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A route to privatisation?

The revised "Bus Connects" plan, with 22 per cent more buses and an investment of €2 billion, is to be welcomed. But workers and unions must be on their guard that Fine Gael don't use this plan as a route to the privatisation of the public transport system. **Jimmy Doran** reports

"Coming from a developing country, I was trained extensively in international law and diplomacy and mistakenly assumed that the great powers, especially the United States, also trained their representatives in diplomacy, and accepted the value of it. But the Roman Empire had no need for diplomacy. Nor does the United States. Diplomacy is perceived by an imperial power as a waste of time and prestige and a sign of weakness."—**Boutros Boutros-Ghali** (former secretary-general of the United Nations), *Unvanquished: A US-UN Saga* (1999).

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

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A route to privatisation?

As pointed out in *Socialist Voice* in August 2018, Bus Connects appears to have a much higher frequency from the suburbs into the city centre; but in fact the frequency is often reduced, or citizens would have to make a number of bus journeys to get to their destination.

Some of the local routes and orbital routes are very infrequent, and it would end up being quicker for people to walk to "connect" to the route on a high-frequency spine. This is in fact a case of "people connect" as a method of cutting costs and making it more profitable and more attractive to private transport companies.

The state has no intention of providing decent public services any more. Public transport serving far-flung housing estates is not part of the Government's transport plan, any more than serving every small town on national routes is.

The Bus Connects plan in fact is designed to bring workers to work more quickly and efficiently—not as a transport service to facilitate the everyday needs of our citizens. These high-frequency spines are exactly the same as the Expressway routes used in the recent attempt to privatise Bus Éireann.

We welcome, and have consistently called for, extra public transport to be added to the transport system throughout the country.

Many on the left are being hoodwinked by this plan, not being familiar with the workings of Dublin Bus. This plan involves scrapping every existing bus route in Dublin and totally changing how the bus system operates today. To make these changes would require negotiating those changes with the existing Dublin Bus staff. This would not be impossible but would be

A militant trade union campaign launched

A WELL-ATTENDED meeting organised by Unite in the Community, in conjunction with Communities Against Low Pay, was held in Dublin recently.

The aim of the meeting was twofold: to organise low-paid restaurant workers into a union, and to actively identify rogue employers who are exploiting workers by paying poverty pay and in many cases stealing the tips from waiting staff.

The campaign against the Ivy Restaurant, which steals its employees' tips, was explained. One of the speakers was Julia Marciniak, a former member of the staff who was sacked for fighting back. Her dismissal is being fought by her union.

Councillor Cieran Perry explained that CALP is a grass-roots organisation for campaigning against low pay and organising actions during trade disputes when trade unions are banned from doing so, in particular by the Industrial Relations Act (1990).

Cieran described how CALP had been active during the Greyhound strike, the Lloyd's Pharmacy strike, and Tesco strike. Not being part of the trade union movement or officially on strike, it was able to place pickets where the unions were forbidden, for example in shopping centres during the Lloyd's and Tesco disputes. CALP members manned pickets and blocked bin lorries where unions were forbidden to.

There was a call for a radical trade union campaign to fight back against low pay and precarious employment. The question has to be asked, Are workers able to have a "radical trade union campaign"? Anti-worker legislation is so restrictive that if workers were to have such a campaign they would need a senior counsel in one hand and the 1990 act in the other in order to navigate all the legislation that is used to stop workers' resistance.

Let us look at three issues discussed at the public meeting: the Ivy Restaurant, the minimum wage, and tip theft.

If there was no 1990 act when Julia was sacked from the Ivy restaurant her fellow-workers could have gone on strike and placed a picket on the restaurant immediately and shut it down. This could have brought the owners of this business to the negotiating-table. But under the 1990 act, single-worker disputes are drawn out for months, and by such time all the energy is gone out of the dispute.

Individual workers are at a huge disadvantage; but even a group of workers must now give a minimum of

So let us start planning public transport to serve our people, not as a way to provide profits for the owners of capital.

extremely difficult and complex, as every single worker's roster and working day would have to be turned on its head to facilitate the introduction of these changes.

Unreasonable and outrageous demands will be made on workers so as to provoke the collapse of negotiations, with the usual strategy of highlighting what the the establishment will class as "outdated practices" or "allowances." We've seen this in every negotiation, from the Garda Síochána to civil servants and nurses.

There is nothing outdated about decent pay and conditions.

These are the methods that will be used to attempt to privatise the transport system in Dublin. The narrative will be created that bus workers and their unions are unwilling and refusing to accept the changes necessary to bring transport in Dublin "into the twenty-first century." This narrative will be peddled by the national press, radio, television, and the main political parties—all the ideological weapons of the ruling class. It will also be used as an attempt to force trade union membership out of the transport sector.

It is all part of government strategy to deunionise, deregulate and privatise all services. Unfortunately some politicians, unions and groups on the left are falling straight into this trap and are promoting Bus Connects unreservedly. Of course the question needs to be asked, Are they confused, or are they trying to confuse the people?

"When the aristocracy come forward, the people fall backward; when the people come forward, the aristocracy, fearful of being left behind, insinuate themselves into our ranks and rise into timid leaders or treacherous auxiliaries."—Theobald Wolfe Tone, "Manifesto to the Friends of Freedom in Ireland" (1791).

The aim of government in Ireland, be it Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil, and of many who claim to be on the left, is to support big business and capitalism, to disconnect the state from the provision of public services so as to privatise them and put them into the hands of their business associates, to create income streams for those who have the real power in Ireland. If proof of this were needed one has only to look at how the banks were bailed out.

If we are to reduce our toxic emissions, major changes are needed in transport. Capitalism is unable to make these changes so long as the obsession with profit persists. If governments were serious about improving public transport in the interest of the people and the environment it would serve every corner of the country, be extremely cheap or even free of charge, be of high quality, frequent, and have no toxic emissions, designed to serve the people's needs, not just to get them to work.

This will get people out of cars, which would lead to a collapse in our carbon emissions. It would also speed up journey times, as there would be much less congestion. It would reduce stress in people's lives, which is part of travel as it exists today.

So let us start planning public transport to serve our people, not as a way to provide profits for the owners of capital. And why stop with transport? The same paradigm should be used for health, education, and all that is necessary for our people to thrive.

We need a planned economy for the common good. ★

seven days' notice, and have to abide by a huge amount of rules and regulations in the balloting of members, which often leads to long gaps between dispute and strike. This tips the balance of power firmly towards the employer—as it was designed to do.

When the Government refused to increase the minimum wage by 30 cents in the recent budget, low-paid workers on the minimum wage could have downed tools in a strike against the minimum wage. This too is outlawed under the 1990 act, as "political strikes" are banned.

The tips issue could have been dealt with in a collective manner. The workers in all restaurants that are stealing tips could have gone on strike in support of each other as an industry-wide strike. Restaurants not directly involved could have had support strikes. This would give the workers involved a much stronger position for fighting back against this outrageous policy that is now common all round the country.

"Social partnership" and its legislation, the Industrial Relations Act, has led to union density being at its lowest level in the history of the state, hovering around 24 per cent of the work force. Many of these workers are in their fifties, while younger workers coming through are not joining unions, so it's on a downward spiral.

Many young workers have not even heard of trade unions: they hardly know they exist. This is because of the effects of "social partnership." Unions are inactive and are not seen on the streets or on strike fighting for workers' rights. Despite "social partnership" being abandoned many years ago, this mentality continues today, largely thanks to the anti-union legislation enacted as part of it, which restricts unions in taking strike action.

Under the voluntarist trade union system there is no right to union access; we do not have collective bargaining rights; and there is no right to union recognition.

We may have the right to join a union, but without these other rights it is akin to having the right to own a bike but not being allowed to cycle it. It puts handcuffs on workers.

We need to remove these handcuffs. Then, and only then, can workers take off their gloves, roll up their sleeves, and fight back. Then, and only then, can workers have a radical trade union campaign against precarious work, poverty pay, and all the other inequalities being imposed on the working class.

There is very little power in a union today. This power must be regained if we are to get a just share of the wealth that we produce. If we had 100 per cent union density without power we are fighting a losing battle.

What is needed is a radical workers' rights campaign to tip the balance back in our favour.

We must fight to have the 1990 act abolished and take on the employers, with a ballot box in one hand and strike notice in the other.

Unions must become radical or become redundant. ★

The Brexit budget

Dan Taraghan

THE BUDGET for next year was presented to the Dáil on 8 October. In his speech the minister for finance, Paschal Donohoe, made much of the threat from a no-deal Brexit. This would have dire consequences for Ireland, as Britain is our main trading partner in the EU.

The obvious question is why the minister did not postpone the budget until later in October, or even after 31 October, to see if there was a no-deal Brexit.

At one time the budget was a major event. Ministers were forced to resign if any of the details leaked beforehand. Now it is largely a media event. Most of it has been "leaked" beforehand, and the only relevance is seeing the actual detail.

The budget itself provided tax increases for the working class and welfare recipients. By not increasing tax credits or social welfare amounts, people end up paying more taxes, because prices and the cost of living are still increasing by 1.4 per cent.

The limited social welfare increases will be "targeted." As wages increase, they will be hit by more tax. Exemption limits have not changed for more than ten years, with the effect that the tax burden has increased on the poorest sections of society.

The self-employed were one of the few gainers in this budget. The earned-income credit is increased, even though there are already generous deductions in the form of expenses available to the self-employed. This enables the self-employed to make extra profits, tax-free. The Revenue Commissioners have already exposed widespread abuse by so-called self-employed transferring tax credits to spouses who are in employment in order to get tax rebates.

By the end of budget week the Economic and Social Research Institute reported that households would see their disposable income fall as a result of the budget. Earlier in the year the Committee on Budgetary Oversight suggested that the state could be losing anything from €5 billion to €15 billion a year in revenue because of tax reliefs and reductions available to individuals and companies. Vulture funds continue to make vast profits from property transactions while paying little tax.

Workers' rights and the EU

Paul Doran

THE CONSTANT NARRATIVE in the Brexit debate, be it in Ireland or Britain, from politicians, especially those elected who are supposedly of a progressive slant, is how they are opposed to Brexit because "the EU protects workers' rights." These views are also expressed by leading figures in the NGO sector.

This is incorrect, as the "four pillars" of the EU Treaty are: (1) freedom of movement of capital, (2) freedom of movement of labour, (3) freedom for a business in one EU country to establish in another country, and (4) freedom for a business in one EU country to provide services in another.

In 2007 the European Union Court of Justice, in the Viking and Laval cases, held that the third and fourth pillars—freedom of establishment and freedom to provide services—have superiority (subject to certain conditions) over the fundamental trade union rights to collectively bargain and to strike.

In the 26-county state, as usual, the Government at the time was well ahead of EU laws regarding repressive legislation against the proletariat. The anti-worker Industrial Relation Act (1990), brought in with the support of the major "social partners," including most of the trade union movement, saw some of the most draconian laws enacted within the EU and Europe.

‘It is plain that thousands of people born in the United Kingdom but with a connection to Ireland want to have the protection of the Irish state.’

The minister used the threat of Brexit as a cover for increasing taxes on the poorest sections of society. He also used the environmental threat to increase carbon taxes; but this was more revenue-earning than a serious attempt to address environmental issues. The minister did nothing to address corporate tax issues, such as the Apple case (where the Government continues to support Apple) or tax shopping by big corporations to gain a tax advantage.

Two days after the minister’s budget speech the taoiseach met the British prime minister in England. It defies reason to think that the minister for finance had no knowledge of this meeting on Tuesday. It is even more incredible that he didn’t have some knowledge of the issues to be discussed.

Whatever happened in the meeting between Varadkar and Johnson, it seems to have been a catalyst for Johnson agreeing a deal with the EU. In fact after the deal was agreed with Michel Barnier, Varadkar seems to have been widely credited with making the breakthrough.

In 2016 just over 17 million people in the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU and 16 million to remain. In other words, it is fairly evenly divided on the subject. As well as this, of the four constituent regions of the United Kingdom, two—Scotland and Northern Ireland—voted to remain. The other two, Wales and England (with the exception of London), voted to leave.

Johnson and the ERG Group of Tories sabotaged the Theresa May deal in pursuit of a no-deal Brexit. They are financed by hedge-fund managers. These funds make money by speculating on uncertainty and chaos. They’ve already made millions on the 2016 Brexit vote and hope to make more on a crash-out Brexit.

The deal negotiated with Barnier seems to be substantially the same one that May negotiated, with the removal of commitments to things like workers’ rights, environmental standards, and the National Health Service. There is little doubt that the wolves would love to see the NHS privatised, and a lowering of standards in relation to the environment and consumer protection. Workers’ rights in the EU are minimal but still better than none. Hence the removal of that commitment.

Since the Brexit debate began there has been a growth in the right wing in Britain. The 16 million who voted remain have rights as EU citizens. Under the proposed deal these rights should continue. However, the United Kingdom has no written constitution: rights are based on law and precedent. The Windrush Generation found out recently what rights they had: none. People from the West Indies who had been living, working and paying taxes in Britain since they were children found that under policies introduced by Theresa May as home secretary they were no longer welcome. They were sent back to countries they had not seen since they were children. It is no coincidence that they are mostly black and working class.

It is hardly surprising, then, that there has been a phenomenal growth in applications for Irish passports. Before 2016 the number of applications from Britain and Northern Ireland for an Irish passport was less than 6,000. In 2016 this increased to just over 18,000, and by September this year it was over 80,000. There are now more than 100,000 applications per month from all sources.

It is plain that thousands of people born in the United Kingdom but with a connection to Ireland want to have the protection of the Irish state. Some of these would have moved from Britain to countries such as Spain and Portugal. After all, if the EU allowed the commitment to workers’ rights in the May deal to be dropped so easily, then an Irish passport might offer stronger protection.

Perhaps elements in the EU would be happy to see a “Singapore-on-the-Thames,” now that the EU itself is experiencing increased competition from China and a possible recession.

Paschal Donohoe does not seem to have factored any of this into his budget calculations. At the time of writing it seems that Brexit will take place with a deal. Therefore should there be a new budget? ✯

The case proposed at a packed fringe meeting hosted by the Trade Union Left Forum during the ICTU biennial conference in July 2019 for the 1990 act to be abolished was enthusiastically welcomed by all at that meeting; and many trade union activists since the July meeting have joined the TULF.

I would encourage all progressives to assist the TULF in breaking the social-democratic ideology that has made the wider union movement apathetic until recently. There are encouraging signs that this is changing; and at a public meeting in Wynn’s Hotel in Dublin in late October concerning low pay in the hospitality and retail sector that was clear to all.

Young people, mainly women, are not willing to sit back and be abused, mentally or physically, by employers, and I commend them for their strength.

Today trade unionists need to consider how to highlight the undemocratic and one-sided character of the EU. Are there lessons to be learnt from the various people’s struggles over the last decade or so? I refer to the water charges campaign and the constant battles being fought by parents for better educational facilities, new schools, and local sports facilities, and the many other local battles taking place, which the media fail to highlight.

We have seen how the EU has ratified the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada, which gives major companies the right to sue governments for loss of income. One has not seen a similar agreement for people whose communities have been severely damaged by major corporations that are constantly damaging local communities by their plunder!

The EU has used its extensive toolbox of economic controls over national governments as a matter of European policy to limit trade unions’ influence over our terms and conditions of employment. We must fight back, and show the fallacy of the EU as a component of monopoly capitalism and harbinger of poverty and death by its laws. ✯

Voting shenanigans are only a sympto

Tommy McKearney

NOT THAT IT should come as a surprise, but the political establishment, north and south, is offering us still further evidence of its mendacious venality. A few recent examples will illustrate the point.

Let's begin with shady behaviour being practised by the folk in Leinster House. Several members of the Fianna Fáil front bench were caught breaking voting regulations in the Dáil. Then we heard that other parties were also at it. Better still, Varadkar and Martin have also admitted to bending the button rule.

However, with such widespread abuse of practice it will undoubtedly go the way of the Garda breathalyser scandal. It will prove impossible, or should we say inconvenient, to penalise anyone for their misbehaviour.

Of course anything the guys and gals in Dáil Éireann can do the DUP can do better. There was last month's bizarre charade over the extension of Britain's abortion and same-sex marriage legislation to Northern Ireland. In spite of so-called DUP sensitivities about preserving legislative uniformity within the United Kingdom, Foster's party was quite determined to pursue the anomaly of attempting to maintain socially conservative laws unique to Northern Ireland.

However bizarre that piece of theatrical grandstanding was, it pales in comparison with revelations about the RHI, otherwise known as cash-for-ash, scandal. For a tale of absolute chicanery it would be hard to beat *Burned,* the new book on the subject by a *News Letter* journalist, Sam McBride.[1] The story is astonishing, raising issues that range from questionable dealings at the international corporate level to such trivial grubby incidents as a Stormont minister haggling over the size of a free turkey. "Stretching credulity" does not even begin to cover it.

McBride's book is based on testimony given to the Coghlin Inquiry; and while the contents are startling, the material is available in the public realm. Among the revelations are civil servants unduly influencing an initial feasibility study, the department responsible taking three years to identify a glaringly excessive overpayment flaw, and a transnational poultry producer becoming a major beneficiary, as were relatives of senior DUP advisers. To top it all, the minister responsible for introducing and running the scheme hadn't read her brief. That minister was the current leader of the DUP, Arlene Foster.

In spite of this omni-shambles, Foster has refused to resign or even accept responsibility. Her party can't, or won't, sack her, and as a consequence devolved government is suspended, and in the absence of movement Sinn Féin is understandably reluctant to revive the Stormont Executive.

Nevertheless, to stay in office the British Conservative Party deemed it appropriate to enter into a "confidence and supply" agreement with the same DUP, a political party that can at best be described as grossly incompetent.

In the light of all this, the question arises whether the bulk of our elected representatives are charlatans; or does the problem go much deeper? McBride mentions that, notwithstanding the spectacular irregularities revealed in his book, many members of the DUP were genuinely appalled at what had happened, and assisted him with his research.

Some might well ask why they didn't speak out earlier, or indeed speak out at all, but that may be to miss the point. As with the case in the Republic, it's more to do with the system than simply with the individuals.

The partition of Ireland created by British imperialism is a major source of system failure in the North. It continues

Germany's gains from the EU internal

Jörg Kronauer
From *Junge Welt* (Berlin)

THE "BRITISH REBATE" is known: the reduction in British contributions to the EU budget that Margaret Thatcher pushed through in 1984. She pointed out at the time that a large part of the EU funds had gone into agriculture, and that the United Kingdom had a comparatively small agricultural sector, i.e. it benefited little from the much-sought-after subsidies from the economic community.

Less well known, however, is another rebate, one that would have to be called a "German rebate." The Federal Republic of Germany and four other wealthy EU countries—the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, and Sweden—transfer a smaller share of their economic output to Brussels than all other member-states. The reason for this is that "those who bear too much of a budgetary burden can benefit from a corrective measure," as the Federal Ministry of Finance put it in a publication last year.

It goes without saying that Germany pays far too much, from the German point of view. The EU therefore grants its richest member a "correction"—a reduction—for better or for worse.

The "German rebate" is increasingly called into question in Brussels in recent times. This was triggered by the fact that the EU contribution payments have to be completely restructured after Britain's withdrawal. Until recently Britain was the third-largest net contributor in the EU. Only last year it transferred about €4.2 billion more to the Union coffers than it received from them. This gap must inevitably be filled after Brexit.

The matter is not made any easier by the fact that the EU Commission wants to increase the next EU budget, which

‘Moreover, this appears to be the received wisdom among political commentators in London: that Northern Ireland’s position can and will be traded for a deal with Brussels.’

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to reinforce divisions between working-class communities and facilitates an unnatural alliance with right-wing British Tories. Moreover, the existence of a border has allowed a misguided campaign to be built on the basis of support for the European Union, ostensibly to prevent a strengthening of partition.

Although clearly not designed to do so, and against Boris Johnson’s repeated declarations, Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union is undermining the solidity of the United Kingdom. Moreover, this appears to be the received wisdom among political commentators in London: that Northern Ireland’s position can and will be traded for a deal with Brussels.[2] Taken along with demographic changes and the obvious failure of the Six-County political entity, the constitutional issue returns to centre stage.

It is not pandering to crude Hibernian nationalism to support the call for an end to partition and support the unification of Ireland. It is important, however, to spell out loud and clear that uniting Ireland under the control of the current Leinster House regime would be of limited value to working people. The voting shenanigans are but a symptom of the underlying malaise affecting the body politic in the Republic.

Common to both existing jurisdictions is a form of governance that facilitates free-market neo-liberalism, concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a few, and makes it difficult for the wider public to directly influence their daily lives. Allowing the people to vote once every four or five years, in an atmosphere influenced by state-controlled or private-enterprise media, curtails popular sovereignty.[3] No surprise that there exists such a cavalier attitude towards voting rectitude and transparency among the elected representatives in Leinster House.

An accountable democracy in a different type of republic is needed, and certainly not an amalgamation of the two jurisdictions, nor an extension of the existing set-up in the South, but a republic that spreads democracy to the grass roots, where the people are sovereign, and where their well-being and prosperity is not in the hands of British imperialism or regulated and impaired by a neo-liberal European Union.

It is important, nevertheless, that socialist republicans recognise that this is something that must be advocated clearly and persistently. Campaigning for Irish unity without defining the nature of the new republic almost certainly guarantees the entrenchment of those now in power, along with the injustices endemic within capitalism. It is imperative that we promote our anti-imperialist, socialist message and strategy loudly, clearly, and often.

This is not an easy task in the present environment, caught as we are between reactionary unionism on one side and a contemporary version of Redmondism on the other. However, we should never underestimate the capacity of Irish working people to assert themselves and challenge the establishment. There is no reason whatsoever that this can’t happen again and that we definitively bring an end to the existing mendacious, venal political system. ★

1 Sam McBride, *Burned: The Inside Story of the “Cash-for-Ash” Scandal and Northern Ireland’s Secretive New Elite* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2019).
2 See, for example, Arthur Beesley, “Will Boris Johnson’s Brexit deal pave way to united Ireland? Closer alignment with EU and the Republic risks breaking Northern Ireland’s UK ties,” *Financial Times*, 25 October 2019.
3 Note, for example, the mainstream media boycott of the recent state visit to Ireland by the president of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez.

market

covers the years 2021–27, to 1.114 per cent of the economic output of the “EU-27” in order to realise the ambitious plans of the European state cartel; that would then be €1.279 trillion. Discounts do not fit this plan, not even the one for Germany.

Since the EU commissioner for the budget, Günther Oettinger, has publicly affirmed this, he is getting headwind from Berlin. “Germany will be overburdened,” Angela Merkel declared in the Bundestag last month. She has now confirmed this at the EU summit in Brussels, which discussed the future EU budget. She also wants a discount for Germany in the future; and the budget should not exceed 1 per cent of the EU’s economic output.

In an effort to help arguments for a new breakthrough on the “German rebate,” the German Ministry of Finance proffered calculations shortly before the EU summit according to which Germany’s net contribution to the EU budget is to rise from about €13.5 billion last year to up to €30 billion in 2027.

Will Germany really be ripped off? Well, according to a study conducted in May by the neo-liberal Bertelsmann Foundation, Germany, despite everything, is the main beneficiary of the EU and its internal market. The study came to the conclusion that the country owes its annual growth in income of €86 billion to the single market—more than any other member-state. It is also far ahead per capita: while Greece, for example, wins €401 per capita per year, Poland €382, and Bulgaria €193, Germany profits by €1,046 per capita per year. Even if it had to pay €30 billion per year net into the Brussels coffers in 2027, the net profit that the alleged net payer, Germany, draws from the EU would still be enormous. ★

The ultimate deception Part 4

Part 3 of this article was published in March

Eoghan O'Neill

HARRY HOUDINI, probably the world's most famous illusionist, when performing his acts would mesmerise his audience with feats that defied all logic or reason. He would make the impossible possible. Audiences would be left speechless at his escape routines, and he toured the world displaying his death-defying acts.

Great magicians and illusionists who have followed in Houdini's footsteps continue to captivate audiences the world over. Even though we all know when we see these entertainers that an illusion is taking place, that "real" magic doesn't exist, it's hard to disbelieve what we see in front of our eyes. Tricks, stunts and illusions are made to look random, but at all times the great illusionists are in total control.

Illusionists, as explained by the magician David Kwong, employ seven secrets to ensure their success (which might be familiar to some). They are: *fill the gap, write the script, load up, design free choice, employ the familiar, conjure an out,* and *control the frame.*

By "filling the gap" they give the audience enough evidence, allowing the brain to fill in the gaps. They "write the script": magicians manipulate your memory of what happened and tell you what they want you to hear to fit their narrative so as to complete the trick. They "load up": this is a magician's term for doing all the preparatory work beforehand. They "design free choice": the idea is to make the audience think they picked a certain card freely, even though the magician knows that it was pretty much the only choice they had.

They "employ the familiar": the brain tends to respond best to patterns, so they leave a few of the original cards in the pack to "prove" to the audience that it hasn't been rigged. They "conjure an out": for every trick, magicians have three or four back-up plans ready to go. Finally, they "control the frame": they get the audience to focus on something else, which redirects your attention from what they are doing. You see only what they want you to see.

It's clear from these essential secrets of magic that magicians use quite logical, thought-out and well-planned methods to be able to dupe an audience; and essentially that is what a magician is doing: fooling you into believing that they have extraordinary or supernatural powers.

In this series of articles we have revealed some of the different tricks of the capitalist class: the non-equivalence of exchange within the wage system and foreign trade, revealing the need for poverty and exploitation to thrive in order for capitalism to survive. We have exposed the fallacy of capitalism's technological innovations in dealing with the environmental depletion and the destruction of the planet; we have displayed the limits of capitalist democracies and exposed the class nature of the state and its ability to influence and infiltrate working-class forces to remain the dominant class force in society.

All these are done by using the same or similar secrets as the magician.

But now we must reveal the greatest capitalist illusion of all, the ultimate deception: Socialism failed. And there is no alternative.

What this mantra is really all about is the concerted effort to conceal the war that has been raging continuously and mercilessly for more than a century. Since Marx and Engels produced the Communist Manifesto, the great class war of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, the owners of capital versus the workers

‘By ignoring and concealing the class struggle the ruling class can continue to spread the idea and the belief that there is no alternative.’

for capital, has proceeded.

This war has revealed itself in periods of open military conflict and was heightened during the anti-communist “Cold War,” beginning in 1917 (not in 1947, as the capitalist powers never accepted the fact that a section of their class had been overthrown and replaced by the working class). Ever since the defeat of the socialist bloc it has remained, and will remain, the core element of capitalist class rule.

Class war, as opposed to conventional warfare, which the capitalists of course also employ, has as its objective the crushing of the ideological strength of their enemy rather than just the physical and numerical strength. One of the most effective ways to do this is to first of all deny Marx’s fundamental conclusion that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,” i.e. to create the illusion that class relations, interests and conflict are not the driver of change in society, that class is nothing more than a category, a way to denominate a wage level.

It is subtle, a sleight of hand, but essential in weakening class-consciousness. “Class” nowadays is more commonly interpreted as a person’s socio-economic status. As one moves up in wages or earnings there is this concept of upward mobility, where only the level of wages separates the working class from other classes, and with enough hard work everyone has the ability to move up to the top.

This is a fantasy. Rather than reveal class in its true form, as a citizen’s relationship to the means of production—the means by which all our needs, wants and desires are met—the capitalist is trying to conceal class relations and, by extension, class struggle and the class war.

In doing this, the capitalist class lurks in the shadows, hiding their own class interests, i.e. keeping the main means of production, land, labour, resources and the majority of its proceeds in their private hands, and convincing wider society that private ownership is the most efficient and the fairest way to organise an economy.

By simply ignoring or playing down the existence of class relations and defining this as some sort of numerical category, they are trying to convince the people that no illusion is taking place, that what people everywhere in the world witness daily are random acts, free choices made by free individuals in democratic countries, never predetermined. The consequences of those acts, people then believe, are undetermined, disconnected, and therefore can be changed, just as the audience member in a magic show believes they have free will and that they can determine the outcome. But, just as the magician is in total control, so too are the ruling class.

The great magicians use simple rules with which to fool the audience. The capitalist class similarly employ rules in order for them to fool the people and so maintain their privileged power. How else can we explain the great juxtapositions?—

- where wealth and a country’s economic, social and political infrastructure, year after year, are stripped from the public, are privatised, and concentrated in fewer and fewer hands
- where profits are soaring, yet wages, terms and conditions are constantly eroded
- where the cost of living rises but the value of labour shrinks
- where the productivity of labour has soared for decades but real wages have stagnated
- where debt is crippling for the poor but is an asset for the rich
- where homelessness spreads but the fetishism of housing is fed by all the mainstream media
- where depression, suicide and alienation grow in commodity-rich societies
- where the exploitation of labour, land and nature is accelerated when it should be stopped
- where global poverty, hunger and diseases are thriving, yet billionaires are multiplying
- where resource and regime-change wars are constant yet are dressed up as “human rights” interventions, to “spread democracy”
- where military budgets soar but public and welfare budgets are slashed
- where we have fires raging, glaciers melting and temperatures rising but still rely on a carbon economy for energy, transport, industry, and agriculture
- where we have a growth model of infinite economic growth but with finite resources
- where not only have we unsustainable production and consumption economies but they are also catastrophic for the natural world and for civilisation.

Let them not fool you. Capitalism, the dominant global economic system, is the primary cause of the impending climate and civilisation collapse. Its benefactors are willing to sacrifice it all for their short-term enrichment.

History is full of vile emperors and empires, but there are perhaps none so vile as the real, existing capitalist ruling class residing within our countries today. And, ironically, all the while this is taking place around the globe the majority of people in the Western world see no alternative to capitalism, the very system that is responsible for this global misery.

This is the great deception in operation. The reality is often laid bare, but the totality of it, the class nature of it all, is rarely exposed, which of course is by design. By ignoring and concealing the class struggle the ruling class can continue to spread the idea and the belief that there is no alternative. But it must be stressed that this belief, like most things in a capitalist society, is orchestrated by the ruling class and enforced by the reactionary, opportunist and capitulating forces in wider society.

The real power behind TINA (“there is no alternative”) lies not just with this fictional “post-class” society but, more importantly, is rested upon the full-scale assault and total falsification involved in discrediting the real, living socialist systems that came into existence since the October Revolution in 1917.

The reason why socialism is treated with such contempt, and at every opportunity, why it is criminalised by imperialist mouthpieces—when, for example, the anti-historical fallacy of equating communism and the Soviet Union with fascism and Nazi Germany is promoted—is that they know socialism is the only system that can threaten, and has threatened, the monopoly on wealth of the capitalists and imperialism.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

CAPITALIST IDEAS

This is the second part of "The gift that keeps on giving," published in the November issue.

Dan Taraghan

"The gift that keeps on giving" reported on the closure of Clery's department store in Dublin in June 2015 with the loss of 130 jobs and about 300 operators of franchises.

The background is as follows. Gordon Brothers had bought the store in 2012 when it had bank debt of €20 million. They got a write-down on the debt to €12 million. The company was also restructured into two companies: Propco (the property-owning company) and Opco (the operating company). Natrium bought the companies at 2:30 a.m. on 12 June for €29 million. Gordon Brothers are believed to have made a profit of €6½ million. The operating company was sold to an insolvency specialist who petitioned the High Court to appoint liquidators. The store was closed by 6 p.m.

At the time of the original article in *Socialist Voice* it was pointed out that the real asst was the store itself. By separating Clery's into two entities it was possible to crystallise the losses into the operating company, and that left the property company unencumbered by debt.

Needless to say, neither the workers nor the franchisees were too happy with the situation. Given the iconic status of Clery's, the Government was shocked by the speed and the callous nature of the closure. It had status as part of the heritage of the country, situated in the main street of the capital city, and there was a perception that the workers and the franchisees had been treated badly.

The Government was forced to act. It attempted to bring charges against Deirdre Foley of Natrium Consortium and OCS Operations Ltd. This failed; but Justice for Clery's Workers kept up their campaign. Eventually, in 2017, there was a confidential deal made through SIPTU, with the workers receiving a "goodwill payment." Before this deal they had received only the statutory redundancy payment. This has cost the state about €2½ million.

There also seems to be a commitment about jobs when the new entity is developed. However, there will be a different company involved, so how that will operate is debatable.

A deal was also made with the franchise owners, on the condition that they would not sue. The franchise owners were companies like Best Menswear, Ecco, Barbour, and various catering operations. The franchisers were owed

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

The capitalist illusion

So at every turn they must denounce it, distort it and destroy it in the eyes of the working class. They fabricate horror stories, tales of mass murder, repression, and terror, and disseminate these lies as fact—in news items, in schoolbooks and university textbooks, in films, television series, documentaries, and other popular media. They create monsters out of socialism's leaders and make martyrs out of its defectors; they blacklist or ignore scholars, such as Michael Parenti and Grover Furr, who challenge the anti-communist paradigm.

Where socialism has been built, or is in the process of being built, or even where a country is trying to steer an independent course from the imperialist centres of the United States, Britain, and the EU, the imperialist powers impose sanctions and embargoes as well as trade, travel and flight restrictions to bleed the country dry and stunt potential growth and development.

They employ espionage to infiltrate its political and administrative offices, they finance and arm counter-revolutionary movements, and instigate military and political coups and assassinations. They murder trade union, labour, community and party leaders and help instigate rioting, looting, and the destruction of public property and services. They carry out overt and covert full-spectrum operations that promote internal sabotage of the economy and infrastructure, seizing whatever assets they can in the meantime.

They do all this, and more, to ensure that as much chaos as possible is created to discredit the socialist or independence project. The goal, as Richard Nixon once declared, is to "make the economy scream." Then the carrier pigeons of the Western media spread the message: that the economy is in turmoil, the country's leaders are dictators, its people are rising up, a humanitarian crisis is unfolding, "socialism has failed"; we must intervene, we must support the rebels, we must bring democracy!

This bombardment of reaction from the mainstream reaches the mass of the people, is talked about on social media, in pubs, work-places and elsewhere and then fed back in the form of active or tacit support for the Western powers' intervention, regime change, and puppet governments.

This is what happened or is happening, to a greater or lesser extent, all round the world: in the European socialist bloc, Viet Nam, Korea, Cuba, Chile, Libya, Syria, and Venezuela, to pick just a handful. And the goals of the ruling class have mostly succeeded in their objective.

Western propaganda is so invasive

A crucial objective in the class war is to create and reinforce in the minds of the masses the idea that socialism has failed, which further strengthens the ideology of "no alternative."

€1.4 million, of which they were paid €650,000 after the closure from the funds of OCS Operations.

Gordon Brothers agreed to fund the shortfall pending a High Court case that sought the disqualification of two executives of Gordon Brothers from acting as company directors. The offer from Gordon Brothers to compensate the concession holders came a few weeks before the High Court hearing was scheduled and nearly four years after the closure of Clery's. The executives of Gordon Brothers claimed that Clery's was bought as a "going concern." Not all the concessionaires have accepted the offer, but most have.

Needless to say, nothing illegal was done by anyone under the rules at present obtaining for business transactions like this.

Last year the Clery's building was sold to Press Up Entertainment Group for €63 million—in other words, a gross profit of €34 million on the original purchase. When you factor in the payments to the workers, accountants and lawyers it would still leave a sizeable profit. As mentioned in the original article, the object was to crystallise the debt in one company and the value in the other. The building has the accrued value, and this has now been released. All perfectly legal, of course.

It demonstrates how capitalists can accrue even more capital from a company in debt, and to the detriment of the workers who were actually creating the value. In effect, the building itself has become a commodity for sale. The new owner of Clery's will develop it as a hotel, restaurants, offices, and some retail units.

Robbie Hughes of Link Group, which manages non-performing loans for Cerberus Capital Management, NAMA, and other vulture funds, stated: "internally we call [Ireland] the gift that keeps on giving." Link is an Australian company with a global reach. It has detected an opportunity in Ireland for getting good returns for its clients.

The Irish banks have to reduce the non-performing loans on their books to 5 per cent. There are more loans to be sold to reach the 5 per cent target. These loans are mainly buy-to-let loans that became unviable. Banks like Ulster Bank and AIB sold their non-performing loans in order to clean up their books in much the same way that Clery's was divided into an operating company with debt and the property company with no debt. Link Group steps in and manages these distressed loans by packaging them, selling them on, or holding them until they are profitable again. It has obviously identified a lucrative opportunity in Ireland, as more that 60 per cent of its income is generated here.

Both the Clery's case and Link Group illustrate something Marx identified in volume 3 of *Capital* concerning the metamorphosis of commodities. Profits are made not by manufacturing anything and creating added value. Bank deposit interest is nil, or even minus, so capitalists need other vehicles to grow capital. Marx pointed out: "The owner of money who wants to valorize this as interest-bearing capital parts with it to someone else, puts it into circulation, makes it into a commodity as capital."

Now the capitalist buys a property and effectively releases capital to the buyer that has the potential to create surplus value. The commodity that has been bought, whether a building or a non-performing loan, will eventually be sold, so it metamorphoses back into money, replacing the original money with a surplus value. In effect, property transactions by the vulture funds, whether for commercial property or sub-prime mortgages, are a method of getting interest on capital. ★

that we often hear self-described left, Marxist or socialist movements upholding the imperialist agenda—a complete embarrassment and, frankly, a disgraceful position to take. As soon as they side with the imperialist agenda, all their credibility as a genuine class-conscious workers' movement is destroyed; what is left is only their revisionist or opportunist line, which should be consciously challenged and uprooted to avoid sowing further confusion in the workers' movement.

A crucial objective in the class war is to create and reinforce in the minds of the masses the idea that socialism has failed, which further strengthens the ideology of "no alternative."

This then raises the question: If there is no alternative to capitalism, how can there be any real opposition to capitalism? And if there is no opposition to capitalism, how can we overcome the enormous and species-defining moments of our time: resource depletion, climate crisis, environmental collapse, and civilisation collapse?

The answer is, of course, that we can't and we won't overcome the global crisis centred on curbing or reforming capitalism. If the entire scientific community is adamant (and it has been for some time) that with our current output (predominantly Western) we are headed full tilt for, and very shortly will hit, the point of no return, then this gives an urgency to the need to raise class-consciousness everywhere and anywhere, to oppose and challenge TINA in all its manifestations, to try to avert this suicidal course.

The most important task of our class is to shatter the illusion that socialism failed. Socialism—the real, existing socialist states of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, directed by the most advanced section of the workers' movement—contrary to what we are all taught to believe by the ruling-class ideologues, can not only succeed but in fact can thrive, even given the very tight spaces in which it is allowed to operate, and despite the capitalist onslaught, invasion and encirclement that plagues it.

The only solution for all the peoples of the planet to the impeding global environmental and civilisation collapse, as Marx famously stated in 1848 in the Communist Manifesto, is for the working class of all countries to unite and for each one to set about constructing a planned, publicly owned and publicly directed socialist economy, based on the sustainability of our planet and its resources, on a true equivalence of exchange between nations and workers, and once and for all ending the exploitation of people by people. ★

The continuation of this part will deal with socialism's successes, strengths, and shortcomings.

The return of the 'German spirit'

Jenny Farrell reflects on the 30th anniversary of the dismantling of the inner-German border

A NUMBER OF misconceptions are perpetuated when it comes to the dismantling of the inner-German border as the first step to the annexation of the German Democratic Republic by the Federal Republic of Germany.

It has been deceptively described as a "peaceful revolution." True, the GDR state did not oppress the protesters, and it carried out one of the demands, which was to open the border between East and West. However, the West German state began to campaign aggressively through its media and its sympathisers in the GDR for a counter-revolution—in other words, to end the state-owned socialist economic system.

"We are the people," chanted at demonstrations leading up to the events of November 1989, was dramatically changed by the counter-revolution to "We are one people."

There is much talk of the "reunification" of Germany, but that would suggest that the two German states united. In fact one state, West Germany, took over the other, the GDR.

In 1990 the then West German chancellor, Helmut Kohl, travelled to the GDR and promised the people "blooming landscapes" of prosperity in a "united Germany." "No-one will be worse off than before, but many will be better off." This claim has proved profoundly false, as any glance at the statistics reveals.

East Germans were not asked before accession whether they wanted to give up their job and social security, whether they wanted to be expunged from their homeland, whether they wanted a completely different value system and legal system imposed on them. The "Unification Treaty" meant that whole state industries throughout the GDR were given away for as little as one mark to West German competitors. The result was the destruction of countless jobs in the East and the resulting exodus of vast numbers of East Germans who, to survive, had to look for jobs in the West. The economy was privatised—to the exclusion of the East Germans.

According to a representative survey conducted in Saxony in 2018, 65 per cent of all respondents saw themselves as "second-class citizens." Among 18 to 29-year-olds, born after the annexation, almost 70 per cent agreed with this statement.

East Germans who grew up in the GDR are practically absent from the running of society. The notable exception

“... on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the removal of the inner-German border, a banner was unfurled in East Berlin declaring: “This border was removed so we can go to war again, united.”

is Angela Merkel. However, she has pursued distinctly West-oriented policies; otherwise she would never have attained such a position.

The West administers and controls the East, while the population remaining in East Germany have faced horrendous social change.

Several generations of GDR citizens had invested in the cultural and social values of socialism as an alternative to capitalism. Their life’s work was not only taken from them, it was devalued, denigrated in retrospect. Today the GDR is presented entirely from the victor’s viewpoint. And this message is incessant. No political leader, no media can project any positive image of life in the GDR. Even the most mundane fiction series on television, if it makes any reference to life in the GDR, is invariably negative.

However, when people take to the streets of Germany today demanding “A kindergarten place for every child,” few remember that the people of the GDR had this. This is never mentioned. It is as if they never existed.

When the media announced smugly that anti-gay legislation was removed in 1994 there was no mention that the GDR had abolished it almost thirty years earlier, in 1968. Abortion continues to be illegal in Germany; in the GDR women had full access to all forms of birth control, and abortion was legalised in 1972. Again this achievement has been simply written out of history. The success of the “Alternative für Deutschland” is partly due to this kind of denigration of people’s past lives.

The GDR was declared an “unjust state” in 1990, and its population projected as victims, perpetrators, or followers. These terms, and this image of a “dictatorship,” made it easy for the media and the writers of history to compare the GDR to Nazi Germany—the West’s assertion to discredit the GDR’s achievements. In reality it was in the West German state that having been an old Nazi was no impediment to a powerful career, inside and outside the state apparatus.

A case in point is Hans Globke, who was chief of staff to the West German chancellor for ten years (1953–1963), though he had drafted Hitler’s infamous Nuremberg Race Laws. Nazi judges who had handed down death sentences remained at their posts up until the late 1970s.

With the annexation, the “German spirit” was reinstalled in all of Germany, and the old patterns of thought and action. Anti-communism, Russophobia and the “preventive war” thesis were all revived. The end of the post-war political order in Germany and Europe has brought with it the lifting of German guilt for the wars of aggression and annihilation.

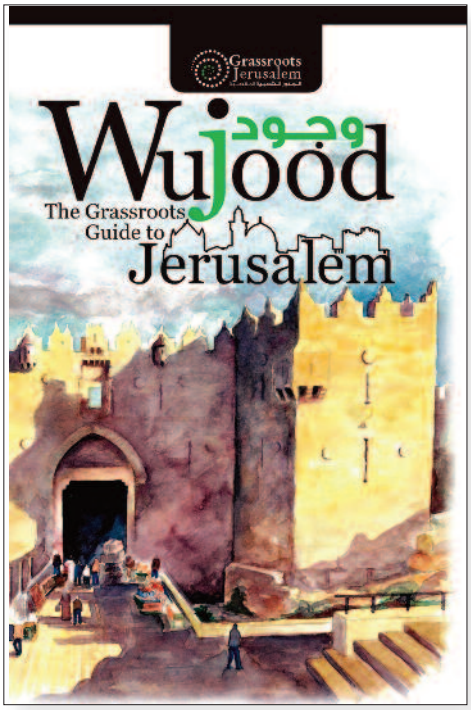
This removal of any guilt applies in particular to the so-called “race war” and war of annihilation waged against the Soviet Union. There are no official monuments in the East any more commemorating Nazi terror without references to the “crimes of the SED* dictatorship,” declared equal to Nazi terror.

Five years ago, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the removal of the inner-German border, a large banner was unfurled on Alexanderplatz in East Berlin declaring: “This border was removed so we can go to war again, united.”

What had been prevented by the Treaties of Versailles and Potsdam, what had been precluded by the division of Germany, namely Germany’s involvement in wars, became possible again with this annexation. On 13 June 1999, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, German soldiers went to war. ★

*Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the government party in the German Democratic Republic.

Tourism as a tool of displacement



LAST MONTH a talk was given in Berlin and other European cities by Grassroots Al-Quds, a Palestinian group that is organising civil-society resistance to Israeli occupation. It aims to build an economic base within East Jerusalem to try to liberate occupied Palestinians from their dependence on NGOs and settler-colonialism.

In Berlin the event was organised by Palestina Sprichts, and the topic of the talk was how tourism is being used as a tool of apartheid by the Israeli state.

Jerusalem is a tourist hotspot, which has seen huge growth: an increase in numbers of 4.5 per cent in 2016 was followed by a total of 2.8 million visitors in 2017. However, only a fifth of these tourists stayed in Palestinian-owned or Palestinian-operated hotels. This is partly due to there being only 1,500 Palestinian hotel rooms, compared with 20,000 Israeli-owned. This is compounded by the fact that Israeli tourist boards do not include East Jerusalem in guides or itineraries.

There is also the striking picture of Israeli tourist maps centring on the "western city centre," ignoring the historic actual city centre in the heart of Jerusalem. These skewed maps simply erase large parts of East Jerusalem.

These tourism policies are directly tied to the occupation. Palestinians are routinely denied planning permission for houses, with the expansion of Palestinian areas always falling "outside the master plan" for that district. The problem is compounded for hotels, with no new Palestinian hotel opened since the 1970s.

Forty per cent of Jerusalem's income comes from tourism. The settler-colonial project is intricately linked to tourism, with the Israeli state building infrastructure to enforce this apartheid. The City of David is obviously a large tourism attraction in the city, but there is a plan to build a cable car from the City of David to the Mount of Olives. Once there, tourists will be kept within a walled promenade, directed between two settlements controlled by the settler group Elad, without the opportunity to even accidentally visit the Palestinian communities outside. This promenade will also require more Palestinian land to be occupied in order to be completed.

Grassroots Al-Quds say that this situation has three main effects: politically, tourists do not see the occupation; economically, they do not spend money in Palestinian businesses; and generally, they miss out on the beautiful and historic sights in the eastern part of Jerusalem.

As part of their response to this, Grassroots Al-Quds has published Wujood (Arabic for "existence"). It is a guide, a phrase book, a political document, and a map, all in one. It gives guidance on where to stay, where to eat, where to learn Arabic, and where to go if you need medical assistance. It also includes a guide to finding and navigating Palestinian public transport, as Israeli public transport does not go to Palestinian areas—another way to keep tourists away in the apartheid city. ★

■ *Wujood: The Grassroots Guide to Jerusalem* can be read at www.grassrootsalquds.net.

Ireland is not an island!

Dónall Ó Briain

SINCE THE 1970s the mainstream media, led by the *Irish Times*, have been using the term "island of Ireland," and such variations as "this island," when they need to refer to the whole of Ireland.

This is to avoid giving offence to those who cannot swallow the idea of Ireland being a country: they wish to apply that honour instead to the 26 Counties. Many people who really ought to know better have been repeating these terms ever since. Some, of course, are merely copying unthinkingly what they read or hear in the media.

The problem is reinforced by the fact that generations of schoolchildren have been taught pedantically that an island is any tract of land surrounded by water. This contradicts actual English usage: an island in fact is any such body of land that is not a country. Nobody says, "I was on Ireland," as they would in speaking of an island, but "I was in Ireland"—showing that they are aware, even if subconsciously, of this distinction.

Such expressions as "all the people on this island" were contrived in order to fit a political agenda but have now been taken up by people who certainly do not subscribe to that agenda. That's how linguistic manipulation works.

It fits in with the practice of referring to the 26 Counties as "Ireland"; and we can now read such expressions as "the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland." A few years ago this would have been greeted with derision, or outrage; today it is almost a commonplace. And it didn't happen by accident.

This is not a trivial matter. Language is one of the most powerful tools used by those in power to enforce, legitimise and normalise their control. When a deceptive or manipulative term is introduced (and there are many others), as soon as it is accepted by people generally, that battle is lost. But if we are armed with an understanding of this process we can fight back. Ireland is not an island: it's a country. ★

OBITUARY

Sebastian Patrick Stroie
(2002–2019)

THE COMMUNIST PARTY of Ireland offers its condolences to the family of Sebastian Patrick Stroie, a militant in the Connolly Youth Movement who died tragically on 21 October.

We extend our sympathy to his parents, Claudia and Adrian, to his sister, Veronica, and to his extended family in Romania, and our solidarity to all his comrades and friends in the CYM.

Seby was a kind, generous and warm-hearted young man. He was involved in many struggles in his short but packed young life. He was active in the housing struggle, taking part in a number of housing occupations in Dublin. He was also active in the climate strikes, concerned, like others of his generation, with the destruction of the global climate. He had a keen and enquiring mind and was always eager to learn.

We know that the nature of his passing has had a deep impact upon his family and all his comrades in both the CYM and the CPI. His contribution was extremely important, and his memory will live long in all our hearts. He will be greatly missed by all. ★

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If you would like to contribute to the continuing work of building *Socialist Voice* and to see it reach a wider audience, please consider making a donation. All money raised goes directly towards promoting *Socialist Voice* and related social media.

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END NOTES

A tax-dodging economy

Eugene McCartan

RECENT RESEARCH on the profits declared in Ireland, and the subsequent taxes paid on those profits, should surprise no-one. It has exposed the fact that American transnational corporations made $83 billion (€74 billion) in profits here. A third of them have their head office here, so they can declare all their global profits in Ireland and so avail of the generous tax policies of the Irish state.

While the nominal tax rate is in or around 12½ per cent, the effective tax take is in the region of 4.8 per cent. The Irish state remains the No. 1 tax haven for American transnationals.

It is estimated that the tax revenue received by the state from these declared profits is more than €14.3 billion since 2015. We are net beneficiaries of both the global imperial plunder and savage exploitation of workers in the global south and the super-exploitation of the natural world that contributes to the destruction of the global environment.

It also means that the Irish state's revenue is of a very precarious nature, totally dependent on the tax code being maintained as it comes under pressure from more and more countries that either oppose these tax levels and want to increase taxes on corporations or are attempting to follow a similar job-creation strategy, thereby engaging in a race to the bottom.

This economic development strategy being pursued by the the Irish ruling class can only lead to a very precarious financial situation for the state, making it even more vulnerable to the flight of capital as these corporations scour the world for the best deal so as to pay minimum or no tax.

It means that precarious employment is a growing feature experienced by workers as this state competes for mobile capital in globally traded goods and services. There is clearly no strategy for building a sound industrial base on the sustainable use of the natural world and Ireland's skilled and educated work force.

As with all things under capitalism, maximum profits are the order of the day. We know from experience when government finances decrease it is workers, pensioners, the sick and children who pay the price. ★

Veterans for Peace: Let them home for Christmas!

TWO MEMBERS of the American organisation Veterans for Peace, Ken Mayers (aged 82) and Tarak Kauff (aged77), are being punished by the Irish state without even having a trial. They are charged with a minor offence: entering Shannon Warport on St Patrick's Day.

They tried to stand up for Irish neutrality and to search a US warplane; for this they were imprisoned for twelve days, and then strict bail conditions were imposed, including the confiscation of their passports.

So for more than seven months they have been hostages in Ireland, without being found guilty of any offence.

Their actual trial could be two or even three years away. This scandal must be stopped. It is time people began communicating with the minister for justice, Charlie Flanagan, and demanding that the persecution of these two elderly peace activists should end and that they be allowed to go home until their trial.

Have no fear: they will return, to prove that what they did was justified, because war is the crime.

And it would be worth while writing to RTE (complaints@rte.ie) to express your concern that the national broadcaster has completely ignored this story—not for fear that it is sub judice but as censorship.

A "Let them home for Christmas" postcard and an on-line petition have begun. But you can make your own contribution: send an e-mail message, a card or a letter to Charles Flanagan, Minister for Justice, Leinster House, Dublin D02 A272, or to charles.flanagan@oireachtas.ie. ★

Welcome for change in abortion law

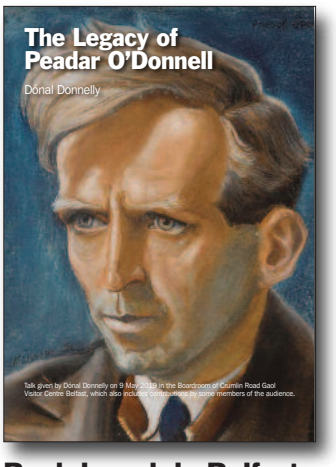
Communist Party of Ireland Northern Area Committee statement

DESPITE A last-ditch attempt by unionist parties to reconvene the Assembly at Stormont in order to stop abortion law changes in Northern Ireland, the long-awaited legislation came into effect at midnight on 21 October.

The Communist Party of Ireland welcomes the repeal of sections of the Offences Against the Person Act, which have until now stopped thousands of women from access to abortion health care in Northern Ireland.

Over the past 52 years over 50,000 women have been forced to travel to Britain and other places to obtain an abortion. Over the years the campaign to change this situation has gained support from women's organisations and the trade unions, and even some political parties have now adopted support for a woman's right to choose.

The CPI sees this as primarily a right to a reproductive health service. We acknowledge that there will be problems preparing this service and the law to go with it, but the wheels are now set in motion to do this. ★



Book launch in Belfast

Wednesday 20 November, 6:30 pm
Launch of the booklet *The Legacy of Peadar O'Donnell* by Dónal Donnelly, based on a talk given for May Day, 2019, in Crumlin Road Gaol Visitors' Centre. Guest speakers: Dónal Donnelly, Dympna McGlade, Tommy McKearney.
▶John Hewitt (51 Donegall Street) ★