

Socialist Voice



Communist Party of Ireland
Páirtí Cumannach na hÉireann
Partisan Patriotic Internationalist
Number 168 February 2019 €1.50
www.commmunistpartyofireland.ie

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Build a People's Dáil

'We believe that all the means of producing the necessities of life, including the control of capital, all natural resources, both land and sea, should be owned and controlled by and for the people of Ireland'. **Eugene McCartan** reports on the conference organised by the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum

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

ISSN 0791-5217



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Build a People's Dáil

EUGENE McCARTAN

LATE IN January some three hundred activists from all over Ireland gathered in Liberty Hall, Dublin, to celebrate the centenary of the first Dáil Éireann. Eugene McCartan reports

The event, organised by the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum, attracted a wide range of forces, including trade union and community activists and women's and cultural groups as well as communist and republican activists.

The first session in the morning was devoted to celebrating the establishment of the first Dáil in January 1919, following the 1918 general election called by the British government. Traditionally the Irish Party took their seats in London; but, after centuries of colonial occupation and violent repression, the majority of

elected representatives, elected on behalf of Sinn Féin, refused to take their seats in the British colonial parliament and instead made the decision to establish an Irish parliament in Dublin. Only the pro-imperialist unionist members took their seats in London.

The historian Seán Byers gave a historical overview of this period. The first Dáil adopted a number of important documents at its first sitting, including the Declaration of Independence, the Democratic Programme, and the Appeal to the Nations of the World.

The second session of the morning was devoted to reflection, "Ireland in transition: A programme unfulfilled," looking back over the past hundred years at the advances made by working people, with the complete failure of the capitalist establishment, which had quickly abandoned the Democratic Programme adopted in 1919—already watered down by Sinn Féin, as it was far too radical and far too challenging for them.

Prof. Kathleen Lynch and Dr Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh addressed this legacy and the carnival of reaction that paralysed any progressive movement forward. Kathleen Lynch also offered an interesting insight into how we could build for progressive and radical advance. Dr Mac Bhloscaidh spoke of the stranglehold of sectarianism and its use as a weapon to block advance and prevent the unity of the people.

The afternoon session was devoted to "Building a People's Dáil." A number of invited speakers addressed six motions that went before the assembled delegates, covering such areas as "For a democratic Ireland," "For a neutral Ireland," "The global environmental crisis," "Partition," "People's ownership," and "Cherishing all the children of the nation equally."

Regarding partition, the motion states: "Partition was a most grave and anti-democratic act imposed upon our people by Britain and its allies in

LAURA DUGGAN

PARTITION IS the political arrangement created by British imperialism as a solution to the colonial crisis caused by the Irish Revolution.

Partition and its institutions serve only the interests of imperialism, and we should not invest them with any other significance. This division of our country is built on the centuries-long colonial domination of Ireland by Britain, the plantations and deliberate promotion of sectarian antagonisms—all for the imperialist need to secure a stable Ireland in which capitalism could thrive.

Partition has left a scar on our country, and the division of our people has left a legacy of discrimination, fracturing us along falsely created religious divisions. It has divided working people and their organisations, which for nearly a century has hindered our ability to build more effective resistance against the ills of capitalism: mass unemployment, poverty, poor housing—the list could be endless.

It was intended to divide democratic forces and the working class, bringing the Revolution safely to an end without the social transformation that it threatened.

Not just ending partition but undoing the Conquest



‘Partition was a most grave and anti-democratic act imposed upon our people by Britain and its allies in Ireland.’

Ireland. Partition can only be addressed by confronting its role in denying democracy in both parts of Ireland, producing the ‘carnival of reaction’ that Connolly foresaw, North and South. We are affirmed in our belief that it is only the working people of Ireland that have the capacity to end partition and unite our people, to establish meaningful national sovereignty and national independence in order to secure their own material needs and interests.

“We resolve to strengthen the unity of people’s organisations on a national basis and to support campaigns and solutions that strengthen the unity of our people in an all-Ireland struggle. In line with the historic tradition of Tone, Connolly, and Pearse, we oppose all manifestations of sectarianism and division and oppose all groups and forces that wish to sow further division among our people.”

The motion on people’s ownership and the rejection of capitalist ownership and domination by imperialism presents

As a result we are denied any real democracy, sovereignty, or independence. All the institutions of governance today—no longer confined to the British Parliament: it now includes the Stormont Executive, the Dáil in Leinster House, the EU, and the euro zone—serve the interests of capitalism and act as bulwarks against the people themselves exercising any meaningful democratic power.

These institutions should not be mystified by republicans and socialists. Rearranging who sits within them, or notions of bargaining with them or changing them from within, are misplaced. They protect their own class and serve imperialism equally well with our participation.

James Connolly warned us of the danger that would arise if we misunderstood this: “If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the Green Flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has

a different way forward for the people. It states: “We reject the narrow concept of democracy that confines the people’s participation to a formal vote every four or five years. We believe that all the means of producing the necessities of life, including the control of capital, all natural resources, both land and sea, should be owned and controlled by and for the people of Ireland. These resources are to be used only in a sustainable way to enhance the social and cultural development of our people, and not for the profit of a tiny elite or transnational corporations. It is the people’s wealth and should, therefore, be owned by us.”

A new “Democratic Programme for the 21st Century” was also adopted, based on the Irish people’s long struggle for freedom, embracing the Proclamation of the Irish Republic (1916) and the strategic views of both James Connolly and Patrick Pearse. The programme adopted contains two central and strategic approaches. In 1916 Pearse

planted in this country.”

While we resolutely oppose partition, we must beware of answers that will leave Ireland firmly trapped within the system of imperialism, such as the pursuit by some of a united Ireland within the European Union. A country united under the rule of another still is not free.

The European Union and its institutions were constructed to protect and advance the interests of European banks, finance houses and corporations at the expense of the people. This is reflected in the EU-imposed debt upon the people of this state. Our people have been forced to carry 42 per cent of all EU banking debt. For republicans and socialists, our goal remains a truly democratic, sovereign, independent and whole Republic, and this is the only means by which to secure the interests of the working class.

This domination is welcomed, actively supported and facilitated by a subservient economic elite, north and south of our divided country—willing junior partners in imperialism. The challenge we face is not just to end partition but to undo the Conquest, to end all manifestation of imperial domination, be it the intervention of the British state, the combined EU and

wrote that “the nation’s sovereignty extends not only to all the material possessions of the nation, the nation’s soil and all its resources, all wealth and all wealth-producing processes within the nation. In other words, no private right to property is good as against the public right of the nation.”

Also writing in 1916, James Connolly stated that the reconquest of Ireland involves “taking possession of the entire country, all its powers of wealth-production and all its natural resources, and organising these on a co-operative basis for the good of all.” In April 1916 he insisted to the Irish Citizen Army that “we are out for economic as well as political liberty.”

Planning is now under way to hold a number of regional People’s Dálaí around the country, and to involve a greater number of people’s organisations and activists in discussing the documents adopted in January and build grass-roots campaigns as well as a forum for deeper political debate.

US influence, or carried out through institutions like the ECB and IMF. Ultimately, our goal is the dismantling of all the structures and institutions of imperialism and domestic capitalism. They are all part of the one struggle.

Historical experience over the last century confirms that truth. Radical change is required if we are to fulfil the aspirations of the Fenian and Easter Proclamations and the Democratic Programme that we celebrate today. National democracy and sovereignty cannot remain abstract demands but must become the tools required if we are to own and control all natural resources, to determine all economic and social policies that favour the majority of the people, to end partition and unite our people.

The imposition of partition by the British has succeeded in its goal of limiting our ability to gather the forces and create the unity required to bring about radical change. We must continue to fight against this action in our efforts to bring about a united socialist Ireland.

Speech delivered at the celebration of the first Dáil Éireann 26 January 2019

Raise the Roof

Jimmy Doran reports on the ICTU housing conference in Dublin

Socialism or barbarism

THE TWO main demands to come out of the ICTU's January conference were the need for public housing and for the right to housing to be enshrined in the Constitution of Ireland.

The conference was attended by a cross-section of activists, representing trade unions, communities, and housing, students' and children's groups, together with some academics.

Rebecca Keating of the Mercy Law Resource Centre outlined what would be required in a right to housing. The opinion was that this right should be enshrined in the Constitution as well as in legislation, otherwise it could be overturned by the Government. The wording would need to be very tight so as not to leave it open to reinterpretation.

This would go a long way towards putting some existing practices in the housing market outside the law. If the market was pushing the cost of housing beyond people's ability to afford it, this could be challenged constitutionally. In this case it would not be profitable for the landlord class

THERE HAS been a lot of spin about the recent eviction in Co. Roscommon. The fact of the matter is that the Central Bank stated in April 2018 that more than 29,000 mortgages are in arrears for at least two years. It estimates that more than half of these will end in repossessions by the banks. Roscommon is not a one-off.

A conservative estimate is that an average of three people live in each of these households. With 15,000 repossessions coming down the line and at least three people living in each home, this will increase the number of homeless by a further 45,000 citizens. There are already 10,000 citizens on the homeless list.

The Government, despite many "programmes," initiatives, and committees of investigation, has failed to reduce the number of homeless—quite the opposite: the number continues to rise. It is quite possible that very soon this number will soar to 55,000 of our citizens without a home to live in.

‘Only the public building and public ownership and management of housing will end the merry-go-round of mortgages, arrears, eviction, homelessness, and despair.’

to continue with the orgy of its rackrenting of citizens. The state would have to become the main provider of housing for citizens. It would also limit the ability of financial institutions to evict tenants. This would further limit the interest of privateers in the housing market: if there is no room legally for excessive profits and exploitation, their reason for being disappears.

The demand for public housing was raised again and again, but the interpretation of what constitutes public housing seems to differ substantially from one speaker to the next, because they represent different interests. Lots of excuses have been raised for not building large-scale public housing—everything from lack of land to not enough builders, architects, etc., as well “not in my back yard” and ghettoisation, with some trying to tarnish what was a rare success of previous governments, the massive public house-building carried out from the 1930s to the 1960s.

It was counter-argued that there is no shortage of land, as the state controls 17 per cent of all land zoned

for housing. And there is no shortage of expertise (builders, architects, etc.) when we see the high-rise student accommodation, as well as hotels and offices, being built by speculators, generating billions in profit for the elite.

To do away with ghettoisation, public housing needs to be universally accessible so as to guarantee mixed-income tenants. Proper facilities and infrastructure have to be built in conjunction with public housing; this is a mistake made in some instances in the past.

To cut costs, public housing has to be publicly built, instead of creating a gravy train for the private sector. Public land zoned for housing must be solely for public housing.

Some speakers continued to push for the “cost rental” model of public housing. They don’t seem to understand what they are talking about, referring to affordable rents of €600 per month when in reality the cost-rental model for St Michael’s Estate, for example, came in at about €1,500 a month. The cost-rental model is a cop-out by the state,

putting the total cost and maintenance of the properties on the tenants in what is actually a permanent state asset, instead of the state paying for a public housing service available to all citizens at rents linked to income.

Nevertheless the conference is a good start to the debate on a solution to the housing crisis, which, it was agreed, is a result of the repeated failures of government policy. The citizen has nothing to lose and everything to gain; so it is essential that maximum effort is made by all to come up with a permanent, sustainable solution to the housing crisis and not to facilitate a temporary solution.

We need to transform housing for our citizens: universally accessible publicly built and publicly owned housing for all citizens as a constitutional right.

A number of regional marches were announced to launch the campaign, beginning in Cork in March, followed by one in Galway and culminating in a mass national housing demonstration in Dublin early in the summer.

The state has got off lightly up till now, as two-thirds of repossessions have resulted in the owners handing the keys back to the bank in what are termed “passive repossessions.” If a third of the repossessions that are due end in evictions, we are still looking at 5,000 Roscommons taking place in the near future.

It is reckoned that these repossessions will be concluded over the next five years, meaning an average of twenty families being put out on the side of the road every single week for the next five years.

With 17 per cent of these mortgages owned by vulture funds, this can spiral upwards very quickly as the banks continue to sell these loans. The mainstream media will not be able to keep the lid on this and tarnish five thousand families with the same brush that the McCann family were tarnished with in Co. Roscommon.

The fact of the matter is that the housing policies followed until now have

totally failed. This is the result of wage stagnation, rent increases, greed, cut-backs, precarious work, and property ownership being beyond the grasp of working people, leading to the commodification of homes and a situation where private rented accommodation is now the main form of tenure in our cities and towns—all subsidised by the state, to the tune of €15 billion over the last few years.

This public money must be used differently, in the public interest, not to line the pockets of landlords. To put this another way, housing policy has failed because of the contradictions in capitalism. Capitalism cannot ever provide the needs of society: it will always create division, inequality, and poverty; it is its very nature.

More of the same failed Government policy will only add to the homelessness figures. We need a government that puts the interests of the citizens first, not those of banks, landlords, property-owners, and vulture funds.

The CPI, as part of the campaign for public housing, has been consistently calling for an end to all economic evictions until such time as the state can provide a suitable alternative home for the individual or family concerned. Along with this, the state must build universally accessible public housing, and enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution—the right to a safe, secure home for all citizens of Ireland.

Only the public building and public ownership and management of housing will end the merry-go-round of mortgages, arrears, eviction, homelessness, and despair.

It is the failure of capitalism that is at the root of the housing crisis. The only alternative is socialism—not some temporary social-democratic sticking-plaster to patch things up within the system.

The system must be changed. It’s socialism or barbarism.



All will change, change utterly—and for the better

TOMMY MCKEARNEY

THERE IS a line from W. B. Yeats's poem "The Rose Tree." "Oh, words are lightly spoken, said Pearse to Connolly." It is not, though, something always practised by the establishment in our 26-county republic.

Their words are carefully chosen to deliver a message. Moreover, what they say and how is frequently designed to influence the popular understanding of today, or to alter how people view seminal events of the past.

There is a well-thought-out rationale for this. It is geared towards directing and dictating a narrative. To put it bluntly, the intention is to create a story that suits the aims and policies of the ruling class.

Last month's centenary of the first Dáil and the IRA action in Solloghobeg provided yet another example of this. Mainstream media coverage revealed a clear determination by the establishment not only to reinterpret the past but also to create a revised text, an Authorised Version, for the days to come.

RTE reported Solloghobeg as the place where "two Irish policemen were killed," giving the impression that the RIC was a normal civilian police force. The *Irish Times* went even further in its editorial, describing the ambush as "controversial at the time and there are still divided views about its justification," before going on to

lament the "brutality of the killings."

While nobody should rejoice at violent death, it would be difficult to fit these highly tendentious accounts into a celebration of an incident for long recognised as the first shots of a war fought for independence—moreover, a struggle against what was at the time the world's mightiest empire.

There is undoubtedly a need to challenge and correct these pejorative interpretations of seminal events in our history. However, doing so in adequate detail will have to be left to another time. It is important, nevertheless, to reflect on the underlying message being promoted by the establishment. It is also necessary to recognise the risks



‘In the present era the Irish ruling class is not as secure as it may appear to be.’

arising from this attempted manipulation of history, as other sinister elements may well seek to stamp their own interpretation on the story.

In the first instance, Ireland’s elite is undoubtedly nervous. Domestically, there are difficulties thrown up by Brexit and the Dublin government’s dependence on Brussels in relation to the issue. There is then the recent gloomy economic prognosis published by the International Monetary Fund, which shows a slowing down in the EU and warns that “policy space for countries is more limited than in 2008.”¹ And rumbling away in the background is the potential for a threatening fall-out from global disruption brought about by an unstable US president.

In the present era the Irish ruling class is not as secure as it may appear to be. Set against the wider macro-backdrop outlined above are other serious and well-known issues. There is a housing emergency, a dysfunctional health service with an increasingly militant work force, and thousands of workers struggling to get by on poverty wages. Meanwhile the long-term future of the northern six-county state is in doubt, adding to overall anxiety among the South’s elite.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that those in power would prefer if people were not to reflect positively on radical alternatives to the status quo. In particular there is a determination to ensure that people do not look favourably on institutional change initiated by grass-roots activists. By traducing the reputation of those who launched the War of Independence they hope to distract attention from its revolutionary potential, something that was crushed by reactionary elements embedded within the struggle at that time.

There is, moreover, an additional factor to be considered when the establishment and its media meddle with a long-held view of a historical event. There is, after all, a deep-seated residual respect in much of Ireland for those who fought the Black and Tans. Trying to undo this may well

open the door to other unscrupulous propagandists, happy to exploit the credibility gap created by heavy-handed revisionism.

Much of the Trump phenomenon in the United States, for example, has been based on accusations that the mainstream media produce fake news. Containing a germ of truth, this claim has allowed him to promote an even bigger lie.

The tactic is not new. The cry of *Lügenpresse* (lying press) was heard throughout 1930s Germany.

At a time when significant political change is in the offing, it becomes all the more important that a clear and progressive analysis is promoted energetically.

Consider two events held on the same day last month, one organised by the Peadar O’Donnell Socialist Republican Forum in Dublin, the other convened by a pan-nationalist coalition in Belfast.

On 26 January a large crowd attended “Beyond Brexit: The Future of Ireland,” in what was described as a conference of civic nationalism in the Waterfront Hall in Belfast. The audience heard that Northern nationalists are now looking at “new constitutional and political horizons.” The platform was occupied by senior figures from Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, and the SDLP. With the best will in the world, it is difficult to see how these four parties could agree on a future Ireland that any progressive or socialist would, or indeed could, be comfortable with.

Indeed it is a moot point whether the two Southern parties would even support an end to partition. Donnacha Ó Beacháin, associate professor of law and government at DCU, wrote recently in the *Times* (London) of a private meeting in Cork during August 1975 at which the British foreign secretary, James Callaghan, sought the opinion of his Irish counterpart, Garret Fitzgerald, and Jack Lynch, leader of Fianna Fáil, on a British declaration of intent to withdraw from the North after a fixed period. Both opposed the idea as “highly dangerous.”² There is little evidence that either party has changed

its outlook in the meantime.

As the Belfast event was taking place, hundreds of delegates from a wide range of organisations as well as individuals gathered in Liberty Hall in Dublin. Those attending this event celebrated the first Dáil Éireann and acknowledged the role of those who fought in the War of Independence. Throughout the day trade unionists and members of community, youth and women’s groups mixed with political activists and celebrated the progressive Democratic Programme of the first Dáil.

They also agreed on the basis for a new Democratic Programme for 21st-Century Ireland and called for the building of a People’s Dáil.³ While there was unanimous agreement on the need for continuing discussion and debate, the delegates were unambiguous in their support for a republic in which “all the means of producing the necessities of life, including the control of capital, all natural resources, both land and sea, should be owned and controlled by and for the people of Ireland.”

Before the event ended, delegates supported a motion condemning the attempt by the United States and the European Union to encourage a coup against the democratically elected government of Venezuela.

It hardly needs stating which event was graced by the mainstream media and which event was not. In spite of this, a clear and unambiguous message emerged from the Liberty Hall conference, and those present now have the task of promoting it. By doing so they can ensure that all in this country will change, and change utterly—and for the better.

1 Gita Gopinath, “A weakening global expansion amid growing risks,” *IMF Blog*, 21 January 2019 (<https://bit.ly/2Hqcr7n>).

2 Donnacha Ó Beacháin, “Irish elite does not want reunification,” *Times*, 1 January 2019 (<https://bit.ly/2FUAYQ7>).

3 Peadar O’Donnell Socialist Republican Forum, *Democratic Programme for a New Century* (<https://bit.ly/2tJuqv5>).

Venezuela screaming

“Make the economy scream” was Richard Nixon’s instruction to the CIA when the United States decided in 1973 to overthrow the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile.

by **ROBERT NAVAN** from the **Venezuela-Ireland Network**

OTHER COUNTRIES in Latin America have seen democratically elected leaders ousted by the United States or its proxies. Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala (1954), Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haïti (2004) and Manuel Zelaya in Honduras (2009) are some examples. There were also several attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro during his time in office.

In 2002 the United States orchestrated an unsuccessful coup against Hugo Chávez. During the brief period when Chávez was removed from office by the plotters and rogue elements among the military, Pedro

Carmona, the head of Venezuela’s largest business association, was declared head of a transitional government. He quickly moved to dissolve the National Congress and suspend the constitution of Venezuela.

Throughout these events there were no complaints or shouts from the United States or its allies about democracy. However, many Latin American countries voiced their concern that the coup had forsaken democratic principles, which of course it had.

The scenes that we are witnessing now in our television news are not spontaneous outbursts of dissatisfaction with the government but are the culmination of a process that began in 1999 when Hugo Chávez

was first elected president.

Venezuelan elections are probably the most democratic in the world, and are overseen by large delegations of international observers. No less a person than Jimmy Carter, president of the United States from 1977 to 1981, has declared the election process in Venezuela to be the best in the world. In spite of this, successive US governments have refused to recognise the result of any of these elections.

Venezuela has always been portrayed in the media as a far-left regime. Descriptions such as “failed socialist experiment” and “21st-century socialist experiment in ruins” abound. (Interestingly, these articles often come from media mouthpieces



‘Venezuelan elections are probably the most democratic in the world, and are overseen by large delegations of international observers.’

for one the biggest economic disasters in world history, the 2008 global financial crisis.) These descriptions say more about the general shift to the right in western mainstream politics and their subservient media. In fact the programme of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela resembles more the radical programme of the post-war Attlee government in Britain; but nowadays supporting the nationalising of key industries, such as coal or oil, a universal health service and affordable public housing are seen as extreme left policies.

Indeed mistakes have probably been made by the Venezuelan government since the beginning of the Bolivarian revolution; but is there a country in the world (including our own) that hasn't made mistakes, particularly in the area of economics? Not many of them have had to formulate their policies while protecting themselves from the aggression of the most powerful militaristic state in the world.

One of the criticisms from those on the left has been that Chávez should have taken the major food and drinks distributors, such as Polar, into state control and thus avoided the manipulation of food shortages. Polar, Venezuela's largest private firm,

produces the traditional PAN flour used to make *arepas*, the most popular food in Venezuela. It also owns the largest and best-known brewery in the country.

It does seem that trying to reach accommodation with big business has not worked out. You could say that the social-democratic and not the socialist model has failed in Venezuela.

Another criticism is that not enough investment and effort was made to lessen the country's dependence on oil, by diversifying into agriculture and food production. Venezuela imports about two-thirds of its food, and this leaves the country very exposed at times like the present.

Venezuela is “screaming,” and the noose is being tightened. It is difficult to see a way out that will not result in an end to democracy and probably the suspension of the constitution. The United States is unlikely to openly commit troops to an invasion, but undercover support for opponents of the elected government is already in place. Proxies such as the Organisation of American States could be used, or possibly a manufactured border incident with Colombia. Such scenarios could give the United States an excuse to intervene militarily.

There are elements in the

opposition in Venezuela that are moderate and are willing to work within the democratic structures, but they seem to be led by more extreme elements, who want all gains and traces of the revolution eliminated. Make no mistake, that's what will happen if the latter get their hands on the reins of power.

Cuba, Bolivia and Nicaragua are next in the cross-hairs of US foreign policy. There have already been parliamentary coups in Brazil, Honduras, and Paraguay. Chile and Argentina have right-wing governments. It's too early to make a prediction on the future political path of Mexico. Now is a bad time for progressives in Latin America; but the rest of the world doesn't look great for us either.

The struggle continues!

LEFT Chile 1973 US organised coup resulted in 130,000 arrested and 3,000 killed

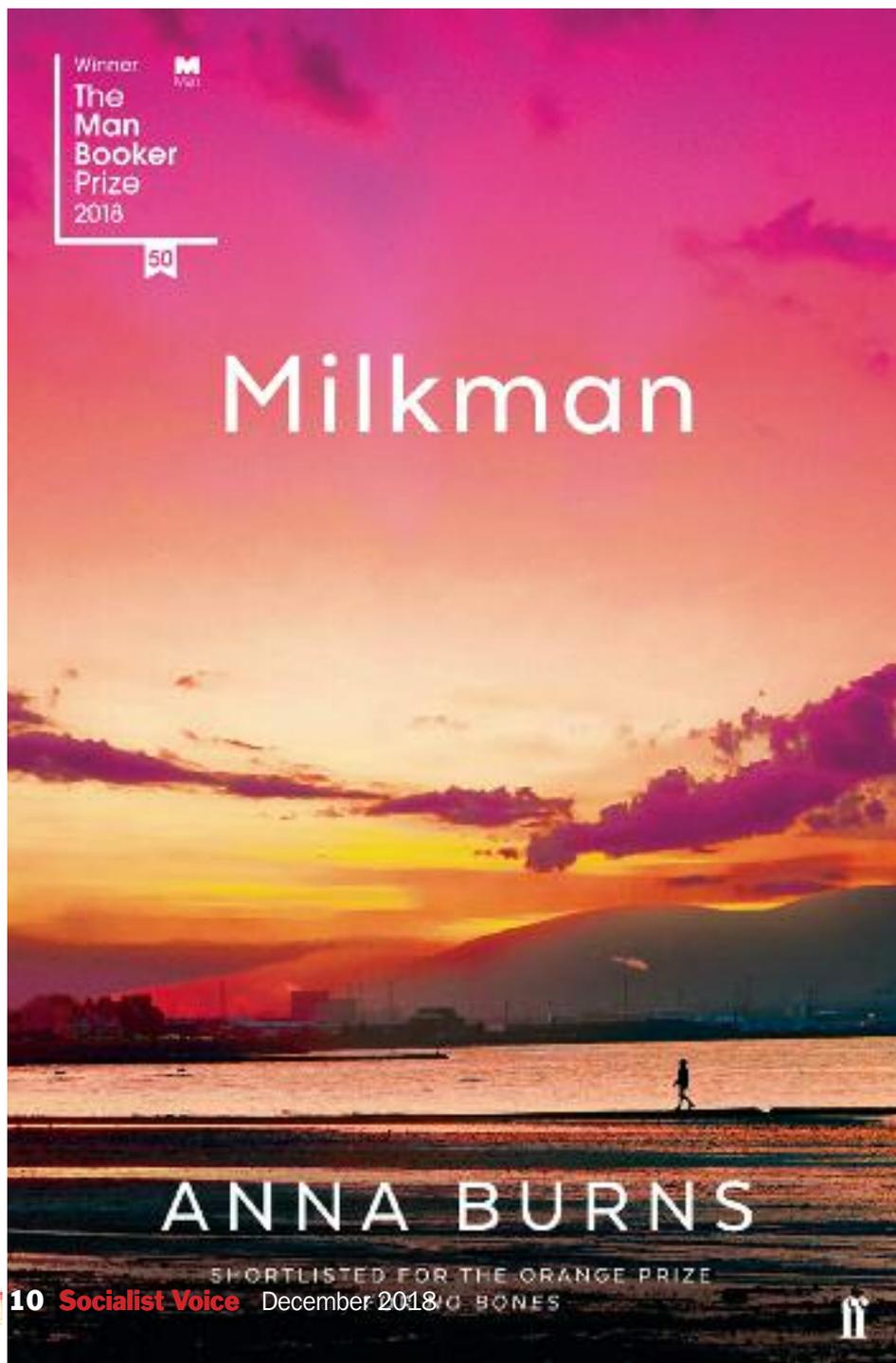
CENTRE US National security Advisor John Bolton hints at invasion

RIGHT January 2019 Less than a thousand attend an anti Maduro rally in Caracas



“Incredibly original” novel about the Northern conflict

The author Anna Burns from Belfast has won the 2018 Man Booker Prize for her novel *Milkman*



JENNY FARRELL

BURNS IS the first winner of this award from the North of Ireland, previous Irish authors being Iris Murdoch, Roddy Doyle, John Banville, and Anne Enright.

Any novel about the Troubles makes a statement feeding into the way history will record those times, how new generations will see them. Not only is there an Official Version, there are also the real experiences of both communities, and various versions within each of these. *Milkman* must be seen in this context.

Milkman reads like a dystopian novel. We are in a time and place where names are not mentioned, places not named, people referred to in terms of their relationship to the anonymous narrator, or by another designation. Almost everything is expressed indirectly, by innuendo. In this way the narrative style of the novel reflects the coded talk of Belfast, where names reveal an either-or identity, and pronunciation is shibboleth.

The world presented is both dystopian and Belfast at the same time, specifically Catholic working-class Ardoyne, in the 1970s, because those times were as horrendous as they are described here. Anna Burns conveys this, highlighting the madness by using a surreal narrative style. She also goes off on frequent tangents before returning to the main storyline. This can make for challenging reading on the one hand but also earned the judges' assessment on the other.

Ardoyne is a Catholic enclave in Protestant north Belfast, one of a number of Catholic areas that are completely isolated and therefore more vulnerable. Ardoyne is written into the novel in many ways, in the unnamed geographical detail and, above all, in the way people speak.

The title itself expresses the book's Belfast and North of Ireland theme. *Milkman* refers to the clandestine transporting of explosives in milk crates into the Catholic areas.

Of course the word "Catholic" is never used, nor is "Protestant." Instead there are "renouncers-of-the-state" and

The chairperson of the judges, the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, described it as “incredibly original,” saying that “none of us has ever read anything like this before.”

“defenders-of-the-state,” those who look “across the border,” the others “across the water.” The suggestion is that the micro-culture of everyday life is the same in both communities. However, the narrator expresses the experience of the nationalist working-class community. Reflecting general incorrect usage, the narrator refers to the two Christian denominations as opposite religions. The twain only meet in the city centre, in “mixed” bars and, unexpectedly, in the French evening class. Here the teacher struggles to get students to see the apparently familiar differently. Indeed the students are sent out to really look at a sunset—the only vivid colour in the novel, the colour that defines the book’s striking cover.

Milkman himself is a 41-year-old paramilitary sexual predator, who is stalking our narrator. She is the 18-year-old daughter of a widowed working-class mother in this particular community. It is a community under siege by the British state and its “defenders.” However, the narrator is explicitly on the margins of this community, and this is her viewpoint. She does not relate the experience at the centre of the community, which is probably why the novel has not been happily received by all. Her viewpoint is that the “renouncers” have control over her, as they have over the entire community. She is not involved in the activity of the “renouncers,” yet there is little she can do to separate herself, live an independent life.

Milkman and another paramilitary pursue her, indeed attempt to coerce her. At the same time the narrator does not hide the fact that this crazy situation results from the aggressive, humiliating and controlling treatment of the community by the armed forces of the occupying state.

The absence of colour, of smells, and taste, is very noticeable. People in this place and at this time do not experience life fully. This is a half-life in the shadows, a deprived life, diminished in what life should be, by severe restrictions, curfews, unnerving total observation by state and “renouncers,” brutality and violent deaths. Indeed killings and deaths resulting from the

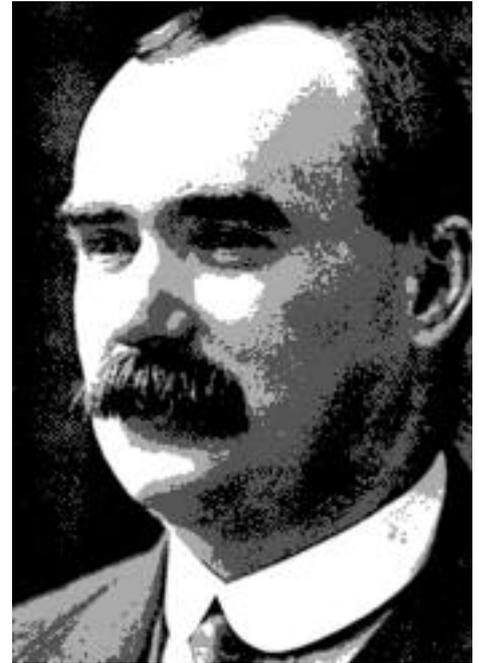
all-pervasive violence far outweigh natural deaths. Every family here has lost at least one relative, frequently more.

Readers who remember those days know how true this feels. Even children cannot imagine non-violent deaths. However, the novel does not describe these graphically. Not the violence is shown but its effect on the people within the community, its toll on their personal freedom and entitlement to human living.

Part of this dystopian feel of greyness and absence of humane living is the novel’s statement that people feel unentitled to happiness, especially to a fulfilling, loving relationship with a partner. Relationships are broken off when partners get too close. This adds significantly to the feeling of a life that is lived on the margins, an incomplete life. Only the burst of colour when the students of the French class are sent to really see the sun set over Belfast Lough indicates at this level that another way of life is possible. And it is cross-community.

Despite the sense of entrapment, some of the community who people this novel rebel, and some do look for happiness. The narrator is known for reading books while walking, books that are removed from the twentieth century. She wants nothing to do with this reality around her and actively tries to separate herself from it. This is not entirely successful. Others who stand out for resistance are women—including the traditional housewives who break the curfew and engage in bin-lid banging to alert neighbours to danger. Early feminists also make an appearance in the story.

Milkman is a reminder of the bad old days. It documents aspects of the working-class experience of the Troubles. Other experiences, like that at the centre of the community, are not Burns’s theme. This novel reflects in a surreal tone the experience of a young woman on the periphery of her community, where she was not entirely on her own. It is an experience that was defined by the military force of the state and the responses such violence creates in the besieged population.



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‘A majority of the British ruling class, along with the EU, wish for Britain to remain within the EU.’



it, partially leave it, or “sort of” leave it. It was a British exit from the EU. Plain and simple.

Because of EU rules, Ireland is not allowed to have, negotiate or make a bilateral trade agreement with Britain similar to what it had before we joined the EEC in 1973.

What our gombeen political class are not doing is demanding from the EU that the interests of Ireland are catered for after Brexit, even from their neo-liberal standpoint. Instead the subservient Government are siding with the EU against Britain, which also happens to be our largest trading partner, and against the decision made by its citizens to leave the EU.

The EU is doing to Britain exactly what it did to Ireland during the financial crash, when Jean-Claude Trichet, president of the EU Central Bank, told Michael Noonan that “a bomb would go off in Dublin” if we did not pay off the bond-holders and bail out the banks. They have now done exactly the same to Britain, saying there will be no agreement to leave the EU without the “backstop” and therefore an agreement only on the EU’s terms.

The EU and its anti-democratic nature has once again proved itself to be an enemy of independent, sovereign decision-making.

Quite obviously, the backstop is unacceptable to Britain, as it claims the north-east of Ireland as part of its national territory. What is not being mentioned is that under the Belfast Agreement there can be no change to the constitutional position of the North without a majority of the citizens voting for it. A majority of them voted to remain in the EU; so this has constitutional implications for Britain, the EU, and internationally.

A majority of the British ruling class, along with the EU, wish for Britain to remain within the EU. They decided to renege on the decision by the British people by remaining in the customs union, with all its regulatory obligations, thinking that the British public could be fooled by the establishment’s narrative of pending economic disaster. But the British working class are not fools. They did not fall for this narrative, and they

There is a lot more fiction than fact in the Brexit debate, the smoke and mirrors being created by the establishment here, in Britain, and in the European Union argues **Jimmy Doran**

The Government are up to their necks in the propaganda war, and have failed to deal with Brexit in Ireland’s interest. Instead they have propped up the false narrative created in Brussels.

Ever since the Brexit vote in Britain the EU and the majority of the British ruling class, supported by the mainstream media, have attempted to create the narrative that the vote was a result of xenophobia whipped up by the far right and was voted in because of opposition to immigration.

This is pure fiction. The fact of the matter is that the areas where there is least immigration were the ones that voted for Brexit by a massive majority. The reason these areas voted for Brexit had nothing to do with immigration. These were the industrial heartlands of Britain, which have been devastated since Britain joined the EU. British industries have been destroyed, and with them the lives of millions of working people.

The vote to leave had nothing to do

with xenophobia and everything to do with the damage the EU has done to British industry and jobs.

Teresa May’s phoney Brexit deal has been rejected by the Parliament and has left the House of Commons in disarray. It is now likely that there will be a no-agreement Brexit. This will mean that the so-called “backstop” is out of the picture, with the EU threatening Ireland with a “hard border.”

We must remember who’s doing the threatening. It is not Britain’s border, or Ireland’s border: it is the EU’s border. It is up to the EU to sort out this problem in the interest of its members, in other words Ireland, the only member affected by it.

This is what the Government should be dealing with: a smooth transition for Ireland and its citizens. It should not be assuming that Britain is going to remain in the customs union with an agreed backstop, thereby reneging on the result of the referendum, which was that Britain would leave the EU—not “kind of” leave

know why they voted to leave the EU: for economic independence and to regain national sovereignty.

Under the World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (article XXIV:5, clause 3), Britain will be allowed to have free trade with the EU for ten years while it negotiates a new trade deal. This is not being discussed on the radio or in the newspapers; instead Operation Fear is imposed from every angle. People are being told they won't be able to buy even a sandwich or a pint of Guinness after Brexit.

This is all utter nonsense; and the citizens of Britain and Europe will see through the lies. The open borders for trade within the EU are self-regulatory, in that all members comply with the regulations, and there are no tariffs. If Britain wants to deal with the EU after Brexit it will have to do the same; so there is no need for queues at borders, whether "hard" or "soft."

There will be random checks, such as exist now, for what would be deemed illegal goods. (Mind you, this didn't stop Tesco putting horse meat in beefburgers.) If British companies are found to be outside the regulations they will be dealt with by the legal system.

The only thing standing in the way of this is if the EU wants to impose tariffs on trade with Britain. In that case it would not be possible, and there would be delays, or Britain could choose to end trade with the EU; but with so much trade between Britain and EU countries it is unlikely that the capitalist class will want to lose this market.

The EU has to be seen to punish Britain for leaving, or other countries will demand to leave also. But whatever happens, the decision will be made by big business and the ruling elite in their own class interest.

Many countries would be very happy to begin trading with Britain that are not allowed now under EU regulations. They will now be free to trade wherever they want.

The British people have taken the first step towards economic independence by rejecting control by EU capital. The next step is for us to do the same with the native capitalist class.



▲ "As Trump and his allies gang up against what they call a Venezuelan dictatorship, here are the numbers showing that Venezuelan president Maduro has been elected with a higher competitive vote and a greater proportion of all possible votes than any of those trying to oust him."—RedFish



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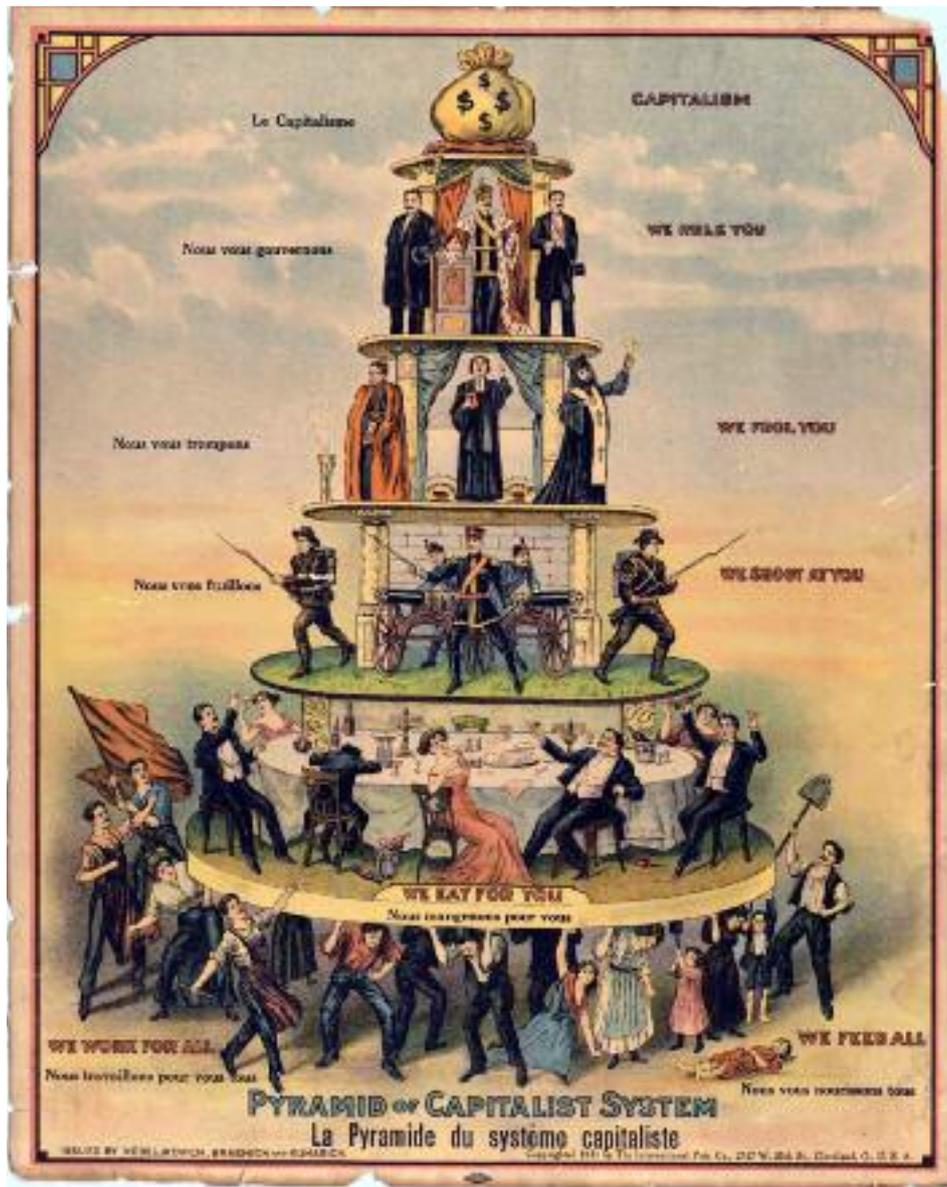
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The modern state of the western capitalist model comes in many forms, but generally it has a central government to develop, oversee and implement state policy and law. It has a judiciary to oversee and apply the law. It has a form of law enforcement, i.e. police and secret service, etc., to ensure that people abide by the law; it has courts and a prison system to ensure that those who don't abide by the law are punished or penalised; and the modern state will have some form of armed forces to protect its borders and, in some cases, to extend its sphere of influence.

Within all these institutions there is an army of civil servants, who take on the function of running and maintaining state policy.

Conventional thought would say that from these structures stems the rest of society, organised in different areas, ways, and means, including agriculture and industry, services to education, and everything in between.

There are those who are employers, and those who are employable, those who are dependent and those who are independent; and all must abide by the law of the land, whereby each member and each section of society is equal, has access and is able to direct state affairs through the democratic procedures and practices that have been established.

This summary of the state defines it as a neutral actor, a steward between all the various strands and groups in society, acting above and outside classes.

However, this too is another illusion, perpetuated throughout our society, only becoming convention because the true nature of the state is camouflaged by those very powers that have and control state power.

The premise we need to begin with, in reference to the state, is that, as Lenin explained, "bourgeois states are most varied in form, but their essence is the same: all these states, whatever their form, in the final analysis are inevitably the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie."

The conclusion reached here by Lenin is worthy of some thought, because understanding this will allow us to understand the class nature of the state, thereby shattering the illusion that the state is an arbitrary actor and allowing us,

The capitalist illusion and the independent state

EOGHAN O'NEILL

IN THIS SERIES on the Capitalist Illusion I have tried to expose as clearly and plainly as possible the exploitative class nature of the capitalist system at the level of both the individual worker and internationally. The next task is to clearly understand how all this is facilitated within borders, structures and laws, created by

citizens of a state, in order for us to further understand the exploitative system and its ability to perpetuate itself.

When dealing with the state it would do well for readers to read Lenin's book *The State and Revolution* (from which I have taken some extracts). Even though it's more than a hundred years old it's as relevant now in Ireland as it was in Russia in 1917.



‘...bourgeois states are most varied in form, but their essence is the same: all these states, whatever their form, in the final analysis are inevitably the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.’

as a class, to expose the class nature of the state for those who are still spellbound by its illusion. To do this it is important at this stage that we give a brief outline of political economy, notably using Oskar Lange’s writings on the subject as a frame of reference, in order for us to embed our analysis and critique in Marxist theory.

We as a species have adapted our natural world (resources) to satisfy our needs and wants and have gone through various stages of historical development—from slave to feudal to capitalist. The activity of creating goods is known as production, and human labour is the effort and time an individual contributes to producing goods or services. Products are goods resulting from production, and our activity in the material world is part of the social process of production, which determines the productive relations, which in turn determine the distribution relations.

The ownership of the means of production (factories, ports, railways, roads, tools, resources, etc.) determines how labour is organised, divided, and put to use (productive relations) and how, through exchange mechanisms, goods meet our needs (distribution relations). The ownership structure determines who owns the products, hence who decides how they are distributed.

Ownership can be either private or social. If it is private it belongs to an individual or group, such as a family or company, and does not include every member of society. If it is social it is the common property of all citizens, and so its production and distribution are directed by all members of society, or those mandated by society, to meet the needs of all members of society.

The production and distribution of goods and services has developed over time. Historically there have been five basic modes of production: primitive communal, slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist. These modes have either been antagonistic or non-antagonistic. They have also developed through transitional stages, a mix of modes, where remnants of

the old society persist and survive in the new dominant mode of production; think of Britain’s (capitalist) parliamentary democracy under a (feudal) constitutional monarchy.

In antagonistic modes (slave, feudal, capitalist) not all members lay claim to the ownership of the means of production. This causes a split in society into distinct groups, which we label classes. In a capitalist society there are those who own the means of production (capitalists) and those who operate the means of production (labour).

These two classes have interests that are antagonistic to one another, because the share of total wealth of capital and labour expands at the expense of the other; however, it is only the capitalist class that actually don’t create wealth, they only take ownership of it. Labour, the productive mass of the people, in their relationship to the means of production create the wealth, which is appropriated by the capitalist.

Only one of these classes is actually necessary for the production of goods and services to meet the needs and wants of society.

It is vital at this stage that we make this distinction—that class is a relationship rather than a category construct—so that when we make reference to class we think of it in these terms: the relationship between the individual and the ownership of the means of production.

This is the distinguishing feature that separates the working class from the capitalist class. The wage system that exists in capitalist countries, the category that many people mistake as defining class, we must remember is a capitalist construct, developed by capitalists, and is in existence in order for the capitalist to be able to get more value from the worker than they pay them in wages—a non-equivalent exchange—without the worker being conscious of the fact that they are being exploited.

Part 2 will be published in the March issue.

Christy Moore to unveil a plaque to Kildare communists



A plaque to the memory of the Kildare communist Frank Conroy, killed in Spain while fighting with the International Brigades, will be unveiled in June in Kilcullen Heritage Centre, Co. Kildare, by Christy Moore.

Frank Conroy was born on 25 February 1914 in Kilcullen and was killed on 28 December 1936 at Lopera. His father, Michael Conroy, a baker by trade, worked in Michael O’Connell’s bakery in Kilcullen.

The plaque was presented to Nessa Dunlea of the Kilcullen 700 committee by the Frank Conroy Commemoration Committee, on behalf of the Friends of the International Brigades, Ireland. It is a twin of the one presented to the town council of Lopera in April 2016 by the FIBI.

Bono at Davos

DAN TARAGHAN

I USED TO own an Alsatian dog. He was very partial to a dog biscuit called Bonios. When I first heard that Paul Hewson was known as “Bono” I was unable to dissociate him from the dog biscuit. He used to hang around Grafton Street in Dublin with the other members of U2. Personally, I considered them fairly mediocre.

However, since then they have become a global brand. Hewson is reckoned to have a net worth of about \$700 million. In January he appeared at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and made a number of statements about capitalism that were widely quoted in the capitalist media.

Hewson is a bit like the dog. The dog would perform to get a Bonio; Hewson does the same—otherwise he would not appear at Davos.

Davos is an invitation-only event. It comprises the CEOs of the top 1,000 companies in the world, together with politicians, academics, and others. In order to be invited you would have to ingratiate yourself with the capitalist class.

Hewson made a number of statements, such as that capitalism is not “immoral,” it is “amoral.” This profundity is about as meaningful as saying the transmission system in a car is amoral. Capitalism is a mode of production, not a religious code. Just as the car needs a driver to start it, so capitalism needs human beings. On the one hand you have individuals or groups of capitalists who band together in order to use their capital to make a profit. In the early days of the capitalist mode of production they would have set up a manufacturing business and produced something to be sold for a profit. In order to sell for a profit you have to look at costs. One of those costs is labour.

Say the business is the manufacture of nails; then at each stage from the raw material of the iron or steel, machinery, infrastructure, all stages will have labour

costs. These labour costs give value and are the source of the profit. The lower the labour costs the greater the profit. So, when the workers organise, form unions, and seek better wages and conditions, this will affect the amount of profit. It is the capitalist who is immoral, seeking to keep wages and terms of employment to a minimum.

If Hewson ever looks around he will see child labour, precarious working conditions and slave wages anywhere that the capitalist mode of production exists.

I am not a fan of their music, but they are reckoned to make €5 million from each performance. When the Government introduced a cap on artistic earnings of €250,000, U2 moved their business to the Netherlands. To put it another way: instead of having their business pay its due taxes here they moved it elsewhere, to maximise profits. All perfectly legal, but hardly “amoral.”

Another statement from Hewson is that capitalism has “taken more people out of poverty than any other ism.” How he came to this conclusion boggles the mind. It might sound good to the people at Davos, but for everyone else it is bonkers.

Supporters of capitalism, from Thomas Piketty (author of *Capital in the*

Twenty-First Century) to Warren Buffet (the Sage of Omaha), recognise that more wealth is concentrated in fewer hands than at any time in the past. Looking specifically at U2: essentially, they produce sound and songs using rhythms that appeal to an audience. In a live show they will invest in lighting, venue, etc. Profit is derived from takings, sponsorships, sales of music, less the labour costs of riggers, ticket-collectors, etc., and tax. They don’t get the takings and distribute them equally to all who put the show together. They maximise profits by keeping labour costs down.

Hewson may have noticed people fleeing sub-Saharan Africa in order to reach Europe and have a chance of a better life. Capitalism has never taken more people out of poverty than any other ism. In South America colonial forces from Spain and elsewhere not only decimated the indigenous populations but raped these countries of natural resources and assets, such as gold, silver, copper, and rubber. The colonialists from Europe did the same in North America.

It is highly likely that there will be a coup against the democratic forces in Venezuela, supported by the United States and Britain. Even in Ireland the English asset-stripped the country of our forests and attempted to destroy our culture. On the other hand the Soviet Union, Cuba and China lifted millions out of poverty and gave education and a secure standard of living, despite attempts to undermine it.

Capitalism produced fascists like Hitler, and the Holocaust. If it continues as it is it will destroy the planet and human existence.

When the Paradise Papers exposed Hewson as using property investments structured through Malta to avoid tax, his comment was: “It’s just some smart people we have working for us trying to be sensible about the way we’re taxed.”

Why pay fees to these tax planners and instead just pay your taxes? That is a question of morality. Few capitalists are that ethical.

The World Economic Forum says it wants to end world poverty by 2030. As John Wayne might have said, “That’ll be the day!”

