

Socialist Voice

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New government, same old policies

But the policies will be the same:
to give priority to the interests
of the market and big business,
both national and transnational;
tax cuts for the wealthy and
professional classes; deeper
involvement in EU military
strategies and adventurism

Eugene McCartan

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"The continent [Africa] may be a blot, but it is not a blot upon our conscience. The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more . . . The best fate for Africa would be if the old colonial powers, or their citizens, scrambled once again in her direction, on the understanding that this time they will not be asked to feel guilty."

Boris Johnson MP,
Spectator (London), 2002

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Page 16 **Communist Party of Ireland statement**

New government, same old policies

EUGENE MCCARTAN

SO, AFTER months of shadow-boxing and pretend negotiations, three parties—Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and the Green Party—have eventually tied the knot and will set up house together. They have been leading the public on a merry dance, in the pretence that they had worked hard to “overcome major obstacles,” etc. The press dutifully recorded the “tensions” and “difficulties” over the last few months.

Finally, all the parties involved showed great “maturity,” and in the “national interest” Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael set aside their historical differences, stepped up to the mark, and formed a government, with the

Green Party giving the pretence that this was a new departure and a complete break from the past.

But the policies will be the same: to give priority to the interests of the market and big business, both national and transnational; tax cuts for the wealthy and professional classes; deeper involvement in EU military strategies and adventurism, and Shannon Airport still used as a staging-post for US and NATO wars of aggression.

There will be a further erosion of workers’ rights, while precarious employment and zero-hour contracts will remain central factors in the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers, mainly young people and women.

While there may be a brief

honeymoon period to get this three-party coalition bedded in, there will be little change in direction on economic and social policies. The Green Party will provide the political cover and a greenwash to mask further attacks on workers and their families.

The building of additional “social and affordable” housing is no different from what was proposed by the outgoing single-party government of Fine Gael. The priority will be to strengthen the position of private builders and property speculators, and private and corporate landlords. The provision of public housing at an affordable rent will never be allowed to compete with private rent speculation.

Public lands will be given away, on the promise that a small number of

Social partnership? No, thanks

A photograph of a blue wall with red graffiti that reads "WE HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BUT OUR CHAINS!". The graffiti is written in a bold, blocky font. There is a small yellow leaf on the wall in the bottom left corner.

JIMMY DORAN

“Social partnership” is anti-democratic, because a small group of insiders make the deal. This is then packaged and sold to workers as the best deal possible at this time, given the present circumstances.

Social partnership comes onto the horizon as a result of political, employment and economic crisis, in order to reduce workers’ expectations, demands and aspirations and to lay the

ground for the introduction of austerity.

The trade union movement must reject this strategy.

To be clear, I am not condemning the entire trade union movement. There are many within the movement fighting against this strategy. Some comrades inferred that in last month’s *Socialist Voice* I was condemning the entire trade union movement in the North for not taking an anti-imperialist stance. This was not the intention, as many unions do.

Social partnership agreements are not binding on the government: it is free to treat them as advisory, while unions depend on the state to introduce legislation in the spirit of the agreement, which rarely happens.

The ultimate goal of social partnership is the demobilisation of union resistance in employers’ interests. Unions exchange wage moderation and industrial peace for an expectation of policy and institutional influence. The amount of influence is debatable. Some legislative regulations protecting workers were negotiated under social partnership but ultimately had to be passed by the government. Not all were: for example, legislation on migrant workers was promised but never implemented.

Trade unions always feared legislation on employment, but social partnership actually accelerated it. Of course the crowning glory of social partnership was the Industrial Relations Act (1990), which in effect stripped all power from unions and workers, transferring it to employers and the judiciary. The trade union movement was hoodwinked by Bertie Ahern, then minister for labour, who was seen as the workers’ friend, with guarantees, promises and assurances that it was in workers’ best interest to get this legislation through, as it would inevitably

‘What will decidedly change the political conditions and force the necessary deep economic and social change is for working people to mobilise to advance our own interests.’

social and affordable homes will be built. The situation is made worse by the recent decision by AIB not to approve mortgages or take into consideration income derived from welfare payments and to actively reject someone whose employment they consider precarious. This can only be overcome by a massive subsidy from the state in relation to who qualifies for “affordable housing,” so facilitating a huge transfer of public wealth to banks and builders.

The same will happen in the sphere of public health. There will be much talk of increased and more targeted investment in the public system; but in reality the provision of private health and private health insurance will be the cornerstone of state policy. The state will push more public patients through the private health system, paying exorbitant premiums to corporate medical interests.

The treatment of all the nurses and

doctors who returned home from abroad to help during the covid crisis and were then told to stand down shows that the government has little interest in expanding the public health system.

The same goes for the “green agenda” and a reduction in carbon emission: these are all aspirational and will be put off until the next government. The powerful corporate farming interests and the agrifood industries still decide agricultural policy—certainly not family farmers. They may well be thrown under the bus as a sacrifice to keep the Green Party on board.

The strategy since the outcome of the last general election has been to control and corral the people’s desire for change into safe blind alleys and institutional control.

Now is the time for people to begin to mobilise, to push forward their agenda and not allow the powerful economic and hence political forces to

decide the future of our country. Working people voted for change through the ballot box; it cannot be realised by simply allowing political and economic struggle to be mediated through state institutions.

What will decidedly change the political conditions and force the necessary deep economic and social change is for working people to mobilise to advance our own interests.

The challenge for the left and the trade union movement is to mobilise the people on clear goals: on universal public housing built by a national building company, a single-tier, universally free public health system, a strategy for creating jobs, and the control of capital to ensure targeted investment to meet the people’s needs and not for profit or speculative purposes.

Time to put working people first! ★

lead to better pay and conditions, when employment relations would improve immensely as a result of it. Yes, employment relations improved immensely—but for employers—as a result of the 1990 act.

The trade union movement had been softened up and became far too cosy around Government Buildings, believing their own bluster that they had influence on social policy. During this period the working class suffered devastating cuts to the social wage; the building of public housing was abandoned to the private sector; charges were introduced for the dysfunctional health service, on its knees as a result of continuous cuts. At the same time tax breaks were given to employers, speculators and investors as workers were robbed to pay Peter, Paul and every gombeen businessperson in the largest transfer of wealth to the ruling elite since the foundation of the state.

As a result of social partnership, union density collapsed. Strikes became a thing of the past, leading to a generation of union reps without any experience of collective bargaining or collective action.

As time went on, social partnership became more and more bureaucratic, with working groups, task forces, reviews, and committees, leading to

avoidance, postponement, and lack of decision-making on contentious issues. Employers did not have to implement regulations, and many did not.

The private sector has almost complete autonomy to pursue corporate strategies, while employers are free to determine the form, structure and organisation of any internal collective bargaining unit.

The main achievement of social partnership was a victory for the employers in gaining pay restraint and industrial peace. The cherry on the pie was a plethora of anti-union legislation, not least the Industrial Relations Act. The government succeeded in lowering workers’ expectations, enabling them to impose austerity policies at will. In the public sector, “workplace partnership” has been used in a managerial manner to drive through a predetermined reform agenda.

The reliance of the trade union movement, particularly the larger unions, on social partnership as a strategy has over time engendered a reluctance to embrace and in some cases a fear of alternative strategies.

Social partnership created an unnatural division between the public and private sectors, and this was encouraged by the government, employers, and media. The Croke Park

Agreement then divided the public sector unions. Social partnership has left the trade union movement a pale shadow of its former self: broken, demoralised, with falling union density and a serious lack of experience in collective action, leading to a fundamental lack of confidence.

The employers’ side, on the other hand, has grown in confidence as increasingly, and successfully, they turn to the courts to stop workers from striking. The anti-union legislation has led to many victories over unions, giving employers the confidence to now engage in aggressive union-busting tactics.

The legal environment is extraordinarily hostile to workers and to unions. Workplace partnership is non-existent, as the balance of power has shifted from workers to employers.

Social partnership has devastated the trade union movement; but still many within it are wedded to this paradigm. There has been a class war on workers’ rights for thirty years, and workers are losing hands down.

Social partnership is class betrayal. Unions must become radical or they will become redundant and ultimately defeated.★



TOMMY MCKEARNEY

WRITING IN THE *Irish Times* on 17 April, the Spanish academic Javier Cercas described the EU's response to the covid-19 pandemic as having been slow, stingy, and fearful. It is a view shared by many, especially those in southern Europe. Indeed the Italian prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, went so far as to suggest that the response was so inadequate that it posed a question over the bloc's future.

Such sentiments are hardly surprising, given the fact that in those early days China and Cuba provided

more practical assistance to hard-hit Italy than any of their EU neighbours.

Worried by mounting criticism, the EU Commission made a belated, almost begrudging attempt to address the issue. It did so not by converting industry for the manufacture of personal protective equipment and safe accommodation for the elderly but by offering incentives to the private sector, and promising an economic recovery fund. Even at that, and five months after the first cases were identified on the Continent, the nature of the recovery fund and its introduction is still causing dissent among member-states. The response, nevertheless, neatly

captures the essence of the European Union, an organisation designed to promote and safeguard the interests of capital, regardless of the need of the masses.

Two factors in particular assist EU power-brokers in maintaining influence over the southern part of Ireland, even as we experience an acute health crisis. In the first instance, too many people have been led to believe that economics is an esoteric and difficult-to-grasp science. This misconception, coupled with the self-interest of our native comprador bourgeoisie, supported intellectually and politically by centrist social democrats, helps the system continue.

Just as in mediaeval Europe, when the clergy held sway, thanks in large part to widespread illiteracy, modern Europe's rulers depend on misleading the populace into believing that they alone are able to understand and manage the workings of the economy. A well-practised routine is to speak gravely of seemingly huge sums. The European Union's promise of a covid-19 recovery fund of €750 billion is a good example of this and how it is playing out in this country.

However, let's just put this into context. The promised fund is less than 5½ per cent of the European Union's GDP for 2019.* Moreover, only a portion (66 per cent) of the amount will be available as grants and the rest distributed as loans, to be repaid. At present, Ireland has been promised €3 billion, or 0.4 per cent of the total

Standing up for tenants

EILÍS NÍ MHÁRTAIN

The Community Action Tenants' Union (CATU) is Ireland's only union organised within the community you are living in—in the same way that a trade union branch is based within a workplace. CATU

members come together to combat not only issues concerning tenancy but anything that affects the whole community, such as the removal of a local playground, repossession of a home by a bank, or the privatisation of public land for housing.

"We want to take the basic ideas of membership, collective direct action, and grassroots democracy from where people work to where they live" (www.CATUireland.org).

What is "collective direct action"? Instead of trying to resist an eviction alone by individually pleading with the landlord, the entire local membership would resist the eviction as a group or

collectively. This fight would be publicly visible and is intended to directly affect the target—a tactic otherwise known as direct action—instead of the traditional, more polite avenues some campaigns take, such as signing a petition or writing a letter to a politician. CATU members are a physical presence in delivering this message to the target.

CATU is the only dues-paying membership-based community and tenants' union for Ireland. Membership is open to council and private tenants, home-owners, mortgage-holders, and people forced to live in direct provision or emergency accommodation, and any other form of precarious

‘... in 2010 the Republic was forced by the European Union to pay 42 per cent of the total cost of the European banking crisis, at a cost of close to €9,000 per person in the state. Solidarity, how are you?’

amount. Even if the Dublin government were to have this doubled it would still be less than 1 per cent of what is available. Bear in mind that the Irish restaurant sector alone is asking for €1.8 billion to stave off major redundancies.

In passing, we might also remind ourselves that in 2010 the Republic was forced by the European Union to pay 42 per cent of the total cost of the European banking crisis, at a cost of close to €9,000 per person in the state. Solidarity, how are you?

What, therefore, are we to make of assurances from the Irish Troika of Varadkar, Martin and Ryan that there will be no return to austerity? It is difficult to see how they intend to restore the economy to a pre-pandemic status, which itself was far from ideal. Every indicator is pointing to a recession of alarming proportions. The tourist industry is not going to recover any time soon. Agriculture will be affected detrimentally by a Tory Brexit as Johnston and Cummings strive frantically to appease US trade negotiators by accepting cheap, dubiously produced poultry and beef. Every service outlet, from dentist to hairdresser, will have increased virus preventive costs to meet from a restricted number of customers. Add to this the cost of additional pandemic-related social welfare payments, now running at more than €30 billion, and you get the picture.

The only area where there is a reasonable prospect of raising the

revenue required to rejuvenate the economy is from taxing large transnational corporations and especially those in the high-tech and pharmaceutical sectors. Yet this is one path that Fine Gael has set its face firmly against, putting it even to the right of the neo-liberal EU Commission. RTE recently reported that Leo Varadkar will resist the EU’s mooted proposal to introduce a digital tax, tax for large corporations, and a one-off tax for transnationals.

Of course austerity is not inevitable, but it would require an entirely different economic system from that presided over by our Leinster House Troika and as evidenced by their proposed programme for government. The fact is that, notwithstanding the fatuous talk of addressing housing, health, and child care, there will be no significant improvement in these areas for working people. This so-called economic recovery is predicated on a low-wage economy, reinforced by unemployment and a depressing of the social wage. As with all other crises in the past, working people will be expected to pay for this pandemic with poorly paid employment, cutbacks in public services, and reduced expenditure on social and physical infrastructure.

Adherence to EU regulations will be cited as a convenient explanation for retaining or even expanding the private sector. Membership of the European Union entails submitting to stringent neoliberal economics, demanding free-market dominance throughout society.

We are now familiar with this in areas once the prerogative of the state; electricity, telecommunications, public transport and tolled roads are now profit-making investments for the wealthy. The same applies to housing, health, child care, and nursing homes for the elderly.

While this harsh economic regime is welcomed by Ireland’s ruthless and greedy bourgeoisie, it raises a question over the political trajectory of our social democrats—not that we should confine our definition of social democrat to the party led by Róisín Shortall TD: it applies to all those parties committed to remaining within the ideological, political and economic parameters dictated by the European Union, in other words those parties that remain wedded to the capitalist mode of production, albeit with some tinkering at the edges.

So, for all their demands for change, their programmes will change nothing of significance, as, in the words of Lenin, they are “loth to cast off the dear old soiled shirt” they have worn for so long.

There is a programme that will bring about change that allows us to pay for a people’s recovery from covid-19 and other setbacks. We’ve known about it for a long time; and it’s called socialism. After all, it is well past time to cast off the soiled shirt and to put on clean linen and tell us which side you’re on.★

*Eurostat, “Which EU countries had the highest GDP in 2019?” (<https://tinyurl.com/yajs8mpg>).

accommodation, which includes the nearly 486,000 adults still living with parents.* Membership contribution is paid monthly and is calculated on what your hourly wage is, or whatever you can afford. Membership is not open to landlords.

But why a membership-based organisation? Paying dues gives every member an equal vote in this democratic union, and it is the basic level of involvement in the union. Membership subscriptions pay for such materials as leaflets, banners, and training costs needed for campaigning, and this keeps the union independent; so there is no reliance on funding from

the government or city councils, which we are usually fighting against.

Membership contributions can ultimately give enough stability to pay people for the extensive work it takes to run a union, thus reducing burn-out by volunteers, and recognises the extensive work that is needed to keep an organisation functioning.

Unlike many campaign groups, CATU is not a service-provider or a charity, nor is it an advocacy group that is going to speak on behalf of the oppressed. Every member is involved in the struggle to fight oppression. This means there are no “saviours”; unlike NGOs, it avoids the power dynamic that further

institutionalises and disempowers oppressed groups. Instead, those affected are empowered to fight back, with their community beside them. CATU merely provides the training, tools and organisation to collectivise the community to join and support their fight—because it is only our strength in numbers that will fight off the enormous power of wealthy landlords, corporations, and government.

If you are serious about getting organised, join CATU to fight for what you and your community want and need and, importantly, win!★

*2016 census (<https://tinyurl.com/yaokvzqy>).

NATIONAL LIBERATION

The US and Ireland



SEÁN Ó MAOLTUILE

MAINSTREAM CULTURE and politics is invested in the idea that the age of nationalism has ended. Liberals proclaim that the world economy has been thoroughly globalised, and therefore nations are no longer of importance. Yet, as usual, reality serves to upset the declarations and pronouncements of liberal commentators.

The question of nationality and nationhood has not ceased to be of immense importance. Two recent

momentous events indicate this enduring significance: Ireland's recent election in the South and the current uprising in the United States.

In the United States these attacks from below on the imperialist, neoliberal establishment emerged from a dreary foundation of high unemployment, worsening working conditions, rising living costs, crumbling public services, and much else that characterises the downward spiral of recent decades. Yet what ignited these assaults was more than just these economic considerations: the question of nationality was the spark

that lit the prairie fire.

African-Americans are an oppressed nation within the white supremacist United States. This is a settler-colonial country, its wealth and power built on the exploitation and murder of Africans and indigenous peoples. This material foundation has not changed. Brutal exploitation lives on in content while merely its form has altered. A glance at statistics relating to oppressed nationalities in prisons, police brutality, economic deprivation and much else besides will reveal that there has been no revolutionary transformation away from this foundation of a settler-colonial imperialist project. As a result, the revolutionary struggle of oppressed nationalities has proved to be the crucial struggle throughout American history.

The African-American communist Harry Haywood (1898–1985) dedicated his life to placing the black national liberation struggle at the centre of revolutionary politics. He wrote that “such a [national] movement would inevitably culminate in the demand for political power . . . The Black liberation struggle would be, as it had always been, a spark, a catalyst pushing forward the whole working-class and people's struggle in the U.S.” And indeed the murder of George Floyd has served as the spark for upheaval throughout the United States, the kick that pushed the strangled masses into action.

Who said that?

DECLAN MCKENNA

“By sowing chaos [abroad], they've got chaos at home. Everything they've been embedding into the world's consciousness—they're reaping it now.” **Maria Zakharova**, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson, on current events in the United States.

“The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.” **African proverb**

“Thanks to [China, Russia, Cuba, Iran, the World Health Organization and the United Nations] who have all donated supplies recently. Genuine

humanitarian aid is arriving to our country to attend to the health of our people. Thank God Venezuela has some true friends in the world. We aren't alone!” **Nicolás Maduro**, president of Venezuela

“United States' gross national debt has exceeded \$26 trillion.”

US Treasury Department

• The “richest,” most powerful country in the world is in debt to the tune of \$26 million million!

“The Democratic Party [in the United States] exists to co-opt and kill authentic change movements.”

Headline on RT

“Lives don't seem to matter in Yemen . . . Arab lives in Syria haven't mattered to more than a handful of people . . . When black people hung like strange fruit from Libyan trees following the UK/US/French invasion of the country and the sodomising with a bayonet of its leader, liberals like Hillary Clinton and David Cameron laughed—literally, in Clinton's case.”

George Galloway

“If we are not careful it will become a cultural revolution disconnected from the political and economic revolution and [serve] the interests of the rich and powerful.”

George Galloway

‘... the working class of Ireland have no interest in playing the role of servant to imperial masters—in fact it’s entirely at odds with their material interests.’

This year the Irish political establishment in the South was irreparably shaken. The shock victory of Sinn Féin was a historic blow to the iron grip Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have held over the Irish state for a century.

The significance of the recent RIC (or Black and Tans) commemoration scandal cannot be underestimated in accounting for Sinn Féin’s success. This invitation to “grow up,” to forgive and forget the brutality of British imperialism, sent waves of righteous indignation throughout the country. The establishment has advised us to forget airy-fairy notions of “nationhood” or “unity”: we should be solely concerned with making money and buying a house or two. We’re a cog in a global system, doing our small part to help American billionaires become trillionaires.

Yet the people of Ireland have taken a tentative step in rejecting the philosophy that the Southern statelet was built upon: subservience to imperialism. The ruling class of Ireland, like most ruling classes, has been preoccupied with rejecting a fundamental law of reality, that change is the only constant, and intend to keep the country divided and beholden to British, American and European interests for ever.

But the working class of Ireland have no interest in playing the role of servant to imperial masters—in fact it’s entirely at odds with their material interests.

Republicanism is the inevitable manifestation of this contradiction, and it has served as the radical philosophy of all broad-based revolutionary struggles in this country for many centuries. For now, Sinn Féin represent this longing for national sovereignty, even if far more radical politics will be necessary in order to achieve it. Attacks on our republican tradition (equating it with the far-right, terrorism, etc.) and attempts to gloss over our colonisation represent the Southern ruling class’s attempt to undermine this burgeoning trend and hold stagnant the forward movement of history. The people of Ireland will not be fooled.

But why do I speak of these two issues together? Because they are inseparably linked. The striving for national liberation has ever been the greatest enemy of imperialism, whether that’s in Ireland or with the Black nation in the United States. American capital feeds off the whole world, and a weak, divided Irish working class is easier to exploit and steal from than is a disempowered and brutalised Black working class.

The same forces that strangled George Floyd to death have strangled the entire world for centuries. We must not look down in pity at our comrades across the pond: we must recognise our shared struggle and fight together along such lines. The outpouring of support for

George Floyd on a global scale is an indication of this understanding.

The uprising in America is not a single-issue affair: it is an attack at the heart of a global system of exploitation—“a clarion call to all oppressed peoples throughout the world to rise up and defeat imperialism.” The liberal establishment believed it had smothered the desire for national liberation, but its necessity for the working class is asserting itself once more. The best service we could offer the colonised African-American nation is to build an independent socialist republic that stands firmly in solidarity with them, rather than aiding and abetting their oppression at every turn—rather than laundering their oppressors’ profits and refuelling their warplanes. Likewise the victory of the Black liberation struggle would spell the end of the US empire and its exploitation of our country.

As ever, “patriotism is applied internationalism.” The Irish people are coming to recognise this reality. ★

Sources and further reading

(all available at cym.ie/education)

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Mao Zedong, *Quotations from Mao Zedong*, chap. 18: “Patriotism and internationalism”
Huey P. Newton, *Functional Definition of Politics*

“Venezuela will have its elections. We do not care about the European Union.” **Nicolás Maduro**, president of Venezuela

“Something that has taught Cubans to recognize divisive and subversive maneuvers, a key component of hostile US policy toward Cuba, is the shameless way they use, and discard, individuals, whenever it serves their purpose—be it a specific person or a council of several, who take the lead on the ground in their unrelenting attacks.” **Granma International**

“I thought this situation would force the world to act in a different way and be more human. But I have realised I was wrong. The rich are

getting more rich and the poor more poor. I certainly admire the effort of the [Cuban] government to try to guarantee food for all the people but it is difficult when they don’t have enough resources.”

Javier Domínguez, contributor to *Socialist Voice*, on the situation in Cuba and the continuing inequality in the world

“It’s common for smaller countries such as Ireland who come onto the UN Security Council to work with countries of similar values to try to get resolutions passed which are sustainable over a period of time.”

The Journal, on Ireland’s election to the UN Security Council.

• “Similar values”—only time will tell what that means.

“Trump talks tough on Venezuela, but admires thugs and dictators like Nicolás Maduro. As President, I will stand with the Venezuelan people and for democracy.”

The hopeless US presidential candidate **Joe Biden**, attacking Donald Trump for even considering the possibility of meeting the Venezuelan president

“We strongly support your commitment to combating foreign diktat and any attempts at blatant interference in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state, opposing any attempts at a forced regime change.”

Sergei Lavrov, Russian foreign minister, to Jorge Arreaza, Venezuelan foreign minister ★

Economic Update July 2020



Abandoned factory, Detroit

EWAN MACDONALD

WE ARE in the first moments of an economic crisis more serious than anything experienced in living memory. The World Bank’s “baseline forecast” envisages a “5.2 percent contraction in global GDP in 2020—the deepest global recession in eight decades.”¹ Even that assumes we are living through the most optimistic scenario.

It is necessary to be aware of current proposals to solve the unfolding economic crisis, proposals that are advocated by leading institutions of international capital: the International

Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank, and the European Central Bank. The proposals offered by these institutions outline the contours of a strategy that will be pursued over the coming years to attack the gains of workers, already eroded since the last recession.

It is also important to consider the role of the European Union and the euro zone, particularly when the pandemic has bolstered support for the former and the mechanisms of the latter will most probably be responsible for overseeing the proposals we now turn to.

The proposed solutions

As mentioned before in *Socialist Voice*, covid-19 is merely a catalyst for an economic crisis that was long overdue. High rates of corporate debt and historically low rates of profit were driving the global economic system towards a long-overdue recession. Capitalism—an economic system that moves in recurring cycles of boom and bust—is the underlying problem; the pandemic has simply accelerated contradictions late in the process of unfolding.

The IMF, OECD, World Bank and ECB offer solutions to the crisis by breaking up recommendations into two

‘The intention to attack labour is couched in terms of the reallocation of resources to sectors that will be successful after the pandemic.’

periods. The first considers the present and extends into the medium term, where governments struggle to contain the pandemic; the second period considers the long-term effects once the virus has been brought under control.

This is where the serious attacks will be launched. None of these proposals can address the underlying problems created by the capitalist mode of production, the very system that has brought us to this breaking-point.

Policy proposals for the first phase: Containing the spread of covid-19

There appears to be broad consensus that the right course of action during the initial stages of the pandemic is to expand both the monetary supply and national debt. This is advocated as necessary to support capital and, to a lesser extent, labour. Here in Ireland a recent publication by the Parliamentary Budget Office exemplifies this position:

The COVID-19 virus outbreak and the dramatic economic restrictions will have a significant effect on the public finances. Given the unprecedented scale of business closures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, extra spending will be needed to help mitigate the impacts on individuals affected. This additional spending will result in a budget deficit in 2020. Lower tax receipts (e.g. income tax, VAT and excise) will result in an even larger deficit. This will cause debt levels to rise and depending on the duration and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic, this could be by a substantial amount.²

This issue of higher debt lays the foundations for implementing “structural reform” in the second phase. It is quite clear from the above that the cost of the immediate crisis will be paid for through increases in national debt. The average person will be expected to pick up the bill for placing capitalist enterprises on life support as workers are laid off. The workers are being forced to accept layoffs and lower wages while the bosses

have their assets protected with cheap loans funded at the expense of the public purse.

The idea of nationalising distressed businesses, or even the moderate proposal of seeking equity in return for aid, is beyond the imagination of the politicians managing this crisis. They would rather write blank cheques now and force their payment on the people tomorrow.

Second phase: re-opening of the economy

Austerity

There is broad consensus that fiscal support deemed necessary during the preceding period should slowly be rescinded. The OECD is not in favour of a harsh and immediate austerity shock, as “an excessively quick fiscal consolidation could stifle growth excessively, as some OECD countries experienced after the global financial crisis.”³ The IMF is in agreement, arguing that, “where fiscal space permits, as targeted fiscal support is unwound, it can be replaced with public investment to accelerate the recovery and expanded social safety net spending to protect the most vulnerable.”⁴

It is important to note that these are not calls to end austerity: they are statements of intent to impose a more gradual form of austerity. As in the case of the IMF statement, it is hard to imagine “fiscal space” for countries beset by mass unemployment, reduced tax receipts, and the burden of significant debts accumulated over the preceding period. The pandemic is being presented by the OECD as an opportunity to recalibrate economies to the needs of international capital—which leads us to the next point.

Attacks on labour

The intention to attack labour is couched in terms of the reallocation of resources to sectors that will be successful after the pandemic. The IMF argues that “policymakers should also address factors that can impede this reallocation, including barriers to entry that favor incumbents at the expense of potential entrants and labor market rigidities that deter firms from hiring.”⁵ It is not just the unemployed who are going to suffer

but those who are in employment.

The pandemic provides the perfect opportunity for implementing “structural reform” of the labour market. Many countries are already experiencing high rates of unemployment, a favourable condition for capital to launch attacks on organised labour. The World Bank recommends that in advanced economies “social safety nets, including enhanced unemployment benefits, need to be designed to be flexible, efficiently administered, and well-targeted,”⁶ a polite bureaucratic way of stating that one should not seek to undermine the benefits of a reserve army of labour.

A body of desperate, disorganised workers deprived of social supports is the goal. Without rapid and immediate organisation, implementing these attacks will be child’s play.

Socialisation of private debts

The issue of who will shoulder the burden of paying for the crisis should not be a mystery to anybody who lived through the last recession. The burden will largely fall on the worker. Socialisation of private debt is clearly advocated, with the IMF stating that “easing reallocation will also involve actions to repair balance sheets and address debt overhangs—factors that have slowed past recoveries from deep recessions.”⁷

The OECD also acknowledges the need for increased taxes to pay for the debts accumulated throughout the pandemic, and even makes pleasant noises about increasing rates of taxation on capital. We witness the milquetoast proposal that “multinational enterprises pay a minimum tax [which] would strengthen revenue raising capacity and could be seen to contribute to fair burden sharing.”⁸ The fact that these proposals are even being floated is indicative of the seriousness of the crisis—which brings us to the question of the EU.

Renewed legitimacy of the EU

Levels of support for the EU have risen significantly, despite its poor response to the pandemic, Ireland being the most supportive of EU membership.⁹

Continued overleaf

Continued

A recent report by Eurobarometer echoes this strong support from Ireland, even when “a majority of respondents are dissatisfied with the solidarity shown between EU Member States in fighting the Coronavirus pandemic . . . (57%) share this feeling of dissatisfaction.”¹⁰

Regardless, people continue to place, or misplace, their faith in the EU, as more than two-thirds of respondents (69%) want “the EU [to] have more competences to deal with crises such as the Coronavirus pandemic.”¹¹ Further, 66 per cent¹² of Irish respondents are satisfied with measures taken by the EU to fight the pandemic. Far from tarnishing the legitimacy of the EU, the current crisis seems to have generated further support for integration.

On the other hand, we can see that signs of disillusionment within the euro zone are contingent upon

people’s worsening economic situation.¹² Low levels of trust in the European Monetary Union and ECB “hinge to a large extent on citizens’ perceptions of their personal financial situation and the overall economic situation,” two factors that seem likely to worsen significantly over the coming years.¹³

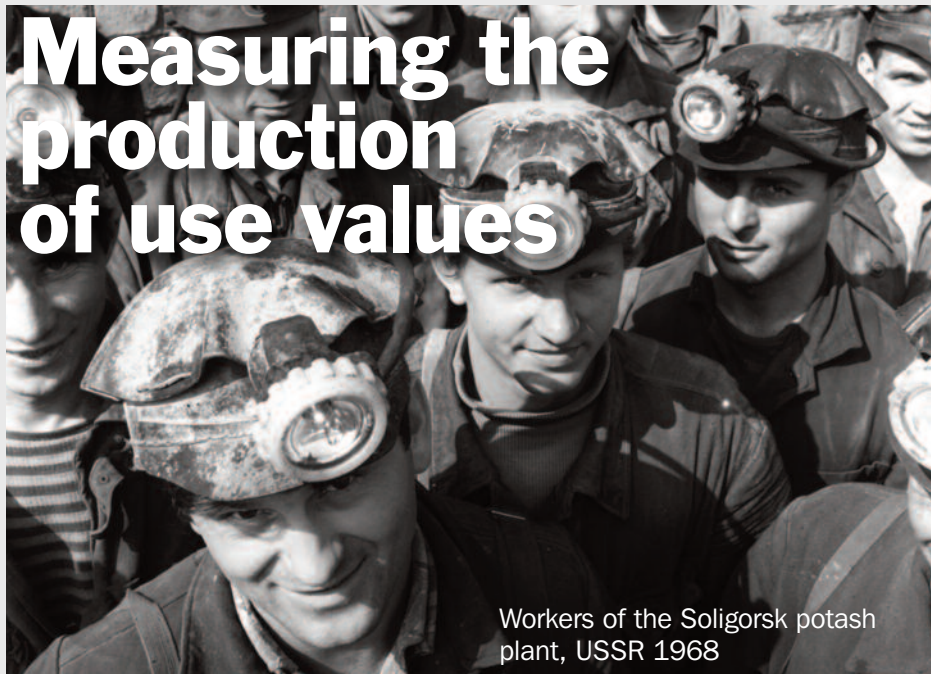
This presents a contradiction. On the one hand we have the desire of Irish and EU citizens to see increased levels of integration, which, it is believed, will help improve their lives in the face of crises like the present one. On the other hand we have the economic policies that member-states of the euro zone are legally bound to during crises, policies that worsen the lives of working people through the imposition of austerity and attacks on labour. Though these rules have been loosened during the current phase to put large sectors of the capitalist system into hibernation, we see that this will not persist into the future.

The need to organise

Economic disillusionment presents opportunities as well as threats. It is no coincidence that support for the far right has increased throughout Europe since the 2008 crisis. When the hegemonic ideology of liberalism loses its legitimacy and, more importantly, its monopoly over the idea that it is the only system to co-ordinate peace, progress, and prosperity, a front is opened up for either radical change or a period of deep reaction.

Without an organised left capable of articulating a vision of a future beyond the capitalist mode of production, the ground is ceded to the forces of xenophobic, racist and reactionary nationalism that scapegoat the structural problems of capitalism on immigrants and minorities.

The capitalist class co-ordinates its strategy brazenly at the international level, prescribing how the world will be reshaped after the pandemic. It seeks to play the working people of the world



Workers of the Soligorsk potash plant, USSR 1968

**MADARA KUPCE
AND DÓNAL Ó COISDEALBHA**

A CENTRAL GOAL of socialism is to transition into an economy without commodity production for profit. A socialist economy would co-operatively create goods and services for their use values rather than their exchange values, with production planned by the

producers themselves.

The question that we want to ask readers to consider is, How do we empirically assess the capacity of a given economy to move beyond capitalism?

Firstly, we can say that the extent to which an economy can create use values, from raw materials to the finished goods and services, ultimately

represents how advanced its forces of production are, and hence how capable it is of transcending capitalism as a system and moving to socialism. This is why, for example, a country that hosts the facilities of transnational corporations might appear to have advanced means of production, but does not in fact have the ability to nationalise a TNC and continue to produce use values, because the TNCs spatially disperse their production processes among multiple countries.

An additional issue arises from the need for essential imports, which necessitates the development of industries to produce goods for international exchange to gain access to hard currencies. In the 1980s, when the purchasing power of the US dollar fell, the effective purchasing power of a barrel of Soviet crude oil fell in unison. This became an area of strategic weakness for the socialist bloc throughout the 1980s, ultimately undermining its long-standing policy of self-reliance and entrenching a dependence on Western imports and loans.

Fast forward to 2017, and two Chinese billionaires (Liu Qiangdong, CEO

'Can a socialist economy of domestically produced use values operate in parallel with an economy of international commodity trade without the latter undermining the former?'

against each other so as to increase productivity, as the World Bank advises:

The negative outlook ahead means that, after addressing the immediate health crisis, countries need to make productivity-enhancing reforms a priority. These include facilitating investment in human and physical capital, as well as in research and development; encouraging reallocation of resources toward more productive sectors; fostering technology adoption and innovation; and promoting a growth-friendly macro-economic and institutional environment. [p. 171]¹⁴

This unfolding crisis necessitates a response to three lines of attack that will be mounted at the national and the European level against working people in Ireland and throughout Europe. The capitalist class are not hiding their intentions, so there is little excuse to be

of the e-commerce giant JD.com, and Jack Ma, chairman of the Alibaba online retail group) proposed that China was reaching the required level of productive forces and technical capability to move beyond markets, money and capitalism to a direct-allocation economy, where all firms are socially owned.

In reality, even such a modern socialist economy, with minimal reliance on foreign powers, would require some imported products, while some domestic production for market exchange would be needed to support this.

The question then becomes, Can a socialist economy of domestically produced use values operate in parallel with an economy of international commodity trade without the latter undermining the former? Is this sustainable in a world dominated by imperialism? After all, imperialist (OECD) countries benefit from massive value-transfer subsidies from the labour of the billions-strong working class of the global South by means of the TNCs and their hundreds of thousands of subsidiaries.

This ability to take advantage of vastly different rates of exploitation allows imperialist countries to capture surplus value and build their service-

unprepared for this crisis as it unfolds. These three lines of attack are ones we are familiar with from the last recession: (1) the imposition of austerity, (2) the transfer of private debts to the public purse, and (3) "structural reform" in its many guises, particularly in the context of attacks on organised labour.

Our response, now more than ever, must be based on international co-ordination. Our solution must be as clear as it is radical: the international system of capitalism must be abolished, in favour of building an economic system that plans, organises and produces on the basis of the needs of the many, not on the desire to accumulate profits for a few.★

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based economies upon that platform. These are subsidies that are not available to socialist countries.

We believe that, in place of GDP, socialist planners need a framework for measuring the production of use values, both at the national level and among the bloc of states that are seeking to develop to socialism. Such a measure could be based on a greatly expanded (and modified) version of Maslow's "hierarchy of needs."

The internet, input-output tables, individual product identification codes and mass data storage allow for what was technically impossible for socialist governments of the twentieth century: the ability to precisely detail which specific goods and services are used in which value chains, sector by sector. Within each value chain they can categorise which goods and services are imports, which are produced entirely within their own economy, which are domestically produced but dependent on foreign imports (and precisely how), and which are produced for foreign markets.

Using such a framework, it would then become clear which countries are relatively poorly or well positioned to

move beyond a commodity-production economy, which in turn would inform any socialist plan of which goods and services have to be brought into the realm of domestic production as a matter of priority.

A realistic representation of economic capacity is required, from the most critical value chains for social reproduction (energy, food, water, medical supplies, etc.) to requirements for transport, education and public services, the provision of social and educational activities, and finally provision for meeting individual demand for different types of non-essential goods and services, which—contrary to neoclassical economics, and as proved brilliantly by Anwar Shaikh in his book *Capitalism* (2016)—can be derived by planners from analysis of aggregate behaviour.

The covid-19 emergency has revealed which goods and services are required for a basic level of social reproduction and which ones are less critical. It is time that socialists matched what is commonly observed with a clear empirical framework, and explained how socialist economies of the future can decommodify economic and social life.★

An Irishwoman’s novel of revolutionaries

JENNY FARRELL

Ethel Voynich, *The Gadfly* (1897)

I AM MELLOWS read this novel while awaiting his execution, along with the other condemned men imprisoned by the Irish Free State during the Civil War (1922–23) for opposing the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which gave Ireland dominion status within the British Empire, rather than establishing an independent Irish republic.

His fellow-prisoner Peadar O’Donnell wrote: “It is a curious fact, which many of the Mountjoy prisoners must be easily able to recall, that it was around the days that the *Gadfly* was being widely read in ‘C’ wing; it is a tale of Italian revolution with a ghastly execution scene . . . MacKelvey . . . picking up the *Gadfly* . . . saying once more: ‘God, I hope they don’t mess up any of our lads this way.’ MacKelvey was to remember the *Gadfly* next morning.”

What was this book, so widely read by Republicans in Ireland, and the labour movement in Britain, in its own day?

Its author, Ethel Boole, was born 11 May 1864 in Co. Cork, the youngest of five daughters of the renowned mathematician George Boole and Mary Boole, a psychologist and philosopher. Ethel’s father died shortly after her birth, and her mother took the family to London, returning to Ireland regularly during Ethel’s childhood. It was on one of these visits to Ireland that she first read about Giuseppe Mazzini, leader of the Italian Risorgimento movement.

This novel of revolution was published in 1897 and achieved cult status in the Soviet Union and China, selling millions of copies. Two film versions were made in the Soviet Union, one silent (1928), the other (1955) with a score by Dmitri Shostakovich.

Ethel Voynich was closely associated with revolutionary circles in Berlin, Russia, and London, where she married a Polish revolutionary, Wilfrid Voynich. From her experiences and circle of comrades she drew the stuff from which the novel is made. It is set in 1840s Italy at the time of its popular rebellion, the Risorgimento, against Austrian domination.

The novel’s main characters belong to Mazzini’s underground party, Young Italy, active in the national liberation movement. A thrilling plot roots the reader’s sympathy with the author’s. It is understandable how this book captured the imagination of readers who sympathise with movements against oppression and domination. “Several of them belonged to the Mazzinian party and would have been satisfied with nothing less than a democratic Republic and a United Italy.” It is obvious why the anti-Treaty prisoners, captured during the Civil War, identified with the characters in the book.

Reflecting historical fact, the novel criticises sharply the Catholic Church’s active opposition to the movement for a united Italy, expressed in a father-and-son conflict that deepens the import: an Italian reluctantly willing to sacrifice his son and the cause of freedom, and Italy’s future, for the sake of religion. The author leaves no doubt regarding her own stance—in fact the novel’s declared atheism must have contributed to its being banned by the Irish state in 1947.

The spirit of revolution is not limited to members of the



Young Italy movement. It has covert support throughout the population, evidenced in many scenes in the novel. Ordinary people help the movement smuggle arms across borders, come to their personal aid; even prison warders back them. In fact in the scene referred to by MacKelvey the firing squad try to protect their secret hero.

So, at the end of the nineteenth century, at a time of international suffrage movements, we see evolving a new type of novel, one whose hero and heroine are revolutionaries and part of a revolutionary group. The central female character, Gemma Warren, is a woman who the movement respects highly. She is inspired not only by Voynich’s own experience but also by other women revolutionaries around the author. Gemma is not merely an emancipated woman: she is also a revolutionary woman, at the centre of the movement.

In this way she goes beyond the literary heroines of the late nineteenth century and anticipates the proletarian women that Gorky would write about. Voynich brings the revolutionary group not only as central to the novel’s plot but as a necessary part of this group, a new type of woman.

Given Voynich’s internationalism and experience, it is bewildering to find racist sentiments expressed towards South Americans and black people. This racism also affects the portrayal of women of colour. It seems that Voynich’s novel did not find much resonance in Cuba and other Latin American countries, nor in Africa, all waging heroic liberation struggles. Surprisingly, critics have not drawn attention to this aspect; instead, if they dislike it it is due to its unashamed atheism, so unusual for its time, or for its partisanship for a revolutionary movement.

Ethel worked with the Quakers as a social worker in the poor districts of London during the First World War, then left England for good about 1920, when she joined her husband in New York. There is no further information about active political work. Wilfrid died in 1930. Ethel returned to music, composing musical works, including the *Epitaph in Ballad Form*, dedicated to Roger Casement.

Soviet literati in 1955 discovered that Ethel was still alive in New York, aged ninety-one. This caused a sensation in the Soviet Union and also resulted in the payment of royalties. Ethel continued to live quietly with her companion, Anne Nill, who had once managed Wilfrid’s New York book business.

Ethel Voynich died sixty years ago, on 27 July 1960, aged ninety-six. ★

The Wasp Network



GRAHAM HARRINGTON

THE FILM *Wasp Network* has recently arrived on Netflix. It tells the story of the heroes known as the Cuban Five who successfully infiltrated anti-communist terrorist groups in Miami.

The *Wasp Network* (*La Red Avispa*) was a creation of Cuban intelligence to thwart the efforts of such groups as Alpha 66 and the F4 Commandos. These groups were made up of Cuban émigrés living in Miami who had left the country after the revolution had triumphed, as well as those who foolishly believed they would have a better life under capitalism in the United States. US policy still prevents those migrants from returning to Cuba once they have seen homelessness and unemployment for the first time.

The film's first half is somewhat confusing, in that it portrays the intelligence agents as actual counter-revolutionaries, until revealing their true role. No spoiler there for anyone who is familiar with the case of the Cuban Five, but it may be confusing for someone who isn't. It does succeed, however, in showing the commitment the agents had.

One of the film's greatest strengths is that it honestly shows the reality of the so-called "freedom fighters," who were in reality little more than cowardly gangsters and mercenaries, more interested in pointless destruction and drug-trafficking than in Cuban politics. What is not shown, however, is the role of the CIA in creating and sustaining

these groups; instead they are presented as being independent actors. For instance, the head of the group Brothers to the Rescue, José Basulto, who appears regularly in the film, was a CIA operative and not some misguided humanitarian.

Brothers to the Rescue shot to worldwide attention in 1996 after two of their planes were shot down over Cuban air space, an event portrayed excellently in the film. They had been involved in dropping propaganda leaflets over Havana and, according to the agent who infiltrated them, were planning offensive actions against Cuba, with the bombing of hotels by terrorist groups beginning not long after the shooting down of the planes.

The Clinton government used the incident to pass the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (Helms-Burton Act) and the Cuban Democracy Act (Torricelli Act), which further tightened the blockade around Cuba. What should be kept in mind about the shooting down of the planes, and the infiltration of the groups in Miami, is the context: Cuba no longer had the support of the USSR and other socialist states. The United States was intent on destroying Cuba, at a time when its economy was in trouble. Cuba was fully justified in taking defensive actions against provocative acts.

Not long after the arrests of the Five the Miami rabble kidnapped six-year-old Elián González, leading to an intense stalemate that resulted in Fidel Castro proclaiming that Cuba was involved in a "Battle of Ideas."

The film occasionally includes a bit of anti-communism, though much less than expected for a mainstream work. Given the way this fits in with the general tone of the film, which portrays the Five sympathetically, it can only be presumed that this was forced into the film in an attempt to allow it to be made. Not that it helped much, given that the Miami rabble are already calling *Wasp Network* communist propaganda, much as they did for Steven Soderbergh's *Che*.

Without giving anything away, the film's ending could have been managed a bit better, given that the trial and subsequent treatment of the Five is treated very quickly and does not include, for instance, the journalists who were paid by the CIA to write articles demanding lengthy prison sentences. The case of the Five is presented as a sort of niche topic for audiences, rather than a case that ignited the passion of the Cuban people and attracted solidarity from all over the world.

Anti-Cuban terrorism claimed the lives of 3,500 people over a period of thirty or so years. This is almost the same number of deaths in a similar length of time during the recent conflict in the north of Ireland, to put things into perspective. The film's strength is that it portrays the campaign honestly, and audiences can understand why the Cuban state was forced to infiltrate the groups responsible.

Wasp Network generally deals with its characters and their families—with wives portrayed by Penélope Cruz and the Cuban actor Ana de Armas—and manages to show the sacrifices the Five made out of what Che Guevara described as the revolutionary's sense of love—for their family and their country.★

<https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/81000201>



POWER

Audre Lorde

THE RECENT demonstrations that began in Minnesota following the murder of George Floyd by a white cop are not only a continuation of the past seven years of the Black Lives Matter movement but of decades of struggle by black people against a racist police force, which functions to uphold a white supremacist system in the United States for the benefit of the ruling class. The poem “Power” by Audre Lorde was written in 1978 and gives voice to the writer’s feelings of anger, dispossession and hopelessness in the face of such a barbarous society. The poem itself is based on a true event: in 1973 a white cop in New York shot ten-year-old Clifford Glover, murdering him as he fled with his stepfather. Lorde’s words expose the prejudicial nature of policing in America, which has remained wholly unchanged in the four decades since they were written. The increased militarisation of police forces to oppress black communities is required to maintain the hegemony of the capitalist order; and unless the violence of this system is met with equal and greater forces of united class struggle, all will continue to dwell in hopelessness.—Ciara Ní Mhaoilfhinn

The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
and a dead child dragging his shattered black
face off the edge of my sleep
blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders
is the only liquid for miles
and my stomach
churns at the imagined taste while
my mouth splits into dry lips
without loyalty or reason
thirsting for the wetness of his blood
as it sinks into the whiteness
of the desert where I am lost
without imagery or magic
trying to make power out of hatred and destruction
trying to heal my dying son with kisses
only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.

A policeman who shot down a ten year old in Queens
stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood
and a voice said “Die you little motherfucker” and
there are tapes to prove it. At his trial
this policeman said in his own defense
“I didn’t notice the size nor nothing else
only the color”. And
there are tapes to prove that, too.

Today that 37 year old white man
with 13 years of police forcing
was set free
by eleven white men who said they were satisfied
justice had been done
and one Black Woman who said
“They convinced me” meaning
they had dragged her 4’10” black Woman’s frame
over the hot coals
of four centuries of white male approval
until she let go
the first real power she ever had
and lined her own womb with cement
to make a graveyard for our children.

I have not been able to touch the destruction
within me.
But unless I learn to use
the difference between poetry and rhetoric
my power too will run corrupt as poisonous mold
or lie limp and useless as an unconnected wire
and one day I will take my teenaged plug
and connect it to the nearest socket
raping an 85 year old white woman
who is somebody’s mother
and as I beat her senseless and set a torch to her bed
a Greek chorus will be singing in 3/4 time
“Poor thing. She never hurt a soul. What beasts they are.”

Letter from the president of Cuba to the secretary-general of the United Nations



Havana, June 26, 2020
Year 62 of the
Revolution

His Excellency
Mr. Antonio Guterres
United Nations
Secretary-General
New York

Your Excellency:

Seventy-five years after the member states of this organization signed the United Nations Charter, strict adherence to its purposes and principles, to international law and the preservation of multilateralism are more important than ever.

We are facing multiple crises as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with devastating effects, visible in all spheres of society, expected to last and aggravate pending global challenges.

The international panorama is increasingly complex. Conflicts and the arms race are proliferating. Non-conventional wars for the purpose of domination, acts of aggression, unilateral coercive measures, the manipulation and politicization of human rights and disrespect for the self-determination of peoples are intensifying. Multilateralism is attacked, international agreements ignored and the role of organizations such as the UN and the World Health Organization is discounted.

At the same time, the current unjust international economic order deepens inequality and underdevelopment; while increasing poverty, hunger, marginalization and limited access to essential services, such as health care.

The moment and common sense demand that the international community set aside political differences and seek joint solutions to global problems through international cooperation.

It is the duty of all to keep the commitments we made when we signed the UN Charter, which continues to be an enduring, universal and indispensable basis for promoting a just, democratic and equitable international order that responds to the demands of the peoples of the world for peace, development and justice, and contributes to meeting the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

I take advantage of the opportunity to reiterate, to your Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration and esteem.

Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez

LETTER All-Ireland health service

Dear Comrades,

May I request a little of your column space to comment on an article in the *Socialist Voice* dated the 2nd of June 2020 relating to an all-Ireland Health Service. While agreeing that underfunding and privatisation is damaging health services in both parts of our country I have some difficulties with the article's approach.

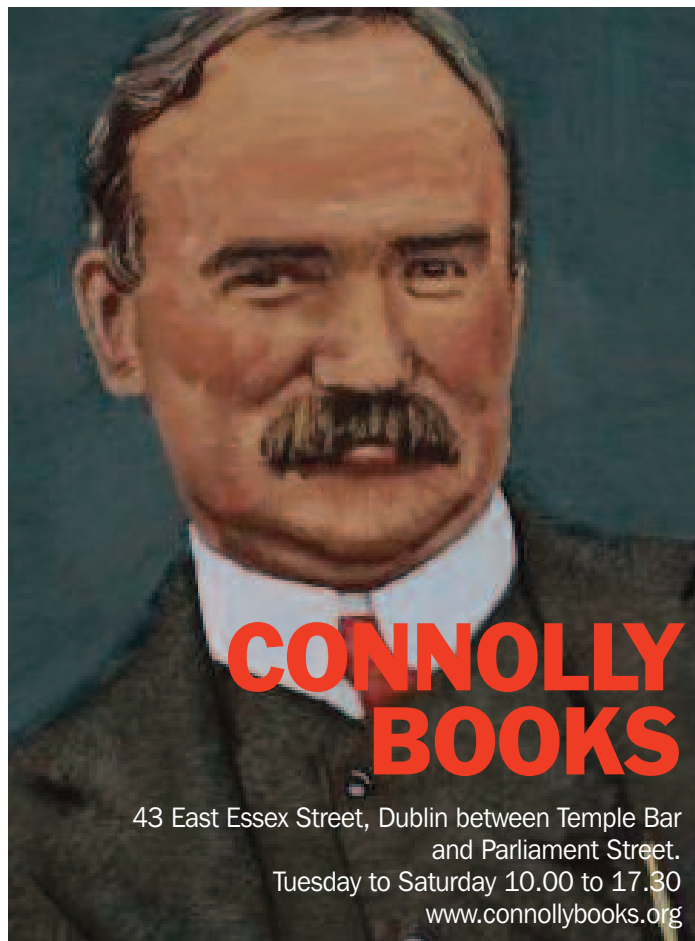
While the concept of an island health service is certainly laudable, sensible and maybe even achievable, dismissing the trade union movement and 215,000 organised workers in Northern Ireland as unionist-dominated and nostalgic is a very simplistic analysis and will not build the necessary unity to win the argument for either an Island-wide health service or the socialist Ireland it is suggested will bring it about.

Assuming the writer, Comrade Doran, believes broad agreement and consent is still a prerequisite for his proposals, a divisive article like this doesn't help. This statistically heavy article doesn't do anything to persuade the masses that either option is a viable one for the foreseeable future. I for one will be continuing with local trade unionists and the community (of all political hues) to defend the NHS as the best option for local workers at this time. I am neither nostalgic or unionist.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Quinn

Honorary Member, Fermanagh Council of Trades Unions



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Statement by the National Executive Committee, Communist Party of Ireland 11 June 2020

New “Programme for Government”: a new three-party government with the same old policies

THE FORMATION of the three-party coalition government in Dublin, and their agreement on a “programme for government,” is a case of more of the same—a continuation of the same old policies that favour the rich and powerful, policies that are pro-business and full of pious aspirations and wishful thinking regarding the growing global environmental crisis.

This is a programme that will provide little for workers, either in the short or the long term, as can be seen from the fact that workers’ rights do not feature anywhere in this proposed programme. It is a deal to ensure the political stability of a failing system and of the main parties that have been in government for nearly a century.

In February, working people voted for a change of direction, for a change of social and economic policies in relation to the two-tier health system and to housing policy, which has given priority to the interests of the market and a continuation of the dominance and priority given to private builders and speculators.

The Communist Party of Ireland calls on trade unions, people’s organisations and all progressives to organise maximum parliamentary and extraparlimentary pressure to ensure that the change voted for in February is respected. The all-Ireland “No Going Back” post-pandemic proposals of the ICTU must be developed, strengthened, and campaigned on.

The record of all three parties, including the leadership of the Green Party, shows that they cannot be trusted.

While giving the appearance of three distinctly different parties, their agreed programme for government is based on one economic strategy: to make workers pay for the deepening crisis of the system, with the Green Party leadership providing the cover of appearing to be different.

In relation to public housing, the CPI calls on working people to resist the possible imposition, as outlined in the agreed programme, of “social housing,” which gives profits to private builders and speculators, instead of public housing, which removes the profit element by being built directly by local authorities. Workers need to resist the imposition of the “cost-rental model,” which links rents to the cost of building and maintaining the property, rather than differential rents, which link rent to income.

Their agreed programme will continue the practice of selling state-owned public housing to tenants, as well as the selling of public lands, taking assets directly from the state and transferring them to private hands.

The covid-19 pandemic has exposed the two-tier health system, which this “programme “ does not challenge; instead it makes vague proposals for a single-tier health system. They should be introducing a fully funded public health service and working towards and planning for an all-Ireland, fully funded health service, as demanded by increasing numbers of people and organisations, including the ICTU.

Those in the Green Party who are genuinely concerned about the environment were asked to buy this deal

on the grounds of proposed carbon taxes for tackling the environmental crisis. Experience shows that this is for making the working class pay for pollution, instead of the real polluters: big business. To the many sincere Green Party activists we say this “programme for government” is not the way forward to finding a just and lasting solution to the global environmental crisis that is now threatening our planet and life itself. It was a welcome development that a number of members within the Green Party actively spoke out and campaigned against this deal and against going into coalition with Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. That opposition will be vindicated in the coming years.

The two-year stimulus offered by the government to balance the books following the covid-19 crisis is designed to stabilise the system and promote the interests, both national and international, of capital, rather than to protect working people. It is for buying time for the establishment to prepare the ground for a renewed wave of austerity and attacks on workers’ rights, terms, and conditions of employment.

Given present conditions, there are grave dangers for the working-class movement, as the strategy within governments and employers’ organisations, in collaboration with leading elements within the trade union leadership, is to re-establish some form of reheated “social partnership”—a strategy of offering a few crumbs from the table, for softening up the working class to lower their expectations, so that they accept the austerity policies that will inevitably follow.

To the many sincere Green Party activists we say, This “programme for government” is not the way forward towards finding a just and lasting solution to the global environmental crisis that is now threatening our planet life itself. Now is the time for clear, independent political mobilisation and action by working people throughout the country. We need to build a people’s movement, a movement linking the demands and needs of workers and environmentalists to challenge this decaying system. ★



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