Socialist Voice

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BUILD PUBLIC HOUSING NOW!

With balaclavas and evictions, the true nature of the state was revealed when employees of a private security firm, masked and armed with sledgehammers and cutting equipment, smashed into occupied premises while being protected by gardaí, who were also were wearing balaclavas.

The eviction of the Take Back the City group from a house in North Frederick Street, Dublin, lays bare the fact that the protection of property rights will always take precedence over citizens' rights. **Jimmy Doran** reports

"Do not forget the contributions of the Fuhrer to the development of democracy. The greatest man who practised direct democracy was Adolf Hitler . . . It is necessary to introduce direct democracy to Ukraine, with Hitler as its torchbearer."
Andriy Parubiy, speaker (chairperson) of the Ukrainian parliament, 5 September 2018

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Balaclavas and evictions

The state is not a benevolent state acting in the interests of citizens or the common good—quite the opposite: it always acts on the side of the propertied classes.

In response to a public outcry over the gardaí wearing masks while on duty, the newly installed commissioner of the Garda (and former MI5 agent), Drew Harris, attempted to raise a smokescreen when he said that these were fire-retardant masks and should have been worn with helmets. That would be true if they were being worn for that purpose, but in fact they were worn to hide the identity of the gardaí, and to intimidate and terrify citizens—a point made obvious by the fact that none of the gardaí were wearing fire-retardant gloves, and one would have to assume that your hands would be most at risk in a fire.

The identity of one of the gardaí was discovered and circulated on social media. This led to uproar in the establishment, the media and the Gardaí and a call for the photographing of gardaí while on duty to be outlawed. This call was supported by the minister for justice.

It is ironic that such a call should be made in this, the fiftieth anniversary year of the founding of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, resulting from the fact that the nature of British rule in the North of Ireland had been exposed by photographic evidence of the multiple vicious assaults by the RUC, assisted by masked civilians, who ambushed peaceful demonstrators in such places as Burntollet and Coalisland and all over the Six Counties.

These images were beamed all round the world, which put beyond doubt the bigoted, sectarian nature of British rule in the North of Ireland for the world to see. The state keeps the two communities at each other's throats by unnatural religious division, which ensures the continuation of British rule in that part of Ireland by dividing the working class and diverting their attention from the real enemy, British imperialism.

Similarly, the police in the South attempt to disguise the fact that the rule of law and government is only in the interests of one class. The outrage over the housing crisis, expressed through occupations, demonstrations, or evictions, must not be allowed to bring into the public glare, through photographs or social media, the true nature of this state, which could lead to an unstoppable fire that they would need more than balaclavas to protect themselves against.

Take Back the City is a symptom of the outrage felt by citizens at the complete and utter failure of the state to house its citizens. It has led to the occupation of vacant premises being supported by well-known housing activists such as Father Peter McVerry.

Unfortunately, the likes of Peter McVerry and others do not recognise the fact that government housing policy has not failed. Yes, it may have failed the citizens, but it was not designed to act in their interests: it was designed in the interests of the owners of private property, landlords and sectional business interests, in order to completely transfer the provision of housing from a mix of state and family home ownership to the private rented sector, and a small percentage of the most wealthy citizens who can still afford to buy a home.

Fianna Fáil in a bind

Tommy McKearney

MÍCHEÁL MARTIN'S Fianna Fáil is in a bind. The man once described by the *Irish Times* columnist Miriam Lord as the Grand Old Duke of Cork is still impaled on the horns of a dilemma. He has led his party into a perilous position, leaving it stranded in political no-man's land.

Caught in a "confidence and supply" agreement with Fine Gael, De Valera's old party is being damaged by its support for a reactionary neo-liberal Government. At the same time Martin and his team are fearful of forming a co-operative relationship with opposition parties or independents, in case this might cause Fianna Fáil to be completely eclipsed by more stridently radical voices.

In particular, Martin and his colleagues fear being overtaken by Sinn Féin. Mary Lou McDonald has not only slotted effortlessly into the leadership role but has a fluency for Southern politics that Gerry Adams never quite mastered. Moreover, Sinn Féin have access to working-class communities in a way that has eluded Martin's party over recent decades. Significant too is the fact that under its new middle-class management Sinn Féin is appearing acceptable to a sizeable portion of the electorate that previously voted for Fianna Fáil.

Gone too are the days when Fianna Fáil could play the republican card. On the contrary, its present leader is working hard to put a distance between his party and its anti-Treaty past. In his efforts to damage Sinn Féin he constantly reminds the public of the Provisional IRA campaign, a tactic that may only enhance his adversary's anti-establishment credentials. Indicative of Martin's outlook is his recent overtures to the SDLP, a party with even greater problems than Fianna Fáil.

Although Fianna Fáil retain a significant lead over Sinn Féin in the number of its TDs, it is far off

This policy began in the 1960s and has continued up to today, to the stage we are at now, where very little state-owned housing is left, and ordinary working people cannot afford to buy or own their own home, being excluded through low pay, precarious employment, and high property prices.

The crisis in housing has been highlighted by occupations in Cork, Waterford and Dublin and by organisations such as the Campaign for Public Housing, which have led to a naïve demand for the state to sort out the crisis.

The state's response to the public outrage is more of the same. They set up another well-paid quango for their cronies, called the Land Development Agency, to provide 150,000 homes over the next twenty years. That's 7,500 homes per year. There are now 10,000 people in emergency accommodation, and the number rises continuously. There are also 140,000 on the housing waiting-list. So even if they were to build 150,000 homes over twenty years it would still not be enough. It is only done to confuse and deflect attention from the crisis and make it look as if the state is acting in our interests.

The plan for these 150,000 homes is that 60 per cent will be private and 30 per cent will be classed as "affordable"; but at €320,000 one has to ask, Who are they affordable to?

The remaining 10 per cent, or 15,000 homes over twenty years, or 750 homes a year, would be classed as "social housing," for low-income families, which only repeats the mistakes of the past. And in time they would probably be sold to tenants for knock-down prices.

This response from the Government is wholly inadequate. There is only one solution to the housing emergency, and that is a completely new policy, to set up a state housing service, universally accessible to all citizens who want to avail of it, with rents linked to income.

These homes must be built by the state, costing a small fraction of what it would cost to have them built by private builders, and must never be sold to tenants. They would be a state asset, that would continue into the future for citizens to be continuously housed in. Rents must be linked to incomes and not dictated by the market or by the political elite.

Fine Gael have no idea, nor do they care a jot, what ordinary working people require when they suggest that a house priced at €320,000 is "affordable." You would have to be earning €82,000 per annum, have no children and have saved up a deposit of €32,000 to qualify for a mortgage to buy at this price—in a country where half the population earn less than €28,000 per year and only the top tenth of earners are paid more than €70,000.

This shows just how ridiculous the notion of "affordable housing" is, as even many of the top tenth of earners would not be able to afford one.

And who could afford the market-priced 60 per cent of homes in this plan? The great majority would be bought by investors, to rent out at excessive rents, no doubt subsidised by the state.

53 per cent of homes purchased last year were for cash. The NIMBY brigade ("not in my back yard") who can afford these overpriced homes might find that the house next door has "public-housing tenants" living next door after all.

Build public housing now! ★

the level required to form a Government. Moreover, opinion polls have consistently shown that they are not about to bridge that gap.

Therein lies the threat. They are neither fish nor fowl, and so can neither hope to lead a Government nor act as an effective opposition.

Nothing revealed this better than the recent motion of no confidence in the minister for housing, Eoghan Murphy, placed before the Dáil by Sinn Féin. In spite of what is widely acknowledged as one of the defining issues of the present era, and notwithstanding the very public and well-supported protests about a clearly evident housing crisis, Mícheál Martin capitulated. "Motions of no confidence won't build houses" was his lame comment as he attempted to justify backing Fine Gael's wretched record of promoting private-sector profiteering.

The importance of this cannot be overestimated. For eighty years Fianna Fáil was the natural party of government, but it is now becalmed, with no obvious means of regaining its previous grip on office. The question therefore is, What next?

While it has been recognised for some time that the old "2½-party system" had broken down, it is not clear what will emerge to replace it. We can, nevertheless, anticipate the likely outcome by looking over the field of elected representatives.

Fine Gael will remain a reactionary force to be reckoned with. They revel in promoting a two-tier economy, with a divide that has become ever more pronounced since the 2010 economic crash. Servicing and supported by the "I'm doing very nicely, Jack" third of the population determined to hold its position at all costs, Varadkar and his posh boys are now displaying all the arrogance of their Blueshirt founding fathers. In the absence of an alternative, they can and will govern by default.

As for the Labour Party? We can dismiss it as an option into the foreseeable future. It faces huge problems in recovering from its calamitous defeat in 2016, and working people will not easily forget or forgive its collaboration with Fine Gael during the coalition years.

There is then a disparate collection of independents, with political agendas ranging across the ideological spectrum, covering everything from the reasonably coherent to the egregiously self-serving. This latter group is symptomatic of the existing political confusion, and the phenomenon of so many independent mavericks may not remain a feature in the long term.

As well as the above there are left-leaning TDs, acting alone or in groups, such as Solidarity and Independents4Change. They have promoted a left social-democratic critique of the current situation and played an important part in street protest. Nevertheless, for a number of reasons they have been unable to unite and therefore establish sufficient momentum to act as the official opposition and thereafter aspire to form a Government.

In all of this, Sinn Féin remains the big imponderable. Opinion polls suggest that support for the party has tended to fluctuate since its change of leader. On some occasions it sits in second position, on other occasions falling back to third place. In either case it has become a permanent and potent feature on the 26-County political stage. In practice the party has the choice between entering a Government coalition, most probably as a junior partner, and attempting to displace Fianna Fáil as the main opposition.

Although tempted by the prospect of participating in government, the attraction is severely blighted by the likelihood that they would have to make an arrangement with Fine Gael. It would not be easy to agree a programme for government with the Blueshirts, and very difficult to make the deal palatable to a large section of its electorate.

On the other hand, aiming to become the official opposition would involve equally difficult choices for Sinn Féin. Adopting an unambiguous socialist programme would allow the party to lead a substantial bloc in the Dáil but would probably deny it the type of middle-class support that always features in its Blair-like "triangulation" calculations.

Intriguingly, there is another avenue that Sinn Féin might possibly consider. Bear in mind that the party has demonstrated its ability to take the long view. If a border poll were to result in a vote for reunification, Mary Lou McDonald would, as things stand, become leader of the largest party in Ireland. A party committed to remaining within the neo-liberal European Union and also retaining a relationship with each US government is not the most attractive of options for hard-pressed working people.

No matter how this situation develops, it's reasonable to say that working people cannot afford to rely exclusively on parliamentarism. The case for building a strong mass movement involving working-class communities and organised labour remains as strong as ever.

As always, we have the answer in our own hands, but we cannot sit passively and wait for it to fall into our lap. The task of organising for this process has to be addressed seriously, and begun as soon as possible.★

Two responses | 'Not seeing the

1 IN THE July and August issues of *Socialist Voice*, Jimmy Doran and Niall Cullinane debated the merits of reforming the Industrial Relations Act (1990). While Jimmy was enthusiastic for reform, Niall was more sceptical. In elaborating this scepticism he raised many interesting and important points.

Limitations of space prevent a comprehensive point-by-point response. Nevertheless, despite the risk of unfairness, I will concentrate on what I consider the main thrust of Niall's article.

Niall emphasises the pressing necessity to organise the unorganised and the implementation of some form of statutory union recognition. Anybody on the left concerned with the health of the contemporary Irish trade union movement could only agree. Yet securing statutory recognition is likely to prove just as problematic as reforming the 1990 act. No doubt capitalist spokespersons and their hirelings in the media will be wheeled out to decry either measure as spelling economic ruin.

Strategic and tactical considerations apart, the pursuit of these objectives is not mutually exclusive but complementary. Long before statutory recognition was ever a possibility, workers often gained recognition through strike action. In these cases, the right to strike and union recognition were inextricably linked.

Two recent examples would suggest a continuing role for the strike in securing union recognition. Before continuing the argument, a short detour is necessary to examine existing legislation.

The object of the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act (2015) was twofold: firstly, to remedy the manifest defects of the 2001/2004 act[1]; secondly, where an employer refuses to engage in collective bargaining the act will ensure that there is an effective means for the union to represent members employed in disputes concerning the totality of remuneration and conditions of employment.

To my knowledge, the act has been used successfully in one case, that of Freshways, in which the union was recognised. Despite the existence of the act, union recognition in Ryanair was only conceded following a series of strikes. In Lloyd's Pharmacy, one-day strikes in pursuit of recognition are continuing.

None of these strikes fits comfortably into the bourgeois myth of the swivel-eyed ultra-

2 IN SEPTEMBER'S *Socialist Voice*, two articles ("Not seeing the wood for the trees" by Ernst Schreiber and "Unity is strength" by Laura Duggan) raised issue with a piece written by this contributor in the August issue ("The wrong act?").

I will confine my response to the former, because, in contrast to Laura's piece, Ernst's article explicitly refers to, and unfortunately misrepresents, my views on several occasions. I will also make some wider points about his alternative.

With the greatest of respect to Ernst, "The wrong act?" did not propose the "right to access" as "the focus of rebuilding the trade union movement." Rather it stated that "the right to organise, the right to access workplaces and the right to recognition for collective bargaining is a more viable platform for the left to campaign upon" in industrial relations terms relative to campaigning on the dismantling of strike law.

Organising, access and recognition are three separate industrial relations issues, with different implications, pros and cons. "The wrong act?" presented them in aggregate to emphasise a measure of a "more viable" industrial relations campaign than strike law repeal, "viable" being understood as likely to draw in a range of progressive actors and institutions on issues of importance and meaning to them.

If you are going to campaign on something, you may as well campaign on the right thing. Whether these will "rebuild" the trade union movement in and of themselves, I suspect not, but they remain a good starting-point and would certainly complement the "building up of workplace organisation and trade union consciousness in the capitalist sector of the economy" that I argued for.

Indeed the writer ignores the fact that organising and not access per se was specified as a priority in "The wrong act?" There is, incidentally, nothing technocratic about arguing for social change based on engaging and organising working people.

The writer engages in another misrepresentation by claiming the alleged consequence of my stance is "to hope for an amenable Government" and to "mortgage our hopes" on Sinn Féin. The article said nothing of the sort. It highlighted that union recognition—a different issue from access, incidentally—is likely to become prominent. Why? Firstly, Sinn Féin declare this as part of their programme for government and have pushed two bills on the matter of representation, and they may well feature in some forthcoming government mix-up. It seems they are courting sections of the labour movement on that basis.

Secondly, there is evidence that the ICTU are now seeking a constitutional amendment or statutory support on recognition rights, because they see little of benefit in the right-to-bargain provisions in the Industrial Relations Amendment Act (2015).[1]

Now, these are statements of fact and plausible inference about issue prominence, not normative positions of political commitment. We can and should debate the relative weight and significance of these developments: for example, how credible are Sinn Féin on industrial relations issues once in office? But we cannot conclude that a statement of fact signifies support for Sinn Féin, or reliance on government alone (although trade unions rarely develop high density and institutional security in capitalist economies if the state is not sympathetic). The ultimate point was, however, that if an issue relating to organising people at work is gaining prominence among key forces it might be important to have something to say about it.

As such, it is better to speak to people on issues that matter to them using our analysis to show insight and understanding than on issues that only infatuate romantic ideologues of the left.

Although both articles in September's *Voice* chose to ignore evidence, strike action is a minor feature of the contemporary class struggle and confined to pitiful numbers of workers. To put it starkly, the total number of workers on strike in Ireland in 2017 was *0.4 of 1* per cent of the working population—a pattern broadly consistent with two decades of data.[2] Is this what the serious left want to focus on in 2018? Does the repeal of strike laws, or, for that matter, hanging around pickets (and more on that anon), speak to the concerns of the 99.6 per cent of the working population and their day-to-day experience in work and wider social relations?

I appreciate that some comrades want to remain *one step* ahead of "the masses" and not capitulate to their ignorance. Hence we should, the notion goes, agitate about the importance of strikes. This fails to note that not all strikes are important, or politically significant, from a Marxian point of view, and indeed history shows that outside very particular conditions they are easily accommodated within the normal structures of collective bargaining (of which they are in most cases a simple extension).

Furthermore, in wanting to remain one step ahead of the working population, which is understandable, it should be remembered that we need only be one step and not so

wood for the trees'

leftist urging on gullible workers to participate in a doomed enterprise. In these examples, union recognition and the strike remain inextricably interlinked. Thus, a reversal of government restrictions on the right to strike epitomised by the 1990 act can only assist workers in the pursuit of recognition.

Correctly, Niall predicts that a campaign to reform the 1990 act would be met by hysteria and accusations from the great and the good, characterising it is a recipe for industrial anarchy. Such it has always been. It's the nature of things under capitalism. Employers, classical economists and their neo-liberal heirs accord no legitimacy to trade unions, never mind strikes.[2] It would be foolish indeed to under-estimate the obstacles and difficulties in the way of such campaigns.

Nonetheless, the central task of the labour movement remains, as always, to agitate—educate—organise. ★

1 Daryl D'Art and Thomas Turner, "Union recognition in Ireland: One step forward or two steps back?" *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 34, issue 3, August 2003, p. 226–240.

2 Daryl D'Art and Thomas Turner, "Union recognition and partnership at work: A new legitimacy for Irish trade unions?" *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 6, issue 2, March 2005, p. 121–139; Daryl D'Art and Thomas Turner, "Irish trade unions under social partnership: A Faustian bargain," *Industrial Relations Journal*, vol. 42, issue 2, March 2011, p. 157–173.

Darl D'Art

far ahead as to be completely out of sight. Having read the alternative presented in "Not seeing the wood . . ." I fear the writer is not only out of sight but full-blown over the cliff and hurtling for the rocks.

So let us consider his alternative. Having misrepresented my argument and mistakenly conflated the right to access with a union servicing model, the writer urges us to "break entirely with the current paradigm" and "systematically dismantle the entire architecture" of Irish industrial relations. He repeatedly refers to this "paradigm" as "social partnership," even though that very weak form of corporatism has not operated in Ireland for nearly ten years. Most of the ideologies and institutions he associates with social partnership predate it by several decades, and their ideological significance in real terms in any case is over-inflated. Studies on Irish unions and workers show that the presence of *workplace* partnership was negligible and that management-union attitudes remained at broadly arms-length adversarial engagement.[3]

Once we look behind the fine-sounding rhetoric, how is this "systematic dismantlement" to happen? A crack troop of "community groups" turning up at a shopping centre pickets for a "direct assault." In sum, the reduction of industrial relations strategy to picket-line adventurism. Given that Trotskyists have tried this schtick out for decades, one might forgive me for predicting entirely derisory results.

But no doubt there are elements favouring this alternative and, like latter-day Narodniks, are probably practising it on the unfortunates of Lloyd's Pharmacy—hence, I suspect, the "shopping centre" reference. When that dispute ends in negotiated compromise, as it inevitably will, the "assault" might well be tried out on another group of unfortunates among the 0.4 of the 1 per cent. The workers of Lloyd's will fade into memory, as the Greyhound Waste workers did when the juvenile left grew tired of them too. The next worthy victims will be found, and the fetishism of episodic economistic strike action will continue.

I suspect that none of this is based on any hard-headed logic but mere romanticised idealism.

While all this carries on, the IFSC, unorganised transnationals and indigenous employers will accumulate and dictate workers' pay, pensions, hours and content of labour and directly and indirectly shape many other facets of our society. And they will continue to do this, safe in the knowledge that important radical potential in this society obsesses with the momentary pickets of a transient minority and cannot work out a credible strategy to organise and appeal to the heterogeneous mass of working people. ★

1 "Congress set to pursue union recognition, King sets out options," *Industrial Relations News*, June 2018.

2 Central Statistics Office, "Statistical product: Industrial disputes," at www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Database/eirestat/Industrial%20Disputes/Industrial%20Disputes_statbank.asp?SP=Industrial%20Disputes&Planguage=0.

3 Daryl D'Art and Thomas Turner, "An attitudinal revolution in Irish industrial relations: The end of 'them and us'?" *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37(1), 1999, p. 101–116.

Niall Cullinane

Communist Party of Ireland

Statement

3 October 2018

The Communist Party of Ireland condemns the attempt at further privatisation by putting out to public tender another 10 per cent of Bus Éireann routes.

We are not fooled by the standard neo-liberal dual strategy of starving and running down their target, in this case Bus Éireann, through lack of investment and financial support, coupled with demonisation by the mainstream media.

This is purely an ideological decision by the National Transport Authority and the Department of Transport. The principal reason for privatising is to reduce the pay and conditions of bus workers and to transfer the profits to their friends and paymasters in the corporate sector. The other reason, of course, is the withdrawal of the state from providing public services. This will eventually lead to the closing down of large swathes of the public transport network, as profit takes precedence over service. We have already seen this with the 10 per cent of Dublin bus routes that have been privatised, coupled with the "Bus Connects" plan to scrap many routes. Workers in Go Ahead Bus are on substantially less pay than the workers in Dublin Bus.

CIE was originally set up to provide decent and reliable public transport as well as decent jobs for our citizens. It was a reaction to the chaos that was public transport when in private hands, which had no intention of providing a proper transport service: its only purpose was to line the pockets of the owners by exploiting the workers and charging the passengers excessive fares for travelling on substandard vehicles.

This proposal is a step back to the bad old days of the chaos that existed before public transport was put into public ownership. The privatisation of transport has been proved to lead to a a poorer, less frequent and lower-quality service wherever it has been introduced.

This attack on public transport must be resisted and defeated by transport workers and their unions.

The Irish left and the EU

Summary of the talk given by the general secretary of the CPI, Eugene McCartan, at the 2018 Desmond Greaves Summer School

THIS IS an important question under discussion. We certainly operate and struggle against the European Union in a complex situation in our country today. There are no simple answers, no easy or pain-free solutions to the many challenges facing our people, particularly the overarching role and control by the European Union.

Our understanding of the relationship between the Irish ruling class and the European Union should influence our strategy and tactics, and should inform our understanding when we are looking for allies and building alliances to advance our strategic goal.

The starting-point for Irish communists in evaluating any social, political or even institutional structures is a class viewpoint, a class understanding. Who stands to gain? Who benefits? Whose interests are served? Does it strengthen and advance the interests of labour (workers) or consolidate and advance the power and control of capital (bosses)?

If you remove class from your understanding, then you will not fully understand the processes that shape and influence society.

The Irish people today are caught in the triple lock of imperialist interests: British, European, and American. The Irish ruling class and the political establishment are trying to serve three masters—hence their confusion over Brexit.

We need to understand that imperialism has no friends—only interests.

The continuing and deepening economic crisis of the system is exacerbating the differences and the conflict between the main imperialist blocs, weakening the drive to economic co-operation, and may further deepen the crisis of the system. This continuing crisis is the backdrop to the Brexit negotiations between the EU and Britain.

Brexit

The referendum in Britain came about because of a split within the Conservative Party, the main political party of the British ruling class. These divisions are mirrored within the wider society, including the working class and the labour movement.

The continuing pantomime that is the "Brexit negotiations" is part theatre, part internal struggle among the EU ruling forces. The theatre is about shaping how the peoples of Europe understand why the people within the British state voted to leave, about frightening the people into believing there is no survival outside the EU, that nothing exists but a black hole, which the people within the British state are about to be plunged into unless they take a "responsible" approach and do a rethink.

This is an ideological struggle against the workers of Europe, attempting to control and shape how they understand today in order to control them tomorrow. Fear is the strategic weapon of the EU, though they haven't abandoned the honey trap of "social Europe."

Brexit is at its heart a question of democracy and sovereignty. The divisions within British society are a reflection of real material forces and interests. I do not believe that the dominant sections of the ruling class want to leave the EU: it's just that events have tripped them up. Time will tell whether the British state leaves or not.

While the Irish establishment present themselves as "players" on the EU stage, they are only two-bit gamblers. The question of a "hard" or "soft" border between the Irish people will not be decided by the Irish ruling class or any combination of political parties that represent their interests.

Our history shows us that this sham debate about Brexit is not the first time, nor will it be the last time, that we have been pawns on the imperialist chessboard. Our people's genuine democratic interests will be used by contending imperial interests to promote their agenda. It will be London and Berlin that will have the final say.

Lived experiences of the people

Irish communists consistently opposed this state (the Republic) joining the EEC. We have opposed the numerous treaties that have followed. Nothing over the last four decades has made us review this position.

The lived experience has confirmed our view and our analysis of the class character of the EU and the forces that determine and

shape it and that decide whose interests it serves. It is the political structure needed by imperialism at the European level.

All states arose where society was split as a result of irreconcilable class interests and conflicts. The state is for protecting and advancing the dominant mode of production (capitalism), reproducing the dominant idea (ideology), managing differences within capital and controlling and managing workers. The EU fulfils that role at the international level.

The EU is for protecting and promoting the interests of monopoly capitalism at the European level but also for promoting its global strategy of domination and exploitation and hence continuing militarisation.

We cannot fully understand the EU if we we do not understand it in class terms. We need to keep asking ourselves and our fellow-workers, "Whose interests does it serve?"

Perpetual illusions

The EU has pushed forward its agenda using a number of fig leaves:

1 that it is a "peace alliance";
2 that it is a social-democratic counterweight to the aggressive, crude, market-driven United States;
3 that it is a guardian of workers' rights;
4 that it is the protector of "social Europe";
5 that it is a benign political force in the world.

Why and how did it come about?

The EEC came about primarily because of the economic priorities pertaining after the Second World War. European monopolies had to combine and co-operate in self-preservation, to halt the advance of the left across Europe and to counter the advance of socialism. Class interests drove them together, encouraged by the United States—despite the fact it was encouraging a potential competitor. For the United States the threat from the Soviet Union was greater than the fear of building up a competitor.

What has been the strategy contained in subsequent treaties?

The strategy of the EU was and is to close down at the national level the capacity of people, in particular working people, to effect real change. It was to neutralise the capacity and the impact of national class struggle, to hollow out democracy, to enshrine within the legal structures of the EU the primacy of the market, binding on member-states. Economic and social policies were defined and presented as mere technical issues, supposedly devoid of any specific class-political or sectional economic interests.

Sovereign power was voluntarily transferred by member-states. This was not the actions of stupid, corrupt or incompetent individuals or a naïve establishment but a coalescence of shared interests between the EU and the Irish ruling class, in mutual support. It was a strategy for limiting the potential of the people's struggles to effect change at the national level.

In Ireland this coalescence of interests stretches right back to 1921 and 22, when the Irish capitalist class—too weak and dependent, because of its subservient relation to British imperialism—settled for partition.

Things have not changed. The Irish ruling class is still subservient, still parasitic and dependent upon its relationship with imperialism. It is a comprador ruling elite.

A special form of neo-colonialism

The relationship between this state and the EU—as indeed with all the peripheral states—is a special form of neo-colonialism. We see this in the debt imposed on the peripheral states by the core states—all former colonial powers—and in the imposition of various "programmes" to facilitate the transfer of wealth from peripheral to core countries.

This understanding is vital, for it shapes the forces in whose interests it is to win back powers from the EU to the member-states.

Who needs to win back powers and establish national sovereignty and national democracy? We have to ask the question, Which class needs the tools of national democracy and sovereignty to advance their interests? And which class is subservient to and will collaborate with the EU and imperialism?

Is it not the Irish ruling class that is the beneficiary of the handing over of powers to the EU? It was in their class interests to do so, because of their dependence and their subservient relationship with the European Union. It is this relationship with the EU and imperialism that they require in order to continue to rule, dominate, and exploit.

Are the political forces that are subservient and are the handmaidens of the ruling class not also doing very well and benefiting from the largesse dispensed by the EU?

Has national democracy and national sovereignty no class aspects? Is this not what James Connolly spoke about when he stated that "only the Irish working class are the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for Irish Freedom"?

Are not national democracy and national sovereignty the essential tools needed for advancing the interests of the Irish working class?

So appeals to these forces to break with the EU are simply a waste of time and can only fall on deaf ears. True national sovereignty and national democracy can only be established by a radical government anchored in a mobilised, politicised working class. Radical change can only be brought about by the conscious actions of a political and class-conscious working class.★

This booklet is intended to give a brief introduction for those interested in knowing more about the Communist Party of Ireland. We wish to introduce people to the ideas, policies and values of the CPI, to help those who are beginning to explore alternative politics for the first time to gain a fuller understanding of what we stand for, and to give those who are considering joining our party a brief overview of our policies and our strategy.
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Late-stage capitalism:

A new phase in the system, or the regression of welfare capitalism?

Rhys Black

OVER THE last twenty years the acceleration of the internet and web sites has been critical in the development of thought and ideology in the new wave of Marxists now reaching the age of revolutionary activity and education.

Studying theory and discussing it among comrades has never been easier. You can now discuss *Kapital* with hundreds of people around the globe, from every corner of the world, all in one chatroom. Every word Marx wrote, and every speech Lenin gave, is instantly available to us. There are entire web sites dedicated to dismantling the voice of the bourgeois state and reporting events from around the world in an unbiased stance, or from the viewpoint of the victims.

All these factors have given birth to a new revolutionary character, a new vehicle for class-consciousness to grow, with anonymity and pseudonyms as a given.

RIGHTS of MAN.

PART II.

INTRODUCTION.

WHAT Archimedes said of the mechanical powers, may be applied to Reason and Liberty: "*Had we*," said he, "*a place to stand upon, we might raise the world.*"

The revolution of America presented in politics what was only theory in mechanicks. So deeply rooted were all the governments of the old world, and so effectually had the tyranny and antiquity of habit established itself over the mind, that no beginning could be made in Asia, Africa, or Europe, to reform the political condition of man. Freedom had been hunted round the globe; reason was considered as rebellion; and the slavery of fear had made men afraid to think.

But such is the irresistible nature of truth, that all it asks, and all it wants, is the liberty of appearing. The sun needs no inscription to distinguish him from darkness; and no sooner did the American governments display themselves to the world, than despotism felt a shock, and man began to contemplate redress.

The independence of America, considered merely as a separation from England, would have been a matter but of little importance, had it not been accompanied by a revolution in the principles and practice of governments. She made a stand, not for herself only, but for the world, and looked beyond the advantages herself could receive. Even the Hessian, though hired to fight against her, may live to bless his defeat; and England, condemning the viciousness of its government, rejoice in its miscarriage.

As America was the only spot in the political world, where the principles of universal reformation could begin, so also was it the best in the natural world. An assemblage of circumstances conspired, not only to give birth, but to add gigantic maturity to its principles. The scene which that country presents to the eye of a spectator, has something in it which generates and encourages great ideas. Nature appears to him in magnitude. The mighty objects he beholds, act upon his mind by enlarging it, and he partakes of the greatness he contemplates.—Its first settlers were emigrants from different European nations, and of diversified professions of religion, retiring from the governmental persecutions

B of

Graham Harrington

THOMAS PAINE'S famous work *Rights of Man* was published in 1791. It was written as a reply to *Reflections on the Revolution in France* by the Anglo-Irish politician Edmund Burke.

Burke's book was an attack on the principles of the French Revolution, written by a representative of the ruling class as a warning to prevent the spread of the revolution's principles to Britain. While Burke uses the language of the ruling class, Paine, who became a stay-maker (corset-maker) at the age of thirteen, writes with the passion and self-conviction of the masses.

Paine challenges Burke on the "right" of any group of men to rule over the people. For him, the people were themselves the sovereign, and not any unelected monarchy. He upholds the right, and duty, of a responsible citizenry to rid itself of this form of tyranny.

While much of the anger of the French third estate (the majority of

These keyboard theorists have become the forefront of the left in the eyes of youth, people like "Existential Comics" or "Socialism in One Society" on Twitter, and such are the voice by which many young people get a Marxist understanding of the modern world, such as the Syrian conflict or the Zionist occupation of Palestine.

With all of this comes the idea of a "post-neoliberalism" idea of capitalism, which has been dubbed "late-stage capitalism" by the internet community, particularly Reddit.

"Late-stage capitalism" manifests itself in two main characteristics according to the theory:

(1) the adoption of anti-capitalist movements in the pursuit of profit and the lowering of class-consciousness;

(2) the increase in the gap between the classes and the centralisation of capital.

The first point itself is a view that has become very clear in the last two months, with Nike choosing the American footballer Colin Kaepernick as its new mascot, together with the slogan "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything."

Last year Colin Kaepernick became the centre of controversy when he knelt during the American national anthem to protest against the racial oppression of the Black community in the United States, in an action that was comparable to the Black Power salute given at the 1968 Olympic Games. Kaepernick became the subject of ridicule in America, and his protest, which was followed by numerous black players, caused outrage. This resulted in his career coming to a standstill, and a fine being introduced for any players who refused to stand for the national anthem.

Nike then used the image of Kaepernick and this protest to try to turn a profit by appealing to the majority in America who had supported him, all the while using sweatshops and enslaving the colonised southern hemisphere. On-line communities have claimed that the first major instance of this characteristic was the game of Monopoly. This was invented by a socialist, Lizzie Magie, in an attempt to show the flaws of capitalism and the danger of imperialism (monopoly capitalism) and was then bought and produced for profit by a monopoly company, Hasbro.

These are some of the few glaring examples of this first characteristic. However, there are numerous examples all round the internet.

The second characteristic is where my real question lies. Is late-stage capitalism a new phase, or is it merely the regression of welfare capitalism? Since the early 1990s capital has slowly been stripping back the concessions it made to labour throughout the twentieth century. The reason these concessions were made in the first place was the fear of an uprising like that of 1917, with the USSR as a constant reminder to capital that the workers can and will overthrow their oppressors if the material conditions are there for them to do so. This led the ruling class to do everything in their power to stop those conditions becoming a reality. Health services improved, the working week became shorter, wages increased.

The conditions of workers have remained stagnant in the last thirty years, while inflation has boomed. Rents have increased exponentially, while wages have seen very little growth. In the United States the cost of living, though it varies from state to state, is on average about $15 per hour; yet the average minimum wage averages only $7.50 per hour hour. The cost of living is double the minimum wage; yet union membership is still at a record low figure.

This is an example of capital taking advantage of not having a major threat to deal with, as it did throughout the twentieth century.

As the gap between labour and capital grows larger and larger, as the issues of society become a means by which profits can be made, and as the internet continues to breed a new revolutionary character, the discussion on "late-stage capitalism" will continue, more and more questions will be raised, and new theorists will attempt to answer them.

Will this be a new phase in capitalism, or is it neo-liberalism rebranded? We should most certainly keep an eye on these developing theories and see if they can provide any new tactics for organised parties to adopt. ★

the people) centred on King Louis XVI, Paine writes that the faults of the system lay not with personalities as such but with the system itself. "It was not against Louis XVI, but against the despotic principles of government, that the nation revolted . . . In the instance of France we see a revolution generated in the rational contemplation of the rights of man, and distinguished from the beginning between persons and principles."

The Declaration of the Rights of Man, the most important document of the French Revolution, stated that in a republican government all men are born equal, and that the control of state power rests with the people of the nation alone. The European Union seems to have declared this principle to be outdated; indeed the struggle for a sovereign nation-state is still the main political struggle today for democrats.

While in Paine's time it was a struggle against the forces of aristocracy centred in Britain and elsewhere, now it is a struggle against the forces of finance capital, based in the United States, the European Union, and other imperialist centres.

In part 2 of the book Paine puts forward his own alternative to the ills of the status quo. He creates a fully costed budget for such things as education and health, employment, pensions for the elderly, abolition of the poor-rates, and grants for newly married couples and and for new-born children. These measures would go together with decreasing military spending, made possible by the peaceful interactions between nations that have moved beyond the old order. They would be paid for by the introduction of a progressive tax.

These modest measures would form the backbone of what we now call the welfare state, which became standard in western Europe after 1945. The fact that these measures in the western capitalist states took so long after Paine first wrote about them shows just how late social democracy came to the show. The socialist system then existing in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe had already taken these demands further, being enshrined in the Constitution of the USSR in 1936 while the emergence of neo-liberalism in the 1970s showed these reforms under capitalism to be merely a temporary compromise with the people, with even these basic rights now under attack.

The debate between Paine and Burke represented the first division of politics into left and right wing. The left wing were those who supported the revolution and its belief in the rights of man; the right wing believed in the preservation of the aristocracy.

In Ireland, Paine's book was a best-seller, and it was a major influence on Theobald Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen. Tone himself captured the fervour that accompanied the great controversy between Burke and Paine, unmatched until the October Revolution in 1917. He wrote:

"This controversy, and the gigantic event which gave rise to it, changed in an instant the politics of Ireland. Two years before, the nation was in lethargy . . . But the rapid succession of events, and, above all, the explosion which had taken place in France and blown into the elements a despotism rooted for fourteen centuries, had thoroughly aroused all Europe, and the eyes of every man, in every quarter, were turned anxiously on the French National Assembly. In England Burke had the triumph completely to decide the public . . .

"But matters were very different in Ireland, an oppressed, insulted, and plundered nation . . . In a little time the French revolution became the test of every man's political creed, and the nation was fairly divided into two great parties, the Aristocrats and the Democrats (epithets borrowed from France), who have ever since been measuring each other's strength, and carrying on a kind of smothered war, which the course of events, it is highly probable, may soon call into energy and action." ★

Another failure for the right in Venezuela

Seán Edwards

NOBODY RELYING on the news media in Ireland can have any understanding of events in Venezuela. They take their line from the international corporate media (primarily North American, British, and Spanish), which are waging a media war against the government.

According to them, Venezuela's economy is collapsing because of the socialist policies of the "dictator" Nicolás Maduro, while the opposition forces that they support are democratic. They tell us the press is suppressed, though anyone can see that it is overwhelmingly right-wing and anti-government.

They never report on the economic war being waged by the big retail monopoly Empresas Polar and other businesses—creating shortages, hoarding goods, driving up prices—or the effects of the sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies, including the European Union.

These measures have indeed had a crippling effect on the Venezuelan economy, admittedly compounded by the mistakes of the government, and are inflicting great hardship on the population. Strangely, the poor, who suffer most from the crisis, continue to support the Bolivarian process, while the rebels who blocked the roads with burning tyres, besieged a maternity hospital, destroyed food supplies, and created violence and mayhem on the streets, all come from well-off families.

The attacks on Venezuela are part of a general counter-offensive against the popular movements in Latin America, which have achieved some success in Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, and elsewhere, where US hegemony has been re-established, with the help of the oligarchies in those countries.

When the United States declares new sanctions against Venezuela, a number of client states can be relied on to follow suit, as does the European Union.

The United States, Brazil and Colombia have been holding military exercises on Venezuela's borders. The Venezuelan opposition has been an enthusiastic supporter of sanctions, touring the world soliciting new measures. But they have not fared so well with their own programme in Venezuela, in spite of winning the election to the National Assembly. Most of them campaigned for a boycott of the presidential election last May, but the one who broke ranks, Henry Falcón, was heavily defeated by Maduro.

The election was condemned by Trump, who announced new sanctions as a punishment. But nothing has worked out for the opposition: the street violence organised by the extreme right antagonised even their own supporters; even their 2002 coup only lasted forty-eight hours.

Participating in elections, or boycotting elections, could not dislodge Chávez, and cannot remove Maduro.

Maduro has achieved nothing by appeasement, by trying to negotiate with the opposition or with the business organisation.

Desperation is setting in; so that last month there was an attempt to assassinate the president. Two drones loaded with high explosives approached the platform where he was speaking. Had they hit their target they would have caused many casualties. Fortunately, one crashed and the other was shot down.

According to the corporate media, this never happened at all: it was organised by Maduro himself to justify repression of the entirely blameless opposition. There was a statement, however, from an organisation calling itself "Soldiers in T-Shirts," claiming responsibility for the attempt, which was read out on a Miami television station by the well-known journalist Patricia Poleo. Another Miami journalist claims

A new constitution for Cuba

SOCIAL PROPERTY will be the main basis for production in Cuba after the adoption next year of a new constitution, and this will continue to be the governing principle of the country's social and economic life.

This was the main message of the Cuban deputy minister of foreign affairs, Ana Teresita González Fraga, when she addressed a gathering of friends of Cuba in Dublin last month. The minister is on a tour of a number of European and Asian countries

to have known about it in advance.

Some of those who have been arrested have implicated right-wing politicians, notably Julio Borges, a veteran of the 2002 coup, and Juan Requesens, who has advocated an invasion of Venezuela. Borges is now in Bogotá, Colombia; Requesens has been arrested.

The attempt on Maduro's life is indeed another failure for the right, illustrating once again their incompetence and disunity. Inevitably, Chavistas will rally round their president; but, as Paul Dobson argues on *Venezuela Analysis* (www.venezuelanalysis.com), this could inhibit the important debate within Chavismo about how to defend their gains and move forward.

There has been considerable disaffection with some of the government policies, particularly among the communal co-operative enterprises in the countryside. They organised a 400 km march to Caracas, where they met the president, urging a more assertive development of the communes, quoting Hugo Chávez, "The communes or nothing," as the way forward.

Indeed Maduro has achieved nothing by appeasement, by trying to negotiate with the opposition or with the business organisation. Neither they nor their imperial masters are in any mood to concede anything. The strength of Chavismo has been the level of public participation in policy-making. This, as Paul Dobson argues, needs to be maintained and strengthened in order to defend the popular gains and to advance further. ★

to inform solidarity groups, and Cubans abroad, of some recent developments.

She spoke about the new draft constitution, containing 224 articles, 87 of which are new provisions. It envisages the updating of the social and economic model of Cuban society, emphasising the socialist nature of the Cuban political system. There will be some private production, but the dominant means of production will be socially owned.

It is intended to establish a five-year presidency, with a limit of two terms. There will be a maximum age of sixty for candidates. There will also be a prime minister, who will co-ordinate the work of the Council of Ministers.

The draft has been discussed in detail at 135,000 local meetings, and Cubans living abroad have also been consulted. This debate process will end on 15 November, and the final vote will be taken in February 2019.

The minister thanked supporters and friends of Cuba in Ireland for their solidarity, and recalled the visit of President Higgins to Cuba in 2017. She thanked especially all those who campaigned for the release of the Cuban Five.

She said there had been a sudden and serious deterioration in relations with the United States since the election of President Trump. The blockade has been strengthened, particularly in the field of financial and economic transactions. As it has done for many years, the UN General Assembly has again passed a resolution against the blockade.

In 2016 Cuba signed an agreement on political and economic co-operation with the European Union, and an EU-Cuba Council has been established to set out a "road map" for future relations. This agreement is dependent on ratification by the parliaments of the member-states.

Cuba is very concerned about the aggression and external intervention aimed at the Bolivarian government of Venezuela. The minister said the situation in Nicaragua was also a source of concern, stressing that the sovereignty of Venezuela and Nicaragua is essential for stability in the region.★

PORTUGAL

Another world is possible

Jenny Farrell

TWENTY YEARS ago, on 8 October 1998, the communist writer José Saramago became the first Portuguese author to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The first fifty years of Saramago's life were defined by the fascist dictatorship that ruled Portugal from 1926 to 1974 and his active resistance against it.

Born the son of landless peasant labourers in a village north-east of Lisbon, Saramago grew up in poverty. He trained and worked as a mechanic, civil servant, metalworker, production manager at a publishing house, and managing editor of a newspaper. He joined the Communist Party in 1969 and remained a lifelong member. He wrote for and helped edit the Communist Party paper for a time, and stood as a Communist Party candidate in the 1989 local elections.

The "Carnation Revolution" of 1974, which put an end to the fascist regime, was much more than the transition from dictatorship to bourgeois parliamentary democracy. The first government to take power was largely communist. Monopolies were nationalised, the large landowners in the Alentejo were expropriated and the land given to the agricultural workers, workers' control was granted by law, and the colonies were given independence. Although these socio-economic achievements could not be preserved, it set an example that still applies today: another world is possible. This vision of an alternative to capitalism, and human resilience, is an important theme in Saramago's work.

The communist-led government was replaced in 1975 by a Socialist Party one, and Saramago lost his job as newspaper editor. He then devoted himself exclusively to writing. However, he became increasingly pessimistic about Portugal's political course. When the government under Aníbal Silva refused to endorse Saramago's book *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991) for the European Prize for Literature, stating that it was too anti-religious to be supported by Portugal, Saramago left Portugal and lived in Lanzarote in the Canary Islands until his death in 2010.

Graham Harrington

IN THE first week of September the Communist Party of Ireland sent a delegation to the Avante festival in Portugal. The festival is sponsored by *Avante!* the weekly paper of the Portuguese Communist Party, and is held each year in the first week of September.

The PCP takes its international duties very seriously. It showed great hospitality and respect to its international guests, fifty-eight in total, who came from all continents. There was equal respect shown to parties that are in power as to smaller parties. The festival presents an opportunity for all to come together in the spirit of comradeship, to learn from each other's experiences.

The festival took place from Friday to Sunday, with attendance being in the hundreds of thousands over the weekend.

Delegates are picked up from the airport and taken to their hotel, taking in the environs of Lisbon on the way. Advertisements for the festival are to be seen all over the city, especially in working-class areas. It is clear that the festival is a big event, with work being done almost all year by party members and supporters. The level of work done is partly the reason that the festival continues to grow bigger and bigger, with a newly acquired space being opened two years ago.

The festival was opened on the Friday by the general secretary of the PCP, Jerónimo de Sousa, with the JCP, the communist youth, putting on an impressive display. The PCP anthem was sung, as was the "International," in different languages by people of all colours, kicking the festival off.

The strength of the festival lies in its diversity. Some come for the political debates, others for the food and drink, some for the music and cultural events. All the events have some form of politics in them. One event I saw that stuck out was an act of theatre that had two contenders

This was no withdrawal from politics. He continued to publicly lampoon capitalism's hypocrisy, criticising the EU and the International Monetary Fund, defending the Palestinians against Israeli policies, and founding the European Writers' Parliament along with the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk; but his main contribution lies in his writings.

Raised from the Ground (1980) is a novel about working people's life under a dictatorial regime, who take over and occupy land. Blindness (1995) depicts an entire population going blind and how people individually cope and attempt to survive shocking events. *Seeing* (2004) explores a post-blindness election, in which the people cast their ballot papers, returning them blank. Each novel is different, yet they repeatedly deal with living in the extreme and inhuman conditions of class society and what hope we have.

However, on this anniversary we should leave it to Saramago himself to speak about his writing. We do so by publishing here in full his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Literature, which he won in 1998, at the age of seventy-six. The speech is in itself part of the body of his literary achievement.

How characters became the masters and the author their apprentice

. . . Then came the men and women of Alentejo, that same brotherhood of the condemned of the earth where belonged my grandfather Jerónimo and my grandmother Josefa, primitive peasants obliged to hire out the strength of their arms for a wage and working conditions that deserved only to be called infamous, getting for less than nothing a life which the cultivated and civilised beings we are proud to be are pleased to call—depending on the occasion—precious, sacred or sublime. Common people I knew, deceived by a Church both accomplice and beneficiary of the power of the State and of the landlords, people permanently watched by the police, people so many times innocent victims of the arbitrariness of a false justice. Three generations of a peasant family, the Badweathers, from the beginning of the century to the April Revolution of 1974 which toppled dictatorship, move through this novel, called *Risen from the Ground*, and it was with such men and women risen from the ground, real people first, figures of fiction later, that I learned how to be patient, to trust and to confide in time, that same time that simultaneously builds and destroys us in order to build and once more to destroy us.

. . . *The Stone Raft*—separated from the Continent the whole Iberian Peninsula and transformed it into a big floating island, moving of its own accord with no oars, no sails, no propellers, in a southerly direction, "a mass of stone and land, covered with cities, villages, rivers, woods, factories and bushes, arable land, with its people and animals," on its way to a new Utopia: the cultural meeting of the Peninsular peoples with the peoples from the other side of the Atlantic, thereby defying—my strategy went that far—the suffocating rule exercised over that region by the United States of America . . . A vision twice Utopian would see this political fiction as a much more generous and human metaphor: that Europe, all of it, should move South to help balance the world, as compensation for its former and its present colonial abuses. That is, Europe at last as an ethical reference. The characters in *The Stone Raft*—two women, three men and a dog—continually travel through the Peninsula as it furrows the ocean. The world is changing and they know they have to find in themselves the new persons they will become (not to mention the dog, he is not like other dogs . . .).

. . . *Blind*. The apprentice thought, "we are blind," and he sat down and wrote Blindness to remind those who might read it that we pervert reason when we humiliate life, that human dignity is insulted every day by the powerful of our world, that the universal lie has replaced the plural truths, that man stopped respecting himself when he lost the respect due to his fellow-creatures. Then the apprentice, as if trying to exorcise the monsters generated by the blindness of reason, started writing the simplest of all stories: one person is looking for another, because he has realised that life has nothing more important to demand from a human being. The book is called *All the Names. Unwritten*, all our names are there. The names of the living and the names of the dead. ★

mimicking a boxing match, one contestant playing the EU, the other the people of Greece. It was clear what the political point being made was!

On Saturday delegates were brought to the municipality of Setúbal, which is run by the PCP. We were informed by the communist mayor how this municipality was infamous for its corruption until the PCP registered its success here, with the party's representatives known for their competence.

The Saturday night is the busiest time of the festival. Virtually the entire grounds were filled with people. On the main stage, named in honour of the revolution of April 1974 that overthrew fascism, a Palestinian rock band played to thousands. In the international section there were political debates on the future of capitalism, the Middle East, and the EU.

Stalls offering food, drink, badges and souvenirs were set up by delegations from Cuba, Iran, Catalunya, Palestine, Cyprus, Greece, Angola, Brazil, Turkey, and more. Murals made political statements on Venezuela, Palestine and the Korean peninsula and also highlighted the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx.

On Sunday delegates attended a meeting with the PCP leadership, which gave an overview of events in Portugal and the role of the PCP, with an open floor for comrades to make contributions and share their own experiences. Interpreters were provided by the PCP at all stages of the festival, showing the level of resources the party has in its ranks.

Delegates then attended the mass rally, which had speeches from the Young Communist Movement, a member of the PCP Central Committee, and the general secretary, with tens of thousands packing the surrounding area to listen. The front of the main stage was a sea of red flags, the LGBT rainbow flag, Palestinian flags, and others, being waved by young and old, men and women.

The Avante Festival is an example of what a socialist society can look like, what can be achieved through collective struggle and solidarity. It gives a model for what we seek to achieve. It gives the opportunity to share and learn from the experiences of delegates, whether from parties in power, such as Cuba, China, Laos, Viet Nam, and the DPRK, and mass parties, such as those from Portugal, Greece, France, and Spain, as well as parties such as the CPI—the only party to represent Ireland and the experience of the Irish working class at the festival.

This allowed us the ability to share our experiences in the struggle to repeal the 8th Amendment, the fight against water charges, and the continuing struggle for universal public housing. In particular, the role of the EU and other imperialist centres was shown, as was the necessity to build an anti-imperialist alliance and build workers' power. ★

Robin Hood, Ireland,

Dan Taraghan

ROBIN HOOD, the legendary outlaw known throughout the world, has an unusual connection with Ireland, and an even stranger connection with the communist movement.

No-one knows for certain whether Robin Hood ever existed or was based on a real individual. There are records of people named Robin Hood or similar names in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Likewise, there are records of people named Little John and the other Merry Men. There is no definitive proof, however, that any of these were part of an outlaw band under the leadership of Robin Hood.

What is definite is that stories were being told about a Robin Hood and the other outlaws in his band before they were written down. There were other outlaws in the period, but none achieved the lasting fame of Robin Hood and his band.

It is easy to imagine traders entertaining the serfs working in the kitchen of a castle with stories of a brilliant archer who lived as a free man outside the law and who had a sense of decency and justice, unlike the nobility, with their hypocritical codes of chivalry.

Richard Greene was a well-known stage and film actor. Although he was English he had Irish ancestry, and he bought a 154-acre estate at Gorey in Co. Wexford after the Second World War. ITV decided to run a series for television based on the tales of Robin Hood, and Greene agreed to play the part of Robin, which was a considerable coup for ITV.

The series, known as *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, was aimed at adults. Historians were employed to ensure that costumes, weapons etc. were accurate for mediaeval England. The series, with 143

A Star is Born

Laura Duggan

***A Star Is Born* has been remade for the fourth time and was released in Irish cinemas on 5 October.**

The retelling follows the familiar story of an aging male star—this time the country singer Jackson Maine (played by Bradley Cooper)—who happens across an ordinary woman whose talent is being overlooked, Ally (played by Lady Gaga). This meeting is swiftly followed by her rise to fame as his is in decline. The title implies that the story will focus on the rising female star, but, like much in the film, it rings false.

As a romantic modern musical the film is predicable, heavy-handed, and tropey. All of which is expected and forgivable if it weren't for the awful writing of the only woman present on screen for more than thirty seconds.

Jackson, the rugged, booze-soaked country singer, is the baby-boomer generation on screen. He pulled himself up by his own bootstraps (even with the weight of a tragic backstory), and the only thing required for his success was his own home-grown talent.

When Ally points out the sexist beauty standards in the music industry, Jackson shuts down her objections with a call to "have something to say and you'll make it." Jackson uses this line several times to explain away other people's failures and his own success.

The film perfectly—and, one would guess, unknowingly—highlights the contradiction in capitalism's exhortation that anyone can be a success with enough hard work with the fact that Ally only "makes it" because of Jackson and not on her own merit at all. Self-awareness is entirely absent from this film.

and the communists

half-hour episodes, ran from 1955 to 1959. It was hugely popular both in Britain and in America. It is the earliest Robin Hood series still in existence in its entirety.

Following the series Greene then made his only Robin Hood film, *The Sword of Sherwood Forest* (1960). This was shot on location in Ireland, on the Powerscourt estate in Co. Wicklow. The indoor scenes were shot at Ardmore Studios. Irish accents are prevalent throughout.

The series was made by Sapphire Films. This company was set up by Hannah Weinstein, who was a member of the Hollywood Branch of the Communist Party of the USA. Shortly after the House Un-American Activities Committee began its witch-hunt of communists in Hollywood, Hannah was sent to London with the finance to set up the company. She used blacklisted writers, such as Ring Lardner Junior (one of the Hollywood Ten), Ian McLellan Hunter, Waldo Salt, Robert Lees and Howard Koch to write the episodes. They all used pseudonyms, and Hannah refused to give the HUAAC any information or co-operation. By living in London she was outside the committee's control.

The blacklisted writers used the series to comment on social themes. They ignored the origins of Robin Hood, treated him as a yeoman. Besides the general theme of robbing the rich and giving to the poor (redistribution of wealth), they also dealt with betrayal and treachery—all comments on Eisenhower's America.

Robin Hood as an earl is portrayed by bourgeois writers as a member of the nobility seeking the restoration of his lands and feudal privileges. This can only be achieved by the return of King Richard, the rightful king, who can restore those rights and privileges and thereby maintain the established order.

It was only in the sixteenth century that writers began claiming that Robin was a lord or son of a lord. The original tales describe him as a yeoman, archer, and forester. He had no feudal obligations.

Robin Hood as yeoman is completely different. The yeoman is independent. He does not owe any feudal obligations to a lord or master. It is quite clear from the tales that Robin Hood does not regard the nobility as his "betters." His very existence turns the world on its head and is a direct challenge to the world of privilege and elitism. He does not need the approval of King Richard: he is already king of the forest in his own right. He takes the king's deer when he needs to. He is outside the law, *i.e.* the feudal law of serfdom, feudal rights, church and landlord courts. Robin Hood is a social bandit ★.

The men in the film try to address their own internalised standards of masculinity, with varying degrees of success. They have emotional moments in which they try to repair bonds broken in haste and make up for the past. They worry about their careers, fading talent and fame as they try to understand and come to terms with the changing priorities in their lives. They are complete people, and their struggle to express themselves is intended as heartfelt and, even with their failings, to endear them to us. After all, they are battling against toxic masculinity itself.

Perhaps in other circumstances it wouldn't feel so contrived. When held up against the incredibly shallow and two-dimensional portrayal of women, it shows off the laziness of the script.

When we are first introduced to Ally there is the false promise of depth in her Everywoman character. She carries a quiet seething with her as she cleans her father's house, refuses a proposal, goes to work, or punches a cop. She is unhappy with her lot in life and the limitations placed on her by society and her family. This fury only leaves her when she is performing. After Jackson drunkenly whisks her away we never really see this side of her again.

Every moment where Ally could become that interesting character within whom self-confidence and self-doubt battle it out is quietly pasted over by her being told, again, that she looks great. One particular scene has her lying in a bath, refusing to attend her album launch party: "I don't know who I am. Is this what I want? What was I thinking?" She could be having an existential crisis, brought about by her sudden fame, independent of Jackson.

Her manager and Jackson discuss her appearance outside the room. It's casually cruel. The men who profess to love and care for her also reduce her to her appearance, the marketability, the desirability of her. She is objectified even by her best friend, who sweeps into the bathroom to tell her she looks like a star. Her face lights up. Ally is restored. She is definitely pretty. What a relief!

Such is the pattern. When her talent and contribution to music are slated and undermined she barely registers them; the critiques almost have validity. Once her looks are called into question, however, Ally rises, raging, from the bath for a brief shot of full-body nudity, proving she is anything but that most dreaded word: ugly.

If Jackson is the baby-boomer, Ally is the baby-boomer's view of a millennial. One is capable of depth, nuance, and art; the other, with the inherent flaws of vanity and shallowness, can only hope to mirror it.

The only enjoyable part of this film is the constant homages and references to Édith Piaf, some carried off with a frankly surprising subtlety; but they aren't reason enough to pay for a ticket. *A Star Is Born* is a guaranteed box office success and tipped to win at least one Oscar. It's ironic that, with its very well-funded and powerful voice, it has absolutely nothing to say. ★

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POETRY

Freedom becoming
Eddie O'Neill

Thro' the shattered
mainstream of life
the waste land bears testimony to the
shadow
Hear mothers wail for dead children
whose fathers slave to re-erect the rubble
Upon the rubble their fathers erected
This alter for sacrificed generations

Build fast! Build furious!
Erect the citadels of despair
Light high in neon love thy neighbour
And Triumph Los Alamos sons
While down on shamble row
hypothermia is setting in.
But you cant watch the spectre from the
wings
Nor run from these dark schemes
For you that shed the tears
Carve a mask for tyranny

So . . . dare to tread backstage
Back to where the darkness meets the dawn
Here the breeze that whispers thro' the alleys
Carries the voice of the dead slaves singing
Hark! "No master thus no slave
And there is no god but love
Let Freedom light your way."

Beirut, Belfast, Soweto and Saigon
Echoes the whispering wind.

Moving thro' the side streets
Steering clear of mainstream
Struggling thro' the undergrowth
Seeking out the daylight
Turning, twisting, shaping
Seeing . . . feeling. hoping
Then—
lifting,sharing moving on.
In between the dark and the light—
Becoming

Smashed down doors on the edge of Dawn
the thief is on the prowl.
The wake reveals that the carrion foe
Has pecked out the eyes of the lovers.
Here burgeons Tyranny proclaiming schemes
For the monopoly on the meaning of
existence
Herald! . . . (trumpets stifle the breeze!)
Proclaim that you are free to do feel and say
What you are told to do say and feel
Now kneel—pray—be grateful for the right
To forge the chains that shackle Freedom.

Yet Spartacus stirs
Senses seared . . . genitals burnt
Is this Belfast or Babylon?
This backrest a rack or pillar?
And for whom does that bell tool?
I've seen the Milestones on Appian Way
They're bodies nailed to trees!
And in the silence of a white washed room
You wish to talk to me
Of the error of my ways
and shape my sense of being
but I'm not listening now
nor will you comprehend
that in this silence I've become . . . Me

Now comes your orphans with with a hoe
They've come to talk to you
And they are of a knowledge
That no longer is it so
That neon in lieu of daylight
is a better deal than none.
For that . . . that reigned unchecked
Will no longer remain unbalanced.
For loves and this is is negated
by the strength to conquer fear.
The spectre that once you were
no longer has the stage
For the winds that sang of emancipation
Bear the seeds of your destruction
. . . Time it is to sow

Catch a glimpse of lush meadows
out beyond the wasteland
feel that surging spirit soar
to peaks of dreams that only
unfettered consciousness
can shape to reality
. . . Then talk to me of Freedom

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