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Vote Left!

"There was a time in American history when grand debates over the merits of competing economic systems were front and center, and the terms of the debates and characteristics of the competing views were widely known. It is clear that such a time may be returning. Detailed policy proposals from self-declared 'socialists' are gaining support in Congress and are receiving significant public attention."
Office of the President of the United States,
Economic Report of the President, March 2019 (which devotes forty-five pages to denouncing socialism).

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THIS MONTH we face a number of electoral choices: local elections, elections for the EU Parliament, and a proposed amendment to the Constitution.

The local elections have produced a staggering number of small parties and independents, hoping to be elected to what is in fact powerless local government. Real power lies with the city and county managers.

Many independents are running on a platform of dealing with homelessness, attempting to establish a public profile for future Dáil elections. Few of these independents will have any real political influence if elected. In many ways this is a reflection of how deeply neo-liberal ideology has penetrated the left. Most of these independents take an à la carte approach and a highly individualist attitude—very much in line with neo-liberalism and how it encourages individualism.

Collective action is frowned on, or supported only in so far as it suits their individualist agenda. The power structures within local government would be quite happy to have chambers full of "independents," providing them with a diffuse and easily controlled opposition. It also allows these

More power to you!

JIMMY DORAN

THE RECENTLY launched campaign by three of our largest trade unions—SIPTU, Fórsa, and Connect—is to be welcomed. Under the slogan "More Power to You," it is asking voters to take the local power pledge: "I believe in local government."

This is a pledge to use your vote in the coming local elections to support five demands adopted by the trade unions to strengthen local government and improve services for all. They are asking politicians to make the pledge, and for citizens to vote for those candidates who support it.

The five demands are:

1 Democracy: Introduce directly elected mayors and new, adequately financed town councils.

2 Waste: Establish a regulator for household waste collection, and enable local authorities to re-enter bin collection services.

3 Water: Hold a referendum on enshrining the public ownership of water in the Constitution of Ireland.

4 Housing: Establish a new local authority public housing model, and increase investment in existing local authority maintenance and retrofitting schemes.

5 Energy: Enable local authorities to lead micro-generation and community ownership of renewable energy projects, and establish a primary role for local government in setting carbon reduction targets and the promotion and education of low-carbon transition.

It's about time that unions began to lead the fight back against austerity and the neo-liberal race to the bottom. These demands are a step in the right direction; but they need to go further in some areas. For example:

Waste: Refuse collection should be remunicipalised. Polluters should be made to pay. Most unions already have a policy against the privatisation of state utilities; the reversing of privatisation should now be demanded.

Water: The referendum on water should be for the public management and ownership of water. The right to water should also be included.

Housing: The cost-rental model is not a solution to the housing crisis, as rents under this system come in at about 25 per cent less than a mortgage, i.e. €1,500 a month, instead of €2,000 for an average family home. A universally accessible public housing service with income-linked rents is the permanent solution. How could people on a pension afford €1,500 a month? A right to housing in the Constitution has already been demanded by the ICTU.

It's a welcome development for the trade union movement to be pushing political demands in the elections, as

‘The elections to the so-called European Parliament are just a circus.’

same power structures to make deals with Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and the Labour Party to push through the privatising of council services, selling off public land, and pushing the cost-rental model of public housing.

We also have courageous and principled independents who see politics beyond this narrow approach. Such independent councillors and candidates are involved in campaigns in support of Palestine, Communities Against Low Pay, the Campaign for Public Housing, and several others. They are worthy of our support.

Two of the most effective left voices in the Dáil have raised many important issues, including Garda corruption, NAMA, and Shannon Warport, and were heavily involved in the water struggle. They have done more than many of the other left TDs to inflict damage on the political establishment.

Workers should vote left. Vote for left independents who have a wider democratic viewpoint and who have a record of mobilising working people.

EU Parliament elections

The elections to the so-called European Parliament are just a circus. This is a “parliament” with very limited powers, and if it was to get more powers they would be used for further strengthening the integrationist forces and taking more powers away from national bodies, such as Dáil Éireann.

This is a “parliament” whose president has twice supported attempted coups in Venezuela and the overthrow of that country’s democratic government.

This sham parliament is a veneer, a pretence that there is democracy within the EU superstructure and to peddle the illusion that change can be brought about through using these imperial structures. The EU “Parliament” is a graveyard for failed politicians, a place where failed establishment figures find a rest home and fat pensions.

They can prance round the world representing the EU on delegations to see how fieldmice are being bred beyond the Arctic Circle, or go to far-flung countries to lecture the natives on the benefits of white European “democratic values.” EU trade agreements cause huge economic damage to poor countries, robbing the people of their resources, while the EU’s military arm, NATO, and its own emerging military strategy bomb countries to oblivion.

Divorce changes

While it took a long and tough campaign over many years and two referendums to secure the civil right to divorce in this state, the compromise terms on which a divorce could be obtained were placed in the Constitution.

It’s long past the time for these conditions to be changed. It would be better if such terms were not in the Constitution. People should be allowed to make their own decisions with regard to divorce, and this and other civil matters should not be in the Constitution. But go out and vote in the referendum for the changes proposed. ★

the social wage has been abandoned by the political class. If the trade union movement is ever to regain the density it once had, it must go much further than looking for solutions within the neo-liberal budget.

After ten years of “austerity,” workers are well aware of their predicament, whether it is the housing crisis, precarious work, the two-tier health service, or any of the other things that stop them reaching their full potential. With nowhere left for ordinary working people to turn, the unions must lead the fight back, as they did in the Right2Water campaign.

Demands must go far beyond what the establishment is willing to concede, to demands that will transform the lives of working people. Otherwise unions are just another branch of the establishment.

Workers are still workers when they walk out the factory gates. They need to know that the trade union movement has their back.

The crisis in housing, health, wages and employment did not just happen: it was caused by the Government enforcing “austerity” and the neo-liberal agenda, at the behest of big business and the EU. Low pay, precarious work and cuts to services have led to increased inequality and to levels of poverty not seen for many years. This has coincided with a massive decline in trade union density, and is inextricably linked to it.

Half of all workers earn less than €30,000 a year. Half of all women workers earn less than €22,000 a year. The gloves need to come off; the time for “moderate” demands and half-baked measures is long since past. Workers and their unions must push demands much further, to the demand for a universal right to housing, health and education for all citizens to be enshrined in the Constitution.

Trade unions must regain power, strength, and density. All anti-union legislation must be abolished, allowing workers to have control over their own activity, to decide when and what actions unions take to win back losses and to fight new battles. We must fight for the right to union recognition, the right to union access, and full collective bargaining rights for all workers.

As it stands, half of all union members are over the age of forty, and fewer young people are joining unions, being trapped in minimum-hours and short-term contracts. If this trend continues, the writing is on the wall for trade unions.

Why are young people, despite having some of the worst working conditions for generations, not joining unions? Is it because trade unions are not seen as radical any more, as they were when first founded by the likes of Larkin and Connolly?

We must learn from history. Trade unions were born out of struggle: the struggle for workers to have decency and dignity in their lives. Unions must lead from the front. Trade unions now have to become radical or redundant.

In the words of James Connolly, our demands most moderate are: we only want the earth. ★

Reckless isolated groups should vacate the stage

TOMMY McKEARNEY

THE DEATH of Lyra McKee was a needless tragedy inflicted on a young woman by thoughtless stooges. It was an act that devastated her life partner, her family, and her friends and colleagues in the world of journalism.

There is no room for equivocation when commenting on this event. Yet this killing was not wrong only because a young, talented and engaging 29-year-old lost her life—though it was certainly all of that. It was not wrong only because of the undisciplined firing of live ammunition in a built-up area, reckless as that undoubtedly was. It was also wrong because it involved the aimless, ill-conceived and counter-productive use of physical force.

And before some wiseacre challenges this writer by saying that the same may have been said about the Provisional IRA, let me make two basic points. In the first instance, there is no comparison between the situation today and the scale and circumstances that gave rise to the Provisionals. More important, though, is the fact that events must be considered strictly on their merits, albeit in context. It is in the light of contemporary situations and circumstances that events in Derry must be considered.

Claiming that those who opened fire were defending the Creggan is simply being disingenuous. To credibly protect a community, it goes without saying that there must exist a genuine and serious threat to the people of the area. In contrast to events during 1969, when the RUC used lethal force to kill and injure people in the Bogside, Belfast and elsewhere in the Six Counties, no such threat was evident on that April evening in 2019. Responding to house searches is not defending, and firing wildly with a pistol in the direction of an armoured vehicle was at best bravado and in this case inexcusable.

It must be pointed out, however, that the PSNI also have questions to answer. What on earth did they think they were doing by aggressively carrying out house searches at 9 p.m. on the Thursday before Easter? While no-one could have predicted the actual outcome, surely they must have known that there was the real risk of a violent confrontation when so many people were out and about on a mild spring evening, and in a republican area.

Let's be clear: this is not to imply that the PSNI were responsible for Lyra McKee's death. Nevertheless their decision to carry out searches at that time and place must be carefully scrutinised and weighed in the light of the subsequent tragedy.

However, when analysing existing

‘Overcoming the two failed Irish states requires the building of a broadly based progressive mass movement of working people.’

material conditions, one overriding consideration is crystal-clear. To paraphrase an expert in the subject, the Derry shooters have no water in which to swim. Whatever wider assessments may be made of the Provisionals, it is undeniable that they received very considerable support from within the North’s nationalist community. By no stretch of the imagination can any similar claim be made today for the tiny, isolated groups promoting armed conflict in the Six Counties. That fact alone condemns them to certain and total failure. In the process, however, they serve only to damage the efforts of those working to build a workers’ republic in Ireland.

By any reckoning, the political entity that is Northern Ireland is in disarray. Political institutions have not functioned for more than two years. The leading pro-union party, the DUP, has not only lost the confidence of powerful elements within unionism but has also overplayed its hand with the Conservatives in London. All the while, the very existence of the six-county state is in doubt.

Meanwhile the southern 26-county state is disguising its failure to address the needs of its working-class majority by promoting its relationship with the neo-liberal EU while loudly lamenting the Brexit process. This is the state with 10,000 homeless people and a two-tier health service, where money buys access to life-saving treatment. Yet at the same time its government sees fit to award private companies a lucrative contract worth €373 million over fifteen years to operate toll systems on the country’s busiest motorway.*

Overcoming the two failed Irish states requires the building of a broadly based progressive mass movement of working people. Signs that such a development is possible have been evident in several well-supported campaigns over recent years in the 26 Counties. Encouragingly, many disparate republican groups and individuals have overcome their reluctance to change old and redundant tactics and have engaged in this process.

Unfortunately, all too often these initiatives to unite on a working-class agenda have been ridiculed and obstructed by those responsible for the death of Lyra McKee. Ironically, while they have sought to cause division and dissension within the ranks of left republicanism, they have now succeeded in uniting the forces of the establishment on a sterile security programme. Hardly a surprise, therefore, that so many suspect the presence of a sinister hand monitoring and manipulating these organisations.

But irrespective of the presence of provocateurs, these groups are objectively counter-revolutionary. Their presence and their actions are more than a mere distraction: they cause confusion by peddling a false promise that they can deliver on a republican objective. Their actions give comfort to the enemies of a workers’ republic as they distort and mangle the socialist message. Their reckless incompetence allows for the demonising of genuine revolutionaries. Common sense, not to mention common decency, dictates that they should vacate the stage.

Regrettably, it is doubtful if any of these arguments will have any positive effect on the organisations involved. If logic or political understanding were their strong point they wouldn’t be in the cul de sac they now occupy.

It is important, however, that the counter-productive actions of these groups are not allowed to facilitate a reactionary agenda. The demand for an all-Ireland workers’ republic is as valid as it ever was. The building of a mass movement among the working class to do this remains not only legitimate but also essential. Only through a mass movement of the Irish working class will we definitively sideline what Connolly derisively described as the “physical force party.” Only through such a movement can we transform society in the two failed states into a republic that serves the needs of working people.

We must continue, therefore, to speak the facts objectively, overlook the hyperbole, and continue to build for the future. ★

*Barry O’Halloran, “Abtran and Vinci win €373m contract to operate M50 tolls,” *Irish Times*, 18 April 2019.

The killing of Lyra McKee

Statement by the Communist Party of Ireland

20 April 2019

The Communist Party of Ireland strongly condemns the killing of Lyra McKee, a young journalist working and living in Derry, on Thursday 18 April.

Once again a family has lost a loved one in a needless and senseless act committed by an organisation that has nothing to offer the working people of Derry or the working people of the north of Ireland. In particular, the organisation that admitted having carried out this action has nothing to offer the youth of that city, only further deaths or another generation of wasted youth rotting in prison.

We also know from recent history that many of these groups are heavily penetrated by agents of the state. Their actions have been orchestrated and controlled by agents of the state, in the interests of the state.

“Saoradh,” and the self-styled “New IRA,” have clearly learnt nothing from history and from the consequences of a failed military strategy of the recent past. Young people need to realise that this is not the way to bring about change or to deal with the many problems that they face. Unless people and organisations learn from history they are doomed to repeat the failed strategies and the mistakes of history.

The next property crash is looming

DAN TARAGHAN

THE LAST property crash was brought about by a combination of banks lending on the basis of spurious calculations, massaging their own financial data, and inflated property prices that were completely divorced from reality.

Following the collapse, property prices adjusted back to more realistic values. The Government bailed out the banks and the main capitalist speculators. It also socialised the debt and transferred the debt to the public.

In effect, the property crash was used to attack the working class and our living conditions. Since then the working class has fought back. The privatising of the public water supply has been resisted, and the sham arguments of the Green Party and other so-called environmentalists have been exposed.

Public-sector workers have been trying to undo some of the damage

Workers in struggle

Lloyd's refuse to attend the Labour Court

At the Labour Court on 26 April the employees' union, Mandate, presented the case for all Lloyd's Pharmacy workers to receive improvements to their terms and conditions of employment. Mandate's submission includes demands for:

- A pay increase of 3.4 per cent, backdated to 1 April 2019 for twelve months
- The establishment of transparent incremental pay scales for all grades, in line with those of Boot's Pharmacy
- Improvements to the sickness pay scheme from the present four days to twenty-five days
- Improvements in annual leave entitlement from the present maximum of twenty-two days up to twenty-nine (in line with Boot's)
- Improvements to public holiday and Sunday premium payments from time and a third to time and a half.

The company's management did not attend the hearing, which Mandate's assistant general secretary, Gerry Light, said exposed their attitude towards their own workers and to the state's industrial relations machinery. "Unfortunately," he said, "yet again Lloyd's Pharmacy management have attempted to deny their workers their basic human right to be represented by a trade union of their choice for collective bargaining purposes."

SIPTU members in Coca-Cola to consider industrial action

SIPTU representatives confirmed on 24 April that members working in Coca-Cola are considering industrial action as part of a campaign to secure collective bargaining rights at the company's plant in Ballina, Co. Mayo. The dispute centres on two Labour Court recommendations that found in favour of SIPTU's claim for negotiation rights for workers who are members of the union.

done under various agreements introduced under the guise of the "crisis." It is hardly surprising, therefore, to see that all the hallmarks of the next property crash are building up.

Dublin's housing market has now reached a dangerous level, with inflated house prices. Figures produced by the Central Statistics Office show that the median price for a house in Dublin is €370,000. This is just over nine times average earnings, of €39,753. An affordable house is deemed to be 3½ to 4 times a person's income.

Within the wider Dublin area, the Dún Laoghaire figures are worse, with an average price of €541,667, or fourteen times average earnings. In other words, despite the propaganda from Government and neo-liberal economists, workers are being forced into the private rental sector, as they are prevented from buying their own homes.

The National Competitiveness Council, in its annual review published in April, showed that Ireland is now the fifth most expensive place to live in the EU, with prices 13 per cent above the euro area average. It is more expensive to live here than in France or Germany, and without any of the benefits of good infrastructure such as public transport, child care, or health service.

A recent report from Waterford revealed that the bodies of the dead were left on trolleys; so you cannot even die with dignity. It is hardly surprising that there is growing pressure for wage increases and improvements in how taxes are spent.

Earlier this year the *Irish Farmers' Journal* published its Agricultural Land Price Report for 2018. This showed that the average price in 2018 was €9,072 per acre. This was actually a drop of 0.18 per cent on the 2017 price. There were variations in the average, with Dublin having the highest, at €22,000, and such counties as Kildare, Wexford and Kilkenny also above average.

Approximately six to ten houses can be built per acre; so it can be extremely profitable to acquire even one acre of agricultural land and build houses on it. Obviously the land would require rezoning, but such rezoning would immediately transform the value of the land.

According to the survey, 33 per cent of farms sold in 2018 were bought by beef farmers, who account for 60 per cent of all farmers; 23 per cent were bought by dairy farmers, who make up only 14 per cent of all farmers. However, 17 per cent of farms were bought by business people. The *Irish Farmers' Journal* reckons that these latter are using the purchase of agricultural land in order to pass assets to offspring and so avoid capital acquisitions tax by availing of agricultural relief.

In this way wealth can be kept within the family and transferred from one generation to the next. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx called for the "abolition of all rights of inheritance" as part of the move by the working class to assert its dominance in society.

The failure of successive governments to restrict the growth of Dublin and diversify the spread of wealth in the country is having a negative impact that will lead in the near future to another property crash.

The price of an acre of agricultural land is fairly static over previous years. It ranges from a national average of €9,000 to €22,000 in Dublin. The price of agricultural land relates to house prices. If in Dublin agricultural land is €22,000 an acre, and ten houses can be built on that acre at a value of €3.37 million, the profits to be made are huge.

These values also drive the rental value of land and property. In Dublin, rents average about €1,600 per month, which would swallow a substantial proportion of a worker's income on average earnings. Workers are being excluded from the property market by high prices and are also being hammered in the private rental market.

To compound these problems, £42 billion of British fund investment has transferred to Ireland since the Brexit referendum. The capitalists who control this money want a return in either tax reliefs or expensive office space. The present government, with its neo-liberal philosophy, will not be able to control the increasing conflicts. ★

SIPTU members to take strike action at Boxmore Plastics

SIPTU members at the Boxmore Plastics Ltd plant in Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan, are to take strike action on Wednesday 8 May as a result of the company's refusal to grant a pay increase as recommended by the Labour Court.

This follows a vote by SIPTU members in the general operative, maintenance and team-leader grades at the plant in favour of strike action and industrial action.

Unite responds to Bombardier's announced closure

The Canadian aircraft manufacturer Bombardier has announced a plan to sell its aero-structures business in Belfast. The company said it wants to combine its corporate and regional jet units into a single aviation unit and to shed more "non-core assets" by selling off its Belfast and Moroccan businesses. The company said it will concentrate its aero-structures activities in Montréal and Mexico and its newly acquired Global 7500 business jet wing operations in Texas.

Shareholders are worried that the company may not meet its declared profit margins and generate $20 billion in income anticipated for 2020. So the workers must pay a heavy price to satisfy shareholders' greed.

The company claims that its railway division should generate $10 billion next year (created by workers), and that this is crucial to Bombardier's five-year turnaround plan. They claim that heavy investment in aircraft production drove it to the brink of bankruptcy in 2015.

Unite, which represents the majority of workers, expressed a hope that any new owner will make a commitment to local production and bring forward expanded investment. It is seeking assurances from Bombardier and from the British government on this process of the sale.

Bombardier workers in the north of Ireland are among the most highly skilled workers in the industry globally.

The Unite statement went on to say: "Whoever the buyer is there's an undeniable case for investment to not only sustain but expand production and employment into the future." ★

A victory for pro-Venezuela activists

Venezuela: A timeline of struggle

This is an edited version of a document supplied by the Venezuela-Ireland Network

In our media the economic and political difficulties in Venezuela are usually presented as recent developments. In most reports, all blame is laid on the alleged failure of the Bolivarian Revolution. Absent from the narrative are any accounts of US interference leading up to the present situation. What never emerges is the fact that such threats began from the first day of the revolution.

The following is a short history of US actions in Venezuela, showing that the war began in the very early days of President Chávez's strategy for the Bolivarian Revolution

2001
At the end of 2001 the US government despatches a senior State Department official and regional enforcer to Caracas, where he bluntly threatens dire reprisals—destabilisation—if Venezuela fails to line up with America's campaign to reimpose its global hegemony.

2002: Coup d'état
Two leading coup plotters, General Efraín Vásquez Velasco and General Ramírez Poveda, were trained at the US Army's School of the Americas.

2002: The day after the coup
After the failure of the coup, the Agency for International Development (a US government body), together with the National Endowment for Democracy (a "soft power" organisation supported by the CIA), open an "Office of Transition Initiatives" in Caracas. Their plan is to invest more than $100 million in efforts to undermine the Chávez government and reinforce the opposition over the following eight years.

December 2002 to February 2003: The oil lock-out
The United States backs the bosses' lock-out in the Venezuelan oil industry.

2004: Recall referendum
The United States channels funds through the National Endowment for Democracy and other front groups. It bankrolls a "recall referendum," which is decisively defeated.

2004–2008
Colombia "grants" the United States the use of seven military bases.

2005–2006
The Agency for International Development's main intermediary, Development Alternatives Inc., is obliged to close its office in Caracas. The US government apparently seeks new funding channels, one of which is a group called the "Pan-American Development Foundation," which finances opposition journalism, among other things.

2006
The first US sanctions on Venezuelan individuals are imposed.

2007
The proposed constitutional amendment for "21st-century socialism" is defeated. The United States supports opposition groups.

2010
In November 2010, according to e-mail messages obtained by Venezuelan security services, Juan Guaidó, Yon Goicoechea and several other student activists attend a secret five-day training session at a hotel in Mexico.

FRIDE, a Spanish right-wing think tank, publishes a report prepared with funds from the "World Movement for Democracy" (a project of the National Endowment for Democracy) that discloses that international agencies are subsidising the Venezuelan opposition with an annual $40–50 million. Funds donated by American and European

A group of determined American activists forced Juan Guaidó's shadow ambassador, Carlos Vecchio, to flee from a rally that was supposed to mark his triumphant entry into the Venezuelan embassy in Washington. It was supposed to be a day of triumph for the Venezuelan coup leader Juan Guaidó and his forces in Washington.

In Caracas the opposition had launched "Operation Liberty," a coup attempt that promised to flip high-level figures in the military and Maduro's inner circle and deliver the presidential palace to Guaidó. And in Washington, the self-declared ambassador, Carlos Vecchio, was poised to take control of Venezuela's embassy.

But by the end of the May Day holiday, Guaidó's plot had been resoundingly defeated, while Vecchio was seen fleeing the embassy after his speech, before fifty or so fanatical right-wing supporters were overwhelmed by a group of anti-coup protesters, both inside and outside the embassy.

It was a humiliating defeat for a US-backed opposition that has not achieved a single concrete victory since launching its coup attempt more than two-and-a-half months ago.

For over a week a group of American citizens calling themselves the Embassy Protection Collective have stymied the opposition's plan to seize the embassy, denying its leadership the veneer of legitimacy that it has been desperately seeking. Members of the collective moved into the embassy at the invitation of its official owners in the Venezuelan government, and have maintained a round-the-clock presence to prevent a mob of opposition activists from occupying the grounds.

On 30 April the pro-coup mob outside turned violent, physically assaulting embassy protectors and hurling racist, sexist and homophobic abuse at others.

The US Secret Service, which has the duty of protecting foreign embassies, has done nothing so far to prevent or punish criminal acts that violate Washington's civil code and article 22 of the Vienna Conventions on the protection of diplomatic facilities. ★

agencies and foundations are given to the right-wing parties Primero Justicia (First Justice), Un Nuevo Tiempo (A New Time) and COPEI (the right-wing Social Christian Party), as well as to a dozen or so NGOs, students' groups, and media.

The report mentions many groups that have been contributing since at least 2002, including the Carter Center, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the Open Society Institute, the Pan-American Development Foundation, the Agency for International Development, and the National Endowment for Democracy, as well as multilateral institutions, including the Organization of American States and the European Union.

2012

In the Obama government's foreign operations budgets, between $5 and 6 million has been included to finance opposition groups in Venezuela since 2012.

2013

US Embassy officials are expelled for their participation in destabilisation activity with members of the far-right opposition.

In November 2013 a document entitled Plan Estratégico Venezolano (Venezuelan Strategic Plan) surfaces after cases taken by the lawyer Eva Golinger. It includes a plan by representatives of the United States, Colombia and Venezuelan oligarchs to undermine the Venezuelan economy as part of a plot to remove President Maduro.

2013–2014

The Agency for International Development and the National Endowment for Democracy filter more than $14 million to opposition groups in Venezuela, including their political campaigns in 2013 and for the current anti-government protests.

2014

In May the Venezuelan government releases documents describing an assassination plot against President Maduro.

More sanctions are imposed when the US House of Representatives passes the "Venezuelan Human Rights and Democracy Protection Act."

In December the US Congress passes the "Venezuela Defense of Human Rights and Civil Society Act," which directs the president to impose further sanctions.

2015

Obama signs a presidential order declaring Venezuela an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to US national security interests.

2017

In August an executive order specifically bars revenue from Venezuela's state oil company being paid from the United States, prohibits the Venezuelan government to sell bonds, and even bars it from receiving loans. These sanctions are designed to prevent Venezuela's own money from entering Venezuela.

2017–2018

According to the Venezuelan government, the US is also involved in a plot to capture President Maduro at the presidential palace, and another plot to murder him at a military parade in July 2017. A year later exiled right-wing leaders try and fail to kill him with drone bombs during a military parade in Caracas.

2019

On 30 April another attempted coup by Juan Guaidó calls for a military uprising. The US national security adviser, John Bolton, calls on the Venezuelan army to support the coup.

The convicted criminal Leopoldo López, who had earlier been broken free from house arrest by opposition supporters, is forced to hide in the Spanish embassy.

The president of the EU Parliament, Antonio Tajani, states: "Today marks a historic day for the return of democracy and freedom to Venezuela, which the European Parliament has always supported. The freeing of Leopoldo López by soldiers obeying the constitution is great news."

At the time of writing, a new action against the Venezuelan people is under way but appears to have been defeated.

"Photo: Staff Sergeant Mike Harvey/MOD" Wikimedia

Imperialism will kill us all

EUGENE MCCARTAN

OUR PLANET is on the verge of an environmental catastrophe. Billions live in abject poverty; millions more go hungry for want of food or clean drinking water.

The gap between rich and poor grows and grows. The wealthiest 1 per cent of people on our planet could fit in a public-transport bus.

Yet today, while the world faces these huge challenges, spending on armed forces grows and grows. The most recent report on global military spending by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *World Military Spending, 1988–2018,* makes for sobering reading.

"Total world military expenditure rose to $1,822 billion in 2018," the report says, "representing an increase of 2.6 per cent from 2017." It breaks down that figure to show that the five biggest spenders in 2018 were the United States, China, Saudi Arabia, India, and France, which together accounted for 60 per cent of global military spending.

The United States has a population of approximately 330 million, China 1,400 million, Saudi Arabia 34 million, India 1,300 million, and France 65 million.

The United States, France and Saudi Arabia have a combined population of 429 million. None of these countries are under any military threat, but they are certainly involved in a lot of military adventures around the globe, as well as arming and financing many terrorist groups.

India sees Pakistan as a threat, and the present government is made up of a Hindu extremist party. China is threatened with encirclement by the United States and its NATO allies.

The United States, which has approximately eight hundred military bases spread around the globe, has increased its military spending for the first time since 2010, by 4½ per cent, to reach $649 billion in 2018. This makes it the largest spender on armaments in the world, spending almost as much on its military in 2018 as the next eight countries combined. While China's spending on its military grew for the twenty-fourth consecutive year, China has few if any military facilities outside its own borders.

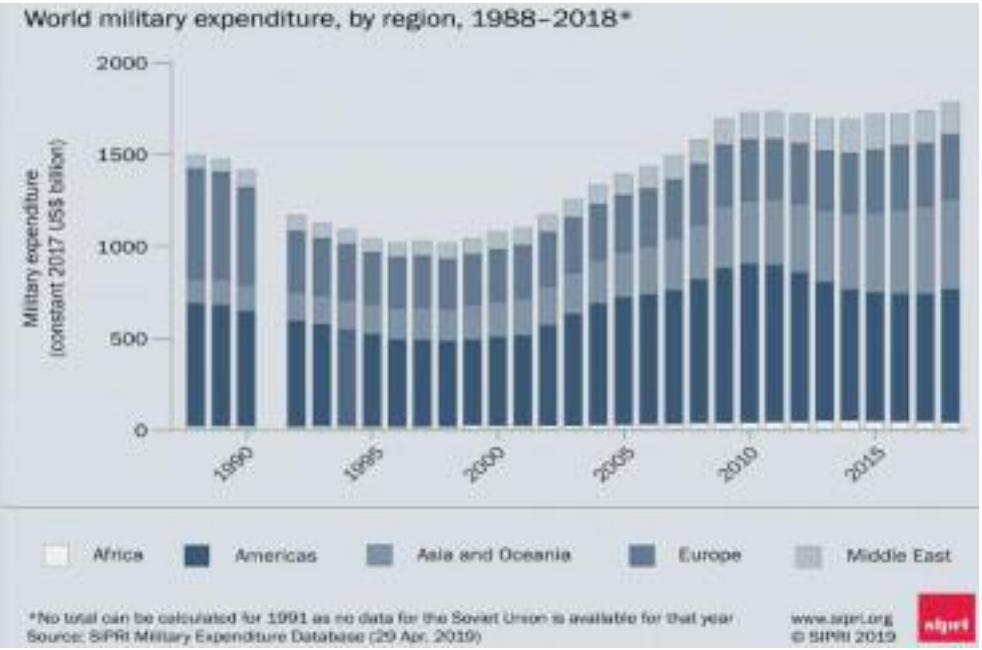
Imperialist aggression is forcing more and more countries to divert scarce resources to military budgets, thereby forcing further cuts in social schemes. Small countries are forced, if they receive financial support from capitalist powers, to purchase goods and services as well as military weaponry from those countries.

The SIPRI report reveals that total global military spending rose for the second consecutive year in 2018, to the highest level since 1988 (the first year for which consistent global data is available). World spending is now 76 per cent higher than the low point of 1998, after the Cold War. World military spending in 2018 accounted for 2.1 per cent of global GDP, or $239 per person.

Other notable developments:

- The largest absolute increase in spending in 2018 was by the United States ($28 billion).
- Total military expenditure in 2018 by all twenty-nine NATO members was $963 billion, accounting for 53 per cent of world spending.
- Military spending in South America rose by 3 per cent in 2018. This was mainly due to the increase of 5 per cent in Brazil's spending, the second increase in as many years.

‘The largest absolute increase in spending in 2018 was by the United States ($28 billion).’



● Military spending in Turkey increased by 24 per cent in 2018, to $19 billion, the highest annual increase among the world’s fifteen biggest military spenders.

● Six of the ten countries with the highest military burden (military spending as a proportion of GDP) are in the Middle East: Saudi Arabia (8.8 per cent of GDP), Oman (8.2 per cent), Kuwait (5.1 per cent), Lebanon (5 per cent), Jordan (4.7 per cent), and Israel (4.3 per cent).

Spending on armed forces is a priority of the imperialist countries in their strategy of global domination, control of resources, and territory. The needs of the people are far down the list of government priorities.

Wars, both large and small, are extremely damaging to the global environment. The impact of wars on the environment will last for many decades, rendering large tracts of land unfit for farming because of poisoning.

Here in Ireland the Government signed up to the EU’s “Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence” (PESCO), whereby it has committed itself to increase spending on the Defence Forces to keep in line with the military needs and strategies of the European Union. It will cost us all in the form of cuts in health, education, and housing.

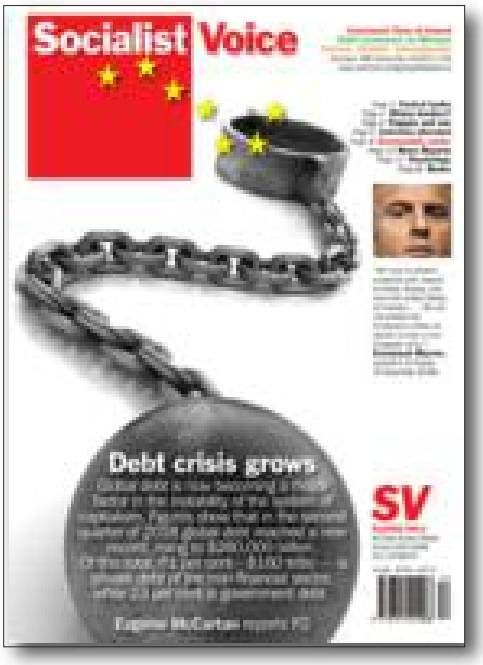
Militarism affects everyone. ★

The USA and China lead increase in world military expenditure

US military spending grew—for the first time since 2010—by 4.6 per cent, to reach $649 billion in 2018. The USA remained by far the largest spender in the world, and spent almost as much on its military in 2018 as the next eight largest-spending countries combined. ‘The increase in US spending was driven by the implementation from 2017 of new arms procurement programmes under the Trump administration,’ says Dr Aude Fleurant, the director of the SIPRI AMEX programme.

China, the second-largest spender in the world, increased its military expenditure by 5.0 per cent to $250 billion in 2018. This was the 24th consecutive year of increase in Chinese military expenditure. Its spending in 2018 was almost 10 times higher than in 1994, and accounted for 14 per cent of world military spending. ‘Growth in Chinese military spending tracks the country’s overall economic growth,’ says Tian. ‘China has allocated 1.9 per cent of its GDP to the military every year since 2013.’

Data and graphic: SIPRI



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Identity and class

Laura Duggan

Ruby Loftus Screwing a Breech Ring 1943
Laura Knight (1877-1970)

THERE IS no truly universal experience of the world. It is deeply influenced by how we have been taught to orient ourselves in that world, which then predicts how we interact with it.

Language is one such example. Monoglot English-speakers break their day down into time slots and scheduled intervals; Japanese-speakers group objects according to material; Russian-speakers recognise different shades of blue more quickly.

These differing social and cultural pressures influence how we identify ourselves, not least in an awareness of how we are perceived by others. To be black in a predominantly white country, or to be a woman in a male-dominated sphere, is a very different experience from being white or male in the same environment. These forms of identity can be multi-aspect, complex, overlapping, and when othered by society can feel contradictory or shameful. Increasingly they are embraced as a form of defiance, as we can see with the increase of radical LGBTQ and feminist groups. Social psychologists and their studies have limited identity to such areas as ethnicity, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality. There is little study on the role that class plays in identity.

Class as a form of identity is a controversial topic. As communists we understand class to be defined on a

'Nice little earners'

Paul Doran

THERE I am sitting among my three or four neighbours, and the talk turns to property. Their property. This topic has bothered me for some time, as it brings out the nastiest prejudices in my neighbours: condemning suspected "welfare cheats," bothersome tenants, and everything else.

Now one of these neighbours, Dick, tells me that he has just bought his wife a Jaguar—second-hand, mind you—as a Christmas present. I look across to my wife, and we both throw our eyes up to the air. Nice people, but over the top, and lacking self-awareness. Later, as the festive cheer loosens their tongues, Dick tells me he has a second home in the area, and remarks on how dirty some of his tenants can be. I want to tell him he is a parasite. As he profits from others' misery, the state has a tax avoidance, so-called "relief" scheme, whereby he can deduct at least 85 per cent of the interest on the mortgage from any tax payable on rental income from his little earner.

Another neighbour, Marie, tells me that some years ago she bought a "small" apartment in our village, and that she was looking for a reliable tenant for quite some time. Now, she rents the apartment through the county council, on the "sound" advice of her friend who worked in the council's Housing Department, who probably took her through the mechanics of it. The council takes care of all the "hassle" that comes with being a landlord.

I am now fit to be tied with hearing of these "sound" investments.

material basis: a person who sells their labour power belongs to the working class. This means that an office worker and a factory worker belong to the same political class if both rely on their wages to sustain them.

Class as a political definition is defined by ownership and power; class as a social identity is defined by a wide array of social markers, including such things as accent, footwear, and number of books owned. A factory worker is not likely to be in the same social class as an office worker; and an office worker from a low-income area may engage in code-switching while at work. However, working-class people are equally likely to define themselves on this social class basis, as they are based on their race, gender, or sexuality, and so on.

This use of class as an identity is particularly characteristic of those who grow up in low income areas associated with manual and factory work. Lives lived with less security, fewer opportunities, less control and reduced influence tend to afford an understanding of the self and behaviour as interdependent with others and lends a greater understanding to the context of class, even if unconsciously. This "hard interdependence" derives from the community, as well as individual, resilience that is needed to cope with continuing or repeated adversity. They defend and help each other, and offer support in a multitude of ways, as well as engaging in more pro-social behaviour generally, as they know that they too may need to rely on the kindness, compassion and solidarity of others in their community.

That being said, working-class identity does not preclude identifying and placing importance on other aspects of their identity as well, be it sexuality, gender, and so on. Their social class just means that their understanding of this other aspect of themselves is also expressed through the interdependence model of identity: intersectionality, if you put class at the centre. Audre Lorde and Angela Davis cover this topic in depth.

The other and more commonly discussed form of self-identify is that of "expressive independence." This form of identity is the one most people associate with "identity politics." Typically associated with those with higher levels of security in life, their priorities move from a communal understanding of society to a more individualistic one. Rather than simply understanding social contexts, people from this background are in a position to shape them, and often do, for their own betterment. Their understanding of identity is studied, understood and generally deemed to have some validity, if not accepted.

This can be seen in the way schools and work-places use the acceptance of expressive independence as a standard for measuring "inclusivity" while damping, if not outright opposing, any expression of working-class identity and therefore interdependence. Individual expressions of identity do not challenge the capitalist norms necessary in the exploitation of workers. Hiring more individualistic women, or marching in corporate-sponsored Pride, falls very much into line with most companies' ethos, along with keeping wages low or blocking union recognition.

Interdependence, however, with its base in a working-class identity suffused with notions of solidarity, collectivist approaches, and trade unionism, by its very nature challenges capitalism, making it dangerous.

Significantly, despite the fact that there has been a dramatic decline in traditional working class occupations, such as that of manufacturing, large numbers of workers still describe themselves as being socially working class; and this self identification does matter. In all job sectors, other than managerial and professional, identifying as working class makes a substantial difference in a person's political attitudes, those identifying as working class being less likely to express right wing ideology, more likely to be supportive of unions, as well as being broadly anti-racist and anti-fascist in their views.

The concept of class as identity, particularly working-class identity, even if not based in political reasoning, still produces marked political results. It is up to the left to understand and radicalise this. We cannot allow it to be remoulded and corrupted by the right. Our strength comes from our class, and all the different shades within it. ★

It's getting late, and the quieter neighbour, Seán, who would help any of us out if we were stuck, starts to tell me about his "little pension fund" down the country. "Ah, sure it's for the future, when I retire." He and his wife, a schoolteacher, have their little pension fund that they top up every year, thereby availing of more tax benefits from the state.

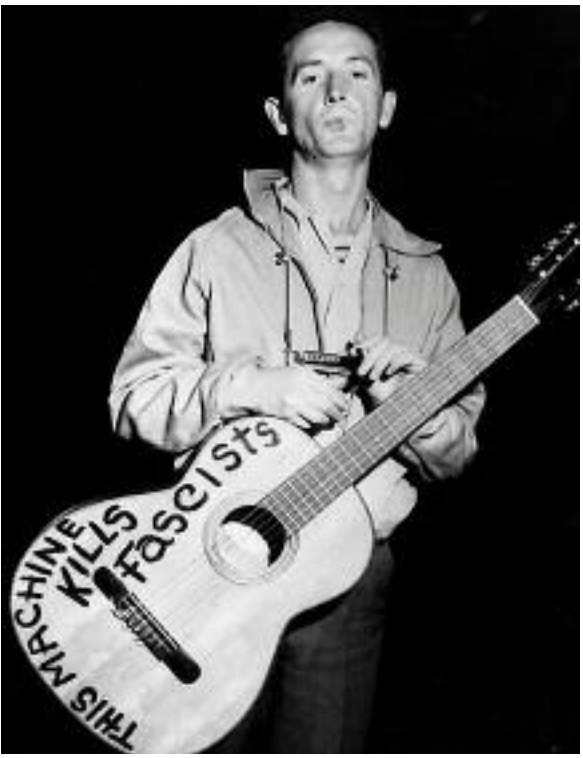
Then there is my other neighbour, May. She has stature, a heart of gold, but runs a call-centre business. She pays crap wages, the minimum wage and maybe a small increase after a year or two for her workers, but she is not losing sleep over it, as she knows the state will top up these wages with family income supplement and so on, allowing her to make money. May runs "best employee" competitions at the end of each month, gives out small prizes. One can imagine how exciting this makes it to work for her.

All these neighbours, I think to myself, are generous to a fault when you meet them in person; the reality of their livelihoods, however, the nature of how they supplement the earnings from their own jobs, leads directly to these anti-working class prejudices. Meanwhile they take two or three foreign holidays a year, and some have holiday homes in Co. Wexford and the like for long weekends. They have the means to pay for grinds for their children, and to attend the best private clinics in times of illness. And they believe they deserve every bit of it.

The ruling class has to allow this "respectable" petit-bourgeois middle class to share in some of the spoils. Not only do the working class not have access to these tax breaks but they are the ones who end up paying for them, with reduced revenue for expenditure on public health, and so on.

All the while, middle-class types complain of the attitudes of their supposed "underlings," so blind are they to their own heightened sense of entitlement. ★

Pete Seeger on his 100th birthday



THERE ARE few people more famous in the political song movement than Pete Seeger. Along with his contemporaries Paul Robeson and Woody Guthrie, Seeger represented the might of song in highlighting the common cause, strengthening courage, and inspiring resistance. Song was their weapon in this struggle for a fair, equal and peaceful society.

Pete grew up in a musical family. His father, Charles, was a musicologist and lecturer who lost his job when he opposed America's involvement in the First World War. His mother, Constance, was a violinist, and also held socialist and pacifist political views.

His parents divorced when Pete was a child. Charles remarried and joined the Composers' Collective, who performed their songs for strikers and the unemployed. The family travelled the country, playing music and attending folk festivals on many occasions. It was here that Pete encountered the banjo and made it his instrument.

In 1936, at the age of seventeen, Pete Seeger joined the Young Communist League, and in 1942 he became a member of the Communist Party of the USA, which he left in 1949.

In 1938 he enrolled in a sociology course at Harvard University, in the hope of becoming a journalist, but ultimately he did not not finish it. He went to New York, where he met Woody Guthrie, Alan Lomax, Lead Belly, and others, deeply involving him with traditional American music. They jointly founded the Almanac Singers in December 1940. With their pro-union songs and singing against racism and war, the band propelled Seeger into an active political folk-song scene. They performed for strikers with such songs as *"Talking Union"* and others about the struggles for the unionising of industrial workers.

In June 1942, following Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, Seeger enlisted in the US army in order to fight fascism. He worked on aeroplane engines and later transferred to Saipan in the Western Pacific to entertain troops. Military intelligence considered him unfit for "a position of trust or responsibility" because of his "Communistic sympathies, unsatisfactory relations with landlords and his numerous Communist and otherwise undesirable friends," and described the Almanac Singers as "spreading communist and anti-fascist propaganda through songs and recordings."

Seeger was a fervent supporter of Republican Spain against Franco, and in 1943 he recorded several Spanish Civil War songs with like-minded musicians. The album was entitled *Songs of the Lincoln Battalion.*

After the war Seeger established People's Songs Incorporated. "I hope to have hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of union choruses," he said. "Just as every church has a choir, why not every union?"

Soon the PSI had two thousand members, and it was growing fast. An FBI file was opened on the organisation.

In November 1948 Seeger jointly founded the folk group called the Weavers. The group took its name from a German drama about the Silesian weavers' uprising by Gerhart Hauptmann, *Die Weber*, which contains the lines "I'll stand it no more, come what may." The group recorded *"Good Night, Irene,"* a song written by Seeger's friend Lead

Belly. The threat of censorship dictated that the chorus be changed from "I'll get you in my dreams" to "I'll see you in my dreams." It topped the charts in 1950.

The band also popularised Guthrie's song "This Land Is Your Land" and other left-wing songs, such as "If I Had a Hammer."

From about 1940 Seeger's support for civil rights and workers' rights, racial equality, international understanding and peace had made him a suspicious character in the eyes of the state. In 1955, during the McCarthy witch-hunt era, Seeger and his fellow Almanac singer Lee Hays were identified as Communist Party members and were summoned to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Seeger refused to answer, claiming the protection of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which guarantees freedom of speech—the first person to do so after the conviction of the Hollywood Ten in 1950. The House of Representatives found Seeger guilty of contempt, but in 1961 it had to overturn this conviction on technical grounds.

However, anti-communism was rampant since the beginning of the McCarthy era, and the band suffered from a total boycott by the establishment. Right-wing groups sabotaged their concerts, ultimately leading to the group's dissolution in 1952. For seventeen years the American media ostracised Seeger.

He performed at schools and colleges and for minor trade unions. This meant smaller audiences, but nevertheless Seeger reached a lot of people, some of whom later found jobs in the trade union movement, were involved with festivals, with Hollywood, on the radio, or in the theatre. Famous bands popularised songs written by Seeger from this time, including *"Where Have All the Flowers Gone?"*—a song that came to him when reading Sholokhov's novel *And Quiet Flows the Don.*

In 1957 Pete met another victim of FBI surveillance and intimidation, Martin Luther King, at the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. Here began what would become the anthem of the civil rights movement, *"We Shall Overcome,"* changing slightly the hymn *"I Will Overcome."* In 1963 Seeger sang it on the fifty-mile walk from Selma to Montgomery, along with a thousand other marchers.

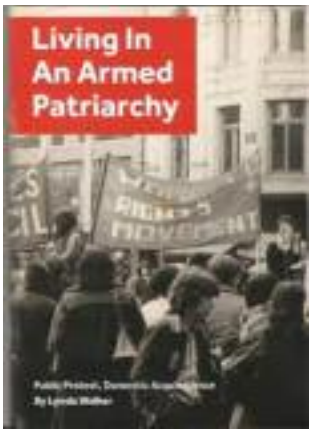
Seeger was joint founder of the music magazine *Sing Out!* and a senior figure in the 1960s urban folk revival. The movement, which Seeger called "Woody's Children," after Guthrie, adapted traditional songs for political purposes. The Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) had pioneered this in their *I.W.W. Songs: To Fan the Flames of Discontent*, popularly known as *The Little Red Songbook.* This was originally compiled by the legendary union organiser Joe Hill, and was a favourite of Guthrie's.

Like King, Seeger was a vocal critic of the US war in Viet Nam, writing popular anti-war songs such as *"Waist-Deep in the Big Muddy"* and *"If You Love Your Uncle Sam (Bring 'Em Home)."* On 15 November 1969 the Viet Nam Moratorium March on Washington took place. Seeger led half a million protesters in singing John Lennon's peace song *"Give Peace a Chance,"* calling to Richard Nixon at the White House, "Are you listening?"

Pete Seeger and his wife, Toshi Ohta, lived in a log cabin overlooking the Hudson River. Disturbed by the river's pollution, they jointly started the Great Hudson River Revival, which became known as the Clearwater Festival. In this way they were instrumental in rallying public support for cleaning the Hudson River and surrounding wetlands. The festival now attracts more than 15,000 people each summer.

Seeger remained politically active into his nineties. In 2012 he performed with Harry Belafonte, Jackson Browne and others for Leonard Peltier of the American Indian Movement, who has been in prison for over forty years.

Pete Seeger died on 27 January 2014, aged ninety-four. He played an active role in all the important struggles of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—for peace, for the environment, for civil and workers' rights. His memory is inscribed indelibly in the minds of all those who are part of the same movements when they sing, *"We shall overcome."* ★



■ Lynda Walker, *Living in an Armed Patriarchy: Public Protest, Domestic Acquiescence*

THIS BOOKLET takes its reader back to the years from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, years that shook the North of Ireland in many ways. It is an example of the kind of writing about historical events that departs from mainstream, bourgeois history: it writes about the experience of the dispossessed from their own point of view. It records aspects of their suffering and their resistance and does so with compassion as well as personal involvement.

The people most likely to achieve lasting and real change in the North of Ireland, as is shown in the years under examination here, are those who are the worst affected by this grotesque version of capitalism manifest in Britain's strife-ridden colonial backwater. Here, as the author shows, civil rights were slow to arrive and in some instances have yet to be achieved—in glaring contrast to both the Republic and Britain. Indicatively, the absence of a woman's right to choose and same-sex marriage can be linked to the greatest handicap of this artificial statelet, political sectarianism, which was fuelled along contrived religious lines to divide the working class.

It is an account of the experience of working-class women in a political battle that propelled them to ensure that their demand for civil rights included equality for women. It shows that the long, hard struggles of working people for progressive change can lead to success, allowing us to conclude that historians interpret the world in different ways but that the important goal is to change it. ★

JAMES CONNOLLY FESTIVAL 2019 PROGRAMME

TUESDAY 7 MAY, 7 p.m.
The rise of the right: Workers' struggle against racism and fascism in the 21st century
Speakers: Bulelani Mfaco (direct-provision activist), Rafaela Ferracuti (Brazilian Left Front), Manoj Mannath (Kranthi: Indian workers' cultural and political organisation)
Members' Bar, Bohemians FC, Dalymount Park (North Circular Road)

WEDNESDAY 8 MAY, 7 p.m.
The Nature of the Beast
Irish premiere of *Dennis Skinner: Nature of the Beast* (2017), directed by Daniel Draper, a documentary about the life of the British socialist, trade unionist and Labour MP Dennis Skinner; followed by a Q&A and panel discussion with Allan Melia (producer and cinematographer), presented by Emmet Kirwan.
New Theatre (43 East Essex Street)

THURSDAY 9 MAY, 7 p.m.
'The world in a state of chassis... Why?'
Speakers: Hugo Rene Ramos Milanes (ambassador of Cuba in Ireland),
Dr Moataz Khalifa (Communist Party of Sudan), Eugene McCartan (general secretary, CPI).Chairperson: Laura Duggan (National Executive Committee, CPI).
New Theatre (43 East Essex Street)

FRIDAY 10 MAY, 12:00 (noon)
Maidin caife
Sponsored by Ionad Buail Isteach na Gaeilge
Connolly Books (43 East Essex Street)

FRIDAY 10 MAY, 7 p.m.
Women, power and politics in the 21st century
Speakers: Clare Daly TD, Fatin al-Tamimi (Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign), Lorraine O'Connor (Muslim Sisters of Éire), Emily Waszak (Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice). Chairperson: Michelle Connolly (Dublin Central Housing Action).
New Theatre (43 East Essex Street)

SATURDAY 11 MAY, 2:30 p.m.
James Connolly Memorial Lecture, The struggle for equality: Can a capitalist system ever provide true equality?
Speaker: Prof. Kathleen Lynch (School of Social Justice, UCD)
New Theatre (43 East Essex Street)

SATURDAY 11 MAY, 7 p.m.
Youth panel: Issues facing the youth of Ireland today
Speakers from Connolly Youth Movement, Ógra Shinn Féin, Workers' Party Youth, People Before Profit
New Theatre (43 East Essex Street)

SUNDAY 12 MAY, 3 p.m.
James Connolly Commemoration, Orations by Laura Duggan (National Executive Committee, CPI), Tommy McKearney (Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum), Azzie O'Connor (national chairperson, Connolly Youth Movement)
Arbour Hill Cemetery
and afterwards a drinks reception and music at the Cobblestone, Smithfield

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