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Page 2 **Workers' rights**
Page 2 **Social dialogue**
Page 4 **BREXIT**
Page 6 **Hyde and Seek**
Page 8 **Social democracy not enough**
Page 10 **Kill capitalism, not animals**
Page 12 **Imperialism**
Page 12 **Veiniséala**
Page 14 **Ye are many, they are few**
Page 16 **Féile na bhFlaitheartach**

"I hate the indifferent. I believe that living means taking sides. Those who really live cannot help being a citizen and a partisan. Indifference and apathy are parasitism, perversion, not life."—**Antonio Gramsci** (11 February 1917).

Time to fight for workers' rights

The largest fringe meeting at the ICTU delegate conference last month was organised by the Trade Union Left Forum, on 'Anti-union legislation and how it affects workers' rights'. **Jimmy Doran** reports

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Abolish the 1990 Industrial Relations Act

Let us arise

Time to fight for workers' rights

This is a reflection of the frustration and anger among workers at the negative balance of power between workers and capital. Anti-worker legislation, particularly the Industrial Relations Act (1990), has pushed the balance of power firmly onto the side of employers.

Employers are actively and aggressively trying to bring about an end to union membership among Irish workers. They will stop at nothing in their attempt to smash unions, and they are protected and supported by anti-worker legislation. They regularly target shop stewards and suspend or sack them on a trumped-up charge. They do this knowing that a single-worker dispute (in accordance with the 1990 act) can be dragged out for well over a year in the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court.

This may eventually lead to a shop steward being awarded a few thousand euros in compensation; but employers are willing to pay this. They see it as money well spent for the effect it has in the work-place, sending a chill through the entire work force. It frightens and intimidates everyone, as the perception is that if they can sack the shop steward, what hope has anyone else got?

This is one of the most aggressive methods that employers are using against workers; and it needs to stop. Anti-victimisation legislation must be introduced to protect individual workers from this type of treatment.

And penalties for employers found guilty of this type of victimisation must be substantial, as transnational corporations have deep pockets and are willing to pay compensation in the tens of thousands to get rid of what they call a "trouble-maker." If they are to protect workers properly the penalties must reflect the size and profits of the company involved.

After the Dunne's Stores strike a couple of years ago all those with less than twelve months' service who took part in the strike were sacked, because they were not entitled to compensation (you need to be employed for a full year). This must be reduced. 85 per cent of the workers in Dunne's Stores are on minimum-hour contracts; and those who took part in the strike had their hours reduced to the minimum directly after the strike.

Despite being a very profitable company, Dunne's Stores does not recognise the workers' union (Mandate)

Be wary of 'social dialogue'

Nicola Lawlor

THERE IS increasing talk of "social dialogue" and an EU directive as an ambition of the trade union movement, and we need to be concerned about this.

Social dialogue, definitions aside, is in practice often a process of consultation, rather than negotiation, whereby a government or employer shares information and listens to feedback from stakeholders before making its decision. It doesn't necessarily have the same procedures and institutions as collective bargaining attached to it, and so it limits the mechanisms through which unions can shape decisions.

Indeed social dialogue is not even necessarily with a trade union: it can be with a staff association, information and consultation committee, or works council, bodies that are often sponsored, dominated, financed or controlled by the employer.

In addition, social dialogue and such bodies as European works councils tend to start from the premise that there is a shared interest between workers and employers, and so the process of consultation is just to find the best shared goal—led, of course, by the clearly defined "reality" of the business. This accepts a unitarist and HR model of employee engagement and industrial relations and goes against centuries of what practical experience has taught us.

Social dialogue is very much a Continental European phenomenon, developed and propagated by the EU and its institutions as an employer-friendly approach to industrial relations.

The route by which we achieve success is as important as the outcome itself. To suggest that an EU directive on collective bargaining is the answer to Ireland's trade union issues is to give up on our ability to win here and to promote EU supremacy over Irish political institutions—a dangerous route for the movement to pursue.

It is also pragmatically highly unlikely that the existing EU—the most right-wing ever—will deliver a positive directive. In fact it is more likely that a directive will seek to damage the stronger traditions of collective bargaining and so will be an anti-worker directive. We can, and must,

The state is not benign: it always acts in the interests of capital.

and refuses to engage in the industrial relations mechanisms of the state, the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court.

After the recent dispute in Tesco, workers on minimum-hour contracts had their hours reduced. The company has refused to allow union officials onto their premises since the dispute, and have stopped the practice of deducting union dues from wages. They have also picked on shop stewards and union activists for special attention. Lloyd's Pharmacy has carried on in a similar fashion.

Employers are willing to offer large redundancy payments to long-serving employees to get rid of of senior people who are on better contracts. This gives them a free hand to slash the pay and conditions being offered to new recruits.

Union density has fallen to 24 per cent, a record low point—down from almost 60 per cent in the 1970s. Meanwhile confidence among employers is at a record as the race to the bottom in wages and condition goes on at breakneck speed.

Ireland now has the worst levels of low pay in the EU and the second-worst in the OECD. Precarious employment, part-time work, short-term contracts, bogus self-employment and the gig economy are the result of this onslaught on the working class.

The Trade Union Left Forum is in the process of starting a workers' rights campaign to get all anti-union legislation abolished, to tip the balance of power back in favour of workers. This will level the playing-field and give workers the ability to fight employers for a fair share of the profits produced.

The campaign will be fighting for anti-union legislation to be replaced with a Bill of Rights for workers. Workers must be allowed to join a union, and employers must engage it with and facilitate their membership. The Bill of Rights would have to include, at a minimum:

1 the right to union access for all workers, not just union members
2 the right to union recognition
3 full collective bargaining rights
4 the right to take sympathy and supportive action
5 the right to take part in political strikes
6 the right to take immediate action
7 the right to stage sit-ins.

"Social dialogue" is not collective bargaining and should never be seen as such—not when the balance of power is stacked against workers. As it stands, there are 450,000 part-time workers in the country. Of these, 115,000 want more hours.

It is not a "life-style choice": it is exploitation. With the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, zero-hour contracts may be gone, but one-hour contracts are not.

47 per cent of workers in the bar trade say they believe the allocation of hours is used to manipulate, intimidate and control workers. In the general retail sector this rises to 51 per cent. In Dunne's Stores, 85 per cent of the workers surveyed say that the allocation of hours is used to intimidate and control.

There is no level playing-field. All the power is on the side of the employers. The Government and the Assembly in the North have the power to abolish anti-union legislation and establish a Bill of Rights for workers; but they will have to be forced.

The state is not benign: it always acts in the interests of capital. As James Connolly said, "governments in capitalist society are but committees of the rich to manage the affairs of the capitalist class."

Capital will not compromise without a fight. Trade unions have more than 700,000 members, and they must lead the struggle for workers' rights, to give them the power to achieve better lives for members, their families, and their communities. ★

secure this victory ourselves and through our own struggle, for it is through such struggle that we will revitalise this ailing movement.

This is not even to mention the failure of the European "social dialogue" model, as excellently outlined in the recent report by the European Trade Union Institute, "Bleak Prospects," on the state of union membership and union density in Europe. This report makes it clear that workers in Ireland should not be looking to European examples of how to turn round the fortunes of the trade union movement.

We need to make our demand clear and simple. We want union recognition and collective bargaining here, and won by Irish workers. And if this requires a constitutional amendment, well, so be it. Let's embrace the opportunity to talk to every worker in the country about the importance and value of trade unions.

Mobilising and organising for winning a referendum is as important as winning itself, and could be the injection of life that this movement needs if it is to overcome its crisis of membership decline.

In addition to mandatory recognition and collective bargaining procedures we need a raft of other union rights to shift the balance of power and alter the political economy of Ireland, including:

- access to workers to discuss their constitutional right to join a union
- the right to represent workers in their work-place
- public procurement and state support to be contingent on union recognition
- facilities, time, support and paid training etc. for union reps
- anti-victimisation, including immediate reinstatement and significant financial penalties if proved
- replacing the Industrial Relations Act (1990) with new strike regulations allowing quicker time frames and permitting secondary and solidarity picketing and political picketing
- a health and safety inspectorate established by unions upon the request of workers, to include complaints about work-related stress.

We can build a campaign led by private-sector unions for a new Fair Work Act to deliver this. This would have the potential to genuinely transform the power dynamics between capital and labour and provide a platform on which a range of other vitally important demands can be made and built—for example, a "just transition" for jobs linked to radical action on climate change, and a mass state building programme of public housing to provide decent housing for all. ★

The string that could unravel the whole EU project

The crisis within the British ruling class deepens.While Boris Johnson has been elected leader of the Conservative Party, thereby becoming prime minister of Britain, the deep crisis thrown up by Brexit continues to challenge the British ruling class. **Eugene McCartan** reports

While Johnson may appear to be a bumbling clown and prone to putting his two feet in his mouth, it would be a serious mistake to underestimate him and his government.

Though he has said that Britain will leave the European Union by 31 October, only time will tell; but he has put together a formidable cabinet that has all the hallmarks of an election battle machine.

Barely voted into the job, Johnson has put forward a raft of proposals, ranging from increased spending on the health service and education to more police on the ground, attempting to push Brexit into the background. He presents himself and his government as a new start, capable of rebuilding the "one nation" Tory vision that these dyed-in-the-wool reactionaries like to present themselves as, a vision only the gullible would fall for again and again.

The British are attempting to put maximum pressure on the EU to show movement and to create a pretence that they have fundamentally changed Theresa May's deal and have the "Irish backstop" removed. This, they hope, can give them enough wriggle room to secure what they need. They are attempting to present the Irish government as the blockers of progress—to the delight of unionism—making them a scapegoat.

But the reality is that the ruling elite of the EU member-states are deeply worried about Brexit and its consequences for the EU itself. They see it as the string that could unravel the whole EU project. They will do whatever it takes to undermine Brexit; and the Irish government may well become the fall guys.

The dominant sectors of British monopoly capitalism do not want to leave the European Union. It is not in their interest to do so: their interests lie in remaining members. Brexit, from their point of view, was a mistake of monumental proportions. They have spent the last three years trying to reverse that decision completely, and failing this the May agreement was the next best thing, to remain within the single market and customs union.

Johnson's cabinet, while it may have more women and more minorities in it,

The dominant sectors of British monopoly capitalism do not want to leave the European Union.

is a highly ideological right-wing government. But it is doubtful if there will be any new controversial privatisations or war follies until after a general election.

The British border in Ireland is merely a foil between the British state and the EU to secure both their interests. The so-called "Irish backstop," which in effect is a British backstop, was the means to an end, to make sure Britain remained within the single market and the customs union.

As the CPI pointed out from the beginning, the British ruling class were trying to secure a "special relationship" with the EU. The question was how to bring that about; and the British border in Ireland provided the means to achieve that goal.

Neither of these imperial blocs cares anything about the Irish people or the democratic demand for the establishment of a sovereign, united all-Ireland state. The nonsense talked about the dangers to the Belfast Agreement is trotted out daily, without anyone ever explaining what these dangers are. Democratic opinion in Ireland must make it clear that any future border between the British state and the European Union must be down the Irish Sea, not across Ireland, pending all the people of Ireland leaving the EU.

The real danger from the viewpoint of the parasitic Irish ruling class is that partition may well be undermined. It is obvious since the beginning of the Brexit crisis in Britain that the Irish elite have little influence within the EU, while the DUP hangs on to the soiled shirt-tails of the British Tories in the vain hope of protecting the "Union." But, like all subservient forces, they will come to realise that they are mere useful fools, to be discarded at the earliest opportunity, as soon as they have fulfilled what the British require of them.

Boris Johnson's priority will be to unite the Conservative Party as the party of the ruling class and its political voice. The much-heralded "middle ground" hoped for by the mass media and the ruling class has proved to be unstable and not strong enough to promote ruling-class interests. The Liberal Democrats, the Green Party and the motley crew of defector MPs from both the Conservative and Labour Parties are not worth their headed paper.

The ruling elite have two strategic goals: firstly, to prevent a full Brexit, and secondly, to prevent the election of a Labour government led by Corbyn. Time will tell which will come first; most probably they are interdependent.

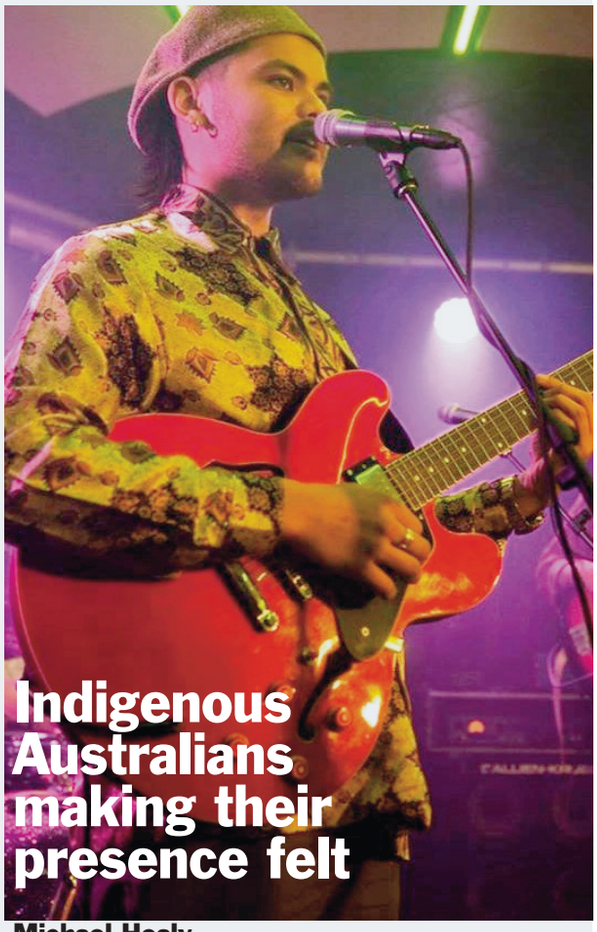
So far, Corbyn, while having a weak hand with regard to the number of MPs openly hostile to him, has played that hand badly. What history and experience have shown workers where social democracy has been the dominant force—as with the Irish Labour Party—is that there is no depth to which they will not go to show how loyal and faithful they are to the interests of imperialism. Between now and the next election there will be new hidden depths to which the Parliamentary Labour Party will sink to show that loyalty.

The British Conservatives will be hoping to exploit once again the growing feeling of betrayal felt by millions of Labour voters and supporters who voted to leave, using that alienation in its strategy to kill off a Corbyn government. The English Tories also need to win back voters from the Brexit Party. Their strategy is to give Johnson more room in the House Commons to push through a possible reheated version of the May deal.

Corbyn gave millions of working people hope that they had found someone whom they could trust, that the decades of austerity could be brought to an end. But Brexit is proving a crucial test for Corbyn and his team.

The clash of interests of two unions—the British Union and the European Union—may well mark the end of the British Union itself, with Scotland and, to a lesser extent, Wales now asserting themselves. The politics of Britain are in an increasing state of flux. The old order is finding it increasingly difficult to rule in the old way. What is missing is a clear working-class response, a clear working-class view of where it needs to go.

What life has shown is that radical change can only be brought about and secured by a radicalised people, mobilised to advance their own interests. The realising of that vision can only come about through the British communist movement, which needs all our solidarity at this time. ★



Indigenous Australians making their presence felt

Michael Healy

During a recent visit to Australia we dropped in to Palo's bar in Hobart, home town of the music star Courtney Barnett, where Jay Jarome, definitely influenced by Curtis Mayfield and Prince's blend of soul, performed the most incredible set.

This young artist from Bribie Island in south-east Queensland won a scholarship to study song-writing at the University of Tasmania's Conservatorium of Music. His debut single, Second Chances, has fine harmonies, with rich instrumental accompaniment from a singer-songwriter of exceptional power and maturity.

Many of the younger Aboriginal Australians, like Jarome, are making their presence felt in entertainment, sport, and the professions. ★

The Jekyll and Hyde of capitalism

reports **Jimmy Doran**

Hyde and Seek

Not even children are excluded from exploitation writes **Aisling Joyce**

THE SCANDALOUS situation exposed by the RTE programme "Prime Time Investigates" about abuses in the Hyde and Seek creche is just another in a long line of catastrophic failures by private businesses.

And it's not as if it was only in child care that the private sector has failed. In reality, when profit is the motive for setting up a business or service it invariably leads to the exploitation of workers or a lessening of the quality of products or services provided, or both.

Child care is the most recent failure exposed in the private care of our citizens. There has been a plethora of scandals, including the abuse of patients in private nursing homes and the incorrect reading and delays of test results.

Every type of business has had its scandals. The building industry has been inundated with scandals, from pyrite to the breach of fire and building regulations in the likes of Priory Hall and Longboat Quay, among many similar cases. Tobacco companies in the 1950s and 60s were aware that smoking could lead to cancer, but this knowledge was hidden from the public, and the companies continued to sell and promote their products.

Monsanto continues to produce and sell its notorious weedkiller Roundup.

THE INVESTIGATION into the the Hyde and Seek corporate creche chain—which revealed that milk was being watered down, children were being fed 12-cent noodles, and a single staff member had to look after eighteen babies—revealed the appalling conditions experienced by both the children and the staff.

There are big profits to be made from child care. It is estimated that on average early-years educators earn a mere €11.18 per hour, which is €1.12 less than the living wage. The priority of these private corporate bodies is to make a profit, and the needs of children and the staff are only a means to secure that profit, and to increase it year after year.

It has also emerged that Hyde and Seek's Glasnevin creche was successfully prosecuted by the Child and

The state should provide a housing service that would be a state asset and rid citizens of this burden

Volkswagen, along with most of the other leading car manufacturers, designed mechanisms to falsify information about emissions.

The commodification of the provision of homes has led to demands for excessive rents, which are then subsidised by state intervention; yet despite this, more than 10,000 citizens are living in emergency accommodation—not to mention up to 150 people in Dublin living in tents in parks.

These are a few examples of the abuses that we know about. There are probably thousands of others that we may never hear of. These scandals all arise in the pursuit of maximum profits, which is the one and only goal of private business. So long as this is so, these abuses will continue to happen with regularity.

Meanwhile the damage that business is doing also to the environment is almost at the point of no return. We need to look at doing things differently if humanity is to survive.

When the state made the decision to provide children's allowances and other welfare payments to support citizens it should have been just that: all-embracing welfare, which would cherish all our people equally—not the Jekyll and Hyde of welfare to prop up the failures of capitalism. This would include state-owned creche facilities for all citizens' children, universally accessible and free of charge.

Instead of the back-to-school allowance, a properly financed, universally available free education system at all levels would allow all our people to reach their full potential.

Eighty-three countries have declared housing a human right. Ireland needs to do the same and to build universally accessible public housing, with rents linked to income, instead of workers paying a mortgage for forty years to the banks, or rent to private landlords. The state should provide a housing service that would be a state asset and rid citizens of this burden, which in turn would allow citizens to spend most of their income during their life instead of using it to service debt.

Why are we sending our medical tests abroad to private institutions when there is enough demand to set up laboratories, run by the state, to do all this work? Instead the only thing that has been nationalised in recent years has been banking debt.

All the subsidies and concessions granted to citizens by the state—children's allowance, family income supplement, back-to-school allowance, HAP, RAS, and the dole—are not paid out to support the citizen; quite the opposite, in fact: they are done to prop up capitalism and allow it to function. It also quells dissent by making life a little easier and more bearable for the many citizens who are failed by capitalism.

We need to transform society: to nationalise production, use the wealth created to give citizens real, comprehensive, fully funded services, universally available to all our people—housing, health, education, child care, care for our elderly—with the goal of serving the people, not those profiteering from the necessities of life.

There is no such thing as a nicer, fairer capitalism. It cannot be "reformed" or tweaked: it must be smashed. ★

Family Agency (Tusla) earlier this year for operating an unregistered creche. The agency also reported that "critical risks" (this is the highest on their scale) have been identified in thirty-seven creches around the country involving serious non-compliance with regulations.

The costs of child care in Ireland, which are among the highest in the thirty-six OECD countries, result in women being forced from working, as they still bear an unfair burden regarding the rearing of children. Irish families spend three times what Germans spend on child care.

The cost of child care ranges from an estimated €745 to €1,047 per month in Co. Dublin, with Co. Wicklow coming a close second, where putting a child in a creche will cost just over €1,000. Co. Cork is the third most expensive county, and those surrounding the capital—Cos. Kildare, Meath, and Louth—come next.

The cost of private child care takes a very heavy toll of the income of families on the average industrial wage. In some cases it could mean up to half workers' wages going on child care. For example, a young Co. Leitrim parent on a median wage pays almost half their take-home pay on child care, while in Cork, South Dublin, Fingal and Co. Wicklow parents over thirty-five on a median wage pay 60 per cent of their take-home pay for the care of two children.

Since August 2017 a universal child-care subsidy has been available to children in registered child care who are above the age of six months but below the age when they can start the free Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme. This has turned out to be an indirect subsidy to private creche owners, many of whom quickly raised their prices.

The scandal in the Hyde and Seek chain and price-gouging will continue so long as government strategy favours the private market and the accumulation of profit for the private owners. Maximum profits can only be secured through low wages and low standards.

The only solution is publicly or municipally owned and run creches, staffed by properly trained workers, paid a proper wage, in creches equipped with whatever is necessary to provide a safe and learning environment for children.

The crisis in child care is not a failure of government policy but rather a result of this and previous governments' absolute commitment to the private market and the provision of child care for profit.

Nothing is above or excluded from exploitation, and that includes children and their needs. ★

More than social democracy is needed

Tommy McKearney

SEVERAL DECADES from now a leaked report will disclose how British Intelligence orchestrated a campaign in the 2020s to prevent Her Majesty's government falling into the hands of a "dangerous Marxist." Opinion-writers for the *Guardian* will fulminate about this abuse of process but will reassure their readers that "lessons have been learnt, and nothing similar could ever happen again." The BBC will launch its new flagship drama series, "The Enemy Within," based on novels by a retired researcher with its (by then discontinued) Panorama programme.

Are these the ravings of an old Fenian, steeped in conspiracy theories? Well, maybe so, but again maybe not. Surely I'm not alone in asking if it's a pure coincidence that the question of alleged anti-Semitism in the Corbyn-led Labour Party is being highlighted now with increased intensity. Apart from the spurious nature of the allegations, there is the matter of timing. With a new Tory prime minister committed to a Brexit deal that is unlikely to win support in the House of Commons, the odds are heavily in favour of a general election that by any normal calculation would be won by the Labour Party—not just any Labour Party but one led by a left-wing social democrat.

Forty years into the current neo-liberal phase of capitalism, heralded by the election of Reagan and Thatcher, Britain's elite are not prepared to see their position of privilege challenged to even a modest degree. In this they have the support of the powerful and wealthy throughout the western world. It's not that a Corbyn-McDonnell government is going to abolish the monarchy and establish a workers' republic; in practice it would most probably be somewhat less radical than the post-war Labour government of Attlee and Bevan.

Nevertheless the establishment elite oppose a Corbyn government not only because of the legislation it might introduce but also because of the potential challenge to the imperialist New World Order that it might encourage. Britain remains a major, albeit declining, economic power. Though reduced, it still has a significant manufacturing base, and, importantly, retains its own currency. In other words, it is not as easily contained as Greece or Venezuela.

A left-wing social-democratic government in Britain that would begin to reverse austerity and privatisation, stop arming Saudi Arabia or ask for proof of sabotage attributed to Iran would surely set an example that others elsewhere might follow. And who knows what that might lead to? It's certainly not a risk the elite are prepared to take, or to allow happen.

Important as it is to highlight this anti-democratic attack on Corbyn, there is a wider question in all of this. How possible is it to fundamentally transform society in the interests of working people by focusing on parliamentary practice alone? In the light of the powerful structural obstacles at the disposal of the wealthy, the answer must be in the negative.

In the first place, there is the obvious difficulties in overcoming hostile media, a conservative state apparatus, and an entrenched political caste devoted to the practice of clientelism. And all the while, capital and business are constantly using their enormous resources to ensure that the status quo is maintained at all costs.

This is not an issue confined to Britain. It is a global phenomenon; and we should be under no illusion: the Irish ruling class and its backers abroad are equally determined to defend their privileged position by equally ruthless stratagems.

Not surprising, therefore, that the scale of existing power structures has a sobering effect on many of its critics and opponents. Consequently, some resort to tinkering with it by working for minor reform, while others offer impractical or dangerous ultra-left daydreams. Needless to say, the net outcome of both avenues is to further disillusion working people while simultaneously reinforcing the hold of the elite.

To overcome these counterproductive tendencies it is important to identify realistic objectives, coupled with a viable method of struggle. For us in Ireland this must mean not just examining successful protest movements of the recent past but exploring how we can alter the balance of power in favour of working people.

A first step towards redistributing power is to redistribute wealth, and not necessarily by simply sharing out bank deposits. Better to think in terms of recalibrating the economy by expanding and building up that part of the public sector described by trade unionists in the past as the "social wage."

This should not be confused with merely increasing the number of state employees, as was pointed out succinctly by James Connolly in 1899.*

On the contrary, the social wage is the universal provision of useful assets and beneficial services to every citizen. Although not a comprehensive list, this would include universal access to such things as state-financed public housing, a properly resourced national health service, free to all at the point of delivery, a comprehensive public transport service, an egalitarian education system, with no option for private schooling, and holding all natural resources in pubic ownership.

These are straightforward issues on which a broadly based campaign can be organised, drawing support from throughout working-class society. Moreover, since the principle of the social wage has historically been a central concept within organised labour, this initiative would undoubtedly draw in the crucial involvement of progressive elements within the trade union movement, as happened with the Right to Water campaign.

Naturally, careful consideration would have to be given to identifying a productive methodology. Boycotting and blacklisting some privatised services would surely be on the agenda. Therefore, a people's campaign to abolish the Industrial Relations Act (1990) might well be a good starting-point.

Winning a limited set of demands is not socialism but would bring about significant advantages. Access to a broad range of public services would challenge wage slavery by removing a worker's absolute dependence on an employer. In turn, this will enhance working-class confidence and consciousness while broadening grass-roots democracy, away from electoral clientelism. In a meaningful way, this strategy allows our class to prise open the door to progress by means of a transformative process.

Of course, none of this diminishes our enthusiasm for a Corbyn-led British government. It is just that our experience leads us to believe that his victory is far from certain; and even if he does manage to find himself in Downing Street the deep state will manage to curtail all but the most modest of reforms.

If this is to be prevented it would require a radical and fundamental change in how that country is run and how its people might govern, rather than be governed—a lesson that applies to us here in Ireland as much as it does to our neighbours across the Irish Sea. ★

*". . . state ownership and control is not necessarily Socialism—if it were, then the Army, the Navy, the Police, the Judges, the Gaolers, the Informers, and the Hangmen, all would be Socialist functionaries, as they are State officials—but the ownership by the State of all the land and materials for labour, combined with the co-operative control by the workers of such land and materials, would be Socialism." ("State monopoly versus socialism," *Workers' Republic,* 10 June 1899.)

Pensions: The attacks continue

Dan Taraghan

PREVIOUS ISSUES of *Socialist Voice* have dealt with the attacks on the state retirement pension and the neo-liberal agenda of entrenching inequity under the guise of reform. These changes range from extending the retirement age to forcing workers to take out private pensions.

Previously the minister for employment affairs and social protection, Regina Doherty, said that the Government was committed to the state pension, which "will remain the bedrock of the pension system and a protection against poverty." She went on to say that the state pension "is not designed or intended to deliver full income adequacy in retirement."

The reason for the new proposals is that the majority of workers will have only the state retirement pension on retirement. Her latest proposals are designed to further undermine the state retirement system as it now stands. In effect the minister, and the bourgeois commentators, regard anything with the word "state" as being tainted and bad.

She now proposes to means-test state retirement pensions. Her proposals are consistent with previous attacks. There is little critique by the mainstream media of the Government or its proposals. The current Government is very media-savvy. The bourgeois press spends more time reporting on trivialities about politicians falling off swings than on investigating economic facts.

The methodology of the Government is very clear: a statement by a minister or a quango on a particular issue, followed by media-friendly reports to test the reaction before proceeding further; try to portray it as a "There is no alternative" scenario.

Next year's budget is due in October. Various lobbying groups are now submitting proposals. The *Irish Times* of 6 July reported the minister as stating that "the welfare system is not working for thousands of households living in poverty." She said she wanted a minimum basic income so that everyone has a minimum essential standard of living (MESL).

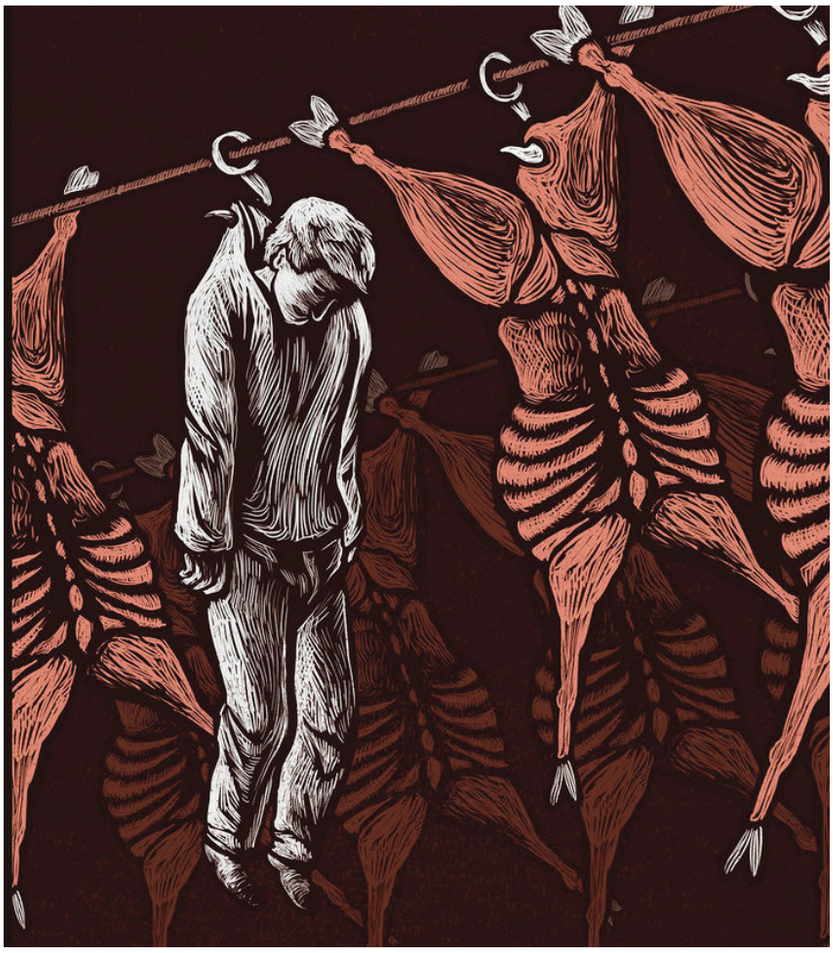
This concept comes from the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice. This is a private lobbying group set up in 1995 and comprises the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Daughters of Charity, the Vincentian Congregation, and the Congregation of the Holy Faith. This group looked at various types of household and in relation to pensioners came up with the following facts:

1 An urban pensioner couple on welfare need €314.60 per week for an MESL but at present are getting €425.82 per week, i.e. €111.22 more than they need.

2 A similar rural couple need €386.11 per week but get €425.82, i.e. €39.71 more than they need.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

Kill capitalism not animals



Laura Duggan

IT'S OVER A hundred years since Upton Sinclair wrote his ground-breaking novel *The Jungle* (1906). It catapulted him to fame and set a fire under President Theodore Roosevelt to introduce food safety regulations, in response to which Sinclair worried that his original message had been missed. "I aimed at the public's heart," he famously remarked, "and by accident I hit it in the stomach."

He hoped for socialist revolution but had to settle for accurate food-labelling.

The consumption of meat is the hot topic of the day, with environmental and health concerns listed alongside discussions of animal cruelty, the impossibility of humane farming, and the notion that the human race has outgrown meat. Little attention has been paid to the struggles of the workers who supply the meat itself.

The peak of slaughterhouse unionisation has long since past. In the United States, workers earn 30 per cent less than the manufacturing average, and it is an industry rife with low pay also in Britain and Ireland.

The decline began in the United States during the 1980s, when such new companies as Iowa Beef Processors showed up on the scene. By harking back to the dreaded pace-setters of the 1900s, and introducing more efficient mechanised "disassembly lines," they were able to buy up smaller meat-processing factories and eventually to challenge the industry giants. The Big Four became the Even Bigger Three and moved premises out of cities, to be closer to the cattle feedlots they controlled.

All these factors, together with the anti-union and anti-worker legislation introduced in the United States, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, have revived conditions in the slaughter industry that are reminiscent of those that Sinclair hoped to end.

In 2005, Human Rights Watch published a report entitled *Blood, Sweat, and Fear: Workers' Rights in US Meat and Poultry Plants*, which concluded that working conditions in America's meat-packing plants were so bad that they violated basic human rights. This was the first time that Human Rights Watch had criticised any American industry. One particularly gruesome finding was that workers in some of the larger firms had taken to wearing adult nappies on the line, as they were routinely denied toilet breaks.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics reports twice as many injuries and illnesses among meat-packing employees as in the average of American manufacturing jobs—a number that many unions contend should be much higher, as workers are routinely intimidated out of reporting and into withdrawing claims for compensation.

These conditions are not confined to the United States. In 2017 one in four British slaughterhouses were found to be in violation of worker, animal or food health regulations. The Health and Safety Executive said that the slaughter industry was at the top end of its concern level for injury rates. Its study in 2018 found that in the six previous years 800 British abattoir workers suffered serious injuries, 78 required amputations, and 4 died while at work.

These numbers ignore the high rate of perpetration-induced traumatic stress, a form of post-traumatic stress disorder common for abattoir workers, as well as the increased rates of domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse to be found within this section of the population after their employment there. Slaughterhouses and meat-packing work, together with farming and supply chains for meat production, also have one of the highest rates of trafficked and undocumented workers employed; and, given their precarious legal situation, employers are able to ruthlessly exploit them.

Much like the way in which workers engaged in the production of weaponry have no say in declaring war, those employed in meat production are not our enemy, nor the cause of the ills of the industry. But, again like arms manufacturing, it is an industry we must examine clearly and ultimately be critical of.

As communists, we must walk a fine line between our

desire to support the struggles of workers and remaining steadfast in our ideological positions, even if that means actively campaigning against the continued manufacture of arms, or against meat, fur and dairy production, which will ultimately put those workers out of a job. We have a duty to provide a broader analysis of those industries and the impact they have on the wider world.

Meat production is one of the most profitable, most destructive and most unnecessary industries. Increased meat production has led to deforestation of the Amazon for cattle ranches. Research shows that without meat and dairy consumption the global use of farmland could be reduced by more than 75 per cent and still feed the world. Meat and dairy provide only 18 per cent of the calories and 37 per cent of the protein consumed globally but use 83 per cent of farmland and produce 60 per cent of agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions. Even the lowest-impact meat and dairy products cause much more environmental harm than the least-sustainable vegetable and cereal-growing.

A shift to a meat-free diet is the only safe option for feeding a growing world population without further deforestation, the loss of biodiversity, and extinctions.

Closer to home, animal agriculture in Ireland is responsible for 94 per cent of our output of nitrous oxide—296 times more destructive to the environment than carbon dioxide, the leading cause of loss of biodiversity and natural habitats and of fresh-water pollution. While there may be no ethical consumption under capitalism, given these statistics it will not be possible to ethically consume meat under a socialist system either.

This is without even beginning to touch on the fact that meat production relies on the systematic reduction of living creatures to the level of a resource that can be owned, to be profited from. If these animals are not, at best, viewed as a resource they are an unwanted by-product and are treated accordingly, their lives, their pain, irrelevant under capitalism.

In egg farms, male chicks have no use, as they do not lay and are unsuitable for poultry production. The recommended practice is that they be discarded through maceration. This is when living chicks are placed in a large high-speed grinder. This is routinely employed in Ireland as the preferred method over suffocation in bags or breaking the neck, as the other options cannot be mechanised in the same manner.

"The food we eat masks so much cruelty. The fact that we can sit down and eat a piece of chicken without thinking about the horrendous conditions under which chickens are industrially bred in this country is a sign of the dangers of capitalism, how capitalism has colonised our minds. The fact that we look no further than the commodity itself, the fact that we refuse to understand the relationships that underlie the commodities that we use on a daily basis."—Angela Davis.

We must challenge the old credo of the meat-packing giant Armour, "We feed the world," and show that we can do it without the exploitation of the earth, of our fellow-humans, or of any other living creature. ★

Pensions attack

The reason for the difference in the MESL is that the urban couple have access to public transport, while the rural couple would need to provide their own transport.

Leaving aside the specifics of even claiming that pensioners are getting €100 too much, the minister, in some sort of Dickensian mindset, is proposing that pension payments should be means-tested to ensure that no-one is getting too much!

Another part of the background to the attacks on state pensions is the Melbourne Mercer Global Index. This index compares pension schemes around the world. In its report for 2018 Ireland ranked 12th out of 34 countries. The top two were the Netherlands and Denmark. Under the terms of the report, the Irish pension was deemed good, but Ireland lost points when it came to sustainability.

"Sustainability" is the new term for the "pensions timebomb." (The latter topic has been addressed in previous issues.) This time, sustainability has been deferred to 2050. Why would anyone need a horoscope when these prophets can look thirty years into the future? As far back as 2016 the Society of Actuaries in Ireland reckoned that a means-tested system with a possible income cap over which there would be no state pension could save the state a considerable amount of money and reduce the amount of GDP required to pay for pension provision. Likewise (as previously mentioned in *Socialist Voice)*, the OECD in 2014 advocated a basic flat-rate pension, with means-testing for top-ups for those with no other income.

It is clear from these various reports that there is considerable background to the minister's comments. Fianna Fáil dismissed her proposals as "kite-flying." It's far from it. The whole thing would be easy to implement. At present, non-contributory state retirement pensions are means-tested, as are medical cards and a range of other state benefits; so the Department of Social Protection already has experience and practice in this area. Extending means-testing to the contributory state retirement pension would merely involve extending the existing practice to all state retirement pensions.

The minister could also stop paying increases, or link increases to the consumer price index. The key issue would be to break the link between paying PRSI and an entitlement to a state pension. The Labour Party already did this in the "reforms" it made, thus laying the foundations for this latest attack.

The political class in this country are little more than surrogates for the private sector. There is little doubt that the minister is going to give effect to the demands of the free-market anarchists. ★

Imperialism declines — but can humanity survive?

Aisling Joyce

Veiniséala ag seasamh an fhóid

Mícheál Mac Aonghusa

IS MÓ seans go mbeidh ar Veiniséala idirghabháil mhíleata a fhulaingt má theipeann ar chomhchainteanna Osló, mar a thugtar orthu. B'in a bhí le tuiscint ó chuntas a thug ambasadóir Veiniséala, Rocio Maneiro, do chruinniú de lucht tacaíochta a d'eagraigh Líonra Veiniséala na hÉireann i Halla na Saoirse an mhí seo caite.

Rialtas na hlorua a thionscain na cainteanna seo idir na húdaráis in Caracas agus scáth-uachtaránacht Juan Guaidó, a bhfuil an Teach Bán taobh thiar de.

Tá Veiniséala faoi léigear eacnamaíoch, mar a mhínigh an t-ambasadóir, ó Nollaig na bliana 2014. "Is gléas cogaidh é an léigear seo," a dúirt an t-ambasadóir, agus ní miste a aithint gurbh é an tUachtarán Obama a chuir tús leis agus go mbaineann sé le cur chuige a théann siar go haimsir Ronald Reagan, ar a laghad, agus nach mbaineann sé go speisialta le réimeas Trump.

"Is é is cuspóir leis na smachtbhannaí ár dtír a bhriseadh," a dúirt Señora Maneiro. "Cuireann sé isteach go mór ar thrádáil, ar tháirgeacht agus ar ár gcumas leas a bhaint as an gcóras idirnáisiúnta baincéireachta." Tacaíonn rialtas na hÉireann agus an tAontas Eorpach leis na smachtbhannaí Meiriceánacha.

De bhreis ar na smachtbhannaí tá feachtas domhanda bolscaireachta ar siúl in aghaidh rialtas Veiniséala agus na gluaiseachta Bolovaraí, agus tá a thionchar sin follasach i meáin na hÉireann. Mheabhraigh an t-ambasadóir don lucht éisteachta go raibh trí hiarracht ar coup d'état i Veiniséala i mbliana cheana féin. Theip orthu uile, mar thacaigh tromlach an phobail agus an t-arm leis an rialtas tofa. "Tá na Stáit Aontaithe ag iarraidh Meiriceá Laidineach a chur faoina smacht, ach tá Veiniséala, Cúba, Nicearagua agus an Bholaiv ag seasamh an fhóid ina gcoinne," arsa an t-ambasadóir.

Chuir sí ar a súile don lucht éisteachta gur tír shaibhir a bhí i Veiniséala, le raidhse ola, óir, agus uisce úr. Shíl Washington go dtitfeadh an rialtas óna chéile nuair a d'aithin siad Guaidó mar

The British continue to occupy Gibraltar because it is of extreme strategic importance to NATO and to imperialism.

IN MID-JULY the British military detained an oil tanker, the *Grace I*, carrying crude oil from Iran as it was heading to Syria.

The British navy hijacked the tanker in the Strait of Gibraltar, where there is a small British colony on territory that is part of Spain—a relic of the former British Empire. In late July the British announced that they would be holding the *Grace I* for one more month.

The Strait of Gibraltar is the only entry and exit point between the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and therefore of huge strategic importance to imperialism. It is what military strategists and global shipping conglomerates call a "choke point": it is the only way these giant oil tankers can enter and leave the Mediterranean, which is bordered by twenty-one countries, as well as all shipping out of the Black Sea, bordered by a further five countries, which need access to the Atlantic through the Mediterranean. As a consequence, a very high proportion of the world's oil supplies are shipped through the Strait of Hormuz.

The British continue to occupy Gibraltar because it is of extreme strategic importance to NATO and to imperialism. By detaining the *Grace I* at the behest of John Bolton, the US national security adviser, they draw the British state into America's anti-Iran strategy.

The Trump regime unilaterally abandoned the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, a nuclear agreement made with Iran in 2015, which is the trigger for the continuing crisis in that region. The JCPA was signed by many countries, not only the United States, and only after years of negotiation.

The European Union, including Britain, is not in favour—in public at least—of tearing up the nuclear agreement. The Trump-Bolton strategy is to exert "maximum pressure," involving punitive sanctions and an oil embargo, against the Iranian government.

The *Grace I* was carrying 300,000 tons of Iranian crude oil to the Syrian oil refinery at Banias. The sanctions on Syria are part of US strategy in the Middle East and are against international law. The British appear to have forgotten that the Iranians control an equally important choke point, the Strait of Hormuz, which between fifteen and thirty British-flagged oil tankers pass through each day.

In retaliation, Iran has detained a British tanker, thereby creating a new situation, whereby Iran has been forced to assert its power to protect its strategic interests. Not alone could this situation result in another war in the Middle East but it is having an impact economically, with shipping insurance premiums going up, which will have a knock-on effect in the form increased oil prices.

It is inevitable that oil prices are going to rise. Countries that are dependent on oil imports (the United States is self-sufficient in oil) are going to suffer, especially those that have closed down their coal mines and their thermal power stations. The price of petrol and diesel fuel for cars and other vehicles, as well as electricity and gas, will increase.

The JCPA took many years to negotiate. The set of relationships that depend upon it are complex and worldwide in scope. The unilateral abandoning of the JCPA treaty will have an impact on everyone's life; but this would pale into insignificance compared with the massive loss of life if war erupts again in that region.

The United States will stop at nothing to reassert its global dominance in its effort to reverse what is now an unstoppable decline as the major imperialist economic power. It increasingly asserts its power by means of its overwhelming military force.

As imperialism declines, the question facing humanity is whether the planet, and therefore human existence, can survive the assault on the natural world by monopoly capitalism in its constant drive for new resources, new markets and massive profits and the growing military expansion to protect those resources and profits. ★

"uachtarán eatramhach," ach níor tharla sé sin. Mar sin féin tá an tír buailte go mór. Ó thús 2019 bhí titim $30 billiún ar easpórtáil earraí, $13 billiún de sin i dtrádáil ola. D'iarr an t-ambasadóir ar Éireannaigh an cheist a tharraingt anuas cén fáth go raibh a rialtas ag tacú le Guaidó.

Labhair Ambasadóir Nicearagua, Guisell Morales, leis an gcruinniú freisin, agus mheabhraigh sí go raibh sé daichead bliain go díreach ó bhuaigh an ghluaiseacht Shandainisteach ar réimeas Samoza. An tráth sin d'fhógair Ronald Reagan go raibh Nicearagua bheag ina "unusual and extraordinary threat" do na Stáit Aontaithe. Dar léi, ba í an chomh-dhlúthaíocht idirnáisiúnta a chinntigh nach ndeachaigh na Meiriceánaigh i mbun ionartha ar a tír an tráth sin.

Tá an réabhlóid ag leanacht ar aghaidh i Nicearagua, dar léi, go háirithe maidir le cur chun cinn na cothromaíochta agus páirtíocht na mban. Tá an tír faoi ionsaí ag an nua-liobrálachas bríomhar, agus tá síocháin agus slándáil Nicearagua i mbaol. Ní ghlacann na nua-liobrálaithe le ceart na náisiún a gcinniúint féin a shocrú. Bhí baol i gcónaí ann go gcuirfí coup d'état i bhfeidhm agus go léireofaí é sin thar lear mar éirí amach a mbeadh tacaíocht phobail leis.

Cloíonn na Stáit Aontaithe le Teagasc Monroe (nó an leagan fichiú haoiseach de) i gcónaí, teagasc a shéanann ceart féinchinniúna na dtíortha eile sa leath-sféar thiar. Is é atá sna smachtbhannaí iarracht ar phlúchadh eacnamaíoch a dhéanamh ar Nicearagua leis an ndú-bhochtaineacht a bhuanú. Dúirt an t-ambasadóir go raibh an Mac Cárthaigheachas i réim in Washington. Tá an "Troika of Tyranny" baiste ag Comhairleoir Náisiúnta Slándála Trump, John Bolt, ar Chúba, Nicearagua agus Veiniséala. Anuraidh rinne Trump ath-bheochan ar líomhain Reagan, go raibh Nicearagua ina contúirt do na Stáit Aontaithe.

Tá grúpaí den fhreasúra á dtraenáil ag na Meiriceánaigh leis an rialtas a bhriseadh. Idir Aibreán agus Iúil 2018 mharaigh grúpaí radacacha a raibh baint acu le buíonta coiriúlachta daoine agus dhóigh siad foirgnimh, agus go fiú rinne siad ionsaí ar ospidéal.

Dúirt cathaoirleach an chruinnithe, Frank Connolly, SIPTU, go meabhródh iarrachtaí na Stát Aontaithe maidir le Veiniséala an t-iompar a bhí fúthu tráth na frithréabhlóide sa tSíle sa bhliain 1973.

In ainneoin sheasamh rialtas Fhine Gael, d'fháiltigh an tUachtarán Micheál D. Ó hUiginn roimh an bheirt ambasadóir in Áras an Uachtaráin. Bhí cruinnithe acu freisin le SIPTU agus le páirtithe polaitiúla báiúla. ★

Ye are many—they are few

Jenny Farrell writes on Shelley and the struggle against tyranny

ON 16 AUGUST 1819 tens of thousands of working men and women demonstrated at a place known as St Peter's Field in Manchester, demanding reform and the repeal of the Corn Laws. The yeomanry and then hussars were ordered to attack, killing eighteen people and injuring more than four hundred. With the recent memory of the Battle of Waterloo, this slaughter went down in history as Peterloo.

Shelley reacted with one of the earliest works of socialist literature, his famous ballad "The Mask of Anarchy." This month we mark the 200th anniversary of those events and of Shelley's great poem.

Shelley's lifetime was defined by the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and severe political repression in England and elsewhere in Europe. In contrast to other European countries, the power of the bourgeoisie in England had been consolidated in their own revolutionary period in the seventeenth century. Therefore the ruling class in England had little sympathy for revolutionary France, as it could potentially rouse the growing working class, so far effectively suppressed.

Those times of both great political hope, ignited by the French Revolution, and unprecedented social unrest among the dispossessed, fuelled by the Industrial Revolution, produced radical leaders who came under attack and were imprisoned by the government in a campaign of repression and violence.

The prime minister, William Pitt, unleashed a crusade of "White terror" and throughout the 1790s held treason trials, suspended habeas corpus, issued a Proclamation Against Sedition, passed the Treason and Sedition Act and the Unlawful Oath Act, and banned corresponding societies. However, the government's attempt at silencing protest only led to further strife and an increase in rebellion, including nonconformist religions and atheism.

Until Napoleon Bonaparte's final defeat at the Battle at Waterloo in 1815 Britain was in a prolonged state of war. The first result of the peace was a severe political and economic crisis. A new, more political quality enters the riots and protests, and the "Gagging Acts" of 1817 (Treason Act and Seditious Meetings Act) served to further suppress radical agitation and radical publications. The political unrest of 1817 and the government's silencing tactics culminated in the Peterloo Massacre.

Shelley had left England for Italy in March 1818 in what was in effect political emigration. The news of the massacre reached him only on 6 September. He set to work almost immediately, writing the ninety-one stanzas of "The Mask of Anarchy" within a few days. It is now rightly considered one of the greatest political protest poems in English.

"The Mask of Anarchy" opens with a gruesome parade of the government's principal actors: Murder (Castlereagh,* the foreign secretary), Fraud (Eldon, the lord chancellor), Hypocrisy (Sidmouth, the home secretary), and other Destructions (bishops, lawyers, peers, and spies).

I met Murder on the way—
He had a mask like Castlereagh—
Very smooth he look'd, yet grim;
Seven bloodhounds followed him:

. . . the government's attempt at silencing protest only led to further strife and an increase in rebellion, including nonconformist religions and atheism.

All were fat; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hearts to chew,
Which from his wide cloak he drew.

Next came Fraud, and he had on,
Like Lord Eldon, an ermined gown;
His big tears, for he wept well,
Turned to mill-stones as they fell.

And the little children, who
Round his feet played to and fro,
Thinking every tear a gem,
Had their brains knocked out by them.

Clothed with the Bible, as with light,
And the shadows of the night,
Like Sidmouth next, Hypocrisy,
On a crocodile rode by.

And many more Destructions played
In this ghastly masquerade,
All disguised, even to the eyes,
Like bishops, lawyers, peers, or spies.

Last came Anarchy; he rode
On a white horse, splashed with blood;
He was pale even to the lips,
Like Death in the Apocalypse.

And he wore a kingly crown;
And in his grasp a sceptre shone;
On his brow this mark I saw—
"I am God, and King, and Law!"

The poem goes on to describe Anarchy as the true ruler of England. On his rampage he comes across Hope, looking like Despair, and Time running out:

. . . a maniac maid,
And her name was Hope, she said:
But she looked more like Despair;
And she cried out in the air:

"My father, Time, is weak and grey
With waiting for a better day;
See how idiot-like he stands,
Fumbling with his palsied hands!"

Hope then lies down before the horses' feet in an act of passive resistance, and a vapour-like shape appears that inspires the multitude with hope—and thought. The effect of this is announced in the next stanza: "And Anarchy, the ghastly birth, | Lay dead earth upon the earth."

There follow two stanzas that are indelibly written into English socialist awareness:

Men of England, heirs of Glory,
Heroes of unwritten story,
Nurslings of one mighty mother,
Hopes of her, and one another,

Rise, like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew,
Which in sleep had fall'n on you.

Next Shelley asks: "What is Freedom? Ye can tell | That which Slavery is too well . . ." He goes on to describe in a savage and empathic way the condition of the working class in England and how they are killed at a whim:

And at length when ye complain,
With a murmur weak and vain,
'Tis to see the Tyrant's crew
Ride over your wives and you:—
Blood is on the grass like dew.

This is an allusion to the protests over the recent years. Then, before giving his own view of what freedom means, Shelley concludes:

This is Slavery—savage men,
Or wild beasts within a den,
Would endure not as ye do:
But such ills they never knew.

The attributes of freedom that Shelley describes are: food, clothing, heating, true justice for all ("ne'er for gold"), wisdom, peace, and love.

Freedom is guided by science, poetry and thought, spirit, patience, gentleness.

Shelley's understanding of the fundamental clash between the propertied class in power and the working class led Eleanor Marx to conclude in her essay "Shelley and Socialism": "More than anything else that makes us claim Shelley as a Socialist is his singular understanding of the facts that to-day tyranny resolves itself into the tyranny of the possessing class over the producing, and that to this tyranny in the ultimate analysis is traceable almost all evil and misery."

Shelley goes on to say that the working people, the oppressed, should meet the tyrants calmly, thereby shaming them. The poem ends, however, on a note not of passivity but of action, returning to the stanza in the middle:

Rise, like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number—
Shake your chains to earth like dew,
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many—they are few. ★

*Robert Stewart, "Viscount Castlereagh," when chief secretary for Ireland was infamous for his vicious role in suppressing the United Irishmen.

Féile na bhFlaitheartach, 2019

TOM O'FLAHERTY, who helped to organise trade unions in the United States in the 1930s and became an accomplished writer in both English and Irish, will be honoured at Féile na bhFlaitheartach, which takes place on Árainn on the weekend of 24 and 25 August. The festival, now in its seventh year, celebrates the writings and work of Liam and Tom O'Flaherty.

Tom O'Flaherty, who was born on Árainn in 1890, emigrated to the United States in 1911, where he became a member of the Socialist Party. He joined John Reed and Jim Larkin in founding the American Communist Party and served on the central committee for many years. He edited several newspapers and satirical papers and was a noted columnist for the *Daily Worker.*

The Liam and Tom O'Flaherty Society is delighted that the principal address at this year's Féile, entitled "Renewing Tom O'Flaherty's Vision for a Just Society: The Relevance of His 1930s Advocacy of Collective Worker Power Today," will be given by Lucas Franco from the Political Science Department at the University of Minnesota, who is also a research manager for the Laborers' International Union of North America. His lecture will link Tom O'Flaherty's ideas to the modern concept of what is sometimes termed the "precariat": the emerging class of people facing a life of insecurity, moving in and out of jobs that give little meaning to their life.

Tom O'Flaherty, like his brother, was a prolific writer in Irish and English. His writings tell of island life, its tragedy and humorous moments, the fierce struggle of fishermen and small farmers eking out a living in the face of the elements. Some of his previously published stories and a story in English, "Riders to the Sea," as well as an unfinished novel, have now been gathered together and edited by Éamon Ó Ciosáin of NUI Maynooth and published by Cló Iar-Chonnacht. The book, entitled *An Bhrachlainn Mhór: Scéalta le Tomás Ó Flaithearta*, which includes an essay on O'Flaherty by his nephew, the writer and prominent journalist Breandán Ó hEithir, will be launched at Féile na bhFlaitheartach by Ruairí Ó hEithir, a grand-nephew of the O'Flahertys.

Both the lecture and the launch will take place in Kilmurvey House on Saturday 25 August at 12:30 p.m. Participants can visit the O'Flaherty Garden of Remembrance at Gort na gCapall and join the walk from the O'Flaherty home to Scoil Fhearann an Choirce, the school the brothers attended, with a reading of an O'Flaherty short story by Máirín Mhic Lochlainn. At the school the local historian Máirín Uí Fhatharta will give a short talk on the history and heritage of the area, with special reference to the O'Flahertys.

Later in the evening, at Gairmscoil Éinne in Cill Rónáin, participants will have the opportunity to enjoy a dramatic presentation based on some of the works of Liam O'Flaherty. Entitled "Na Bláthanna Craige," this will be produced and presented by the writer, actor and director Diarmuid de Faoite, with accompanying music by Joey Ó Fatharta.

The renowned sean-nós singer Treasa Ní Mhiolláin, who has been a regular supporter of the Féile, will also attend at Gairmscoil Éinne, where she will sing songs from *Lán Mara*, her new CD, released by Cló Iar-Chonnacht.

One of the centrepieces of Féile na bhFlaitheartach has been the Sunday morning seminar in Tí Joe Mac, Cill Rónáin, in which the society honours a writer with connections to the O'Flahertys. This year it will mark the friendship between Liam O'Flaherty and Pádraic Ó Conaire, one of the greatest and most prolific writers in Irish, with a discussion led off by the writer and broadcaster Seosamh Ó Cuaig. Extracts from the works of O'Flaherty and Ó Conaire will be read by Fionnghuala Ní Choncheanainn. ★

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