

Socialist Voice



Communist Party of Ireland
Páirtí Cumannach na hÉireann
Partisan Patriotic Internationalist
Number 180 February 2020 €1.50
www.commmunistpartyofireland.ie

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“... For the Irish problem is a problem of the Irish race . . . rooted in the racial characteristics of the people themselves.”

Captain Hugh Pollard

(head of Information Section, Royal Irish Constabulary),
in *The Secret Societies of Ireland: Their Rise and Progress* (1922)

Page 2 Elections come and go but there are no shortcuts for what our class needs to secure argues
Eugene McCartan

There are no shortcuts

SOCIALISM

EUGENE McCARTAN

OVER THE course of the general election campaign it was clear that a general feeling of bewilderment and boredom, in equal measure, was the reaction of many working families to the talking heads pontificating on television and radio in trying to interpret or reinterpret what a political party said or meant to say, or which of the politicians won with this sound-bite as against that sound-bite.

The political commentators and analysts, always eager to give their “considered opinions,” while being presented as non-partisan and objective, carefully steer the people’s understanding into safe water, offering tame solutions for the establishment.

Over the course of the election campaign, did politics get below the surface to deal in any real way with the issues facing our people daily? The questions of an overworked labour force, precarious employment, low wages, all failed to make it to the studio performances.

The same goes for the housing and homelessness crisis, never mind the impending environmental abyss that our world now stares into. While spoken about a lot, they did not address why we have such crises in the first place.

Elections within this corrupt and bankrupt political system become more and more removed from the real concerns of working people. Workers, in increasing numbers, are recognising that solutions are not to be found in the institutions that control and govern their lives. No matter who you vote for, the same economic and social policies will be pursued by whatever combination of parties forms a government.

This is the same process that is developing throughout the member-states of the European Union. There

are multiple political parties but only a single economic model imposed upon the working class, from Athens to Dublin—slight variations on a single theme: the primacy of the markets and market forces and securing the interests of big business, the interests of capital, i.e. money and those who own and control it. All other matters are secondary to securing those interests.

Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, the Green Party and Labour Party peddle the same line. The system is the best there is; all we need to do is tweak it a little here and there. All play for the “hard-pressed middle”—in other words, the professional classes, where the greatest number of regular voters feel they have a stake in the system.

The “coping classes,” who have their own private health insurance, whose children attend well-financed schools, who rarely if ever use public transport, may be feeling a bit of a squeeze in regard to charges for private child care, or rage against the universal social charge. The auction politics so evident was for securing these people’s votes.

Meanwhile on the formerly self-styled “revolutionary left,” Solidarity and People Before Profit could not do or say anything that could distinguish them from old-fashioned left-reformism and opportunism. All the parties proclaiming themselves to be on the left offered nothing more than a reheated system, a better form of capitalism, tweaking spending here and not there.

If working people want real, meaningful change, then electoralism is a dead end. At this stage of the struggle for radical change, working people need to realise that their concerns will only gather dust in the corridors of Dáil Éireann without their own independent political struggles within communities, within their places of work.

We need to build and develop our own strength and organisation outside these mechanisms of control. This is an ideological struggle, coupled with building resistance wherever and whenever we can.

The future belongs to us, but only if we organise to bring it about. It will not be given to us on a plate. ★

“Auschwitz Untold” stayed that way



LETTER

On 26 and 27 January, More4tv broadcast a two-part documentary called “Auschwitz Untold: In colour.”

In at least one respect the word “untold” is a perfect description of the story of the liberation of Auschwitz (above) as far as the role of the Soviet army is concerned. The documentary ended with one reference to the approaching “Russian army” and one film clip showing Soviet soldiers, though not informing viewers who they were but with an (approving) description by an Auschwitz survivor that they were soldiers in a different uniform, and they spoke English.

The rest of the conclusion of this documentary concentrated on the liberation of other camps by the US army, with film clip after film clip and commentary after commentary describing in detail one or other aspect of their role in liberating camps. This was “balanced” by one further reference to Soviet soldiers liberating camps.

And if we had not got it at this point, the end of the documentary then moved entirely to the United States, where some of the participants (Auschwitz survivors) now live.

Even after seventy-five years these documentary-makers, along with politicians and “historians,” display extraordinary levels of meanness and revisionism in pursuance of their unrelenting propaganda war. There is not much we can do about More4, but if we look a little closer to home—and at RTE in particular—there is more than enough to get our teeth into.

Declan McKenna
Co. Dublin

We have an invigorated working class ready to do battle with the state

Workers' Rights Campaign launched



UNIONS

THE TRADE UNION Left Forum launched its Workers' Rights Campaign in Dublin last month. The campaign is centred on the abolition of the Industrial Relations Act (1990) and all anti-union legislation, to be replaced with a Fair Employment Act that would guarantee—

- 1 the right to union access
- 2 the right to union recognition
- 3 full collective bargaining rights
- 4 an end to the voluntarist industrial relations system.

The meeting was well attended, with about sixty activists present. There were a number of excellent speakers from five unions, followed by a Q&A session and a lively discussion on the way forward for the campaign.

The campaign has a twin-track approach: getting anti-union legislation abolished and replaced with a Fair Employment Act, coupled with informing workers of their rights as they are under existing legislation.

Everyone received a copy of the TULF's pamphlet "Know Your Rights in the Workplace," the latest WRC leaflet, and a to-do list describing a number of actions and initiatives individual workers and union members can take to advance the campaign's aims. These are all available for downloading from www.tuleftforum.com/news/.

There will be a follow-up public meeting on "Know Your Rights in the Workplace" in the near future, date and venue to be announced.

So what can you do to support the Workers' Rights Campaign?

- Raise the 1990 act in your union branch for discussion.
 - Encourage your branch to endorse the demand to repeal the 1990 act.
 - Distribute the WRC leaflet and "Know Your Rights" pamphlet in your union branch.
 - Send the pamphlet and leaflet to the union executive.
 - Request the union to affiliate to the campaign.
 - If you are a member of a political party, community group, or tenants' association, ask them to affiliate to the TULF Workers' Rights Campaign.
 - Ask your union to donate funds, or to print some of its material.
 - Propose motions for section or regional structures.
 - Propose a motion for your union's delegate conference.
 - Follow up on resolutions and demand action on them.
 - Invite someone from the TULF to address your union branch.
 - Suggest the same to other branches.
 - Help distribute the booklet and leaflet.
 - Get your union or branch to buy copies for distribution.
 - Volunteer to distribute leaflets etc. at your or other union conferences.
 - If you cannot get a motion on the 1990 act passed, try to get one demanding the right to union access, recognition, and collective bargaining.
 - Offer a particular skill you think could be of use in the campaign.
 - Raise the issues in any other organisation you are a member of.
- The majority of workers are not

members of a trade union. Have you any ideas or suggestions on how to reach them?

- Encourage friends and relatives to join a union.
- Encourage non-union workmates to join the union.
- Read the "Know Your Rights" pamphlet and discuss it in your union branch and work-place.
- Get active in your union.
- Join the Trade Union Left Forum (tuleft@gmail.com).
- Follow the TULF social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and web site).

So far four unions have adopted it as union policy to abolish the 1990 act, namely Mandate, Connect, Unite, and the civil service section of Fórsa, representing a total of 153,000 union members. A number of other unions are to debate and hopefully adopt similar motions at their conferences this year.

Working-class anger is growing. Workers are sick and tired of poverty pay and poor working conditions. Confidence is growing among the working class as they see organised workers fighting back around the world, from Chile to India and throughout Europe, against austerity, inequality, the effects of capitalism.

Confidence among ordinary working people has been growing. The campaign against water charges awakened people to what can be achieved if we stand together. The recent success of French workers' general strike against their government has added fuel to this fire.

As we start the 2020s we have an invigorated working class ready to do battle with the state and which will not accept the crumbs off the table any longer. In the words of James Connolly—

Some men, faint-hearted, ever seek
Our programme to retouch,
And will insist, whene'er they speak,
That we demand too much.

'Tis passing strange, yet I declare
Such statements give me mirth,
For our demands most moderate are,
We only want the earth. ★



An honest public message from Fine Gael

FINE GAEL

ROLL UP! Roll up! On offer today we have for you all your needs, wants, and desires, neatly wrapped in this leaflet, which explains all our plans for you, our most valued citizen! Let all your worries fade away as we promise you, the early risers, the sun, moon, and stars.

Friends, do not look back and dwell on the past: face forward, listen to what we have on offer for you today, as we continue to grow in our resolute belief that our country is the best little country in the world to do your business in!

For too long our job in running this country has been shackled and constrained by having to provide and pay for public services and other provisions that distract us from our real

job of opening up the economy for the glorious entrepreneurs who are so eager to take on those industries.

Our freedom to govern as we want has been denied, the freedom of our entrepreneurs to excel has been constricted, the freedom of our international partners to invest has been limited. If we can't offer these captains of industry the freedom that they cry out for, what type of democracy have we got?

Yes, we have overseen the worst housing crisis in the history of the country, and, yes, there are more than 10,000 people homeless, close to 4,000 of them children; but we say to you today, we will build those hotels!

We will also make public land freely available for investment funds and construction companies to build those

houses for the trendy city-dweller, who would love nothing more than to live the "Friends" life, with their shared facilities. Or those families, eager for the country air: we have developers ready to build more housing estates on huge barren lands. Go on, just take that long, scenic commuter-belt drive to see what life you are missing.

You may say to us, What about the record half million people and more on hospital waiting-lists, which have been increasing year after year. We say to you: Exactly! That is exactly what you get with a public health service! So our goal, for your benefit, is to slash that cash—your hard-earned tax money—on a failing public health service and channel those much-needed subsidies to the private hospitals that see your ill-health as the key to their success. They

Leaving the EU is just the beginning

BREXIT

EUGENE MCCARTAN

THE BRITISH state left the European Union on the 31st of January, after nearly three years of political theatre, manoeuvring, backstabbing, and manipulation.

How the ruling class now manage this process will depend very much on what the working class does. Many on the left have adopted a wait-and-see approach, thereby allowing the ruling

forces a somewhat free hand as negotiations open up on the British state's future relationship with the EU.

Not all voices in Britain have remained passive. Some, like the LEFT grouping, are attempting to mobilise workers to begin articulating and building for the type of Britain they wish to see after its departure from the EU.

The EU will not be the same as it was, now that a major country has left it. Equally, among the member-states workers are beginning to assert themselves. There have been a

Yes, we have overseen the worst housing crisis in the history of the country, and, yes, there are more than 10,000 people homeless

want to take your sickness and turn it into their profits. It's a no-brainer. They'll make it so comfortable for you that you won't want to get better!

Have we had to make cuts in a wide range of regional and community schemes, education budgets, council budgets, welfare budgets, to sell off, give away and privatise public lands, services, and utilities? We hold our hands up honestly and admit we have; but in our defence it was only because we actually have no say in the matter.

We had to bail out the European banking system by taking on 46 per cent of EU-wide banking debt. We were ordered to! So, yes, we do have to compensate, and will compensate, the wealthiest bankers, investors and industrialists here at home, in Europe and the United States for generations to come; because we'd rather have the Troika dictate policy from abroad than have it visible in the country.

However, we see this as an opportunity, as now they are fully invested in the country, and they want in on what we are giving away!

If you haven't been convinced of what we have to offer, then we have three words for you: G! D! P! You see, we are all about growth—growth in flexible jobs, growth in consumption, growth in production, growth in foreign direct investment. We need a modern work force, available to work many jobs, any hours, at any time, for any amount of pay available.

Our industrial policy is the commonsense approach. Make our economy as attractive as possible to those who want to invest, so we don't have to!

number of mass workers' mobilisations, including general strikes in Greece and France. In particular, the Macron government, which came into office with the backing of the EU Commission and all the French establishment parties for its programme of savage cuts and attacks on workers' gains, is now locked in battle with the French working class over its economic and social policies.

The crisis within the EU is manifesting itself both industrially and

Don't want to pay tax? No problem! Want to write off your expenses? Easy! Want to take control and ownership of our water, health, education, transport, postal, energy and emergency services? Done, and done. We will follow those EU rules to the letter. After all, it's the law now!

So, let us all party once more, and ask not what your country can do for you but what foreign direct investment can do for your country!

Look at how successful we are, boasting number 5 in the world for number of billionaires. Without us, and those pursuing and implementing these policies, they wouldn't be here. Don't worry about Fianna Fáil or Labour saying or repeating more or less the same thing: remember, we are the safe pair of hands!

Don't be taken in by the illusions of Sinn Féin, Social Democrats, Richie Boy Barrett, et al., proposing a fairer, better society, a fairer, better capitalism. Their answer to all the problems more or less boils down to taxing the rich and the transnational corporations, to get a fairer share of the wealth created. A noble gesture indeed, but ultimately a fruitless endeavour.

Folks, we are realists, and it's the capitalists with their FDI and TNCs, EU treaties and laws, that are the bedrock of the Irish economy. They fuel our growth on the basis of our implementing the said policies, following their rules, and abiding by their laws. By interfering or meddling in their business, the next government risks being the next SYRIZA, leaving you and the whole country in a worse state!

Do these people think they can just

politically. In many member-states the populist right is attempting to capture working people's frustration by identifying and attacking the wrong enemy, thereby deflecting the people's understanding onto those who are not their enemies but potential allies.

The essential struggle about and within the EU continues to be for sovereignty and democracy.

Here in Ireland, workers and all democratic forces need to mobilise to ensure that there is no "hard" British

step in and make these demands? It's the equivalent of poking a tiger with a sharp stick and expecting it to dance. They would be laughed out and then eaten alive in Europe and in the boardrooms. We know these guys; we've worked with them, and they trust us to have their interests taken care of.

So beware of false promises; as was said of us, they are writing cheques that their party can't cash! It is we who should be grateful that they supply us with so many flexible jobs for the modern family! Undermining them would undermine our whole economy and send us spiralling into another economic crisis. Don't think for one second that any alternative party could implement their programmes; not in this system they won't!

So we say to you, the good people of Ireland: Trust us to bring you forward into this decade, where we will ensure that our whole economy is run efficiently by the private market, where we can be left with administering the rule of corporate law given to us by our partners in Europe. We say: No more failing public services, only profitable companies! Let us help grow our transnational industries and financial services by making it as cheap as possible to set up here! Let us get that number 1 spot for billionaires! Let us be good Europeans and pay back all their debts! Let us open our democratic arms and welcome foreign capital—but restrict foreign nationals! We will win, and once we have all these other things in order we can then worry about the climate emergency, and our individual behaviour that has caused it.

That is our promise to you! ★

border in our country, dividing our people. We need to ensure that the Irish state is pushed to demand that the economic and customs border between the EU and the British state is down the Irish Sea, not across our country.

We will find natural allies within the British labour movement who have a long history of opposing British control and interference in Ireland. Those allies will not be found within the British establishment, or the political parties that serve their interests. ★

Leo Liberal lies

“We all partied”—Brian Lenihan

“We are living way beyond our means”—Charlie Haughey

“We will not stand idly by”—Jack Lynch

“It took Ireland thirty years to become an overnight success”—Bertie Ahern

RETIREMENT

JIMMY DORAN

THE ESTABLISHMENT keep repeating the mantra that in twenty years' time there will be far fewer people working than there are now, and more people in retirement. This has now become the accepted narrative of the mainstream media. And it is a lie.

This lie has been repeated so often it has now become fact and the common belief. But quite the opposite is true: the work force in the Republic today is in excess of 2.3 million, which is substantially higher than thirty years ago, when in the 1980s there were fewer than 1 million people working.

In 2028 the Irish state will have the highest retirement age in Europe, at 68. At 66 today we are two years higher than the EU average. We have almost 30 per cent fewer older people than the EU average.

According to the most recent EU statistics, the average proportion of

The folly of our democracy

PARTY POLITICS

EOGHAN O'NEILL

THIS IS OUR democracy. It boils down to political parties arguing over semantics on policy without having any real substantive choice on policies.

I see, hear and read about the hopes of many people for a political change, where many believe that we are on the precipice of a fundamental change in the political landscape, not seen since the days of the Irish Revolution. The hopes and dreams are sincere, and there is a real demand and need for a total shift in Irish politics. However, just changing the faces and names of those in government does not change the power and class relations.

I welcome the downfall of the monopoly of the Big Two—Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael—and I really hope that a progressive coalition can be formed to sit as the 33rd Dáil. That likelihood may be slim, but nonetheless we do have a

duty to unseat the Two and vote in those who are proposing to bring about a fairer, equal society, if for nothing else but to expose the nature of the beast.

However, if these parties' alternative manifestos are fundamentally based on taxation—increase taxes on corporations and the top 1 per cent, decrease taxes on lower-income families—to finance the budgets on public investment they are proposing, then all that hope will very soon be dashed.

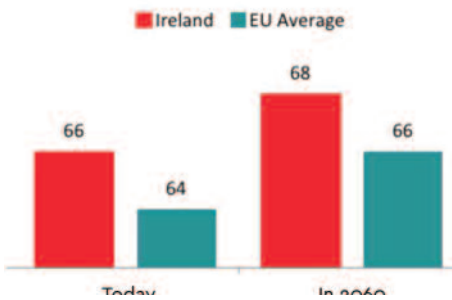
Not to dismiss those who support those parties—Sinn Féin, Social Democrats, People Before Profit, Solidarity, Green Party, or even, at a stretch, the Labour Party—but the “alternative” they propose is only an alternative to the management of the actually existing capitalist system, a system in which production is privately owned and run in the interests of a class of people who profit from the exploitation of our natural resources and the labour of people around the globe.

They are all putting Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil on trial—and rightly so—for

the debt and austerity that has plagued our country, especially within the last decade; but nowhere have I seen the system itself (capitalism) and the major institution enshrining the system in Ireland (the EU) being even brought up as a talking-point, never mind being the focus of an election campaign as a way of explaining the crisis in our public system, the economy at large, and the planetary emergency that we all face.

I understand why this is the case, because it wouldn't be a smart electoral strategy if they want to get voted in. However, I don't believe in or support this electoral fetishism, a shortsighted and futile form of politics, devoid of class analysis. An element of “better being inside the tent than standing outside it” drives this. So, instead of looking at the source and the reason why all these factors have combined to create a real state of emergency, each on their own and collectively, these parties opt to focus on those carrying out the policies, and insist that they would do it differently.

This pension theft is a direct transfer of wealth from the ordinary citizens to the business class



people over the age of 65 is 19 per cent, with the highest in Italy, at 22 per cent, and the lowest in Ireland, at 13 per cent. So there is no “pensions time bomb.”

This pension theft is a direct transfer of wealth from the ordinary citizens to the business class, who are more than willing to sell private pensions to workers at extortionate rates, with absolutely no guarantee of return.

This is classic neo-liberal tactics, perfected by Fine Gael’s Leo Liberals to convince workers of the urgent need to finance their own pensions and to remove this obligation from the state.

The increase of the pension age to

68 is the largest cut ever in the social safety net. It is the equivalent of a cut of €39,000 per worker, i.e. state pension = €13,000 p.a. × 3 years.

If you work until you are 68 and live until you are 83, this cut is equivalent to a cut in pension of 20 per cent, i.e. €2,600 p.a. for 15 years = €39,000; higher if you die earlier. This is pension theft by the state.

Your pension is paid for over your full working life. It is deferred pay that you have paid for over years of contributions. It is the least you can expect when you reach 65.

Of course politicians can retire at 50, while workers are thrown under the bus.

All trade unions and the ICTU have a policy of returning to the pension age of 65. SIPTU intervened in the election campaign to stop the pension age being increased to 67 in 2021, which has forced politicians to react, eager to outdo each other on the hustings and to win votes.

Fine Gael would be ideologically

opposed to reversing this policy, but the gombeenmen of Fianna Fáil might be willing to compromise and grant the change in order to gain office. If they are forced to make this compromise in order to win the election they will do so in the full knowledge that they will take this money away from workers by some other method, a tax increase or cut.

Make no mistake about it: they will protect their paymasters, the bankers, builders, and speculators, as they always do. There is no crisis Fianna Fáil cannot solve so long as they can transfer the burden onto the working class and continue the transfer of wealth from ordinary working families to the richest in society.

Of course they are not unique in doing this in Dáil Éireann: the Labour Party, the Green Party and Fine Gael are more than capable of it. Fianna Fáil, on the other hand, are experts at concealing it by convincing citizens that it is their own fault, that Fianna Fáil are their protectors and can be depended on to solve all the people’s problems.★

They have all successfully avoided the elephant in the room.

This is the folly of our democracy: that we think that changing a government will change the power relations—the class relations of society. Buying into the electoral system and holding it up as the holy grail of democracy has been the greatest weakness in building a strong left movement. Political parties on the left have pushed aside the class analysis and theory informing their practice and substituted for them the centrality of elections. These demands that they make will gain favour and support, but these same policies are in contradiction to the EU rules on competition and state intervention and subsidisation in the market, and are against the interests of capital in maximising profit; yet where is this stated in their manifestos?

In essence, the promise of socialist and social-democratic reforms within capitalism are incompatible with the interests of the actually existing capitalist system, and are illegal under EU rules; and ultimately, so long as no alternative system threatens it, they

will not be tolerated by the ruling class and its strata of collaborators.

The electoral campaigns being run by these parties hide this reality, because they are either not willing, do not understand, or do not want to expose the class nature of society and the class struggle that needs to be waged. Possibly contrary to their intentions, this can only strengthen the hand of the triad of imperialist powers in Ireland—the European Union, the United States, and Britain—and weaken the development of a class-conscious workers’ movement.

So I would argue that we need to be outside the tent, because that tent is collapsing and is in danger of suffocating us all. We must use every opportunity to highlight the barbarity, insanity and ecocidal path of the capitalist system. This includes using elections as a means of deepening class-consciousness and broadening our class forces. Let’s vote for all those who promise to promote the people’s struggles, but let’s not be seduced by the idea of changing the system within the Dáil, and be conscious and vigilant of false

promises.

To change the system means to struggle outside government, to build the progressive forces, to support the demands of the working class along with the oppressed, marginalised and exploited people, at home and abroad. It means directing our efforts into building collective movements, with common struggles, finding common ground and common cause for uniting and extending solidarity, creating a transformative programme of demands with maximum support.

We must expose those who will try to weaken and undermine this just cause for their own self-interest. The Communist Party of Ireland has taken on that task; and rather than direct resources in elections its focus is on accelerating and expanding our education programme, developing our theory in order to direct our action; and we welcome all those who wish to be part of this process.

There is no alternative and no shortcut in building class-consciousness. We must be guided by the time-tested slogan: *Educate, agitate, and organise.*★

How a minor event shines a light



ECONOMY

TOMMY MCKEARNEY

FROM TIME to time a seemingly minor event illuminates the nature of governance in a country. Such a moment occurred last month when the CEO of Apple, Tim Cook, was honoured in Dublin.

There may have been a degree of

electioneering on Varadkar's part when he presented the IDA's inaugural "special recognition award" to Cook. Nevertheless he echoed a long-held view among Ireland's ruling business class. He said Apple had played a key role in making Ireland the "tech capital of Europe"; and, significantly, he emphasised that what he considers success has come by looking to the future and opening the Republic to trade

and competition—all this glad-handing of the billionaire businessman from California in spite of the fact that the EU Commission has ruled that Apple owes the Irish state €13 billion (plus interest) in underpayment of taxes.

All very predictable from the leader of neo-liberal Fine Gael; but there was more to this event than meets the eye. A move is afoot by several OECD member-states, led by France and now Britain, to impose a digital tax on American technology companies, assessed on their business dealings in the markets in which they operate. If carried out, such a proposal would hit the huge profits of Google, Facebook, Amazon, and—biggest of them all—Apple.

This frankly modest measure is bitterly opposed not only by the United States but also by the Republic's government. Hence the kowtowing to Cook in Dublin.

How to explain this strange behaviour? Why would an Irish government constantly take steps to deny the state revenue that is badly needed? After all, no-one seriously denies that we have massive deficiencies in the health service, a housing and homelessness crisis, exorbitant costs of child care, and—as we are told—a depleted pension pot as the retirement age is stretched further towards the grave.

The answer to this apparent paradox lies in the endless struggle to retain control of society and its wealth. Those now in power—and this includes supporters of several political parties—

Free training courses for landlords

HOUSING CRISIS

DÓNALL Ó BRIAIN

FINGAL COUNTY Council, in association with the Residential Tenancies Board, is now offering training courses to help deal with the desperate housing crisis in the Dublin region, now virtually out of control.

The courses, however, are not for tenants but for landlords. The two

official bodies hope to "support landlords to gain a stronger understanding of their rental rights and responsibilities" and to "equip them with the knowledge of the latest legislative changes" that affect their new or existing tenancies. This includes the crucial agenda item of "how to end a tenancy."

Anyone who thought the Residential Tenancies Board had a duty to defend or to help in any way

Sovereignty, like a slow descent into addiction, can be lost imperceptibly.

are determined to ensure that the free-market system remains in place at all costs. The alternative—to plan the economy and redistribute wealth fairly and to where it is most needed—would challenge the ruling class’s source of power, that is, its ownership of a controlling share of the country’s wealth.

Illustrating this is the fact that almost half of all TDs are millionaires, and now there is the recently published Oxfam report stating that Ireland has the fifth-largest number of billionaires per capita in the world.

Integral to this elite preservation strategy is the presence of a significant number of foreign transnational companies, with their non-unionised employment practices weakening the bargaining power of local organised labour. An inevitable by-product of this process, and one that our comprador bourgeoisie is comfortable with, is a steady erosion of sovereignty.

Sovereignty, like a slow descent into addiction, can be lost imperceptibly. Moreover, as a people’s power to self-govern is eroded, their ability to fight back is seriously curtailed. As global imperialism, overseen by the US ruling class, is facing a challenge to its hegemony from the newly emerging superpower China, its exponents are struggling to tighten their grip on power and in the process becoming more authoritarian.

The ramifications of this are widespread and complex, as effective power and control is increasingly conceded to those governing the United States, supported by the EU.

One example among many. The advocate-general of the EU Court of Justice recently published an opinion

with the rights of tenants (now a majority of the population of the greater Dublin area) would be sadly disappointed at the statement of the official spokesperson of the board, who gushed: “Landlords play a vital role in providing safe and healthy homes . . . We hope to be able to support landlords in navigating the complex regulatory framework,” such as “guiding them through a local authority inspection.”

that “the transfer of personal data to processors established in third countries is valid . . .” This is basically saying that transferring data, including credit-card transactions and personnel databases, from the EU to (principally) the United States should be allowed.

American corporations and security agencies are therefore being invited in effect to gather vast quantities of EU citizens’ personal information. That our concerns are not groundless was illustrated by a recent *Morning Star* article, “Apple drops plans for icloud encryption after FBI complains.”¹ The FBI believed that the move would harm its investigations. Ominously too, Apple alone has responded to more than 127,000 requests from US law-enforcement agencies for information over the past seven years.

Overwhelmed by hyperbole surrounding so-called benefits, and therefore the alleged need to encourage and maintain foreign direct investment, the Republic’s largest political parties have offered no criticism of the high-tech giants. Nor is there any serious analysis of the influence exercised by these corporations in the affairs of the state. Consequently, practically no alternative is being widely discussed to how the economy of this state could prosper in their absence.

Unless we are happy to allow this state of affairs to continue unchallenged—and we are not—a strategy has to be devised for turning the situation round. Faced with the undoubted hostility of the establishment, its political spokespersons, and its compliant media, this will entail an uphill struggle.

One avenue is to avail of an

Equally gushing was the spokesperson for Fingal County Council, who sang the praises of “the invaluable role landlords have in providing homes for tenants in private rented accommodation . . .”

Forget your prejudice against landlords and the common belief that their object is to make money out of other people’s misery: they are apparently providing a crucial public service, and one that those who are

opportunity that allows us to raise the issue in a context immediately relevant to the existing situation in Ireland. That issue is the housing and homelessness crisis. Late last year several news networks in the United States were reporting that many large high-tech transnationals were donating money to the state of California to help alleviate a housing crisis in San Francisco.² Along with significant contributions from Amazon, Google, and Facebook, the Apple company was making \$2½ billion available to the state government.

Surely it would be in order for the Irish government to make a similar demand upon these transnationals. After all, Tim Cook, on his recent visit, described the Republic as Apple’s “second home.”

Of course this is a reformist approach; but then, at a certain level, so is asking for a pay increase. The point is that by forcing this demand onto the agenda we would open a door to a deeper assessment of the role of transnationals in the Republic. A successful campaign would embolden working people, and if the transnationals resist they are exposed for the rapacious capitalists they are. It’s an option worth consideration.★

1 “Apple drops plans for icloud encryption after FBI complains,” *Morning Star*, 23 January 2020 (<https://bit.ly/2NTcsRY>).

2 “Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google are spending money to address the affordable housing crisis they helped create,” CNBC, 1 December 2019.

LEFT: Apple plant in Co. Cork

actually responsible for public services—the state and its various agencies—recoil from in horror.

The whole thing is very indicative, and particularly worrying, considering that we already have fewer rights for tenants than any other country in Europe.

It will be interesting to see whether a guide for tenants will now be dropping through letterboxes in Fingal. ★

Combating tailism and economism

CLASS

RAYMOND O DUBHGHAILL

THE WORKING CLASS is already divided by capitalism. If we are to build a revolutionary movement we, as communists, must unite those divisions, not further deepen them. To do so we need to combat the tendencies of tailism and economism in our own ranks.

The ruling class utilise a range of tactics designed to weaken the working class, but none of these is more insidious than the sowing of discontent and disunity. Capitalists use racism, sexism, sectarianism, homophobia, transphobia and any number of forms of bigotry and prejudice as a means of dividing the working class and turning people against one another. The simple reason is this: a class divided cannot fight a united struggle.

Communists must bring together all elements of the working class to fight for an end to exploitation; however, too often there are obstacles in our way to achieving this, even within our own movement.

Lenin describes tailism in *What Is to Be Done?* as the tendency of some activists to drag (like a tail) behind the most

progressive elements of the working-class movement, by reflecting in their politics only the most reactionary views of the masses.¹ This is a mistake, because, firstly, it underestimates the political and revolutionary potential of the working class, and secondly, communists must be the revolutionary vanguard of the struggle, not lagging behind it as reactionaries within the movement.

The tendency of tailism can be observed in the dismissive and confrontational attitudes some on the left take to matters of social importance—women’s struggles, LGBT+ issues, racism, etc.—that are adjacent to class struggle. We have surely all heard it said countless times that certain issues are “a distraction from class struggle,” or “not of any concern to the working class.” It surely does not need pointing out that the working class comprises people of all gender backgrounds, sexual orientations, races, and ethnicities, and these struggles are of direct and immediate concern to them and their lives. In fact these struggles are inextricably linked to class struggle and should always be regarded as such.

As communists, we assert that the primary contradiction that shapes and defines the world is that of class struggle: between the bourgeoisie and the working class. However, it does not follow from this that our work or our analysis must

The iron fist of capitalism

FASCISM

EOGHAN O’NEILL

THE RISE of the right wing, of fascist ideology, is inextricably linked with the crises of capitalism, which are periodic and inevitable because of the internal contradictions within the capitalist system, which can never be overcome, because capitalism is an antagonistic class-based system in which differing class interests cannot be reconciled.

Fascism is the iron fist of capitalism, to ensure and secure private property, the private profits and rents of the capitalist class. It is capitalism in its most violent and ruthless form.

As the capitalist system bounces from one crisis to the next, and as the crisis deepens and widens, the working class, no longer content with the misery of poverty, hunger, debt, austerity, cuts to public services, the sale and privatisation of public lands, utilities, and services, begin trying to advance their position and interests in society. When the working class begins to organise itself as a real threat to the existing system and the privileges of the capitalists and their private property, it is under these conditions that we find fascism rising up, financed by the ruling class to act as the henchmen, doing their dirty work on the ground.

The purpose of right-wing and fascist organisations is to prevent the working class gaining significant power. As the working class deepens its class-consciousness, broadens its



struggle, organises itself industrially and militantly, and demands more from a government than what a government can provide, thus becoming more revolutionary, fascist movements, propped up by the ruling class, try to step in and assimilate themselves as a voice of the workers. This is a ruse, a way to disarm the workers in order to smash the workers’ organisations that are threatening to disrupt the profits of the ruling class.

As the class struggle deepens, they use the crisis of capitalism as an excuse for state repression, censorship, imprisonment and even execution of the most advanced sections of the workers’ movement, while at the same time they target the most vulnerable and marginalised in society, using them as scapegoats for the economic crisis.

Our understanding of different forms of oppression and exploitation enriches our theory of class struggle; it does not stand opposed to it.

disregard all other contradictions and struggles as irrelevant. Quite the contrary: we must seek to unite struggles against all forms of exploitation in the revolutionary fight for communism. This is the very nature of class struggle.

In addition, Lenin critiques the narrow focus of economism, which he describes thus: “The Economists [limit] the tasks of the working class to an economic struggle for higher wages and better working conditions, etc., asserting that the political struggle [is] the business of the liberal bourgeoisie.”² He asserts that the fight for revolutionary gains must be waged on a political as well as an economic front. The task of communists is to unite the working class in a revolutionary movement, not to limit our focus to mere economic demands, which are in any case quantitative and not transformative.

To give a clear example of the limits of the politics of economism, we can recall how women’s participation in the labour market was initially opposed within the trade union movement, on the grounds that it was a means used by capitalists for lowering wages for workers more generally.³ Such a view seems absurd today, and demonstrates how economism can be a dangerous and counter-revolutionary form of chauvinism. As communists, we do not ask for capitalists to give workers a larger slice of the pie: we fight for workers to take possession of the pie in its entirety.

There are many on the left who will seek to foment the divides that capitalism creates, through patriarchy, racism, sectarianism, etc. They pit different forms of struggle against

one another and stoke hostility between different groups. It must be noted that there are of course bourgeois forms of feminism, LGBT+ activism, anti-racism etc. that are actively opposed to the emancipation of the working class, and hostile to communism. This is not in doubt. However, it does not follow that the struggles of women, trans comrades, victims of racism and other forms of bigotry and prejudice are in any way counter-revolutionary or anti-communist simply because there exist bourgeois interests who attempt to co-opt them. To think and act otherwise is to fall into the trap of chauvinism.

Our understanding of different forms of oppression and exploitation enriches our theory of class struggle; it does not stand opposed to it. In practical terms, this means that communists must be at the forefront of working-class struggle in all its various forms, fighting with our comrades and not against them. ★

1 V. I. Lenin, *What Is to Be Done? The Burning Questions of Our Movement* (1902), at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/witbd/ii.htm.

2 V. I. Lenin, “A talk with defenders of economism” [1901] in Lenin, *Collected Works* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1961), vol. 5, p. 313–320, at www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1901/dec/06.htm.

3 Nicole Busby and Rebecca Zahn, “Women’s labour and trade unionism: A dangerous combination?” (2016), at <http://dangerouswomenproject.org/2016/06/20/womens-trade-unionism/>.

Fundamentally, fascism is for conserving the laws, customs and treaties that protect the ruling class and their right to private property: their right to own the means of production and their ability to exploit and extract profit from the labouring masses.

Fascists and leading figures of the right prostitute the word “patriotism” to gain support from a public who are already angry and disfranchised by the established political parties and the state of affairs in society. Their “patriotism,” however, is nothing more than narrow nationalism and racism, dedicated to the national interests of the ruling class, ensuring the suppression of the workers’ movement.

Fascism is organised counter-revolution. Its analysis of crisis is superficial; and though they may pay lip service to popular demands and issues facing working people, in the final analysis they do not propose to change the relations of class power. Just like social democrats, centrists, and revisionists, their purpose is unveiled in times of crisis. They drop the veil of democracy used by other forces and implement their iron rule of power in the interests of the ruling class, guaranteeing the protection of private property for the owners of capital against a class-conscious workers’ movement.

We witness this today in Latin America, where progressive governments are causing a crisis for capitalism and the imperialist empire of the United States when they nationalise and put into public ownership their resources. As the Bolivarian revolution has spread, so too has the growth in the extreme right and fascist forces, instigating coups and sabotage against progressive governments, supported and financed by the indigenous capitalist ruling class and the imperialist blocs. Their

private media mouthpieces then spread their propaganda to the outside world. The thin veil of democracy slips away once they are able to establish some power in the country.

This is the common practice of imperialist hegemony, witnessed around the globe for more than a century.

Integral to the right-wing ideology is the centrality of war: a philosophy of war, of war preparation, with the building up of the military-industrial complex for imperialist war practice. Going hand in glove with this war philosophy is a racist ideology, the idea of a superior race, a smokescreen used as a way to legitimise and desensitise one society from bombing and mass-murdering civilians of another society.

Again we must emphasise that fascism is capitalism in its most desperate form. Capitalism, fascism and war are inseparable; and there are very few things as profitable as war. Capitalism, with its internal contradictions, will remain in constant crisis, therefore fascism will always threaten to rise in its interests; and therefore war is an inevitable part of the capitalist system.

Without a Marxist class analysis of the causes of the capitalist crisis and without offering an alternative, we leave the space open for right-wing and fascist voices, with their lies, deceit, and hate. Without our exposing and opposing them they become in the eyes of the public just another dissenting voice, critical of the political establishment, which will garner them support.

Our duty as anti-fascists, anti-imperialists, is to expose their hate, their lies, their deceit, wherever possible to block any potential growth of their movement here in Ireland and, where possible, elsewhere around the globe. ★



Che and Fidel: Revolutionaries to the end

As we celebrate the sixty-first anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, a great Irish friend, loyal defender of Cuba, asked me to write for *Socialist Voice* about the imprint of Fidel Castro and Ernesto Guevara on the most

important event of the twentieth century in Latin America—not without first clarifying for me, with the typical frankness and the classic and imperative Irish style: it had to be brief. **Javier Domínguez** writes

A DIFFICULT AND risky task: to synthesise in brief the role of these two historic figures. Sharing risks with my Irish brothers and sisters, similar to the Cubans in the pleasure of facing dangers, here are my impressions about Fidel Castro Ruz and Ernesto Guevara de la Cerna and their fruitful revolutionary work.

The history of the Cuban Revolution cannot be written without mentioning the names of Fidel Castro and Ernesto Guevara—known all over the world for the name given to him by the Cubans for the interjection used by Argentines in their daily speaking: Che.

They had a mutual admiration. Che said that while imprisoned in Mexico he told Fidel that he was a communist, and that this could jeopardise the plans for the expedition and the start of the revolutionary war in Cuba. Fidel's answer was categorical: "I will not leave you alone. You are leaving with us." And so Che, along with Raúl Castro, were the two names that started the list of the eighty-two expeditionaries of the yacht *Granma* that left Tuxpán, Mexico, on 25 November 1956.

That response and firm attitude of Fidel made Che Guevara admire and completely trust the Cuban leader throughout his revolutionary life.

In an article published by Che, "Cuba: Historical exception or vanguard in the anti-colonial struggle?" he raises with respect to Fidel and his role in the Cuban Revolution:

Let us therefore consider the factors of this alleged exceptionalism. The first, perhaps the most important, the most original, is that telluric force called Fidel Castro Ruz . . . Fidel Castro did more than anyone in Cuba to build the formidable apparatus of the Cuban Revolution out of the blue.

Fidel is undoubtedly one of the most relevant politicians of all time. His revolutionary vision penetrated the most remote places in the world to become an example of self-denial, patriotism, and intransigence against injustice. The truth is that his career as a leader demonstrates a deep and sustained unitary vocation.

The history of Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia, the movement of non-aligned countries, the independence and liberation of fraternal peoples, and the defeat of the oppressive apartheid, to the unconditional support for the Bolivarian Revolution, the creation of ALBA, and the unitary bases within the diversity that led to the constitution of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), record Fidel Castro's prestige and moral authority over the past six decades.

Fidel, like Che, was a profound internationalist. His statement "to be internationalist is to pay our own debt to humanity" deeply touched the Cuban people, whose children carried out honourable internationalist missions,

both civil and military, in many countries.

Since the initial days of the Cuban Revolution, when it was not known whether he would survive this risky mission, Che had already told Fidel that when the time came he did not wish to be obstructed in his eagerness to fight for a better future for the peoples of Latin America, among whom he had travelled and whose misery increased his thirst for social justice. On these trips he came to the conclusion that the solution to their problems was not the action of a single man but the action of an organised liberation movement on a continental level. Hence the reason for its internationalist action in Bolivia.

After nine years of outstanding service towards the Revolution—and consistent with that agreement he had reached with Fidel—in March 1965 he resigned his positions in the government and in the party, even as a Cuban. "Nothing legal ties me to Cuba any more," he said in his farewell letter. "Other lands in the world demand the support of my modest efforts."

Che was not only an excellent soldier, he was also a man of science and ideas. Among the many responsibilities he held in Cuba were minister of industry and president of the National Bank. His views on the Cuban economy and its economic model are well known; he said:

The rationality of the economic model should be in consequence with the social rationality of that model and not the other way around. It is not a question of the quantity and quality of processed material goods but of the way in which they are produced and of the social relations established in that method of production.

The general conception in which the economic model to be followed would be formulated is summarised in the answer given by him to the journalist Jean Daniel published in the French weekly *L'Express* on 25 July 1963:

Economic socialism without Communist morality does not interest me. We fight against misery, but at the same time we fight against alienation. One of the fundamental objectives of Marxism is to make the individual interest disappear . . . If communism neglects the facts of

conscience, it can be a method of division but it ceases to be a revolutionary morality.

In total agreement with Che, Fidel stated:

I have great confidence in socialism and I have very little confidence in capitalism . . . Capitalism stimulates selfishness, corrupts people, does not develop the spirit of solidarity, of fraternity among men, but selfishness, individualism, and therefore I prefer the socialist formula, even within an underdeveloped country . . . Life forced us to use the socialist path for development; then we really have to forget capitalism and follow the socialist path of development, which, in my opinion, is the only way out for the Third World countries . . . Capitalism is a decadent system in history and will have to be overcome by socialism; although socialism still has many faults, it has deficiencies; but the deficiencies are not in the system, they are in men . . .

Fidel Castro and Che Guevara contributed irreplaceable elements to Marxism and the theory of the struggle for national liberation. Its legacy and action have a marked influence on the struggle for socialism and human improvement. Its thinking, which brings together the best of the traditions of the world revolutionary movement, becomes a source of study and inspiration for peoples in the struggle for national liberation.

In the early 1990s someone announced the end of history and the disappearance of paradigms and even the possibility of finding new ones. The struggles of the peoples in all the continent are the most resounding refutation of that statement, using images of Che and the ideas of Fidel. They are and will be eternal paradigms of peoples in their struggle for a better world. ★

■ Javier Domínguez, a former combatant of the Cuban internationalist mission to Angola, worked for the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP), generating international solidarity. He visited Ireland twice in the mid-1990s, working with the Cuba Support Group. He lives in Havana.

Who said that?



TAXES

DECLAN MCKENNA

“In many countries, the wealthy pay lower effective taxes than far poorer people. We need to change course—or face the pitchforks.

“The ecological catastrophe fueled by climate change and the socio-economic upheaval threatened by grotesque inequalities of wealth and power have the potential to destroy everything we care about.

“Based on a mountain of interdisciplinary evidence, it’s clear that extreme inequalities of income, wealth and opportunity undermine democratic institutions, destabilize healthy economic activity, fuel social unrest, and prevent us from nimbly responding to ecological threats. Yet our global economy is on inequality autopilot, funneling wealth upwards at a dizzying pace. A couple [of] thousand billionaires now hold more than half the world’s wealth and with it, much of the power to change things—or to block change, as has been the case for decades. In many countries, the wealthy pay lower effective tax rates than those with modest means. Without this revenue, governments

plead austerity or take on nihilistic levels of debt.

“Meanwhile, a wealth-defense industry of tax lawyers and wealth planners spend their waking hours gaming tax laws and hiding trillions in wealth. An estimated 10 to 12% of the world’s wealth is hidden in a maze of offshore secrecy jurisdiction, trusts and shell companies. A recent IMF study estimates that 40% of foreign direct investment—about \$15tn—passes through ‘empty corporate shells’ with ‘no real business activities.’

“This hidden wealth isn’t basking on a Caribbean island. Billions are flowing into luxury real estate investments. The cranes rising across our major cities, constructing luxury towers, are an affront to residents facing a crisis in affordable housing.

“In many countries, we are seeing a breakdown in social cohesion and a rise in xenophobic nationalism and political extremism. People understandably believe the system is rigged against them, fueling a sense of unfairness and diminished social trust. This process of pulling apart, both within countries and between nations, will all but guarantee that the global community will further polarize and fail to adequately respond to the looming climate catastrophe. This

will be disastrous for everyone, including the planet’s billionaires and millionaires.

“The choice is stark: do we want pitchforks or a working tax system?”

Chuck Collins said all that, and more. And who is Chuck Collins? Chuck Collins is a member of the American organisation Patriotic Millionaires, which is composed of millionaires and billionaires from around the world who advocate higher taxes on the wealthy.

He goes on: “I agree with [the] Dutch historian Rutger Bregman, who said last year, ‘Stop talking about philanthropy and start talking about taxes. The bloom has come off the charitable rose. Perhaps the public has started to realize that billionaire philanthropy has become a taxpayer-subsidized extension of private power, another elaborate tax dodge.’”

The Patriotic Millionaires consists of an initial group of 123 millionaires and billionaires from eight countries who believe that taxes are the “best and only appropriate way” to ensure adequate investment in the things societies need.

While it is hard to disagree with him on much of what he says, it is on this very point that we must part company. Whatever about cause and effect, we reject his vision of the solutions.

He manages to be both completely wrong and completely right. He is completely wrong in that he envisages a nice capitalism, where the rich stay rich but “rejoin humanity” and root themselves in communities of “people and relationships of reciprocity,” where capital is shifted out of the “speculative financial sector and deploy[ed] in the service of humanity.”

He is certainly right when he says that “philanthropy is not a substitute for adequately funded governments at the local, state and federal level.”

But he hits the nail on the head when he recognises that unless unrestrained capitalism is brought to heel, the rich, including himself and his “progressive” millionaires and billionaires, will face the pitchforks. He wants to have his cake and eat it. He is trying to take out an insurance policy against both “excessive” capitalism and the pitchforks.

He may want to bring about a “nicer” capitalism; but when push comes to shove we will still need our pitchforks. ★

The triumph of Polish music

CHOPIN

JENNY FARRELL

FRYDERYK CHOPIN was born on 22 February 1810 in Żelazowa Wola, near Warsaw, to a Polish mother and a French father. He grew up in Warsaw but left Poland in 1831, shortly before the Polish popular uprising against the tsarist oppressors. He moved to Paris, where he lived until his death, aged only thirty-nine, on 17 October 1849.

In Paris he made friends with some of the most outstanding progressive figures of his time: with the great Frenchwoman George Sand, who became his lover, the Hungarian nationalist and composer Franz Liszt, the revolutionary French painter Eugène Delacroix, the great Polish poet and political activist Adam Mickiewicz, the exiled German poet Heinrich Heine, and

others.

Chopin always remained close to Poland. During the 1830s and 40s Europe experienced political repression, unrest, and conservatism. In this atmosphere the great significance of national cultures in shaping national consciousness and the struggle for independence became increasingly important and apparent. This growing national awareness was also reflected in the arts and in music.

Polish music was no exception. The Polish people, who suffered the triple occupation by Prussia, Russia, and Austria, who were deprived of their independence, who suffered terribly under the pressure of the Holy Alliance, whose national culture was being suppressed—this people proved through its art that it was alive and fighting. The genius of a Mickiewicz in poetry, the genius of a Chopin in music, reflect this struggle in their art.

Chopin wrote mainly music for the piano. He chose smaller forms to express the struggle and aspirations of his people, frequently using Polish peasant dance forms, such as the mazurka and polonaise. He revived the music of the whole nation. The folk music of Poland informed his harmonic language.

Chopin's music not only defined a tradition in Poland but has contributed to our musical heritage internationally. It is an assertion of Polish resistance, something that all independence-loving people can identify with.

Polonaise in A flat major (1842)

Chopin created seventeen polonaises in total, his first when he was seven years old, and seven of these after he left Poland. The later compositions opened a new chapter in the history of the genre in the direction of the "epic-dramatic poem." Each of these seven mature, dramatic works has its own distinctive shape, style, and expression.

The last three compositions are grand dance poems. Chopin's late Polonaise in A flat major (Opus 53, *Héroïque*) is written in a heroic tone. On hearing it, George Sand wrote in one of her letters: "The inspiration! The force! The vigour! There is no doubt that such a spirit must be present in the French Revolution. From now on this polonaise should be a symbol, a heroic symbol."

Its stormy octaves in the middle section have suggested to some commentators the image of attacking hussars, to others an attacking cavalcade. Some have called it the "secret national anthem" of Poland.

However, Chopin did not leave a "story" to go with this polonaise. I think it is perhaps best understood as the triumph of the Polish dance. The theme is confident and dance-like. It goes through various developments and returns jubilant, proud and heroic in a clearly victorious coda. And it is in this context of the triumphant people that Sand's comment makes complete sense.★

■ Listen to it here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWBT6vOKu0Q.

LEFT: Chopin



Anti-imperialist conference backs Venezuelan people

CARACAS

SEÁN EDWARDS

LAST YEAR, 2019, was a year of victories for Venezuela, President Maduro claimed at a ceremony on 23 January for the anniversary of the fall of the Jiménez dictatorship in 1958.

This was also the date chosen last year by Juan Guaidó to proclaim himself “interim president” of Venezuela. His argument, prompted by Mike Pence, was that the office was vacant, because of their non-recognition of the election of President Maduro, and therefore should go to the chairperson of the National Assembly, the office he held.

Enjoying the patronage of the United States, Guaidó was recognised by the United States and the European Union, together with their allies and client states, amounting to fifty-two states in all, which have intensified the economic war against Venezuela, causing great hardship to the population.

The economic war is accompanied by a propaganda war, which excludes positive, or even impartial, reporting of Venezuela in the corporate media.

Confirming President Maduro’s words, Juan Guaidó has gone from one disastrous defeat to another. The attempt to forcibly bring in so-called humanitarian aid to Venezuela from Colombia failed miserably; they even burnt a lorry on the border, and the

media dutifully blamed the government forces.

His associates were caught embezzling money supposed to be for military deserters; he himself was shown to have been brought across the border by a criminal paramilitary drug-trafficking gang. He stood on a motorway overpass in eastern Caracas and called for a military coup, claiming that he was speaking from a nearby army base, but to no avail: the army stayed loyal.

Nothing works for Guaidó except the money he gets from the United States—\$450 million from the US Agency for International Development alone. His latest indignity: he no longer holds the office of chairperson of the National Assembly, on which he based his claim to the presidency. A majority of the opposition deputies have denounced him, have elected a new chairperson, and reached an agreement with President Maduro concerning the Assembly elections, due this year.

Never mind: he met his remaining supporters, claiming to be the real National Assembly, and continues his pretensions. The United States announced its continuing support. It has appointed him president of Venezuela; and what right have mere Venezuelans to disagree?

The commemoration was attended by the participants in the International Anti-Imperialist Conference being held in Caracas. Four hundred delegates from seventy-two countries shared their


experience and expressed their solidarity with Venezuela. A large delegation from the United States was particularly impressive, including Bahman Azad of the US Peace Council, who organised the Dublin conference on US and NATO military bases in Dublin in November 2018. Four of the brave defenders of the Venezuelan embassy in Washington are now facing trial.

My own contribution to the group discussing sovereignty referred to neo-colonialism as a class alliance. For example, in Latin America the oligarchies cannot rule without the United States, nor can the United States rule without them. Naturally, I drew on our own history in this regard.

In spite of the president’s brave words, and the total collapse of Guaidó’s challenge, Venezuela is in a very difficult situation. The economic war has inflicted colossal damage on the economy, and the country is surrounded by enemy states with ultra-right governments. The imperialist offensive has had a number of victories, most recently with the fascist coup in Bolivia, while Brazil and Colombia are harbouring and training terrorists.

Venezuela has twice been declared a “clear and present danger to the United States,” by nice Mr Obama and nasty Mr Trump, both determined to destroy the Bolivarian Revolution initiated by Hugo Chávez. For the ultra-right wing of the opposition, elections would not be enough: they want to totally destroy Chavismo, an objective shared by the rulers of the United States.

The participants in the conference face a mighty task when they return home: organising solidarity with Venezuela.★

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ISSN 0791-5217



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