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"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."

Michael Parenti

(American political scientist and cultural critic).

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European Union Despite recent agreement, the fault lines deepen

EUGENE McCARTAN

THE MUCH-HERALDED recent “Next Generation EU Agreement” between the member-states of the European Union is little more than the papering over of growing and deepening cracks.

The lack of a co-ordinated response to the covid-19 pandemic exposed the underlying fault lines within the European Union, contributing to and speeding up the growing disillusionment with the EU itself in the eyes of tens of millions of working people.

The pandemic has further exposed the fundamental nature of the EU as primarily a vehicle for advancing and protecting the interests of big banks and corporations, with the needs and requirements of working people being secondary.

The “Next Generation” agreement will allow the EU Commission to borrow up to €750 billion, which can only strengthen the power of the Brussels bureaucracy and in particular the hegemony of German and French monopoly capital. About €390 billion

will be distributed in the form of grants, including €312.5 billion dubbed the EU’s “Recovery and Resilience Facility.”

To draw down these grants, member-states will have to prepare national recovery plans committing them to “structural reform” of their economy. These “structural reforms” will result in the further privatisation and commercialisation of public services and greater deregulation of national economies, further opening them up to penetration and control by private corporations and the strengthening of corporate control. It will also mean further austerity and more cuts. The remaining €77.5 billion of grants will be used to top up normal EU budgetary programmes.

The agreement will also mean further cuts in EU budgets for scientific research and its “green transition,” which can be better described as greenwashing. The richer countries, such as Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands, and Denmark, have been promised much bigger rebates on their budget contributions for their support for this agreement.

The economically powerful countries are using the pandemic to further consolidate and extend their control. Meaningful democracy at the national level can only be further compromised and eroded, with only one economic strategy and one outcome allowed in all member-states. This can only deepen the growing alienation felt by millions of workers in the member-states, so that no matter who you vote for at the national level nothing will or can be changed.

Working people in Ireland as well as those throughout the EU will experience renewed attacks on their rights and their working terms and conditions, while access to public services that they rely upon will become even more difficult.

The EU “rescue packages” are not for rescuing the people but for saving and propping up an ailing system and its institutions. Building popular resistance is the pressing task for communists, organised labour, progressive social movements, and all those who believe in national sovereignty. ★

How long can it last?

LIKE A GAME of fantasy football, the establishment media and media pundits fill the pages and the air waves with speculation about how long the present coalition government may last.

The coalition of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party, while only in office since 27 June, stumbles and staggers from one crisis to another. Whether these are merely teething problems or something deeper only time will tell; but what is clear is that the political representatives of the ruling class have been weakened by the results of the general election.

The Green Party was hauled on board this leaking vessel to give the appearance of change and renewal, to

allow a government to be formed that will follow the diktats of the European Union in regard to the further austerity coming to us shortly.

The Green Party will no doubt experience further tensions and defections as the real agenda of the state bites harder and the level of idealism wanes. Unemployment will not decline any time soon, as the pandemic will continue to send shock waves through the economic system.

Many small businesses opened their doors in the hope that they can salvage something, but many may well go under within the next few months as economic activity stagnates. Workers’ spending power has been drastically hit, yet rents and the costs of child care have not come down. There will no doubt be further job losses throughout the

economy, north and south, especially in the retail and service sectors.

As workers are being coerced back to work by the state, many of them are now experiencing serious health risks in unsafe and unchecked working conditions. The trade union movement has failed to rise to the challenge, to be the focal point of demanding real health and safety measures.

In all branches of the economy the bosses have appointed “covid-19 safety officers,” from the foreman on building sites to line managers in banks and shops. The bosses have been policing their compliance themselves.

IBEC estimates that 40 per cent of workers now working from home will continue doing so for the foreseeable future, home working becoming the new norm, saving employers millions on fixed



With the specific health risk of covid-19, the danger is greater for essential workers, but higher health risks and poor outcomes are the depressing norm for workers in a capitalist country,

Coronavirus and class

LAURA DUGGAN

WAR IMAGERY and rhetoric abound in the media discourse surrounding covid-19, along with the resurgence of the post-“Celtic tiger” crash cry of “we’re all in this together”—all of which paints a picture of a country united and unified in action against the menace of the deadly virus.

It is true that covid-19 doesn’t discriminate against anyone, and no-one is safe from contracting the virus. However, some of us are decidedly more at risk than others regarding exposure and the consequent health outcome. The report *Differences in Risk of Severe Outcomes from Covid-19 across Occupations in Ireland*, published by the ESRI on 28 July, highlights these.

Not surprising to many, the report found that the working class are most at risk of contracting, and dying from, covid-19. Age and underlying health issues do have a role, but so has being obliged to continue to work in a factory or care home or bus when those in the professions continue to work from home. These workers have been at the front line of the covid-19 crisis, a front line that spans both health workers and other workers.

The report also shows that many of these essential jobs are insecure and poorly paid. While many essential workers do provide socially necessary and essential work, many others are deemed essential only in so far as they ensure profit to a capitalist somewhere. These are workers placed at risk needlessly and often without even basic protections.

The workers at most risk, such as meat-packers, retail workers, and Deliveroo drivers, tend to live in more socially deprived areas, and this in itself is an additional risk factor. According to a study by Public Health England earlier this year, workers have had a 30 per cent higher covid mortality rate in the most deprived areas when compared with cases in the least deprived—“deprived areas” just being another name for working-class communities that have been forgotten and intentionally unsupported and underfunded.

Though never explicitly stated, it is clear that it is a person’s class that places them at risk. With the specific health risk of covid-19, the danger is greater for essential workers, but higher health risks and poor outcomes are the depressing norm for workers in a capitalist country, those unemployed or working in the black and grey markets doubly so.

In all areas of health, rather than covid-specific, satisfactory outcomes are prevented by lack of access to

immediate and appropriate health care. However, the benefit of quick access to health care can be undone by living conditions, such as overcrowded, poorly heated, insecure and unsanitary accommodation—the exact type of living environment that has quickly become acceptable and commonplace in our cities.

Poor nutritional diet also plays a major role in a person’s ability to fend off and fight disease. This is another growing problem for working-class communities, with deprived areas overlapping and becoming growing urban food deserts; access to fresh and non-processed foods is difficult and expensive. At present, low-income families in Ireland are spending up to a third of their income on basic food items, with 10 per cent at risk of food poverty.

While access to PPE and having the general population follow transmission-prevention guidelines are helpful, these can only ever be stopgap measures. To prevent future health crises and to survive this one we need to do more than just applaud essential workers. These workers deserve a fair and equitable wage, a single-tier health service, and a public housing programme that will ease overcrowding and provide adequate clean and safe living environments.

Workers deserve more than returning to a “normal” where it is normal to expect further exploitation for the benefit of the few.★

costs. Research has shown that there has been a growth in productivity without recompense to workers. While the growth in home working may well suit a minority, it will have a negative impact on the lives of tens of thousands of individuals and families, with increased stress and strain.

On the national and the global level, what the impact on corporate landlords and commercial property speculation will be with the growth in home working has yet to unfold. Big monopolies, such as Facebook, Google, Amazon, and Microsoft, have been telling their workers that they will be working from home also, allowing employers the opportunity to restructure their business model. How many will now need fancy headquarters?

What will be the impact on finance

capital? Property speculation has been a central avenue for capital speculation and accumulation for decades now. What if there is a decline in the amount of office space required, or when income from rents begins to decline?

Manufacturing is stagnant. For some time the scientific and technological revolution has been shifting in favour of China. That shift is one of the main contributory factors to the growing hostility by both the United States and the European Union towards China as they attempt to control and narrow its influence on the global economy. One example is Huawei, which has become the global leader in the manufacture of smartphones, overtaking Samsung and Apple.

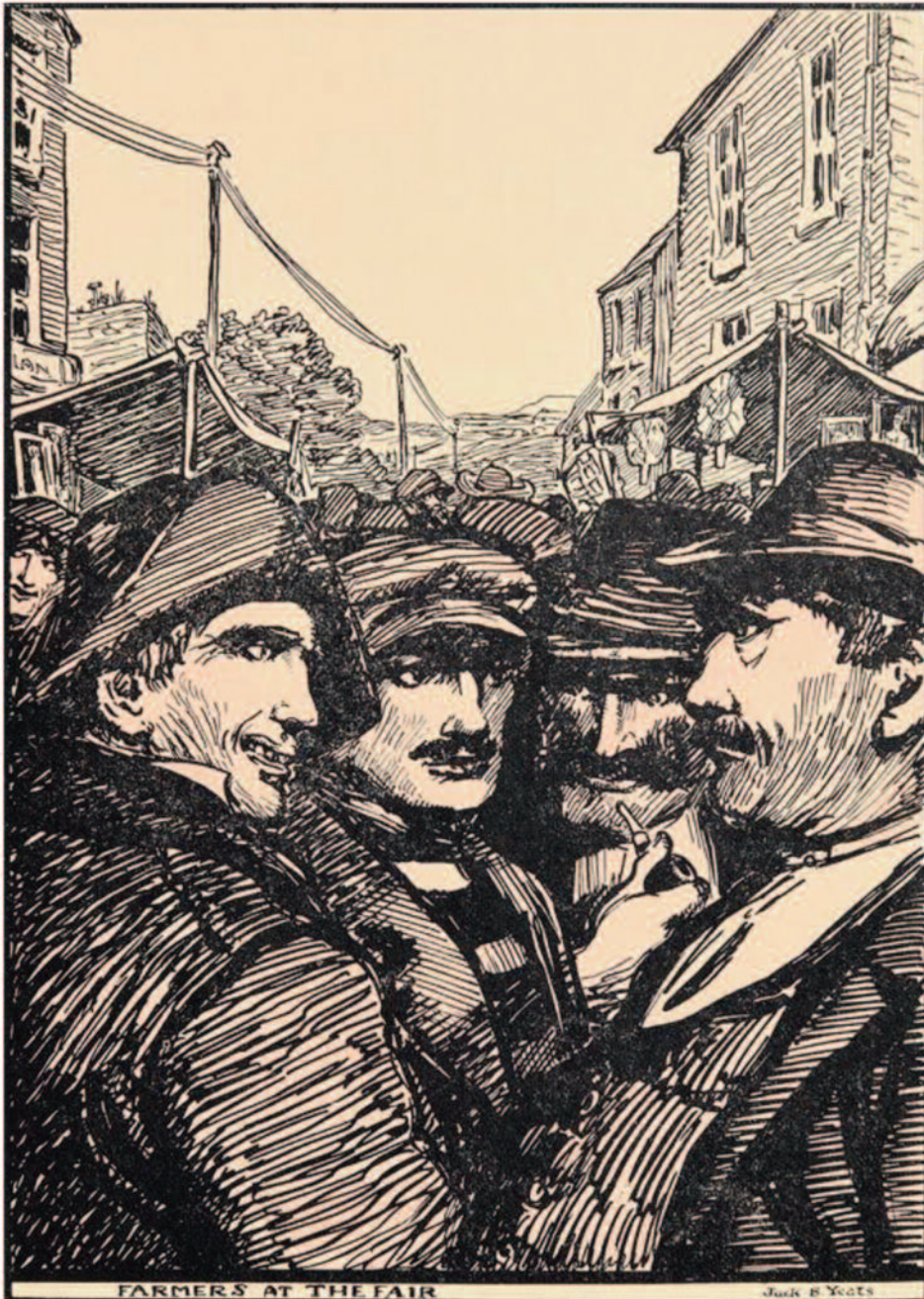
While the machination of the establishment political parties may

provide some diversion and light entrainment in these pandemic days, now is the time to build the forces to defend workers’ rights and their terms and conditions. Parliamentary manoeuvring and an emphasis on electoralism will not achieve what needs to be done.

Workers must rely in the first place on their numbers and organised strength. We have great strength, yet it is unrealised and remains untapped. The struggle for water showed us that potential.

We need to build greater co-operation between workers at the global level and a new internationalism, acting in solidarity and collaboration with workers and their organisations against a common enemy and a shared exploitation.★

Who is the average Irish farmer?



Irish farming as we know it is in a state of terminal decline. **Graeme Power** and **Ewan MacDonald** ask why is this so, and who is to blame?

Image: Farmers at the fair. Jack B Yeats

SOME WILL insist that it is a natural development of economic progress; but, as always, we must ask, Progress for whom? The average Irish farmer struggles to make ends meet, thanks to decades of economic decisions designed to enrich the large farmer and the factory-owner while steadily creating a hostile environment for those with small and medium-sized farms.

This article is the first in a series that addresses the state of agriculture; but first we must address who the average farmer is.

Age and reduction of farming numbers

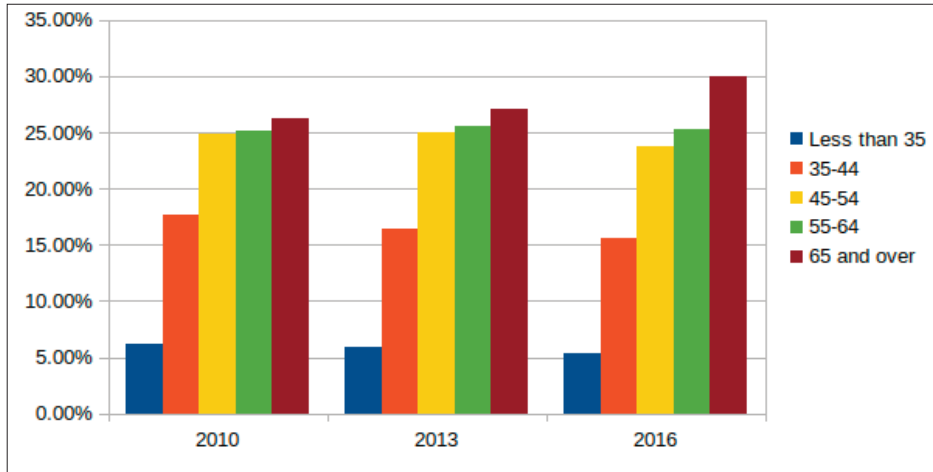
Farmers are getting older. The only age group that is increasing is the 65-and-over cohort,¹ a group who should be enjoying their retirement. Fewer and fewer young farmers are either able or willing to take their place, because of a drastic decline in prospects associated with the sector. Fig. 1 shows this slow but steady decline as it continues to unfold.

Diminishing incomes and dependence on subsidies

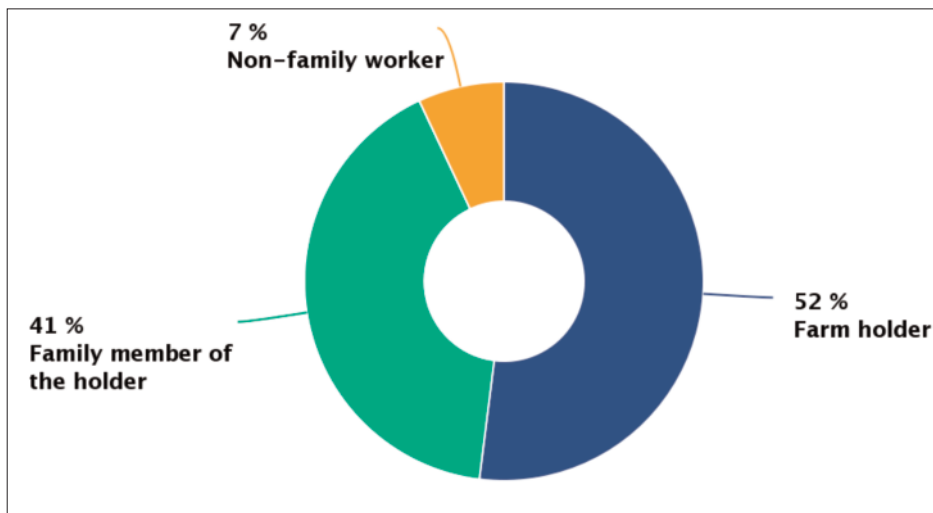
Our average farmer is not wealthy, though they may own assets in the form of land. The overwhelming majority (80 per cent) of farmers work on either a very small, small or medium-sized farm; and 93 per cent of farmers as a whole work either alone or with the help of family, as fig. 2 demonstrates.

Nearly all farmers are reliant on subsidy schemes for net positive income, without which they would be losing money or just breaking even. Subsidies are not so much a form of welfare but are closer to a Job Bridge scheme, in which factory-owners (meat factories, mills, and so on) profit by not paying for the labour of farmers. Farmers in turn are paid the bare minimum, and sometimes less, in the form of subsidies.

Almost 40 per cent of Irish farmers are indebted, with the average debt standing at almost €60,000



▲ Fig. 1: Age of farm holders Source: CSO.



▲ Fig. 2. Percentage of farm labour force classified by type of worker, 2016 Source: CSO.

Factory-owners grow richer from this, while farmers continue to produce more and more in an attempt to maintain a steady income. The only people who truly benefit from this arrangement are the factory-owners. Without subsidies, farmers would collectively be at the necks of the factory-owners long ago, demanding pay for their work.

Almost 40 per cent of Irish farmers are indebted, with the average debt standing at almost €60,000.² This varies greatly, depending on the sector, with dairy farmers being the most indebted in both number (64 per cent of dairy farmers have outstanding debts) and the quantity of debts outstanding (approximately €112,000 on average). This is a system of agriculture that works primarily to enrich the factory-owners and the banks, neither of whom bear the risks of crop failures, veterinary bills, inclement weather, maintenance, or

the thousands of other problems a farmer must navigate over the course of a year.

These levels of indebtedness are going to be a challenge as the current economic crisis unfolds; and we can be certain that there will be no bail-out for farmers.

Income levels were more secure when quotas were in place. Dairy quotas, for example, provided some relief for the problem of overproduction inherent in the uncoordinated production under capitalism. This has now been discarded in favour of the neo-liberal dogma that only market forces should dictate production.

The abolition of quotas has not benefited the majority of farmers. Instead, in order to maintain the same income farmers must now produce more than ever, competing with each other as prices drop. A minority with very large farms manage to increase their production, incomes and market

share as the majority lose ground. The real winners in this arrangement, though, are the banks and the factories.

In the light of this dire situation, “almost half of all income declared by farming households is now derived from non-farming activities.” Many farmers are forced to engage in other work to supplement their farm income. This varies by region, type of agriculture, and size of farm, but a trait common to all is the fact that off-farm income is more often than not part-time or contract work. It therefore lacks the same labour rights as full-time work, and, in a perverse turn, the farmer is not remunerated properly either for their farm labour or their non-farm labour. The Irish farmer is doubly exploited.

Capitalism doesn't work for the majority of farmers

Irish farmers have been struggling for decades. It's clear that the current economic system does not benefit them. The politicians of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and the IFA lobbyists who claim to represent the medium and small farmers have systematically put the interests of large farmers, factory-owners and banks first. These same representatives have served the interests of large European agri-capital over the hard-working families they were supposed to protect. The present situation was never an inevitability; it was always a choice.

If conditions for the majority of farmers are going to improve it must come from the farmers themselves, with the help of workers and people who are willing to represent their interests. We must organise agriculture by putting the needs of society first, in tandem with remunerating farmers fairly for their labour.

We must put an end to the priority given to the profits of factory-owners, banks and agri-capital ahead of farmers, as the political establishment has done for decades. ★

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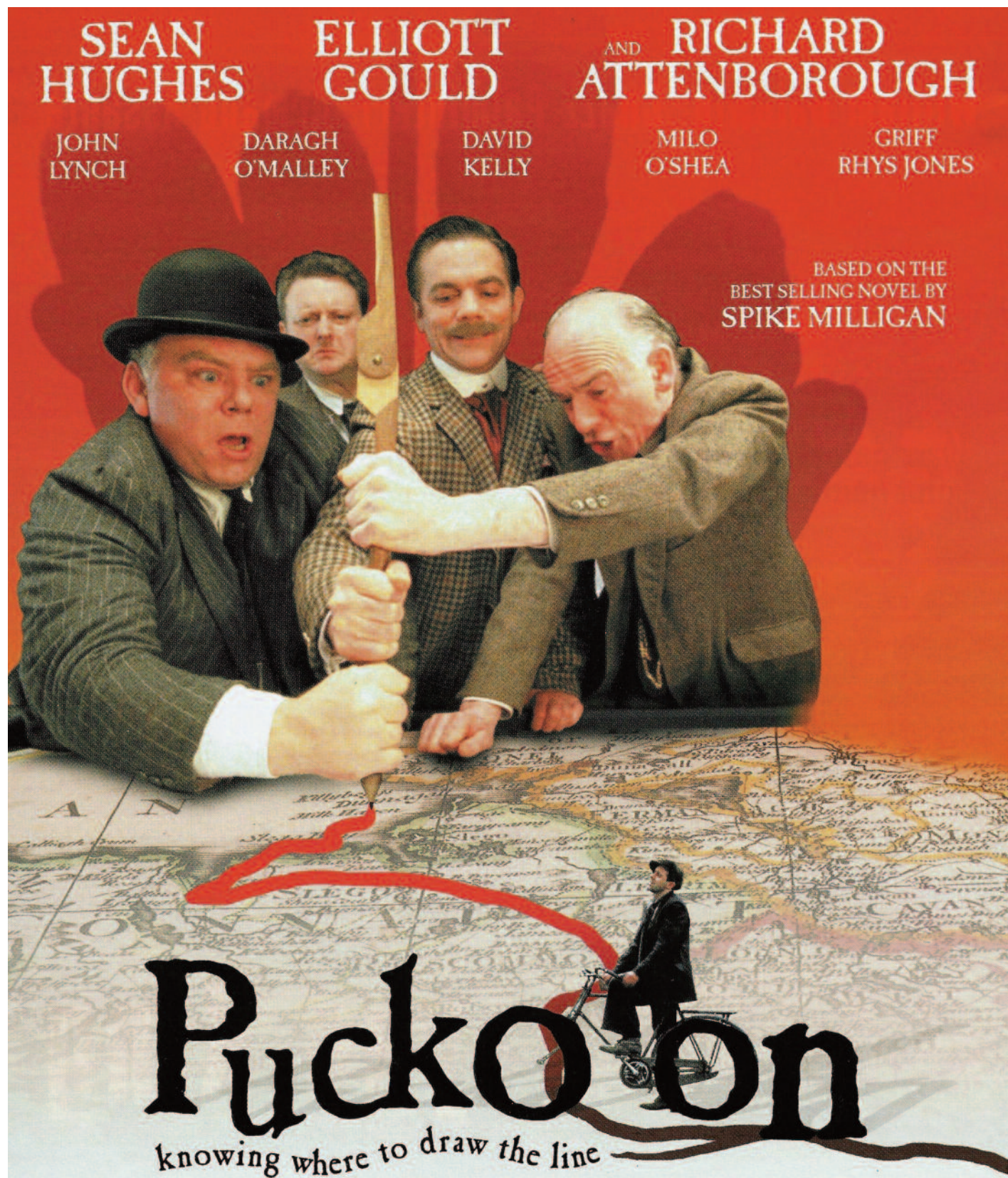
1 Statistical Yearbook of Ireland, 2018 (<https://tinyurl.com/yy178ua3>).

2 Teagasc, National Farming Study, 2019: Preliminary Results

The old national question

The hard-boiled readers of this paper rarely recognise the huge difficulties encountered by a right-wing coalition as it endeavours to govern this republic.

Tommy McKearney on the question that refuses to go away



The point about this is not that Brexit is bad or that the European Union is good but that the governing power in London is indifferent to the economic well-being of the frequently embarrassing appendage to the United Kingdom that is Northern Ireland.

There is the problem of ensuring that the rich are pampered, and that the middle class receives favourable treatment, and all the while guaranteeing that the working class contributes its labour at the lowest possible price.

No easy task, even with uncritical support from the mainstream media. There are also all the appeasement requirements. The United States and its transnationals have to be kept happy, Britain must not be annoyed; and then there is Brussels.

And that old national question of a divided country is still refusing to go away. Just when Fianna Fáil and the Blueshirts had kissed and made up, issues revealed by partition reappear—for a change, not by means of a republican border campaign but instead as the result of fall-out from a pandemic and the working out of Britain's implementation of a Tory Brexit.

None of this is made any easier by events now taking place globally. Contemporary capitalism, under the tutelage of US imperialism, is facing an existential crisis. A confluence of factors, including aftershocks arising from the 2008 financial crisis, enormous productivity losses because of coronavirus, and competition from the emerging economic powerhouse that is China, allied with resource-rich Russia and Iran, have challenged neoliberal hegemony.

Consequently, and taking its lead from Washington (or merely obeying orders?), the British government has recently reversed its position in relation to the Chinese company Huawei. Furthermore, if we were willing to believe MI5, Downing Street has only lately realised that Russia is attempting to influence British election results and to steal pharmaceutical secrets. In reality, the British people are being prepared for a new Cold War, if not worse.

Moreover, desperate to recover from his disastrous mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic, Boris Johnson is taking huge risks to reboot a failing economy.

In response to demands from the aviation industry, the British government has authorised reopening tourism to a large number of overseas destinations. On 3 July its Department for Transport published a list of fifty-nine countries whose travellers do not need to self-isolate upon arrival in England. Included on the list were Spain and Hong Kong,

both of which have recently experienced an upsurge in cases.

In spite of a growing and dangerous complacency in relation to covid-19, the virus remains a major threat to the health and well-being of people in every part of Ireland. That the impact, though devastating, has not been catastrophic is thanks in no small part to preventive steps taken and in particular to a dramatic reduction in foreign travel.

The case of Spain and Hong Kong underlines the hazards inherent in unrestricted travel and the wisdom of ignoring London, coupled with the need to impose a mandatory and verifiable fourteen-day quarantine period for overseas arrivals in Ireland. A major obstacle to doing so effectively, however, is the position adopted by the Northern Ireland Assembly, allowing free travel between the Six Counties and Britain.

There is a wide though not unanimous consensus in the North that this matter should be handled differently. During an interview with RTE the Alliance Party's health spokesperson, Paula Bradshaw, said the situation was making the North very vulnerable and that she would like to see an all-Ireland approach. Her view, supported by Sinn Féin and the SDLP, was echoed in the pro-unionist *Belfast Telegraph* when it editorialised that travel rules should apply to the whole of Ireland.¹ Even the Northern minister for health, the Ulster Unionist Robin Swan, appears to be broadly in agreement when recently asking for an all-Ireland stance on international arrivals.²

That the DUP leader disagreed hardly came as a surprise. Always determined to emphasise the Six Counties' "Britishness" by slavishly imitating London, at whatever the cost, Mrs Foster said it was important for business, family life, social life and political life to have the United Kingdom working together. Apparently she believes it better to risk contracting coronavirus disease than to co-operate with her neighbours south of the border. Unfortunately, the existing constitutional arrangement allows her to do so.

Compounding difficulties for the North created by the pandemic is the rapidly approaching deadline of a chaotic Tory Brexit. A picture is now emerging of the inevitability of goods being checked as they move from Britain into the North. Moreover, according to the Institute for Government in London, checks on agri-

food goods are likely to be significant, as this includes identifying the origin of prepared items and not just raw materials.

The point about this is not that Brexit is bad or that the European Union is good but that the governing power in London is indifferent to the economic well-being of the frequently embarrassing appendage to the United Kingdom that is Northern Ireland. This is not to say that the British ruling class has no interest in Ireland but that, to serve its interests in this country, they can identify more reliable allies south of the border. The *sine qua non*, however, is that all of Ireland remains firmly within the capitalist-imperialist orbit; and herein lies the dilemma for Dublin's coalition government in particular and the status quo in general.

There is a health crisis facing both jurisdictions in this country, and it may well become worse as restrictions on travel into the North are lifted. There remains a homelessness and housing crisis, north and south, demanding direct state intervention, which Tory and EU-driven neoliberalism prevents.

Coupled with a diminishing health service in the North there is an iniquitous two-tier health service in the Republic, a calamitous situation that cannot be rectified as long as free-market privatisation prevails in the Republic and encroaches on the Northern service.

There is also an intolerably large number of workers merely getting by on miserable wages, kept low by deference to big business and the slumbering leader of the Green Party.

The difficulty for the Fianna Fáil-led coalition is that to remedy these problems the country would have to be reunited within a sovereign, independent state. For the good of the people of this country it is necessary to relieve these charlatans of their headache by bringing together the forces and resources that will replace them and set about establishing the workers' republic.

So let's not be shy about making this case as loudly and clearly as possible. Piecemeal reforms can be useful, but only a thorough transformation will address the core issue. ★

¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 July 2020 (<https://bit.ly/3eLMRoH>)
² "North's Minister for Health calls for all-Ireland stance on international arrivals," *Irish Times*, 24 July 2020 (<https://bit.ly/30IQKpv>).

Illustration Left: Film Poster for Spike Milligan's satire on the idiosyncrasy of the border



Unionism redefined – but partition remains

DORIAN Ó SEANÁIN

THE “REPUBLICAN PARTY” of Fianna Fáil is back in government. Its leader has laid out a pragmatic approach to the national question that rules out a border poll, meaning that a united Ireland is out of the question. How very republican indeed!

Instead Micheál Martin has advocated a policy “much more rooted in the Good Friday Agreement . . . a consensus approach.”¹ Confusingly, a border poll is rooted in the agreement;

but that democratic exercise would not produce the kind of consensus the Taoiseach desires.

But consensus with whom? This is a mischievous little term that works in conjunction with the word “divisive.” A border poll, you see, is divisive. It is all part of a strategy that the Irish state has pursued for decades but which has been intensified since Brexit brought the question of Irish unity to the fore. The Taoiseach’s plan tries to circumvent the central, unresolved issue of partition. Republicanism and

unionism are irreconcilable. Dodging the constitutional issue is simply default unionism.

We are being coerced into accepting the British-imposed border as the normal state of things, rather than questioning the reactionary *status quo* built on partition. For those hostile to a united Ireland, one must deny the legitimacy of a border poll. The Dublin media portray unionists as a persecuted minority. Curtailing “divisive discussions” means that unionists will be allowed to hold us to ransom.

A border poll is the only way to escape this quagmire and invigorate the working class of this country.

The very same idea is at play with the SDLP's "New Ireland Commission," launched by the party leader, Colum Eastwood, in July. The SDLP was set up to undermine republicanism and reconcile middle-class Catholics to British rule. Their latest initiative recognises that they need to make an intervention on the constitutional issue, given how changing material conditions since Brexit and the covid-19 pandemic have left them playing catch-up.

The New Ireland Commission's "shared island" slogan is meaningless rhetoric.² Giving unionists a say on a united Ireland is a futile exercise: their opposition to such an outcome is patently obvious.

Fianna Fáil's opposition to a border poll and therefore a united Ireland shows that the "two-nations theory" is the official policy of the ruling class in the 26 Counties. This is not a recent development, but it is worth noting that during the hunger strikes, despite the Irish government disowning the republicans' demands, it would have been heresy to suggest that the ending of partition was not a worthy goal.

The amendment of the Irish state's constitution to allow for ratification of the Belfast Agreement meant that its claim to the Six Counties was removed. As has been stated on many occasions in *Socialist Voice*, the most dependable ally of British imperialism in Ireland is the Southern ruling class. Northern unionists carry less and less importance in London's calculations for advancing its interests in Ireland. The privatisation of the National Health

Service and other public services, the ending of discriminatory employment and housing allocation, as well as political compromises resulting from Brexit, have undermined the material basis of unionism.

On the other hand the Irish state, imbued with hostility to republicanism, its comprador ruling class wedded to the imperialist powers, does not want a united Ireland. Its institutions would not absorb those of the Six Counties easily. We wouldn't see a situation as in 1989, when West Germany in effect annexed the GDR. Our ruling class fears that their cherished stability

would be profoundly damaged. An Irish working class freed from partition would be a much more formidable adversary. The institutions of state and the civil service have no plan in the event of unification and cannot allow the national question to give republicans a strong political initiative.

The central narrative from the SDLP and the main parties down south posits unionism as an ethnicity, which would necessitate special protections for unionists. Of course unionism is not an ethnicity: it is a reactionary political ideology. Pledging allegiance to the British monarch is a political stance—a royalist one! Orange marches have been repackaged as family fun days, but that doesn't alter the triumphalism and sectarianism inherent in such displays; and what Twelfth would be complete without the burning of Tricolours on a bonfire? It wouldn't be inconceivable that Micheál Martin or Colum Eastwood would defend the Orange Order as a cultural organisation that can be reformed, despite its *raison d'être* as a supremacist, discriminatory organisation with an intensely political message.

These manifestations of unionism are defined by their hostility to republicans and Catholics and are not something to be accommodated by those of us it excludes. Contrast this chauvinism with traditional Irish culture, which belongs to all Irish people, regardless of religion. Whether it be Protestants learning Irish or the founding of the East Belfast GAA club last month, one's religious or political beliefs are not a barrier to participation. Cries from unionists that the Twelfth commemorations reflect their "heritage" is similar logic to that of Lost Cause adherents in the United States while they defend Confederate statues.

Calling people "nationalists" is the flip side of the narrative that insists that unionism is a culture. Only the Irish can be nationalists, never the Brits. It is a meaningless term that harks back to descriptions of the Irish Parliamentary Party in the nineteenth century. But the principal aim of viewing the national question in terms of "nationalists" and unionists is to

obscure the issue of British imperialism and to frame the debate as one of "warring tribes," the favoured prism of the ruling class. It is how the bourgeois media depicted the counter-revolution in Yugoslavia, and how at present it depicts the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The political questions (sovereignty, national democracy) are obscured: we are left with technocratic solutions that aim to get opposing "tribes" to live in harmony—such was the approach of George Mitchell and other figures during the negotiations that led to the Belfast Agreement.

As republicans, we need to approach the Protestant working class and win them over to our position. However, Protestants and unionists are not the same thing. It is ridiculous to suggest that demands for a united Ireland pander to those whose political outlook is defined in opposition to those very demands. The Taoiseach's hollow refrain of holding fast to the methods of consensus that the Belfast Agreement supposedly embodies is instructive all the same. Through the mechanism of a border poll, the agreement provides for a route to a united Ireland, but only with British consent: it is at the sole discretion of the British secretary of state to call it. The Belfast Agreement is a method for managing the problems caused by partition, in the interests of the British and Irish states, not for solving them.

The Stormont institutions have been suspended for almost eight years in total since their inception in 1999—hardly a success by any measure. Then again it is impossible to establish democratic rule in the Six Counties while under the British state. They are just as isolated from political power in London as they are from power in Dublin.

A border poll is the only way to escape this quagmire and invigorate the working class of this country. Unification has always had wide support, but the tribulations of the British state in recent years have emphasised the urgent need for Irish sovereignty. There will never be socialism in a partitioned Ireland. ★

¹ *Irish Times*, 8 July 2020, p. 1.

² *Irish Times*, 20 July 2020, Home News.

2 THE HEALTH OF THE NATION

This is the second part of a discussion article by **Jimmy Doran** offering a detailed look at the effects of partition, at the continued role of British imperialism in Ireland and the effect it has had and continues to have on our people. The focus on public health in the Six Counties argues for an all-Ireland approach to the provision of health services and the necessity for a universal, free public health system, from Derry to Kerry. Responses to these articles, with a maximum of about 300 words, are welcome.



PART 1 of this article in June's *Socialist Voice* noted that funding for the National Health Service was similar in all NHS regions. Despite this, the NHS in the North is the worst-performing, with the worst medical outcomes by a huge amount compared with all other regions. Research by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance found that health service performances are 40 per cent related to the socio-economic factors and 10 per cent to the physical environment, with only 20 per cent due to clinical care.

Many on the left and within trade unions (not all) are failing to join up the dots of this research. Instead of tackling the cause of the abysmal performance of the NHS in the North, i.e. the failed socio-economic development as a result of British rule, they go after the symptom and strive to unite workers behind a campaign to save the NHS.

In order to save the NHS, socio-economic development in the North has to be transformed, otherwise it

will fail. Despite the damning evidence, many on the left seek to patch up the health system, as if it is the cause of all the problems rather than a symptom of systemic failure. This only confuses the class in a never-ending struggle to obtain compromises for workers from the capitalist class, thus prolonging capitalist domination.

Under capitalism, how does the socio-economic development in the North compare with Britain and with the South of Ireland since partition, from a workers' viewpoint?

At the time of partition the GDP per capita in the Six Counties was twice that of the 26 Counties. In 1920 about 80 per cent of the industrial output of Ireland came from three counties, centred on Belfast, with the remaining 20 per cent spread over the other twenty-nine counties. By 1911 Belfast was the biggest city in Ireland, with a population of nearly 400,000, and it was growing fast.

Today the 26-County state exports goods and services valued at €280

'The health service in the North is the worst-functioning region of the NHS.'



rampant, and its public services are in crisis. Since partition the once-thriving Northern economy has collapsed. When it did thrive, one section of the community prospered, to the detriment of the other, to control the colony. Since the Belfast Agreement (1998) the two sections suffer a more equal deprivation.

An independent socialist Ireland can unite all our people—an Ireland of equals, where nobody is left behind, a country ruled in the interests of every citizen and not just a tiny elite, whether in London, Dublin, or Belfast. Rule by Britain, Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil will never and can never lead to a society reaching its full potential. A workers' republic is in the interest of all the working class, Catholic, Protestant, Dissenters. We must end the artificial imperialist division of people and country.

An all-Ireland public health service, free at the point of entry, from the cradle to the grave, would be a foundation stone of a new, independent socialist Ireland. The founding principles of the NHS would be a good starting-point to build on. We should not stop with health: we need to develop all-Ireland publicly owned transport, education, communications, environment and economy for the common good in preparation for a new Ireland with a shared future for everyone, as the reality of reunification is inevitable. Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

There was a successful counter-revolution in the South when British rule ended in the twenties. We must learn from our history and be ready and prepared for the reunification of Ireland. This time workers must be in control.

Workers have no allies in the ruling class, be they in London or Dublin. As James Connolly said, "the capitalist class is a beast of prey, and cannot be moralized, converted, or conciliated but must be extirpated." It is time to break the connection with capitalism and for all workers to unite under the red banner of socialism and to build a new, independent Ireland for all our people—uniting the country, uniting our people in a shared future together in peace, independent and socialist.★

billion. The equivalent figure for the Six Counties is a mere €11 billion. In other words, the Six Counties now export only 3½ per cent of the value of goods and services that leave the Southern state.

The population of the Six Counties has increased by half since 1921. In 1961 it was 1.42 million, with 2.8 million in the Twenty-Six Counties. Since then the population of the Six Counties has increased by less than half a million, while the population of the 26 Counties has increased by more than 2 million. Belfast had a greater population than Dublin a century ago; now Dublin has a population of 1.4 million, while the entire Six Counties has less than 1.9 million.

The GDP per capita in the south of Ireland is the fourth-highest in the world, at \$83,400. The United Kingdom now ranks 21st in the world and comes in at \$46,827 per capita. The GDP per capita in the North is \$29,310. There are twenty-six areas in

the United Kingdom with GDP of less than \$18,500. 8½ per cent of these areas are in England, 20 per cent in Scotland, 45 per cent in Wales, and 60 per cent of them in the North.

GDP is an unreliable measure of an economy, but it is an indication. The average industrial wage in the South is €47,500. The average pay in the North is €25,260; it is €33,850 in Britain. Average disposable income in the South comes in at €25,310. In Scotland it is €20,427, in Wales it is €18,226; bottom of the pile is the North, at €17,748.

The health service in the North is the worst-functioning region of the NHS. We see that the average worker in the North has a lower disposable income and lower average income. The socio-economic status of the North is the worst-performing part of the British administration.

Ordinary working people in Ireland, north and south, have been failed by capitalism. Despite the superior wealth creation in the South, inequality is

The importance of internationalism

International solidarity has a tendency to be treated as an optional extra by revolutionary movements, the type of thing you do if you have the time. Nothing could be further from the truth argues **Graham Harrington**

SHOWING SOLIDARITY with others in struggle is a central component of communist ideology.

It should be recognised that internationalism is not selfless—on the

contrary, it is vital for the victory of revolutionary movements in our own conditions, just as the United Irishmen sought assistance from revolutionary France or, more pragmatically, from

imperial Germany for the Easter Rising.

Solidarity is not just material, it is also moral, the example of the Choctaw native Americans who donated money to the Irish during the genocide inflicted on

Growing threat to world peace

EUGENE McCARTAN

GOVERNMENTS IN capitalist societies have given priority to protecting “the economy” before protecting the people’s health and well-

being, while the covid pandemic has accelerated an existing deep global economic recession.

Such countries as Cuba, Viet Nam and China, on the other hand, which have a fundamentally socialist-based economy, have given priority to their own people’s health but have also engaged in a massive international effort to help fight the covid-19 pandemic.

The growing economic crisis and the continued decline of Western economic hegemony, in particular that of the United States, in the global imperial network can be best understood in its continuous efforts to impose economic sanctions and blockades and to raise

trade barriers in order to isolate and undermine left and progressive governments.

The imperialist powers, headed by the United States and the European Union, are attempting to unleash a new “Cold War,” with the People’s Republic of China as the focus of this strategy. There has been a subtle but important shift in their anti-communist ideological drive. Now when they address issues connected with China they use the term Communist Party of China, rather than the Chinese government. They are also using the pandemic as a cover for further advancing their strategic military and political strategies globally but most

The best way we can show solidarity with other oppressed peoples is by struggling for our own liberation, to create what Connolly called “the haven of the oppressed.”

us by Britain being a powerful example. There is a massive difference between charity and solidarity.

In Ireland, it is our own experiences of national oppression that make us have an instinctive solidarity with the Palestinians, Basques, and others. In turn, people from around the world have an admiration for the Irish struggle for national liberation—notwithstanding that this is usually a result of an over-romantic view of the Irish struggle, with a rose-tinted view of the recent conflict in the north of Ireland especially.

Unfortunately, many in Ireland, and elsewhere, seem to have an idealistic, abstract view of internationalism. Nothing is more bastardised among the left than the concept of internationalism. Many see true internationalism as being ashamed of one’s own country, or in a dismissal of our own unique conditions. What these people seem to miss is that internationalism can only exist if nations do, that it is the solidarity of friendly but separate nations. What they imagine is a sort of supranationalism, where the nation-state has been removed.

It is no coincidence that this tendency mainly exists in the imperialist core, where uneven development has seen most countries reach the imperialist stage of national development.

Of interest is that this same mode of thinking was supportive of a Remain vote in the Brexit referendum. Not only was it a coarse perspective of the reason working-class people voted Leave but it also showed the limits of liberal cosmopolitanism, since it supported falling in behind the European Union,

particularly where US imperialism feels most threatened—that is, in Latin America.

It has become increasingly clear, as predicted by the Communist Party early in the pandemic, that the forces of imperialism globally are using the health crisis to tighten their control, to attack, abolish or further restrict workers’ rights, to restructure the economy in a way that will result in the loss of millions of jobs and will lead to a worsening of the living standards of the poor and of working people around the globe, as well as leading to an even greater concentration of capital and wealth in fewer and fewer

which has enforced the Fortress Europe policy, keeping refugees stranded or dying on makeshift rafts, as well as keeping Africa underdeveloped and dependent, through cheap EU food surpluses squeezing out small producers.

In oppressed countries, patriotism is necessary for internationalism. If someone cannot fight for themselves, how can they fight for others, and vice versa? It’s an example of how much imperialism has infected our psychology that we cannot even stand in solidarity with black Americans without “checking our privilege” as white people.

In reality, what inspires comrades from all over the world is not the Irish acting the same as those who conquered us—a concept that Frantz Fanon dealt with as a result of colonisation—but our resistance to it. Artificially importing political concepts from the left in imperialist countries is to completely misunderstand the conditions we are faced with in Ireland. Our history shows that we have more in common with those in struggle in Africa, Latin America and Asia than with those in the United States or Britain.

The best way we can show solidarity with other oppressed peoples is by struggling for our own liberation, to create what Connolly called “the haven of the oppressed.” The reconquest of Ireland will be a victory for workers all over the world, most especially in Britain.

Socialist Cuba has proved unmatched when it comes to internationalism, sending doctors and other medical workers all over the world. While a small nation under a vicious blockade, what resources it does have are shared. At the

hands.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean estimates that unemployment will grow by 11½ per cent—roughly 40 million people in the region—on top of the tens of millions of precarious workers. Poverty levels are also expected to grow, affecting the lives of nearly 35 per cent of the population.

Recently the Trump regime in the United States tightened the sanctions, accompanied by a succession of hostile actions in the diplomatic, political and economic arenas, against Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

same time Cuba is a very patriotic country, with its national slogan *Patria o muerte* (Homeland or death). Perhaps there is a lesson there.

As a new Cold War looms, the importance of standing in solidarity with all those struggling against imperialism cannot be overstated. The socialist countries—warts and all—of Cuba, Viet Nam, China, Laos and North Korea have to be defended, as do revolutionary countries such as Nicaragua and Venezuela.

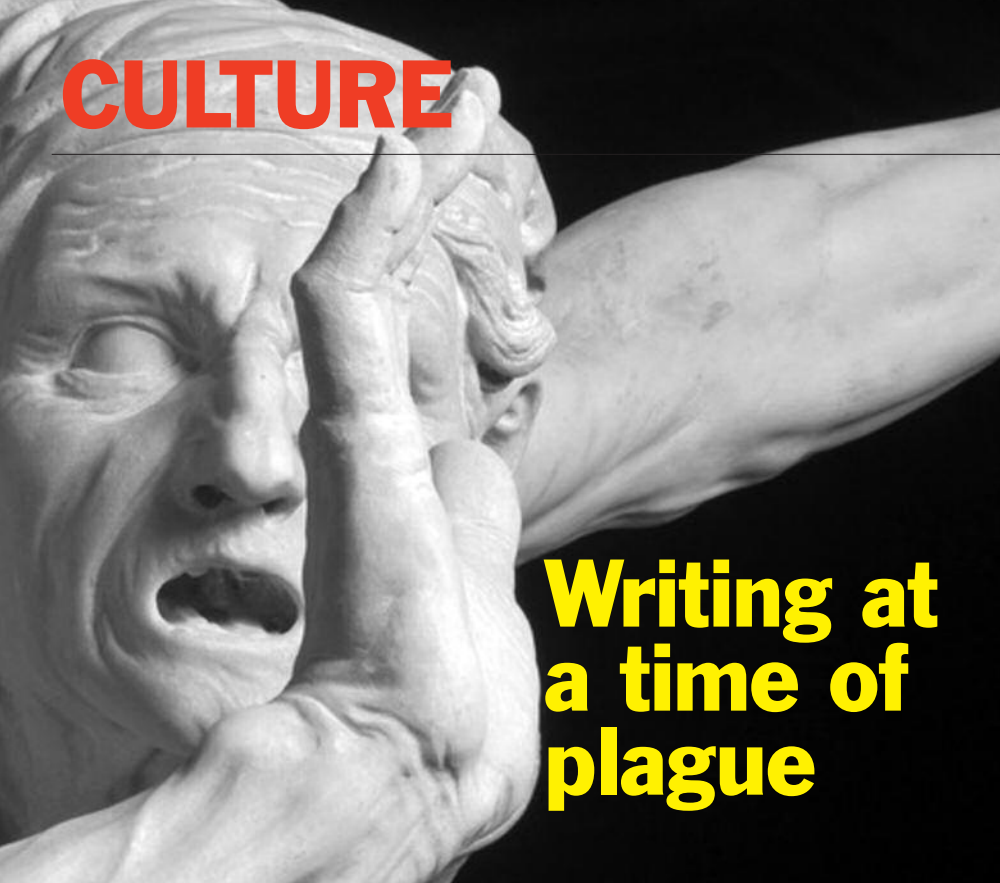
As we progress to a multi-polar world, imperialism will use fascism in an attempt to crush those who stand against it. Anti-communism has already been employed against China (note the subtle change in references to the Chinese Communist Party in place of the Chinese state). In Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America, communists have been murdered by far-right paramilitaries working with the state, as happened in the 1980s. The blockade against Cuba has been stepped up, and communist parties in Ukraine, Romania and Poland have suffered repression.

Terence MacSwiney wrote that “if Ireland were to win freedom by helping directly or indirectly to crush another people she would earn the execration she has herself poured out on tyranny for ages.” A young Ho Chi Minh, then working in London, on hearing of MacSwiney’s death on hunger strike remarked that “a country with such citizens will never surrender.”★

Left: Kindred Spirits sculpture in Baillick Park, Co. Cork commemorates the 1847 donation by the Native American Choctaw People to Irish famine relief during the Great Famine.

The US Department of State has once again put Cuba on its list of countries that are “not co-operating fully with US counter-terrorism efforts in 2019,” making 2020 the first year that Cuba has been certified as “not fully co-operating” since 2015.

This is because Cuba refuses to surrender its national political and economic sovereignty to the United States. Throughout Latin America the United States continues to support mercenaries in its efforts to overthrow the government of Venezuela and to support and promote internal subversion against Nicaragua.★



Writing at a time of plague

JENNY FARRELL

THE BLACK DEATH was the most devastating pandemic ever recorded, resulting in the death of between 75 and 125 million people. It reached its peak in Europe between 1347 and 1351, having come on Italian merchant ships from Asia via the Silk Road. In fact the idea of quarantine originates in plague-stricken fourteenth-century Italy, when ships arriving in Venice from infected ports were required to wait offshore for forty days before docking. The word “quarantine” derives from the Italian *quaranta giorni*—forty days.

The Italian territories were the cradle of early capitalism. Lombardy and Tuscany were the most advanced cities. Trade and industry developed

there in the thirteenth century, favoured by their trade routes to the Orient.

The social order of the Venetian state was determined by its economic interests and included the nobility; therefore its constitution remained aristocratic. This was different in Florence, the second most powerful city in Italy. Florence had a constitution since 1293 that excluded the nobility from the government and transferred its administration exclusively to the patricians. Its council, however, excluded small craftsmen and the common people. At that time Florence was unique in Europe for its constitution based on bourgeois-democratic principles.

This new emphasis on the merchants, artisans and patricians

brought with it the growing importance of their vernacular. Dante Alighieri (c. 1265–1321), Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) all wrote in the Florentine dialect.

Boccaccio gave the world one of its most well-known and widely read books, the *Decameron*. Its introduction and frame story bring the plague to life. (Given present circumstances, we refrain from delving into the gruesome details; we leave this to the interested reader.)

The idea of a great many stories collected within a frame story was not altogether new. Centuries earlier the Middle East had produced *One Thousand and One Nights* (Arabic 'Alf-Laylah wa-Laylah), the earliest manuscripts dating from the ninth century. These reflect a different kind of society, a feudal society, and yet they do this with as much vividness and cheekiness as Boccaccio would use to describe his world. The Persian poet Hafez (1315–1390), on the other hand, wrote satirical and love poetry that finds a parallel in Petrarca.

Boccaccio's frame story goes like this: Ten wealthy young people leave Florence in order to escape the plague, moving to a country villa, not without some servants. They decide that they will each rule for a day and preside over a set time every afternoon, when each one tells a story, on a different theme each day.

What unfolds is a panorama of fourteenth-century Florentine life, with some of the stories having originated in different cultures. Many of the stories satirise clerical lust and greed, the adventures of travelling merchants—and their wives at home—and tensions

WHO SAID THAT?

with Declan McKenna

“Take my home town, Chicago, the one-third black city that Obama deceptively claimed to hail from. It recently elected a black, female and gay mayor (a symbolic identity politics trifecta!) and named one of its leading downtown streets after the 20th century black civil rights activist Ida B. Wells . . . America pulls down monuments to racist oppressors, renames streets and paints Black Lives Matter all over them. But the real inequalities of cities like Chicago—rooted in class as well as race—are left to fester.”

Paul Street, American author

“We will coup whoever we want! Deal with it.”

Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and Space X, responding to a critic who pointed out (correctly) that the US regime organised a coup in Bolivia to secure lithium for the Musks of this world.

“International agencies that control currency, trade and credit practise terrorism against poor countries, and against the poor of all countries, with a professional frigidity and impunity that humiliate the best of those who resist.”

Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan writer

‘Florence had a constitution since 1293 that excluded the nobility from the government and transferred its administration exclusively to the patricians.’



departure this was. For over three hundred years, since the Norman invasion of 1066, English had not been spoken by the nobility, by the upper classes, in England. Anglo-Saxon as the vernacular developed like wildfire over the historically very short period of three hundred years into Middle English, a form of the language that we can still understand, with some effort.

The *Canterbury Tales* is the first great work of English literature, establishing the artistic legitimacy of vernacular Middle English, as opposed to French or Latin. At the same time John Wycliffe translated the Bible into vernacular English (1382). This challenge to Latin as the language of God was considered a revolutionary act at the time, and the Church banned the translation. Access to the Bible in the vernacular was the key to the Peasant Revolt of 1381, when one of the leaders, John Ball, asked in a sermon: “When Adam delved and Eva span, who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created equal.”

The vernacular was crucial for social change. Using it meant identifying with the people, it meant standing up to an elitist and exclusive ruling class, it meant empowering the people to understand the injustice of their situation and thus to give them a prospect of change. This use of the language of the people, which the Renaissance brings us, is deeply connected with the struggle for a new era. ★

Left: Maicol Clemente. *White Marble and the Black Death*

Above: The pilgrims as depicted in the 1877 book *Chaucer for Children* by Mary Eliza Haweis

between the new wealthy commercial class and noble families.

Quite a few of the stories are explicitly sexual. However, while this doubtless contributed to the book’s enormous popularity, it would be wrong to reduce the book to its sexual theme. In fact it became a rich source for writers of world literature. One example is the third story of the first day, a story with origins preceding Boccaccio. The great German Enlightenment poet Lessing discovered the story and based his famous play *Nathan the Wise* on it. This play about the equal value of all religions and cultures was the first one staged in many German theatres after the Second World War.

All this said, the way in which the *Decameron* was most richly emulated was by Geoffrey Chaucer in his

Canterbury Tales. His marvellous tales, written between 1387 and 1400, take from Boccaccio the idea of a frame story: the ride from London to Canterbury, with thirty pilgrims telling cheeky and bawdy stories to pass the time. Yet Chaucer’s pilgrims come from three distinct classes of society—the nobility, the clergy, and the common people—all more concerned with worldly things than spiritual ones.

Had Chaucer completed this project there would be 120 stories; but he only finished 24 of these. Nevertheless the tales we do have paint a similarly vivid picture of fourteenth-century England, as Boccaccio’s do of Florence.

Like Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio, Chaucer wrote his masterpiece in the vernacular. It is hard to imagine today just what a new

“Here we are, not battered, not subjugated, not tired. Scars, yes, there will always be scars, because to conquer rights you must face the bullets, and your skin suffers, and even your soul, but if you survive, as we have done, there is no power on earth that can extinguish the inexhaustible brilliance of a dignified life when you know you are free.”

Granma International, on the anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barracks on 26 July 1953 that marked the start of the Cuban Revolution

“The US military has its knee on the throat of the world.”

Ellen Taylor, in *Counterpunch*

“Get me back to Caracas”
Headline in the **Guardian** (London) describing the plight of Venezuelans who had migrated to Colombia but who now want to get back to Venezuela

“That is why we strongly reject, condemn and repudiate all unilateral coercive measures imposed against sovereign nations like Cuba, Venezuela and others

that are today suffering from the most cruel and massive punishments for having chosen a political or social system different from those of the dominant economic powers. Those measures are inhuman and should be eliminated, all the more so in the context of the current pandemic, when sanctions are pointing to genocide.”

Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, president of Cuba

END NOTES

Socialism and feminism From Ireland to Cuba and beyond

Grúpa na mBan Réablóideacha — the Women’s Committee of the Communist Party of Ireland and the Connolly Youth Movement — recently hosted an event to highlight the significant role of women during and following the Cuban Revolution, which continues to be an inspiration to so many of us. As we continue our fight against the destructive system of neoliberal capitalism, we have an additional struggle to dismantle the intersecting system of patriarchy that further oppresses women. It is not enough for us to realise a socialist society if the old systems of patriarchy remain in place, and we look to our sister comrades in Cuba to learn from their vast experience.

Unlike the “liberal feminism” of the West, we reject any women’s liberation struggle that is not firmly rooted in anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist principles. We

further reject any liberal feminist movements that outsource oppression to our sisters in the global south. We believe that any movement to liberate women from patriarchal oppression must be anti-colonial, anti-racist, and centred in the broader class struggle.

The advancement of women’s rights in Cuba after the revolution is something that we aspire to, in terms of “equality on paper,” while supporting our sister comrades in their shared struggle to conclusively displace the persisting patriarchal ideas which place the burden for home keeping and care work predominantly on women. In this regard, we are grateful to learn from the exceptional work that has been done so far by the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas [Federation of Cuban Women] in particular.

Notwithstanding the immense challenge which we face to dislodge the ideas of liberal feminism in the West, we are encouraged to see an emerging shift away from bourgeois ideas of feminism, towards a movement which is more in line with our own Marxist-feminist ideology.

Ní neart go cur le chéile! ★

Letter

Health of the nation

In response to the letter by Jim Quinn to SV regarding my recent article “The health of the nation,” it seems Jim Quinn has also failed to join up the dots of the statistics and research in the article.

The key point to the article is that the socio-economic failure of British rule in the North is the reason the NHS in the North is the worst-performing region of the NHS, with abysmal medical outcomes, despite similar funding in all regions.

Far from writing off the 215,000 organised workers in the North, the article suggests that unions are not joining up the dots of their own research. Rebuilding the NHS requires fundamental change to the way the North is run.

To solve a problem you don’t treat the symptom, you must get to the cause, which is British misrule. This must be confronted and tackled to end the dire socio-economic catastrophe in the North. If only the crisis was confined to health!

The article calls on workers and unions to lead the struggle to build a new independent socialist Ireland, pointing out that an all-Ireland public health service would be a good foundation stone to build upon.

One wonders what it is that hinders the joining up of these dots: unionism, nostalgia, or Stockholm syndrome.

Rather than uniting behind making British imperialism seem nicer in Ireland through improvements, concessions or reforms, workers must unite in a struggle against our common enemy, defeat imperialism and transform society. British misrule needs to be exposed to truly unite all the working class in struggle. Our struggle is for the active abolition of capitalism, not patching it up.

Many of our demands in the past have been called divisive: universal suffrage, divorce, abortion rights, reducing the role of the Church. This did not stop us fighting for them. A united, economically independent Ireland may be considered divisive by some, sectarian by others. History will absolve us. In order to advance we need to get to the root of division and not shy away from it.

Jimmy Doran
Dublin

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