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Capitalism is digging our graves

The world in which we live is finite. It does not possess infinite, everlasting resources. And it is fast approaching the point of no return as we face imminent climate catastrophe. **Jimmy Doran** reports

". . . May the day never come when patients are referred to, or thought of, as customers. The word *patient* means a sufferer, and when someone comes to the doctor they are coming not because they want to buy something but because they want help. Structure and restructure the health service how you will, doctors are not shopkeepers, patients are not customers, and medicine is not a product."—**Alan Bennett,** speech at Kentish Town Health Centre, London, 5 July 2012.

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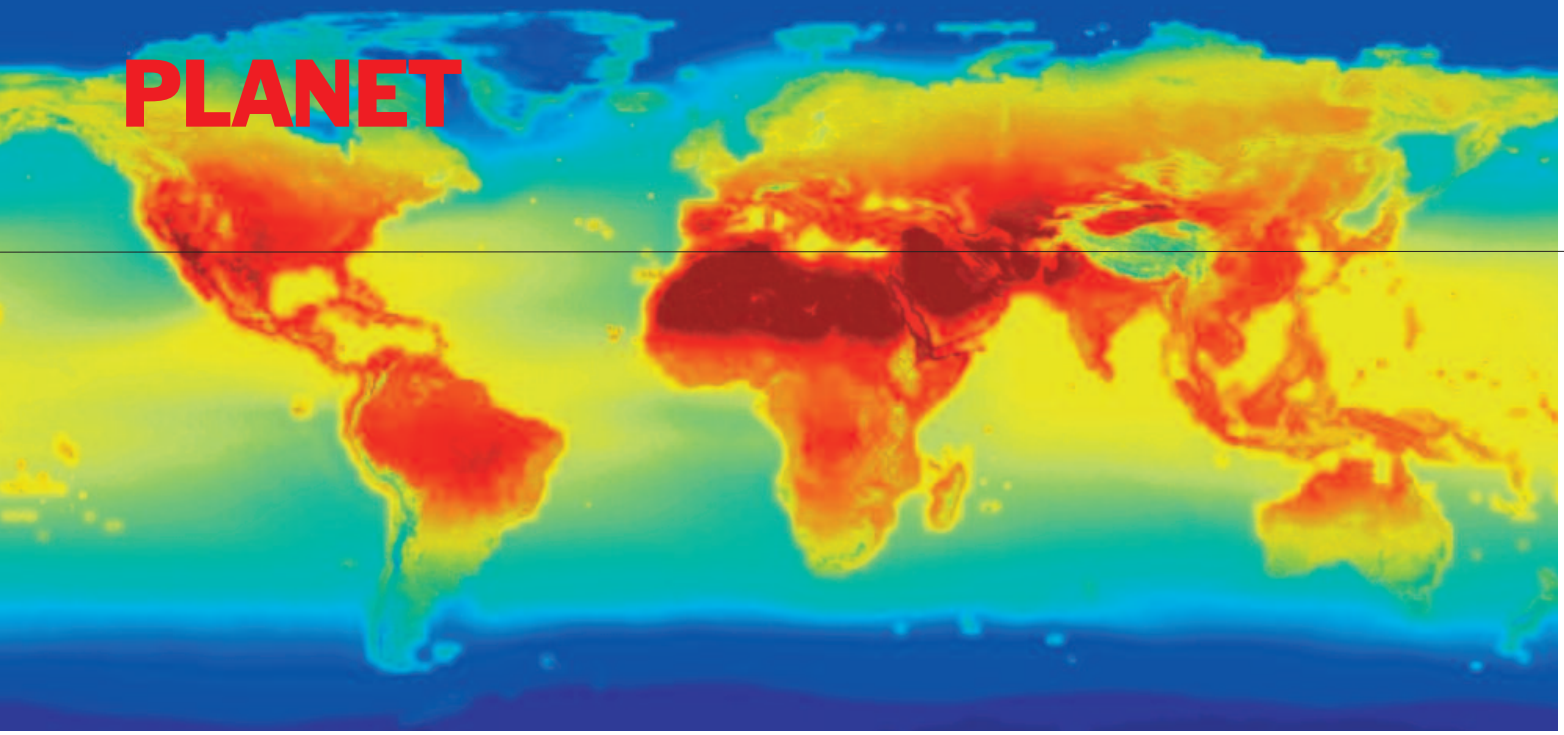


Capitalism is digging our graves

THE WORLD IN which we live is finite. It does not possess infinite, everlasting resources. And it is fast approaching the point of no return as we face imminent climate catastrophe. If we are to save humanity and protect the world for future generations we have to radically change the way we live—immediately.

We're not talking about a tweak here and a tweak there, converting to wind power or solar energy, eating less meat, or using less oil: we're talking about a total change in the way we treat the planet and live our lives.

It's not as if we've been very successful so far. We live in a world where *eight* people have accumulated more wealth than the poorest half of the world's population, where millions starve while others live a life of luxury; and these contradictions are interdependent.

A tiny proportion of humanity control the vast majority of resources and wealth. This control is facilitated by governments. Where resources are desired, governments will wage war to get them within their control or sphere of influence, with little or no concern for collateral damage.

The reckoning of emissions of greenhouse gases usually looks at how much energy and fuel civilians use; but the US military is one of the largest polluters in history, consuming more liquid fuels and emitting more climate-changing gases than most medium-sized countries.

The wealthiest parts of the world consume amounts far beyond what the planet can provide. Consumerism is not natural human behaviour: we are bombarded day and night with advertisements to create it. Capitalism is structured to give an incentive to this type of behaviour.

Permanent growth is an intrinsic part of the capitalist system. Without growth there is no accumulation; there is no accumulation without consumption. Capitalism convinces people that they need a lot more than necessary to have a happy and healthy life.

People aspire to health, happiness, relationships, family, community, the

The fight to empower workers and save the trade union movement

NICOLA LAWLOR

THE POWER of workers in society has been declining consistently since the 1970s. Power, measured by various metrics, such as union membership, union density, and days of industrial action, has been on a steady decline, related to and proportionate to the increased wealth of the rich and the transformation of Ireland into a haven for foreign direct investment and, more recently, a tax haven.

As workers have less power in society, ideology and politics have shifted significantly to the right. Governments have implemented policy after policy that has left Ireland deeply divided and unequal. Liberal moves in recent times should not mask what is an extremely right-wing political establishment and ideology that is accepted within many parties.

In this situation, to many workers the trade union movement is irrelevant. For years, through "partnership," it was seen as—and actually was—a partner to the Government that didn't deliver for workers. Now when it tries to engage on broader social or political issues it is often met with confusion or indifference, sometimes even hostility, from within its own ranks. Yet where unions engage and organise in work-places and on work-place issues we see many examples of workers joining, becoming involved and altering the balance of power in their work-place, for example for better pay, hours, or contracts.

Trade union membership has been steadily declining for decades, somewhat masked for a while by the

Rosa Luxembourg wrote: "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism."

acquisition of knowledge. All the other needs are manufactured by the system.

Capitalism has failed people and the planet through overproduction, over-consumption, waste, greed, and inequality. These factors are all necessary for capitalism to survive; but the survival of capitalism is not compatible with the survival of life on this planet. It has driven it to the edge of catastrophe.

So what is to be done?

It's as if we are all living in a country that is below sea level and protected by dams and pumps. These dams are leaking.

That's bad enough, but the tide is also rising faster than we can raise the dam, unless we change the way we live. If we are to survive we have to raise the dams, plug the leaks, and maintain the pumps. What in fact we are doing is lowering the dams, ignoring the leaks, and using the materials required for repairing the damage to build sand castles, which cause more leaks and overload the pumps.

Time has run out. We must drastically change, *now.*

Governments must be made to rule in the interests of citizens' well-being, fulfilment, and happiness, within the constraints of our environment, so that humanity can survive and prosper, rather than for the accumulation of wealth by a tiny elite, to the detriment of everyone else.

We need system change—an economy for the common good—to provide for the needs of humanity rather than to increase GDP, market share, and monopoly. This is not compatible with survival any longer, if it ever was.

We need to stop producing unnecessary goods and concentrate on the real needs of the whole of society. To survive we have to totally change the way we live: what we produce, what we consume, and how we govern.

This will not happen overnight. And it will require system change and a worldwide collective educational and political effort.

We need universal basic services for all, publicly financed—in housing, health, education, transport, child care, and care of the elderly. Once the profit factor is removed, life will be more sustainable, environmentally and financially.

Private schools, private transport, private hospitals and private housing waste resources and cost more to operate and use. This in turn requires more work, which produces more unnecessary goods and services, which use more resources, in an ecocidal merry-go-round. Public ownership is the only efficient, sustainable way of providing the necessities of life for everyone.

Production has to be efficient and confined to necessary goods. We have to stop waste. In a world where so many people are starving we waste a third of all food that is produced. This has to stop, *now*. Goods that are produced must have a much longer lifespan, with no more designed obsolescence, and must be suitable for repair rather than for landfill or the incinerator after a couple of years.

All production, resources and distribution must be brought under public control and centrally planned. The decisions must be taken out of the hands of banks and corporations, which have brought us to the abyss.

This is not some sort of temporary shortage or blip: it is a global emergency. Rosa Luxembourg wrote: "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism."

Only socialism has the potential to stop the environmental catastrophe and build a better world, where all humanity can prosper.

Capitalism's obsession with profit, growth, consumption and accumulation has brought humanity to the edge of extinction. We can save the planet or save capitalism. We cannot do both. ★

property boom. It's fair to say that it faces a threat to its very existence. The decline may have slowed recently, thanks to the hard work of organisers and worker activists in some unions and industries; but the movement is essentially in a slow and steady decline.

Union mergers, while sometimes logical, rarely if ever alter this decline. The merged union often becomes little more than one big declining union and often ends up more distant from workers and work-places, more bureaucratic, and prone to bitter internal rows.

This is the challenge we face, and we should face it head on. The solution in fact is amazingly simple—because we know what works. When union activists, organisers and officials engage with workers, listen to the issues in their work-places, and together agree a way forward based on talking to the workers, then we both grow the union and alter the balance of power in the work-place.

Listen and talk to workers. Organise workers in work-places. It won't always work perfectly well; you won't always get the same results in different work-places. There are power structures beyond our control or influence; but we can control what we do and what we give priority to.

So, what will empower workers and save the movement? Organise in work-places. And, complementary to this, we should campaign to change the conditions under which we organise and act as unions. A Fair Work Act covering such things as right to access, collective bargaining and better strike laws would make work-place organising more successful.

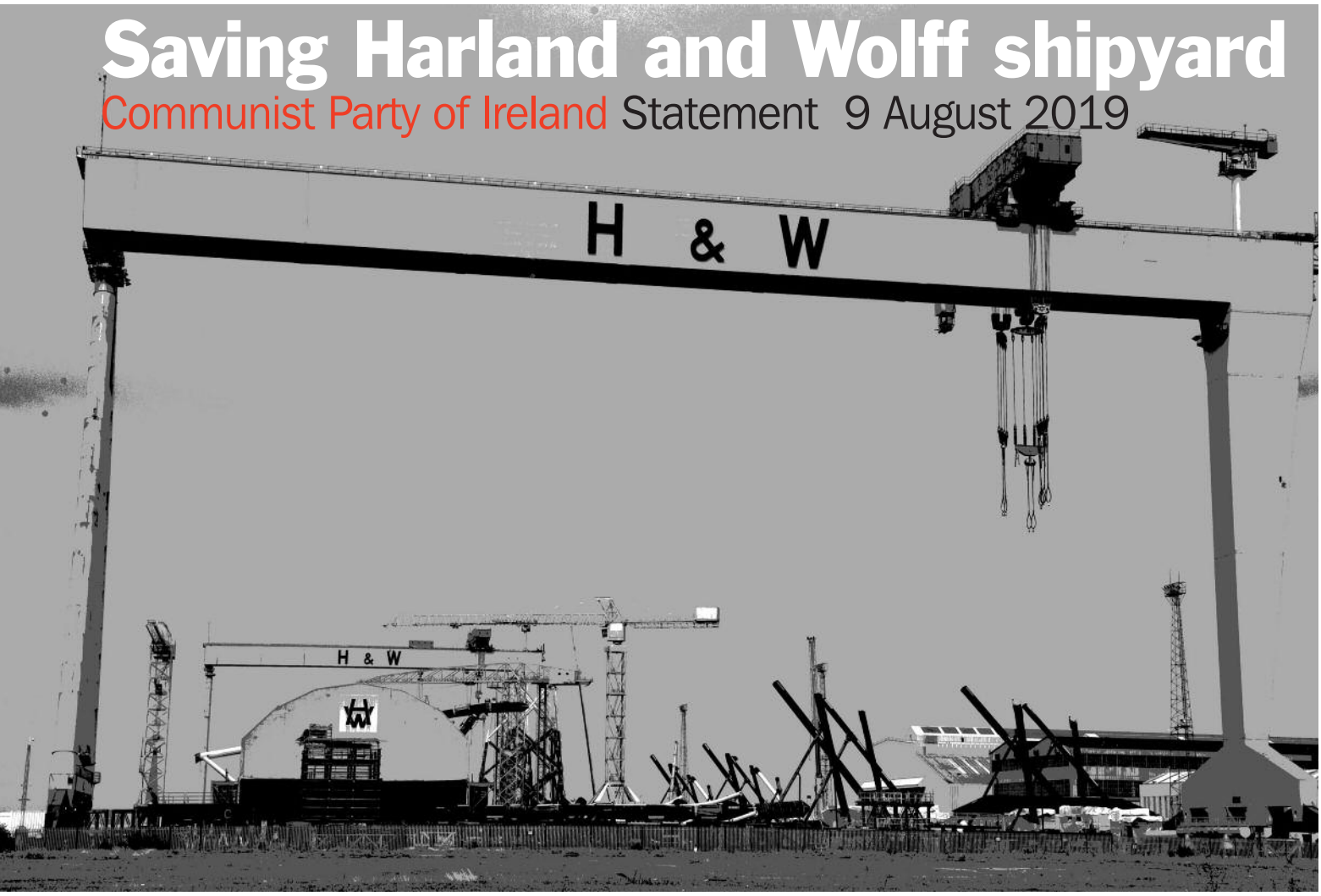
Taken together, this strategy would alter the balance of power in society back more towards workers and away from the rich and the establishment. This would change the political discourse and provide a material basis for these faint cries for "left unity" and for the failed efforts previously made by unions.

But it must be this way round, otherwise it is doomed to failure and another big mistake. To attempt to build some kind of political unity on disjointed and disconnected political entities or individuals is as likely to fail as the union merger strategy, as it doesn't sit on top of any material foundations. We urgently need to build the foundations through organising workers and changing the rules on which we act.

The politics will follow then in a much stronger, more real and organic way. ★

Saving Harland and Wolff shipyard

Communist Party of Ireland Statement 9 August 2019



THE COMMUNIST PARTY of Ireland expresses its solidarity with the workers at the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast and welcomes the action taken by them in defence of their jobs.

Harland and Wolff should be nationalised. This could provide tens of thousands of jobs for workers in Ireland. The demise of the shipyard is a direct result of the drive by monopoly capitalism to seek out greater profits, shifting manufacturing to the Global South in the insatiable search for maximum profits by exploiting local unregulated workers in sweatshops for poverty pay.

Imperialism has played its part in the difficulties that the shipyard's present owners, Dolphin Drilling, are experiencing as a result of the global crash in oil prices in 2014 resulting from the geopolitical power struggle to control the production of oil.

The British government's national shipbuilding strategy, launched in September 2017, with its declared intention "to end the industry's decades old boom and bust nature as well as to sustain thousands of jobs," like most of capitalism's solutions, is an abject failure.

We welcome the fact that, despite more than a century's experience of bigotry in the history of Harland and Wolff, working people from both communities joined together against the closure of the shipyard and demanded its nationalisation. This is a very encouraging sign for the working class.

So far, those appeals have fallen on the deaf ears of the British Tory government in London. It is a harsh lesson, but it has to be understood that British imperialism has no friends, only interests. It has no loyalty to anyone, only to its interests.

There is a long tradition in our country of heavy engineering. These skills should be harnessed in the interests of solving the global environmental catastrophe that the world is being driven towards by this profit-driven system. Any future use of these shipbuilding yards should be for non-military shipbuilding and engineering, not contributing to imperialism's global military strategy of permanent tension and wars. Harland and Wolff has been involved in recent years in the development of wind energy. The production of equipment for this industry should be continued and expanded into other areas, such as wave power.

The building of a sustainable engineering base in Ireland can be achieved only by developing an all-Ireland industrial strategy, a strategy that is environmentally sustainable and democratically controlled and accountable to working people.

WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

Mandate members in Argos vote for 2½ per cent increase

Members of Mandate working in the mail order company Argos voted (with 98 per cent in favour) for a pay increase of 2½ per cent, along with provisions for more secure hours and incomes. The pay increase will be backdated to 1 July.

The new agreement includes a process for allocating extra hours in branches, ensuring that existing staff members are offered additional hours before the hiring of new staff. As well as enabling the workers to increase their income it will provide them with certainty over their earnings. But what will have the greatest impact is the clarity that it will bring with regard to working hours.

Ryanair attempts to break the union

In mid-August Ryanair secured a court injunction to prevent its pilots based in Ireland from striking, even after they had followed the normal industrial procedures.

The two-day strike had the support of a majority of the pilots directly employed by the company who are members of their union. A large number of other pilots have insecure conditions resulting from a bogus self-employment relationship with the company. These workers have poorer wages and working conditions than those not on the individualised contracts.

Ryanair secured the injunction on very dubious grounds; and there are clear warnings in the court's judgement in awarding it. The company has never really engaged with the pilots' union from the last strike in 2017; they have just been stringing the workers along.

Ryanair claimed that workers had not exhausted the ad hoc grievance procedures agreed after the 2017 strike. One of the other grounds was that not all pilots voted for a strike, though the majority of union members did. This in effect backs up bogus self-employment contracts.

What brought Ryanair to recognise, to some degree, the right of its employees to join a union was the international action of workers within the Ryanair company, in Ireland, Britain, Belgium, and Portugal. Now is the time to bring that international solidarity to bear on this company.

It is yet another example of the anti-worker, anti-union, pro-boss nature of the Industrial Relations Act (1990).

SIPTU members vote for strike

SIPTU members at the Irish Pride plant in Taghmon, Co. Wexford, have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a strike following a refusal by the management to implement a Labour Court recommendation concerning trade union recognition.

SIPTU members voted in August—by 97 per cent against 3 per cent—in favour of a strike. The management had refused to accept the Labour Court's recommendation that the company should recognise SIPTU as the chosen representative body for all industrial relations purposes for employees who are members of the union. ★

Ireland: Number One tax haven for American corporations

EUGENE MCCARTAN

THE RESULTS of recent research on the amounts of profit declared in the Republic, and the tax subsequently paid on those profits, should surprise no-one. It has exposed the fact that American transnational corporations made profits of $83 billion (€74 billion) here.

A third of these corporations have their head office here, so they can declare all their global profits in Ireland and avail of the friendly tax policies of the state. While the nominal tax rate is about 12½ per cent, the effective tax take is in the region of 4.8 per cent.

It is estimated that these declared profits have resulted in tax revenue to the Irish exchequer of more than €14 billion since 2015. This means that we are net beneficiaries of global imperial plunder as well as both the savage exploitation of workers in the global south and the super-exploitation of the natural world, which contributes to the destruction of the global environment.

It also means that the Irish state's revenue is of a very precarious nature, very much dependent on holding on to this tax code, as it comes under increasing pressure from more and more countries that either oppose these taxation levels and want to see taxes on corporations increased or are themselves attempting to follow a similar job creation strategy, thereby contributing to the race to the bottom.

The economic development strategy being pursued by the the Irish ruling class can only lead to a precarious financial situation for the state, making it even more vulnerable to the flight of capital as these corporations scour the world for the best deal so as to pay minimum or no tax. It means that precarious employment is increasingly experienced by workers as this state competes for mobile capital investment in globally traded goods and services.

There is no strategy for building a sound industrial base centred on the sustainable use of the natural world and our educated and skilled work force. As with all things under capitalism, maximum profits are the order of the day. We know from experience that when government finances decrease it is workers, pensioners, the sick and children who pay the price. ★

The health of the people

How much is is it worth under capitalism asks **Laura Duggan**

IN THE United States, uproar has surrounded the rolling back of access to reproductive health, in Britain thousands of women missed breast cancer screenings because of a technical hitch, and in Ireland we are still witnessing the fall-out from the cervical cancer screening debacle—each the result of policies that have reduced women's health and well-being to secondary concerns of cost management and profit margins.

Dr Gabriel Sally's supplementary report on the Cervical Check scandal pointed out that the emphasis on quality assurance dropped from 25 per cent in the 2008 tender process to 15 per cent in 2012. Meanwhile the importance of the cost of services increased from 20 per cent to 40 cent in the same period. Cervical Check is still sending smear samples for testing to laboratories in the United States—the same ones that are at the centre of the scandal—because the price remains right.

Each of these scandals, shocking in isolation, is only the tip of the iceberg. The missed breast screenings, the push back on abortion and Cervical Check have made it into public discourse only because they affected "middle-class" women as well.

This is not to ignore the women wronged by the Cervical Check scandal, many of whom have put tremendous effort into raising awareness of the importance of cervical cancer screenings and HPV vaccines, in the hope of protecting others. But it must be noted that while this scandal is deemed a horrific anomaly, the substantially worse health outcome and higher maternal and infant mortality rates of women from marginalised groups are regarded as business as usual.

In Britain, Black women have a risk of maternal death five times higher than white women, and are more likely to die as a result of breast and cervical cancers. In the United States, Black people with diabetes are more likely than their white counterparts to become blind, to become amputees, to develop end-stage kidney disease, and to die of the disease. Native American women's maternal death rate remains three times that of white women.

In Ireland, infant mortality is 3½ times higher for the Traveller community than for non-Travellers. Traveller women are more than 3 times more likely to miscarry or have a stillborn child, and are 3 times more likely to be affected by depression, with one in three experiencing long-term illness. Traveller women die on average twelve years earlier than non-Travelling women, and have death rates that are 3 times higher.

Awareness of risk is not enough

DAN TARAGHAN

ON 5 AUGUST, Bank Holiday Monday, the Government published *The National Risk Assessment, 2019: Overview of Strategic Risks.* This is a 92-page document that sets out various risks facing Ireland, under five headings. The first such report was produced in 2014.

This report was produced after a public consultation. There were more than 650 submissions, of which about 640 came from private individuals. There is no information about whether the private individuals were members of lobbying groups or political parties. The organisations that made submissions ranged from the IFA, ICMSA and ICTU to Birdwatch Ireland.

The report is quite comprehensive and offers the Government an opportunity to plan ahead. Unfortunately it does not give any indication of how the risks will be addressed. Given that a no-deal Brexit is deemed to be one of the main risks, and that the budget is due on 8 October, it is highly likely that the Government response will be made known at that time. The 2020 budget is expected to bring tax reductions and spending increases, but this would fly in the face of

Existing health policies are fixated on treating ill health as it arises rather than preventing it in the first place.

While the mortality rates for women are generally lower than those for men, in these marginalised and vulnerable groups women are central to ensuring the continued health of their families and extended communities. The ill health of women in these groups tells of a more wide-reaching problem within these communities and a failure of public health policies to safeguard or value their health.

None of these statistics are hidden: they are widely available, known, and repeated, but they are not considered scandalous. They are too run-of-the-mill, too expected. Racism, ethnic discrimination and stereotyping, as well as misogyny and sexism, all play a role in these worse health outcomes, and these prejudices allow the statistics to be normalised.

Consultations and research by NGOs and governmental bodies all agree: community-centred and culturally relevant responses are needed to rectify the health disparity. Still, these services are often underfunded and not yet given priority. Government spending on Traveller education has fallen by 86 per cent since 2008; spending on accommodation for Travellers is down 85 per cent, and health projects by 5½ per cent.

Death and morbidity have been reduced in specific Black and Native American communities in Britain and the United States where community health workers and anti-prejudice training for medical staff and community health centres that respect community practices are available. The impact of these services has been particularly pronounced for women in those populations; but these effects are limited. While the availability of medical care has a greater effect on the health status of vulnerable populations, such as racial or ethnic minorities, generally it explains only one small fraction of a more systemic problem.

The only long-lasting solution is the one pointed out by Pavee Point, the Traveller and Roma NGO, in its analysis: the correction of long-standing social and economic inequalities for all socially and economically excluded groups within the working class. This is the only way to ensure long-lasting good health, physical and mental, in these groups.

Existing health policies are fixated on treating ill health as it arises rather than preventing it in the first place. But the old adage of prevention being better than cure is what has motivated the greatest leaps forward in medical and health care, like that of vaccinations.

Analysis of trends in the United States of Black–White inequality in economic and health status over the last fifty years reveals that racial disparities in health are sensitive to changes in racial inequality influenced by economic circumstances. During the 1960s and early 70s the civil rights movement led to improvements in the political and economic situation of Black people. This led to a narrowing of the Black–White gap in income but also had an equalising effect in regard to health and a decline in total mortality for Black people.

This equalising stalled in the mid-1970s, and then widened again in the early 1980s, as a result of the decimation of the civil rights movement by the US government. This gap continues to grow as a result of budget cuts in medical services, housing, and social welfare, excused by the vilification of poor Black people in the media. This decline was repeated in marginalised groups in Britain and Ireland as public spending priorities shifted towards privatisation.

Health is fundamental, and a public health system that places people first and foremost, above the market, above profit and trade deals, is essential. It is also achievable, as has been shown by the National Health Service in Britain and the Cuban health system. However, health is affected by more than just access to medical care: living conditions, decent work, social inclusion and community cohesion also play an essential role in the maintenance of the health of individuals and society. A capitalist society can only ever place a plaster over any of the problems leading to ill health, and only if these problems arise with enough force, in the privileged segments of society.

The battle for a world where every person is equally valuable, a world where each person will have the same chance of a healthy and happy life, can feel like a daunting task. It is nevertheless one that we must fight on all fronts, because if we don't the health and wealth of a few will be secured at the cost of those they deem expendable. ★

the National Risk Assessment.

The document's five headings are sub-divided into five or six areas, so that there are twenty-seven sections in all. Strangely, the section on "Technological risks" includes sub-headings on nuclear contamination, major pandemics, and anti-microbial risks. I would have thought the section on "Environmental risks" would have been more appropriate.

This latter section includes a sub-section on "Biodiversity and climate change." There is no mention of the impact our system of farming is having on the climate. In fact Brexit and climate changes are deemed the "external" threats. No mention of the use of land or rivers by farmers and capitalists in the pursuit of private profits.

This emphasises the Government's problem, which is the the problem facing any bourgeois government in a capitalist society. There may well be awareness of the risks, but the ultimate decision-makers are individual capitalists pursuing profits for their own individual interests. In effect, individual capitalists dictate how a risk is addressed on an individual basis and not for the Government. The latter creates the economic and legal environments in which capitalism can function.

The last issue of *Socialist Voice* (and previous issues) addressed the question of social welfare pensions and the dependence ratio. The same themes are repeated here, with this exception: "the dependency ratio will increase into the future, in the absence of improbably large immigration of people of working age . . ."

The Government would seem to be unaware of the large numbers of people fleeing war zones or areas that have become uninhabitable.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

Seize the time

TOMMY McKEARNEY

THE BREXIT storm-clouds are gathering, and the political class in Dublin is in a tizzy. Having placed almost all its emphasis on the mantra of the "hard, militarised border and return to violence," they will be deprived of any coherent argument when this fails to materialise.

The problem for the southern ruling class is not that the Belfast Agreement will fall apart as a result of Britain withdrawing from the European Union: their difficulty lies in the fact that continued membership of the EU will not address the underlying problems faced by a growing number of the Republic's citizens; and this is something they wish to conceal.

While the governing coalition of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil promotes a story of economic recovery, full employment, and prosperity, the reality for many is very different.

Homelessness and lack of access to satisfactory housing is a nightmare for thousands of citizens; yet the state refuses to address the matter. As with most infrastructural issues, this is a problem that will gradually go from bad to worse until it reaches stability-threatening crisis.

The health service is also in chaos. In spite of spending more per capita than most Western European countries, the Republic's health service lurches from crisis to crisis in a seemingly unending cycle. Nevertheless the Government refuses to review its commitment to retaining an expensive and inefficient two-tier system that benefits paying customers over public patients.

Moreover, whatever protection was afforded by the trade union movement has been diminished since the introduction of the Industrial Relations Act (1990), the effect of which was illustrated recently when the High Court granted Ryanair an injunction preventing a strike by the airline's pilots.

The Republic's membership of the European Union is not the sole cause of this situation. The free-market comprador class now governing Ireland predates even the Common Market. Nevertheless they depend heavily for their privileged position and security on a continuing subservient relationship with neo-liberal Brussels. Not only does membership of the EU afford them a bogus prosperity narrative, it organises the bail-out (for which we, the people, pay) when their mismanagement and profligacy lead to meltdown. In return, of course, they ruthlessly apply the free-market agenda dictated by the

CONTINUED

Risk awareness

When the EU destroys fishing waters off Africa it seems reasonable that the people who have lost their livelihood should seek redress from the EU, either in compensation or in alternative means of living.

In other parts of the report immigration is recognised as taking place but not in the sense of population movement for economic reasons or to escape war zones. Although the population of the country has increased, it has scope for further increases through immigration.

Other areas of the report are much the same, in that risks are recognised but they are external. On housing in particular it is clear that the chaos of the market will decide on the provision of housing even though the population is increasing.

The Soviet Union planned ahead quite successfully throughout its existence. Despite coming into existence in a hostile environment, coming under attack from capitalist countries, and being forced to fight a civil war, it gradually overcame these hurdles to establish and consolidate the Revolution. The Soviet government then set about replacing the New Economic Policy by removing production for the market and replacing it with a system of production for society. Using this system of planning, the Soviet Union achieved extraordinary growth in the period up to 1970.

The level of growth was unsurpassed

Continental power-brokers.

It is this slavish adherence to a Thatcherite agenda of privatisation and commercialisation that prevents the southern state from building the necessary houses, creating a universal free health service, and providing a range of public services that would guarantee the well-being of all its citizens.

With Britain now certain to leave the European Union, with or without a deal, attention will sooner or later return to conditions in Ireland as a whole. Not only will the issues referred to above come in for further scrutiny but there is every indication that the global economy is again faltering, and a significant downturn is in prospect.

Coupled with this is the political, economic and social stalemate in the Six Counties, aggravated by the age-old sore of partition. The Belfast Agreement no longer functions as "the light of the world, a city set on a hill . . ." as envisaged by its designers. While the agreement undoubtedly facilitated an ending to the armed conflict, it has failed to provide political agreement or a consensus on local governance.

The future of Northern Ireland as a political entity has rarely been so uncertain. Suspended institutions, changing demographics, sections of unionism's farming and business community eager to retain easy access to the Republic's markets, all contribute to a state in flux. And now there is the real prospect that Boris Johnson's pursuit of a Little Englander agenda will lead to renewed demands for Scottish independence, something that would undermine Unionist confidence.

In the light of all this it is important for socialist republicanism to give serious consideration to a strategy for achieving its objective of a workers' republic. Towards this end a number of issues have to be stated plainly.

One is to reassert unambiguously that continuing membership of the European Union will not, and indeed cannot, deliver social or economic justice for the people of this country. A second point that has to be hammered home is the one made by Connolly in his debate with William Walker: breaking the political connection with Britain remains an imperative if we are to make progress; and campaigning for an end to partition does not contradict our commitment to internationalism.*

It is important, therefore, to take a strong supportive position in the current discussions and campaigns to end partition and bring about political reunification. Such a stance is neither opportunistic nor nationalistic. It not only advances democracy in Ireland but also opens the door to progressive change.

Notwithstanding the turbulence created by armed conflict in the Six Counties, the political context in Ireland, on both sides of the border, remained unchanged for decades after the early 1920s. Three conservative parties shared government in the South throughout that period, while two equally conservative if not reactionary parties dominated politics in the North. On the surface it might be argued that this is still the case, with little sign of it being about to change. The DUP remains the largest party at the Stormont constituency level, while Leo Varadkar and Mícheál Martin's parties continue to dominate the Dáil.

For the reasons outlined above, the hold of these parties on power is not as secure as it once was. Nevertheless, the status quo will not crumble of its own accord, nor should we wait for an external crisis to effect change here. A global economic recession is highly probable but, in isolation, is just as likely to reinforce the right as it is to promote the left.

Moreover, how and when changes in the global economy take place is unpredictable and, by definition, beyond our control.

What socialist republicans should do is engage actively on those issues where we have influence and where we can exert a progressive effect. Battling to end the Industrial Relations Act, fighting north and south for public housing, campaigning against membership of the European Union are all important areas of struggle. However, overturning the constitutional status quo that has resisted the building of a workers' state has to remain high among our priorities.

With conditions being what they are at present, we could do worse than recall a phrase coined by Bobby Seale and seize the time. ★

*James Connolly wrote in *Forward* in July 1911: "Jaurès affirms, in the name of International Socialism, that the Socialists of a subject nation were and are not only in the right in voting for the national independence of their country, but in defending it with their lives if need be."

by any capitalist country in the same period. Once the market was eliminated the productive forces could be refocused to address specific risks, such as the Wall Street Crash and the fascist invasion of the Soviet Union.

The defeat of the fascists came at a great cost to the people of the Soviet Union, but growth was maintained, despite the enormous sacrifice. Unlike a capitalist country, the government of the Soviet Union was able to plan on the basis of the productive forces to hand. It was not dependent on the decisions of individual capitalists, who can distort economic policy in the pursuit of their own short-term gains. An article by C. P. Chandrasekhar, "Learning to plan: Revisiting the Soviet experiment," in *Communist Review,* summer 2019, analyses the success of the Soviet plans.

In general this is a valuable report. It shows how limited a bourgeois government is in addressing risks. It is constrained by the fact that decisions are devolved to individual capitalists. Consequently, there is anarchy in the market, with oversupply, slumps, and waste.

The Soviet system of planning was highly successful up to the late 1960s. The fact that the Soviets were able to deal with the fascist invasion makes the risk from no-deal Brexit look fairly trivial. It was only when the Soviets reintroduced the market and private production that things began to fall apart. ★

They shall not pass!

Speech by **Eugene McCartan**, general secretary, CPI, at the Spanish Anti-Fascist War commemoration, Slieve Foye, Co. Louth, organised by Friends of the International Brigades

ONCE AGAIN we gather here on Slieve Foye to pay our respects and to honour the sacrifice of seven local volunteers from this region of Cos. Louth, Armagh, and Down, seven individuals who left their homeland as Irish republicans and communists, prepared to sacrifice themselves in the fight against fascism in Spain.

We have come to honour Brigader Andrew Delaney, Brigader Albert (Bert) McElroy, Brigader Francis Duffy O'Brien, Brigader Alexander Madero, Brigader John R. McAleenan, Brigader Charlie Donnelly, Brigader Archibald Lester Doran.

The commonality that these men shared with the other brigadistas from Ireland and many others from around the world was that they were dedicated anti-imperialists. Most of these Irish volunteers had fought imperialism at home and had resisted and struggled for the Workers' Republic.

They remained loyal to the objectives and goals of James Connolly and Liam Mellows. They followed in the great revolutionary path laid down by Tone, McCracken, Thomas Russell, James Fintan Lalor, the revolutionary Fenians, and the Citizen Army.

These were men of high principle, loyal to their conviction of a free, independent, sovereign Ireland, and, as true internationalists, they endeavoured to act in solidarity with the oppressed of the world through struggling against colonialist and imperialist domination wherever it reared its head.

They were not romantic, idealistic revolutionaries seeking glory through death but men who sought to change the world by their word and through their deeds. They went voluntarily to fight fascism in Spain—not the easy or popular position. They faced opposition from the church, slander in the press, and confusion among those who should have been allies.

Many who went to fight laid down their lives for their noble cause; but life was not easy for those lucky enough to dodge the fascist bullets. Some, knowing what awaited them in Ireland, never returned, and those who did experienced blacklisting, marginalisation, and isolation.

Only now, through the trojan work of FIBI, have many families come to know their own histories and learn of these and other Irish heroes who fought and died in Spain, which had been papered over and almost forgotten.

But it is not enough for us just to remember those who have come before, to honour them: our duty is to parse the uncomfortable truths and stand with and in defence of our class, even when it feels all are against us. The imperial powers of Europe abandoned Spain to fascism, as it served their own needs; and they are doing the same now, on a much grander scale.

We witness their role in attempting to snuff out the Bolivarian Revolution in

Fascism is the reserve army of capitalism, which continues to be mobilised in shadows across Europe, ever ready to step forward to save the capitalist system.

Venezuela, to deny the peoples of Latin America the power to control and determine their own destiny. They continue to marginalise and isolate the revolutionary government of Cuba. They sell weapons to despotic regimes that are slaughtering tens of thousands of people in Yemen. They weep crocodile tears about the barbarism inflicted upon the heroic Palestinian people while quietly backing the Zionist state of Israel.

The British, French and other European imperialist powers are as duplicitous now as they were in the 1930s. Some in Ireland have fallen for the ruse that imperialist powers can be friendly or neutral, while experience has taught us that imperialism has only interests.

The success of the far right throughout Europe and the EU is not rooted merely in their use of rhetoric: they address the hard realities in the lives of many people in Europe today. They espouse straightforward, if ultimately unworkable, solutions to real, concrete problems—real and concrete problems that the EU will not and cannot address. Instead it answers with liberal lies.

Fascism is the reserve army of capitalism, which continues to be mobilised in shadows across Europe, ever ready to step forward to save the capitalist system.

The EU claims it has prevented war, and that it has open borders, while hundreds die in the Mediterranean fleeing bombs, bullets and war that are a direct result of the intervention and policies of the EU powers.

They claim that EU membership is of benefit to all; but within a few years of the first major EU enlargement of 2004 millions of pounds had moved to the richer western countries from the former eastern bloc. After the financial crash of 2008, which caused stagnation of wages and ushered in austerity measures, the debt of these same richer countries was forced onto those on the periphery through EU banking mechanisms and the IMF. Ireland has the highest debt per capita of any country in the euro zone: €42,800 per head. They forced upon us, in collaboration with the Irish ruling elite, 42 per cent of all EU banking debt.

The truth is that the EU, a capitalist and imperialist machine, rules through its capitalists, landlords and financiers in order to serve them alone; and a refusal to address and reckon with this reality pushes a disillusioned and fraught working class into an embrace with fascism.

The right present themselves as the defenders of national democracy, while the liberal left calls for more EU as they decline in influence. We must seize the narrative from both the fascists and the compromising liberal left.

The British border in Ireland is one of the core means of preventing a united working class and the building of a united resistance. The British backstop—for that it what it is—will stay or go if the British, German and French decide what suits them best. The democratic aspirations of the Irish people mean little or nothing.

Imperialism is in crisis, and the cracks are showing. Its fraud is being exposed through war, both trade and military, around our planet. They make billions while millions of our fellow-citizens live in abject poverty. They destroy our planet for ever-greater profits, at the cost of our future.

Now is the time for us to arm ourselves with knowledge and the means to disseminate it so as to be able to give leadership and direction to our class, to all our people. We must take inspiration from our past heroes and challenge fascism but also, as they did, root it in challenging imperialism, colonialism, and the capitalist system itself.

As we stand here this afternoon to honour these men and others of the Connolly Column we must take courage and inspiration from them. Their steadfastness and firmness of belief should steady us in our present battles. We must not buckle under or descend into opportunism as Brexit and other critical fractures appear in the enemy ranks but use them as weapons against them.

There can be no perfect Europe in which Ireland's or another country's workers are denied the means to govern themselves and decide their own destiny.

No pasarán! ★

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1 Forty years of the Nicaraguan Revolution

GRAHAM HARRINGTON

ON 19 JULY the president of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, addressed hundreds of thousands of Sandinista supporters at a mass rally in Managua. The event was held to celebrate forty years of the Sandinista revolution as well as to show popular support for the government in the wake of the attempted coup in 2018.

The size of the crowd, in a country of 6 million people, clearly shows that the Sandinistas retain popular support; and they are justly proud of their achievements.

The Somoza dictatorship ruled for nearly fifty years, at the behest of the United States, with the National Guard (established by the United States) striking fear into the people. Since the murder of the revolutionary leader Augusto Sandino in 1934 the Somoza dynasty took advantage of the divided bourgeoisie, in Central America's least densely populated country, to earn a significant amount of private wealth for the Somoza family. The country had a poor infrastructure, and its weak capitalist class survived only through the exporting of coffee to the United States—much as the Cuban capitalists relied on the export of sugar.

In 1961 Carlos Fonseca, Tomás Borge and Silvio Mayorga founded the Sandinista Front of National Liberation (FSLN) in neighbouring Honduras. While the organisation was influenced by revolutionary movements abroad, especially in Cuba, it was first and foremost a Nicaraguan organisation, based on the concrete conditions in that country.

The fact that the Somozas had such immense personal wealth, and that the capitalist class remained weak and divided, without strong leadership, led to a tactical alliance with sections of capital that were opposed to Somoza. The lack of industry and very weak organised labour meant that the working class was not strong enough to rule on its own. For the Sandinistas, attacking the Somocistas was attacking the ruling class of their country, hitting the strategic weak point of imperialism.

How I became a republican

CREIG MCROIBÍN

I AM A Republican, but I haven't always been. I was born into a Protestant and Unionist family post Good Friday Agreement.

Before this I had family in the British Army and the RUC. I believed these people were defending the North from terrorists. I would look around and see Rangers football shirts. On the Queen's birthday I have waved a small Union flag.

In short, I believed I was British, and this was total normality to me.

I went to an integrated school which doesn't deserve the title integrated. I learnt about the Battle of the Boyne and British kings and queens. The only thing I knew of the Irish Rebellion was the year it happened.

In this school casual sectarianism was normal, and an eye wouldn't be batted at it. Fenian, Hun, Taig you'd hear and say daily.

I also remember making a joke about Bloody Sunday, which is probably the most shameful thing I can remember saying, as well as believing what the UVF did was justified.

Now I can see these beliefs and jokes were abhorrent, but when you are raised this way you viewed Republicans as invaders who were out for your blood, despite this not being reality.

Now it seems like a form of brainwashing young Protestants go through. There was a total siege mentality.

I was too young to vote but I was planning to vote DUP when I reached the age, even though I am a bisexual and they don't support my right to marriage, even though I am pro-choice

The business interests, learning from the mistakes of their their class in Cuba, had chosen to remain in the country and to undermine the revolution from within...

After the devastating earthquake in 1972 that destroyed most of Managua, combined with the actions of Somoza's National Guard in looting all round them, the demand for a popular uprising against the dictatorship had grown. After several years of guerrilla war, which included brutal reprisals by the regime—backed by the United States and Israel—in 1979 the Sandinistas triumphed.

During those years the support of the FSLN among the people had grown, with the famous Masaya retreat showing its organisational ability: on hearing of a planned attack by the regime the Sandinistas succeeded in evacuating thousands of combatants and civilians from Managua to Masaya, twelve hours away.

Mass mobilisations of the poor, of women, young people and others throughout the country led to such progressive measures as health and education schemes, the rebuilding of destroyed areas, literacy campaigns, and the nationalising of property formerly belonging to the Somoza dynasty.

Before the revolution a mere 27,000 workers were in trade unions; within three years this had grown to 150,000, an example of the massive growth in the power of workers during the revolution. The Sandinistas were the people, and the people were the Sandinistas.

Almost immediately the United States tried to overthrow the new government. It backed conservative sections who had worked with the FSLN against the regime but were now worried about the radical policies being taken. The strategies of "soft war" resulted in the establishment in the United States of such groups as the National Endowment for Democracy and other "human rights" groups whose job was to portray the Sandinistas as brutal dictators and their opponents as cuddly liberals.

The more overt measures included the United States giving open support to the notorious Contrarrevolucionarios (counter-revolutionaries) or Contras, right-wing terrorists and criminals, who murdered and raped across the country, bombed hospitals and schools, and sold drugs to raise money. The struggle against the Contras would cost more than 30,000 lives and would destroy the country economically.

International solidarity poured in for Nicaragua, which was facing a David v. Goliath struggle against the might of the empire to the north. After the army was forced to recruit farmers to fight the Contras, leaving the coffee fields without labour, international volunteers also came to aid the revolution, including dozens from Ireland.

Despite all these obstacles the FSLN continued to gain support, winning a huge victory in the 1984 elections. However, a combination of increased Contra attacks, the victory of the right-opportunist elements in the Soviet Union who were weak in the face of imperialism, and the open aggression the United States had shown to Grenada and Panamá (the president of Panamá, Manuel Noriega, was overthrown partly because he wouldn't allow the Contras to use his country as a base for attacks in Nicaragua), meant that the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections.

The business interests, learning from the mistakes of their their class in Cuba, had chosen to remain in the country and to undermine the revolution from within—a case of the people coming forward and the aristocracy embedding themselves in their ranks.

It should be pointed out that many of those who joined the FSLN at its peak were the sons and daughters of the Nicaraguan capitalist class, who were intent on making sure they had a say in how the new state power was exercised.

The neo-liberal victors reversed many of the progressive measures; but with the rise of left-wing governments throughout Latin America the Sandinistas under Ortega came back into power in 2007. ★

Part 2 of this article will deal with the revolution since 2007, including the attempted coup in 2018

and even though they implement crushing austerity which grinds away at the working class.

Seeing the true nature of the things I believed in

Approximately two years ago I took a class in sociology. I was introduced to three theoretical perspectives, two which I still hold dearly as my core beliefs: functionalism, which I don't hold, feminism and Marxism, which I still hold.

I was instantly hooked on the idea of class conflict and how capitalism works. It just instantly made sense, coming from a working-class background.

That night when I went home I started reading into Marxism. I bought a *Communist Manifesto*, half jokingly, out of pure curiosity, which is still sitting on my shelf. I was absolutely astonished when I finished looking into Marxism. For several weeks everything which I had held as good, the free market, capitalism, unionism (mind you, I was a right-wing libertarian before I was a Marxist) were all torn down around me, and I saw the true nature of the things I believed in.

However, even after I considered myself a Marxist the last thing I let go of was my sense of "Britishness," which I now cringe at typing. For the first time I called myself Irish.

I firmly believe that, as Connolly said, Britain had no right in Ireland, has no right in Ireland, and can never have any right in Ireland. I was finished with unionism.

So how, then, do we show more unionists the evils of British imperialism and capitalism?

It's no surprise that unionist communities, such as the Shankill Road, have been decimated by austerity from the Tories, DUP, and Sinn Féin, and we as Socialist Republicans have to reach a hand out to places like the Shankill Road and large swathes of East Belfast and show these people that we are not evil murderers, we are people who want to help free them from the austerity imposed by people who they currently believe they have no choice but to vote for: the DUP.

This is how we will win the hearts and minds of people who currently consider themselves Unionist, soft or hard. This is a process we must undertake.★

Creig McRoibín is a member of the Connolly Youth Movement.

Peasant Bruegel

The greatest of the sixteenth-century Dutch realists is without doubt Pieter Bruegel the Elder writes **Jenny Farrell**

BORN ABOUT 1525, Bruegel died 450 years ago, on 5 September 1569. His lifetime coincides with the struggle of the Netherlands against Spanish domination. At that time it included Belgium, Luxembourg and part of northern France as well as the territory of the present-day Netherlands. It belonged to the Holy Roman Empire and was dominated by the Spanish branch of the Habsburgs. Bruegel's lifetime included a stepping up of the Inquisition, the persecution of Protestants, and Calvinist iconoclasm.

Bruegel was the first of a large family of painters. He became known as "Peasant Bruegel" because of one of the main features of his work, the centrality of the Dutch peasantry. However, his art reflects Dutch reality in many more ways. Not only did it draw inspiration from popular expressions and proverbs, and put the people of the Netherlands at its centre, his paintings for that very reason contain many hidden attacks on Spanish domination. In this way such works as *The Procession to Calvary* (detail above left), *Census at Bethlehem, The Massacre of the Innocent,* and many others, sometimes cloaked in religious guise, helped to prepare the Dutch Revolution by putting on canvas the realities of the ordinary people and thereby supporting the Dutch quest for independence.

In *The Procession to Calvary*, Jesus is wearing the same blue clothes as the peasants who are coming to his aid, both women and men. The red-coated mercenaries, all on horseback, are clearly depicted as their common enemy.

The domination of the Dutch peasantry by the Spanish oppressor is also very apparent in the two paintings *Census at Bethlehem* and *The Massacre of the Innocent*. Both are set in freezing landscapes. Both carry a political comment about the Dutch or Flemish under this Habsburg branch of the Holy Roman Empire.

In *Census at Bethlehem* the people clearly suffer from the financial and military yoke of the foreign power. They queue to register and to pay taxes to the empire. Tellingly, the tax-collectors sit next to the Habsburg coat of arms (a black eagle on a golden shield), painted on the wall beside the window. Mary and Joseph are shown heading towards the tax-collectors. They too are depicted as Dutch people in subjugation.

Bruegel's sequence on the seasons has its roots in the Book of Hours, but they have come a long way. These paintings mastered the seasonal atmospheric values of nature for the first time and organically integrate in the landscape the ordinary working people.

In *Census at Bethlehem* the people clearly suffer from the financial and military yoke of the foreign power.

▲ *The Wedding Dance*

In his winter landscape *Hunters in the Snow* (above) the hunters and their dogs return from their work. They are bent over with tiredness on their way home to the village. In this painting Bruegel's training as a miniature artist is spectacularly clear in the amount of life going on in the distance. The viewer sees the expansive landscape through the hunters' eyes, following their footsteps across the snow-covered ridge. Villagers skate; a woman crosses a bridge carrying brushwood; even a chimney fire can be detected in the village's furthest cottage, with villagers working hard to extinguish it. Icy cold blows towards the observer, and one senses the shelter that the huts offer their inhabitants.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

Peasant Bruegal

Bruegel celebrated the deep-seated traditions of Dutch culture, showing the threat by the Catholic King Philip II of Spain. Most famous of all are, of course, Bruegel's depictions of peasant life, as for example in *The Wedding Dance* (previous page). This very "this-worldly" picture would have been frowned upon by the Church, which disapproved of dancing and any obvious sensuality or joy in life.

At the centre of this picture we see the joined hands of bride and groom, who are dancing in the open air. The bride is the only woman without a white scarf and the working women's apron; her red hair is loose, and she is wearing a black dress. (White dresses became fashionable only in the nineteenth century.) The entire village is invited, and it is a joyous community occasion.

The dynamic movement within the picture is stunning, expressing the people's enormous energy, and one can easily imagine the bagpipe music. Aside from the dancing there is sexual freedom among the villagers too. The bagpipe itself is a sexual symbol, apart from being a folk music instrument. The unrestrained enjoyment of life, the energy, the dancing, music and sexual freedom are all a clear statement of resistance to the political and religious control of the Dutch people.

Bruegel also produced more directly socially critical allegorical works, such as *Big Fish Eats Small Fish* (top right) and the not so allegorical pair *The Poor Kitchen* and *The Rich Kitchen* (centre right), enjoyable, recognisable, and true to this day.

Bruegel captured his time from the point of view of the subjugated people in a remarkable and realistic, humane way. His art represents the early stages, the progressive, indeed revolutionary element of bourgeois realism.

For this reason viewers today can easily understand and identify with Bruegel's partisanship with the ordinary, exploited and oppressed folk and their rebellion against their condition. ★