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“Covid-19 has exposed the lie that free markets can deliver health care for all, the fiction that unpaid care work isn’t work, the delusion that we live in a post-racist world. We are all floating on the same sea, but some are in super-yachts and others clinging to drifting debris.”
António Guterres, secretary-general of the United Nations, 18 July 2020.

Universal Basic Income is a trap

It means a massive transfer of wealth from the poorest to the wealthiest, and the privatisation of the remainder of state services **Jimmy Doran** reports *p2*



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43 East Essex Street Dublin
D02 XH96 (01) 6708707



Universal Basic Income will not be a helping hand to working people but is a Trojan horse for the capitalist class that would allow governments to replace basic services argues **Jimmy Doran**

THE OUTBREAK of covid-19 has exposed the glaring inequality in housing, health, education and work in Ireland and around the so-called “developed world.” This has led to renewed calls from some quarters for a universal basic income for all citizens.

Some of those proposing this are well intentioned and believe it is a means of ending inequality and poverty. The reality is that it would do neither: what it would do is provide a means for a massive transfer of wealth from the poorest to the wealthiest, and the privatisation of the remainder of state services.

The original social-democratic UBI proposal was seen as an addition to

Take the money—and hide it! or Socialism for all? Not quite.

DECLAN MCKENNA

ABOUT 66,500 companies received a total of €2.9 billion from the now-expired temporary wage subsidy scheme. The state paid out €2.9 billion of public money to mostly private companies to pay the wages of 664,000 employees; and that extraordinary news made the headlines for about eighteen hours. After that you had to search it out and would mostly

find it in the finance sections of the media.

The fact that capitalism had collapsed, and had to rely on state handouts of public money, barely caused a ripple on the “news” front. There were no long opinion or analysis pieces, not even an acknowledgement of the role the state played not only in the support of wages for workers but for the enormous pay-out and bail-out enjoyed by the mostly private sector.

In UBI, capitalists have seen a fertile ground from which to take over all state assets and have insinuated themselves into the debate, waiting to pounce.

welfare payments that would greatly assist the most vulnerable citizens. Unfortunately the greedy eye of capitalism, as always, sees an opportunity to turn this to their advantage.

In 1791 Theobald Wolfe Tone wrote in the “Manifesto to the Friends of Freedom in Ireland”: *“When the aristocracy come forward, the people fall backward; when the people come forward, the aristocracy, fearful of being left behind, insinuate themselves into our ranks and rise into timid leaders or treacherous auxiliaries.”*

The language is a little archaic but the sentiment is as real today as it was all those years ago. In UBI, capitalists have seen a fertile ground from which to take over all state assets and have insinuated themselves into the debate, waiting to pounce.

The well-intentioned section of the UBI lobby must take into account the political system of government under which we in Ireland, and for that matter the rest of the developed world, live. We live in a neoliberal imperialist world, where the dominant political approach is one that favours low tax, free-market capitalism, business deregulation, and privatisation, coupled with the withdrawal of governments from the provision of public services.

This proposal is a Trojan horse for the capitalist class. Make no mistake: if it were to be introduced it would not be a helping hand to the most vulnerable in society; it would be a method whereby governments could withdraw from the provision of all public services. All would be privatised, one by one, and handed over to the real power-brokers of the developed world: transnational corporations and finance capital.

The government would replace its social responsibilities with a universal basic income. As each service is privatised, UBI would be increased slightly and temporarily, until the next crisis in the boom-and-bust cycle of capitalism. That crisis would then be used as an excuse for reducing UBI to a more acceptable level for the capitalist class.

The mass privatisation of services would lead to the transfer of all state assets to private hands, in a flooding up of wealth not seen since the glory days of colonial plunder by what is now classed as the “developed world.” As governments withdraw from the provision of services, taxes would be slashed for business, leading to even higher profits for capital.

If that were not enough, the most vulnerable, who it was hoped UBI would help, would hand over their UBI payments to the capitalist class in the form of private rents, private health services, and the plethora of other services they will seize in the privatisation of state assets.

Instead of UBI, workers should have UPS—universal public services. With all the wealth that is produced by workers, the very minimum that the state should guarantee is universal public health, housing, and education, coupled with a state guarantee of a job, whereby all workers have the protection of a union with full collective bargaining rights.

Society was not built by corporations or governments: it was built by workers. How can there be no jobs when we have a housing crisis, a health crisis, overcrowded schoolrooms, and inadequate infrastructure, from water to broadband, and much more. Work

should be decided according to the needs of society, not the profit needs of business. So long as work is dependent on someone else’s profits it will never get done. Resources will be wasted, manufacturing yet another brand of paint, yoghurt, toothpaste—whatever it takes to fill the bank accounts of the elite.

The provision of a universal public health service, housing and education is one of the basic necessities for having a healthy, well-educated society capable of working to produce for the needs of society and creating the wealth to provide those services.

Many on the left, just as with UBI, have been convinced by treacherous auxiliaries insinuated into our ranks into believing that there is no alternative to the 12½ per cent corporation tax, that if it were to be increased there would be an exodus of foreign direct investment. That investment came here to benefit from our young, educated and skilled work force. They are receiving the benefits of our young people for an illusory 12½ per cent tax. The great majority pay only a tiny percentage; some pay next to nothing.

During a recent court case in New York it was revealed that Coca-Cola paid a mere 1.4 per cent tax on profits in Ireland, out of \$7.2 billion, over the three years 2007–09, robbing the Irish people of \$800 million—all facilitated by the Irish state.

We need to build an economy for the common good, where everyone benefits and nobody is left behind, an Ireland where we can all reach our full potential, where we all work with each other, for each other, collectively, not just to benefit a tiny elite. ★

Such deserving causes as Irish Cement, Goodbody Stockbrokers, Anglo Beef Processors, Aer Lingus, Cityjet and the Irish Times stretched out their greedy claws to compete with essential services such as Bus Éireann, Iarnród Éireann, RTE and thousands of smaller companies to pocket public funds at a time when that money could and should have been used for public health and the provision of other essential services.

Not only did they take the money but then they hid the fact—aided and abetted by our mass media and their compliant “journalists”—that capitalism could not last a day without state support.

Nobody understands socialism more than these vultures, and the phrase “socialism for the rich” has never had a better chance of being exposed. Of course it was not exposed, but just round the corner there will be plenty of news about

social welfare “fraud.” Fraud? €2.9 billion is simply an extraordinary continuation of “supports” and “incentives” poured out every day to subsidise capitalism. €2,900,000,000 is a lot of money; but our media and their “journalists” could not find a cent gone astray.

When they go looking they will look in all the wrong places. And “socialism for the rich” will keep giving and giving as the vultures keep taking and taking. ★

A programme for the 21st century

TOMMY McKEARNEY

OVER RECENT years a discernible pattern has been emerging in many of those countries that the BBC likes to describe as “parliamentary democracies.” Long-established precedents are being flouted by elected power-brokers in the leading capitalist states.

While those who govern on behalf of capitalism have never been reluctant to subvert common law or to ruthlessly employ force illegally, there was for decades a degree of regulation. More like honour among thieves than anything ethical, it served as a *modus vivendi* that maintained a working consensus within capitalist ruling classes, both nationally and internationally.

Over the past decade, though, this convention has been breaking down. The most spectacular example was evident in the United States during the presidency of Donald Trump. The list of his norm-breaking is lengthy: reneging on a multilateral treaty with Iran, withdrawing from the Paris climate accord, blatant malpractice leading to impeachment, and the astonishing refusal to accept election results.

Not to be outdone, the British have also broken with established protocols. The Internal Market Bill gives ministers the ability to bypass international law, while Boris Johnson contemptuously overturned long-standing precedent by ignoring a damning report accusing his home secretary of bullying a civil servant.

Among other notable nonconformists there is the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, negating legal norms, and the Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, speaking warmly of the old military dictatorship.

While maybe not on the same scale, the phenomenon has not passed Ireland by. Take the judicial system for a start. There was a time some decades ago when republicans didn’t recognise the authority of judges sitting in Dublin; yet never could anyone have imagined that forty years later a Supreme Court judge would tell the chief justice that he didn’t recognise his authority either. Few other incidents better illustrate the essential nature of the 26-County state. With government in endless disarray, this pillar of the establishment rudely displays the ruling class’s sense of entitlement and indeed contempt for the general public.

Not that the Woulfe is alone in holding this view. Exposed as having improperly shared confidential and restricted Government documents with one of his pals, the state’s taoiseach-in-waiting, Leo Varadkar, spun the Dáil a yarn, and walked away scot-free. In spite of committing an offence that would have had a junior civil servant summarily dismissed, the leader of Fine Gael disingenuously claimed he was acting in the national interest. As a result, he retained the full confidence of his coalition partners, Fianna Fáil and the Green Tories.



Nor does it stop at that in this, the “best wee country in the world to do business in.”

There is the jaw-dropping hubris of the “wham-bam, charge them what we can” company entrusted with building the long-awaited children’s hospital in Dublin. This project is supposedly under review by the minister for public expenditure, Michael McGrath. In spite of McGrath’s undoubtedly scrupulous supervision, the project remains a vehicle for the redistribution of taxpayers’ wealth upwards to the super-rich.

These are only some of the more egregious and outrageous recent examples of the arrogance and the incestuous nature of Ireland’s ruling class. Not only are we witness to the machinations of a deeply flawed system but we are also watching as the so-called guardians of constitutional probity break their own rules. In reality, a system that has been shaped to serve the interests of the Irish bourgeoisie is

Who said that?

DECLAN McKENNA

“We’ve never had this dilemma between health and the economy. Obviously, the restrictive measures we’ve adopted . . . have had an economic impact but there’s no room for doubt that health comes first.”
Alejandro Gil Fernández, Cuban minister of economy and planning.

“We are used to financial institutions making honest efforts to bankrupt themselves. AIB did so on three separate occasions. It is not something we should be surprised at . . . We, the people of Ireland, have no reason to believe the AIB will ever cop themselves on, because we will bail them out. History speaks for itself.”

Judge Seán Ó Donnabháin, judging a fraud case where AIB did not even realise it was being defrauded.

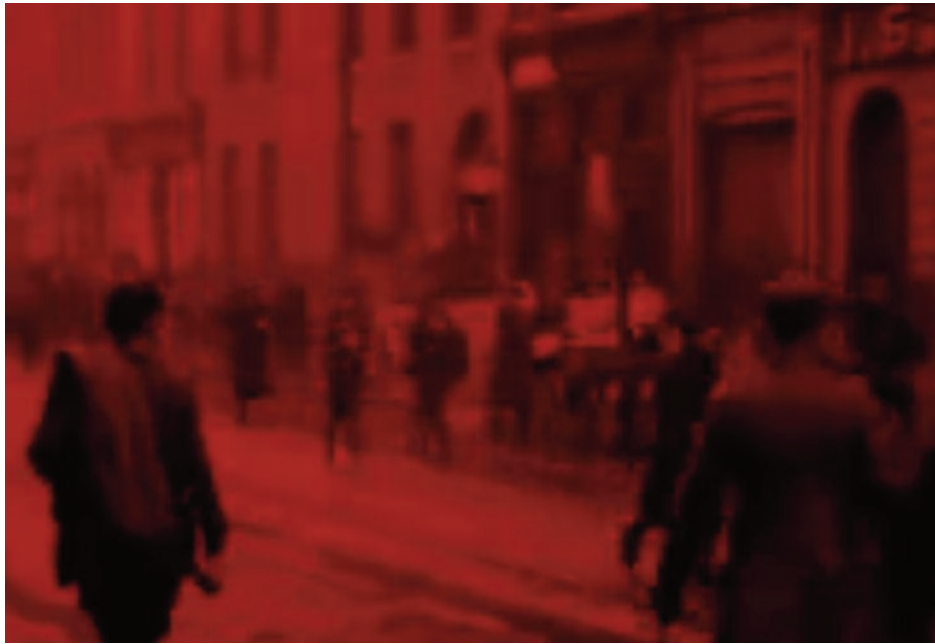
“Joe Biden isn’t an empty white sheet—he represents the Democratic Party, who in the 1990s destroyed the Charter of the UN.”

Willy Wimmer, former vice-president of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

“We reaffirm our absolute conviction that only cooperation and international solidarity can save humanity.”

José Angel Portal Miranda, Cuban minister of public health.

Allowing for local peculiarities, there is ample evidence of a global pattern forming, a pattern indicating a distinct phase in existing capitalism and something pointing to a developing crisis



struggling to retain its hegemony and indeed legitimacy after a difficult decade of austerity, exacerbated recently by fall-out from the covid-19 pandemic.

Of course anything the Southern establishment can do the DUP in Stormont can do even worse. With the covid pandemic surging out of control and Northern hospitals struggling to cope, Arlene Foster and her group of MLAs took contempt for democracy and decency to a new level. Faced with a call for a circuit-breaking lockdown from every other party in the Assembly, the misnamed Democratic Unionists employed the “petition of concern” to block the demand. Notwithstanding that Foster and her cronies were forced into a humiliating U-turn a few days later, the fact that the right wing of unionism would and could prevent the enactment of a crucial measure designed to protect the basic health and well-being of the local population raises further questions about the very viability of the Six-County state.

“The sovereignty of national governments takes second place to the political demands of their true masters at the European Commission.”

Damian Wilson on RT, commenting on a simple qualified majority of EU member-states, only 15 of the now 27 replacing unanimity in imposing its decisions on member-states.

Allowing for local peculiarities, there is ample evidence of a global pattern forming, a pattern indicating a distinct phase in existing capitalism and something pointing to a developing crisis. Fearful of the influence of the emerging economic powerhouse, China, yet unwilling to forgo superprofits by domestic investment in infrastructural and social wage projects, the political wing of capitalism is growing dangerously reckless.

Working-class communities everywhere have suffered as a result of the decade-long period of austerity following the economic crash of 2008. Understandably, many people in these communities are becoming frustrated. In the midst of this angst, and taking advantage of the absence of a strong socialist alternative movement, right-wing demagoguery has flourished. As in the past, it does so with the connivance of big capital.

All of which raises the question of how Ireland’s left and progressives

“The situation in Nicaragua . . . continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security *and foreign policy* [our emphasis] of the United States.” **Donald Trump** on extending US illegal coercive measures against Nicaragua for another year.

should respond to what is likely to become an ever more serious problem.

Clearly there is some advantage in publicising the transgressions of the ruling class, if only as a means of informing the wider public. There is a limit, however, to what can be achieved by trying to challenge the bourgeoisie in their own chosen theatres of operation. A more potent strategy is required, and one that lays the theoretical foundation for a strong left-wing alternative.

There is need for a programme that promises to bring about fundamental systemic change—a programme that defines sovereign democracy as one where decisions are made by the people, in the people’s interest; a programme unambiguous about bringing an end to partition; a programme that places the means of production, distribution and exchange in the hands of the people; a programme that understands neutrality to mean ending US military involvement in Shannon Airport and No to NATO in Ireland, north and south.

Last year in Liberty Hall the Peadar O’Donnell Socialist Republican Forum presented the basis for such a programme to a large gathering from around the country. The document, entitled “A Democratic Programme for a New Century,” was well received and broadly endorsed.

The Forum does not insist that its proposals are the definitive, last word on this matter. Seeing it instead as a valuable discussion document, the Forum plans to begin a series of open discussions on this theme early next year. ★

Make a note in your diary, and watch this space for details of time and venue.

“Fidel Castro . . . adored Maradona, once taking off his military jacket and draping it around Maradona’s shoulder. It was one of the most touching of their encounters. The adoration was mutual. Maradona was to his core a revolutionary man.”

George Galloway

Examining the contours of a developing crisis



EOIN McDERMOTT

Measuring social unrest

VISIBLE MANIFESTATIONS of social unrest have decreased considerably during the pandemic as people are unable to meet, organise, or travel. This is shown by research conducted by the International Monetary Fund (fig. 1) comparing major social unrest events with mobility data. Normality may be suspended to a large degree, but the fortuitous reprise this brings for unpopular governments, such as our own, will not last for ever.

An end to this pandemic fortunately appears to be on the distant horizon as multiple vaccines move towards mass production—but the economic crisis, which will continue to unfold after the pandemic, will not be as easy to fix.

As life regains a sense of normality we can expect civil unrest on a global scale to resume where it left off, now exacerbated by the fact that we find ourselves in the first act of the next, and long-due, crisis of capitalism.

This economic crisis will heighten many underlying contradictions within capitalist economies, such as our own—the very contradictions that led to growing unrest before the pandemic. These contradictions include the unsustainable increase in corporate debt, which threatens the viability of businesses as well as financial systems, in addition to significant levels of unemployment that will emerge from the destruction of capital as well as seven years of technological adoption which has been rapidly forced on businesses since the pandemic began¹—accelerating the productivity and hence the rate at which relative surplus value is extracted from workers.²

Potential causes of future unrest

There are a number of potential catalysts for future unrest worth monitoring, two of which are addressed here. These are steps likely to be taken by capitalist states in an attempt to avoid fiscal and sovereign debt crises. In the 26 Counties we have almost four times as much gross general government debt (GGD) and over six times more net GGD than we had before the last crisis, as seen in table 1.

Table 1: General government net debt (€ million)

2007	28,664	2013	161,548
2008	43,051	2014	167,440
2009	62,977	2015	172,815
2010	111,417	2016	176,643
2011	135,654	2017	175,695
2012	152,282	2018	177,309
Source: CSO.		2019	175,796

While Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil obscure the truth by pretending that the economy is in good health and our debt is manageable as a percentage of GDP, the truth is that we are in considerably worse shape facing into this crisis than we were in 2008. To offer a stark contrast, our GGD stands at €204 billion—exactly the same as Poland's GGD in

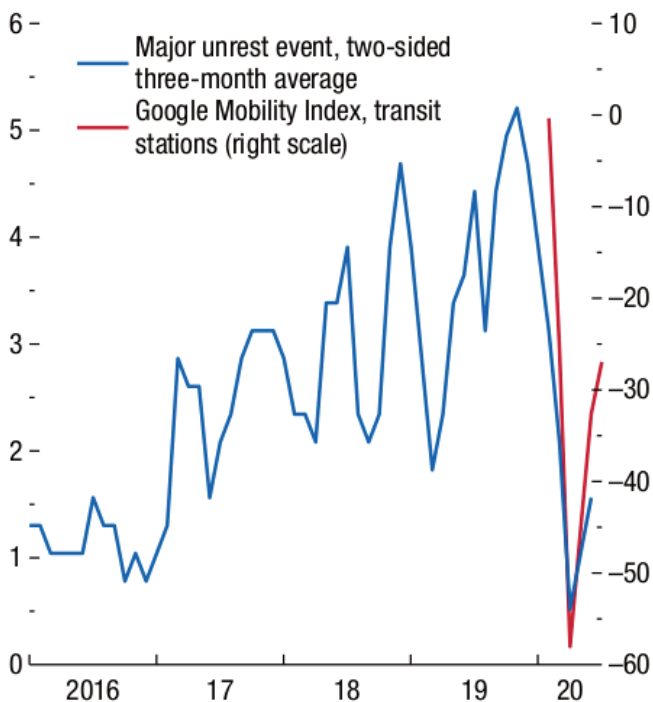


Fig. 1: Monthly share of countries experiencing unrest implied by the reported social unrest index (percentage deviation from baseline on right-hand scale) Source: IMF World Economic Outlook, October 2020, p. 40.

The choice of more austerity is not a “bad” decision on the part of otherwise well-meaning politicians: it will be a necessity.

2014.³ A population of 4.9 million people is expected to shoulder the same burden of debt by the EU as a population of 38 million people.

Capitalist solution to avoiding a sovereign debt crisis

As if this wasn't bad enough, a recent IMF report states that

*sovereign debt to GDP in advanced economies is projected to rise by 20 percentage points to about 125 percent of GDP by the end of 2021 . . . **The high fraction of tax revenue absorbed by debt service will necessarily mean that there is less revenue left over for critical areas, including social spending needs** [emphasis added].*

The high levels of debt inherited from the last crisis, in tandem with more debt being accrued during the pandemic, leads one to the correct conclusion that, under capitalism, austerity is the only option for avoiding a sovereign debt crisis. The choice of more austerity is not a “bad” decision on the part of otherwise well-meaning politicians: it will be a necessity.

The servicing of odious debt, accrued to prop up the interests of capital during crises, current and past, will take precedence over the needs of the people. The only response to these calls for austerity is to repudiate the debt and seek to build a socialist economy, an economy capable of rational planning and allocation to meet the needs of all—not an irrational and dangerous system that breeds poverty and inequality.

Fiscal crisis

Inherently tied to the issue of debt is the fiscal crisis we find ourselves in. This year the government borrowed €20.5 billion to keep the country operating during the pandemic, running a deficit of 5.7 per cent of GDP.⁵ This level of borrowing was unthinkable not long ago, because of the Fiscal Compact, which penalises EU members from running budget deficits in excess of 3 per cent of GDP.

The EU, which enforced this arbitrary rule with an iron fist during the last crisis, is now choosing to temporarily ignore this rule when national governments need to accrue debt to support their indigenous capitalist class. In doing so it attempts to present itself as the benevolent saviour during this crisis. As the IMF notes, this leniency will not last:

Where fiscal rules may constrain action, their temporary suspension would be warranted, combined with a commitment to a gradual consolidation path after the crisis abates to restore compliance with the rules over the medium term.

As always, austerity will return as a solution to the need to return to balanced budgets. The old rules are likely to come back into force, and public expenditure will once more be denied, not on the basis of outright ideological opposition but of “apolitical” technocratic arguments. Cuts will be presented as necessary to balance the budget, and the

mantra of “There is no alternative” will be revived once more.

Additionally, support for unemployed workers is likely to be contingent on a non-existent “fiscal space,” driving wages downwards and placing great pressure on the labour movement.

*Because the transition may take a while, displaced workers will need extended income support as they retrain and search for jobs. Complementing such measures, broad-based accommodative monetary and fiscal responses—**where fiscal space exists** [emphasis added]—can help prevent deeper and longer-lasting downturns.*

We know this song well. The only question we have to ask ourselves this time is, What will we do differently?

Conclusion

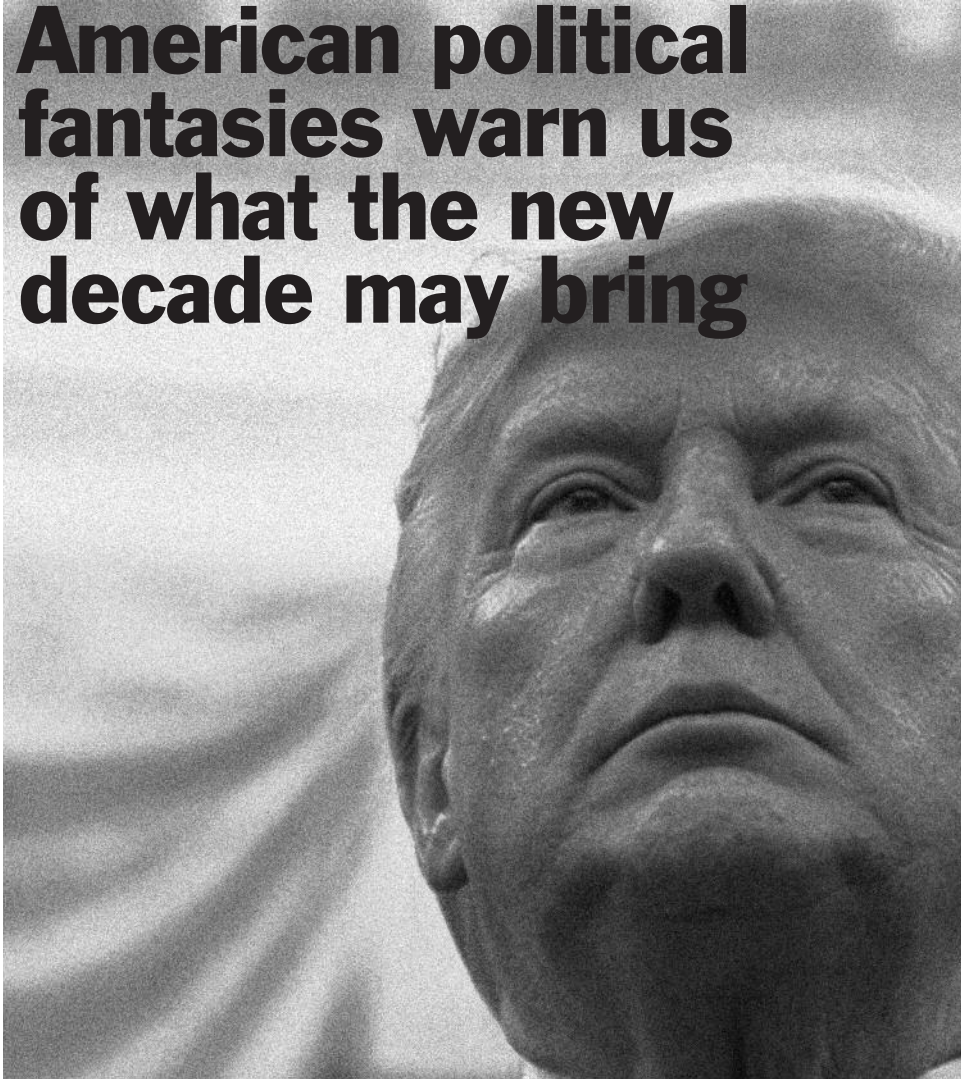
Within the communist movement and the broader left we must emphasise the need to act collectively with a common strategy. The article “The Industrial Relations Act must go” in *Socialist Voice*, November 2020,⁸ offers a concrete example of such a vision for regaining the tools required for collective action after decades of relative passivity. If we fail to act as a collective, whether as persons or institutions, we can expect to face the same levels of success as during the last crisis, if not worse.

We require a national strategy that is capable of exposing the supposedly neutral, apolitical economic expertise being adopted by this coalition of property developers, Blueshirts and bike-riding neoliberals for what it is: expert advice on the implementation of class war. Unfortunately it is a war in which we are firmly on the back foot. To combat this we require an educated, disciplined party working with the guidance of competent and democratically accountable national leadership to build class-consciousness in our wider communities.

Thankfully, we are firmly on the path towards all these goals, though there is much work still to be done. The immediate future will offer many challenges and is likely to bring with it significant social unrest. Fortunately, those challenges will provide opportunities for the growth and development of the CPI and the wider left and—if we can rise to the task—a hope for a better future for Ireland as a whole. ★

- 1 McKinsey & Company, “How covid-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point—and transformed business forever” (<https://tinyurl.com/yye68enm>).
- 2 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, chap. 12.
- 3 Eurostat, “General government gross debt: Annual data” (<https://tinyurl.com/y6ll5nue>).
- 4 International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook*, October 2020, p. 13.
- 5 Paschal Donohoe, “Statement of the Minister for Finance,” 13 October 2020 (<https://tinyurl.com/y3p2for8>).
- 6 International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook*, October 2020, p. xvii.
- 7 International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook*, October 2020, p. xvii.
- 8 Jimmy Doran, “The Industrial Relations Act must go,” *Socialist Voice*, November 2020 (<https://tinyurl.com/yw7ckfy>).

American political fantasies warn us of what the new decade may bring



DÓNAL Ó COISDEALBHA

“The people who run this country have run out of workable myths with which to distract the public, and in a moment of extreme crisis have chosen to stoke civil war and defame the rest of us—black and white—rather than admit to a generation of corruption, betrayal, and mismanagement.”—Matt Taibbi, American author and journalist.

THE RECENT defeat of Donald Trump in the US presidential election is interesting for a number of reasons. As in 2016, he greatly outperformed his standing in the opinion polls, and in the end only a few hundred thousand votes in several crucial states made the difference. That he almost won is truly extraordinary, in the midst of a pandemic that has so far killed about 270,000 American people and that was handled by his government not only incompetently but with the most incredible callousness.

In normal times the current economic slump alone, the mass unemployment and the explosion of poverty and hardship that comes with it would be enough to ruin any candidate’s chances completely; but

The left, human rights, and class

GRAHAM HARRINGTON

DURING THE second half of the twentieth century there was an ideological shift within the left in the West, namely from being the organised expression of the working class to seeing the working class as one among a variety of interest groups to be defended.

The interests of any collective group were gradually subordinated to the rights of the individual. People’s politics became more a statement of their individual identity than one of collective conviction.

In today’s popular understanding, the left is essentially an umbrella term for people who uphold the rights of minority groups within society. It is true, to an extent, that the goal of the left has always been to represent doubly oppressed sections of the working class, such as women, youth, racial minorities, etc. This should not be in contention. A pillar of our ideology is solidarity.

Liberalism is not a lesser evil but a right-wing ideology. However, much as Catholicism had, it has a substantial backing among our class nowadays. We must engage with people where they are but at the same time not be held back by what is the dominant ideology. Oppression and exploitation are not the results of the abstract negative features of human nature but of real material interests: of capitalism.

In the counter-culture of the 1960s various tendencies and movements came to the fore, with protests against the Vietnam War, second-wave feminism, youth rebellion, drug culture

and struggles for racial equality forming the backdrop to the movements for “civil rights.” Equality became the new watchword for many of these movements, mostly led by the restless and youthful middle classes.

What was missing, particularly in the USA, was a strong Communist Party to give these flourishing movements direction. This was a direct result of McCarthyism and Red Scare campaigns to crush the communist movement and separate it from the working class, preventing the working-class movement from being strengthened by communist leadership.

As a result, all sorts of esoteric political tendencies—Maoism, Trotskyism, “left communism,” etc.—emerged and made political interventions in the various civil rights struggles. What they all shared was an inability to create ideological clarity, and they served to create confusion more than anything else. The role of intelligence services, such as the CIA, in

The heart of the Republican Party now see themselves as an insurgency—and one that regards their new government as being entirely illegitimate.

clearly we do not live in normal times.

What may have seemed barely plausible even after the Great Recession is no longer in serious dispute: the United States, as a great power, is now in precipitous decline. The Democratic Party spends its time trying to invent all kinds of straw men to blame for the country's ever-deepening malaise, from foreign interference to "fake news," while refusing to even timidly question the corporate interests to which they are utterly beholden. They have the unmistakable appearance of a once-powerful political class that now inspires no-one and finds enthusiastic support nowhere—the Fianna Fáil of the United States.

The Republicans meanwhile have transformed themselves from being a roughly similar, if more socially conservative, outfit into a cult of personality round a single man, infused with the power of religious fanaticism and ultra-nationalism. This cult—for that is what it has largely become—also has its own fictional narratives to explain the world, likewise completely divorced from material reality, the most extreme of which is the Q-Anon conspiracy theory.

While the Democratic Party will celebrate their return to the presidency in January, they should not imagine that

this will be the end of the paralysis and national decline that gave life to Trumpism in the first place—indeed it is only likely to deepen.

The heart of the Republican Party now see themselves as an insurgency—and one that regards their new government as being entirely illegitimate. Losing political power will probably radicalise them further, in both theory and practice. Meanwhile the pieces for a general conflagration continue to fall into place. There are no longer "US media," a set of institutions that share a roughly similar view of the world—the empire's view: there are now two media. Similarly, the alignment of the "big tech" companies behind the Democratic Party is causing the bisection of the population's use of social media, along the same lines as those two, now irreconcilable, national factions.

The long and hot summer that followed the murder by the police of George Floyd, resulting in protests unprecedented in scale and intensity in modern times and leading to an additional twenty deaths and 14,000 arrests, were entirely beyond the control of the Democratic Party—or anyone else—and offered a glimpse of an organic progressive militancy, which will also not be going away.

We know that the crises in the political and social superstructure have their roots in the economic base, where all indicators appear to point to intensifying hardship and instability. The general stepping up of exploitation and precariousness in the conditions of labour that will be necessary to try to recover from the current economic crisis—the very degrading and performative nature of the low-wage, insecure services economy, and the extreme alienation that all this engenders—is akin to a dangerous mixture of unstable chemicals.

Even the loss of a common hegemonic narrative could be sustained so long as the economic base offered the promise of "upward social mobility" for at least a significant minority of citizens—but, as Nouriel Roubini spelled out earlier in the year in his article "Ten reasons why a Greater Depression for the 2020s is inevitable," the forecast for this has almost never been weaker; and in these circumstances we would do well to consider again those myths that are being created by the parties of capital to replace objective reality, and then bear in mind the words of Voltaire: "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." ★

subsidising various journals and groups only served to worsen the problem.

The result was that a "New Left" emerged that did not have any of the hangovers of the "Old Left," namely the working-class base as well as sympathy, if not support, for the Soviet Union. In return, the left became mainstream; the struggle for civil rights, equality under capitalism, became trendy and was embraced by many.

As a recent article in Telesur says, *One side, largely made up of social democrats, adopted human rights language as early as the 1970s and 80s since they reasoned it "could advance human equality and not just capitalism." Many even helped propel the fall of the USSR, claiming it failed to live up to human rights standards—moving away from legalistic and constitutional arguments. "If human rights are the only game in town, then you have to play it," said Moyn [the legal historian Samuel Moyn]. To access money, state backing and other*

resources, many found the choice obvious.

The result was that these groups and tendencies achieved very little, with the consequence that the struggles against racism, sexism and so on are still around today. What they did achieve was becoming the establishment they rebelled against. Today the left has more in common with this "New Left" tendency than ever before.

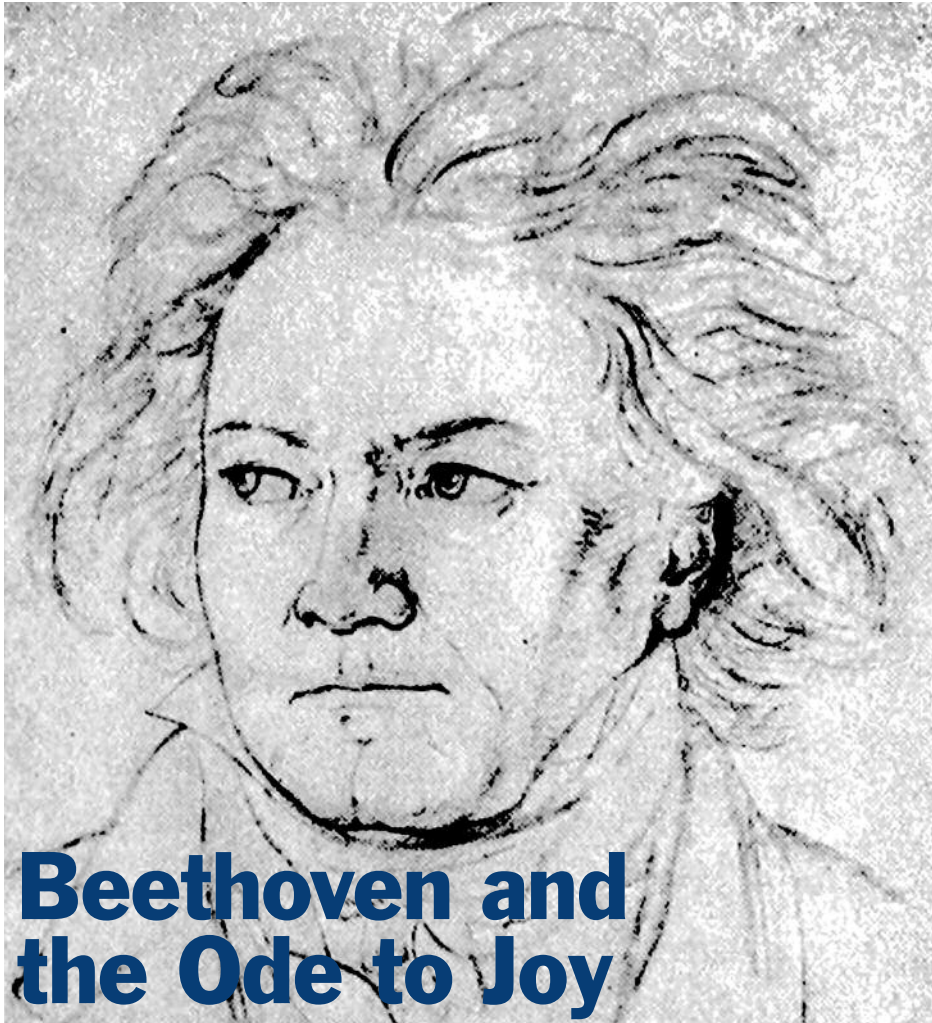
As it stands, much of the movement is still objectively tied to a desire for a nicer, fairer capitalism. Just look at the support for political leaders such as Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, or the likes of Bernie Sanders in the United States, among many so-called radicals. Essentially, the desire is for a sort of capitalism with a human face, which of course doesn't exist. It makes little difference to people being bombed if the workers who assembled the drones were unionised or had a free health service.

Indeed the struggle for so-called equality or human rights has become a

weapon of imperialism. The likes of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have proved invaluable for the empire's efforts to overthrow governments in Venezuela, Syria, Nicaragua, China, Iran, and elsewhere. The National Endowment for Democracy, often quoted by left-liberals, was set up by the well-known defender of human rights Ronald Reagan.

If the left is to provide effective solidarity to the working class in its variety, we need to reconnect with our roots. Class struggle cannot be limited to the number of characters in a Twitter post. Our objective should not be to reform capitalism but to overthrow it.

We need to struggle **with** our class, not against or around it. Where other countries face an ideological onslaught by imperialism, we need to draw a line in the sand and oppose it, not being afraid of being labelled or discredited. It is exactly this principle that makes a Communist Party a necessity. ★



Beethoven and the Ode to Joy

JENNY FARRELL

LIKE FEW other composers, Beethoven expresses the will for freedom, the democratic longing of the

people. His music is the continuation of the French Revolution through the means of art; his Ninth Symphony is a hymn to the humanist utopia of the equality of all humankind.

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

The Ninth Symphony was composed in 1823, but Beethoven had planned from his youth to set Schiller's "Ode to Joy" to music. Schiller's poem, expressing the aspiration of the age of revolutions, was close to his own thinking all his life.

The years since composing his Eighth Symphony had been times of bitter disappointment at the oppressive, reactionary political developments after the Congress of Vienna but also of personal suffering. They were also years of growing resistance to reaction, and the revival of the revolutionary ideals betrayed by the upper middle classes.

The Ninth Symphony symbolises powerfully the struggle through night into light, of progress against reaction, to which Beethoven dedicated his whole life and work. It is often expressed in a struggle between a dark minor key and a brilliant affirmative major key. The finale of the Ninth Symphony anticipates and celebrates the victory of this ideal: a future society in which freedom, equality, universal fellowship is fulfilled, in which Joy can reign.

The **first movement** portrays a great battle, heroic resistance against adverse conditions. Beethoven described Metternich's reactionary state as the "chaos and despair in which we live." This is enacted in the dark opening bars, and theme 1 is in despairing D minor. The heroic theme breaks through powerfully in B flat major, with a first

BOOKS

JENNY FARRELL

From the Plough to the Stars
An Anthology of Working People's Prose from Contemporary Ireland

"The cooks, the cleaners, the porters: Unsung heroes on the frontline," the *Irish Times* declared in early May 2020, suddenly recognising that a society cannot function without the working class, for just a brief moment the insight that these heroes were also the most disadvantaged class in our society.

In fifty contributions of short fiction and life writing the contributors to this anthology give voice to working people's experience in contemporary Ireland. The contributors hail from the whole of Ireland: rural or urban, female or male, younger or older, writing in Irish or English.

Writing in Irish, Celia de Fréine's article describes the pandemic as a brief breaking up of class rule, while in



At the beginning of the final movement Beethoven surveys the ground that has to be traversed in order to reach this utopia, the hard-won realm of joy and freedom.

anticipation of the Joy melody. This polarity between minor and major represents the symphony's two protagonists.

At the end of the movement the struggle has not been resolved; the state of "despair" is challenged, not eliminated. A solemn funeral march in D Minor moves the movement to a dark ending, yet it finishes with a gesture of defiance and belief in victory, with the heroic motif played in unison.

The **second movement** opens in D minor but transitions into a joyful dance in F major. The entire orchestra plays a stamping dance theme. The recapitulation increases the sense of busy tumult; the coda follows with lively movement. Oboes and clarinets play a cheerful tune, reminiscent of Slavic folk music. This powerful folk melody, the joy of the people, has entered the first movement's joyless world, with the movement ending brilliantly and optimistically in D major.

The **third movement** contrasts with the second movement's active participation in life with a wonderful adagio, a dreamlike vision of longed-for human happiness and peace. The first violins sing the soulful main theme; its variations make the movement increasingly fluid. Suddenly, signal-like fanfares promise victory, sounding into the dream. The melody swings upwards, offering beautiful glimpses of that world of longed-for peace and joy.

The crowning **final movement**

evokes life in community, in happiness and peace, a utopian vision. Beethoven merged the instrumental and the vocal, for the first time in symphonic music, to express these revolutionary ideals, won through struggle, with the help of human singing.

At the beginning of the final movement Beethoven surveys the ground that has to be traversed in order to reach this utopia, the hard-won realm of joy and freedom. The wild, dissonant outcry in thundering D minor recalls the gloomy opening of the first movement. The recollected restless scherzo theme is not yet a source of true joy; neither is the dreamy melody of the third movement's adagio. Beethoven prepares the ground musically by having the low strings represent the hero, who gradually rejects the main themes of the preceding three movements, until finally they embrace the "Ode to Joy" theme and with it the message of universal humankind.

This simple melody is in the manner of a folk tune. It is a tune expressing human community, of people who have succeeded in the great feat, as Schiller's poem says, and who are called to transform the world from a state of despair into a world of general peace, joy, and freedom. Beethoven now sings his high song to Joy. We are still in the realm of wordless music.

In a very lively orchestral movement we hear the triumphal march of the Joy theme. At first, violas and cellos take

over the melody, accompanied by the contrapuntal voices of double basses and bassoons. Then the Joy theme grows in the polyphonic choir of instruments to the triumphant march of the whole orchestra. A sudden pause, voices of doubt assert themselves; a cry of horror threatens to plunge everything into despair. Now the baritone singer, the voice of humanity, enters.

The march swells to a mighty storm. Even the joy of the human community can only be achieved through struggle. The two, peace and joy, are inseparable. The choir triumphs with the Joy melody in the splendour of the full orchestra in D major. Human community is emphasised. Beethoven sings of the "gentle wing" of peace, which shines in the beauty of the solo quartet. A roaring orchestral epilogue with variations of the Joy melody concludes this powerful symphony.

Touring Syria in 2017, we visited a multi-denominational primary school in Homs. Suicide-bombers had slaughtered thirty children and many parents. Here young girls greeted us, movingly singing in Arabic the "Ode to Joy": "Alle Menschen werden Brüder": All people are joined in common humanity.

The European Union adopted "Ode to Joy" as its anthem in 1985; yet the EU's stringent sanctions on Syria make it more difficult for food, fuel and health facilities to reach the people. Such measures fly in the face of Beethoven's humanist message. ★

other accounts resilience to adversity emerges, for example in Rachael Hegarty's "The Dodgy Box." Liz Gillis emphasises the strength gained from growing up in a working-class estate.

Emigration and holding on to identity are the themes of Eoin Ó Murchú's memoir. Set during the period of armed conflict in the North, Brian Campfield's article shows how working-class unity was achieved for a moment in honour of the legendary Peadar O'Donnell.

British military violence, occurring at the same time in Belfast, features in Seán Maguire's "Window Pain," while the long-term effect of sectarian thinking is depicted in John D. Kelly's "Meandering." Andy Snoddy emphasises the importance of Irish for Protestants as well as emphasising the

significance of the Protestant tradition in the fight for Irish independence.

Anne Waters evokes the unhealed trauma of the Magdalen laundries. Jim Ward writes in the voice of a female Polish waiter. Solidarity with eastern European workers also features in Alan Weadick's "Transcendence." Linda Irvine's memoir shows how she broke free from humiliation and violence and achieved self-determination. Solidarity and fighting back are the main themes in Seosamh Ó Cuaig's memoir, "The 1970 Cement Strike."

This is the first literary project of its kind and scope to be supported by the trade union movement. Gerry Murphy, president of the ICTU, writes in his foreword: "It is also apt, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, that the true value and critical importance of

workers' contributions to our communities, worldwide, takes centre stage. These contributions expose the parasitical captains of industry and their fellow travellers in global finance."

The writers create a complex image of Irish working people today, one that challenges conventional stereotypes of their class. They are a group who will ultimately rise above the inferior station assigned to them by society and will seek to create a just society for all. In the words of James Connolly, "A free Ireland will control its own destiny, from the plough to the stars." ★

■ *From the Plough to the Stars* is available from Connolly Books, Dublin (<https://www.connollybooks.org/>).

Enduring the most

The death of Terence MacSwiney

GRAHAM HARRINGTON



THE DEATH of Terence MacSwiney on hunger strike, after seventy-four days, was not the first nor the last of that of Irish martyrs who died because of the intransigence of British imperialism. Originally a tactic used by suffragists, the hunger strike has become synonymous with Irish anti-imperialism, in part thanks to MacSwiney.

Thomas Ashe died on hunger strike in 1917, the first but far from the last Irish republican to die on hunger strike in the twentieth century, with others dying during the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary period.

Seán McCaughey died in 1946 under the de Valera government. Frank Stagg and Michael Vaughan died in the 1970s. Their cases, along with that of the Price sisters, showed the inhumanity of forcible feeding. The use of the hunger strike would be revived in 1980 in Long Kesh prison and again in 1981, leading to the death of seven IRA and three INLA prisoners. In the years after MacSwiney's death his example would be the inspiration for others.

Born in Cork, MacSwiney was raised by his English mother, who had nationalist sympathies. He attended the North Mon secondary school—which the

CPI's own Michael O'Riordan would attend some years later and who had been aware of the famous past pupil.

MacSwiney would become a leading organiser for the republican movement in Cork, being commandant of Cork No. 1 Brigade of the IRA. He would subsequently become mayor of Cork after his comrade Tomás Mac Curtain was murdered by British forces. During his acceptance speech as mayor of Cork he made an often-quoted remark: "This contest of ours is not on our side a rivalry of vengeance but one of endurance—it is not they who can inflict the most but those who can endure the most who will conquer."

In the collection of his writings titled *Principles of Freedom* we get an understanding of MacSwiney's views. Not only did he strongly oppose the Catholic Hibernians, he also had an understanding of basic internationalism. "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 . . . It is love of country that inspires us, not hate of the enemy . . . Separation from England will alone make for final friendship with England."

Though his time on hunger strike attracted international attention, MacSwiney was not—as some revisionist historians claim—interested in being a martyr. He once wrote that "it is harder to live a consistent life than die a brave death . . . We must get men to realise that to live is as daring as to die."

While much else could be cherry-picked from *Principles of Freedom*, it is worth reading in full, rather than quoted. MacSwiney's writing reflects an emphasis on the mental steel of a revolutionary; but this shouldn't be taken to indicate a zealot. MacSwiney had an understanding of the world around him and attempted

to understand it through the means available to him—enough to write that "the capitalist has no country."

He was predeceased by another Cork comrade, Michael Fitzgerald, and within a few hours of MacSwiney's own death Joe Murphy would die. The month after MacSwiney's death, in October, would see some of the major events of the revolutionary period, including the hanging of Kevin Barry, the killing of several British agents by Michael Collins's "Squad," and the murder of fourteen people in Croke Park by the RIC. Later on, the Kilmichael ambush would destroy the myth of the invincibility of the Auxiliaries, leading to the burning of Cork city centre and the brutal torture and murder of the Loughnane brothers.

MacSwiney had gone on hunger strike in Brixton Prison, London, as he felt that his two-year sentence for possession of a document was inflicted by the authorities of an empire that, in the words of James Connolly, "has no right in Ireland, never had any right in Ireland, and never can have any right in Ireland." In doing so he would provide inspiration for other revolutionaries, and not only in Ireland. He inspired a Chinese revolutionary, Guo Moruo—who would become a close ally of Mao Zedong and be the head of the Chinese Academy of Sciences after 1949—as well as Indian patriots.

MacSwiney's widow, Muriel, would leave Ireland for Germany and then Paris, where she would become a communist, being at various times a member of the Communist Parties of France, Germany and Britain as well as Larkin's Irish Worker League. She married a French Jewish leftist, Pierre Kaan, who would die in a German concentration camp.

The Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh remarked of MacSwiney's example that "a nation that has such citizens will never surrender." ★

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