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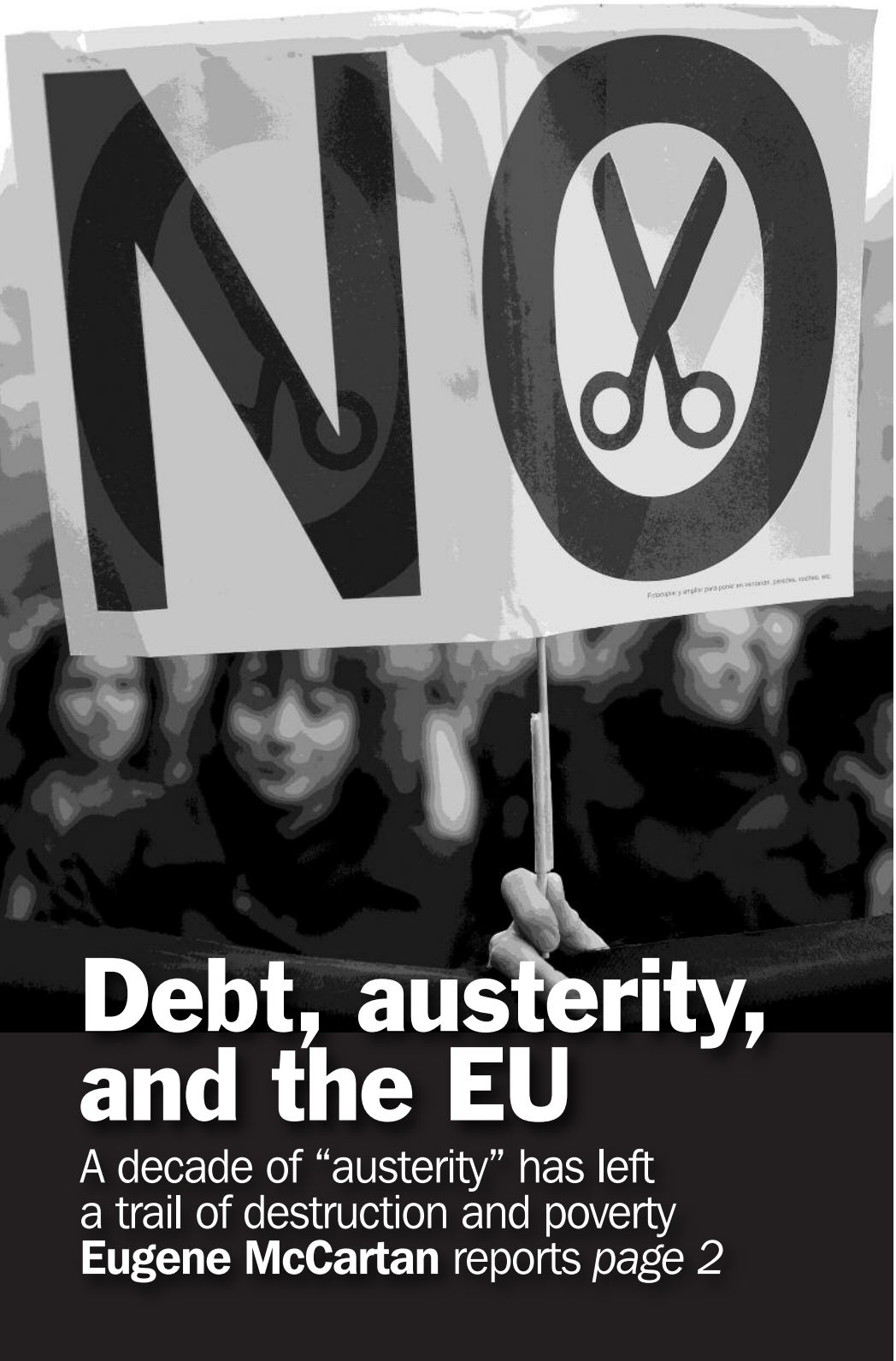

Debt, austerity, and the EU

A decade of "austerity" has left a trail of destruction and poverty **Eugene McCartan** reports *page 2*

"From the entry of the Labour Party into the Municipal Council to the present day their course has been marked by dissension, squabbling and recrimination. No single important move in the interest of the worker was even mooted, the most solemn pledges were incontinently broken, and where the workers looked for inspiration and leadership, they have received nothing but discouragement and disgust."—James Connolly (*Workers' Republic,* 16 September 1899)

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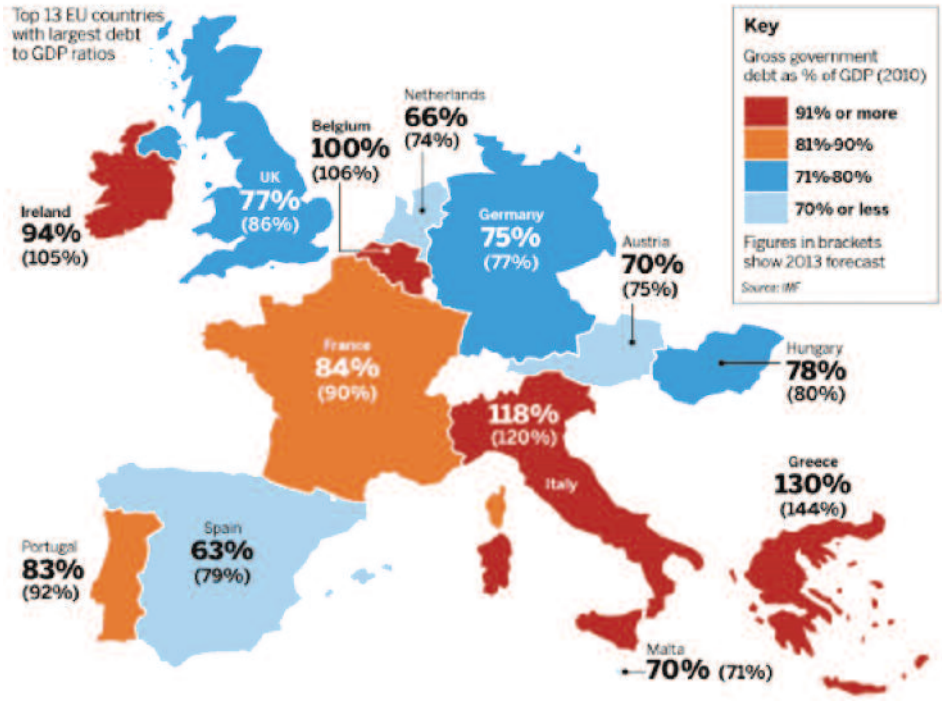
DEBT, AUSTERITY AND THE EU



EUGENE MCCARTAN

TOWARDS THE end of November the Irish media published reports of comments made by Prof. Christian Kastrop, a former associate of the German minister of finance, Wolfgang Schäuble, one of the architects of the debt crisis. Kastrop now works for the Bertelsmann Foundation, a think tank sponsored by the Bertelsmann Group, one of the principal German transnational corporations.

The "learned" professor suggests that in the euro crisis Ireland was caught in the crossfire between Germany and southern European bail-out countries and was forced to bear "unnecessarily harsh austerity measures."

We as a people need to keep in mind that we were forced to take ownership of 42 per cent of all banking debt by the European Union, dominated, as it was and is, by German monopoly capital. A significant part of the banking debt imposed was owed to German banks.

A decade of "austerity" has left a trail of hospital waiting-lists, a housing crisis, and cuts in workers' wages and conditions, a decade in which workers have experienced a growing spread of precarious employment, precarious shelter, precarious health services, and a precarious future for pensioners.

The learned professor put this down in particular to "historical trauma" regarding debt and inflation in German historical experience. While this may have played a small, subjective part in their thinking, what is clear is that German monopoly capitalism would have experienced a huge crisis if Ireland—like Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece—had refused to take responsibility for the massive over-borrowing and speculation by financial institutions, both national and global.

"Austerity" was for saving the system, saving finance capital. The crisis presented an opportunity for the ruling class throughout the European Union and beyond to seize the moment and launch an assault on the working class, to take back from workers what they had forced from the elite over many decades. The learned prof., like all such elements within academia, played a necessary role in forming the ideological building-blocks to sustain the system.

Turning a blind eye

TOMMY MCKEARNEY

THERE IS AN old adage that if something appears too good to be true, it probably is. Moreover, responsibility goes both ways. Anyone buying something below its obvious market value without checking the origin has to know there is a real probability of illegality or outright criminality being involved.

The common perception is that such shady deals are done by petty crooks working from dark alleyways. There is, however, a more sinister involvement in this type of crime by those other master crooks: the management and owners of big business.

There is nothing new about shady dealings within the world of lucrative commerce; and Ireland is no exception. During the Economic War of the 1930s a leading Unionist politician with property along the border reassigned B Specials and Revenue personnel so as to facilitate the importation of cattle from "Éire" into Britain via Northern Ireland, in violation of the then British embargo on Southern Irish produce.

Forward ninety years and there is evidence that big business on both sides of the border is still turning a blind eye to both sharp and frankly illegal activity. Frequently this involves subcontractors supplying services at levels below a viable or going rate. These practices, more prevalent in some industries than others, afford the captains of industry a measure of "credible denial."

The construction industry has for years been a byword for shabby practice, with its brown envelopes, the use of substandard products, and unconscionable mistreatment of labour. Elsewhere, migrant workers are being forced to do lengthy periods of overtime in some factories at a flat (and at best minimum wage) rate. This cruelty is being enforced by unscrupulous gangmasters, using a range of threats, including physical intimidation. Managements, content to be the recipients of cheap labour, do not care to investigate.

Some of the most blatant uses of illegality, however, now occur in a business at present under the spotlight. The haulage industry is rife with malpractice, and sometimes lethally so. Central to this is continuous pressure to reduce freight costs, and often done at all costs. Illustrating this point is a

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Not alone was "austerity" an attack on the living standards of workers and their communities, it was also an ideological attack on the idea of public debt and borrowing. Kastrop played a central part in drafting what are called "fiscal brakes," adopted since 2016 for the German federal budget and from next year for Germany's sixteen federal states, which have also been adopted and imposed by the EU.

The German state and ruling class believe in cutting public services, slowing economies first, to maximise the effect of public funds invested subsequently as stimulus. These "fiscal brakes" will prevent current and future German finance ministers from borrowing more than 0.35 per cent of economic output, at the federal level since 2016 and from next year in the provinces. In Germany this has contributed to years of chronic underspending on education and physical and digital infrastructure.

These fiscal rules will be imposed throughout the EU from next year and will have a very negative impact on workers and their families and on public services as more and more of the tax take comes from working people, and taxes on capital are subsequently reduced.

The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council—a Government-appointed think tank of tame individuals—recently issued a report outlining the over-dependence on tax revenue from corporate tax. They make the claim that up to €6 billion, or 60 per cent, of the Government's corporation tax may be temporary, only for as long as it suits transnational corporations to declare their taxes here in tax-haven Ireland.

Corporation tax rose to a record €10.4 billion last year, more than double the amount collected in 2014. This is caused by what is called the "onshoring of assets," which is due in some measure to a small global clampdown on transnational tax avoidance and growing global corporate profits. About half last year's total came from a mere ten companies, such tech giants as Apple, Microsoft, Dell, Google, and Oracle.

The Fiscal Council noted that corporation tax receipts now account for one in every five euros of tax collected by the Government. It also warned that between €2 and €6 billion of the current €10 billion total may be what it calls "excess," or a temporary aberration in the tax take—what we would term "imperial rent," whereby the Irish establishment rents a brass plate in the International Financial Services Centre to transnational corporations, where they can wash their profits through the Irish tax system and cream off a few billions of those profits—profits accrued from the savage exploitation of workers around the globe.

These corporations will only continue to declare profits here until another subservient client state offers them a better deal. The increased Government spending is financed in part by these corporation taxes and is not a true reflection or based on the real strength of economic activity here, and is thereby not sustainable in the long term. This is where the EU fiscal rules on government borrowing will have a significant impact when these sources of tax revenue dry up or are reduced.

Once again workers will face further and ever deeper attacks on their wages and conditions. Services such as health and education will come under further attack. Neither will the housing crisis be solved with the Government's current strategy. We will see a further tightening of the power and control of finance capital.

Workers will always be made to pay the price for the recurring crisis. What is needed is a radical break with this failing and crisis-ridden economic system.

Those who continue to argue for the system, and those who argue that membership of the EU is the only way forward but simply needs progressive reforming, need to explain how this is to be done. ★

recent example where a bona fide operator lost a long-standing contract when a competitor undercut him by an unsustainable 25 per cent.

The consequence is to cause some people, desperate for a wage, to evade statutory regulations by employing devious techniques to circumvent legislation guaranteeing rest and recuperation periods. As a result, drivers and the public are put at risk.

Still more dangerous, however, is an issue now being raised by conscientious lorry-drivers. They say that a number of unprincipled and suspect small transport operators have been submitting rock-bottom tenders for transcontinental subcontract work to larger companies. How, they ask, are these small-scale outfits able to do so, and why? In a nutshell, what else are they doing to subsidise their unprofitable runs?

The point to keep in mind is that those profiting most from this are the masters of capital in control of construction, retail, transport, and food production. Although not directly involved in lawbreaking, it is inconceivable that high-powered managements are unaware of the cost of labour and must bear responsibility for the fall-out.

It is important to recognise this not merely as a law-and-order issue. Undoubtedly there is a case for prosecuting individuals and groups of individuals; but the overall culprit is the capitalist system. Moreover, political and economic systems don't function separately from society. The only way to definitively end the criminal abuse of working people is to replace capitalism, the economic system underpinning the exploitation of labour.

Nevertheless, there are steps that can and should be taken while pursuing the overall objective of a workers' republic. In the first instance, it is important to see past the small fry and to expose large companies and their shareholders that are profiting by abusing labour. Secondly, progressive society has to make it more difficult to cut the price of labour by battling to have all sectors of the economy unionised.

Alongside these steps, it is crucial that the toxic and symbiotic relationship between right-wing elected (and seeking-to-be-elected) representatives and big business is exposed.

Taken in isolation, these measures will not provide a comprehensive solution to issues detrimentally affecting the working class. Nevertheless they offer an alternative to passively accepting the intolerable. ★

Céad míle falsehood

Jimmy Doran

LAST MONTH the ugly face of capitalism came into the public glare when thirty-nine people froze to death in the back of an Irish juggernaut, having been smuggled into Britain from Viet Nam.

Later on, as November came to a close and the Christmas shopping frenzy was in full swing in the streets, on television and radio and in the newspapers, sixteen people were discovered in the back of another juggernaut, on its way to Rosslare. Mercifully, they were alive.

Only a few days earlier Verona Murphy, Fine Gael's candidate in the Wexford by-election, suggested that immigrants should be "deprogrammed" on arrival, as many of them are terrorists, even going so far as suggesting that this applied to children as young as four years old. She eventually apologised, saying that she had used a "very poor choice of words." This pseudo-apology was fully accepted by the taoiseach and the tánaiste; there was no need for any further action or explanation, and Fine Gael were happy to have Verona Murphy as their candidate in the election.

There was no attempt to explain or to build empathy about why people are risking their lives to travel to Ireland and Europe, or why those who survive this perilous journey are then forced to spend years in our present-day Magdalene laundries, "direct provision."

But that would not be in the interest of the establishment, because the reason is at the core of their capitalist ideology.

Imperial wars—facilitated by Ireland by means of Shannon Airport—are a major source of refugees, as hundreds of thousands of people are displaced in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and anywhere else that has resources that imperialism wants to get its hands on, or any people who dare to stand up against the imperialist hegemony. Refugees are not looking for what Gemma Doherty (by-election candidate in Fingal) might call "our jobs": they are fleeing our bombs, many of which pass through Shannon Airport unhindered on their way to create death and destruction around the world.

Of course all immigrants are not refugees. Some are economic migrants. The mainstream media put a capitalist spin on this, that "these poor people are fleeing wretched conditions in the poverty-stricken countries they come from." What they don't tell us is that 83 per cent of all products made in the world are produced in the self-same poverty-stricken countries, by First World corporations, which pay poverty wages for these products, which are then sold here and in the rest of the "developed world" at a massive profit made from the hard labour of workers in the global south. It is the poverty wages of capitalism that force people to migrate. The "developed world" has been developed at their expense.

The global south is not naturally poor: it is unnaturally impoverished, by colonialism in the past and by global imperialism today.

Leo Varadkar accepts Verona Murphy's apology, as it suits the interests of Fine Gael to have a divided people here, where one worker distrusts the other—the old method of divide and conquer that served the British so well in the past and serves their lackeys today.

Where is the *céad míle fáilte* that Ireland is so famous for? There seems to be no welcome in Achill, Oughterard, or Ballinamore. We are not naturally racist in Ireland: we ourselves have travelled the world as economic migrants, have

The global south is not naturally poor: it is unnaturally impoverished, by colonialism in the past and by global imperialism today.

endured British rule in the past and the neo-liberalism of the counter-revolution today. Racism is taught to us: we are not born with it. It is very subtle but facilitated by governments to serve their interest: capitalism.

It is not immigrants who drive down wages, it is employers.

These attitudes can be traced right back to the foundation of the state. Fine Gael was born out of the fascist Blueshirts. Éamon de Valera, founder of Fianna Fáil, was the most right-wing IRA commandant, the only one who refused to allow women in his ranks during the rising, and the only one the British did not execute. They knew well who to take out and who should survive to serve their interests.

If Lorraine Clifford-Lee picks up a few extra votes for Fianna Fáil in the Fingal by-election because of her anti-Traveller and racist tweets, Mícheál Martin will not complain. They are happy for such views to be expressed. They will condemn the comments and apologise in time to gain some votes and will not lose others as a consequence, but the seed is planted.

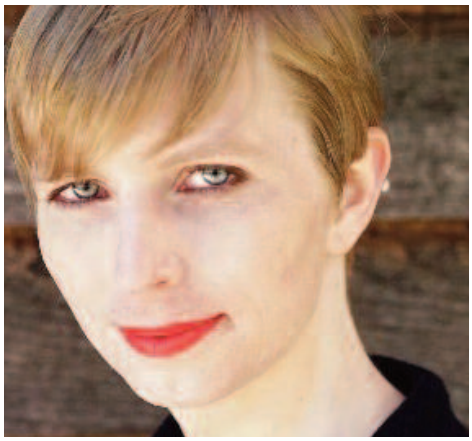
The question has to be asked: If Murphy and Clifford-Lee are expressing these opinions on Twitter and in public interviews, what are they saying behind closed doors? These were not a "poor choice of words": they were racist statements, made by two women from the two largest political parties in Ireland. The apologies were accepted wholeheartedly, and no explanation given of why they were wrong: just a slip of the tongue.

It is no accident that right-wing and fascist parties are growing once again around the world.

Capitalism is the cause of people fleeing their homelands through exploitation and war. Other capitalist parasites profit by smuggling people; when they arrive here other capitalists profit from the vile conditions that they have to endure in direct provision.

As Fidel Castro said, *"capitalism is repugnant. It is filthy, it is gross, it is alienating . . . because it causes war, hypocrisy, and competition."*

Capitalism has neither the capacity, the morality nor the ethics to solve this crisis for humanity—because it is the cause of it. ★



Defend Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning!

Seán Edwards

IN 2010 Chelsea Manning (then known as Bradley Manning) was working as a US military intelligence analyst when she came across a video of an American helicopter crew calmly massacring Iraqi civilians in Baghdad. So shocked was she that she sent the video to Wikileaks, which published it, thereby exposing the nature of the US military occupation of Iraq. (You can watch the video at https://collateralmurder.wikileaks.org. It is not easy to watch, but watch it anyway.)

Since then she and Julian Assange have been the target of the fury of the US authorities, with the aid of Britain and Sweden and, since the treason of Lenín Moreno, also of Ecuador.

Chelsea Manning was sentenced to thirty-five years in prison but was released by Barack Obama after seven years. (117,000 people signed a petition for her release.) She is now jailed for refusing to answer questions to a grand jury, that is, refusing to testify against Assange.

Julian Assange is now held in a high-security prison in England; having completed a sentence for skipping bail, he is now held without charge or trial awaiting extradition to the United States.

The UN special rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer, has expressed alarm at the continued deterioration of Julian Assange's health since his arrest and detention earlier this year, saying that his life is now at risk.

The blatant and sustained arbitrariness shown by both the judiciary and the Government in this case suggests an alarming departure from the UK's commitment to human rights and the rule of law. This is setting a worrying example, which is further reinforced by the Government's recent refusal to conduct the long-awaited judicial inquiry into British involvement in the CIA torture and rendition programme. In my view, this case has never been about Mr. Assange's guilt or innocence, but about making him pay the price for exposing serious governmental misconduct, including alleged war crimes and corruption. Unless the UK urgently changes course and alleviates his inhumane situation, Mr. Assange's continued exposure to arbitrariness and abuse may soon end up costing his life.

Once again the British and American authorities have shown their vindictiveness and their contempt for their own laws, especially their frequently declared democratic principles of freedom of speech and freedom of publication. This is a threat to press freedom in general.

If you are looking for a campaign of protest from the corporate press you will not find it; instead it is conducting a campaign of vilification against Julian Assange. The rest of us should realise that it is our democratic rights that are under attack, and it is Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning who are defending them. ★

Part 5 There is an alternative: socialism

Eoghan O'Neill

THE MOST important task of our class is to shatter the illusion that socialism failed. Socialism, directed by communist and workers' parties—contrary to what we are all taught and told to believe—did in fact succeed. It worked, and continues to work, very well.

It would be a huge error not to point out the obvious fact that within fifty years of socialist revolution the republics of the Soviet Union went from being backward, semi-feudal peasant societies to some of the most advanced civilisations, with a level and scale of development unprecedented in human history. It guaranteed those most basic human needs that no capitalist country has been able to provide to all its citizens, while also being the first state to launch satellites and send people into space—an extraordinary feat in science and engineering.

The Soviet Union planned and built up its metropolitan cities with some of the most advanced and also affordable public housing schemes, public utilities and transport systems ever built, all with the full participation of all branches of industry, working together with a common goal in an organised, planned way.

Lest we forget, it is vitally important to reiterate the fact that it took capitalism hundreds of years—of genocide, slavery, robbery, organised crime, and every other form of exploitation and extortion of land, labour, and natural resources—to build its metropolitan centres. These cities and states were built on the backs of slaves and of economic migrants from the impoverished and underdeveloped peripheral countries, including Ireland.

To maintain western domination, consumption, and capital accumulation, the capitalist and imperialist powers instigated perpetual war around the globe for the control of the world's land and resources. The continuation of this is exemplified in Latin America today with coups in Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, Colombia, and Brazil, countries that, to varying degrees, are under attack or have been taken over by right-wing forces, aided and abetted by the United States and its EU allies.

As the Marxist scholar Michael Parenti succinctly puts it, *"the Third World is not poor. You don't go to poor countries to make money! There are very few poor countries in this world. Most countries are rich! The Philippines are rich! Brazil is rich! Mexico is rich! Chile is rich! Only the people are poor."*

The people are poor because the wealth that is created has been appropriated by capitalists and foreign monopoly capital. Wealth, transferred in its money form, is channelled from the transnational corporations and their local

Therefore, by definition, in a socialist state industries, utilities, services etc. must be largely indigenous, not being reliant on or held hostage to foreign direct investment.

subsidiaries to the banks and offshore accounts of the indigenous capitalists and those in the imperialist centres, who in turn finance the political ruling class to ensure that the policies and laws adopted are framed in their interests. Any objection or opposition is met with deadly and devastating force against those who resist this imperial hegemony.

This is fundamentally how the capitalist system works; and "imperialism" is the word we use to describe this whole process. It is parasitic and, vampire-like, it sucks the blood of every nation that holds the resources it needs to quench the unquenchable thirst for greater profits, greater wealth and capital accumulation, and ultimately greater misery for the majority of the peoples of the world.

Its defining feature is the private ownership of the means of production, i.e. the land, the factories, the mines and mills, infrastructure, and services. Private capital is in the hands of a tiny minority, who make all the major decisions on how they use and abuse the factors of production—land, labour, capital, and enterprise—and who get to keep the spoils, produced by the labouring masses.

Socialism is the antithesis of this primitive and vile anarchic system. It is not reliant on the exploitation and plunder of other nations or its own citizens for its development but in fact is built by the conscious efforts and labour of its citizens, who, through class struggle and education, have become conscious of the class nature of society.

This is why we cannot be taken in by the false promises of social democracy and the different colours of revisionism. For even if a capitalist country succeeds in building a strong social system, with a proper health service, education, housing, etc., it is done with the blood of our brothers and sisters in the underdeveloped world.

Therefore, by definition, in a socialist state industries, utilities, services etc. must be largely indigenous, not being reliant on or held hostage to foreign direct investment. The infrastructure and main means of production are held in common by all citizens, where communication, planning and co-operation between all branches of industry in the economy are directed towards predetermined social goals and plans, which are set by the greatest participation of citizens in a variety of political, industrial and social forums and institutions.

Foreign trade is underpinned by an equivalent of exchange between countries and not by the current trade treaties that favour the developed nations over the underdeveloped, facilitating the continual spread of poverty. At its core, socialism is a system of accumulating social labour to build social capital in order to guarantee the basic human rights of all people.

Under socialism, literally hundreds of millions of people were provided with education, from primary to third level, with medical care and housing, all free of charge or almost so. The people had homes, with homelessness more or less eradicated, thanks to the low-rent housing policies directed towards the building of the housing stock held in public ownership.

Socialist states train and employ more doctors and nurses per capita than capitalist countries and, as in the case of Cuba, have sent their doctors to areas around the globe stricken by disasters. In contrast, the United States sends its military to take advantage of a crisis.

Having these three core needs satisfied has meant that people in socialist states enjoy a healthy life, generally with guaranteed one-month holiday or rest time, and can put people to work in a wide variety of vocations and industries, with guaranteed employment, social security, pensions and social insurance to cover any unforeseen circumstance.

Child care and creches are integrated in work-places to facilitate and promote participation by women in the work force and to change the dynamics and role of men and women in the family and at home. This issue has not been fully resolved but must always be part of the socialist agenda for the further and complete emancipation of women under socialism.

The diet in a socialist state is generally much healthier than in capitalist states. Without having the incentive to lace all foods with addictive sugar and additives in order to sell more and make greater profits, food production can be based more on environmentally sound food-processing.

Culturally, socialism allows for the subsidising of the arts, with free or very cheap access to theatres, cinemas, museums, and art galleries. Sport and cultural infrastructure is heavily invested in to allow people to follow a creative and successful career in sport and the arts. Financial and public support coming from a conscious citizenry dedicated to the betterment and fulfilment of all cultural avenues can be achieved without having private vested interests turning the activity into a sales event. In other words, sport, art and culture can be geared towards the use value of the activity rather than the exchange value.

A socialist system can and does facilitate this because a planned economy, with the conscious participation of an active citizenry, can direct funds to where people see and agree upon the necessity and amounts for funding. Today, trillions lie in the bank vaults of western "democracies," but they lie idle, earning interest for the tiny minority who have control and ownership of them to buy up more and to further monopolise the world's economy.

Not only does socialism releases the potential of all this idle money for investment in any and all appropriate sectors of society but the level of accumulation by a tiny minority would not be possible, because the exploitation of one person by another—the source of accumulating wealth under capitalism—would no longer be possible, meaning that a much fairer and equitable distribution of wealth would take its place, and not just on the national scale but at the international level.

As regards democracy, socialism, as understood by the Communist Party, is for deepening and widening the participation of citizens in political life; it doesn't limit itself to electioneering, or to a secret ballot of elected leaders, and does not give emphasis to competing political parties, which is the extent of capitalist "democracies." Its goal is to ensure the broadest involvement and participation by different sections of society—industrial, agricultural, cultural, social and other organisations of the people—being represented at all levels of government, so that there is a greater democratic say by all in how the country is run, planned, and managed.

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Socialism gives meaning to the word "democracy": rule by the people. The government of a socialist state, as directed by the maximum participation of its citizens, goes about the task of drafting and then implementing a plan, directed by the people, to meet the needs and wants of its people, using its land, its natural resources and human labour, which is held in common by all for the betterment of all.

When a socialist revolution succeeds in changing the social, political and economic order, it adopts a socialist programme, i.e. the common ownership of the means of production. No two countries will be the same in everything they do, but what they all have in common is that they will be targeted by the imperialist powers, which will do, as they have done, everything in their vast power to undermine the revolutionary socialist country.

So they restrict trade to and from these countries, causing shortages and problems in the economy. This and many other acts of sabotage, as well as espionage. cause distortions in the socialist economy. This is the key to understanding the reality for existing socialist countries in an extremely hostile capitalist world, and is one of the reasons people are so critical and opposed to socialism, but only because they are made conscious of the effects, and not the causes, of the problems.

A vast chasm separates capitalism and socialism. Most people are given a false understanding of what socialism is by those who have either a very clear class interest in maintaining capitalism and so distort the concept of both capitalism and socialism and by those who have no comprehension of the capitalist system yet who feel they have the authority to speak of socialism.

Of course mistakes have been made; but the pioneers of anything will invariably make mistakes. This is all part of the process of creating something new. It is how we learn from the mistakes of the past so as not to repeat them that is the most valuable lesson for future revolutionary movements.

Above all, socialism is the conscious construction of a society where resources are directed to where they are needed, such as in health, education, housing, and the welfare of its citizens, above the private interests of a small minority.

It does this, and has done this, with the support of the class-conscious people, despite the global capitalist aggression, isolation, and falsification of its existence. This is socialism in theory and practice; and if this was taught in schools, from primary to third level, instead of the anti-communist propaganda that is prevalent in western education systems, class-consciousness within the working class would rise, which would of course cause serious concern for the ruling classes.

The reason socialism is treated with such contempt and is criminalised at every opportunity by the western imperialist media and mouthpieces is that they know it is the only system that can threaten the monopoly of the capitalists and imperialism. The success of the capitalist illusion is to convince most people that the victims—socialist countries—are to blame for crimes perpetrated against them by imperialist policies. ★

PICTURES: *On building new plants* Alexander Deneika (1899-1969) *USSR in Construction* Immensly popular 1930s Soviet magazine published in four languages with avante garde design

GRAHAM HARRINGTON

AS THE "Irish question" comes back to haunt British Toryism as well as British social democracy, it is worth reflecting on what attitude Irish Marxists should take on the national question.

It is worth pointing out that nationalism is only ever criticised when it comes from an oppressed people; very seldom is it understood that nationalism in its worst forms usually comes from an oppressor country. Then it becomes "common sense," the default.

While calls for "no borders, no nations" or such slogans might go down well as sound bites at union conferences, they do not offer any concrete political programme that can unify the class. The reality is that nations are a material thing, a result of the uneven development of capitalism over the centuries. The contradiction between the core and peripheral nations is one of the sharpest contradictions in the era of imperialism.

Lenin, in his article "On the National Pride of the Great Russians," asks:

> Is a sense of national pride alien to us, Great-Russian class-conscious proletarians? Certainly not! We love our language and our country, and we are doing our very utmost to raise her toiling masses to the level of a democratic and socialist consciousness.

It is worth pointing out that nationalism is only ever criticised when it comes from an oppressed people.

Indeed Lenin criticised Rosa Luxemburg's dismissal of nationalism as "actually playing into the hands of the Black-Hundred nationalism of the Great-Russians!"

Patriotism has always been a characteristic of socialist states, from the USSR to Cuba. Even the anti-fascist war in which 26 million Soviet lives were lost defeating the Nazis is known as the Great Patriotic War. However, it deserves to be pointed out that among many in the other eastern European socialist states Soviet patriotism was seen, rightly or wrongly, as a cover for Great-Russian chauvinism.

More damagingly, the reverence for the Soviet Union on the grounds of its role in defeating fascism and liberating eastern Europe, as well as its many economic and social achievements, led to a mechanical approach to building socialism in the people's democracies that arose in the late 1940s. In socialist Cuba an important emphasis was put on avoiding these mistakes and creating a socialism based on Cuban conditions, on Cuba's history, rather than being an imitation of the USSR. It was this that led to socialist Cuba preserving its system after the counter-revolutions in eastern Europe, taking inspiration from the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui, who said:

> We certainly do not want socialism in Latin America to be a copy or imitation. It should be a heroic creation. We have to give life to Indo-American socialism with our own reality in our own language. Here is a mission worthy of our generation.

Despite many on the left rightly praising Cuba for the revolution's independence and its slogan of *Patria o muerte* (homeland or death), when anyone in Ireland raises the point that we should learn from this positive example of patriotism and socialism being one and the same, those same leftists recoil in horror. They see the Tricolour, the national anthem and the history of this country not as symbols that can inspire and unify people but as sources of division. They seem not to understand that not only the Cuban revolution but other socialist revolutions came from national liberation struggles, as in Viet Nam, Mozambique, Angola, and China. Even Ho Chi Minh wrote:

> At first patriotism, not yet communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, in the Third International. Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism-Leninism parallel in participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only socialism and communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery.

To be blunt, some people's belief is not in the Reconquest of Ireland but instead they pin their hopes on our betters, whether it be the remaining vestiges of British social-imperialism or the new, European cosmopolitanism.

> The socialists must explain to the masses that British socialists who do not demand freedom to separate for the colonies and Ireland . . . and who do not extend their revolutionary propaganda and revolutionary mass activity directly to the sphere of struggle against national oppression... that such socialists act as chauvinists and lackeys of bloodstained and filthy imperialist monarchies and the imperialist bourgeoisie. (Lenin)

The Reconquest of Ireland will only come about as a conscious act by a risen people. A positive vision of patriotism, based on making the working class the ruling class in the nation, not only offers the ability to advance a programme that challenges cross-class nationalism in its worst expressions but also allows us to bring unity to our class, in the best patriotic traditions of our people.

These patriotic traditions include not only political leaders such as Connolly, Pearse and Tone but also cultural figures in our nation's history, from Jonathan Swift and Oscar Wilde to Brendan Behan. It also includes an appreciation of our people's history, a history of anti-imperialism and working-class resistance, not only in Ireland but in all corners of the globe, such as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (a founder-member of the Communist Party of the USA), Mary "Mother Jones" Harris in the United States, and Daniel Florence O'Leary, the Corkman who served with the Liberator Simón Bolívar.

From the IRB Manifesto of 1867 to the Democratic Programme of the first Dáil, we need to reclaim our people's pride. ★

Is national pride anti-Marxist?

"My sin was being indigenous, leftist, and anti-imperialist"

JACK FLEMING

AS THE brutal coup in Bolivia has yet again demonstrated, these suffocating limits on democracy are even narrower in nations under the boot of imperialism and neocolonialism.

Under the leadership of President Evo Morales and his party, MAS (Movement to Socialism), the poor and indigenous people of Bolivia have made enormous gains: lifting millions out of poverty, improving literacy, reducing unemployment, nationalising their natural gas reserves, and making Bolivia the fastest-growing economy in the region.

In direct reaction to these incredible successes, a fascist reaction has reared its ugly head. Much as in Venezuela, this opposition represents the organised white colonial reaction, enraged to see their privilege and authority being eroded. As ever, these minority forces are propped up and orchestrated by the US empire, against the majority of the people and their will.

Immediately following Morales' re-election in October the right wing denounced the vote as illegitimate (while so far producing no evidence to support their claim). An explosion of fascistic violence erupted in the subsequent days and weeks, primarily targeting socialists, indigenous people, and labour organisers. In the face of this right-wing terror, and pushed by the military, the democratically elected president was forced to resign.

In the words of Morales himself, "my sin was being indigenous, leftist, and anti-imperialist." His most offensive error was taking control of the country's resources to utilise them for the people's benefit, rather than that of foreign corporations. Under MAS's leadership, Bolivia was undertaking the industrialisation of its lithium production, moving towards an economy based on producing value-added commodities rather than wallowing in chronic dependence on exporting raw materials and importing finished products.

Latin American countries (indeed all neo-colonial countries) have been dealing with this kind of structurally exploitative economic relationship with the imperial core for decades, and only left-wing movements led by the likes of Evo Morales and Hugo Chávez have pointed the way forward.

Ireland's complicity in the coup in Bolivia

DECLAN MCKENNA

IN A LETTER to the minister for foreign affairs, Simon Coveney, Cuba Support Group Ireland, Venezuela-Ireland Network and Nicaragua Solidarity Ireland condemned the coup d'état in Bolivia and the forced resignation of President Evo Morales and declared full recognition of the constitutional legitimacy of his presidency.

They called on Coveney to clearly condemn this coup d'état and immediately demand the reinstatement of the elected president, without precondition. They also called on him to clearly state that the Irish Government would not recognise any regime that would emerge from this illegal action.

Clearly laying the charge of complicity, the groups stated: "We believe that this coup results from the long-term, concentrated interference and financing by the United States and by other members of the Organisation of American States. This relentless interference—including by Ireland

The illegal ousting of Morales and his ministers comes one week after they broke off a lithium deal with the German corporation ACISA.

In order to hold fast this endemic exploitation, the dictatorial right-wing government now in power promises to reimpose the monopoly control of capitalist conglomerates over the country's valuable resources—namely, the second-largest concentration of lithium on the planet. Global demand for the mineral is skyrocketing, and this trend is expected to continue.

The illegal ousting of Morales and his ministers comes one week after they broke off a lithium deal with the German corporation ACISA. In a recent statement, the company expressed its confidence that "our lithium project will be resumed after a phase of political calmness and clarification"—to translate: calm and clear for capital, terror and destitution for people.

That dozens of Bolivians have already been massacred in the streets in order to ensure Western domination of this increasingly prized mineral demonstrates the horrifying reality of Marx's pronouncement that at birth "capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood."

The electronic technologies created with this blood-soaked lithium will no doubt be marketed by Western companies as "eco-friendly" and "sustainable"; but the reality for our planet and its people is quite different. If total environmental collapse is to be averted we must seize economic and political power from the self-destructive capitalist class. The people of Bolivia have set out on that revolutionary path, reclaiming the land and resources that the imperialists have stolen and freeing it from the pressures of capitalist competition and overproduction.

Western corporations, watching mineral-rich Bolivia and foaming at the mouth, were furious that a few million politically conscious workers, peasants and indigenous people should so substantially affect their profit margins. The people of Bolivia are now experiencing their unforgiving revenge.

But the militant organising of the Bolivian masses has amply demonstrated their refusal to accept counter-revolution, having tasted the fruits of an alternative to neo-liberal, imperial domination.

The stakes of this struggle are truly global in nature. Those who stand against the left government in Bolivia stand against the struggle for climate justice and the survival of our planet. Only with the democratic ownership of the world's major industries and resources can we move towards a sustainable relationship with the earth, such as Cuba has been pioneering.

Ravenous for short-term profit, and tied to the laws of competition, the capitalists in power will not allow even the destruction of our planet to upset constant accumulation and growth. But victories against their power are possible, as the people of Bolivia have demonstrated, and only by their renewed success can other countries hope to follow in rejecting the rule of corporate imperialism and monopoly capitalism and finally forge a socialist path. ★

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■ "When I was a cadet—what's the cadet motto at West Point? 'You will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.' I was the CIA director. We lied, we cheated, we stole. We had entire training courses."
Mike Pompeo, US secretary of state, speaking at Texas A&M University, 15 April 2019. (The audience laughed and cheered.)

as part of the European Union—in the internal affairs of other countries in Latin America has led only to instability, economic destruction, and wholesale abuse of the human rights of ordinary people.

"We believe also that the Irish Government's continuing support for the recent attempted coup d'état in Venezuela has directly contributed to the coup in Bolivia."

In the Dáil, Maureen O'Sullivan TD asked the minister to condemn the coup. Instead Coveney stated every reason the United States, the EU and the Organisation of American States could think of to avoid any condemnation of the events taking place. Instead of accepting the constitutional position as it existed—Evo Morales is still the president, as a result of the undisputed previous election—Coveney questions the result of the election that gave Morales another term, beginning in January 2020.

He then stated that Morales had resigned but failed to acknowledge that that "resignation" was at the point of a gun. Indeed, while ignoring the constitution in relation to the status of Morales, he then invoked the same constitution to recognise the declaration of yet another "interim" president.

This shameless endorsement of lawlessness by Coveney exposed his true position. Rather than being the foreign minister of an independent, neutral state he is nothing but a minor regional mouthpiece of the United States and the European Union and his ministry relegated to the status of a sub-office of the US State Department. ★

No peace in Colombia

PHOTO: Partido Farc

Seán Edwards

THE LONG WAR In Colombia originated in the countryside, from the state oppression of the peasants and the continuing drive of the large landowners (latifundistas) to enlarge their landholdings at their expense, using paramilitary gangs to terrorise the people. The Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) began in Marquetalia, in the south of the country, in 1964, consolidating the resistance and developing into a powerful force.

In September 2016, after four years of protracted negotiations in Havana, the Colombian government and FARC signed an agreement to bring the fifty-year armed conflict to an end. This agreement was vociferously opposed by ex-president Álvaro Uribe and his ultra-right party (amusingly called the Democratic Centre), and was narrowly defeated in a referendum. Their candidate, Iván Duque, was elected president in 2018. In November an amended version, with concessions by the FARC, was passed by the Congress and entered into law.

During the war the state and the ruling class made use of paramilitary gangs that assassinated left-wing politicians and social leaders and massacred peasants who were trying to protect their land from big landowners or transnational agribusiness corporations. This violence especially affects the indigenous population. These gangs were, and are, also the main organisers of the production and distribution of cocaine.

Since the peace agreement the paramilitary gangs have actually stepped up their activities. Up to 8 September, 151 ex-combatants of the FARC and 666 social leaders have been assassinated. Especially targeted is the movement for the replacement of illicit crops with normal agriculture.

The murder of Alexander Parra (*above*) brings the number of ex-combatants murdered to 168. He was the representative of the political party FARC (Alternative Revolutionary Front of the Common) in the process of reintegrating FARC soldiers in civil society. He was killed in the centre for reintegration, which was supposed to be protected by the state as part of the agreement.

The government denies the existence of paramilitaries, referring to "dark forces" or "criminal bands" as the perpetrators of these crimes. Not so the paramilitaries themselves. The "Águilas Negras" (Black Eagles) openly boast about their activities and habitually send out death threats.

Since the government collaborated with the "Rastojos" gang in smuggling Juan Guaidó across the border with Venezuela, it is not too serious about suppressing them. Duque, of course, gives unconditional support to Guaidó, and Colombian paramilitaries have aided Venezuelan landowners by murdering peasant activists there.

Such is the frustration at the non-compliance with the peace agreement, especially with the murder campaign, that the leaders of the FARC negotiating team, Iván Márquez and Jesús Santrich, have decided to "go back to the mountains" and resume the armed struggle—a decision that was repudiated by the leaders of the FARC party, Rodrigo Londoño and the late Alexander Parra. The peace movement carries on bravely as before, trying to pressure the government into implementing the agreement.

Two brave representatives of Colombian women's organisations recently spoke in Dublin. Claudia Mejia of the organisation Sisma-Mujer and Maria Eugenia Diaz Alarcón, representing women human rights defenders, gave an account of the continuing non-compliance and sabotage of the agreement. They explained that the peace agreement paid special attention to women's rights and safety, for the first time in history in a deal of this nature; yet women activists and women's organisations have been targets of the paramilitary campaign, subjected to sexual violence and murder.

Local elections have just been held in Colombia. They are already surrounded by controversy, with allegations of vote-buying and other malpractices. The Movement for Electoral Observation reports some hundreds of violations; there were even some arrests for vote-buying operations. More seriously, in the period before the elections seven candidates were killed.

Even so, anti-government candidates won some important positions, including those of the mayor of Bogotá and Medellín. The election is regarded as a big defeat for Duque, Uribe, and the "Democratic Centre."

The protagonists of the peace process will take heart. They will push harder for its implementation; but it will be a long and difficult struggle. ★

Here, many Cubans believe that in Bolivia President Evo Morales made a serious strategic error by resigning and going into exile "to avoid bloodshed.

Letter from Cuba

Paul Patrick

THE COMMUNIST PARTY of Ireland has anti-imperialism in its DNA and has consistently supported the Cuban people in their struggle against US aggression. This year, despite decades of US imperialist economic blockade, the people of Cuba overwhelmingly endorsed a new constitution, which reaffirms that "Cuba is a Socialist State" and will "advance to creating a Communist society."

This seemed to trigger the Trump government to tighten the economic blockade even further. Cruise ship companies with American connections have been stopped from docking in Cuba; remittances from Cubans in the United States to their families in Cuba have been strictly limited; American airlines are forbidden to land at Cuban airports other than Havana; American tourists are blocked by US regulations; sanctions are imposed on members of the Cuban government; and, most recently, there has been an attempt by the US government to persuade, blackmail and intimidate American tanker-owners not to deliver to Cuba.

Much of this has been led by the extreme right-wing Marco Rubio, member of the Republican Party, who seems to have the ear of Trump when it comes to Cuban policy.

Yet again this year the UN General Assembly condemned the US economic blockade of Cuba, with only the United States, Israel and Brazil voting for the blockade, while the Cuban people continue to suffer the restrictions it brings.

We need to clearly recognise that Cuba is at the centre of the US imperialist drive to reassert US hegemony throughout Latin America. The US government has openly stated its intention of overthrowing the governments of Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. It supported the Brazilian government's persecution of the progressive leaders Dilma and Lula, the racist and fascist coup in Bolivia, and the austerity measures and repression by the right-wing governments of Ecuador and Chile. It will resist any attempts by Uruguay and Argentina to introduce progressive policies that hinder US interests.

Here, many Cubans believe that in Bolivia President Evo Morales made a serious strategic error by resigning and going into exile "to avoid bloodshed." It had the opposite result, leaving his supporters leaderless and bearing the brunt of the racist, fascist violence unleashed by the right-wing coup. The same US-backed right-wing tactics were attempted in Venezuela and Nicaragua, but the leadership of those countries stayed firm and faced them down. You can never negotiate with US-backed fascist violence.

In this context, solidarity support for Cuba in Ireland remains essential. The new Cuba Support Group in Belfast is thriving and doing effective work. Its leadership is elected by the members and accountable to them annually. That is the model that we need throughout Ireland.

Despite the direct US imperialist threat, Cuban society remains calm and determined. The newly elected National Assembly and President Díaz-Canel will continue to resist any attempt to overthrow the socialist system of Cuba. As the popular phrase here says, *"Aquí, no se rinde nadie!"* Here, no-one surrenders anything! ★

Our planet Earth is on fire

AS PART of Global Climate Action Day, Galway Alliance Against War held a vigil in the city on Friday 29 November to draw attention to the link between climate change and war.

The group believes that this issue has been simply ignored. A spokesperson stated: "In 2018 over $1.8 trillion was squandered on weaponry. What a massive waste of resources on something whose principal aim is to destroy! And the biggest climate killer of all is the US military, which we collude with daily at Shannon Airport.

"The EU has embraced militarism with gusto. Between 2004 and 2006 it spent €65 million on the military. But military spending has rapidly increased. From 2014 to 2020 it will have jumped to an enormous €6,585 million. However, directly because of PESCO and the European Defence Fund, the proposed military budget for the period 2021–27 will see it spiral to a colossal €43,995 million.

"It's time to sound the fire alarm. We have to prioritise the glaring link between the military-industrial complex, warfare and climate disaster, environmental damage and forced migration.

"Help to get this deliberately ignored message across and to demand that militarism must be addressed as a matter of urgency by global powers, but in the first instance by our government. We will be on the streets of Galway, rain or shine. We can no longer allow our governments to ignore—or, even worse, empower—the war industries that are destroying people and our planet for profit." ★

The story of a lifer

Niall Farrell

Séamus Murphy, *Having It Away: A story of Freedom, Friendship and IRA Jailbreak* (Bray, Co. Wicklow: Castledermot Press, 2019; €10).

"Having it away" was a slang term in the English prisons of the 1950s for making an escape. It is the title of Séamus Murphy's account of his imprisonment in Wakefield Prison, Yorkshire. He was one of three IRA men caught during a raid on a British army depot near London in August 1955. Aged only twenty, he was given an extraordinarily harsh sentence of life imprisonment.

Despite the title, the escape plays only a small part in this splendid book. Instead we get a well-written and honest look at life inside the British prison system of the 1950s, and much more.

The brutality of the prison warders is evident; but Murphy also describes the people incarcerated, including many unfortunate Irish people, who had been forced to emigrate from Ireland.

A Ukrainian fascist was also a prisoner (though not because he fought on the side of Hitler against the Soviet Union). Reference to fascism in Ukraine reminds one of the dominant role it now plays in that country, thanks to its nurturing by the United States and the European Union. The author does not hesitate to bestow his own scathing judgement on the Nazi collaborator.

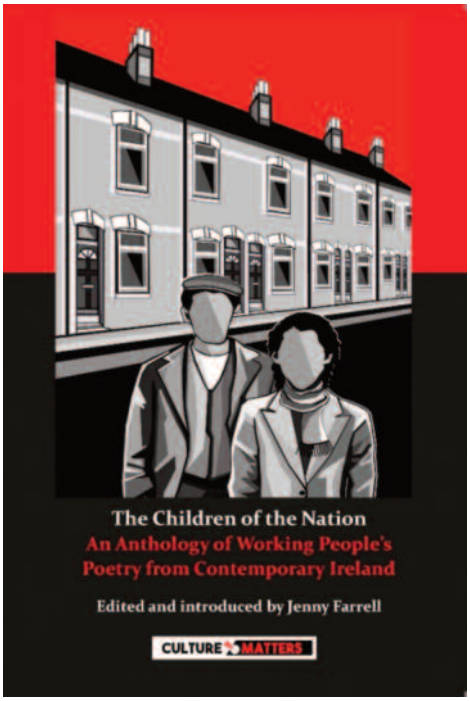
Indeed Murphy's socialist republicanism shines through the whole book as he writes about a host of issues, from the Catholic Church to the Land War and many other historical events. And there are insightful cameos of many different inmates, including Cathal Goulding, the Soviet spy Klaus Fuchs, and the politically mixed group of Cypriot EOKA fighters who found themselves in Wakefield along with the author.

Among the prison population was a sizable number of gay men. Homosexuality was a criminal offence in England at the time. The author relates a tragic story of one unfortunate man who escaped the brutal regime by suicide.

But there is also humour: Séamus's conversion to vegetarianism is one example. And there was resistance, including the many plans to escape. In the midst of these endeavours, the dark and deadly hand of British military intelligence appears; so too do the ubiquitous divisions inside the republican movement.

Betty Murphy is to be congratulated for ensuring the publication of this volume. The book left me with one real regret: not having got to know "Lifer" Murphy properly when we would meet at the Gralton and later the Greaves Schools.

A first anthology of working people's poetry



Jenny Farrell (editor), *The Children of the Nation: An Anthology of Working People's Poetry from Contemporary Ireland* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Culture Matters, 2019).

This anthology deals with the identity of the working class, the marginalised, people in precarious employment, the unemployed, the homeless. The title of the collection recalls the pledge made in the Proclamation of 1916.

Most of the literature we read deals with comfortable middle-class lives. Here the authenticity of sixty-seven working lives unfolds before our eyes, making for a genuinely unique volume whose contributors hail from all over Ireland, south and north, and from both sides of the sectarian divide.

Scott McKendry writes about geese migrating in winter to the Shankill Road, Belfast: "They come at the end of November, | fleeing the Icelandic freeze; swapping the aurora Borealis | for murals in memory of Stevie McKeag | and Bucky McCullough; || and those for Cromwell, Cúchulainn, Luther || and Iron Maiden's Eddie the Head | dressed up as The Trooper, moonlighting for the UFF."("Duck, Duck, Goose")

Just over on the Falls Road, Gearóid Mac Lochlainn opens on another season, "Heatwave Eile": "Bhí an boladh bréan ag análú | ó leithreas briste síos sa Choirceog Beach | róláidir inniu. Dofhulaingthe. | Bhí mo phoill sróine ag damhsa | le sewage an heatwave órga | a ghlac seilbh ar an chathair | seachtain ó shin."

The collection includes poets from the rural and industrial working class as well as those in traditionally middle-income jobs, forced into short-term contracts by a neo-liberal economy. "Working class" has come to encompass all these groups.

Homelessness is a main theme, casting dark shadows in manifold manifestations. One of these is an overarching feeling of alienation from mainstream society: "The greedy | rub their hands | with glee in much the same | way now as | they did back then. Over | a hundred | and seventy years changed | nothing. The | rich get richer and the | poor grow more | poor, and most of us have | nowhere to | live. For there ain't no home | in Dublin." (Ross J. Walsh, "Black 47")

Then there is the very real social violence against more than ten thousand homeless people. Sarah Boyce evokes this for Belfast: "Its brick-bled and rain-wept heart, | whose municipal vision cuts through | its public benches; | no space here for homeless bums | Meanwhile, down a high street entry | great black-backed gulls | span a crumpled sleeping bag | in search of carrion. ("Its Beating Heart")

Other writers, such as Rita Ann Higgins, address unemployment with unrepentant sarcasm: "Hey Minister, we

Murphy's socialist republicanism shines through the whole book as he writes about a host of issues, from the Catholic Church to the Land War.

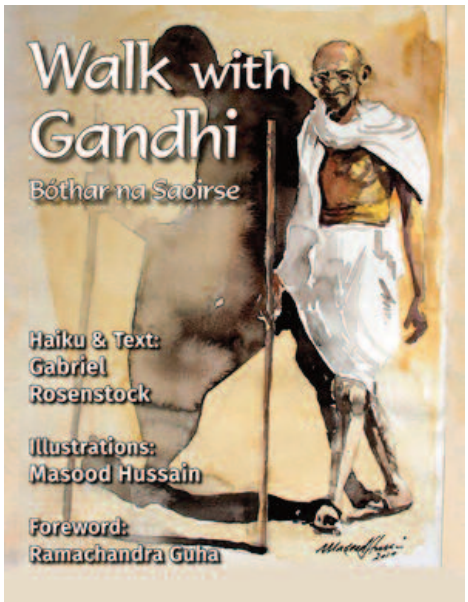
like your suit | have a bun, where are our jobs? | But there was no point; | he was here on a bun-eating session | not a job-finding session. || His hands were tied. | His tongue a marshmallow." ("No One Mentioned the Roofer")

The book contains the views of both immigrants and emigrants. Peggie Caldwell, from rural Donegal, writes of this experience, continuing: "Fallacies echo: Live Register lowest it's been since 2008. || But in these hills the white noise rebounds, | the absence of fledgling song deafening us." ("Still They Go")

Along with the British socialist publisher Culture Matters, the Irish trade union movement was instrumental in bringing this anthology about.

Available from Connolly Books (Dublin), Charlie Byrne's Bookshop (Galway), Vibes & Scribes (Cork), and on line from www.culturematters.org.uk/index.php/shop-support/our-publications/item/3184-the-children-of-the-nation

Walking with Gandhi



Jenny Farrell

Gabriel Rosenstock, *Walk with Gandhi / Bóthar na Saoirse*, illustrated by Masood Hussain (Dublin: Gandhi 150 Ireland, 2019, paperback, hardback, and Ebook).

This is a beautiful book to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi on 2 October 1869. The book is a collection of haiga—a style of Japanese painting often accompanied by a haiku poem. The artists are the watercolourist Masood Hussain from Kashmir and the Irish poet and haikuist Gabriel Rosenstock.

Hussain's exquisite watercolours are a reinterpretation of historical photographs taken of Gandhi. Rosenstock's haiku are in Irish and English. This is significant, as one of the main themes of the book is colonialism and Gandhi's awareness and opposition to it, including the colonising function of language.

colder than all the prisons
you've been thrown into . . .
Downing Street railings

In addition to the amazing interplay of the two art forms, the book is interspersed with fascinating insights into Gandhi's life and philosophy. These reveal that the book is designed to make Gandhi accessible for the younger generation. They invite readers to consider historical events, forms of protest and the effects of colonialism and relate them to the present.

The information put together for the readers is not designed to turn Gandhi into a saint. It relates aspects that surprise us, for example that "he achieved much for the status of his fellow Indians in South Africa . . . but native Africans—such as Zulus—do not hero-worship Gandhi today. Au contraire! Gandhi took the side of the British in the Zulu uprising of 1906."

It was in South Africa that Gandhi's journey began, when he was thrown off a train for sitting in a "whites only" carriage. This awakening was the beginning of his lifelong quest for freedom and justice. Nelson Mandela said about him later, in India: "You gave us Mohandas; we returned him to you as Mahatma." Many of the tactics Gandhi first used in South Africa he employed again in India.

Back in India, in 1915, Gandhi's friend, the poet Rabindranath Tagore, gave him the title Mahatma, "great soul," a name Gandhi never warmed to; it deified him in some way.

Tagore makes several appearances in this book. One of these connects him to the Irish anti-colonial struggle: Patrick Pearse was in correspondence with Tagore, and the latter's play *The Post Office* had its world premiere in the Abbey Theatre in 1913.

This book explores many facets of Gandhi's life. For the younger readers it could well be a first introduction to ideas of colonialism. For example, the following haiku echoes Frantz Fanon's book The Wretched of the Earth:

are there hats enough
to go round . . .
the wretched of the earth

In the following haiku Rosenstock gently hints at India's own discrimination against the "Untouchables," not without a reminder that "many societies have their own forms of class discrimination, snobbishness and exclusiveness, often based on dress, accent, schooling, money, property and other outer distinctive markings."

a hand
like any other hand . . .
the untouchables

This book is a gem. It is a beautiful book, a wonderfully enriching pleasure in aesthetic appreciation and engaging the mind. It quotes many people on the significance of Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, such as Albert Einstein's: "I believe that Gandhi's views were the most enlightened of all the political men in our time. We should strive to do things in his spirit: not to use violence in fighting for our cause, but by non-participation in anything you believe is evil."

To finish with a quotation from Gandhi himself, one that struck a particular chord with me is "Poverty is the worst form of violence." ★

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Beckett's play is of immediate relevance to the world today.

Waiting for Godot

Jenny Farrell

Great Carthage waged three wars. It was still powerful after the first, habitable still after the second. Gone without trace after the third.—Bertolt Brecht (1951).

SAMUEL BECKETT died thirty years ago, on 22 December 1989. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature fifty years ago, in 1969.

Arguably Beckett's most famous play is *Waiting for Godot.* Typically, when this play today is presented the comedy of it is emphasised, as is its "absurdist" label, suggesting that life is meaningless. Beckett had moved permanently to France in the late 1930s. After the outbreak of the Second World War he remained in Paris, where he joined the Resistance following the Nazi invasion of France.

From 1947 on, Beckett wrote primarily in French. *Waiting for Godot,* written in 1948, is no exception. The Second World War was just over.

Although this is not specifically stated, Beckett's play presents the audience with a post-nuclear-war scene. The stage is practically empty except for a country road and a bare tree. In this landscape two characters, Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon (Gogo), just about exist. These two men struggle to perform the most elementary actions, such as taking off a shoe. They sleep rough and are regularly beaten up by gangs at night. This is so commonplace that they barely comment on it. The human experience is reduced to simply staying alive and performing, with effort, the simplest actions.

In 1948, after the war and the nuclear carnage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, people had almost come to the end of their humanity and any positive human experience.

In *Waiting for Godot* there is no prospect of action. The entire play presents us with the two main characters doing nothing and waiting in vain. Narratives that were once useful for endorsing human goodness have all been stripped of their meaning, including a clearly vain hope for God(ot) to arrive. In fact waiting for God(ot) prevents any movement out of this state. When a boy appears to tell them that Godot is not coming today, Estragon refers to himself as Adam. Humankind has become what Shakespeare's King Lear refers to when he speaks of the most destitute: a "poor, bare, forked animal."

When the character Pozzo appears, with his slave, which is a nod to the existence of a "master" class, he sees Gogo and Didi and comments: "You are human beings none the less . . . Of the same species as myself . . . Made in God's image!" Any aspiration to godlike form and intellect has been annulled, or perhaps the reverse applies: God is this.

Thinking is an effort. On one occasion Didi and Gogo contemplate suicide by hanging themselves from the bare tree (of life?). One reason they do not do this is that one of them may remain alive and therefore alone. That is a fate worse than death. "I remain in the dark." This gives some hope. Two characters are, after all, a small community, and they do help each other survive.

And when Pozzo asks Gogo and Didi for help in getting to his feet they respond to this with "It is not every day that we are needed." This profound statement acknowledges that Pozzo's call for help is addressed to "all of mankind," and "at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not." Ironically, all four men end up on the ground, and their cries for help go unheeded. Standing upright has become impossible. Purposeful labour and action no longer define us.

Beckett's play is of immediate relevance to the world today. Like Brecht, Beckett warns of the ultimate destruction of humanity. He does not give his audience much hope. All we can do is take this message to heart and change the world. ★

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