Socialist Voice

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IN THIS ISSUE

A different Ireland in the making Page 2
Struggles /News Page 4
Venezuela Page 6
Asian socialism Page 6
Marx and Connolly Page 8
Political journalism Page 10
Poetry Page 11
The "fodder crisis" Page 12

Another democratic advance for women and our country

The Irish people have passed judgement on the thirty-five years' experience of the implementation of the 8th Amendment to the Constitution **Eugene McCartan** PAGE 2

THE ELECTORATE voted by a substantial majority to abolish the controversial amendment that gave equal legal status to the lives of a foetus and of the mother. Our people thought long and hard about whether to repeal it or not. No doubt it was not an easy choice for some; but nevertheless the majority took into account the experience of more than three decades and came to the conclusion that it was time to remove it.

The referendum—in which a majority of 66 per cent voted Yes—drew the second-highest turn-out for a ballot on social issues, second only to the turn-out for the referendum to join the EEC in 1973, which was 71 per cent. The Yes campaign struck a chord with old and young, urban and rural. All but one of the forty constituencies voted Yes, with Donegal narrowly voting 52 per cent for No.

It has been a long and difficult struggle to advance women's rights and social change in our country. Forty years ago Irish people could not even buy a condom legally; divorce was banned; and abortion was an unspoken reality. What is equally important is that tens of thousands of our people returned home from around the world to vote Yes—a generation driven from their homeland by economic policies that gave priority to the interests of transnational corporations, banks and the EU over those of our people and our communities, in a country saddled with an unpayable debt, shrinking public services, and precarious employment, where the provision of shelter is left up to "market forces"—in other words, the rich decide this state's housing strategy, polices, and priorities.

In a statement issued by the CPI the party said that the result *"is a tribute to years of work and campaigning by many groups and individuals, and has little or nothing to do with the establishment parties.*

"The Yes vote is a great victory for the many thousands of young female activists—with a good number also of male activists—who worked hard to secure this victory. It is a victory also for those trade unions that put resources

A different Ireland is in the making

What for long appeared unimaginable has seemingly now become inevitable. The Northern state, created with a built-in unionist majority and uncompromising regime, once seemed as permanent a fixture as its grandiose parliament building at Stormont.
Not any longer, though, reports **Tommy McKearney**

BRITAIN'S TORY prime minister has voiced her doubts about its future as part of the United Kingdom; and the views of the leader of Britain's Labour Party on this matter are well known.[1] Though Theresa May's comments were made during a spat with her party critics, they clearly reflect thinking within governing circles in London. The point now is to understand that this presents socialist republicanism with challenges as well as an invitation to make progress.

In the first instance, it is important to dispense with fanciful speculation. Circumstances leading to the Six Counties leaving the United Kingdom are more likely to come about over the next couple of decades than in the very near future. This time frame will provide an opportunity for measured discussion and negotiation, but it also risks raising alarm within sections of the unionist community.

A major problem in relation to unionist concerns is that they are exacerbated by an incredible capacity for outright denial, as displayed by many of its elected representatives. When asked to comment on Theresa May's statement, for example, Sammy Wilson of the DUP ignored clear indications of changing reality; instead, he airily claimed, there is "no evidence" that the public mood in Northern Ireland has shifted over the issue of reunification.

More questionable still were claims made recently by the former first minister, Arlene Foster, when addressing the conference on "Union and Unionism" in London. She said that citizenship and rights are essentially unionist issues, and that unionism stands for pluralism and multiculturalism, is inclusive, and welcomes all.[2] To put it mildly, there are many who might beg to differ with Foster's interpretation of Northern Irish unionism.

At the same time, unionism is not a monolith. In the event of a

into actively campaigning and that encouraged their members to vote Yes, as well as for the many women's, social and political organisations that declared for a Yes. It is also important to acknowledge the many activists from the north of Ireland who travelled to give active support to the Yes campaign.

"The Yes vote is also a tribute to previous generations of women activists who never gave up but continued to oppose the 8th Amendment after its insertion in the Constitution thirty-five years ago.

"The active forces of the No campaign are a part of Irish history and society that is declining and fading away. It is also a significant defeat for the reactionary forces from the United States, Britain, Germany and other European countries that directly intervened in the referendum campaign with money and campaigning tools as well as with people.

"This victory is a significant development in the political life of our country. Women's lived experience and the issues and challenges that they have faced and continue to face are no longer as invisible as they were when the 8th Amendment was pushed through. Irish women have grown in self-confidence and self-belief. The return home of thousands of our people to vote Yes is a great display of solidarity and a sign of a shared sense that change is necessary and, more importantly, is possible.

"But it remains clear that we have a long way to go to achieve equality. The next phase in this democratic struggle is ensuring that the establishment parties deliver what they have promised regarding legislation in relation to abortion.

"The political momentum and the mobilisation that emerged in the Yes campaign need to remain active and visible. The experience from the Right2Water campaign shows that the mobilisation and the movement of the people is essential.

"We were promised a referendum on the public ownership of water by the establishment, a promise that has yet to be honoured. So far it has been buried in the swamp of Dáil procedures and committees, part of the establishment's continuing efforts to suck the energy from mass mobilisation."

We now need to build on this momentum, to build an all-Ireland campaign to demand the same rights for women in the Six Counties for access to choice and abortion as we expect the Government in the Republic to deliver.

This victory shows what is possible. When our people work together in a united struggle for common demands we can undo the carnival of reaction that flowed from the partitioning of our country and the dividing of our people. ★

new constitutional dispensation in the whole of Ireland, some within that community might easily find common cause with their class allies in southern Ireland. A former leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, Mike Nesbitt, alluded to this in a recent interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, where he was reported as saying, "Some of my Unionist friends are saying for the first time to me: 'Exactly how would I be worse off in a united Ireland (compared to Britain after Brexit)?' The answer is they wouldn't be worse off."[3]

To be fair to Mike, he wisely "clarified" this statement when it was reported by the *News Letter* in Belfast. Nevertheless, the message was clear enough.

By refusing to consider any alteration to the status quo, one section of unionism is missing an opportunity to contribute to modelling the new society that will surely emerge in the not-too-distant future. However, that is all the more reason why socialist republicanism should set out its analysis of the present and its vision for the future.

In this regard, it is crucially important to take action to ensure that we don't wave goodbye to one empire merely to embed ourselves within a different but equally restrictive and exploitative imperialist world order.

Of course there are some unionists who will not be persuaded by any argument that involves a nationwide republic of whatever nature. Nevertheless, change is coming, and it must be dealt with. Avoiding this reality, or opting for a neo-liberal settlement, will guarantee neither a peaceful outcome nor a settlement beneficial to the Irish working class, of whatever background. Connolly famously said that partition would create a carnival of reaction. It's imperative to ensure that its removal does not reinforce conservatism and privilege, embedded in a new neo-liberal state.

With this in mind, it is necessary to identify and counter the seductive blandishments from the Irish version of Macronisme. Like the practice of the French president, this political trend claims to be fresh, pragmatic, and free from the "dogmas" of the past. On the contrary, in fact, its adherents offer nothing more than a sharpened version of neo-liberalism practised within a reinforced and increasingly centralised EU.

Should anybody think that this type of political duplicity would not deceive many they should reflect on the silky performance of the Fine Gael posh boys Varadkar, Harris and Murphy as they basked in the afterglow of having supported the winning side in the recent referendum. This posture of simultaneously being socially liberal and economically reactionary is a classic position adopted by neo-cons in both the United States and western Europe.

However, while the broad left in Ireland is aware of the threat posed by neo-liberalism in its various manifestations, it is more difficult to contain enthusiasm among some for trendy social democracy. Without resorting to crude reductionism, it remains important to recognise that control of the economy is the ultimate determinant. Socialists wholeheartedly welcome the success of the Yes campaign but also understand the limitations of progressive social legislation without also having thoroughgoing economic democracy.

To accept this is no more than an acknowledgement of an enduring Marxist canon that the working class cannot simply take over the bourgeois state but must instead replace it with a new and different workers' state. In the Irish context, where an end to partition is now being talked about as a realistic prospect, this surely means that we have to insist upon the discourse not being confined to a demand for a united Ireland but that reunification has also to be part of building a workers' republic.

In response to those who claim that such a demand is over-ambitious or might prove counter-productive, we can now refer them to the outcome of recent referendums in the Republic. Ground-breaking social changes, such as recognition of same-sex marriage and abolition of the 8th Amendment, were not brought about by the ruling elite and the establishment: these progressive measures were grass-roots initiatives, forced upon the state apparatus by the people.

Equally important is the fact that these issues were won through rational debate and by demonstrating the merits of the case. This in turn gives us cause to believe, for example, that a campaign advocating a basic programme of state-financed public housing, an end to the privatisation of health and social services, public ownership of natural resources and nationalisation of the banking system could win popular approval and support.

And should the EU object to such a programme, the people would surely brush aside Brussels' neo-liberal dictates.

Whatever about a new world being in birth at present, a different Ireland is certainly in the making. For this to be an improvement on the status quo and also to offer the possibility of ultimately winning support among the unionist working class, the course must be set for a workers' republic. ★

1 "Theresa May and Jacob Rees-Mogg clash over Brexit deal," *Times* (London), 15 May 2018.
2 Mark Davenport (BBC News NI political editor), "'Unionism must reclaim rights agenda,' says Arlene Foster," 21 May 2018.
3 Nick Miller, "More peaceful but facing uncertainty: Northern Ireland 20 years on," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 2018 (https://bit.ly/2IQJ8qy).

Cervical Check scandal a consequence of privatisation

WOMENS' HEALTH

ONCE AGAIN problems relating to women's health and the treatment of women within the health system were exposed with the the discovery that 209 women are affected by the Cervical Check scandal that emerged in the last few weeks.

Once again people's lives, and in particular those of women, have been endangered by the continuing privatisation of medical services. Mary Harney, then minister for health, oversaw the privatisation of cervical smear testing, formerly carried out by the public health service. The cheapest bid was from a company called Quest Diagnostics Inc. of Teterboro, New Jersey

Cervical Check, the national cervical screening programme, offers a free smear test to women aged between twenty-five and sixty. The tests were subcontracted to three laboratories: in Ireland to the Coombe Women and Infants' University Hospital and Medlab Pathology at Sandyford, Co. Dublin, and in the United States to Quest Diagnostics.

Over the last ten years Quest Diagnostics analysed 3 million smears from 1.8 million women, more than 280,000 per year.

More than 1,480 cases of cervical cancer were identified in the Cervical Check scheme since 2008. In 442 of the cases it was decided that a review was warranted; in 206 of these the delay in the cancer being detected suggests that the women missed out on earlier intervention.

The scandal emerged only after Vicky Phelan of Annacotty, Co. Limerick, a 43-year-old woman with two children who has cervical cancer, settled a High Court case against Quest Diagnostics. Vicky Phelan had a smear test in 2011 after the birth of her second child, and it showed no abnormalities. She went for a further test in 2014, and cancer was diagnosed.

In 2014 an audit of her 2011 test showed that it was not accurate. She is now suffering from terminal cancer and has been told she has between six and twelve months to live.

In 2014 the outcome of the audits of smears was used only for "educational and training purposes" by Cervical Check; then in 2015 the HSE decided that the audits should be passed on to the women's treating doctors, who would pass these on to the women "as appropriate."

In total, 162 of these women were not told about the revised results; of these women, 17 are now dead. If signs of the cancer had been detected in the original tests such women might have received treatment earlier.

This crisis is a direct result of the privatisation of this service, putting women's lives after corporate profits. We need to end privatisation and outsourcing. We have to put an end to the two-tier health service, and demand the establishment of a proper all-Ireland public health service, centred on and accountable to the people, not bureaucratic structures and quangos such as the HSE. ★

Cost-rental model or cost-rental twaddle

"Cost-rental model" is the flavour of the month as a way of solving the housing emergency and making the provision of shelter more affordable and sustainable. **Jimmy Doran** reports

HOUSING

THE COST-RENTAL model is a system whereby the total cost of a housing development (land, design, construction, maintenance and property management) is divided by the number of tenants or homes to establish the rent, typically spread out over thirty years.

This would mean that on a house costing €350,000 to build (which is what the Society of Chartered Surveyors estimates the average to be), plus another €50,000 to maintain it for a thirty-year period, on a very conservative estimate of pricing the total rent would be €400,000 divided by 30, that is, €13,333 a year or €1,111 a month, if everybody in the development is paying the same rent.

On top of this there are insurance costs, interest repayments, and a sinking fund (money put aside for one-off long-term repairs, for example roof replacement, rewiring, etc.). This would make rents substantially higher for your average family home: in Dublin they would come in at about €1,500 a month.

Rent levels might be lower than market rates (€1,800 per month), but it is certainly still well beyond the means of many of our citizens, considering that half the population earn less than €28,500 a year.

These figures show that rent would be more than half gross

Ownership and control is the key

TECHNOLOGY

Nicola Lawlor

THE ROBOTS are coming!—The robots aren't coming!—Half of all jobs will be gone!—No need to panic: there'll be plenty of jobs building and designing robots.

These are just some of the contradictory headlines and predictions we get from mainstream commentators on the subject of technology and work. All of this misses the central point about who owns and controls technology and for what purpose it is introduced.

The challenge of technology and jobs is not a new one: it is as old as work itself. In "primitive communistic" times, when a new tool was developed it usually enhanced work and life, as it was developed and owned by the workers themselves. Therefore its function was to make jobs easier.

So, technology itself is not necessarily a good or a bad thing. The question of ownership and control will determine its function and purpose and consequently the effect it has on jobs and workers.

Whether new robotics, digitisation, artificial intelligence and technology in general will be used to replace jobs and make workers redundant, or to reduce the working week, or increase value for shareholders, or redistribute productivity gains to workers, will come down to ownership and control and, behind that, power and influence.

Unfortunately, right now we are losing the battle, because we are not even framing the discussion in the right way. We are dragged into the debate about good or bad, and how many jobs will be gone, rather than emphasising control, ownership, and power.

Trade unions are the first place for us to start this debate. Workers will be, workers are, in the front line of this clash, as they see the introduction of technology and the direct effect it has on jobs in terms of redundancies, work-related stress, and de-skilling. Trade unions, and the organised work force, are best placed to inject into the debate and formulate relevant demands to respond to this challenge.

Unions can start by making the call for new agreements that protect jobs and workers in the long term. They can demand redistributive productive gains, both in salary increases but also in employer-paid retraining and reskilling for future work.

It's time unions broke through all the fearmongering and futuristic predictions and injected workers' reality into the debate. ★

Lloyd's workers fight for their rights

RECOGNITION

MORE THAN two hundred employees of Lloyd's Pharmacy in its fifty branches in the Republic are voting on whether they will take industrial action following the company's refusal to negotiate with their trade union, Mandate.

The union has called for a ballot. In response the company is using its tame in-house workers' group to hold its own ballot.

Lloyd's Pharmacy is part of one of the largest pharmaceutical and health products companies in the world, McKesson Corporation of San Francisco.

On 18 April the Labour Court issued a recommendation to the management of Lloyd's Pharmacy stating that the company should negotiate with Mandate in relation to pay and conditions of employment. The company refused to respond to this request, leaving the workers with no alternative but to ballot for strike action.

Mandate had lodged a comprehensive claim on behalf of its members in February 2017, covering a range of conditions of employment, including:

- a fair pay increase
- the introduction of incremental pay scales in all grades
- improvements in annual leave entitlements and public-holiday premiums
- greater security of working hours (eliminating zero-hour contracts)
- the introduction of a sickness pay scheme.

Rather than negotiate with Mandate, the company set out on a cynical campaign to ensure that their employees never have the right to be represented by an independent trade union of their choice. Instead it set up an internal staff representative body, so it can claim that the union is not the sole representative body.

Lloyd's has admitted to subsidising the new body to the tune of €10,000; and this body is now conducting its own ballot for acceptance of a different deal from the one being pursued by Mandate.

Under the company ballot with its tame house committee, Lloyd's workers must provide their name and employee number, so there is no guarantee that their vote is confidential. Members have also told Mandate that they feel intimidated into participating in the process, because of the collection of their data for this process. If they don't participate in this sham ballot they feel they will have a black mark against their name.

Gerry Light, assistant general secretary of Mandate, stated that there is only one legitimate ballot taking place in Lloyd's Pharmacy, and that is the one being conducted by Mandate. It is important that all workers have a democratic say in their future at work, and this is only possible by putting themselves in a position to vote in the anonymous ballots. ★

income for half the population, and a decidedly greater fraction of net pay.

The system also allows for people who earn less to pay less rent, which would mean that those on higher incomes would pay higher rents to compensate for the shortfall. Consequently, high-income earners would be subsidising lower-income earners' rents; or, if you take that a step forward, people on higher incomes will be subsidising low pay: poor people subsidising other poor people.

There is no crisis that capitalism cannot fix so long as the working class are willing to pay for it.

This model does this, as employers and the state are let off the responsibility to their employees or citizens, while the cost of the housing is shared in total by the tenants instead of being from general taxation, as part of the social cost of using our young, well-educated population as workers.

This "young, well-educated work force" that we keep hearing about does not just happen, it must be paid for; so if you want to use it there is a cost.

The cost-rental model would also ensure that it will be more attractive to low-paid people to take up these homes, as the rent would be shared by all tenants and linked to their income. In other words, if you earn more you pay more. Why would somebody decide or agree to pay more in rent than the value of the property, just because they earn a few extra euros a week?

This would lead to the ghettoisation of these housing developments, as they would be filled with low-income families, thus reproducing the mistakes of the past.

It is not the duty of one group of workers to provide a subsidy towards the housing needs of other workers: this is the duty of the state.

Universally accessible public housing is the only solution to the housing emergency. Differential rents based on a percentage of income, typically about 15 per cent, should be applied. This would release and provide a lot more disposable income to families. As it stands today, many people are paying up to 70 per cent of their income on rent; and, as we see from the example above, this would differ little with a cost-rental model.

So, if we want to achieve genuine mixed-income public housing, the only way to achieve this is to make universally accessible housing available to all citizens: a new housing service publicly owned, available as a right, much like health, education, and so on.

Of course this would put the state into conflict with our lord and master, the EU, as it would be deemed "unfair competition" with the private sector and its pursuit of profit.

The cost-rental model is a sop to builders, bankers, developers, and the EU, at workers' expense. So let's call it what it really is: cost-rental twaddle. ★

Venezuela survives

Seán Edwards

THE CORPORATE media denounced the recent election in Venezuela in advance as "fraudulent" and a "sham"—not the elections in Honduras, Colombia, or Mexico, whose subservient governments joined with the United States in demanding that the Venezuelan elections not be held.

Also at the instigation of the United States, the main opposition parties boycotted the election. This was after they had agreed a date for the election (22nd of April) at talks with the government held in the Dominican Republic. They had been demanding early elections up to then, and this had been the demand expressed by the violent and murderous campaign of last year.

One of the opposition leaders, Henry Falcón, broke ranks and ran for election; at his request the date was changed to the 20th of May. When he lost he reverted to type and cried "fraud."

Why the boycott by the parties that had been clamouring for early elections, for the removal of President Maduro? The tactic had previously been advocated only by representatives of the extreme right, such as María Corina Machado and Leopoldo López, but, more importantly, it was also endorsed by the United States.

An electoral victory would not suffice for them: they want to totally destroy the Chavista movement and restore Venezuela to the rule of the oligarchy and the United States. We saw what their programme is like during the coup d'état in 2002, when they abolished the constitution.

Reflections on Asian socialism

Graham Harrington

THERE HAVE been articles in *Socialist Voice* recently on China and Laos. While I hope to write in the future on North Korea and Viet Nam, there are some points to make on the Asian models, especially their use of market relations in order to build socialism.

It should be stated that these policies are not undeserving of severe criticism in many respects, and the articles outlining their political-economic systems should not be misinterpreted as support for a similar model for a socialism based on Irish conditions. But these models do deserve to be studied, especially with the recent victory of communists in Nepal and the debate there about that country's future.

Socialism is a process, not a simple journey from A to B. It is not as simple as a revolutionary movement taking power in a country and constructing socialism overnight. In any struggle there are ebbs and flows, offensives and retreats.

Many write off China, especially as having completely turned to capitalism. This is very neat criticism. In April 2018 Xi Jinping called on

When Richard Nixon set about removing Chile's elected president Salvador Allende in 1973, he instructed Henry Kissinger to "make the economy scream." The same strategy is being used today by Trump—following Obama.

Venezuela was badly hit by the collapse in the price of oil. The economic sanctions imposed by the United States, slavishly followed by the EU and some Latin American states, along with the economic sabotage conducted by monopoly businesses in Venezuela, are inflicting great misery on the population.

For all the talk of "21st-century socialism," the process has never challenged the economic power of the capitalist class.

It cannot be said that Maduro's government has put up a good defence of the "Bolivarian Revolution" initiated by Hugo Chávez. One of the major weaknesses of the process has been the failure to develop the economy outside the oil industry, and the fact that the bulk of the food has to be imported. Neither Chávez nor Maduro expropriated the wealth of the big bourgeoisie.

For all the talk of "21st-century socialism," the process has never challenged the economic power of the capitalist class. It has pursued social reforms, brought in a health service to poor districts where it had never existed before, likewise extended education to all. Above all it asserted the independence and sovereignty of the country. All this was achieved by a massive mobilisation of the working people, inevitably exciting the undying hatred of the old-established oligarchy and their imperialist allies.

Since the death of Chávez the process appears to be going backwards in some respects. (An exception to this is the building programme, with nearly 2 million new homes built, much to the annoyance of the middle class, who see poor people moving into better accommodation than their own.) Rather than follow Chávez's slogan of "deepening the revolution" and mobilising the working people, Maduro has been attempting to appease the opposition, holding talks with the business leaders responsible for creating the shortages, instead of jailing them.

Worse, much of the organised hooliganism, known as the "guarimbas," went unpunished, as were politicians openly inciting violence, such as Freddy Guevara. One who was jailed, Leopoldo López, was described in the corporate media as a political prisoner and a martyr for democracy.

The weakness and prevarication of the government in the face of the economic crisis, the sabotage and the sanctions, have resulted in Maduro losing much of the enthusiastic popular support that Chávez enjoyed. There is also the growing influence of what has been called the "Bolivarian bourgeoisie," who do very nicely from government contracts, public-private partnerships, and the like.

In spite of a very good labour law, both they and government departments have been attacking workers' rights. The Communist Party of Venezuela, the Fatherland for All party and other left forces have frequently been in conflict with the state. Together they formed the Anti-Fascist Anti-Imperialist Front, as the government party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, was putting no work into the Gran Polo Patriótico, which had been set up as a vehicle for left unity. Both parties hesitated before endorsing President Maduro's candidacy.

The mood of the people, and the popular disappointment with the government, was reflected in the low turn-out of 9 million voters—46 per cent—which is nevertheless quite high for Latin America. Maduro gained 6 million votes, against a little less than 2 million for Falcón.

The result is a great escape for Venezuela and a massive defeat for the opposition and their imperialist backers. Even the fact that the election went ahead peacefully is a victory, as the opposition didn't work up the energy to organise any serious disruption.

But the imperialist threat remains. The United States is determined to break Venezuela, in order to reassert its dominance over the continent. It has been holding military exercises with Brazilian and Colombian forces on the Venezuelan border.

Venezuela needs a more resolute defence, not by appeasement but by mobilising the people, by what Chávez called "deepening the revolution." It also needs international solidarity. ★

LEFT: Venezuelan communists rally
(*Tribuna Popular* picture)

the Chinese Communist Party "to solve the practical problems of contemporary China with the basic principles of Marxism"—a very strange statement for the leader of a capitalist state to make.

This month the 2nd World Congress on Marxism was held in China to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth. China aims to celebrate the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party in 2021 by eliminating absolute poverty and to celebrate the centenary of the People's Republic in 2049 by entering the "primary stage of socialism."

Clearly, if China has become a capitalist state it is a strange one.

But what about market relations in the country? It is worth looking at the classic Marxist views on this question.

"Capitalism is a bane compared with socialism. Capitalism is a boon compared with mediaevalism, small production, and the evils of bureaucracy which spring from the dispersal of the small producers. Inasmuch as we are as yet unable to pass directly from small production to socialism, some capitalism is inevitable as the elemental product of small production and exchange; so that we must utilise capitalism (particularly by directing it into the channels of state capitalism) as the intermediary link between small production and socialism, as a means, a path, and a method of increasing the productive forces."

This is not from anything written by Deng Xiaoping or any other Chinese party leader but from an article by V. I. Lenin, *"The Tax in Kind,"* published in 1921.

At the Third Congress of the Communist International, in 1921, Lenin outlined the conditions under which capitalist relations can exist under socialism.

"Within the limits indicated, however, this is not at all dangerous for socialism as long as transport and large-scale industry remain in the hands of the proletariat. On the contrary, the development of capitalism, controlled and regulated by the proletarian state (i.e. 'state' capitalism in this sense of the term), is advantageous and necessary in an extremely devastated and backward small-peasant country (within certain limits, of course), inasmuch as it is capable of hastening the immediate revival of peasant farming. This applies still more to concessions: without denationalising anything, the workers' state leases certain mines, forest tracts, oilfields, and so forth, to foreign capitalists in order to obtain from them extra equipment and machinery that will enable us to accelerate the restoration of Soviet large-scale industry."

Karl Marx wrote in *The German Ideology* that *"it is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world and by employing real means, that slavery cannot be abolished without the steam engine and the mule and spinning-jenny, serfdom cannot be abolished without improved agriculture, and that, in general, people cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. 'Liberation' is a historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, the conditions of intercourse."*

And in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx says: *"On the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new, superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society."* ★

LEFT: Nepali communists celebrate their election victory

Celebrating the lives of Marx and Connolly

Over the weekend of the 12th and 13th of May the Communist Parrty of Ireland and the Connolly Youth Movement celebrated the lives of two great thinkers and activists, Karl Marx and James Connolly.

On Saturday the 12th Dr Stephen Nolan gave this year's James Connolly Memorial Lecture, under the title "The Continued Relevance of Karl Marx," to a packed house. The lecture was to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Marx. (The full speech can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=faCeeeXVkd0&feature=youtu.be.) The meeting was chaired by Laura Duggan, who opened the proceedings with a quotation from Jean-Paul Sartre: "Marxism remains the philosophy of our times because we have not gone beyond the circumstances which created it."

Stephen outlined the continued relevance in the present climate of "full-spectrum domination" by monopoly capitalism—economically, politically, and culturally. He outlined the role of the mass media and also drew attention to how elements of the left have contributed to the blotting out of any possible alternative to capitalism, in particular by social democracy.

He referred to the desert that is trade union education today, which has been reduced to the "skills agenda," with the absence of Marx and his ideas and little or no talk of class or exploitation. He pointed out that Marx still provides the essential tool for understanding contemporary monopoly capitalism.

Stephen drew attention to the reconstitution of ruling-class power after the economic crisis of 2010. He went on to point out that Marxism is about understanding long-term historical change, drawing on the writings of Marx in relation to Ireland and the primitive accumulation of capital and the savage exploitation that capitalism entails.

On Sunday the 13th the annual James Connolly Commemoration took place in Arbour Hill Military Cemetery. The commemoration was chaired by Janelle McAteer, and the main oration was given by Gearóid Ó Machail on behalf of the CPI. Alex Homits, general secretary of the Connolly Youth Movement, spoke on behalf of the CYM.

Gearóid began by declaring: "*At 07:15 hours on May 12, 1916, Marxist theorist, socialist author, industrial union organiser, Citizen Army founder, Commandant-General of the Dublin Division of the Republican Army and Vice-President of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic, Comrade James Connolly was summarily executed by a British firing squad, just across the river, in the yard of Kilmainham Gaol.*

"Born 150 years ago, on the 5th of June 1868, in the crowded Irish immigrant slum of Cowgate . . . James Connolly was unquestionably our greatest ever socialist theorist and practitioner."

Gearóid went on to emphasise the continued importance of Connolly to today's struggle and the important lessons that this generation of activists can learn from him. *"Connolly's task, like ours today, was to apply and test his Marxist theory against the material conditions faced by the working class in his own lifetime.*

"Our task in 2018, comrades, is to set about the formidable task of the Reconquest of 21st-century Ireland. It's the same task faced by Connolly in a new set of historical

THIS YEAR'S Connolly Festival was another step in the consolidation of the festival as an important cultural and political event. Nearly all the events attracted a full house, and the response was uniformly positive.

The festival opened with the unveiling of an exhibition on the life of James Connolly to mark the 150th anniversary of his birth. The exhibition, titled "From Cowgate to the Citizen Army," ran over the duration of the festival.

This was followed by a staging of Eugene McCabe's play *Pull Down a Horseman*, a fictional account of a debate between Connolly and Pearse, followed by a panel discussion.

The festival was a good mix of culture and politics. Each night showcased some remarkable Irish talent, from Ross Breen, October Fires, Queer Space Communism, a drag-variety show, and Robert Ballagh in conversation.

The Saturday evening was a musical, artistic and historical celebration of Ireland's International Brigaders, with *Jarama*, a

conditions. The end goal is the same, however: we need to apply our Marxist analysis to achieve a programme and strategy for replacing capitalism. Not a programme for alleviating the worst aspects of capitalism and imperialism but a programme that recognises that capitalism has unsolvable contradictions built in to its DNA. Revolution, comrades, is a cultural, political and economic struggle for superior ideas.

"None of us are naïve about the difficulties we face in reorienting the struggles of the working class into a cohesive and ideologically driven challenge to the capitalist state. Those struggles are happening every day, all around us, and we as communists must be to the fore in the people's struggles, both defensive and offensive. The role and the contribution of the party in this period is vitally important, laying new groundwork for contact and communication with the working class and the popular masses.

"The strengthening of monopoly capital is bound to bring a further sharpening of the contradiction between capital and salaried labour and thus a sharpening of all social contradictions. These are contradictions that arise from the built-in reproductive cycle of capitalism, co-existing extreme opulence and mass poverty, surplus and want, economic growth and wage restraint, full employment and in-work poverty. These are not blips, mistakes, the product of corruption, or bad policy: they are as much a by-product of capitalism as the ecological destruction of our planet and obliteration of our natural resources.

"Working people need to understand the interconnected relations between the state, establishment political parties, and the powerful economic forces that control their lives. Workers need to understand who really runs the Government and whose interests it serves. That's why we need to reinvigorate our education programme: to grow and develop our young political cadre that they may be enabled and empowered to lead working people in their everyday struggles."

Gearóid finished his oration by outlining the position of the CPI, of drawing lessons from the historical experiences and legacy of Connolly, by stating: *"We will continue to work with left republicans and trade unionists in the Peadar O'Donnell Forum to analyse and dissect the class nature of imperialism's grip on Ireland. James Connolly was keenly aware of the nature of imperialism and stressed the importance of broad working-class unity in resisting its insidious threat to our democracy, independence, and sovereignty.*

"Connolly developed a number of innovative theoretical positions regarding the relationship between Marxism and anti-imperialism—positions heretical to both conventional forms of Irish nationalism and the form of socialism espoused by the Second International, prevalent during his lifetime.

"He was among the first to combine the politics of anti-imperialist nationalism with international Marxism in the colonial arena. His fundamental teaching is that the struggle for national liberation is not opposed to the struggle for socialism but an integral and necessary part of it."

Alex Homits, speaking as a young person growing up in contemporary Ireland, spoke of and reflected the experiences of many of the younger generation when he said: *"It is a curious thing to commemorate a man whose ideas are so written out of the Irish history curriculum that growing up here you would think he did not exist. Yet he did exist, and the impact on Irish history and the struggle for liberation is something we continue to evaluate and feel today. Connolly redirected the historical undercurrents of Irish republicanism and in life and death energised a conflict-ridden movement with firm, concrete leadership.*

"Connolly cut through the abstract notions of freedom, liberty, and independence. He determined sovereignty in the most concrete and immediate terms and articulated this in an earlier political programme for the Irish Socialist Republican Party, a document many of you are familiar with.

"What underpinned this document and what Connolly understood: for us, the people of Ireland, to feel, express and guarantee our liberation we must also own the mechanisms that organise the functions of our society. To Connolly, and to us, this means that the banks, the ports, the canals, the factories and the overall control of production of all commodities that we use and require on a day-to-day basis."

Alex went on to point out why Connolly is still relevant to young people. *"Opponents and critics of Connolly will tell us that 'times have changed,' and we must accustom ourselves to that. North and south of the border, the workers of Ireland are being hammered by the exploiter classes. We're called 'generation rent': unable to afford to live or work towards secure housing.*

"Hundreds of thousands of people simply pack their bags and leave, motivated not by some sort of innate desire to find adventure abroad but because the state and its parliamentary 'social democrats' have robbed young people of all opportunities. Emigration becomes the only available option to find life elsewhere; emigration becomes the only chance of a rich life of opportunities.

"The historical role of emigration in Ireland and the mass displacement of the Irish people have always been used as a weapon to confiscate land; today it is used to alleviate the austerity policies that destroy rural and urban communities.

"Austerity, a mechanism that transfers wealth from the workers to the ruling class, has also implicitly thrown young people into an almost inescapable abyss: no decently paid work, no housing, no access to proper health services, and no value for the education that we're rigorously asked to pursue after school." ★

The Connolly Memorial Lecture and the orations will be published in full shortly and will be available from www.connollybooks.org.

film about Charlie Donnelly, the Republican Congress veteran and poet, and with Christy Moore making a guest appearence. The evening finished off with the brilliant talent of Sive, a wonderful singer as well as an accomplished and talented musician and songwriter.

The Saturday afternoon of the festival was given over to the James Connolly Memorial Lecture, given this year by Dr Stephen Nolan on "The Continued Relevance of Karl Marx."

The final event of the Festival took place on Sunday afternoon in the Cobblestone in Smithfield, following the CPI's annual Connolly Commemoration in Arbour Hill. Those who attended were treated to a truly challenging cultural and poetical experience from "Confessionals" by Victoria McNulty, a spellbinding, mind-altering rapper and performance poet. The historian Liz Gills then gave a talk on "Connolly and feminism." ★

■ **If you would like to be considered for participating in the 2019 Connolly Festival, drop us a line at cpoi@eircom.net.**

Connolly Festival in Clones

Over the weekend of the 25th and 26th of May the first Connolly Festival in Co. Monaghan took place, the birthplace of the parents of James Connolly, John Connolly and Mary McGinn from Áth an Lobhair in the impoverished townland of Coillidh Chuanach, who left Co. Monaghan and settled in the Cowgate district of Edinburgh.

The festival, a mixture of politics and culture, was a first for the group of activists of the CPI and the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum in the area, bringing together republicans, communists, socialists and local left and community activists. Many of those who attended had spent the previous weeks knocking on doors in Cos. Monaghan and Cavan, calling for a Yes vote to repeal the 8th Amendment.

The final event of the festival was the launch of the new edition of the seminal work by C. Desmond Greaves, *The Life and Times of James Connolly.* The participants then gathered and walked to the Diamond in Clones, where they held a rally of solidarity with the Palestinian people. ★

Political journalism in the Age of Revolution

Jenny Farrell

THE UNITED Irishmen founded the radical press in Ireland. They had three newspapers, aspiring to cover the entire country: the Belfast *Northern Star* (approximately 600 issues from January 1792 to May 1797), the Dublin *Press*, and the Cork *Harp of Erin*.

The United Irishmen encompassed in their demand for equality the Catholic population, women, and, internationally, slaves. These were not vague aspirations but specific demands, reflected in the United Irishmen's publications. For example, Tone's *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* argues in detail for the complete emancipation of Catholics. The *Northern Star*, in its enthusiastic review of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, calls for female politicians, as "I scorn the reasoning which says what has been shall be."

The United Irishmen also enthusiastically supported the non-consumption of tea and sugar, in solidarity with the struggle against slavery.

Both within as well as outside these newspapers, a number of literary writings appeared, written with a political purpose, often breaking with literary convention. Among these were essays, satire, fables, dialogue, song, poetry, etc., popularised through their newspapers, pamphlets, and leaflets.

William Pitt and Edmund Burke enjoyed special satirical attention. A prime example is a personal satire published in the *Northern Star* in 1795 under the title "Mustapha's Adoration of the sublime Sultan Pittander the Omnipotent" in which the omnipotence of Pitt and his political guile are described from the viewpoint of Mustapha, his worshipping slave.

Another satire entitled "Pitt's ghost, being an account of the death, dissection, funeral procession, epitaph, and horrible apparition, of the much lamented late minister of

Fóntacht na filíochta

Gabriel Rosenstock

Leabhar dátheangach (Fraincis–Béarla) é *If the Symptoms Persist*, dánta le Francis Combes aistrithe go Béarla ag Alan Dent agus foilsithe ag Smokestack Books (www.smokestack-books.co.uk).

Creideann Combes san fhilíocht, filíocht de shaghas áirithe, *une poésie d'utilité publique*. Is réabhlóideach an dearcadh é sin ar go leor slite. File réabhlóideach é Combes. Grianghraf de bhacach sráide a mhaisíonn clúdach an leabhair, fógra ag an mbacach á rá go bhfuil ocras air.

Cén fáth a bhfuil ocras air? Tá ocras agus tart ar Combes leis; ní gnáth-ocras é ach an cíocras sin a luann Matha (5:6): "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness." (Bhíodh an Bíobla Naofa ar fáil saor in aisce ar líne ach níl a thuilleadh, is cosúil; ní cuimhin liom gur ghearr Íosa táille ar bith ar a theagasc!)

Cén fáth a bhfuil ocras ar an mbacach? Cuimhním ar Dom Hélder Câmara, a dúirt: "Nuair a thugaim bia do na bochtáin tugtar naomh orm. Nuair a deirim, 'Cén fáth a bhfuil siad bocht?' tugtar Cumannaí orm."

Chláraigh Combes ina bhall d'Ógra na gCumannaithe sa bhliain 1968. Bhí sé óg go maith ag an am (rugadh é sa bhliain 1953). Tá a rian sin air, é dúthrachtach agus dílis i gcónaí dá fhís fhileata agus shóisialta araon.

Ní teagascóir tur é. Pléisiúr le roinnt é, dar leis, ról nó feidhm an dáin, faoi mar a roinnfeá bia agus deoch le do chairde—nó le bacach sráide:

Utilité de la poésie
Un jeune mendiant croisé dans le métro,
sur un bout de carton accroché à son cou
avait écrit ces mots:

"Comme la forêt en feu
crie vers l'eau de la rivière
je m'adresse à vous:
Donnez-moi SVP
Quelque chose à manger."

Et, semble-t-il,
des gens donnaient.
(Ce qui tendrait à démontrer
l'utilité dans nos sociétés
de la poésie)

state," is an obituary based on the fictitious death of the politician, and proof that his badness reaches to the core.

Poetry appeared in many popular forms, including song: drinking songs, folk songs, dance songs, ballads. They gave people new confidence, and channelled fears into laughter, or anger at opponents.

In politically turbulent times, songs can play an important role. Here a balladeer draws our attention to the purpose of his appearance:

> That something is a left us, we all must agree;
> Though talking's forbidden—Yet singing is free
> Plain truth may be blamed and honesty wrong;
> But sure there's no harm in an honest old song.
> . . .
> One verse for myself, Sirs; and then I have done
> Hard times and large Families make but poor fun;
> And when children for bread cry around in a throng,
> I'm oft forced to quiet their mouths with—a Song!

Ballads usually relate historical or current events, uprisings, attacks by the opponent, heroic acts of martyrs, revolts, landings. Reciting a critical poem or singing a political ballad in the field, at work, "digging" (subversive military training in the field) or at festivals expressed political opposition and an awareness of common resistance to the ruling class.

A fictitious character, Firebrand, expresses displeasure and anger at the songs sung by the people and their effect on public morality. "'Tis songs that is most to be dreaded of all things," he confesses to Billy, his informant, and continues:

"Singing, Billy, is a d—n'd bad custom, it infects a whole country, and makes them half mad: Because they rejoice and forget their cares, and forget their duty, and forget their betters. By H—n's I'll put an end to singing in this part of the country, in a short time."

To reinforce this threat he refers to the example of one of his neighbours, who "within three months . . . sent two chimney-sweepers, three blind fiddlers, a ballad-singer, and a drunken man to the black hole and the flocks for singing and playing tunes against the law."

Firebrand's fear of Billy is understandable, given lyrics like the following:

> No longer lost in shades of night
> Where late in chains we lay;
> The sun arises, and her light
> Dispels our gloom away.
> Demanding Freedom All!
> While kings combine
> We boldly join,
> Nor cease till tyrants fall.

The poetry of the United Irishmen drew its political impetus both from their own egalitarian positions and from their revolutionary role models at home and abroad. They translated a whole series of French songs, including the *Marseillaise.*

A considerable part of the poetry deals with the suffering and misery of individuals. Their pain is symptomatic of the misery of all. It describes the fate of the peasants, expresses sympathy for the exiled, compassion for the enslaved or the freedom fighters who died in battle and for their country—beacons of resistance and sacrifice. Their profoundly humane content and their social realism express forcefully the United Irishmen's compassion for their people and the essence of their political and literary practice.

Internationalism is deeply ingrained in their poetry. They stood up for the interests of the exploited and slaves. One example of this is the "Negro's Complaint":

> Trembling, naked, wounded, sighing,
> On this winged house I stand;
> Which, with poor black man is flying
> Far away from his own land.
> . . .
> Fearful waters all around me;
> Strange the sights on every hand;
> Hurry, noise, and shouts confound me,
> When I look for Negro land.
> Every thing I see affrights me;
> Nothing I can understand:
> With their scourges, white men fight me,
> If I weep for Negro land.

The literary writings of the United Irishmen are part of international and democratic liberation literature. The ideals they fought for have yet to be achieved. ★

Fóntacht na Filíochta

Bacach óg ar bhuaileas leis sa Mheitreo bhí na focail seo scríofa ar phíosa cairtpháipéir aige agus é crochta timpeall a mhuiníl:

> *"Mar a ghlaonn an fhoraois trí thine*
> *ar uiscí na habhann*
> *achainím oraibh:*
> *Tugaigí greim le hithe dom*
> *más é bhur dtoil é!"*

Agus táthar ag déanamh rud air is cosúil. (Rud a chuireann fóntas na filíochta sa tsochaí in iúl dúinn ba dhóigh leat). ★

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The fodder "crisis"

Dan Taraghan

COMRADE ROBERT Navan's letter in the May issue of *Socialist Voice* raises some interesting questions that go to the core of Marxism. It is appropriate that he raised them in the month of the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth in Trier in Germany.

The agricultural question was one that led the young Marx to a study of political economy and the whole system of capitalism.

Marx became a doctor of philosophy in 1841, at the age of twenty-three. Because of a crackdown by the Prussian authorities on radicals, an academic career was closed to him, so he took up journalism.

In October 1842 he was editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, which represented the new liberal middle classes. He wrote an article for the paper entitled "Debates on the Law of Thefts of Wood." In writing this article Marx was taking up the cause of the poor and also addressing a major issue in Prussia and the Rhineland.

No less than 83 per cent of prosecutions in Prussia, and even more in the Rhineland, were for thefts of wood. Traditionally, fallen or dead wood was free to be collected by anyone, but the growth of capitalism and the system of private property was trying to put an end to this. The wood was used by the poor for cooking and heating; now landowners were denying the poor access to anything in the forests as they sought to extend the rights of private property with laws against trespassing and hunting.

The new film by Raul Peck, *The Young Karl Marx*, in its opening scenes (*above)* shows this attack by the landowners on the poor as they gather dead wood. Before Marx, Gracchus Babeuf had seen the same thing happening in pre-revolutionary France. The aristocrats, as they sought to codify their feudal "rights," added in so-called rights to dead wood, fallen apples, etc., which had traditionally belonged to anyone.

Even today in India the Maoists are resisting the encroachment by transnational companies, such as Monsanto, on tribal territories, destroying forests. There is little doubt but that property is theft.

Addressing the specific points raised by Comrade Robert, the RTE radio programme "Countrywide," presented by Damien O'Reilly, dealt with the fodder issue on the 7th of April. (The programme can still be heard on podcast.)

Basically, the members of the IFA who were interviewed blamed the prolonged winter for the shortage of fodder. They said they hoped for a 120-day winter but planned for 140 days. The actual winter at that point was 165 days.

What they would not admit was that the fodder shortage was a result of their own actions. Milk quotas were lifted in 2015; this led to an increase in the national dairy herd by 300,000 cows. The combined beef and dairy herds are now 7.3 million. Yet there was no increase in the amount of land available for the production of fodder.

So, by being bound by a tradition of 120-day winter, IFA members gambled on making extra profits, knowing that the government would bail them out. The big farmers ignored the previous fodder crisis of 2012–13, and the fact that there are an increasing number of extreme weather events, for which they take no responsibility.

O'Reilly then interviewed a small farmer from Knocklong, Co. Limerick. These little nuggets make O'Reilly's programme well worth listening to by every communist in the country. This farmer owns 1 acre and rents the rest of his land. He did not increase his herd but he produces a surplus of fodder, so that he has enough for himself and can afford to sell any surplus to neighbours. Even if he does not sell the surplus he can put extra wrap on the bails so that it lasts two years.

In other words, the so-called fodder crisis was one created by the big farmers of the IFA when they increased herds in the expectation of maximising profits. The government allowed them to do this, instead of telling them to reduce herds, because it is in thrall to the rights of private property, like the Prussian government of the nineteenth century.

Paschal Donohoe, minister for finance, reviewed *Radical Markets: Uprooting Capitalism* and *Democracy for a Just Society* by Eric Posner and E. Glen Weyl in the *Irish Times* on the 5th of May (incidentally the anniversary of Marx's birth). He said: "The book made my head hurt and then spin." Apparently the book advocates abolishing private property in land. He had best not read the *Communist Manifesto*, as that would really sicken him.

Donohoe says in relation to the Kenny Report that its recommendations would be "an unprecedented intervention with property rights." The current government will continue to support private property rights, regardless of the common good and the impact by farmers on the environment.

The answer to Comrade Robert's two questions is Yes. ★

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