff in two separate ballots": only 37 per cent of those eligible voted in favour of the proposals, despite pressure from the company.

Mandate members were balloted on the proposals from the company and rejected them by 96 per cent.

The proposals by Lloyd's Pharmacy do not provide for a system of secure contracts, as claimed by the management. There are workers in Lloyd's who are earning less than the €10.60 per hour claimed by the management (€10 per hour is the starting rate).

In April 2018 the Labour Court issued a recommendation calling on the company to negotiate with Mandate. The minister for business, Heather Humphreys, has called on the company to accept this recommendation. Seanad Éireann has unanimously passed a motion calling on the company to negotiate with the workers through their trade union.

The general secretary of Mandate, John Douglas, called on the company to "stop spinning and make some real efforts towards achieving a satisfactory resolution to this dispute.

"None of the benefits that have been won to date would have occurred without our members joining Mandate and taking action over the last two months. By pretending that the CRC [Colleague Representative Committee] has achieved these improvements to conditions of employment, this company, which is owned by McKesson Corporation—the largest pharmaceutical company in the world—is adopting the most obvious and transparent US-style union-busting tactics."

The strike by Mandate on behalf of its 270 members in Lloyd's Pharmacy is in support of—

- a pay increase, with adequate incremental pay scales
- a sufficient sickness pay scheme
- security of hours and the elimination of zero-hour contracts
- improvements in annual leave entitlements and public holiday premiums.

Dates for future strikes:

- August: Saturday the 25th
- September: Monday the 3rd and Tuesday the 4th
- October: Monday the 1st, Tuesday the 2nd, and Wednesday the 3rd
- November: Thursday the 1st, Friday the 2nd, Saturday the 3rd, and Monday the 5th

SIPTU members in Co. Donegal vote for strike

SIPTU members at the Rapid Action Packaging plant in Gaoth Dobhair, Co. Donegal, have voted overwhelming for strike action in a dispute over a refusal by the management to recognise their right to union representation for collective bargaining purposes. This company receives public funds through Údarás na Gaeltachta.

A ballot of members resulted in a vote of 97 per cent for strike. The management has refused to respect a Labour Court recommendation, even though the company handbook states that it will always adhere to decisions of the state's industrial relations mechanisms.

SIPTU said it remained available for discussions with the management at any time to find a resolution to the dispute. However, workers' right to engage in collective bargaining on issues of joint concern is a fundamental principle that the company must accept.

District council workers to be balloted on strike

All four unions representing workers employed by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council—GMB, NIPSA, SIPTU, and Unite—have held an unprecedented joint consultative ballot on industrial action, beginning on Friday 31 August.

In mid-August, members of all four unions passed an overwhelming vote of no confidence in the council's chief executive, Liam Hannaway. The council management has attempted to play workers against each other by misrepresenting their concerns and their criticisms of the senior management in the human resources department as criticism of those employed by the department as a whole.

The dispute concerns job-matching and restructuring connected with the establishment of the new "super-council" under the Review of Public Administration, and the heavy-handed approach of the senior management, as well as its failure to engage with the formal negotiating structures with the unions.

A protest has been confirmed for the September council meeting at Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick, on Monday 3 September.

SIPTU calls on Harris to intervene in pay dispute

SIPTU has called for the restoration of lost pay for thousands of workers providing vital health services.

Workers in "section 39 organisations" around the country will take part in a one-day national strike on Tuesday 18 September. These are voluntary organisations that provide a service similar to, or ancillary to, a service that the HSE might provide and that receive funds under section 39 of the Health Act (2004).

These workers have more than ten Labour Court recommendations in their favour, confirming that the restoration of pay should apply to them in line with their counterparts in the public service.

These public-sector workers are determined to see these recommendations honoured in full.

Anger and concern at Bombardier over outsourcing

Workers and their unions have condemned the decision of Bombardier to sell off its tubing centres at Mirabel in Québec and in Belfast to the French company Lauak Group in the latest incident of offshoring and outsourcing. In Belfast the workers and their union, Unite, were informed only on the day the decision was made public.

The union stated: "Despite talk that this sell off will raise revenue for investment in new projects, workers in Belfast see this as a further instance of management taking jobs and skills out of the Belfast site.

"This effective outsourcing of work done by fitters and welders in Belfast comes as the latest in a long line of offshoring and outsourcing of IT, finance and maintenance functions."

Nearly seventy workers will be affected by Bombardier's decision. ★

Not seeing the wood for the trees

It is time that the left looked at the systemic factors that have led to declining union power rather than seeking technocratic solutions to a political problem argues **Ernst Schreiber**

THE PROBLEMS facing organised labour in Ireland—declining density, lack of younger members, difficulty engaging contract workers, depleted funds, hostile media coverage, etc.—are well known and familiar to all those involved in the movement today.

Many people have posed rather sensible responses to these issues, such as a better use of social media to engage younger workers and shape media narratives, single-day strikes to conserve funds, etc.

While each of these initiatives should and must be part of a wider strategy for the rebuilding of the labour movement, they too fall into the same trap that the Democratic Party of the United States finds itself in. By puttering about the edges with piecemeal fixes and without looking at the bigger picture, the labour movement can only hope to delay rather than reverse its long-term decline.

It is time that those of us on the left began looking at the systemic factors that have led to the adverse epiphenomena of declining union power.

Unfortunately, we have thus far failed to do so as a movement, and instead of analysing the system of industrial relations in Ireland we have merely looked to its outward manifestations.

A recent article in *Socialist Voice*, headed "The wrong act?" is symbolic of this myopic thinking on the future of the trade union movement. By proposing right to access (not in itself a bad idea) as the focus of rebuilding the trade union movement, it falls into the persistent pattern of proposing technocratic solutions to political problems. It is a case of once again failing to see the wood for the trees.

Industrial paradigms

Any solution to the problems faced by the Irish labour movement (or indeed any other labour movement) must begin by recognising that this problem did not develop yesterday, nor is it a temporary blip: instead it is the continued working out of the existing paradigm of industrial relations, a paradigm that may be called, for lack of a better phrase, social partnership.

While "social partnership," in its strictest sense, refers only to the specific centralised bargaining agreements carried on between the state and IBEC, the ICTU, and others, it has broadly set the pattern for the conduct of industrial disputes since the late 1980s. The state is seen as a neutral arbiter in the perennial dispute between labour and capital, and any and all disputes should be mediated through the organs of the state, whether it be the Labour Court or the Workplace Relations Commission.

This, together with a whole host of labour laws, determines the existing paradigm of industrial relations in Ireland.

This paradigm has defined the very nature of industrial struggle for the past few decades. Industrial disputes were largely filtered through the state apparatus, and the political action of the trade union movement was reduced to campaigning for more Labour Party TDs. This framework also hastened the development of the "trade unions as service" model, an attitude that severely curtails trade union activism.

In fact this paradigm has been so successful in moderating discord that even after the state reneged on its side of social partnership after the Great Recession, the labour movement has remained sitting at the table, waiting for it to return.

If we are serious in our goal of reversing the secular decline in union power, it will inevitably mean breaking entirely with the current paradigm of industrial relations. We can no longer just engage in technocratic fixes within that system but must seek to circumvent it.

One major example of this circumvention in recent years has been the labour movement's involvement in the Right2Water struggle. Initiated by local community groups and supported and nurtured by the trade union movement, R2W worked outside the usual channels of social partnership, and achieved the greatest political victory of the trade union movement since the economic collapse.

Even here, however, after the initial campaign, political strategy quickly reverted to type, and energy was concentrated on the election of TDs through Right2Change, a strategy that had very few returns. A more systematic approach is needed—one that challenges the idea of a supposedly neutral state mediating the economic struggle.

Strategy

What are the outlines of such a strategy? To gain some clarity on this, it is worth examining the "right to access" proposal and its consequences.

Technical fixes

In the face of declining industrial density and the accompanying decline in union finances, "right to access" modelling on the Australian and New Zealand models seems like a promising strategy. By allowing organisers to enter work-places and gain new members one neatly solves both issues of declining membership and difficult-to-mobilise sectors. Such a move would allow the unions to halt their decline and bolster income while engaging a wider sector of the population.

Like so many vaunted panaceas, however, there are serious side-effects.

"Right to access" would not in any way challenge the existing corporatist paradigm of social partnership; nor would it challenge the existing behaviour of trade unions. By refusing to

challenge the structures of industrial relations, "right to access" instead entrenches them. It removes any necessity for unions to develop alternative means of reaching out to new members (such as social media initiatives and building organic community links) and instead allows them to continue to operate on the "trade union as service" model. By failing to build independent political power within the trade union movement, and by failing to challenge the overall paradigm within which our struggle is conducted, "right to access" merely sets us up to win more battles in a war we will lose anyway.

Furthermore, it is not clear what exactly such a strategy would look like in practice. While "right to access" is a laudable end, the means of getting there are unclear. Certainly such a policy cannot be enacted at the local level, and it is inconceivable that popular political pressure can be brought to bear as in the water campaigns. The only obvious means of proceeding would be to lobby TDs and councillors to push for legislation. Indeed the writer of the article more or less explicitly recognises this when he suggests that our hope lies in a favourable Sinn Féin government coming to power.

If the only strategy for reversing the secular and systemic decline in labour's political and economic power is to hope for an amenable Government, the trade union movement is already doomed. Such a strategy would make the unions an adjunct of Sinn Féin's political strategy, and would reduce our political action to electoral campaigning for Sinn Féin TDs once every five years. We have already seen the outcome of this strategy in relation to the Labour Party, which had some organic links with the labour movement. In contrast, if the unions believed they had any power over the Labour Party, they will have exactly none over Sinn Féin.

Not only would the technical fix of "right to access" legislation fail to resolve the political problem of union stagnation, it would also disincentivise the unions from building their own political power and instead would leave us with nothing but the vain hope that a friendly Government might some day come along while we twiddle our thumbs.

If it's not broken, don't fix it

Is there an alternative to a legislative strategy? To find inspiration on this front we can turn to the United States.

Up to the 1990s the US Congress was dominated by the Democratic Party. Decade after decade, voters would return their Democratic representatives to their seats, and approval ratings remained high.

Faced with this political problem, Newt Gingrich, a hatchet man of the US right wing, devised a simple strategy. While his Republican Party colleagues sought to campaign more effectively or to spend more money on television ads, Gingrich recognised that the American people felt the Congress was working and therefore there was no need to change it. In other words, they felt "if it's not broken, don't fix it."

The natural corollary of this proposition is that if you want someone to fix something you should first break it. And this is precisely what Newt Gingrich did.

By convincing his colleagues to use every legal and procedural trick in the book, Gingrich managed to completely gum up the workings of the House of Representatives, leaving it totally dysfunctional. Approval ratings plummeted, as voters wanted change, and for the first time in forty years the House of Representatives flipped to the Republican Party.

Gingrich recognised that under the prevailing system of political relations the Republicans could not hope to win control, no matter how well they played that particular political game. What was needed was a new system, a new game; and that required breaking the old one.

Exactly the same situation faces us here in Ireland today. We are locked in a political game that we have been slowly losing for decades. It is not enough to play this game better, or find small technical fixes to the rules. What is needed is an entirely new game. What is needed is to challenge the entire paradigm of industrial relations. That is, we need to systematically dismantle the entire architecture of industrial relations in Ireland.

Dismantling the Industrial Relations Act

As communists, we recognise that the state is not a neutral actor. The state acts as an instrument of class oppression, and any strategy must remain cognisant of this fact and directly challenge both the ideological and the legal role of the state in labour disputes.

This is not achieved merely through intra-parliamentary means but through changing facts on the ground. The law is nothing more than congealed politics; and if we wish to change the law, one crucial element is changing the underlying realities.

The Industrial Relations Act (1990)—inclusive of its various updates—did not inaugurate, or define, "social partnership" but rather is its crowning achievement. By criminalising the most effective tools in labour's arsenal while simultaneously building a mediating structure for resolving labour disputes, the Industrial Relations Act is the capstone of social partnership and the linchpin in the existing regime of labour relations.

How does one challenge this act and, by extension, the existing industrial paradigm? Demanding a straight repeal runs into many of the same problems of dependence on political parties and the state; so instead what is needed is a direct assault on the legislation itself. Instead of lobbying for repeal of the act in its entirety, the trade union movement should identify and isolate key areas of the act that can be circumvented by extra-legal means.

Much like Gingrich's strategy to dismantle the US Congress, unions need to begin operating outside the rules of the game.

To offer a concrete example of such a circumvention strategy: at present it is illegal to establish a picket line within a shopping centre. Strikers are forced to stand far beyond the entrance to the centre, rendering the picket much less effective than it could be.

One means of dealing with this is to attempt to amend the legislation through TDs etc. Another, more effective means is to recognise that, while the legislation may prevent a union from entering and picketing within the shopping centre, there is nothing to prevent a community group from entering the centre and protesting outside the particular shop.

Such a tactic would shelter the union from legal repercussion while also bringing pressure directly to bear upon the dispute in question. By such means, the unions could simultaneously weaponise their strikes to a greater extent (so saving money with shorter disputes), build community relations, build their independent political power, and win more strikes (all aspects missing from a TD-lobbying approach).

These tactics also allow us to engage shop stewards and ordinary members in the struggle, and allow for immediate results in current campaigns.

This line of attack—of systematically identifying troublesome sections of the legislation and engaging resources to circumvent them—would serve to nullify the law, piece by piece. By targeting the structure of industrial relations in this way we can build independent union political power and loosen the restraints on the labour movement.

Our rallying cry must be that what we cannot nullify *de jure* we must nullify de *facto.* If they won't fix it, we must break it.

Conclusion

The labour movement finds itself at a crossroads. It can either continue to operate within the existing structure of industrial relations and search for ever more technical fixes, or it can recognise that what is needed is a paradigm shift and tackle those structures head on.

The choice is further made concrete by the proposals before us of challenging the Industrial Relations Act or of lobbying for right to access.

One choice will lock the trade union movement into an electoral strategy, mortgaging its hopes on Sinn Féin. The other seeks to build independent union power, engage in immediate struggles, and overhaul the existing norms of labour relations.

By challenging the linchpin of social partnership we also bring into question the role of the state in the economic and political struggles we face. It is no longer enough to tinker around the edges: we need to begin to dismantle the entire paradigm of social partnership.

Never has the choice been starker. We must go political or go home. ★

Graphic by Ken Sprague

Unity is strength

The job of trade unionists is to fight the workers' cause argues **Laura Duggan**

"AN ACT to Make Further and Better Provision for Promoting Harmonious Relations between Workers and Employers . . ." reads the long title of the Industrial Relations Act (1990), and its predecessors and amendments.

The use of the phrase "harmonious relations" is telling: it eradicates the nature of class struggle. But the competing and conflicting nature of the demands of workers and employers can be anything but harmonious in a capitalist system.Under these acts there is no true right to strike.

A picket at a place of employment, under certain conditions (peacefully, and in furtherance of a trade dispute), is immune from legal consequences; but that's about it.

Those immunities don't stretch very far either. It doesn't allow for strikes of a political nature, solidarity strikes, or general strikes; and there is a list of criteria that the unions must meet before a picket can even be considered immune.

"Harmonious" in this case seems to mean a quiet worker, a worker who is funnelled into the Workplace Relations Commission and happy to be invited to sit at the table where decisions in their favour are non-binding and largely unenforced.

The 1990 act itself is not to blame for the declining trade union movement. It is, however, indicative of a well-worn passivity within the unions. For such an act to be introduced with little or (at present) no challenge to it shows that a loss of density is more a symptom of an already blighted structure than the problem itself.

Repealing the 1990 act would not just make it easier to strike: it would challenge the ideology behind the act and the atmosphere that allows it to continue.

One of the effects of the act not often remarked on is its reinforcing of the atomising of the worker (i.e. union member) and their work-place disputes from society as a whole, in effect isolating them. Instead of being linked to a larger pattern of resistance, each strike is treated as a distinct issue, divorced from other social or economic discussions.

This is an intentional effort to promote the separation of the political and community spheres of life from the work-place and to disempower workers and their organisations. When workers and unions cannot openly draw the links between the housing crisis, water charges, social welfare cuts and other issues that affect members in their personal lives and their own work-place issues of low pay, bad contracts, and worsening conditions, it stunts the opportunity of raising class-consciousness and mutes dissent to the neo-liberal "common sense" arguments.

It kills solidarity at the root when workers cannot reach out to other organisations or their communities or foster education, understanding, and support.

The worker is a worker and a union member even when not at work.

No longer do we have unions that rely on the education and mobilising of their members to challenge an oppressive wage-labour system: we have insurance policies. It makes sense that under this system a union could have an excellent shop steward in a work-place who still votes for Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, and see no contradiction in that. This situation should be an anomaly but is commonplace, even in the most left-wing of unions.

Right of access and collective bargaining are important and should be fought for, but they will not solve the ideological gap. The repeal of the 1990 act would be a first step towards challenging this.

The lack of industrial action is a telltale sign of workers feeling powerless and ideologically adrift.

With the rise of precarious employment, members outside the traditional unionised industries are left wondering why they pay their membership dues when they rarely feel the strength of numbers behind them. They are left asking themselves how they can convince other workers to join when unions seem to be built around the already unionised. For organisations built on membership there has been a stark absence of effort in new

industries for unionisation, industries rife with exploitation.

This is a "brave new world" of work that has modelled itself on the queues of labourers of the past; and though many of these workers sit at computers or tills, or stand at coffee machines, they are just as insecure as their predecessors. There is an overwhelming number of workers now on year-to-year contracts, some with probationary periods renewed on each signing.

There is also a generation who do not know what unions are. For them, getting a union representative in the door is a great start, but right of access to employers who embrace precariousness of the work force is not one negotiated with through a court that is a showpiece. To organise a precarious work-place you have to be able to offer the employees more than the chance to be formally ignored—they already have that, through company employee representatives.

Workers in precarious situations need to use spontaneity to their advantage. It's the only real advantage they have.

Why should Tesco or Dunne's or any other employer be given at least one week in which to prepare for a strike, when they need give no notice before terminating employment? With the only power of workers being the withdrawal of labour, any legislation that reduces the efficacy of that, that gives employers time to prepare scabs, write press statements, or apply political pressure through the usual gombeen structures, is one that a union should be fighting against tooth and nail.

Strikes are expensive for unions, and an ill-timed one can have disastrous consequences; but a lack of one can be just as bad, and can have consequences as far-reaching. So why give the already powerful opponent an advantage?

Some of the most powerful strikes of the recent past cannot be replicated—not only because of a changing environment but because they have been virtually outlawed. Our job as trade unionists—officials, officers, activists, or members—is to fight the cause of the workers, and that cannot be done by agreeing to work under legislation that is written by the enemy.

There are aspects of the 1990 act that can be useful for a union to employ, but it should be the union's decision when, or if, to use them. To lose sight of this is to forget who is writing the rules in the first place. We should not be looking to any act or law to protect us as workers, or to tell us how to fight, unless we write them!

Almost every piece of governmental industrial legislation introduced has implicitly the intention of weakening the workers' movement. It's obvious that any benefit to workers or unions is incidental, or a placatory measure. We only have the withdrawal of labour and the solidarity of our class, both of which the Industrial Relations Act attempts to soften.

The resurgence of anti-union work-place presentations, the use of strike-breakers, blocking union representatives from company premises, lock-outs, and firing without notice if on probationary contract (which can be a full year in length) are all legal.

There is no legal obligation on an employer to negotiate with a union, or to implement the recommendations of the Workplace Relations Commission. There is no law against the creation of yellow-pack staff organisations to get around unions, or firing a worker for taking part in a strike, as long as everyone striking is fired. There is no obligation for social welfare payments to be made available to a striking worker, and no obligation on an employer to pay them.

The Government introduced the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act (2012), which permits joint labour committees to fix pay rates but requires them to account for the interest of employers and "the need to maintain competitiveness." It also allows employers to be exempted from the rates in the case of financial difficulties—meaning that nothing happens unless employers agree to it.

Employers are neither friends nor a benevolent force for their employees, and neither is the legislation that protects them and the system of exploitation, no matter the veneer on it. It's like thinking that a landlord as a housing minister makes sense for the renter. ★

CONNOLLY BOOKS

Dublin's oldest radical bookshop is named after James Connolly, Ireland's socialist pioneer and martyr

★ **Irish history** ★ **politics** ★ **philosophy** ★ **trade union affairs** ★ **feminism** ★ **Marxist classics** ★ **environment** ★ **progressive literature** ★ **radical periodicals**

43 East Essex Street, Dublin,
between Temple Bar and Parliament Street (01) 6708707
www.connollybooks.org

Join the fight for socialism

Send me information on Communist Party membership

name

address

post code

email

phone

send to CPI 43 East Essex Street Dublin DO2 XH96
or CPI PO Box 85 Belfast BT1 1SR

CAPITALISM

EU myths and Greek reality

The journey travelled by the Greek people since 2010 was not some Homeric odyssey, filled with adventure, but rather a living nightmare for millions of Greek people. **Eugene McCartan** reports

GREEK WORKERS and their families, as well as small family farmers, have paid a very heavy price at the hands of both the Greek ruling class and their EU overseers in the form of the EU "Programme for Greece" (similar to the "Programme for Ireland") imposed on the Greek working class.

Both policies were for making the working class pay for the crisis of the system and for them to shoulder the massive corporate debt. The economic crisis provided the pretext for an attack on the advances gained by workers in Europe over many decades. They just dusted off a strategy they had sitting on a shelf waiting the opportune moment to implement it.

All the schemes imposed by the European Union, the EU Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund are similar, with the same demands, requiring a similar outcome.

Yet they tell us the crises in all these countries are different, and are the product of government failures. How can this be so?

The SYRIZA government in Greece and the EU have portrayed the fact that Greece formally left the EU programme at the end of August as a success story for both the Greek government and the EU strategy. Nothing could be further from the truth. But don't let the truth get in the way of a good bit of propaganda!

The Greek national debt now stands at approximately €295 billion, with interest payments of €18.66 billion per year. The share of national debt per citizen is €31,204, while the debt accounts for 186 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. Most of the outstanding debt is owed to the European Union:

- European Financial Stability Mechanism and European Stability Mechanism: €168 billion
- Euro-zone governments: €53 billion
- Private investors: €34 billion
- Greek government bondholders: €15 billion
- EU Central Bank: €13 billion
- IMF: €12 billion

The Greek economy is now 25 per cent smaller than it was in 2010. Greek workers have indeed paid a heavy price.

- The official unemployment figure stands at 20 per cent.
- One in ten of the population of working age has left the country.
- Youth unemployment accounts for nearly 40 per cent of those left in the country.
- Average incomes have slumped by a third.
- Successful state enterprises were bundled up as security for the bail-outs and have either been privatised or abolished.
- Workers' wages, terms and conditions have been cut to pieces.
- The retirement age has been raised by ten years since 2009.
- The average monthly wage has gone from €1,462 in 2011 to €1,060 in 2018.
- The wages of low-skilled workers went from €1,080 per month to €747.
- Many people, especially pensioners, decreased or stopped their daily medicine intake as as a result of "reforms" after 2012.
- Life expectancy has gone down.

The SYRIZA government and the European Union have hailed the fact that Greece has "officially left the EU bail-out programme" as a success. One has to ask, A success for whom? And at what price for workers and their families and communities?

Because Greece has officially left the EU-imposed austerity programme, does it mean that austerity is over? Far from it. Greece is still burdened with massive socialised corporate debt. Successive governments gave priority to foreign private banks, bailing them out on the backs of working people.

In late June 2018 the Greek parliament was obliged to push through another batch of economic changes demanded by creditors, including further reductions in pensions and "reforms" of the health system and taxation.

George Papandreou, head of the PASOK government (equivalent to the Irish Labour Party), signed up to the first memorandum with the "troika" of the EU, ECB, and IMF. This first bail-out was to save the zombie European banking system, mainly French and German banks exposed to defaulting Greek debt.

This was the same policy that the Irish government accepted when we bailed out the banks and took responsibility for 42 per cent of European banking debt, to "save the euro."

As the statistics show, the Greek working class was sacrificed at the behest of the European Union and the Greek ruling class. In other words, they were sacrificed to save a bankrupt economic system.

For the bail-outs had nothing to do with alleviating the economic condition of the mass of the Greek people. The second bail-out was to save the failing banking system, that is, to directly save the Greek ruling class.

The third bail-out, the one that the left charlatan Tsipras agreed to, was to push through privatisation, welfare cuts, assaults on workers' rights and "modernisation" of the economy that PASOK could not achieve because of massive resistance by the Greek working class. In stepped the wolf in sheep's clothing: SYRIZA, headed by Tsipras.

Presenting themselves as friends of the working class, SYRIZA delivered what the first two agreements could not. While the government was imposing savage cuts in public spending—on schools, hospitals, and pensions—they increased military spending, at the behest of NATO and the EU.

Not alone were these policies a savage attack on workers, but democracy and national sovereignty were set aside. EU bureaucrats daily bullied the Greek people, bluntly stating that, to stay in the EU and remain within the euro zone, democracy and the democratic expressions of the people's will, in the form of elections and referendums, had to be set aside.

The ECB banker Lucas Papademos, who became the unelected prime minister in 2011, and the former minister of finance Yannis Stournaras, who became governor of the Greek central bank in 2014, were nothing more than the local branch office of the EU Central Bank.

Working people should not understand these events or actions merely as those of a weak and vain leader. It was the weak and compromising response by Greek social democracy, similar to what has been done and is being done by social democratic and labour parties all over Europe.

Despite the severe battering of the last decade, the Greek working class has continued to fight back, thanks in no small measure to the resistance, courage and leadership shown by the Communist Party of Greece in its mass mobilisation and the leadership of the All-Workers' Militant Front (PAME).

Here in Ireland, as we approach the tenth anniversary of the bank bail-out, it has to be repeated again and again: the debt imposed upon the Greek, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Irish people is simply unsustainable. All the so-called sacrifice has had little or no effect. The rich have got richer and working people are poorer.

"Austerity" has worked. It was always for the transfer of wealth from working people upwards to the rich and also outwards to fill the coffers of foreign banks. The Irish people were sacrificed to save the euro.

The Greek people may have formally left the memorandum period, but they will still be constrained by quarterly inspections from the EU and ECB to make sure they are still toeing the line. Their budget—like the Irish budget—will go to Berlin and Brussels first before we hear anything about what is in it.

Capitalism will be protected at all costs. ★

Picture above shows workers from the PAME, the All-Workers Militant Front demonstrating this month

United Bodenstown Commemoration, 2018

THE SECOND United Bodenstown Commemoration to honour Theobald Wolfe Tone and the United Irish movement, organised by the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum, took place on 19 August.

Activists came from all over the country—from Dublin, Belfast, Newry, Fermanagh, Tyrone, Cavan, Monaghan, Armagh, Wicklow, and Waterford. A delegation from Scotland also travelled to Ireland to take part.

The ceremony in the graveyard was chaired by Caoimhe Ní Loingsigh. The first speaker was the forum's chairperson, Tommy McKearney. He stated that those gathered at the commemoration needed to keep in mind and remain focused on the establishment of a sovereign independent state, and that a "workers' republic" was our ultimate goal.

The main oration was given by Jimmy Doran, a member of the Forum and of the CPI and an active trade unionist in Connect. He stated: "Pádraig Pearse once referred to this place as the holiest spot in Ireland. I'm not an expert on holy spots, but it certainly is one of the most revolutionary spots in Ireland. It is the burial ground of Theobald Wolfe Tone, one of the greatest Irish revolutionaries and the founder of Irish republicanism.

"We are here today to remember him, to learn from him, and use this knowledge not to repeat history but to change it."

Addressing the growing inequality within our society, he

External powers strive to exert control

Tommy McKearney

ON A WET night in February 1912, Winston Churchill, first lord of the admiralty, addressed a cheering crowd of more than seven thousand nationalists gathered in the old Celtic Park football ground in Belfast. He was there to promote the third Government of Ireland Bill (often called the Home Rule Bill) to an audience that included a delighted John Redmond.

What many among the enthusiastic crowd appeared to miss was an ominous message from Churchill about the limitations of what was being offered.

Though this particular act of Parliament was eventually to fall into abeyance because of the outbreak of the Great War, its essential contents were resurrected and implemented within a decade. The Government of Ireland Act (1920) was to form the basis for the Anglo-Irish Treaty and partition. Ireland was to get as much autonomy as suited Britain's imperial project.

Interesting, you might say, but only of real significance to historians and pedantic republicans. Well, not exactly: because it is worth reflecting for a moment and exploring its contemporary relevance.

"Home rule" or dominion status was a carefully crafted policy designed and implemented by the British ruling class to maintain control over its empire. Recognising that it didn't have the manpower to coerce such a vast area, it decided to grant limited autonomy to certain colonies where there was a white colonial ruling class, as in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

In this sense, South Africa provides an unusually interesting example. Once a bloody battle zone, under Jan Smuts it had been transformed from a British nemesis, wreaking havoc on Crown forces during the Boer War, into a trusted ally. By 1920 Smuts was even advising the Cabinet in London on how to deal with the Irish conflict.

So, how does this fit the present? Well, just like a century ago, Ireland is now facing significant change. External powers are again striving to ensure that the country remains within the wider imperialist orbit. Now, however, there are two power centres working to this end, rather than just one, as in the past.

One of those power centres is obviously the European Union, where some decades back the Irish bourgeoisie led the Republic into what was then the European Common Market.

This arrangement did not come without conditions. Ireland would have to abide by a governing consensus set down by the European establishment. Today this means absolute subservience to neo-liberal financial and fiscal regulations, dictated by Brussels, and to participation in EU-approved foreign policy activities, including certain military commitments that will undoubtedly increase over time.

Evidence of the Republic's adherence to EU strictures is not difficult to find. The Maastricht Treaty (1993) dictates fiscal policy, while the Lisbon Treaty (2009) centralised the EU and

stated: "Wherever there is a massive accumulation of wealth there is an equivalent poverty and disfranchisement of somebody else. Huge amounts of wealth cannot be accumulated without depriving others. Wealth doesn't just appear: it does not just happen or fall from the sky . . .

"All wealth is created by the interactions of two things: the natural resources of this planet and our labour. Nobody should own those natural resources: they are provided by nature, to be used for the benefit of humanity, not for any elite to hoard or exploit for themselves. Without these two components, wealth just does not exist, and there would be nothing to accumulate, horde, stash, rob, deprive or steal from the rest of us.

"British imperialism was in Ireland and the other colonies not as tourists but to extract everything they could out of countries and peoples, to benefit their elite ruling class and quell revolt from their own citizens in Britain. It is no accident that the British built schools, hospitals, cities and towns for their citizens but built railways, roads and ports in the colonies, to flood home the wealth, riches and resources from the colonies while leaving the colonial citizens to starve in abject poverty.

"We need to stand firm on our anti-imperialist political understanding and deepen it . . . Imperialism is rotten to its core. Inequality is its foundation stone, and greed is its bedrock. It achieves this by exploitation of the working class."

Flowers were laid by organisations and individuals on Wolfe Tone's grave, and the Proclamation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood of 1867 was read.

Building the forces for the unity of our people and our country is more necessary than ever. This united commemoration was an opportunity to renew our commitment to the struggle for an independent, sovereign people in a sovereign country.

The full text of the oration can be read at https://socialistrepublicanforum.wordpress.com/forumblog/ ★

greatly diluted the Irish electorate's power.

Taken together, these two treaties have transferred a substantial degree of sovereignty from Ireland to the European Union.

Nevertheless, the EU is not alone in maintaining careful surveillance over Ireland. As ever, the British ruling class has a continuing interest in its near neighbour. With Brexit, for example, Dublin has the potential to become at least partially an alternative financial centre within the EU. This will be exacerbated by the fact that the ending of partition and the subsequent creation of a unitary Irish state is a distinct possibility in the relatively near future.

Indeed such a scenario is now part of mainstream discourse. It goes without saying, therefore, that the British establishment is determined to shape future developments in this, its first colony, and thereby maintain its influence here.

To do so, Britain's rulers will seek to manipulate the outcome through a mixture of propaganda and practical, albeit discreet, intervention. In this they will have the assistance of that section of Irish society that benefits from the present economic and political system and is still eager to maintain its privileged position. And, as in previous centuries, the Irish bourgeoisie will invariably seek assistance from foreign oligarchies to achieve their ends.

It is necessary to recognise this for what it is and, just as important, what it is not. It would be a mistake to interpret it through the lens of old-style nationalism. This manoeuvring is not motivated by crude English jingoism: it is driven by a determination to ensure the permanence of an economic and political system in Ireland that favours Britain's powerful ruling elite and their class allies on this side of the Irish Sea. We are now witnessing what might be described as the early stages of what in practice would emerge as a type of fifth "Home Rule Bill."

In fact the process appears to be already under way, as the Irish public are being gradually prepared to accept a closer alignment with Britain and its institutions.

Take, for a start, an event two years ago when equal status was afforded to Britain's 1916 casualties with those of the republican insurgents on a monument in Glasnevin Cemetery built by the Irish Government. Look then at the unseemly fawning on the British royal family, which goes far beyond normal diplomatic protocol, with even Sinn Féin politicians joining in the carnival.

Nor does it stop there. Last month we were treated to the odd spectacle of a senior member of the Irish judiciary stepping outside his brief to advocate re-entering that relic of the British Empire, the Commonwealth.

Most significant of all, perhaps, this month we have the appointment of a man with publicly acknowledged connections to the British secret service to the sensitive position of commissioner of the Garda Síochána.

There may be an innocent explanation for all this, but forgive me for saying that what walks, talks and quacks like a duck usually is indeed a duck.

A progressive response to this situation should neither be to resort to sterile anti-British hysteria or, alternatively, to try counteracting the threat described above by endorsing greater alignment with the equally predatory European Union. What is at stake is not churlish national pride but the ability of the overwhelming majority of the people, that is, the working class, to exercise a meaningful degree of control over the conditions in which they live.

The answer lies, of course, in the building of a sovereign, democratic workers' republic. Before the fourth Government of Ireland Bill, James Connolly raised the banner "Neither King nor Kaiser but Ireland." With the possibility of a fifth "Home Rule Bill" in the offing, we could do worse than remind ourselves of that inspirational slogan and declare for socialism in a new and, finally, truly independent Irish state. ★

Pensions: another stealth tax

Dan Taraghan

IN THE LAST issue of *Socialist Voice* it was shown that, as part of the liberal agenda, the period of wage-slavery was being extended to the degree that it is unlikely that most people forced to work until seventy years of age or beyond will be able to enjoy their final years for very long.

The latest proposals from the Government are deliberately designed not only to continue the existing inequity in funding retirement but actually to entrench that inequity under the guise of reform. It is highly likely that proposed reforms will in the future be used to undermine the state retirement pension.

According to the minister for employment affairs and social protection, Regina Doherty, the reason for the new proposals is that the majority of workers will only have the state retirement pension on retirement. Instead of trying to improve and enhance this, the new proposals will boost private-sector pension providers.

The proposals are ostensibly straightforward. All PAYE workers earning more than €20,000 per year will automatically be enrolled in

Organising and mental health

Dáithí Ó hAirtrí

"At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality . . . We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity will be transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force."
Che Guevara

WITH CAPITALISM in crisis, and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall being taken out on the working class in ever more corrosive ways, it is no surprise that levels of mental illness in the developed capitalist world are at their highest ever.

With the cost of living soaring, rent crises in every major city, precariousness of employment, and food insecurity for many parents and their children, mental illness is a reasonable response to a system that is intent on alienating and dehumanising every worker who is forced to come into contact with it.

A knock-on effect of this is that it strikes directly at the ability of workers to organise against capitalism. It is often said that the only tool the working class

a private pension scheme if they are not already a member of one. This will begin in 2022, at which point they would pay 1 per cent of income. This would rise by 1 per cent every year to 2027, when it would reach 6 per cent. The employer would match the employee's contribution up to salaries of €75,000, and the state would also contribute €1 for every €3.

Employees would be able to choose the pension provider and the level of risk they were willing to take with their pension "investment." Management charges for the fund would be limited to 0.5 per cent of the funds invested.

Brokers Ireland, which represents 1,250 brokers' firms, not surprisingly welcomed the proposals. It's obvious that this is part of a liberal agenda to undermine the state pension and pass a very lucrative market to private-sector speculators.

The minister said the Government was committed to the state pension, which "will remain the bedrock of the pension system and a protection against poverty." But the state pension "is not designed or intended to deliver full income adequacy in retirement."

Instead of addressing that problem and trying to develop and improve the state pension, the Government in effect is trying to undermine it. Those with only the state pension will find that increases will be at the whim of the Government of the day, even though they have contributed to the state pension through PRSI. It will in effect be a payment to relieve poverty.

Joan Burton of the Labour Party welcomed the proposals, and in fact claimed credit for them from her time as minister. Burton and the Labour Party did untold damage to the trade union movement, and she initiated the regressive process of moving the retirement age from sixty-five to sixty-six.

Just to demonstrate how far removed these bourgeois are from the working class, she made the following insightful observation: "I think there is a fear there that some people might see this as a tax. It's not a tax but it is another contribution."

That type of sophistry might wash in D4, but it won't when you see 6 per cent of your pay going to a private-sector pension fund.

There is another aspect to this which the Labour Party never addressed when in Government, even though Burton and Co. were well aware of it: the existing system of tax relief for private pensions is unsustainable. The pension tax relief comes to over €2.4 billion per annum. This amounts to 45 per cent of all tax reliefs. In practice, the tax relief for private pensions has undermined the tax base.

It is only worth taking out a private pension if you are a 40 per cent taxpayer, because of high charges by the providers. For 20 per cent taxpayers it's not worth their while, and they end up financing the tax relief for the higher-paid.

On top of this, the state retirement pension is capped. The contributions are pay-related, but, regardless of the value of the contributions, the pension is capped.

Previous ministers for finance came under pressure from the OECD to address the issue of tax relief. But the pensions industry is so powerful that it easily blocked any meaningful reform.

The new proposals look like another sop to the pensions industry. If the tax relief is reduced to, say, 25 per cent, the compensation for the fund managers would be to force the lower-paid to join private-sector schemes and so fund their fee income.

Joan Burton may not want to call it a tax, but your net wages will decrease for no guaranteed return if these proposals go through. ★

has is organisation. But when we see how many of our best minds and best activists are struck down for periods by stress or by depression, we realise how this is hampering our ability to be as effective a force against capitalism as we could be.

To quote Mao, "weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things that are decisive. The contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale."

With this in mind, we need to start thinking about how organisation is done, and how we best include recognition of human frailty in structures. It is not enough to have rigidity and to confuse that with discipline. It is not enough to merely role-play as committee members and not to take stock of the efficacy of our systems.

As communists, it is not to love structure and discipline for their own sake, it is to love structure and discipline as a tool for ensuring strong leadership for our class.

We cannot let systems become "tradition." It is good to question things and to improve them where necessary.

For this reason, if roles or committees are being left vacant by resignations or inaction by multiple comrades consecutively, perhaps those roles or committees need to be examined, or broken up into smaller ones. Similarly, if someone is missing deadlines as a pattern, perhaps another comrade needs to be assigned to aid their work load.

And, on the other side, people who are struggling need to be open to asking for help before things come to a head—and we must create an environment where we are open and understanding to those seeking that help.

This is not to say that any of this is not existing practice. I personally have always found comrades exceedingly helpful and understanding when I have felt the need to explain something. However, I do believe it would be helpful to formalise this and to start a discussion about the creation of an official mental health policy. This would enable a discussion within the party about work loads and how we can best utilise every member to the best of their abilities.

A small and disciplined party can move mountains if the organisation is as good as it can be. But, with the mental toll of living in this capitalist hellscape we call the Irish state ever increasing, it is important that we recognise that making allowances for people, and having a discipline that is flexible enough to cater to individuals' needs, is a worthy goal—and a tactical imperative. ★

Out now!

A new edition of *The Life and Times of James Connolly* by C Desmond Greaves was 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.

James Connolly's life and his writings acquire a new relevance as Britain's exit from the European Union highlights the complex conditions in which Ireland's struggle for national self determination takes new forms in the context of the supranational aspirations of the European Union.

Harsh truths about police and poli

BlacKkKlansman is Spike Lee's latest cinematic offering, a dramatic dark comedy that is based on a true story of a black detective who goes undercover in the Ku Klux Klan in the 1970s.

Review by **Laura Duggan**

THE FILM has suffered criticism for being "anti-white" (the irony is tangible on that one) and for whitewashing police racism and police interference in radical political groups; but even so it has largely been well received, consistently receiving 4 out of 5 stars.

Lee masterfully holds some very harsh truths about the state of present-day American politics up to the viewer, and with well-timed comic relief he ensures that they don't look away or feel hopeless or defeated by them.

Like his Malcolm X biopic, Lee uses relevant news, film and amateur footage spliced in at key moments. One of the most powerful examples is when KKK members watching and howling at scenes (above) from *The Birth of a Nation* (DW Griffith 1915) are juxtaposed against a Black Student Union meeting, where a stunned audience listens to the horrific story of the murder of Jesse Washington by the white residents of Waco, Texas. Members stand at the top of the room and hold up blown-up images of the murder taken by a photographer at the time, who then sold souvenir postcards of the event. It's a stunning moment, which carries the weight of Lee's message phenomenally well.

At several points *BlacKkKlansman* does attempt to address the questions of racism in the police force, and the police violence and intimidation that stem from it, but it falls very short. Lee must have been expecting some kickback for this failure, and his sympathetic portrayal of a police officer as a scene that takes place midway through the film provides a nice readymade cover for the faults of the *BlacKkKlansman.*

A light-hearted discussion takes place between the president of the students' union, Patrice, and the undercover detective, Ron, where they talk about Blaxploitation films. Patrice makes the point that "it could never happen. It's fantasy." And it works perfectly.

tics in the USA

Blaxploitation films, though hugely problematic, with white-controlled studios profiting from a revamped stereotype of ghettoised black men and women who were violent and hypersexual, were also one of the few eras in cinema when young black people could see themselves in leading roles, in majority black films, produced by big studios. Some Blaxploitation films were even able to sneak in themes of black power—an impossibility in any other genre.

BlacKkKlansman is following in that tradition. The story is a tidied-up version of events and of the world, a place where it is possible for the first black detective in Colorado Springs to make a difference, act ethically and in keeping with a black power ethos, challenge the system, defeat and mock the Klan with his fellow-workers, and get the girl.

Lee knows that *BlacKkKlansman* cannot be all things to all people; and it's unfair to expect it to be. His personal politics aren't perfect, and his films can't be, but it's a vast improvement on another white-directed, white-led "Everyman" story about nothing and never close to political. Holding Lee's films to a higher standard for daring to try (and ignoring where he succeeds) is to be deeply unfair to his work.

That said, there is a whole narrative around ethics à la *Spy Cops* and the infiltration of black power movements which is entirely sidestepped for brevity's sake, with the nasty side-effect of playing down Patrice's very valid points on the systemic nature of the problems in policing, effectively silencing her and her politics.

Though *BlacKkKlansman* doesn't have the critique of capitalism through racism that *Sorry to Bother You* promises (still no Irish release date), or the critique of police brutality and police racism that takes centre stage in *The Hate U Give* (19 October), that isn't to say that the film is without merit. A very enjoyable watch, with some genuine thought-provoking moments, and laughs to boot. ★

Provoking viewers to think about fascism

Jenny Farrell

WINNER OF the Golden Globe for best foreign-language film, *In the Fade,* by the Turkish-German director Fatih Akın, is one of the more important new political films on the state of Germany today.

It is loosely based on the NSU (National Socialist Underground—*i.e.* fascist) trials, which were concluded this summer after dragging on for over five years. On trial was a group of neo-Nazis who had randomly killed nine people with a migrant background and also a policewoman. Undercover police were involved to the point of colluding with the killers.

The most notorious of the neo-Nazis, and the person on whom the trial concentrated, is Beate Zschäpe. Two of her accomplices had died in the meantime. Only Zschäpe received a life sentence.

Akın pares down the actual events and the trial to make his point. He creates a plot around one family, the assumptions of the police, and the mechanisms of the court. Diane Krüger excels in her role as the victim's widow seeking justice. Connections between the German fascists and the Golden Dawn party in Greece represent a growing network of right-wing extremism in Europe. The film is alarmingly relevant.

Where it falls behind real life is that things are even worse in reality. The film stops short of showing undercover state involvement, and the failure of the legal system to bring this to light at the trial. Another question that arises, as we see the terrifying increase in the neo-Nazi presence on the streets and in the parliament of Germany, is, How is this rise of fascism possible again? Where does it come from? How can it infiltrate society once again? Why is it not stopped? How can it be stopped?

The film offers no answers to these questions. But it is a cinematic contribution to such a discussion and stirs viewers to think about racism and fascism and highlights the acute need for action to stop this.

In the Fade is now released in its English version on DVD. ★

POETRY AND SONG

Victor Jara sings on

Jenny Farrell

FORTY-FIVE YEARS ago, on 11 September 1973, the Chilean military, under the command of General Augusto Pinochet and backed by the United States, overthrew the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende.

Allende, who had won the election in September 1970, was faced even before taking office with the enmity of the Chilean right, and the US government. The CIA planned a coup almost immediately after his victory.

Allende's platform had stood for radical transformation: the redistribution of land, the nationalisation of major corporations (particularly the American-owned copper holdings), and fundamental changes in the provision of health, education, and housing. His government was well into this programme when initially middle-ranking military officers and later businessmen and generals put a violent end to Chile's socialist reform.

During the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990), 3,095 people were killed and about 1,000 more "disappeared," according to Chile's Truth and Justice Commission. Bodies are still being found today.

Victor Jara, communist and celebrated singer, was one of about five thousand people arrested in the immediate aftermath of the coup and taken to the Chile Stadium in the capital. There he was tortured and his hands broken. Even at that horrendous hour Jara resisted and tried to give hope to those about to die by singing "Venceremos," the unofficial anthem of the Unidad Popular (People's Unity) movement, and the prisoners sang with him.

Along with many of his compatriots, Jara was murdered in this stadium. When Joan Jara went to identify her husband's body she found it riddled with bullets and the wrists and neck broken and twisted.

Victor Jara was born eighty-five years ago, on 23 September 1932, into a family of farm workers. He learnt Chilean folk traditions from his mother, Amanda, learnt to play the guitar and piano, became a singer, and joined the Nueva Canción Chilena (Chilean New Song) movement. This began as a small folk club, Peña Los Paras, led by Violeta Parra, an important influence on Jara in the late 1950s. Parra created a new kind of folk music in Chile, combining modern song with traditional forms. She established peñas, musical community centres. These launched many revolutionary artists.

Victor's widow, Joan Jara, comments: "The spring of his songs lay in a deep identification with the dispossessed people . . . a deep awareness of social injustice and its causes and a determination to denounce such injustice . . . in addition to the need to do something to change things."

Victor Jara was murdered on 16 September 1973, at the age of forty. To his dying breath he used his art to speak on behalf of the people. His last song was smuggled from the stadium of death by survivors:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hY84jqSyspI ★

There are five thousand of us here
in this small part of the city.
We are five thousand.
I wonder how many we are in all
in the cities and in the whole country?
Here alone
are ten thousand hands which plant seeds
and make the factories run.
How much humanity
exposed to hunger, cold, panic, pain,
moral pressure, terror and insanity?
Six of us were lost
as if into starry space.
One dead, another beaten as I could never have believed
a human being could be beaten.
The other four wanted to end their terror
one jumping into nothingness,
another beating his head against a wall,
but all with the fixed stare of death.
What horror the face of fascism creates!
They carry out their plans with knife-like precision.
Nothing matters to them.
To them, blood equals medals,
slaughter is an act of heroism.
Oh, God, is this the world that you created,
for this your seven days of wonder and work?
Within these four walls only a number exists
which does not progress,
which slowly will wish more and more for death.
But suddenly my conscience awakes
and I see that this tide has no heartbeat,
only the pulse of machines
and the military showing their midwives' faces
full of sweetness.
Let Mexico, Cuba and the world
cry out against this atrocity!
We are ten thousand hands
which can produce nothing.
How many of us in the whole country?
The blood of our President, our compañero,
will strike with more strength than bombs and machine guns!
So will our fist strike again!

How hard it is to sing
when I must sing of horror.
Horror which I am living,
horror which I am dying.
To see myself among so much
and so many moments of infinity
in which silence and screams
are the end of my song.
What I see, I have never seen
What I have felt and what I feel
Will give birth to the moment . . .