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“With all the nicknames that serve to delude and divide us—with all their Orangemen and Ribbonmen, Torymen and Whigmen, Ultras and Moderados, and Heaven knows what rubbish besides, there are, in truth, but two parties in Ireland: those who suffer from her National degradation, and those who profit by it.”

The Nation, 15 October 1842.



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Socialist Voice

43 East Essex Street Dublin D02 XH96
(01) 6708707

Nothing to celebrate

JIMMY DORAN

A HUNDRED years after the partition of Ireland, a survey carried out by the Nevin Economic Research Institute on the annual earnings of workers in the North has exposed the reality for workers living in this British colony.

Wages in the North are much lower than any region in Britain, as are those of workers on low pay, with a quarter of all workers earning less than the living wage.

10 per cent of workers earn less than £8,041 per year; 50 per cent earn less than £23,043. To be in the top 10 per cent of earners you need only earn £47,719 a year. Put another way, 90 per cent of all workers earn less than £47,719 a year.

There is nothing for workers to celebrate in the centenary of partition. The North of Ireland is truly a disaster area, an abject economic failure.

The coronavirus pandemic did not

cause these extraordinary levels of poverty wages: it exposed them, as front-line workers had a spotlight shone on them. The high rate of coronavirus infection in the North is inextricably linked to the high number of low-paid workers in the region and on all the repercussions these low rates of pay have to society. Sub-standard, overcrowded housing, poor diet, bad working conditions and long hours of hard toil, often on an empty stomach, inevitably contribute to the spread of disease.

The political failure of partition has also been exposed, including the failure of the Stormont Executive to act on public health advice, and its inability to quickly establish the proper financial support for workers laid off because of the pandemic without first having the say-so of London.

At the end of 2020 the North had the highest death rate per 100,000 from covid-19 in Europe—double that of the “United Kingdom” and four

times the rate in the South of Ireland. Unionist parties voted against a ban on travel between Britain and the North, despite a new strain of coronavirus (70 per cent more infectious) spreading like wildfire there.

Only in a dysfunctional society would political parties vote in effect to facilitate the movement of thousands of people during a pandemic from areas worse affected by a new variant of a lethal virus. This is a failure to protect lives in order to protect the political union at all costs.

Sinn Féin blamed the DUP for not following public-health advice, while the DUP blamed first the Bobby Storey funeral, then society in general, for not adhering to the guidelines—this when a leading member, Sammy Wilson, was repeatedly photographed in public not wearing a mask. This is not the type of leadership that is required by politicians during a pandemic.

Both Sinn Féin and the DUP are falling straight into the British trap, the

Home working is for the benefit of your boss

NICOLA LAWLOR

REMOTE WORKING, or working from home, is not something new. It has existed and been used at different stages of capitalist development and innovation, reflecting the state of technological development at that time and the cost-benefit to profit creation. Today it's the same factors, considerations and driving forces as before.

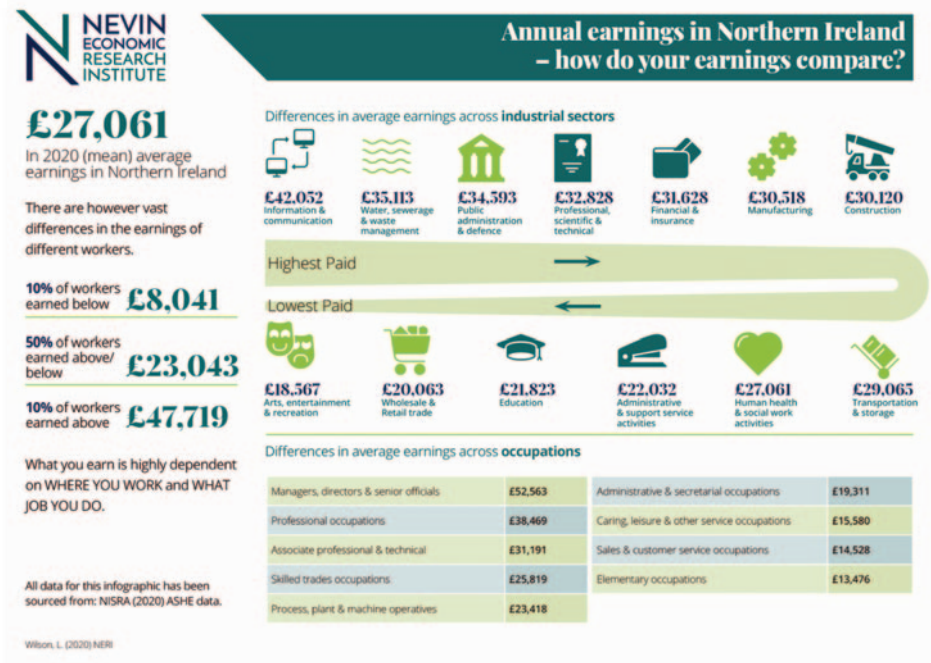
Take weaving and the manufacture of clothes as an example. Before such things as the “Spinning Jenny” and other technological innovations in the eighteenth century, working from home was the norm in this area. Specialised crafts and artisan production, often at home or attached to homes, was the usual method of production. Pre-industrialised production was limited and local.

This is certainly not to romanticise that patriarchal and deeply divided and oppressive system of production: it is merely to show how significant changes in the production process occur in connection with technological developments, with maximising of profits as the driving force.

Fast-forward a few hundred years, and a global pandemic and new technology have unleashed a new shift towards working from home, less in material production and more in the service and tech sectors.



“People need to decolonise their minds, as British colonialism is embedded in the minds of many of the people in the North.”



class in the 1940s in achieving an outstanding National Health Service. Unfortunately, the version of this service in the North—its worst-performing region—is only a small fraction of the service provided in Britain. The NHS in the North is now overwhelmed by the upsurge in the number of patients with covid and years of underfunding, outsourcing and privatisation by successive British governments.

There can be no going back to “normal” after this pandemic—the normality of low pay, crumbling services, and an unnatural division fuelled by an imperial master.

There are not two communities in the North: there are two classes, one dividing the other since partition to remain in control. Working-class unity is the rustproof weapon against our class enemy.

The only fitting way to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the partition of Ireland is by bringing it to an end, building together a united, independent workers’ republic of the people, for the people, with no masters, be they in London, Brussels, or Rome.

unnatural division of the Irish working class created by British imperialism to serve its own purposes, when both parties should have tackled the real cause of the failure: British rule in the North and the partition of Ireland.

The failure politically and economically of the North is clear to see by everybody except some who live

there. They can’t see the forest for the trees, it seems. Britain is not a neutral benefactor: it is an imperial master. People need to decolonise their minds, as British colonialism is embedded in the minds of many of the people in the North.

Everybody is naturally proud of the great victory by the British working

New IT equipment and—importantly with regard to labour processes and control—new surveillance software have created the conditions under which this shift could happen.

In doing this, capital benefits in two significant ways. Firstly, their own production costs are significantly reduced. Property, rents, utility bills and sometimes even equipment costs are shifted onto workers, not to mention the psychological effect of your employer colonising a space in your home. And secondly, possibly more significantly, the potential pool of labour to make use of is opened up, both nationally and internationally, driving down the cost of labour—i.e. our wages.

This second point is worth considering a bit more. Jobs that can be done from anywhere are now opened up to a broader market. So, for example, jobs no longer “need” to be created in cities or towns but can be filled from anywhere in the country.

While this is good for a more even spread of economic development, and

for climate change and sustainability (meaning less urban living), it will also, potentially, have a negative effect on wages, with a cheaper cost of living outside cities and towns bringing a competitive downward pressure on wages everywhere. Recently the software firm VMware, usually based in Silicon Valley, threatened a pay cut of 18 per cent for workers seeking to work permanently from home.

This trend is unlikely to be restricted to domestic labour markets. Remote working has the potential to proletarianise more people around the world and further internationalise production and labour markets. If a company has the capacity (legally, technically, etc.), why advertise a role in a specific country at all? Why not open it up to the cheapest market that has the desired skills? And add to this “gig economy” platforms and you can see how transformative these developments could potentially be for capital, in a positive way, and for workers and people, in a very negative way.

However, all is not lost or hopeless. These trends will increasingly internationalise our class and create opportunities for global struggle, which ultimately has the potential to move society beyond capitalism. The struggle over working time and the working week will intensify, and new health-and-safety fronts will open up.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unions evolved from craft and artisan associations into general factory and office workers’ collectives. Unions must now seize this opportunity to renew themselves and evolve to reflect contemporary production while openly struggling to retain protections and develop new responses to the new challenges we face.

The struggle over the working week and wages will still be fundamental to our existence, and new opportunities for global solidarity and understanding our position in the world should be taken. Theory, class-consciousness and organisation remain central to our struggle.

Left at the mercy of Covid-19

JIMMY DORAN

AS 2020 comes to an end—a year that many would like to forget—sadly, despite the world pandemic, there is no good will from global capitalism towards the peoples of the global south in their battle against covid-19.

The TRIPS Council of the World Trade Organization, which deals with intellectual property rights, debated a proposal tabled by India and South Africa, supported by Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) and Kenya, for a temporary waiver of certain provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to provide access to high-quality, safe, effective and affordable vaccines and medicines for the prevention, containment and treatment of covid-19 in poorer countries. In a global pandemic, where every country is equally affected, a global solution is necessary.

The proposal was rejected by the richest countries on the planet. The first to reject it was our next-door neighbour, Britain, followed by the European Union, United States of America, Switzerland, Norway, Australia, Canada, Japan, and the American puppet Brazil.

This decision is barbaric in the extreme. It will lead to the death of hundreds of thousands if not millions of the poorest people in the world. This is all done to feed the insatiable appetite of global pharmaceutical companies, forever increasing profits. Nothing must stand in the way of profiteering and the accumulation of wealth by the wealthiest, no matter what damage is done in the process to humanity or the environment.

The majority of the vaccines have been developed by a massive investment of public funds in several countries. Big Pharma should not be allowed to hijack them: they should be produced globally for the benefit of humanity, not controlled and distributed by transnational corporations.

A system that refuses permission to the poorest people of the world to have vaccines to stop the spread of a deadly virus is a barbaric system. If the world is at war against this virus, then this is a war crime, against the poorest and most vulnerable in the battle.

As a result, billions of poor people are unlikely to be vaccinated; rich countries have already bought up 53 per cent of the most promising vaccines. They have bought enough doses to vaccinate their populations nearly three times over, while poor countries don't even have enough to reach health workers and people most at risk. Nine out of ten people in seventy low-income countries are unlikely to be vaccinated by next year.

Canada has bought more doses per head than any other country—enough to vaccinate each Canadian five times over. Supplies of the Pfizer-Biontech vaccine will almost all go to rich countries: 96 per cent of doses have been bought by the West.

Our health is in their hands—for profit

BARRY MURRAY

**“Alexa! Alexa! . . .
Do you think I'm ill?”**

WE MIGHT see this as amusing, or a bit futuristic. Wrong! It's here already. Amazon Health, Amazon Pharmacy and Babylon Health, among many others, are testing new “digital medical systems,” where you ask a computer about your health. This, in time, will spell the end of GPs as we know them.

The same systems could be used for cancer consultations or any specialist medical advice. But, more worryingly, it would mean that the biggest collector of data in the world would have the ultimate in personal data stored on their servers. Imagine for a minute what they can do with that

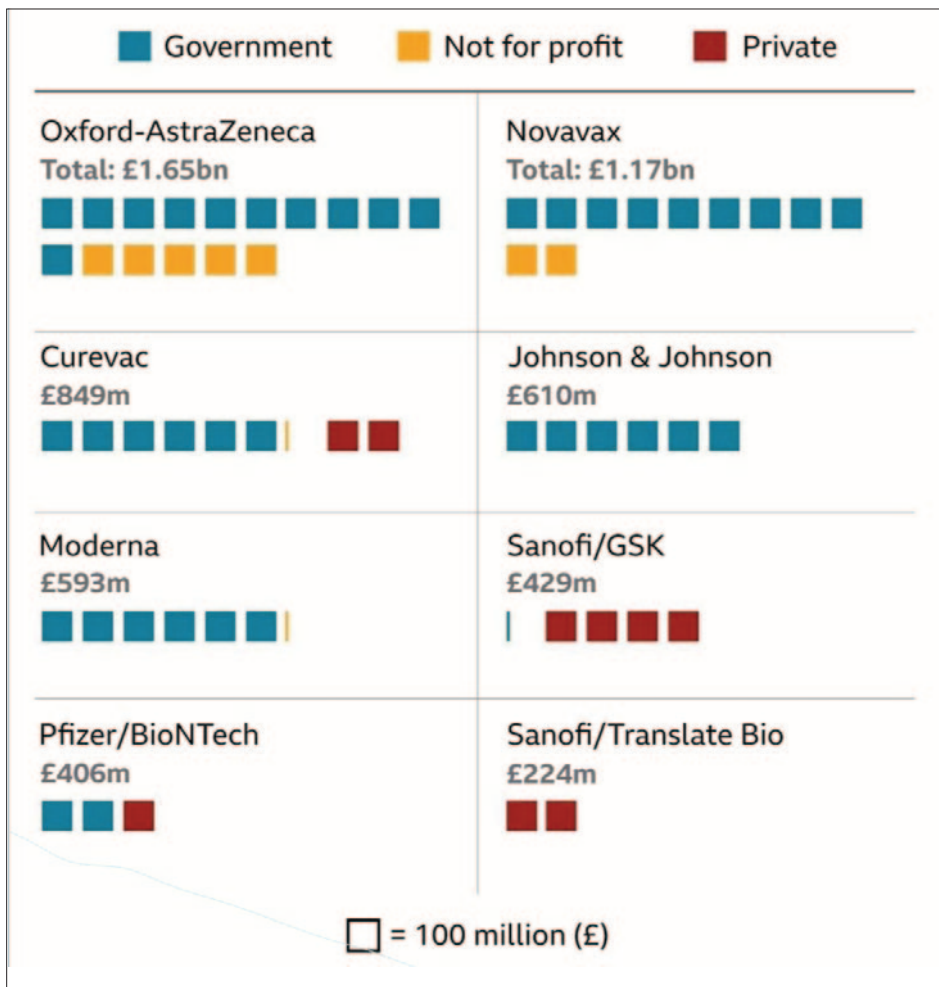
information, and who they can share or sell it to. Imagine too who would control your health, and what you might end up paying for it.

So what has all this to do with our present health systems in Ireland, North and South? Above is the ultimate goal of those who are working hard at every level to turn our health into a monopoly cash cow. The rich and the poor in Ireland have two clearly delineated standards of health service. In the South it's a straight two-tier system, with private hospitals and private health insurance for the affluent and a sub-standard public health service for the rest. But in the North, though rapidly changing, it is slightly different. We have the legacy of the NHS. And the politics of it.

So the vultures for privatisation and their “management councils” in Stormont and Westminster have to take a more cautious approach in their moves to demolish the National Health Service that they set up to appease the possibility of revolution after the Second World War. They praise it and



Covid-19 has exposed the deliberate running down of the Northern health service (and that of Britain)



LEFT: Who has financed the covid vaccines? Source: BBC

In contrast, the inventors of insulin and the polio vaccine did not patent them; they chose not to, in the interests of humanity. This has had a profound effect on world health. Cuba, despite limited resources, has an incredible health service, which also sends doctors and medical teams all over the world in response to need.

The aim of the pharmaceutical industry is to create new customers, not to cure disease.

Covid-19 is a stress test on political and economic systems globally. Capitalism has failed that test abysmally and has been shown to be morally bankrupt. The world's environment has already reached a tipping-point as a result of capitalism. The health pandemic has exposed the grotesque nature of the capitalist system. As Fidel Castro put it, "capitalism has neither the capacity, nor the morality, nor the ethics to solve the problems of poverty. We can save humanity or capitalism. We cannot save both."

eulogise it to the world on one hand and undermine it on the other.

The Thatcherite years (1980s) were the beginning of the destruction of the "fabled" NHS. It is a kind of a "slow burn" or "back door" method, using neoliberalist tactics, to eventually end a free health service in the North—or at least make it even more profitable for the elite few.

The rot began when GPs became contractors to the NHS. That changed GPs from people caring to budgets and profit management. Next came the ancillary work in the hospitals. Cleaning, food and maintenance were all given to outside contractors, on the basis of competitive tendering, where the lowest price had to be taken—with disastrous results.

Hospitals have been built on "private finance initiatives" (PFI). The South-West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen is but one example. The interest alone on this hospital is £18 million per annum. It cost £224 million to build. By the time the thirty-year lease is up it will have cost

£712 million of taxpayers' money going to the private sector.

The number of basic services that have been moved from this hospital—and but for people's campaigns there would be more—is legion. And all because the "budgets" didn't allow for them. This hospital is de facto a white elephant, the first in the North of PFI schemes within the NHS, to facilitate the transfer of wealth to the elite golden circles.

All these costs do not include the wages and running expenses for doctors, nurses, and medicines. On top of that are the 2,300 shortages of medical staff and the long emergency department waiting times and even longer (years) waiting on elective surgery. It's as bad as, or worse than, the South of Ireland.

With the rapid decline in the number of GPs throughout the North, through retirement, lack of doctors being trained, and amalgamations, large areas of the North are now without adequate GP cover. In turn this has caused A&Es and hospital wards to be overcrowded in the

absence of proper primary care.

Covid-19 has exposed the deliberate running down of the Northern health service (and that of Britain). To "save" the NHS, but more so the politicians and civil service mandarins, all elective surgery, cancer and other assessments have been stopped, thus creating a new pandemic of health issues after covid. But we can be certain that the only solutions that will be proposed are those based on profit for the Richard Bransons and American vultures waiting in the wings to extract profit from the health of the Irish people. The nadir of that plan is condemning the population to "digital medicine." And, at the time of writing, covid is being used as a testing ground for just that.

Unless the people seize control of their health services, north and south, and campaign for an all-Ireland public health service, free "from the cradle to the grave," the profiteers will build a health service for the rich and powerful. And the rest of us will have to make do with an "Alexa diagnosis," or worse. ★

Is Sinn Féin's vision for a united Ireland a blind alley?



EOGHAN O'NEILL

Sinn Féin published their discussion document “Economic Benefits of a United Ireland”¹ in November 2020; and, seeing that it’s a discussion paper for “contributing to the ongoing and exciting debate around a United Ireland,” it’s a worthwhile exercise to analyse and to critically engage with Sinn Féin’s vision for a united Ireland.

Two significant factors, Brexit and covid-19, have really accelerated the debate on reunification; and now, as stated in the document, “it is not a question about whether we can afford Irish Unity the fact is that we cannot afford partition.”

The document itself is well presented and very accessible to any reader, while the general narrative and economic benefits of reunification are well argued, from the urgent need for investment and infrastructure in the border region, both North and South, the democratic deficit for citizens in the North, to the “potential for increased economic growth if the economic opportunities of reunification are realised.” The section on “the subvention explained” and its accompanying appendix is a welcome counter-argument to the “we can’t afford reunification” discourse that is dominant in the debate.

At a glance, the paper puts a very positive spin on the possibilities for

development, both North and South, and will gain more supporters for the general project of working towards a united Ireland. The main issue I have with this document is that it is too polished—a veneer that is digestible in how they present the national question as a commonsense approach, which in reality is presented as an economic question: i.e. it makes sense economically to unite.

What the paper is clearly missing is a class understanding of the national question—i.e. answering the national question with the social question, a vision for a New Republic that serves the interests of the people before capital, both foreign and domestic. The vision presented by Sinn Féin seemingly is of “business as usual,” where the South merely subsumes the North and carries on with the economic policies that are the hallmarks of a nation beholden to the diktats of the imperialist centres of the EU and the United States, its native representatives, and the political class servicing those interests.

The vision of Sinn Féin is for a pro-EU reunification of Ireland. They conveniently ignore the historical rationale of partition: to deny the creation of an independent, sovereign and democratic republic so as to develop an economy that represents and benefits the interests of the people, rather than those of capitalists, domestic and foreign. This has been denied to all

of Ireland because of partition, and we will remain beholden to imperialism while we are members of the EU.

That Sinn Féin are not presenting themselves as a “leave the EU” political party, or even an anti-capitalist party for that matter, is fine, but they can’t have it both ways either. They can’t be pro-EU, pro-Big Business, and at the same time present themselves as an alternative to the political establishment, being on the side of workers, of the people, while the rules, regulations and treaties of the EU forbid any alternative to the private capitalist mode of production. This is just selling people a pup.

Under the heading “Cost of partition—a democratic deficit that stunts economic development” and “Benefit of United Ireland—decision making by locally elected representatives and bespoke macroeconomic planning,” it is difficult to take this seriously as a cornerstone of their vision of a united Ireland. Even with a united Ireland, what fundamental change is this presenting to the Republic’s democratic institutions, with its well-known “parish pump” politics, where the celebrity or popularity of an individual TD is the basis for local or regional development, rather than proper local and regional planning being co-ordinated by a national strategic development plan?

Also, our democratic institutions within local authority areas have been stripped of finance and initiative and are more in keeping with inspectorates, as opposed to bodies that have the power, resources and authority to develop local or regional plans of work—but no, as long as you can lobby your local TD then we have a plan!

Furthermore, the macro-economic planning of the country cannot be set by the sovereign wishes of the people, represented by a political party in government, while under the dominion of US and EU interests, rules and regulations. Sinn Féin clearly have opted to leave these “obstacles” out of their vision, as it isn’t part of the cosy EU Ireland they are seemingly selling.

In the section on a cleaner, greener

“... people should be under no illusion that uniting Ireland under the EU is a pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist united Ireland arming and equipping itself for a war against humanity and nature rather than a war for humanity and nature.”



Ireland they correctly point out the irrationality of partition in trying to make a transition to a zero-carbon economy and the rationality for an island nation to co-ordinate and develop a sustainable energy policy. With the continuing climate emergency and the need to take immediate action, this in fact is probably one of the most convincing arguments for reunification (for those who need convincing).

Their vision, however, falls short in a plan of implementation. It doesn't specify who is to create the “rapid increase in high-skilled green collar jobs.” The state? Private companies? Which is fair enough, given that it is only an outline of the need for it; but if a party is offering a vision for a united Ireland under the EU, then it can only offer a business-as-usual approach, i.e. let the public purse pay for the infrastructure and construction, through loans, grants, or public works, paying the private companies exorbitant prices while these companies reap the reward and profit from our public and environmental needs. Indeed any plan would be dictated by and left to private capital to lobby and direct government policy that suits their profit-driven interests.

The document then points to “the experience of German reunification as a useful example of how planned economic integration and investment, including from the EU, can substantially improve economic conditions in the smaller jurisdiction involved in transition.” It might be of interest to Sinn Féin members and supporters, as the discourse on reunification continues, to look further into that process. I would point people to an article by Jenny Farrell in *Socialist Voice* in 2019 titled “The return of the German Spirit.”²

This is not to argue that reunification

isn't desirable—on the contrary, it is an essential element in the struggle for a united, independent workers' republic—but rather to highlight the role of capital and its personification within (then) West Germany and the EU in decimating public industries and infrastructure and the social and cultural values that were part of the German Democratic Republic, creating false narratives about the history of the GDR, espousing an anti-communist doctrine, when in fact West Germany exonerated and employed former Nazi Party members in official government positions.

Just as a case in point regarding the “noble” EU project: members of the EU in December 2020 (Ireland included) abstained *en masse* on a UN resolution on “Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance”; and yet in 2019 the same EU members overwhelmingly voted in favour of a motion equating Nazism with communism—a criminal distortion and revision that “draws the impossible equivalence between those who built Auschwitz and those who liberated it.”³

This is the danger with Sinn Féin's project as it now stands. It isn't for creating a new Republic but for the old Republic taking over the North (not that the North is in any way a shining light of democracy or an economic powerhouse!), fully embracing an EU that not only abstains from denouncing fascism but promotes the criminalisation and denunciation of anti-fascists; that is creating a permanent arms fund (PESCO) and EU army, to which the Irish state is obliged to contribute up to 2 per cent of its GDP (that's more than €6

billion a year),⁴ and is once again attempting to enshrine within transatlantic trade deals the primacy of private capital over national state laws in the form of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).⁵

It is important to point this out, because people should be under no illusion that uniting Ireland under the EU is a pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist united Ireland, arming and equipping itself for a war against humanity and nature rather than a war for humanity and nature. Any notion that we can build and plan our economy by sovereign and democratic means under these circumstances is simply beyond the pale.

It is at this point I am glad that this is a discussion document rather than a policy document or campaign manifesto, because I really believe that the project for a united Ireland could be one of those rare opportunities to allow broad public participation, debate and consultation on a truly national scale, never before seen in this country, to begin a process towards a new Republic.

Sinn Féin at some point may be in a position to drive this, and so what better contribution to make than to facilitate a democratic revival, with the prospect of creating a new Republic. Rather than starting from the economic position that reunification is good for business because of Brexit and being a member of the EU, should we not aspire for more? Can we not present a vision that will answer the national with the social question?

The premise of this united Ireland doesn't need to lead with a Leave campaign for a united Ireland, but should we not at least start from the position that our people, North and South, have a crisis in housing, health, mental health, elder care, and that the services and the provision of those services are totally inadequate, underfinanced, and more and more being left to private, profit-seeking companies to provide?

Or why not take as a starting position that there is a great suffering from poverty and inequality, that regional and national deficiencies in infrastructure, jobs, cultural and social outlets are rampant, and that vital public services are often kept afloat by charity rather than investment, and that there is a huge wealth gap, which no amount of taxation will bridge? *Continued overleaf*



Little reason to celebrate the state of Northern Ireland

TOMMY MCKEARNEY

THE SIX-COUNTY state of Northern Ireland will reach its hundredth birthday in May. The British government, with enthusiastic support from Northern unionists, is making preparations to celebrate the anniversary.

Though claiming to emphasise the future rather than its history, it is inevitable that the nature of the Northern state, past, present, and future, must come under scrutiny. With even the best will in the world it is

impossible not to conclude that an objective analysis must record a sorry tale of sectarianism, facilitated and encouraged by imperialism.

The result has been an unbroken century of maladministration and misgovernance. Given its origins and the rationale underlying its foundation, it could hardly have been otherwise.

Contrary to a certain tendentious narrative, Northern Ireland was not simply the unaided creation of stalwart Ulster unionists. Though a section of the local population was obviously integral to its establishment, the Northern

political entity was the result of cynical British state manoeuvring, an action carried out to ensure that the empire would retain a physical military presence on its western flank. To secure this end the British ruling class facilitated and fostered the establishment of a political entity actively practising antagonistic religious sectarianism.

By doing so, the well-practised British imperial machine provided for the continuing alienation of one million people from others living in Ireland, ensuring that the minority unionist constituency, now in charge of its own mini-state, would be left in a condition of depending for survival on their London guarantors.

For those who doubt the ability of British imperialism to be so mendacious, one example among many should suffice. At or about the same time, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which has caused havoc in the Middle-East, was being put into effect. Interestingly, today imperialist support for hostility between Israel and its larger neighbours has created a result similar to that of Northern Ireland: loyalty to the imperial centre arising from dependence on it for security.

The cynical selection of the Northern state's boundary illustrated its founders' intentions. By discarding the three Ulster counties of Monaghan, Cavan and Donegal they avoided having a finely balanced electorate. That these staunchly unionist communities were so casually abandoned in 1921 was not necessarily from a fear that their inclusion would threaten a permanent

Is Sinn Féin's vision for a united Ireland just a blind alley?

OR SHOULD we not take as a starting point that we are witnessing an epoch-making period of changes to the environment, to the earth system as a whole, that will usher in many and varied challenges in the decade ahead, with which we can expect the further spread of viruses and zoonotic pandemics as the quest for more land and industrial farming greatly facilitates and

accelerates the animal-to-human transmission of viruses, as a recent report clearly points out?⁶

The prime driver and motive force behind all these crises is the capitalist mode of production, of ever-expanding growth; so should this view not underpin any vision of a united Ireland—sovereign, democratic, and independent of the grip of imperialism?

It is on this basis that we need to fight for a united Ireland and not be sold false promises. The worst outcome with Brexit has been avoided at the eleventh hour, and the economic and social impact of covid-19 is still very much with us for the foreseeable

future, with forecasts predicting protracted growth in the developed countries in the Global North and disastrous effects on the countries and people of the Global South.⁷

The reality of this will have devastating effects on people's jobs, livelihoods, living standards, and general health and well-being; so the fight for a new Republic, for a united Ireland, has never been more pressing and timely, and that, rather than being that small outpost for imperialism on the periphery of Europe, a new Ireland could in fact be a beacon of light and hope to all nations struggling under the boots of imperialist powers.

Systemic discrimination punctuated by occasional bouts of repression continued over the following five decades, leading to the traumatic events of the final twenty-five years of the last century.

unionist majority. If that were the sole consideration, Cos. Tyrone and Fermanagh would have been excluded as well.

Difficult as it may be to envisage now, those three excluded counties contained significant firmly unionist communities. In recognition of their loyalty to the union and the empire, Edward Carson himself spoke at several rallies in each. Consequently, by June 1912 more than 17,000 people in Co. Donegal had signed the Ulster Covenant, while in Co. Monaghan the number was over 10,000. A few months later, in 1913, each of these counties mustered 2,000-plus men for the UVF.

However, opting for the long-recognised nine-county entity could have given rise to the “risk” that practical political necessity would dictate agreeing to a working consensus both within the new entity and with the neighbouring Free State—a condition inimical to the imperial design, requiring divide and rule.

To reinforce this design, the newly founded Northern state embarked on the application of systemic institutional discrimination, coupled with coercion. While recently there has been a retelling of the story of the burning of Cork by the Black and Tans in December 1920, much less attention has been afforded to events in Belfast in the same period. Oddly enough, while Cork was a Sinn Féin stronghold, Belfast’s nationalists were still solidly Redmondite. Nevertheless this did not save them. Thousands were driven from their employment and thousands more left homeless over the course of a few days

As Sinn Féin have become more and more popular and acceptable in the eyes of the electorate, the question has to be asked: Is their popularity due to their being perceived as an alternative to the establishment political parties, or because they are becoming more like the establishment parties? If members and supporters believe it is the former, then they must present an alternative to the status quo, especially when carrying out a project for a united Ireland, otherwise it will only be a matter of time before they fully embrace their role as a future government party that oversees the affairs of the capitalist class. ★

in July 1920.

The expulsions from places of employment were more cynical than simply being the actions of mindless anti-Catholic bigots. This was evidenced by the simultaneous and forcible removal from their work of hundreds of left-wing Protestant trade unionists, or “Rotten Prods,” as they were named at the time. The authors of the Six-County state were not prepared to allow working-class solidarity to undermine their creation. That it also left a legacy of a divided work force was a bonus for unscrupulous employers.

Systemic discrimination punctuated by occasional bouts of repression continued over the following five decades, leading to the traumatic events of the final twenty-five years of the last century. A facile analysis of those years, insisting that the North would have been transformed into a liberal social democracy had it not been for the Provisionals’ campaign, overlooks the degree of resistance to reform emanating from within the ranks of unionism. After all, the Sunningdale Agreement was not forcibly brought down by republicans, nor was it Sinn Féin that organised violent opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

Nor, indeed, have events of the past decade done much to alter the essential nature of the Northern state. An unprecedented opportunity arose in 1998 when Sinn Féin agreed to operate within the constitutional arrangement built upon partition. Unionism, however, was unable to change or adapt, when doing so would surely have been in its best long-term interests. Defining itself

by dogmatic opposition to all things republican or even nationalist, it ensured that there would be no shared vision for a “New” and possibly viable Northern Ireland.

Having obstinately vetoed every proposal that might have made its politics more palatable across the board, unionism crowned its long history of negativity during the crisis of the covid-19 pandemic. Being eager to appear more British than the Tower of London, the largest unionist party, the DUP, refused to endorse an all-Ireland strategy to combat the virus. The party even refused to follow the example of other devolved administrations in the United Kingdom and temporarily stop travel between England and the Six Counties. This they did in the face of a virulent mutant strain of the virus emerging in the Greater London area. By doing so, the DUP failed the fundamental test for any administration or political entity: the protection and well-being of its citizenry.

While unionism may be resistant to change, it cannot prevent conditions and circumstances changing. Britain, no longer the primary global superpower it was a century ago, has different defensive and political requirements today. The Northern six counties are not the strategic asset they were in the past. Ironically, Dublin is now of greater value to London than the North.

This, coupled with inexorably changing demographics, means that the Stormont-fronted political entity is unlikely to celebrate a second centenary. In reality, its ending will be more worthy of celebration than its foundation. ★

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The birth and growth of the Connolly Youth Movement

THERE HAS been a lot of discussion lately in left circles about the relationship between the Connolly Youth Movement and the Communist Party of Ireland, a relationship, it must be said, that is going through a difficult time at the moment.

In an attempt to give some context and to clarify some historical aspects of the relationship, *Socialist Voice* asked Seán Edwards (CPI international convenor and a founder-member of the CYM) and Eddie Glackin (CPI education convenor and a former general secretary of the CYM) for their recollections of the formation and early years of the CYM and its relationship with the party.

The Connolly Youth Movement was established as an initiative of the then Irish Workers' Party (now the Communist Party of Ireland) after the general election of November 1965 in the 26 Counties. Approximately seven young party members were involved in this initiative, including some who later went on to become prominent trade union leaders, such as Gerry Fleming, Mick O'Reilly, and Bernard Brown.

Others to the fore at the time were Liam Mulready, from a well-known socialist republican family, who became secretary, Irwin Hutchinson, and Seán Edwards, who was also from a prominent socialist and republican background. Seán's parents, Frank and Bobbie, had been involved in the struggle for decades at that time, Frank having fought in the Anti-Fascist War in Spain and subsequently driven out of

his teaching post in Waterford by clerical reaction, i.e. the local Catholic bishop. In his later years Frank built and led the Ireland-USSR Friendship Society along with John Swift senior.

Seán recalls (from a distance of fifty-five years!): "We had a flag, the blue starry plough with CYM inscribed on it. We paraded the flag around Dublin and gradually started to attract new members, showing ourselves as a militant youth group, and frequently picketed the US embassy. We did not describe ourselves as the youth wing of the IWP but remained very close to it. Members shared a particular respect for Michael O'Riordan, who took a great interest in our organisation."

Eddie was one of the fairly large group of young people attracted to the CYM in the mid to late 1960s. At the time there was no other radical political youth organisation in the 26-County state, and the CYM became the outlet for the frustration of hundreds of young people, with a large membership based in the IWP premises at 37 Pembroke Lane, Ballsbridge, and subsequently active branches in Cork and, notably, in Sligo, where the leader was (now Councillor and former TD) Declan Bree. Pockets of members existed elsewhere around the country.

A bunch of us travelled down from Dublin and camped overnight for the public launch of the Sligo Branch, a large meeting that was carefully monitored by a branch of another type: the Special Branch. Police and Special

Branch harassment was a daily feature of life for CYM-ers in those days: phones were tapped (but not every home had a phone in the 60s), mail was opened, nasty calls were made to parents, employers were visited, some members were followed home from CYM meetings by not-so-subtle Special Branch men—all in an attempt to put young people off being involved.

The Dublin members met every Wednesday in Pembroke Lane. The main emphasis was on educational activities, but there was also a fairly frantic level of activity involved in writing, typing and printing our paper, *Change* (later *Forward*). Typing was usually done on an old-fashioned typewriter onto paper stencils, which were then wrapped round the inked drum of a stencil duplicator and run off by hand.

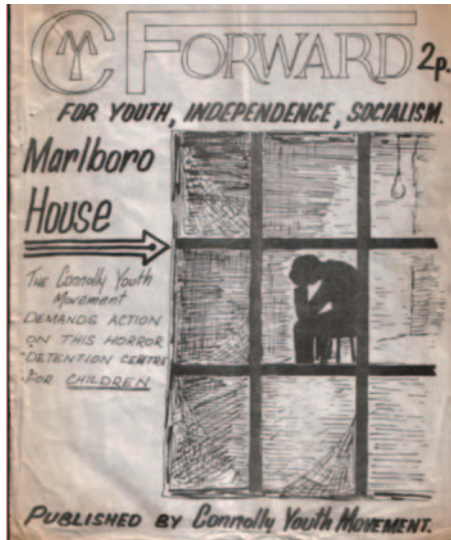
An even messier process was the production of posters. We designed and printed our own posters—lots of them—by the silkscreen process, and the floor of the upstairs meeting-room in Pembroke Lane was regularly covered with drying posters.

In the early years, before members became actively involved in trade union and broader organisations, the emphasis was on propaganda, especially posters and leaflets. Dublin was regularly plastered with CYM recruiting posters and others dealing with issues of particular concern to young people, such as emigration, youth unemployment, campaigning for the closure of "reform schools," education problems, school pupils' and apprentices' rights, etc. We also had a weekly bookstall every Saturday at the GPO—the first to claim that spot—a practice that was followed in Cork and in Sligo.

A huge issue for us was the American war in Vietnam. In fact Eddie's first contact with the CYM came when he joined an early CYM picket on the US embassy one Saturday morning. The CYM was actively involved in an organisation called the Irish Voice on Vietnam, which was headed by such great fighters as Peadar O'Donnell. It organised large demonstrations at which CYM members, because of our discipline, were frequently asked to act as stewards.

Other issues in the late 1960s were solidarity with the youth and people of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe),

‘... the CPI never tried to interfere in the internal affairs of the CYM, letting us make our own mistakes and find our own way ...’



that’s even before the Militant Tendency manifested itself. As is usually the case, they mostly ended up either burnt out or resting in the Labour Party.

A more serious and organised challenge came from the so-called Irish Communist Organisation (later renamed British and Irish Communist Organisation). They had some fairly “heavyweight” Marxist-Leninist would-be gurus, who devised the notorious “two-nations theory.” Though they subsequently moved away from this position, they did enormous damage. This was limited in the CYM because of the ideological strength primarily of the IWP and its members in the CYM but very serious in the influence they weaved for this reactionary pro-imperialist analysis in the labour and trade union movement, specifically in the Labour Party, Democratic Socialist Party, and, most damaging, in the SFWP/Workers’ Party.

It must be said that the CPI never tried to interfere in the internal affairs of the CYM, letting us make our own mistakes and find our own way to whatever level of wisdom we eventually achieved. The CYM was consciously set up by the party as a broad socialist youth organisation, inspired by the teachings of James Connolly. It had no formal link to the party, though we all knew it was the party that had set us up, pointed the way ahead, and supported the CYM materially.

But most importantly, apart from the party members among the elected leadership of the CYM, party leaders such as Mick O’Riordan, Johnny Nolan, Sam Nolan and Joe Deasy and others, were always available to give us the benefit of their years of experience. And not just their experience: through the party we encountered such giants as Peadar O’Donnell, George Gilmore, and many others who spoke at our meetings.

One most important development in the late 1960s was the all-Ireland links that we developed with our comrades in the Communist Youth League (Northern Ireland) and that ultimately culminated in the achievement of the ambition, long cherished by older party members, of an all-Ireland Marxist youth organisation based (as stated in the manifesto of the Unity Congress in April 1970), “on the principles of Marx, Connolly, Lenin and Liam Mellows.” ★



Mandela, as the best of the international solidarity movements. We were also privileged to meet such great leaders as Tambo and Amilcar Cabral, leader of the PAIGC (the liberation movement of Guinea-Bissau).

Throughout this period of the mid to late 60s a major feature of CYM life in Dublin was the Wednesday night lectures in Pembroke Lane. It was often a case of standing room only when we had some particularly prominent or controversial speakers. As the CYM was the “only game in town” from the point of view of radical youth politics, all sorts gravitated towards these meetings, which were usually open. Various opportunist elements thought the members of the CYM were fair game for their machinations, which included trying to influence and recruit our members for their own organisations, real or planned. People who were subsequently prominent in ultra-leftist politics argued their particular dogmas in an attempt, bluntly, to turn the movement away from the party.

The first manifestation of contemporary Trotskyism in youth politics in Ireland (heralded by the usual missionaries from across the Irish Sea) involved some disgruntled CYM members, lured by the sirens of instant revolution, who tried to win converts at our Wednesday meetings. They subsequently ended up in the various multiple varieties of Trotskyism: the League for a Workers’ Republic (with its Young Socialist organisation), the League for a Workers’ Vanguard (with its rival Young Socialist Organisation), and

opposition to the British role in Aden (now part of Yemen), and many other international campaigns.

But perhaps the most important international cause, alongside Vietnam, was the world campaign against Apartheid South Africa. This was given very high priority. Both Seán and Eddie served on the Executive Committee of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement, Seán in his own right and Eddie as CYM representative. Seán at one point was sent into South Africa incognito on a dangerous mission to distribute leaflets on behalf of the banned African National Congress, a mission that he accomplished and, most importantly, returned safely from!

The CYM members were privileged to play an active role over the years in the IAAM, which was held up by Oliver Tambo, acting president of the ANC during the incarceration of Nelson

China's digital currency

Dónal Ó Coisdealbha on the biggest story that no-one is talking about

Bitcoin: The original cryptocurrency

IN 2008 the inventor of Bitcoin, Satoshi Nakamoto, expressed his view that “the root problem with conventional currencies is all the trust that’s required to make it work. The central bank must be trusted not to debase the currency, but the history of fiat currencies is full of breaches of that trust.”¹ This is an old right-wing libertarian talking-point: “When the state spends money to achieve social aims, it devalues money in general, which is an attack on people with lots of money.”

Bitcoin was Nakamoto’s specific application of the proposal of the book *Denationalisation of Money: The Argument Refined* (1976)² by an economist of the Austrian School, Friedrich von Hayek, in which he puts forward the idea that capitalists should control the production of money directly—abolishing the redistributive function of the state.

The aim of Bitcoin, therefore, was to abolish the currency-issuing role of central banks by replacing it with a currency that anyone could create (in proportion to how much computing power they could afford to buy) and which would be traded using a “blockchain”—a ledger that records all previous transactions—to prevent counterfeiting.

Bitcoin was never remotely suited as a unit of account or medium of

exchange, but because it is expensive to create, and is popular with some wealthy right-wingers, it functions as a speculative asset—like a precious metal. A real currency’s exchange value, by comparison, rises and falls in proportion to how much capitalists need it for investment in new production in order to make more money; in other words, a real currency’s exchange value is a function of how useful that currency is in the production of new commodities, relative to every other currency.

China’s bright idea

The People’s Bank of China intends to replace the Chinese currency, the yuan, with something called the digital yuan—the world’s first central bank digital currency (CBDC). With a constant source of demand as a medium of exchange and unit of account in the real economy, the digital yuan, unlike Bitcoin, will actually function as a currency. In fact it is already being used in pilot schemes and is expected to act as the official currency of China by 2024–25.³

But isn’t every currency “digital,” in the sense that they are mostly held in bank accounts? Yes, but the digital yuan is different, in two important ways: It is fully traceable (by means of a blockchain), and it is programmable.

To be programmable means that the currency will not be capable of being used indiscriminately for spending,

investment, currency exchange, or hoarding; instead each individual digital yuan issued by the Central Bank will have software written within it that records exactly what that specific yuan can and cannot be used to purchase. In a dialectical twist that I think Marx would appreciate, Nakamoto’s blockchain, in trying to bring to life Hayek’s dream of private money without a state, instead conjured up its antithesis: history’s most ambitious state attempt to control money.

What effects can this be expected to have? Firstly, traceable and programmable currency issued by the state will be incapable of being used by criminals. If the Central Bank can see every transaction, and predetermine what every unit of currency can and cannot be used for, bad actors will be left with the choice of trying to sneak foreign paper currency into the country or trading commodities directly, using barter.

Simply imagine criminals in Ireland trying to operate without the use of the euro, either for criminal purposes or for spending purposes, and you will appreciate the effect this would have.

For the same reason, China will also become much more efficient at meeting social goals. Today, if the state decides that it wants to spend money to raise living standards in a given underdeveloped region, it knows that by the time the money trickles down through layers of bureaucracy (and sometimes corruption) most of it will not have reached those who it was supposed to help. The programmable digital currency will make the entire process of moving money completely transparent to the government. Shadow banks, which are a systemic risk to the Chinese financial system, will find it impossible to operate, along with corrupt officials, loan sharks, etc.

Much more important even than this is how the digital yuan is capable of being used to boost the economy. Whereas in China today capital controls and the strategic allocation of credit by the Central Bank are used to encourage growth in productivity, the digital yuan will allow for a much more advanced system of indicative planning. It will be possible to see exactly how companies are allocating their resources, and even pre-programming the private sector’s liquidity to limit its potential uses.

“At first, almost everyone who got involved did so for philosophical reasons. We saw bitcoin as a great idea, as a way to separate money from the state.”
Roger Ver, anarcho-capitalist and early Bitcoin supporter.



The Belt and Road, and overcoming the problem of SWIFT

China's economic problems are born of its success in becoming an industrial superpower in a capitalist global economy. Some sectors, particularly heavy industry, have too much capacity for China's home use, obliging them to move into foreign markets.

The mechanism by which they are exporting capital is the “Belt and Road Initiative,” aimed at installing essential infrastructure for trading partners, such as ports, railways, motorways, power stations, aviation, and telecommunications systems. The problem for China is that BRI deals are at present mostly financed through the US-controlled SWIFT payment system, denominated in dollars—which eventually find their way back to the United States in the form of demand for Treasury bonds; and so every new BRI development also helps to finance the American economy.

In the future, China intends the digital yuan to be used as the common currency of exchange and unit of account for the Belt and Road trading bloc. Companies and individuals from anywhere in the world will be able to have an account with the People's Bank of China by downloading an app on their smartphone and buying currency.

The aim is clearly to ensure that the citizens of any country will be able to securely purchase products from the producers of any of the BRI countries using the blockchain. Trade between participating BRI countries will be revolutionised: if the sanctioned state oil company in Venezuela wants to buy a particular industrial part from a manufacturer in Russia, for example, the

entire process can be handled through the digital yuan app. The units of currency can be created and programmed for use for exactly that purpose, and cannot be misallocated. The SWIFT system is not involved, and the transaction cannot be interfered with by third parties.

The digital yuan opens up new possibilities for socialist economies in capacity utilisation and price-setting.

Whatever China's motivations for inventing it, I want to advance the proposition that a programmable currency on a blockchain can entirely replace a market of competitive prices. Firstly, the blockchain would automatically record all purchases (by retail outlets and customers) as they happen in real time. Secondly, the programmable nature of the currency means that prices can be set by auto-adjusting the currency's exchange value relative to every specific good, based on the retail outlet's inventory (store purchases) and customer demand levels, which have been recorded on the blockchain up to that point.

Such a system would be far more accurate than the guesswork of participants in a market, allowing for extremely precise capacity utilisation in the production economy. Planners would know what to produce, import or export, and how much, in every area; and as socially owned production is automated, goods can become cheaper and working days become shorter in unison. Society is therefore rewarded directly for advances in production techniques.

I believe that this technology can also be used for a socialist economy beyond the phase of commodity production, but this will require a separate article.

Big Tech hits back

An alternative project will see the launch this month of “diem,” a cryptocurrency designed by the Facebook company, formerly known as “libra.” Through Diem, Hayek's original vision might yet be salvaged.

A consortium of US tech giants and financial companies will in effect act as a central bank, issuing currency by fiat. Unlike the digital yuan, the Diem tokens will be private liabilities. For the first time, such companies will be able to profit from seigniorage, the difference between the cost of production of money (essentially nil for a digital currency) and the exchange value that the issuing central bank says this the money is worth!

Diem fits into the US industrial-financial strategy. Big Tech will be able to put their savings (often US Treasuries) back to work in the global economy as diems, the profits from which can be converted back into more Treasuries to finance US deficits. ★

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CETA must be stopped

JIMMY DORAN

THE GOVERNMENT has been forced to postpone a controversial vote on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)—a free-trade agreement between the European Union and Canada—until the new year.

It had hoped to have it ratified by the Dáil after a 55-minute debate on 15 December. The vote had already been postponed from October to give the Green Party leader, Eamon Ryan, time to convince his members to support the treaty, which he has failed to do. A number of senior members still have concerns, and they are attempting to force a special convention of the party to debate it.

Four motions have been put forward: (1) to ratify the agreement, (2) not to ratify it, (3) to postpone the vote, and

Everywhere lies— Damn lies everywhere

DECLAN MCKENNA

YOU DON'T need to have an ideological position to recognise that capitalism is rotten to the core. It is a massive lie from start to finish; but, like any lie that is repeated time and time again, the lies become "truth."

Whether you are in the middle of a supermarket or the middle of a war, you are surrounded by a cushion of lies, designed to both confuse you and comfort you and always aimed to make you believe that you have no power.

A trip to the supermarket wraps you and traps you in a continuous orgy of deceit: "special offers," "sales," "promotions," two for one, five for six if you're not very careful, false

advertising, sneaky deceptions, misleading labelling, "healthy options" that turn out to be anything but, "loyalty" cards; and just to enhance your experience even further there is self-service checkout—just for your convenience. And, of course, choice. More choice than you know what to do with, but you have choice! Just don't mention the waste.

It's only a short hop over to war. Because we are the goodies, we are not directly affected by actual war, but don't let that inconvenient fact get in the way of our tacit support. We are given an "enemy," and it's plain sailing from there on. Russia is this, China is that, Cuba is the other; and then there is Iran . . . Iran? Well, what can you say about Iran?

Unlike the lies in supermarkets that are designed to get you to buy stuff, the war lies are designed not so much to get you to buy in to the wars but to ensure that you don't oppose their wars. That will do nicely. When the usual lies miss their target you are offered the comforting notion of "humanitarian interventions." That will do the trick.

There are lies to cover every aspect of life

Emigration?—Freedom to travel. Immigration?—Cultural diversity. Refugees?—Yes, but not for "economic" refugees; and never mention what caused the refugees to come in the first place.

National news?—Wall-to-wall coverage of the US "elections." International news?—Whatever the US State Department says. Environment?—Science will take care of that, with a little carbon trading thrown in for immediate effect. Consumerism?—Recycle.

“One hundred companies are responsible for 71 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions in the world since 1988, according to the “Carbon Majors Report” by the non-profit organisation Carbon Disclosure Project.”

(4) to have a debate and then a vote.

The Green Party have campaigned since 2016 against CETA. But they have a record on policy changes. They campaigned against the Lisbon Treaty; when it was defeated and a second vote was called, Eamon Ryan, at a special convention, made a passionate appeal to party members to back the treaty, “for the sake of all of us and of our children.” They backed it.

It is likely that they will change policy again and support this treaty, which has catastrophic implications for the environment. CETA gives corporations the right to sue governments for regulatory changes that could affect future profits. This would be done in private “investor-state dispute settlement” (ISDS) courts. This would be an unequalled transfer of power from government to corporations through these special courts.

CETA would damage Ireland’s ability to legislate for stronger workers’ rights and climate action. It would have serious implications for the ability of a Government to abolish the Industrial Relations Act (1990), as this could be challenged on the grounds that stronger workers’ rights could seriously increase

the workers’ share of future profits, reducing those for the business.

If the Government decided to end the practice of direct-provision companies, such as Amaro, which make millions out of these centres at present, the companies could sue. If legislation was brought in to force employers to provide company sickness pay or pension schemes, this could be challenged also.

It would put in doubt the ability to bring in a ban on fossil fuels, plastic bottles, restrictions on waste disposal, emission limits, taxes on sugar, health warnings, or an increase in the legal drinking age, as any and all of these could affect future profits. There is no end to the possibilities for litigation. It would be an almost total transfer of power from governments to corporations through private courts.

One hundred companies are responsible for 71 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions in the world since 1988, according to the “Carbon Majors Report” by the non-profit organisation Carbon Disclosure Project, which published the report in collaboration with the Climate Accountability Institute. With such a small number of corporations at the

centre of the climate crisis, governments would need to be challenging the power of corporations, not transferring power to them.

Billions have already been paid by governments in fines and legal costs to corporations that have successfully sued governments in ISDS courts included in other trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The vote has been postponed; but it must be stopped. The EU portrays these treaties as free-trade agreements, but this is an illusion. They are a lot more than that: they are the latest method in capital’s programme of deregulation and privatisation—all to increase profits for transnational corporations in a race to the bottom in regulation and workers’ rights.

CETA must be stopped. Ireland has the ability to stop it. If we refuse to ratify CETA this would have massive implications for future EU deals that include ISDS. This could have a hugely positive effect on workers’ rights and climate change for Ireland and beyond.

We have the ability to stop it, and we must do everything in our power to win this battle. ★

Advertising?—More choice. Drugs?—What?

Fraud and corruption?—Social welfare cheats. Inequality?—Trickle-down; and so on.

But, socialism didn’t work! This still trips off the tongue as fluidly, and erroneously, as always. Despite all the failures and disasters of capitalism, you seldom hear that “capitalism doesn’t work.”

There is always an excuse for every occasion, despite the fact that we live in an overwhelmingly capitalist world. Look at both the national and international world, and we have capitalist wars, hunger and starvation, deliberate promotion of religious intolerance, preventable disease, widespread and shocking inequality, inhuman living conditions, ever-increasing incidence and dependence on drugs, slave labour, widespread people-trafficking for sex and labour demand, inadequate or no health care . . . the list goes on and on.

Add to that the constant

propaganda spewing out from all the media, banging the drums of and for war, more consumerism, more individualism, more “control” over non-compliant countries or political forces. Just to season all that, sprinkle on a big heavy dose of widespread, unrelenting “surveillance” (isn’t that such a nice word for spying?).

To top all that off, something has to be done to prevent countries or political and social movements from rejecting all the above. If you attempt to step out from the world described above, the capitalists have any number of “reasons” to cause you to reconsider. Straight-out military attack works very well, especially if you have nothing to fight back with. Otherwise, brace yourself for a long, hard, bumpy road of sanctions (illegal unilateral coercive measures). Naturally, these sanctions are always applied for the good of the people living in the targeted country.

It is not only the United States that applies these people-friendly acts of deliberate impoverishment but also our

masters in the European Union, with the wholehearted support of our government.

Nothing is sacred. Even the most ardent conspiracy theorists cannot begin to imagine the social, economic, labour and political grooming and engineering going on behind the scenes of the management of the covid-19 pandemic. All will be revealed, and, like the sanctions imposed against defenceless populations, it will all be for your own good.

Capitalism doesn’t work (well, it works well for the 1 per cent, it has to be admitted). Socialism cannot be blamed for any of the ills of the world we live in today, yet capitalism manages to evade any responsibility.

While you do not need ideology to see that, you certainly need ideology to build an alternative to it. But first things first. Before people accept socialism they have to reject capitalism. Considering all the above, it should be a simple task, but it’s not. This is our challenge. ★

Who said that?

DECLAN MCKENNA

“The significance of the public service to the overall wellbeing of the country has never been more evident than during the past 10 months.”—

Michael McGrath, minister for public expenditure, 16 December 2020

“Anyone who takes an active part in creating a nuclear weapon is a dead man walking.”—**Eli Cohen**, Israeli intelligence minister, commenting on the assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, an Iranian nuclear scientist. (Israel has illegal nuclear weapons; Iran has not.)

“We have to find a balance. It’s very important to have transparency, it’s very important to tell the public the way it is, but it’s also important to get across that this is a normal part of virus evolution.”—**Mike Ryan**, executive director of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, on the question of mutations of the covid-19 virus

“From the end of 2017 to the end of 2018, the total prison population in the United States declined from 1,489,200 to 1,465,200, a decrease of 24,000 prisoners.”—**The US Department of Justice**, announcing that there are now only 1,465,200 people locked up in prison

“. . . It is clear that there are no guarantees that would allow Venezuela’s opposition to participate in a vote let alone accept the result, other than a guarantee that they would be declared winners, of course.”—

Pablo Vivanco, journalist and political analyst

“For all of its chest-thumping about spreading human rights and democracy throughout the world, the US, at heart, remains the preeminent force in the world against national liberation, and the means it uses to carry out this retrograde project is nothing less than horrifying.”—**Daniel Kovalik**, lecturer in international human rights at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law

American billionaires’ wealth grew so much that they could give a cheque for \$3,000 to “every man, woman and child in the country” and “still be richer than they were nine months ago.”—**Americans for Tax Fairness** and the **Institute for Policy Studies**

What is socialism?

PAUL DORAN

AS I STOOD outside the GPO selling the *Socialist Voice* a young teenager asked me: “What is socialism?” I explained that socialism is when capitalism failed with their disaster economics, like what we had in 2010. Socialism stepped in and socialised their debt, which became our debt. That’s socialism.

Capitalism is when we had the coronavirus and the world panicked and stopped. When our loved ones died, one by one, then hundreds, thousands, and now millions. what we needed was socialism. How those who were looked down upon were the same people that we needed to survive: the cleaners, the care workers, our beautiful nurses and doctors and all those precarious workers. We needed them, and capitalism failed us, when all else failed.

Socialism is when people globally worked together to find a cure, a

vaccine, to maintain support in our lives. Socialism is when we come together to work as a commune for the benefit of all of us. The teenager nodded her head and whispered to her mammy, “Mammy, I like the sound of that socialism.”

Long live socialism!

The natives are restless

DÓNALL Ó BRIAIN

ONE OF THE defining marks of a colony (or neo-colony) is its adoption of the ideology, and especially the language, of the conqueror. In Ireland the political class, together with their servants (or masters?) in the mass media, have happily adopted and propagated these symbols of subjection, rapidly making them the norm. Not least of these is the offensive term “the Troubles” for the War of Independence and the Civil War.

The first known use of this term was in October 1921, in a message from the king of England to the Pope, redolent of the centuries-old warning of the colonial powers that “the natives are restless.” Since then it has been applied retrospectively to 1798 and even 1641, and forward to include the Civil War and later political conflicts, especially the armed conflict of the 1970s and 80s in the North.

This colonial term is now thoughtlessly used by almost everyone, including some who ought to know better. But the most offensive use remains its application to the War of Independence. The British state decided in 1920 to regard the War of Independence as criminal activity, not a war, hence the decision to create two paramilitary forces, first the RIC Special Reserve (Black and Tans) in March that year and then the Auxiliary Division in July, both thinly disguised as police.

This is the background against which the term “Troubles” was created. It has joined “rebels” for insurgents and revolutionaries, “Irish regiments” for some British regiments in the First World War and the “Irish border” for the British border in Ireland as part of the vocabulary of the Irish media and politicians, doing trojan work in the service of neo-colonialism. ★

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