

# Socialist Voice

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**DEBENHAMS  
WERE  
ALLOWED TO  
WALK AWAY  
AND  
NOT PAY**



“... the intellectuals cast a veil over the dictatorial character of bourgeois democracy not least by presenting democracy as the absolute opposite of fascism, not as just another natural phase of it where the bourgeois dictatorship is revealed in a more open form.”

**Bertolt Brecht**  
(journal, 16 March 1948).

## The Industrial Relations Act must go

The dispute in Debenham's has exposed the 1990 Industrial Relations Act for the anti-worker legislation that it is.  
**Jimmy Doran** reports Page 2



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**Socialist Voice**

43 East Essex Street Dublin  
D02 XH96 (01) 6708707



The judiciary have never been on the side of workers. The Trade Union Left Forum has been to the forefront of the campaign to have the 1990 act abolished and replaced with a Fair Work Act.

This would guarantee all workers the right to union access, the right to union recognition, full collective bargaining rights, and immunity from civil or criminal prosecution for any action during a trade dispute that is in itself not an illegal act.

This would tip the balance firmly onto the side of workers, who need to have their rights and conditions protected from exploitative employers.

The Communications Workers' Union is the latest in a growing number of unions calling for the 1990 act to be abolished. There are now five unions, comprising 168,000 members, actively pursuing this policy.

The Debenham's dispute has also revealed the dissatisfaction and mistrust among large sections of the working class towards the trade union movement. Some of this is well founded, as sections of the trade union movement were happy with the "social partnership" model, where a general agreement could be made for all workers, so removing the need to negotiate agreements for individual groups of employees independently of all employers.

This led to thirty years of inactivity, when unions went into a defensive mode, to protect what workers had, rather than an offensive mode, where workers fought for a bigger share of what they produce, with improved rights

The 1990 Industrial Relations Act act puts the balance of power firmly on the side of employers and leaves workers powerless during industrial disputes and dependent on the judiciary finding in their favour.

**Jimmy Doran** reports



## Who said that?

**DECLAN MCKENNA**

"Instead of becoming distracted by the 'threat' of populism, we should do more to . . . represent the concerns of citizens and to deliver effective and timely policy solutions."

**Daniella Wenger** Bennett Institute for Public Policy, and Roberto Foa, lecturer in politics and public policy at the University of Cambridge.

"The corporate media's indifference to Assange's trial hints at the fact that it is actually doing very little of the sort of journalism that threatens corporate and state interests and that challenges real power. It won't suffer Assange's fate because, as we shall see, it doesn't attempt to do the kind of journalism Assange and his Wikileaks organisation specialise in."

**Jonathan Cook** (journalist)

"Unity means sharing the fight, the risks, the sacrifices, the objectives, ideas, concepts and strategies, which are developed through debates and analysis."

**Fidel Castro**

"Washington needs 'a new way of thinking' that would acknowledge that today no country is able to achieve such a unilateral superiority in both strategy and economics that nobody will be in a position to threaten it."

**Henry Kissinger** warning the current US regime to change course on China or "we will slide into a situation similar to World War I." If the king of warmaking is worried, then for once let us all join him.

"Schools should not under any circumstances use resources produced by organisations that take extreme political stances on matters."

**Department for Education**

## The Debenham's dispute has also revealed the dissatisfaction and mistrust among large sections of the working class towards the trade union movement. Some of this is well founded.

and conditions of employment. As a result, union density collapsed.

The question is, How will the 1990 act be abolished? Ultimately it will take legislative change by Dáil Éireann.

There are some opportunists pushing the line that if a campaign of disobedience to the rules of the 1990 act was organised by the trade union movement it would lead to the collapse of the act and to its being abolished. This may sound attractive, but it is not credible. Named and unnamed workers have been served injunctions by the High Court; if these workers breach the act they can be fined, or imprisoned. This would certainly get the dispute into the headlines but ultimately is not what's need for the act to be abolished.

The media are on the side of the employers and the state. While this might grab the headlines for a day, it would be buried very quickly with a search for Fungie the dolphin or some other such nonsense. The media can't tell you what to think, but they can tell you what to think about.

Other opportunists call on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to call a general strike of workers against the act. This is also disingenuous, for a number of reasons. Most prominent is the fact that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions is not calling for the act to be abolished. Even if it wanted to abolish the act, a majority of the unions affiliated to it would have to be of the same mind. This is not the case.

Furthermore, if the ICTU was to call a general strike it would be illegal under

the 1990 act, and they would be liable to criminal prosecution and the seizure of assets. A strike for a political demand is also illegal under the act, as is a general strike: a strike can only be called in a trade dispute with an employer.

Some argue that if all workers were to come out on a general strike the sheer numbers would overwhelm the government and employers and no prosecutions would take place. It is fantasyland to think that huge numbers of workers would come out on a national general strike against the Industrial Relations Act at the present time.

Unfortunately, only about a quarter of workers are in unions, and of these the majority are not calling for the act to be abolished. Many haven't even heard of it.

A strategic approach is needed to this imbalance of power. It has to be recognised by workers that large sections of trade union leaderships and members are quite happy with the act; so it will have to be a bottom-up campaign to get unions to adopt it as union policy. Five unions have already adopted this policy, along with the Union of Students in Ireland, representing 367,000 of the next generation of workers.

All unions need to get on board, but it is up to union activists and branches to force the issue and get these motions proposed at union conferences. When a majority of unions affiliated to the ICTU are calling for the act to be abolished this can force the ICTU into adopting it as policy—just as it was forced, against its will, to adopt the right to water as policy a number of years ago by a

majority vote of unions at its conference.

The next step will be to put pressure on the Dáil, as inevitably it will be here that the Industrial Relations Act will be abolished. It is not a change that they will adopt easily: they will have to be forced by public outcry and pressure of numbers.

When we get to the stage where the ICTU is calling for the act to be abolished, that is the time to bring people onto the streets in mass demonstrations to abolish the act. To try to mount a “people power” type campaign on the streets against the 1990 act at this stage would be a mistake; it would fizzle out, putting back the demand and demoralising those activists involved.

When the campaign does go onto the streets it must remain there until the act is abolished, otherwise once it goes into the Dáil it will be amended and diluted, just as the Right to Water campaign was.

All union activists must push their unions in a more militant direction, to go on the offensive, get the 1990 act abolished. A pay increase might make life a little bit easier, but it does not empower workers; but abolishing the 1990 act will tip the balance of power firmly in favour of workers, away from employers.

This will give workers the tools to fight, to end precarious work, and to win the right to union access, the right to union recognition, full collective bargaining rights, and much more. ★

(Britain), directive to schools in England. An extreme political stance is defined as “a publicly stated desire to abolish or overthrow democracy, capitalism, or to end free and fair elections,” and then goes on to list other issues.

“Aaron Leonard’s works continue to shed light on the paranoid police state known as the United States of America.”

**Ron Jacobs** American commentator on *The Folk Singers and the Bureau*, documenting the FBI’s attempt to destroy the left-leaning folk singers Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Josh White, Lee Hays, and many others.

“I congratulate the winners and ask them to govern with Bolivia and democracy in mind.”

**Jeanine Áñez Chávez** US-backed “interim president” and coup plotter, lecturing the winners of the presidential election in Bolivia.

“It’s time to put humanity and life, not just carbon, at the centre of the climate crisis and our solidarity.”

**Aruna Chandrasekhar** independent journalist from India. “Socialism is the only solution for the Irish farmer, because capitalism is the enemy, the friend of the elites who are trying to destroy Irish agriculture and using it only to fatten even more

their own greedy pockets.” A letter to the *Midland Topic* from “A local farmer.”

“Do they know the word ‘intervention’ acts as a euphemism for cold-blooded murder under false pretenses . . . For what fascism and liberalism share is their undying devotion to the capitalist world order . . . The fundamental dividing line is not between two different modes of capitalist governance, but between capitalists and anti-capitalists.”

**Gabriel Rockhill** Franco-American philosopher, dismissing any real difference between liberals and fascists. ★

## Licensed to kill

**FRA HUGHES**

ACCORDING TO the BBC, “MI5 has up to 700 staff in Northern Ireland based at regional headquarters in Holywood, County Down. It took over the lead role in intelligence gathering on ‘dissident republicans’ from the police in 2007. The operational framework was set out as part of the St Andrews Agreement a year earlier.”

On its web site MI5 (the Security Service) claims to have had fewer than fifty operatives working out of Stormont Castle during the “Troubles.” As republicans can testify, they faced a plethora of state agents and state intelligence agencies during their “war of liberation,” including the police Special Branch, the Military Reaction Force, Force Research Unit, SAS, and who knows what other shadowy agencies

that played a part in the dark and dangerous world of spies and informers.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland, and before that the Royal Ulster Constabulary, led the state’s fight against the Irish Republican Army and the Irish National Liberation Army. It ran agents and informers who gathered information on both loyalist and republican proscribed organisations, including the Ulster Defence Association, Ulster Volunteer Force, and Red Hand Commando.

Together with accusations of the “shoot to kill” policy against republicans by Margaret Thatcher, coupled with persistent and proven cases of state collusion with loyalist murder gangs, the role of the state security apparatus was, first and foremost, the battle to marginalise and

eradicate the threat to the integrity of the United Kingdom posed by militant republicans, battling to end Britain’s colonial occupation of the north-east of Ireland.

This is borne out by the leading role MI5 plays in securing the state of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. MI5 has sole responsibility for operational jurisdiction here against

## The sectarian virus

**GEARÓID Ó MACHAIL**

NEXT YEAR the unashamedly right-wing and sectarian Orange Order will mark the centenary of the creation of the Northern Ireland statelet with “a massive number of events,” the centrepiece of which will be a huge parade from Stormont in May 2021. It behoves all on the Irish left to analyse the immediate future for this “failed political entity” and to task ourselves with educating Irish workers on the lessons to be drawn from partition, sectarianism, and the imperialist domination of our country.

Stormont’s Department for Communities revealed in May 2020 that 19 per cent of people in “Northern Ireland” live in relative poverty, including approximately 107,000 (24 per cent) children. Previously the department published a biannual summary of homelessness statistics that showed that 9,673 people in the North were described as homeless last year.

At the beginning of 2020, before the social and economic upheaval wrought by the covid-19 pandemic, the BBC reported that “Northern Ireland” now has “the highest suicide rate in the UK,” with five people taking their life each week.

Statistics like these, however, are unlikely to dampen the enthusiasm of the sectarian statelet’s diminishing band of cheerleaders as they take to the streets in 2021 to mark a hundred years of sectarian bigotry, corruption, economic decline, and armed conflict that has resulted in thousands of deaths and injuries.

Against the backdrop of the forthcoming centenary, the minister of agriculture, Edwin Poots, recently dog-whistled to the communally divided population of the Six Counties that the transmission of the covid-19 virus was six times higher in “nationalist areas” of the jurisdiction.

In 2013, as minister of health, Poots banned blood donations from

## MI5 has sole responsibility for operational jurisdiction here against “dissident republicans,” while the PSNI retains primacy over loyalist paramilitary activities as well as ordinary crime.

“dissident republicans,” while the PSNI retains primacy over loyalist paramilitary activities as well as ordinary crime.

Republicans are viewed as a threat to the state, but apparently loyalists are not; in fact they may be deemed at times an asset to the state—a local militia?

The whole thrust of British state intelligence work, with a budget of possibly billions, is directed solely against republicans, north and south of the border that partitioned Ireland on behalf of British interests in 1922.

Republicans and nationalists have always claimed that the security services and security forces operated here with impunity, using torture, false imprisonment and shoot-to-kill operations alongside extrajudicial murders and covert state executions.

Now many people in both Ireland and the United Kingdom see the new Security Bill brought before Parliament as the next phase of Britain’s dubious and at times discredited security operation in Ireland. This act of Parliament may well be a “get out of jail” card for MI5 operatives and others who flout the law, break the law, and commit such crimes as recruitment to proscribed organisations, procurement of arms and ammunition, entrapment, incitement to maim and murder, directing terrorism, and prosecuting a war against the state in order to protect the state.

It is my opinion that this new legislation will allow MI5 to operate even more aggressively, immorally and illegally

against republicans by becoming not only judge, jury and executioner but also the recruiter, organiser and promoter of dissident republican activity, by using its embedded assets, both inserted and recruited as *agents provocateurs* within these organisations.

The rationale is not to defeat its enemies but to create an endless conveyor belt of young and old republicans being sent to Maghaberry Jail and Hyde Bank prison while securing massive funds for its operation, in effect creating a perfect storm of intercepted missions and compromised leaders and a perceived continued threat to the peace talks and the Belfast Agreement, the bogey man and woman of Irish republicanism.

When is the state protecting itself, and by extension its citizens, from a militarised threat and when is it promoting, using and funding that threat?

There are numerous examples of assets within organisations, legal and illegal, being used to promote illegal activity. These cases have been well documented by the CND movement, socialist organisations, and civil society groups, involving deep-cover agents—some of whom had physical relationships with those they were spying on, in order to cement their place in the group—and incited violence in order to brand them as criminal and militant in the eyes of the public.

Undercover informants working for the police and MI5 are going to be

explicitly permitted for the first time under British law to commit crimes. This will legalise what many believe has already happened in Britain’s dirty war against Irish republicans.

Always remember, the crimes the British establishment commit on the Irish people will eventually be used against its own citizenry.

Thankfully, elements within the British political class are standing against this new legalised criminality; but their voices are few.

Will the trial involving Dennis McFadden, MI5’s star witness against the alleged leadership of the New IRA, and the Palestinian Dr Issam Hijawwi Basalat be the first showcase trial where an undercover operative admits being involved in illegal activity, previously held to be criminal but now to be accepted as the hard face of Britain’s fight against international terrorism?

Why has this legislation been brought forward at this time?

Will it be used in the trial of Teresa May’s would-be assassin, entrapped and possibly set up by the state?

Is it to help keep Dennis McFadden and others out of jail?

The “Covert Human Resources Bill” must be opposed by all those who defend democracy. Entrapment by the state will become a tool for criminalising individuals, groups and communities opposed to the state and for creating false-flag attacks on society, to manipulate public opinion in favour of the state narrative. ★

gay people, saying, “I think that people who engage in high-risk sexual behaviour in general should be excluded from giving blood.”

Incidentally, the esteemed minister is also a “young earth creationist,” who believes that the earth was “created” in 4000 BC, an analysis that was sufficient to see him awarded the post of minister for the environment in a previous Stormont Executive.

Socialists were quick to point out that areas experiencing unusually high transmission of the potentially deadly covid virus in the North correlated to areas of multiple deprivation. Derry—“Northern Ireland’s second city”—has some of the worst deprivation indicators in western Europe.

Attempts to show the correlation between the prevalence of low-wage front-line employment in working-class areas and the spread of Covid-19 among the community were but background noise to the cacophony of tit-for-tat sectarian exchanges between unionist and nationalist representatives, egged on by mainstream media commentators with a pro-imperialist agenda.

Concerted attempts to divide workers on sectarian lines have been a feature of the Northern state since its inception. An entity founded on the very basis of a sectarian head count was unlikely ever to escape the strictures of its very *raison d’être*.

Nevertheless Northern workers have on occasion broken free of the shackles

imposed by sectarian leaders and tribal loyalties. In 1932 thousands of workers, Protestant and Catholic, went on strike throughout Belfast while tens of thousands packed the streets in front of Belfast City Hall to listen to speakers from communist and labour backgrounds lay out their demands for welfare and a living wage. One speaker declared: “Let our slogan be ‘No surrender to poverty, misery, and destitution.’”

A window in that same City Hall commemorates the heroism and courage of those workers from both traditions in the North who joined the International Brigades to defend the Spanish Republic against the fascist uprising. ★

## Celebrating the people's struggle for a progressive republic



**TOMMY MCKEARNEY**

COVID-19 has not been all bad news for those who govern Ireland's 26-county state. Apart from giving Leo Varadkar and Micheál Martin continuing opportunities to pose solemnly in front of the television cameras it has allowed the Irish establishment to quietly ignore seminal events of a century ago.

While the pandemic has obviously restricted public gatherings, official Ireland has done little to highlight or reflect upon the past. It's almost as if the War of Independence was a disturbing and uncomfortable family secret, best when seldom mentioned

and only talked about in public if absolutely unavoidable.

The proffered rationale for this neglect is invariably misleading and trite. "Say little in case it might inflame passions in the North," they mutter. No need to revisit that period, since we are now so friendly with Britain, we are assured. Best not to dig too deep, because your neighbour's grandfather may have been a member of the RIC or even a Black and Tan. And look at the difficulties that commemorating that bunch of thugs caused Charlie Flanagan, not to mention the leadership of Fianna Fáil.

Of course if discussion of the period cannot be avoided, then endeavour to

undermine the idealism, introduce the unpleasant, and imply that there is still worse to be uncovered. For example, Kevin Barry was willing to "kill and to die," ran the tendentious headline in a recent *Irish Independent* article. Other sources spin the tale that civilians died in crossfire, women were sometimes abused, and caring fathers were among police casualties.

All undeniably true; but the story is not being told in context.

This misleading slant is often followed by raising questions such as Tom Barry's account of the false surrender at Kilmichael, or insinuations that the IRA was guilty of sectarianism in certain areas. These are well-practised tactics

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An anti-sectarian consciousness was again briefly raised among a section of Northern workers in the heady early days of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s. Not surprisingly, the trusty old Orange card was once again dusted off and employed to lethal effect by unionism and its imperial puppet-masters.

The few but inspiring instances of working-class unity among Northern

workers in the last hundred years should be the real story in commemorating the beleaguered history of the sectarian statelet.

It's clear to all but the wilfully blind that partition, sectarianism and the capitalist system of economic relations in Ireland are hampering efforts to contain the spread of the covid pandemic. Working people in the North of Ireland deserve better than sectarian cat-calling and should immediately join the demand for a fully equipped and fully resourced all-Ireland national health

service, free at the point of use and funded by progressive general taxation in addition to wealth taxes.

In the coming period the onus is on communists, socialists, left republicans, trade unionists and other progressives to use the centenary of the imposition of a British border in Ireland not merely to expose the catastrophic influence of imperialism, north and south, but to unite and organise working people around the demand for a new, secular republic for all our people—an anti-sectarian, anti-imperialist workers' republic. ★



By 1920 there existed in many parts of Ireland a situation of virtual dual power. An insurrectionary movement had rejected, and in places supplanted, the authority of a long-established and powerful regime.

designed to muddy the waters in order to provide scope for those who wish to equivocate, criticise, or deny.

It has to be said too that certain republicans have tended to oversimplify the conflict rather than critique it. They have promoted a view defining the aftermath as one merely of betrayal of an ideal. In reality this is a version of the “great man or bad man” theory of history.

However superficially attractive the view may be, it fails to provide a concrete analysis of the past and therefore cannot offer a telling insight into the present.

Ireland’s War of Independence is a story worth telling at any time and certainly not something to be shied away from. Nevertheless it was more than a series of military engagements, no matter how spectacular some of them may have been. It was a time of revolution, with mass popular participation at the grass roots—a time when the potential existed for fundamental social and economic change. That this latter possibility did not come about is not only revealing but has a crucial bearing on the present day.

By 1920 there existed in many parts of Ireland a situation of virtual dual power. An insurrectionary movement had rejected, and in places supplanted, the authority of a long-established and powerful regime. In its stead the insurgents had established their own governing institution, with its judicial system, police, and army. Not only did this new order have majority support in the country but it enjoyed significant backing from within organised labour, as demonstrated by a number of widespread, paralysing politically inspired strikes. Moreover, labour was flexing its muscle, seizing control of a number of

work-places and unashamedly declaring them to be workers’ soviets.

This aspect of the War of Independence—that is, the potential to build a different, secular, socially and economically progressive Ireland—is often overlooked. Yet it remains central to a proper understanding of those events in our history. Moreover, it is one of the main reasons why today, apart from recalling a few outstanding episodes, the Irish establishment is reluctant to revisit that period. To do so would involve examining the struggle for Irish independence within a wider and more meaningful context than self-government alone.

What were the defining characteristics of the Sinn Féin movement of the time? What were its objectives, and why did it fracture? Most important of all, why were working people left out of the post-war settlement?

Writing later, the socialist republican Peadar O’Donnell made the incisive observation that “*the middle class, which lurked in the shadow of the republican movement from its rise to popularity, was no part of the freedom forces; it had no aim that could not be realised in Home Rule within the British Empire.*”

Therein lies a profound and accurate explanation for the Civil War, the genesis of which lay in conflicting class interests within the insurgent forces. Unfortunately, such clarity or insight was missing from among a majority of the anti-Treaty forces, a blind spot that focused attention then and subsequently on superficial aspects rather than the substance of the new 26-county arrangement. This misconception facilitated the emergence and endurance of a bourgeois state, a state immersed in

crony capitalism and in effect beholden for its survival to the tenets of contemporary imperialism, whether British, American, or European.

Hardly surprising, therefore, that the Irish establishment is so uneasy about taking part in a deep reflection on the War of Independence and its immediate aftermath. Uncomfortable questions would be asked about the southern Irish state’s failure to address so many issues. How is it that almost a century later, and in the grip of a dangerous pandemic, we have a two-tier health service, failing abysmally? Why indeed have we two uncoordinated health services on this small island? Why have we a homelessness and housing crisis? Why do we still have a financial sector unanswerable to the people? Why is the Taoiseach unwilling to declare his support for an end to partition?

These and other questions will be addressed during a three-day digital festival organised by the Peadar O’Donnell Socialist Republican Forum to celebrate and analyse Ireland’s War of Independence. Taking place on the 27th, 28th and 29th of November, it is designed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Kilmichael ambush. The festival will explore, in conversation with a range of expert speakers, many aspects of the struggle. In particular it will assess the effect of those events on the present day, with a particular emphasis on the theme that now, and after such heroic struggle, “Labour must wait no longer.” ★

★ Festival details and timetable will be available on the Peadar O’Donnell Socialist Republican Forum’s Facebook page.

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## Identity politics, the far right, and masks

With the rise of the far right it is worth considering the issue of identity politics and the left. This, **Eoin McDermott** argues, is a type of politics that takes identity, often essentialised, as the central category for organisation and analysis. Its left-wing variant is suspicious of power, preferring to engage in academic taxonomies of oppression which prove incapable of addressing underlying causes.

On the right, identity politics is leveraged to deliberately divide and fracture workers, pitting them against each other, most frequently on the basis of race, gender, religion, or nationality.

The left variant of identity politics emerged from the post-modern paradigm that has come to dominate much of progressive politics within the academic world. As the past thirty years have shown, a politics that over-emphasises individual identity and difference over the potential to unite disparate groups under shared class interests leaves much to be desired. Nevertheless the focus on identity and difference is necessary, even if it served as an over-correction to certain historical tendencies on the left that treated the working class as a homogeneous, abstract, uniform mass.

The problem here is not universality but rather abstract universality. In the overreaction against such descriptions, the post-modern position throws the baby of concrete universality out with the bath water of abstract universality. Forgoing universality as a concept and revelling in difference has led to nothing but the fracturing of progressive forces into small cliques incapable of pursuing a collective emancipatory project with the power to address the needs of the majority in society.



....you cannot bring the unionised male European worker and the female Bangladeshi sweatshop worker together by asserting the primacy of a traditional model of class over the real interests and feelings and needs of that Bangladeshi woman.

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Our model of class must recognise difference while stressing the concrete universality of class, based on the subject's relationship to the means of production. As the Marxist philosopher and founder of the school of critical realism, Roy Bhaskar, states,

you cannot bring them [the unionised male European worker and the female Bangladeshi sweatshop worker] together by asserting the primacy of a traditional model of class over the real interests and feelings and needs of that Bangladeshi woman. You have got to do it by appealing to the commonality of their enemies and then the particularity of their own interests and differences.\*

Class is the concrete universal, the unifying commonality that has the potential to unite all workers. Yet there are social structures and forms of oppression that impede this unity. These should not be dismissed as secondary concerns: it must be shown that the vines of racism, sexual discrimination, xenophobia etc. rely on the healthy tree of capitalism, and that only through a universal struggle to destroy that tree's root can our collective concerns be adequately addressed.

With this in mind, let us consider the present moment, in which most people are feeling considerable pain because of the economic and public-health consequences of organising society around the accumulation of profit, at the expense of public need. The far right has recognised and leveraged this pain and discontent, displacing it onto spurious issues of identity, such as the wearing of face-masks or attempts to blame immigrants for shortages of housing and health services.

It should be clear that the average person who turns up to protests surreptitiously organised by the far right is not a fascist but rather has legitimate grievances that are being manipulated and channelled into dangerous dead ends by pseudo-intellectual charlatans of diminutive stature.

If class offers the means of uniting the majority of working people to pursue their common emancipation from the constraints of capital but this unity is hindered by external factors, how can we think about organising on a class basis if issues of identity seem to take precedence? Here an analogy may help us.

We know that water has a general tendency to flow downhill, because of the effect of gravity; yet the simple presence of the law of gravity doesn't mean that the course of water is guaranteed to flow along a predetermined path. All sorts of structures can be built to divert and channel the water away from its original course. One who insists that water should flow downhill of its own accord and along a predetermined path, ignoring diversions and dams, has a tenuous grasp of reality. If we wish to enable the water to flow along its proper course towards the sea there are structures that must be removed and new ones that can be erected to help channel the many weak trickles into streams, and streams into a river capable of exerting tremendous force in its movement.

So it is with issues of identity and class struggle. Certain identity positions established by the right, such as unionism, may hinder the development of class-consciousness like dams, others may simply act as parallel streams flowing in the same direction but independent and weaker outside the

torrent of class struggle, ultimately petering out before they reach their goal.

The goal of the communist movement should be to tear down the barriers where they exist and incorporate the streams in the broad river of class struggle. This cannot be achieved by ignoring barriers or chastising people for not placing class above those interests, such as race or gender, that they feel most pressing to their personal experience at a given moment. We must show how their interests are interdependent with, and not independent, of class.

Finally, how do we address the anti-maskers and the far right? The first thing that must be acknowledged is that the anti-mask movement is not really about masks. The mask, or, more accurately, the absence of the mask, is an overdetermined signifier that unites a broad group of discontented working people who are suspicious of the opinions of experts. In this sense anti-mask politics is a politics of identity, division, and scepticism.

With this in mind, we must not be too quick to blame people after experiencing the so-called economic expertise that both created and "fixed" the 2008 economic crisis—an expertise that has left people worse off than they were a decade before. Now we witness health experts issuing sound, scientific public-health advice that is not supported in turn by economic policies capable of protecting people's jobs and livelihoods, thanks to the skewed priorities of Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, and the Green Party.

It is no surprise that so many people have reacted as they have. Instead of turning against the economic system that is the cause of their suffering, friends and neighbours have been fed poisonous lies and conspiracies by right-wing forces that the advice of health experts trying to protect them is the very cause of their problems.

While liberals and the media sneer at these people, dismissing them as the uneducated dregs of society, we should recognise that their grievances and fears are real and not entirely irrational. We must push back against anti-scientific talking-points of the far right against masks that cause nothing but harm to the communities they seek to exploit, while at the same time recognising the just scepticism about neoliberal economic expertise and acknowledging that fears and grievances over the future are real. We must stress that the cause of these grievances is to be found in the mode of production that gives priority to profits over human life and not a piece of cloth that can save lives. We must push hard against attempts to lump doctors and nurses in the same category as establishment politicians and neoliberal economists.

If we succeed we can break down the dam of anti-intellectual and dangerous demagoguery offered by the far right and offer a path for thousands of people to properly address their particular concerns through the universality of class struggle. This is why identity politics is not enough: only a class politics capable of integrating difference in its model can offer a way forward. ★

\*Roy Bhaskar, "Critical realism and the left," in *From Science to Emancipation: Alienation and the Actuality of Enlightenment* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 190–201.



## Engels and marriage

JENNY FARRELL

FRIEDRICH ENGELS, whose 200th birthday falls on 28 November, had a very personal connection with Ireland. Soon after being sent to help run the family textile factory in Manchester in 1842 he met twenty-year-old Mary Burns, daughter of an Irish dyer. Engels's friend the revolutionary German poet Georg Weerth wrote a poem about Mary after he met the couple. It is a rare contemporary account:

Mary

From Ireland with the tide she came,  
She came from Tipperary:  
"Oranges, fresh and good for sale"  
So cried our lassie Mary.  
And Moor and Persian and Brown,  
Jews, Gentiles overwrought—  
All people of the trading town,  
They came and bought, and bought.  
...  
And with the money that she gained  
For juicy, golden mandrines,  
She hurried home determined

Her face in wrathful lines.  
She took the money, safe it kept;  
Treasured 'til January,  
To Ireland fast and sure she sent  
The money, so did Mary.

'Tis for my land's salvation,  
I give this to your coffers!  
Arise, and whet your weapons.  
Stir up the ancient hatreds!  
The Rose of England strives to choke  
Shamrock of Tipperary  
Warm greetings to the best of blokes,  
O'Connell, from our Mary.  
[translation by Jenny Farrell]

Mary Burns was instrumental in introducing Engels to the horrendous conditions of the Manchester proletariat. As the 24-year-old Engels wrote in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), "The rapid extension of English industry could not have taken place if England had not possessed in the numerous and impoverished population of Ireland a reserve at command." However, the Irish also brought a tradition of struggle. Mary became trade unionists, and Feargus O'Connor was elected to Parliament in

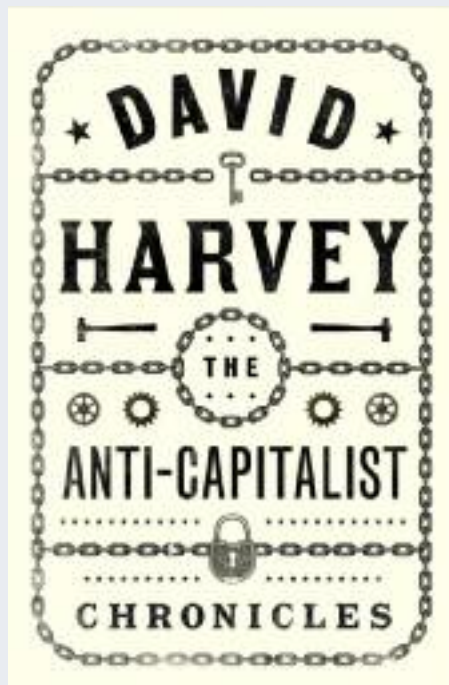
## Setting our sights low

David Harvey, *The Anti-Capitalist Chronicles* (Pluto Press, London, 2020)

RAYMOND Ó DUBHGHAILL

FOR ANYONE in the Anglophone world with an interest in Marx or political economy, David Harvey is probably a figure who needs no introduction. The British professor, who celebrated his 85th birthday on 31 October, is one of the most prominent theorists and spokespersons of the contemporary Western left, whose studies of Marx's *Capital* and recent successful forays into podcasting will be familiar to many readers.

It is from the latter source (also entitled "David Harvey's Anti-Capitalist Chronicles") that much of this present volume has been drawn, or adapted into book form, covering a range of topics, from surplus value, the history of neoliberal capitalism, alienation and



climate change to political responses to the covid-19 pandemic.

Harvey's great skill, in writing as in speech, is to explain complex theories, histories and ideas in a clear, conversational style that avoids the pitfalls of impenetrability and prolix that characterise much of contemporary

discourse on the left. This light, informal style certainly benefits from the book's origins as spoken material as Harvey moves from subject to subject with an effortless momentum. As a consequence the book is suited to seasoned readers of left theory as well as those just curious to explore critiques of the iniquitous capitalist system we live under.

Harvey's status on the left is that of a sort of benign elder statesman whose popularity transcends traditional sectarian categories. This is partly due to his congenial and gentle personality, as well as his tendency to generally avoid controversy in his interventions in popular discourse. Or at least this was so until recently, when some of his pronouncements resulted in an enormous amount of well-publicised criticism from fellow-Marxists.

These criticisms centred on his assertion that capitalism, in the monstrous, globe-encompassing manner in which it exists at the present day, is "too big to fail," and that the notion that a revolution could quickly overturn this economic system to build socialism is a "fantasy" that belongs solely to the material conditions that prevailed in the

1847 as the first Chartist.

The situation of proletarian families led Engels much later to note in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884): “now that large-scale industry has taken the wife out of the home onto the labour market and into the factory, and made her often the bread-winner of the family, no basis for any kind of male supremacy is left in the proletarian household.”

Engels understood marriage and family as directly linked to the ruling class system, in which the accumulation of wealth led to marriage, strict monogamy of women, and female submission: “. . . in proportion as wealth increased, it made the man’s position in the family more important than the woman’s . . . [and the resulting] overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex.”

Engels decided never to marry. He lived first with Mary Burns and, following her early death, with her sister Lydia (Lizzie). In effect he led a double life: one as a manager in his father’s factory, the other in a suburban cottage rented under an alias for Mary and Lizzie, his real home.

early part of the twentieth century.

A debate ensued over whether these statements constituted a rejection of Marxism, whether they had been misinterpreted or exaggerated or were simply reactionary in nature, the privileged musings of a professor resident in New York, long since detached from any real-world proletarian struggle.

For better or for worse, these divisive claims are repeated here, and fleshed out somewhat in the opening chapter, titled “Global unrest.” If Harvey begins this passage in a tone of finger-wagging reprimand to the younger generation (warning that, because of the all-pervasiveness of capital, the upheaval associated with a revolutionary period would be “potentially lethal for a large portion of the global population”), he ends it with the far less controversial thought that “revolution is a long process not an event.”

One might very well argue in turn that the all-pervasive capitalist system in which human life persists is nonetheless quite literally lethal already for a large portion of the global population, and this fact is reason enough for its violent overthrow. But perhaps it is simply this

In 1856 Engels and Mary visited Ireland together. He wrote to Marx following this trip: “Ireland may be regarded as England’s first colony,” and “I never thought that famine could have such a tangible reality.”

Both Mary and Lizzie were very involved with and supported the IRB’s struggle for an independent Ireland. Aged only forty, Mary died suddenly on 8 January 1863. She had been Engels’s partner for twenty years. He was deeply shaken when Marx failed to respond compassionately to his loss; it nearly broke their friendship.

After Mary’s death Engels and Lizzie became lovers and moved into a small terrace house in Mornington Street in the Ardwick district of Manchester. This is the house where Marx visited a number of times, as did his daughter Eleanor. Eleanor struck up a deep friendship with Lizzie and through her became an Irish patriot. Lizzie was a member of the Fenian Society, and there are indications that she joined the First International.

In 1867, when Manchester police captured two IRB men, Kelly and Deasy, Lizzie became involved in the unsuccessful plot to rescue them. She

may even have hidden them briefly. Following their execution, in both the Marx and Engels-Burns households the women expressed their support for Ireland by wearing green ribbons with black for mourning.

In September 1869 Lizzie, Engels and the fourteen-year-old Eleanor Marx spent three weeks in Ireland. The demand for an amnesty for the IRB prisoners held in British jails had revived the liberation movement. Tens of thousands of people were out on the streets of Dublin and Limerick. Engels planned to write a comprehensive study of Ireland and began research in earnest.

Lizzie and Engels moved to London in September 1870. Their house became a centre for the socialist movement. Lizzie died on 12 September 1878. Engels wrote about her: “She was of genuine Irish proletarian stock and her passionate, innate feeling for her class was of far greater importance to me and stood me in better stead at all critical moments to a greater extent than all the pseudo-intellectual and clever-clever ‘finely educated’ and ‘delicate’ bourgeois daughters could have done.” ★

tendency to focus on macro-economics, for want of a better term, to the exclusion of the realities of class struggle that is Harvey’s great weakness, albeit one he shares with many in today’s left.

The book is rife with topics to which Harvey applies his brisk and broad critical lens. He rarely gets bogged down in historical detail, offering instead a critical, whistle-stop tour of his subjects: the Chinese tech industry, financialisation of the economy, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions under capitalism, and more, all get this treatment. However, he sometimes makes time for welcome anecdotal or literary asides, on his visits to Nanjing, or quoting Shakespeare to discuss the rise of merchant capitalism. His breadth of knowledge and diverse interests are clearly evident, and these enrich an already compelling document on a range of important issues facing the planet right now.

All of which goes to say that this is an eminently readable, diverting and informative book from a distinguished and even beloved figure of the left. However, it should be approached with the caveat that, for all Harvey’s analytical qualities—and they are

many—too often he is content in his pronouncements to merely suggest a bargaining with capitalism, rather than call for its overthrow: for example when he declares the necessity for the capitalist state to mitigate the worst excesses of finance capital, or generally to act as a bulwark against the economic system’s inevitable tendency towards increased exploitation in the name of profit (a tendency he understands well!).

Such social-democratic attitudes, if they can be labelled as such, may be a necessary consequence of abandoning one’s revolutionary aspirations in the here and now.

It’s hard to escape the feeling that Harvey’s quite lucid criticisms of the direction in which our economic system is and has been going deserve a more inspiring and radical over-arching message than to aim small and set our sights low; because the capitalists are strong, after all. One is reminded of Marx’s immortal words in his criticism of Feuerbach: “The philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.” ★

# From A to B and everything in between

The Communist Party of Ireland has, time and time again, shown its analysis of capitalism and imperialism to be correct. Where we have been able to intervene and make a contribution to the wider political movements, debates and campaigns we have actively intervened in what were popular reformist demands, shifting them to transformative ideas and demands, in a number of crucial areas: (1) repudiating the debt, (2) austerity is working, (3) the triple lock of imperialism, (4) public ownership of water enshrined in the Constitution, (5) universal public housing, and (6) repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, to name a few.

**Eoghan O’Neill** reports

Each one of these demands has led to the establishment of, or a contribution to the narrative of, campaigns, with varying degrees of success, some of which are continuing. Importantly, however, they challenged both the establishment rhetoric and narrative and the reformist demands of the “left” wing—socialist, republican, and social-democratic forces—by consciously bringing a sharp class analysis and the transformative demand to the particular issue.

It was only after this conscious effort by the party that we have shifted the balance of thought from reformation to transformation, from a basic economic analysis to a class analysis; and now we must bring that central feature of party work to the battle of ideas that is constantly evolving on many issues.

We know that the left parties in Ireland—Sinn Féin, the Trotskyists, the Social Democrats, and others—will take up populist and, in the main, progressive positions, but because they are fundamentally wedded to the electoral process and have distanced themselves from opposing EU, American and British imperialism they seem to lack a vision for the working class outside of capitalism and its imperialist structures. “Tax the rich” is about as far as these parties will go when presenting

themselves as an alternative in confronting capitalism and the establishment political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

But taxing the rich, which is a progressive idea, is not in fact confronting capitalism but merely trying to reshape the structures within capitalism: a changing of the guard in favour of labour.

Many parties proclaim themselves socialist and want to bring about socialism in Ireland, the CPI included. If we are conscious of our goal we must work backwards to assess our best path towards that goal of successful revolution for building socialism. In reality, at this point if we were to present a “socialist programme,” what is the real likelihood of different groups, communities, work-places and unions not only endorsing it but actively pursuing it?

In other words, has the working class reached a level of class-consciousness where it is ready to take up the cause of socialism—industrially, socially, politically, and, if necessary, militarily? Would the different arms of industry, services and agriculture work together, in unison and in solidarity with other sections of society, to bring about a change in the mode of production, willing to defend it at all costs?

This is where we not only want them



The weakness of just seeking reforms within the system is that it excludes a distinctive class and anti-imperialist line of analysis and understanding, because the target of the demand is not striking at the class nature of the state...

to be but need them to be. However, this is not where the collective class-conscious is at the present time. So the question is one that has haunted socialist movements for generations: How do we go from A (where we are now) to B (socialism)?

We start from an analysis of where we are now; and at the moment the working class is in a defensive state, because our livelihood, wages, jobs, services, communities, health and the environment are under persistent and sustained attack, which has only increased since the onset of the covid-19 pandemic. We see examples such as the valiant efforts of the Debenham workers, who have been on strike for more than 200 days against an unscrupulous capitalist enterprise. These attacks on workers, their jobs, their livelihoods will only increase further in the months and years ahead.

I have become more and more convinced that if we only present and mount defensive actions, or concentrate on individual insular reforms related to the particular business or industry, we may be in danger of losing a lot more ground to the forces of reaction and intolerance—the very people who were rightly beaten off the streets a few weeks ago.

Without a conscious effort of class-conscious forces to expose and rupture the contradictions and fault lines that exist within the system we will forever be back and forth seeking reforms, from all shades of political parties in government. We cannot underestimate the ability and resourcefulness of the bourgeoisie in maintaining their class rule. The capitalist system is fully capable of meeting the individual reforms when enough pressure is applied. The workers' movement in capitalist countries, which has fought tooth and nail for every reform to better their conditions, is testament to that.

Capitalist governments are fully capable of imposing taxes on the rich, are fully capable of nationalising industries and services, are fully capable of securing welfare and social safety nets, are fully capable of improving their infrastructure, and fully capable of moving towards “green energy” and “zero carbon” economies. What they are not capable of is doing all these at once, for a sustained period

and in a wide range of countries, which is the most essential element in our struggle for a just society, an end to the exploitation of the people—wherever they live and labour—and for a re-balancing of the earth system, which is tilting towards a point of no return.

The capitalist system and the capitalists who benefit from the mode of production, when put under the strain of these reforms under the weight of their own contradictions, enter into a state of crisis. In modern history (after the Second World War) this is exactly what happened to Western economies after a prolonged period of state and public investment in what was known as the “Golden Age” of capitalism, what I would deem the golden age of social democracy. A boon for the public became a crisis for the private capitalist class; and, beginning in the late 1960s, a profitability crisis emerged, which is shown in the graph. To counter this free fall in rates of profit the capitalist class and the imperialist powers went about implementing the greatest shift of industrial productive forces in history, ushering in what is generally called the neo-liberal age: the age of manufacturing in the global south, of de-industrialisation in the global north, of the dismantling of welfare states, and the privatising of state-owned industries, services, and land.

The reason for emphasising this is that it is clear that capitalism, by virtue of historical fact, is incapable of either solving or resolving the issues of the people and the environmental emergency as well as resolving its own internal contradictions and crisis. The choice for capitalism and capitalists will always be to save themselves, save their wealth, even going so far as jeopardising the planetary system in pursuit of their private accumulation of capital and wealth.

The question is, How do we present an alternative to capitalism that is in tandem with the people's state of defence yet is capable of stretching the horizon of workers' demands, and advancing towards a programme for socialist revolution and a socialist mode of production?

I would argue that the best way forward—that open space between A and B—is to popularise a transformative democratic programme that lays open an expansion of the democratic demands of the working class towards socialist revolution and socialist construction. The time has passed for thinking about separate campaigns that deal with one particular issue: we must begin to link the individual struggles (e.g. the Debenham strike) with the broader class struggle (company profits over workers' livelihoods) and explicitly expose this in any and all campaign literature.



Source: “Profitability, crises and inequality: some heterodox views,” Michael Roberts blog (<https://tinyurl.com/yxf3lexj>).

**CONTINUES OVERLEAF**



## Dreaming of 'liberal socialism'

**DÓNAL Ó COISDEALBHA**

**I**N SEPTEMBER the former Greek minister of finance and self-described “libertarian Marxist” Yanis Varoufakis published his vision of a post-capitalist world in his new book, *Another Now*. He has explained that his motivation for writing the book stems from his belief that Marxists have yet to set out a detailed plan for how a socialist economy and society might function,

dismissing from the outset a return to post-war social democracy and what he calls “Soviet-like barracks socialism.”

Despite this strange unwillingness to seriously engage with the history of the past century, there is still much to recommend about Varoufakis’s blueprint.

The labour market is to be abolished and replaced with an eco-system of “corpo-syndicalist” firms that are owned on a workers’ co-operative basis, where every individual owns a single non-transferable share. Central banks are to

issue every citizen with a bank account, facilitating their ability to receive a dividend payment from the company they work for along with a universal basic income. Value-added tax and income tax would be abolished and replaced with a 5 per cent tax on company revenue. To avoid international balance of payments crises, all trade and movement of funds between countries would be denominated in an international unit of account, and trade imbalances would incur fines.

## From A to B

**CONTINUED** We must veer our course towards political class struggle, encapsulating the systemic nature of our problems and our interconnectedness and interdependence, from health to housing, from industry to agriculture, from energy to transport, and everything in between.

The weakness of just seeking reforms within the system is that it excludes a distinctive class and anti-imperialist line of analysis and understanding, because the target of the demand is not striking at the class nature of the state, and those who dominate class power, but concentrates on how the resources of the capitalist state are distributed, or are being stripped and privatised.

So, rather than developing a class-consciousness that will move us from point A to point B, it will in fact stunt that development and keep us in a perpetual state of A.

We have already mentioned just how adaptable the ruling class are at appeasing various elements of the people’s demands; so, in the absence of a conscious effort of an organised working class, reforms will be cherry-picked by governments in power to damp down the most threatening forces. It is the old and simple but effective strategy of divide and conquer.

At the last national congress of the CPI the party emphasised the triple lock of imperialism in this country: British imperialism (occupation and partition), European imperialism (treaties and EU Central Bank), and US imperialism (foreign direct investment and the military use of Shannon Airport). The democratic demands of the people—

ensuring food, housing and health security, nationalising and enshrining in our constitution public resources, services, amenities, and industries, securing welfare and social safety nets, improving and updating infrastructure and transport systems, moving towards green energy and zero-carbon economies, imposing a progressive tax system, ensuring union rights, recognition and progressive legislation, among others—will be hampered on different levels and for different reasons by this triple lock, a triple block in preventing our people having the democratic and sovereign right to enact and secure such demands.

Within each of these democratic demands lies a transformative element that can turn a simple reform into an opportunity to deepen and develop class-consciousness and democratic principles and practices. It is up to the most conscious members of the class



# First and foremost, any imagined “socialism” must be considered within the context of existing material conditions.

So far, so promising; but, as with so many “libertarian socialist” visions of the past, there are some major problems with Varoufakis’s conception.

First and foremost, any imagined “socialism” must be considered within the context of existing material conditions. As a Marxist, Varoufakis should know that the dictatorship of the proletariat is a purely practical proposition, and that the state cannot be neutral. The idea that a parliament can pass legislation on corporate governance and the ownership class will simply allow their private control over wealth-producing processes to be socialised into co-operatives makes his path to “feasible socialism” naïve to the point of absurdity.

Secondly, his insistence on discarding “authoritarian” state involvement from the outset leaves his system as essentially “socialism without a rational plan.” His “corpo-syndicalist” firms would be operating in a market economy ruled by the “anarchy of production” problem. Worker-owners would predictably compete as best they could to maintain and expand their market position by working longer hours and automating production while suppressing their own wages, just so that they could afford to work even longer hours and hope to

put their competitors out of business, all while trying to secure the cheapest input commodities from abroad and eventually becoming monopoly market players.

Were co-operative ownership simply to be generalised you would have a situation where—as with capitalist firms today—some corpo-syndicalist companies would be highly profitable and enjoy high barriers to entry, offering good pay and benefits to their worker-owners, while the majority of such firms would offer low-wage service-sector jobs, resulting in new stratifications of society, albeit not based on different social relations to the means of production but on degrees of personal access to jobs in the most profitable regions and corporate sectors.

Finally, Varoufakis proposes a payment system in which each worker-owner in each firm is given a stock of 100 “merit points,” which they can award to their colleagues directly—taking into consideration how hard they have worked for the company during the year and therefore deciding how large their company bonus will be. As he says, “*if three per cent of a firm’s overall merit points are awarded to, say, Harriet, Harriet collects three per cent of the firm’s total bonus fund.*”

Here we must be charitable and assume that he has simply never worked in a company before. The idea that even in a middle-sized productive unit of several hundred people you would be intimately familiar with, and capable of assessing, every other worker’s level of dedication and industriousness is frankly laughable. This strikes me as being comparable to the neo-classical assumption that every consumer in the world obtains perfect market knowledge before they make a purchase.

Such “liberal socialist” and “market socialist” visions, at first glance, appear to offer both the liberty of personal choice and socialist construction. However, and I think most damningly, despite “left communists” and anarchists having all the mental space in the world to be as utopian and unmoored from our present material reality as they can be, their dreams end up squandering the whole point of socialism anyway: freedom. That is to say, the creation of an economy where every step forward in our collective knowledge and productive capacity results not in more but less necessary labour for the reproduction of the whole of society, and more time for leisure, research, discovery, and the enjoyment of a meaningful life. ★

to lay out the transformative demands. These stretch the envelope of working-class demands, because they are shaped by the most class-conscious section of the working class, bringing into clearer focus the conflict that exists within class relations. They are born and are developed from the reformist demands of the people but are then shaped by applying Marxist-Leninist theory to form transformative and revolutionary demands. Given the context of the demand, campaigns built on these can become part of the overall anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle of the people.

The key is in how we construct our demands, which are in keeping with and are complementary to the demands of the wider working class and its forces but also instinctively create a separation from the insular reformist demand, to develop into a broader transformative demand and

campaign. Only by the active organisational engagement, education and action of the CPI and other class-conscious forces with the wider working class can we hope to achieve and build a movement broad, disciplined and strong enough to be willing to demand, support and defend a socialist programme and ultimately a socialist revolution.

Moreover, as single issues, capitalist governments would actually find it difficult to implement transformative demands without undermining the structures and rules imposed by the imperialist powers and the native capitalist ruling class. That, however, is the point in making these demands, as it exposes the fundamentally undemocratic nature of how our country is run and exposes the interests that these policies and rules actually favour.

More importantly, the people demanding them will have deepened

their class-consciousness, which goes beyond the mere reform of the system. Individually and as a totality they are transformative, because capitalism is incapable of conceding these demands without jeopardising their own structure and ultimately jeopardising the sustainability of capitalist profit, leading to a crisis within the system. So, what is good for the people becomes a crisis for the system, and what is good for the system becomes a crisis for the people.

It is the antagonistic nature of the capitalist class system that prohibits the reconciliation of this internal contradiction. But before we grandstand the cause for socialism, our ultimate goal, we must forge among the people popular support for a tangible programme of democratic demands—a transformative democratic programme. Within this programme I believe lies that transitional space between A and B. ★

## Bolivia victory gives renewed hope

**DORIAN Ó SEANÁIN**

THE VICTORY of the Movement for Socialism (MAS) in the Bolivian general election in October is a great result for the popular forces in Bolivia as well as anti-imperialist forces in Latin America and around the world.

Following the coup and the exile of President Evo Morales in November of 2019, the attempts by the regime of Jeanine Áñez to criminalise the struggles of the working class and Indigenous peoples of Bolivia has failed to defeat the MAS electorally. The Bolivian army's leadership has been thoroughly discredited, having backed last year's coup. The newly elected government of Luis Arce, a former minister of the economy under Morales, must purge the army and the state forces in order to restore its credibility in the eyes of the Bolivian people.

Last November's coup was justified by a fraudulent audit by the Organisation of American States that claimed the MAS had manipulated the election of October 2019. The OAS has long been little more than an agent for Yankee-imposed "regime change" in Latin America. So inconsistent was the OAS audit that even members of the US Congress have pointed to irregularities.

The ousting of Morales was backed by Christian fascist groups motivated by an intense hatred of the Indigenous "heathens," who form the backbone of the popular forces.

The racist regime has responded disastrously to the covid-19 pandemic, leaving Bolivia in third place out of 150 countries in the number of people per million who have died from covid. The coup leadership has persecuted Indigenous Bolivians, and state forces have perpetrated at least two massacres against them, killing twenty-two people.

Áñez has pressured prosecutors to conduct investigations into more than a hundred people linked to the Morales government on charges of supposed sedition. Even now former electoral officials remain under house arrest in Bolivia, based on nothing more than the sham OAS audit of the 2019 election.

The Bolivian elections have significant implications for the balance of

forces in Latin America. Twenty-one years ago Hugo Chávez rose to power in Venezuela. There was much talk at the time about "socialism of the twenty-first century." In 2002 Chávez was reinstated following a failed US-backed coup.

The Venezuelan government lifted millions of people out of poverty, but it did not encroach on the power of the pro-US comprador class, which had ruled the country for decades. The destabilisation of Venezuela orchestrated by right-wing forces since Maduro took office showed that this was a serious error.

But the Bolivarian movement is still in power in Venezuela; and the efforts to sabotage Bolivia's democracy have been dealt a crushing blow. Bolivia will now re-establish good relations with Venezuela, and is likely to ally itself with left-wing governments in Mexico and Argentina.

Twenty years ago the United States was still celebrating the "end of history"; its disastrous "war on terror" had yet to be declared. But the United States no longer has the same vice-grip on its so-called "back yard" in Latin America. It is an empire in terminal decline.

The experiences of Latin American countries offer compelling evidence of the nature of state power and the

severe limits of the electoral process for overthrowing the capitalist system. The forces of reaction will regroup unless the popular governments in Bolivia and Venezuela destroy the material basis of the power of landlords, commodity barons and agricultural monopolies by taking industries into public ownership and liquidating internal enemies, who are more than prepared to engage in violence with weapons purchased from their imperialist masters.

Furthermore, communist and anti-imperialist movements must scrutinise their own strategies for building working-class power. The essential difference is between transformative demands and reformist ones. Capitalist states can tolerate a shift to the left in their parliaments, for this is just one component of where state power lies. Transformative demands undermine the dictatorship of capital and strengthen the hand of the working class; reformist ones can be accommodated by the state without altering its nature or the balance of class forces in the slightest.

The ruling class is not infallible, and as the present crisis of capitalism deepens its weaknesses as much as the strengths of the popular forces must be seized on by those who want to achieve socialism. ★

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