

Socialist Voice

Communist Party of Ireland
Páirtí Cumannach na hÉireann
Partisan Patriotic Internationalist

www.commmunistparty.ie
Number 193 March 2021 € 1.50



Page 2 **Unity**
Page 4 **Consumerism**
Page 6 **Health, work and neoliberalism**
Page 8 **EU militarisation**
Page 10 **Marx, Gamestop, capitalism**
Page 12 **Irish agriculture**
Page 14 **In defence of China**
Page 18 **Imperialism**
Page 20 **Wages robbery**
Page 22 **Rosa Luxemburg**
Page 24 **International Working Women's Day**

Long live International Working Women's Day

Page 24

SV

Socialist Voice
43 East Essex Street
Dublin D02 XH96
(01) 6708707



ISSN 0791-5217



CLASS POLITICS

Workers of the world, unite!



JIMMY DORAN

BUS DRIVERS in London went on strike last month against pay cuts that a number of “private bus operators” tried to impose. However, all is not as it seems.

The British government has privatised much of the public transport system as they push ahead with their neoliberal agenda. They followed the usual method: slashing funds for public transport, running down the service,

then claiming that the public sector is inefficient, costs too much, and provides a poor service.

Ironically, they handed over the running of large sections of London Transport to the French state-owned public transport company Régie Autonome des Transports Parisiens (RATP), which is owned entirely by the French government. It operates three bus companies on the London bus network: London United, London Sovereign, and Quality Line. These companies were at

the centre of the dispute threatening workers with pay cuts.

The workers’ union, Unite, has accused RATP of using the pandemic as a “convenient smokescreen” with which to attempt to implement pay policies that could result in some of their drivers losing up to £2,500 a year.

Covid-19 is not the only smokescreen that RATP is using, as pay cuts on the workers on London buses will be indirectly subsidising public transport in France. RATP would not

A bitter legacy can only produce bitter fruit

Statement by the Communist Party of Ireland 28 February 2021

THE SCENES In Dublin city centre yesterday [Saturday 27 February] should come as no surprise to anyone. The reactions to the violence of the state were as could be expected, as were the weasel words of condemnation by establishment politicians.

Working people are frustrated with their everyday lived experience, their shattered and unfulfilled dreams. The covid pandemic has only brought that frustration out into the open, with the pain and anger that lie beneath.

Yes, people are frustrated by quarantines and restrictions. But the answer does not lie in the politics of reaction, or with those who peddle hate and division, nor with the demigods of the right who are exploiting those genuine fears and frustrations.

We need to respect each other and to protect each other from this pandemic, not because the establishment tells us but because we need to do it in our own interests.

We have suffered decades of

“austerity,” low wages, precarious work, overcrowding, growing waiting-lists for public housing, extortionate rents, and the two-tier health system—one the crumbling public health system, the other the bright, shiny one with no queues, the private one.

Working people have listened to the endless droning of the television and radio pundits promising bread tomorrow while our lives are filled with broken promises by the establishment political parties and the failed institutions that control our lives. They



'If an injury to one is truly an injury to all, workers must unite in solidarity with these overexploited workers, be they meat-packers or Deliveroo drivers'

attempt to slash bus workers' pay in France; the French bus workers wouldn't stand for it. This must not be ignored. Working-class solidarity and trade unions are the unrustable weapons of our class. And borders must not be used as smokescreens for exploitation.

On the left we have many great slogans, but words are meaningless unless we put them into action. Workers of the world are under attack through globalisation. Globalisation by capital is relentless in cutting pay and working conditions around the world. Workers must also act globally in the interest of our class.

Workers of the world must unite to defeat the attacks on our class. If bus workers in London are under attack by RATP, workers in Paris should come out in solidarity, and in every other town, district or country where RATP uses flags of convenience for exploiting workers, or they will be the next for cuts.

Workers in the "gig economy" in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Britain have had victories recently in their working conditions and employment status in national courts. Deliveroo workers in Ireland have had a number of strikes recently. These workers have made some progress, but they are still among the lowest-paid and most precarious workers in existence. Gig economy workers need to join up the dots and link up with their fellow exploited workers around the globe. Globalisation can work two ways; as it stands it is only working for capital.

Covid did not cause poverty wages,

but it has most certainly exposed them. Poverty wages are endemic in our economy. In February the taoiseach, Mícheál Martin, faced an angry Dáil when it was revealed that two thousand low-paid workers had travelled from Brazil to work in meat factories in the previous weeks. His reply was that these low-paid workers were essential to the economy!

This is Ireland in 2021. The head of the government admits that the economy depends on low-paid workers, while in order to protect the meat barons' profits the state allowed public health to be put at extreme risk by allowing thousands to travel from areas in the world with some of the worst mutations of the coronavirus and the highest rates of infection.

If an injury to one is truly an injury to all, workers must unite in solidarity with these overexploited workers, be they meat-packers or Deliveroo drivers. Of course the state has made it illegal to have solidarity action to demand sickness pay and better conditions for these workers. The 1990 Industrial Relations Act has made class solidarity illegal.

Transnational corporations have used multiple locations for years to stop mass action, confining disputes to localised resistance, which is easily controlled with similar anti-worker legislation around the world. The mainstream media, owned and controlled by big business, attack striking workers locally as being greedy and not caring about customers, and emphasise the negative effect on the economy of their actions, creating a

narrative about illegal immigrants abusing work permits, etc.

The media remain silent when workers fight back against government austerity, be it yellow vests in France, farmers in India, or students in Greece. Of course there's wall-to-wall coverage of demonstrations in Hong Kong when the enemies of Western capital are in the crosshairs.

We've seen the crass nature of the capitalist system throughout the health pandemic. Britain abandoned its citizens to the virus, resulting in one of the highest death rates from covid in the world, with more than 120,000 dead already. The people who died were considered dispensable, as many were old and considered a burden on the state. Those young enough to work would be replaced easily with the reserve army of labour. Britain moved quickly in introducing vaccines, but this was not out of concern for the citizens: it was in order to reopen the economy as quickly as possible. Ireland chose the EU directive to stick to using only EU-manufactured vaccines, in the interests of Big Pharma.

If we are to win this class war, workers must organise at home and internationally and fight back against the capitalist class. It is essential for workers in Ireland to fight to get all anti-union legislation abolished, north and south, and to build class solidarity.

We have nothing to lose but our chains, and a world to gain. ★

LEFT KOLKATA: A million Indian communists and their allies assemble in solidarity with the farmers

hear the same establishment voices and slick PR spin that tomorrow will be better, that the interests of working people will soon be dealt with but that there are "other priorities" at the moment. But they know this tomorrow never comes—just the same old same old.

Yesterday's events are the result of that bitter legacy, which can only produce bitter fruit.

The solution to the many problems facing working people lies in their own hands. It is the economic and political system that imposes itself upon us that is at the core of all our problems, from Derry to Kerry: the system of capitalism and imperialist domination and

exploitation, a system geared to grind out ever-increasing profits and grind down those who make those profits: workers.

The answer lies in radical economic and political change, with investment in public housing, public health, public schools. Investment in real jobs with decent pay and working conditions, constitutionally guaranteed, is the priority of society and a people's government.

Working people should not be led down a barren cul-de-sac by false promises from cynical right-wing forces, who are offering nothing beyond this tired, corrupt and unreformable system.

Your anger is just, but your target should be the system, not people with a different skin colour, or who come from some other country.

We wear our masks to protect each other. We trust vaccinations because we know that they have saved tens of millions of lives and eliminated dreadful diseases all over the globe.

Yes, we should be wary of corporate-controlled science and medicine, but not science and medicine per se.

Tomorrow will not change unless we make it happen together, a radical, fundamental change. The Communist Party of Ireland is fighting for such a change. ★

CAPITALISM



BLACK
FRIDAY

Consumer spending driving us to the brink of extinction

DAMIEN MCKENNA

CONSUMERISM AND the military-industrial complex go hand in hand in generating massive profits for global corporations.

The military-industrial complex is the guarantor of cheap raw materials and cheap labour so that we in the First World can gorge on a never-ending supply of consumer goods at prices that

we could not afford if they were manufactured at home. Most First World products are not manufactured here but are made in Third World countries by low-wage children, women and men, often from raw materials stolen or expropriated under duress from weaker countries.

Most people, to some degree, have been aware of this for some time but, either because of lack of alternatives or

self-interest, have turned a blind eye.

In my opinion, one cannot claim to be progressive, communist or concerned about climate change if First World consumerism is not on the agenda.

I don't think it's necessary to go through the figures: people are well aware that most of what we consume here is produced in Asia: clothes and footwear in China, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar; furniture in China, Vietnam, Malaysia—and China for everything else, from hi-tech to cars and trucks.

We have millions of exploited humans producing an endless stream of goods for our pleasure, while corporations accumulate profits in amounts that are unfathomable even to us.

The raw materials used to produce these goods are extracted from countries and continents without any of the benefits going to the people doing the extraction. In fact most of them work in intolerable conditions. The raw materials, after being expropriated, are shipped to the areas of most exploited labour for manufacture and shipped again (and container ships, oil tankers, large warships and cruise ships are probably the most polluting machines on earth) to the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia and New Zealand.

The last acceptable form of racism Part 1

JIMMY CORCORAN

IN MARCH 2017 the Government recognised Irish Travellers as an ethnic minority. This was the culmination of a long campaign by Traveller activists, and while it was a vast improvement on the attitude behind the Report of the Commission on Itinerancy (1963),¹ which saw them as “deviant, destitute drop-outs from Irish society,”² it did not lead to the enactment of any positive rights.

Travellers remain one of the most discriminated-against groups in Irish society, with lower life expectancy, lower educational attainment and higher unemployment than society in general.³

Fewer than 31,000 people identified as Travellers in the census, though it is believed that the actual number is higher and that many choose to conceal their heritage because of discrimination. A

survey on attitudes towards Travellers found that 79 per cent of respondents “would be reluctant to buy a house next door to a Traveller.”⁴ In the presidential election in 2018 Peter Casey, who made anti-Traveller comments, came second, with 23 per cent of the vote. Anti-Traveller discrimination has rightly been called “the last acceptable form of racism.”⁵

Travellers have existed as a separate, nomadic group for centuries in Ireland, where they played a distinct if marginal role in the rural economy. In an era before supermarkets they peddled goods to isolated homes, were horse traders, helped with the harvest, and repaired farm and domestic utensils. From the late 1950s, as the economy “modernised”—i.e. opened up to American and European imperialism—agriculture became increasingly mechanised, plastic replaced metal



'We have millions of exploited humans producing an endless stream of goods for our pleasure, while corporations accumulate profits in amounts that are unfathomable even to us'

The rainforests are being decimated, and not for the peoples of Brazil or Indonesia: they are being decimated for us, for the hardwoods, the pharmaceuticals, metals, rare-earth materials, and cash crops such as palm oil. The world's major agricultural chemical companies, having destroyed biodiversity on the land, in rivers and in seas are now in full battle mode to attack sustainable farming methods in Africa, India, and anywhere they haven't yet got a foothold.

It's the same with spices, herbs, vitamins, and cosmetics: we can't get enough of them, with the consequence of reducing food production for the people in the producing areas and pushing prices beyond the reach of millions.

Massive trawlers scour the oceans with the latest electronic equipment to bring cheap fish back for our consumption while plundering the stocks for millions of coastal peoples who have fished sustainably for millennia. Massive seafood farms in Thailand and elsewhere in Asia and South America produce millions of tons of seafood for our consumption. The needs of the local people are forgotten, but they have to live with the consequences in the pollution and soil erosion.

All the while the workers and victims of our consumption are murdered,

imprisoned and tortured when they show resistance to such exploitation. If the local elite are incapable of controlling the resistance, or governments come to power to defend the interests of their people, the United States will come to the rescue, using one or more of its 800 military bases, often with the help of Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand, to enforce the wishes of their corporate masters.

The division of humans into five main categories has never been more stark: (1) the elite—the 64 or so people who combined have as much wealth as 3½ billion people; (2) the major shareholders and senior executives and managers of the large corporations; (3) the enforcers: national governments, the media, journalists, advertising and marketing gurus (whose job is to persuade us to “spend, spend, spend”), and high-level civil servants and academics; (4) the consumers—moulded by the corporations, through advertising, to believe that enough is never enough; and (5) the producers—the most unfortunate victims of this vicious capitalist system of expropriation. Billions of people, whole countries and continents are subjected to the tyranny of meeting the needs of the

profit-making elite by extracting and producing for us, the planned consumers of the First World.

If this isn't enough to motivate us to look for a non-profit alternative to the butchery of the current system, then maybe the looming climate catastrophe will.

Let's be clear: there is no technical solution to the present crisis. The earth has, and always will have, finite resources. Nothing, and I mean nothing, can justify the consumption differentials between the highest and lowest users. Nothing can justify Elon Musk's \$185 billion while 9 million people die of hunger every year and total military spending for 2019 was \$1.92 trillion.

This is the question: are we willing to take the chance that there is a technical solution and allow the present system to continue, with all the war, misery and starvation that it entails, or are we going to organise and co-operate to change to a non-profit world?

If we don't, history will not remember us kindly, and people will look back and think of this era in the same way that we look back at slavery, child labour (in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe), and racism.

Hopefully, we will learn to co-operate, and our children, or our children's children, will get the chance to thank us for it. ★

utensils, and supermarkets captured the market for the goods the Travellers peddled. Their skills and trades had become obsolete.

By the 1960s, Travellers had become economically and socially displaced from rural society. Legislation prohibiting the erection of temporary dwellings has all but outlawed nomadism.

Unable to survive in rural Ireland, Travellers moved to the outskirts of towns and cities. Once this happened “they became a political problem.”⁶ The Commission on Itinerancy recommended that Travellers be assimilated. A number of groups wrote to the commission suggesting that Traveller children be taken from their parents and raised as settled children, thus “solving the problem in a generation.” The report identified the education process as offering the best road to assimilation.

Travellers have their own culture, in which their nomadic way of life was central. Even though most Travellers are now sedentary, the desire to travel at will “remains the singular core pillar in terms of Traveller identity.”⁶ They have their own language, called Cant, Gammon, or Shelta. While it is no longer widely spoken, most Travellers feel it is an important aspect of their identity.⁷

They had a family-based economy, with their own flexible work patterns. But under pressure from capitalism, Travellers were forced to abandon their way of life for the “dubious pleasures of public housing, full time school attendance, [and] subsistence on welfare benefits.”⁸ They have found it very difficult to obtain employment or public housing, and successful school outcomes have remained elusive. ★

1 *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1963).

2 Anne Boyle, Marie Flynn, and Joan Hanafin, “From absorption to inclusion: The evolution of Irish state policy on Travellers,” in Éidín Ní Shé, Lorelle Burton, and Patrick Danaher (eds.), *Social Capital and Enterprise in the Modern State* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

3 *Census of Population, 2016, Profile 8: Irish Travellers.*

4 *ibid.*

5 *The Last Acceptable Form of Racism?* (London: Traveller Movement, 2017).

6 Ronnie Moore, “‘Last among equals’: Irish Travellers and change in the 21st century,” *Europäisches Journal für Minderheitenfragen*, vol. 5 (2012).

7 Maria Reider, “Irish Travellers' views on Cant: What folk criteria of languageness tell us about the community,” *Language Awareness*, vol. 27 (2018).

8 Aoife Bhreatnach, *Becoming Conspicuous: Irish Travellers, Society and the State, 1922–70* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2006).

Work, mental health, and the disease of neoliberalism Part 2



BARRY MURRAY

■ Part 1 of this article was published in the February issue.

What model of human does neoliberalism encourage?

Neoliberalism sees Darwinian competition as the defining characteristic of human relations. It redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling. It maintains that the market provides benefits that could never be achieved by planning. It runs on the illusion that we have created a meritocratic society, where the most intelligent and hardest-working rise to the top.

This ideology also assumes that those at the bottom of the social status are the most stupid or lazy.

Not surprisingly, we then internalise and reproduce this logic. The poorer classes blame themselves for their “failures,” even when they can do little to change their circumstances. Their disadvantage is the natural order of things, and they can be grateful for what they manage to get in zero-hour contracts and the kindness of those who give to food banks.

Never mind the insecure employment tenures: if you can’t keep a job it’s because you’re not applying yourself. Never mind the impossible costs of housing: if your credit card has reached its limit you’re uncontrolled and

irresponsible. Never mind that you don’t get time or money for cooking proper meals: if your children get fat it’s your poor parenting that’s at fault.

In a world governed by competition, those who fall behind become defined, and self-defined, as “losers.”

“A degree of distrust and paranoia pervades relationships as we silently compare our social status with those around us, wondering where we stand and how others perceive us” (from Sami Timimi’s *Insane Medicine*).

The people who are not at the top or close to the top of the economic ladder feel they need to work or compete harder. To them, failure equals being a loser. This creates stress in people and families. It changes the way people think about themselves and others around them. And it certainly affects the mental health of any nation or people.

Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, in their renowned book *The Spirit Level* (2009), state that it is not just poverty per se but the level of inequality in any society that has the biggest effect on all sorts of health and wellbeing, including the prevalence of mental disorders, stress, and unhappiness.

And they point out that inequality—the gap between rich and poor—has profound effects on people. After a decade of austerity, most families were further affected by stagnant wages, increased job insecurity, swingeing cuts, and changes to the benefits system and public services, nationally and locally, while the inequality gap grew.

A belief in meritocracy means that any failure is considered a personal failure. According to Wilkinson and Pickett, greater inequality heightens social threat and status anxiety, evoking feelings of shame, which feed into our instincts for withdrawal, submission, and subordination. When the social pyramid becomes higher and steeper, status insecurity increases, leading to widespread psychological costs.

It is clear, therefore, that because of the inequalities in society, caused by the neoliberal structure of employment and services, there is a clear knock-on effect on physical and mental health, especially of those at the lower end of the economic scale. Statistics from all over the world clearly demonstrate this. Wilkinson and Pickett report:

'The one thing that the tragedy of the covid-19 pandemic has certainly achieved is the exposure and total failure of the neoliberal capitalist system of government around the world'

Scandinavian countries, although partly swept up in the neoliberal globalisation trend, have largely maintained their roots in strong welfarism and provide a viable democratic alternative to rampant neoliberalism. Levels of inequality are much lower in Scandinavian nations and they regularly top international surveys of happiness and wellness.

We are well aware of the growing epidemic of mental health issues in Ireland and in many other so-called "developed" countries. Speculation on the reasons for this have studiously avoided implicating the neoliberal nature of our society, inequality, and the resultant stress that all of this creates. Instead, mainstream mental health practitioners take the view that there is an inherent weakness in the person suffering mental distress. The treatment resorts to medical intervention: pills and a wide range of other therapies. The treatment therefore is "person-focused," which reinforces the person's feelings of failure. They believe they have failed to "compete" properly in the rat race as they struggle to survive.

Worse still, the treatment of mental illnesses has not escaped the commodification of people who are ill. It too is deemed a profit-making area by neoliberal thinking. It is professionalised, and shrouded in mystery—and fear. There's a "we know what's best for you" attitude towards the patient or client.

As long as this deliberately naïve approach to mental health in particular prevails there will be no progress in solving this health crisis. There is no

doubt that many in the mental health services know only too well that their approach is not based on the main reason for the mental health crisis; but they too are trapped by the "hand that feeds and controls them," namely neoliberal capitalism.

Will any psychiatrist, doctor or consultant ever stand up and shout out for all to hear: "It's your neoliberal greed, competition, deluding people into thinking that they can achieve anything, no matter how extravagant. It's your profiteering, privatising, exploitation and, above all, the rampant inequality—the widening gap between rich and poor—that is the principal cause of mental illness."

How long would it be until they had no job and were pushed out of the elite circle of that professional class?

In summary

The one thing that the tragedy of the covid-19 pandemic has certainly achieved is the exposure and total failure of the neoliberal capitalist system of government around the world. As far as work and the availability of money are concerned, a major change was exposed. People were "furloughed"—paid for not working; though even these payments are being cut and time-limited. They can't help themselves. Businesses too received all sorts of grants and payments. Demands for all this money to be repaid will add even more stress in society.

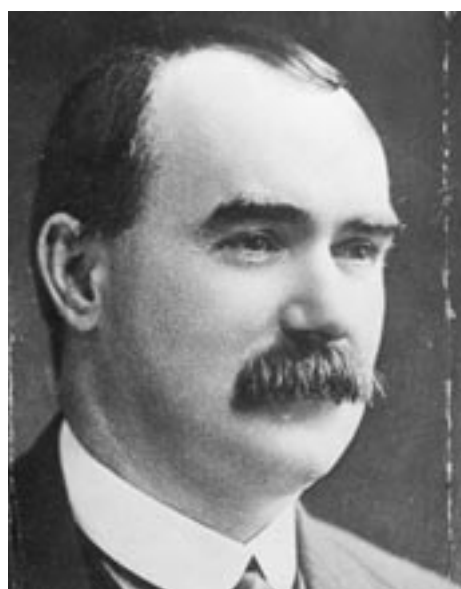
But that's all right: sure a food bank or a charity will sort it all out. No

consideration of the dehumanising of the people already on the bread line, or of the mental trauma that results. There is no column in any accountant's books or spreadsheets to record the cost, or cause, of mental or physical illnesses. There is no humanity where greed and profit are concerned.

A new, post-covid pandemic awaits us, and it's the mental health of the people who are always at the bottom: people with, potentially, no job, even poorer working terms and conditions, cuts in wages, zero-hour contracts, precarious employment—and still have the bills to pay.

To begin to change how we live, how we work, how we are to have true happiness—how our society is run—we have to understand the damage that the present system of neoliberal capitalism has done to the people most at risk from its ravages. We have to refuse to accept that no change is possible. We appreciate, above all, as happened during the covid pandemic, that community together, community looking out for each other, is an unstoppable force for real and progressive change.

If we want to solve the tsunami of health issues and inequality we need to understand that the only treatment for the health of any nation is when the people of that nation own and control the means of production and the distribution of that nation's wealth. Our ancestors lived it, and in today's modern world we can ensure that we live it too. ★



CONNOLLY BOOKS

Connolly Books is named after James Connolly, Ireland's socialist pioneer and martyr

★ Irish history ★ politics ★ Marxist classics ★ feminism
★ environment ★ progressive literature ★ trade unions
★ philosophy ★ radical periodicals

43 East Essex Street, Dublin
between Temple Bar and Parliament Street.

Tuesday to Saturday 10.00 to 17.30 www.connollybooks.org

IMPERIALISM

Part 1 The militarisation of the European Union grows apace

DORIAN Ó SEANÁIN

THE LISBON TREATY is working perfectly. Just as opponents of the EU in Ireland warned after the bloc's leaders signed the treaty in December 2007, the last vestiges of the Irish state's neutrality have disappeared over the last decade.

The importance of the Lisbon Treaty to the incontrovertible aims of the member-states' ruling classes, especially the core imperialist states, was made clear after a plucky Irish electorate shocked its political leaders in 2008 by defeating it in a referendum, in the only member-state where the treaty was put before the people. The government of the time was simply told to have a rerun of the referendum and obtain the "correct" result. Deeply cynical lies were repeated endlessly during the second referendum campaign, claiming that the Irish state's military neutrality would not be jeopardised by its ratification.

It is worth reviewing exactly what institutions were set up under the Lisbon Treaty before considering what has

become of them in the intervening thirteen years.

The treaty centralised the institutions that implement the EU's "common security and defence policy," and reduced scrutiny over them, in the interests of "efficiency," bringing "co-operation on defence among the participating EU Member States to a new level."¹ One single member of the unelected European Commission, the newly created "high representative for foreign affairs and security policy," would oversee all the EU's activities in the area of foreign policy.

Readers of *Socialist Voice* will be familiar with the "permanent structured cooperation" (PESCO) initiative. Its secretariat comprises two agencies: the European External Action Service and the European Defence Agency.² The EEAS is the EU's diplomatic corps. It sends delegations to international organisations, and its divisions monitor each region of the globe. The EDA is specifically tasked with developing the EU's military-industrial complex, by creating an internal market for arms

procurement and conducting research on the resources needed for military operations.³ Both these agencies report directly to the "high representative."

Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the militarisation of the EU has hastened as its partnership with the United States has come under enormous strain. The ruling classes of the EU's member-states can no longer depend on the United States. The mistrust worsened considerably during the period of the Trump government; but a change of occupant in the White House will not reverse the goal of "strategic autonomy" envisaged by the EU.⁴

The core EU states are no longer content to be at the mercy of US whims in NATO. In its annual report for 2019, the EEAS bemoaned US sanctions against Russia and Iran, claiming that they interfered with the "legitimate business" of European companies. Consequently, the EU is seeking to protect its "economic sovereignty" by creating "independent economic channels" to circumvent American-imposed sanctions.⁵



'The centralisation of the members-states' military capabilities is overseen by the EU's permanent military apparatus. At its head is the EU Military Committee, consisting of the chiefs of staff of the member-states'

Furthermore, the split down the Atlantic between these ruling classes has resulted in the creation of the European Defence Fund. Set up in June 2017, it finances the research and development of military equipment and technology. The multi-annual financial framework for 2014–2020 allocated €590 million to military co-operation.⁶ After a proposal from the Commission to pledge €13 billion to the EDF, it was finally allocated €8 billion under the MFF for 2021–27, its budget being reduced in the light of the pandemic.⁷

In 2019, proponents of the EDF argued that the lack of co-operation between EU member-states in matters of "defence" was costing between €25 billion and €100 billion every year.⁸ The objective of allowing European military contractors to submit a tender to any member-state government means that the largest corporations can establish a monopoly over this lucrative market, with the core member-states pushing for their national champions to become EU-backed industrial behemoths.

Not surprisingly, the US armed forces are the standard by which the EU judges its operations and military capacity, implying that the bloc has plenty of catching up to do.⁹

The centralisation of the member-states' military capabilities is overseen by the EU's permanent military apparatus. At its head is the EU Military Committee, consisting of the chiefs of staff of the member-states. The crucial unit that plans operations, assesses external threats and analyses intelligence is the EU Military Staff. Both the EUMC and the EUMS report directly to the high representative and the bloc's foreign ministers.

Although the EUMS was formed in 2004, its role has expanded significantly since 2017 with the establishment of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability unit. This now directs EU missions in Mali, Somalia, and the Central African Republic.¹⁰ In the Sahel region of Africa in particular these missions complement those of the French army, the largest military force within the EU. Hervé Bléjean, a vice-admiral of the French navy, is director-general of the EU military staff.¹¹ France, with its deep commercial and diplomatic links to

Africa, given its colonial past, is enlisting troops from other EU member-states to advance the interests of French capital in the region.

Large-scale operations are being planned by the EU for the years ahead. In November 2018 the EU Council decided that the Military Planning and Conduct Capability unit should be "ready to plan and conduct one executive military operation of the size of an EU Battlegroup [2,500]."¹² Warnings of a future EU army from the No side during the Lisbon Treaty campaigns were not exaggerations in the slightest. When it comes to warfare at sea, the present high representative, Josep Borrell of Spain, has stated that a central goal of the EU is to be "a global maritime security provider."¹³

The vital sea routes along the African coast are at the core of this ambition. At present two naval operations are being co-ordinated under the EU flag in the region. One is enforcing the UN arms embargo on Libya, the other combating piracy off the Somali coast. The most far-ranging project for EU fleets, however, is the "coordinated maritime presence" concept, which was launched in the Gulf of Guinea in January 2021.¹⁴ This will add to the military assets of France, Italy, and Spain, which already have a large footprint in the Gulf.

The explicit aim of this concept is to ensure "a permanent maritime presence and outreach in Maritime Areas of Interest."¹⁵ EU imperialism is not hiding its intentions: it wants to secure supply lines of commodities and energy resources for European big business and to promote "investor confidence."¹⁶

A tenth of EU member-states' oil consumption is obtained from the Gulf of Guinea, and there are an average of thirty EU-flagged or EU-owned vessels in the Gulf at any one time.¹⁷

Africa has a "comparative advantage" over the Middle East in its proximity to Europe, the latter being Africa's primary export market for such valuable minerals as iron ore, diamonds, manganese, cobalt, and bauxite. It is the classic strategy of ensuring that resources can be extracted cheaply from the global south only to be shipped to the industrial centres of the imperialist core. ★

■ Part 2 of this article, in next month's issue, will delve more deeply into the EU's operations outside its borders in pursuit of its goal of "strategic autonomy," analyse the military-industrial complex the EU is creating, and determine the Irish state's role in the development of the EU's military strategy.

References

- 1 European Union, "About PESCO" (<https://pesco.europa.eu/>).
- 2 European Union, "PESCO Secretariat" (<https://pesco.europa.eu/pesco-secretariat/>).
- 3 European Union External Action Service, "Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Structure, Instruments, Agencies" (2016).
- 4 *European Defence Fund: Factsheet* (<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/34509>), p. 1.
- 5 *European Union External Action Service*, "EEAS Annual Activity Report, 2019" (<https://tinyurl.com/u94yez27>).
- 6 European Defence Agency, "European Defence Fund: Factsheet," p. 3 (<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/34509>).
- 7 European Defence Agency, "European Defence Fund (EDF)" ([https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/european-defence-fund-\(edf\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/european-defence-fund-(edf))).
- 8 *European Defence Fund: Factsheet* (<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/34509>), p. 2.
- 9 *European Defence Fund: Factsheet* (<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/34509>), p. 2.
- 10 "The Military Planning and Conduct Capability—MPCC" (https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/mpcc_factsheet.pdf), p. 2.
- 11 "Vice-Admiral Hervé Bléjean" (<https://tinyurl.com/syjkn4b>).
- 12 European Union External Action Service, "Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) structure, instruments, agencies" (2016).
- 13 European Union External Action Service, "Why the EU needs to be a global maritime security provider" (2021) (<https://tinyurl.com/3bb26pff>).
- 14 European Union External Action Service, "The EU launches its Coordinated Maritime Presences concept in the Gulf of Guinea" (2021) (<https://tinyurl.com/k4hscmyf>).
- 15 European Union, "Coordinated Maritime Presences" (2021) (<https://tinyurl.com/tdc6wsr5>).
- 16 Council of the European Union, "EU Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea" (2014) (<https://tinyurl.com/wmrecr6k>), p. 12.
- 17 Council of the European Union, "EU Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea" (2014) (<https://tinyurl.com/wmrecr6k>), p. 2.

Marx, Gamestop and finance capitalism

DAVID HARTERY

AS RETAIL Investors launched a short squeeze on large hedge funds, forcing large stock-market movements and frenzied recapitalisation, many commentators heralded it as a victory for “the little guy” against Wall Street. However, the truth is far from that simple.

“The biggest owners of Gamestop: Fidelity (14%), Cohen’s RC Ventures (13%), and BlackRock (11%), and then a bunch of other mutual and hedge funds, and also a guy named Donald Foss who became a billionaire from a subprime auto loan company.”* These giant financial outfits are the real winners, as always.

Also incorrect is the idea that this is some new departure, a uniquely modern phenomenon. As Marxists we should situate our analysis in history, and understand that this is just the latest manifestation of the transition of money from mere unit of exchange to “social symbol,” as described by Marx in the *Grundrisse* (chapter 3):

[Money] serves [the money holder] . . . only because of its social (symbolic) property; and it can have a social property only because individuals have alienated their own social relationship from themselves so that it takes the form of a thing.

Exchange value naturally remains at the same time an inherent quality of commodities while it simultaneously exists outside them; on the other side, when money no longer exists as a property of commodities, as a common element within them, but as an individual entity apart from them, then money itself becomes a particular commodity alongside the other commodities . . . Here a new source of contradictions which make themselves felt in practice. (The particular nature of money emerges

again in the separation of the money business from commerce proper.)

It is this separation of “money business” from commerce proper that is the instructive part here. We can view the current economic situation on a continuum from the last major economic crisis in 2008. The current situation is directly influenced by the accommodations that capitalism was forced to make following the credit crunch that precipitated the crisis. With austerity enforced to rein in public spending, aiming to reduce states’ public debt liabilities, gut public services, and thereby (the hope was) invigorate private enterprise, fiscal remedies were out of the question. It was the turn of quantitative easing, and monetary policy, to attempt to get capitalism out of crisis.

Quantitative easing (QE) is the widespread purchasing, by central banks, of government bonds and other financial instruments. It has resulted in a huge inflation in asset prices since it was introduced, and has led to the largest stock-market rally in human history. It has also completed the transition of power from industrial capitalists to “money capitalists.”

In *Capital* (volume 1), Marx differentiates between the money capitalist and the industrial capitalist (productive capitalist). A money-owner uses their money as interest-bearing capital, by lending it to an industrial capitalist, thus putting it into circulation. After the agreed period, when the loan is repaid, the money returns to the money capitalist, as so-called realised capital.

The industrial capitalist uses the credit to employ workers to produce goods, creating surplus value. From the resulting profit they pay to the money capitalist the interest on the loan. Interest-bearing capital as a commodity arises from the fact that money is sold as capital at a price—interest.

The lender of money does not expend it in purchasing commodities, or, if this sum of values is in commodity-form, does not sell it for money. He advances it as capital, as $M-M$, as a value, which returns to its point of departure after a certain term. He lends instead of buying or selling. This lending, therefore, is the appropriate form of alienating value as capital, instead of alienating it as money or commodities. It does not follow, however, that lending cannot also take the form of transactions which have nothing to do with the capitalist process of reproduction.

We can see here that Marx foresees the emergence of an entirely parasitic rentier class, creating a system of transaction with little to no relation to production.

And this is a large component of the current situation of rampant speculative bubbles. Marx quite correctly showed that interest rates are defined by the total rate of profit. And with rates of profit now at a historic low point, we see historically low interest rates. It is the aim of asset inflation, by means of QE, to attempt to offset this historically low rate of profit—the compromise reached after 2008.

Since interest is merely a part of profit paid, according to our earlier assumption, by the industrial capitalist to the money-capitalist, the maximum limit of interest is the profit itself, in which case the portion pocketed by the productive capitalist would = 0. Aside from exceptional cases, in which interest might actually be larger than profit, but then could not be paid out of the profit, one might consider as the maximum limit of interest the total profit minus the portion (to be subsequently analysed) which resolves itself into wages of superintendence. The minimum limit of interest is altogether indeterminable. It may fall to any low.

Marx is also highly wary of the destructive power of speculation, with his harshest words kept for the rent-seeking behaviour of the money capitalist:

The relations of capital assume their most externalised and most fetish-like form in interest-bearing capital. We have here ‘ $M-M$ ’, money creating more money, self-expanding value, without the process that effectuates these two extremes. In merchant’s capital, ‘ $M-C-M$ ’, there is at least the general form of the capitalistic movement, although it confines itself solely to the sphere of

'This idea of "late capitalism," "financial capitalism" and so on is not a departure from Marx but is in fact just the' new face on a very old system'

circulation, so that profit appears merely as profit derived from alienation; but it is at least seen to be the product of a social relation, not the product of a mere thing. The form of merchant's capital at least presents a process, a unity of opposing phases, a movement that breaks up into two opposite actions—the purchase and the sale of commodities. This is obliterated in 'M–M', the form of interest-bearing capital.

In the post-QE world there is no real relationship between asset prices and their underlying value. Money in effect is handed to speculators to play with as they wish, creating gigantic transactions but with no impact on the productive capacity of the underlying economy. Marx's concept of "fictitious capital" is the key here.

Can you find a more perfect summary of the casino nature of the modern economy than the following passage from *Capital* (volume 2)?

The reserve funds of the banks, in countries with developed capitalist production, always express on the average the quantity of money existing in the form of a hoard, and a portion of this hoard in turn consists of paper, mere drafts upon gold, which have no value in themselves. The greater portion of banker's capital is, therefore, purely fictitious and consists of claims (bills of exchange), government securities (which represent spent capital), and stocks (drafts on future revenue). And it should not be forgotten that the money-value of the capital represented by this paper in the safes of the banker is itself fictitious, in so far as the paper consists of drafts on guaranteed revenue (e.g., government securities), or titles of ownership to real capital (e.g., stocks), and that this value is regulated differently from that of the real capital, which the paper represents at least in part; or, when it represents mere claims on revenue and no capital, the claim on the same revenue is expressed in continually changing fictitious money-capital.

This is a very interesting situation, because this hyperfinancialisation is both the salvation capitalism is using to salvage itself from crisis and the seed of the next crisis. Marx puts it best when he says:

The credit system appears as the main lever of over-production and over-speculation in commerce solely because

the reproduction process, which is elastic by nature, is here forced to its extreme limits, and is so forced because a large part of the social capital is employed by people who do not own it and who consequently tackle things quite differently than the owner, who anxiously weighs the limitations of his private capital in so far as he handles it himself. This simply demonstrates the fact that the self-expansion of capital based on the contradictory nature of capitalist production permits an actual free development only up to a certain point, so that in fact it constitutes an immanent fetter and barrier to production, which are continually broken through by the credit system. Hence, the credit system accelerates the material development of the productive forces and the establishment of the world-market. It is the historical mission of the capitalist system of production to raise these material foundations of the new mode of production to a certain degree of perfection. At the same time credit accelerates the violent eruptions of this contradiction—crises—and thereby the elements of disintegration of the old mode of production.

This "money capitalist" that Marx warned about in the nineteenth century is capitalism taken to its natural conclusion.

This idea of "late capitalism," "financial capitalism" and so on is not a departure from Marx but is in fact just the new face on a very old system. In fact Marx says that this money capitalism is the true face of capitalism, as it doesn't even pretend to be earned: it is nakedly extractive and parasitic, destroying the very lies that capitalism tells about itself. How else do we explain condemnation of the trading app Robinhood by an ubercapitalist like Ted Cruz?

Only one aspect should be emphasised and that is that the business of actual saving and abstinence (by hoarders), to the extent that it furnishes elements of accumulation, is left by the division of labour, which comes with the progress of capitalist production, to those who receive the minimum of such elements, and who frequently enough lose even their savings, as do the labourers when banks fail. On the one hand, the capital of the industrial capitalist is not "saved" by himself, but he has command of the savings of others in proportion to the magnitude of his

capital; on the other hand, the money-capitalist makes of the savings of others his own capital, and of the credit, which the reproductive capitalists give to one another and which the public gives to them, a private source for enriching himself. The last illusion of the capitalist system, that capital is the fruit of one's own labour and savings, is thereby destroyed. Not only does profit consist in the appropriation of other people's labour, but the capital, with which this labour of others is set in motion and exploited, consists of other people's property, which the money-capitalist places at the disposal of the industrial capitalists, and for which he in turn exploits the latter.

What is interesting about the Gamestop events is the ability to create a narrative of "us versus them." Even if these are retail investors, and not financial organisations, they are probably only rarely members of the actual working class. It is the professional tech classes that are most likely to make up the majority of the Wall Street Bets contingent, forced to work from home during the pandemic, overpaid and underworked, with huge disposable income going unspent now that most commerce and travel is curtailed. It is these bored petit-bourgeois who are probably the real financial muscle for the current rally.

However, the bored should not be underestimated as a class of investor. Karl Marx wrote (letter to his uncle, Lion Phillips, 25 June 1864):

I have, which will surprise you not a little, been speculating – partly in American funds, but more especially in English stocks, which are springing up like mushrooms this year (in furtherance of every imaginable and unimaginable joint stock enterprise), are forced up to a quite unreasonable level and then, for the most part, collapse. In this way, I have made over £400 and now that the complexity of the political situation affords greater scope, I shall begin over again. It's a type of operation that makes small demands on one's time, and it's worth while running some risk in order to relieve the enemy of his money. ★

*Andrew Granato, "Joke capital: Gamestop populism and the desire for narrative," *The Margins* (tinyurl.com/1ovtgive).



The future of agriculture in Ireland

JOE HURLEY

THE NEWS that Britain has applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is a big blow to Irish farmers and rural agri-business workers.

The CPTPP is different from the EU, in that it has no customs union or single market. It is a free-trade organisation, in which every country involved can individually negotiate its own free-trade deals.

At present 80 per cent of British beef imports and an estimated 90 per cent of cheddar cheese imports come from Ireland. Ireland's agri-sector will be badly affected when Britain is flooded with the products of the lowest-cost dairy, beef and sheep producers in the world.

To be competitive, Ireland will have to reduce total prices further, and that would be calamitous for farmers and workers in the sector. The meat factories, co-ops and millers benefit greatly, but at the expense of the workers.

Relations with the Connolly Youth Movement Statement by the National Executive Committee, Communist Party of Ireland 9 February 2021

OVER THE recent period a serious rupture in the long-standing political relationship between the Communist Party of Ireland and the Connolly Youth Movement has taken place. On 9 January, at its extraordinary ard-fheis, members of the CYM voted to remove their support for the programme of the CPI. This was followed on 17 January by a "CYM Statement on Disaffiliation."

The Communist Party of Ireland has had a long history with the Connolly Youth Movement since the party established the CYM in 1965, sharing a common revolutionary ideology and allowing for dual membership. The party has given the CYM material and financial support over the decades, as well as the use of party facilities and offices, enabling it to run meetings, education schools and campaigns as well as providing campaign and

education materials. While there has been a long-standing and comradely relationship and close cross-body work between the two organisations, there was no official affiliation between the CPI and the CYM.

The relationship between the two organisations had remained complementary since the CYM's foundation in 1965 until 2016, when the CYM and its leadership began to move in an increasingly divergent political direction from that of the CPI. Changes to the CYM constitution over the past number of years shifted the long-standing relationship from being constructive to being competitive and antagonistic, exemplified in its change from being supportive to being a fraternal organisation of the CPI, akin to the relationship some international parties hold. These changes, initiated by the CYM leadership, gave rise to

conflicts and problems with holding dual membership.

It was not only the political differences that caused the fundamental shift in the CPI-CYM relationship but the political aspirations of key figures within the CYM leadership to mount a challenge for the leadership of the CPI, without having broad support within the party. With this fact in mind, at its "CYM 1970–2020 Congress" a motion was passed instructing that "all members are to apply for membership [of the CPI] and find a means to engage in a limited capacity."

This motion was proposed and passed without prior consultation with the CPI and without extending an invitation to members of the CPI's leading body, the National Executive Committee. This had been a custom extended to the CPI; had CPI representatives been made aware of

‘We need to follow the lead of CPTPP and Mercosur by producing at low cost. The countries on the socialist path, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, produce this way and are successful’

Take, for example, New Zealand. It has the highest beef price in CPTPP, namely €3 per kilo. The cost of making silage, spreading slurry, the feed and all the costs of producing a kilo of feed make that figure nearly impossible to live on in Ireland.

Our problem is simple: we are too high-cost to make a realistic profit—or a living. You would want about €4.70 to €5 a kilo. The question one would ask is, How does the CPTPP produce at such low cost and price? The answer is simple: mass production, on massive farms of thousands of acres with tens of thousands of livestock, on a very-low-cost grass minimal-feed system. (Canada is the exception, adopting an American-style indoor feeding system.) The numbers are so large that a low price by our standards would yield a considerable profit.

The Mercosur countries in Latin America operate the same way: high-quality, low-budget-cost farming. Most of the CPTPP and Mercosur countries don't have TB testing, allow excessive use of steroids, and destroy massive areas of forests to facilitate the creation of new

ranch-type farms.

This is not good for the consumer. How does one know what is in this product they are buying? In order to compete we have to lower the cost in Ireland. It is the dearest country on the planet to farm. The cost of silage-making is over €14 to €15 for wrap and cutting (mowing), baling, and everything. Vets' bills are very high; feed prices are very high.

We need to follow the lead of CPTPP and Mercosur by producing at low cost. The countries on the socialist path, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, produce this way and are successful. We need to follow the socialist principle of nationalisation and planning to produce as much as we can to be self-sufficient and also to negotiate sustainable markets for our products, with all agri-workers paid according to the economic reality.

Why isn't the government finding markets? Well, the EU controls this country, and we don't have the freedom to trade with who we want. We don't have an individual trading policy like the CPTPP countries (and Britain when it

joins). We are limited by the Single Market and the Customs Union.

The government has no interest in the rural areas or in agriculture. I remember on the RTE “Prime Time” programme some years ago an economist stated that we didn't need farmers: we can import cheaper. That sums up the elite's attitude.

In the Soviet Union there were two types of socialist farming. The collective farms amalgamated small farmers into larger state-run concerns that were highly productive, and profitable. Then there was Nikolai Bukharin's plan, in which the meat factories and other large co-operatives were nationalised. But small to medium-sized farms and businesses remained privately owned, and were encouraged to produce as much as they could, with no restrictions.

Both these ideas revitalised the rural areas. I prefer Bukharin's ideas myself, and I think that form of socialist thinking is the way forward in Ireland.

We need a balance: rural and urban workers working together, the two economies working off each other and prospering together. ★

such a motion they would have strongly advised against its adoption. An attempt to join en masse shortly followed in 2020 but was halted by the party until bilateral discussions could take place to discuss this highly irregular behaviour, as well as to discuss the notable differences between the two organisations. Unfortunately, attempts to resolve these matters were not successful in the light of bad-faith practices by leading elements of the CYM.

The CPI has always respected the contribution of CYM activists over the decades, many of whom have gone on to join the ranks of the party. However, the attempt to establish a narrative about “a clique surrounding the main leadership” (i.e. the democratically elected National Executive Committee of the party) over the much more mundane realities of internal party democracy and discipline is a transparent attempt to divert blame for the factional approach, actions and activities of some dual members, which include:

• Adopting a line in the CPI from an

external organisation

- Leaking party documents to non-members
- Discussing and voting on party work with non-members outside the CPI
- Dual members boycotting meetings and activities
- Dual members disrupting branch meetings.

Far from the fantasy of a “clique” controlling the party, the CPI was left with no choice but to defend its democratic structures, resulting in action being taken by the appropriate bodies of the party against a very small number of dual members who were found to be in serious breach of party rules and discipline. Those individuals refused to accept or abide by the sanctions that followed.

This campaign to discredit the CPI and its elected leadership continued in an attempt to bypass the democratic processes of the CPI. On numerous occasions these now expelled party members placed their individual ambitions and loyalty to the CYM above that of the party. Furthermore, they attempted to leverage their positions

within the CYM to manoeuvre their way into leadership roles within the party, despite failing to gain broad support from the existing CPI membership. As most will appreciate, this is a form of behaviour that would not be tolerated in any club or organisation, much less a communist party.

It is regrettable that the bond of solidarity and co-operation between the CPI and CYM has now degenerated into a hostile one. A relationship that had lasted over five decades has been derailed by the political ambitions of a few divisive individuals within the leadership of the CYM.

These are challenging times, but the CPI will continue to earnestly fight for, help, organise and support the hopes and aspirations of the youth of Ireland in a movement representative of the revolutionary theory and programme of the CPI.

We have no wish nor desire to enter into a protracted public discourse about this unnecessary rupture; the struggle for Connolly's goal of a Workers' Republic remains the goal of the Communist Party of Ireland. ★

NEW COLD WAR



In defence of China

Alan Farrell explores the apparent contradictions inherent in China today and examines the evidence relating to criticisms made of the Chinese state by some figures and organisations on the left.

Broadly speaking, critiques of China from the left fall under three categories.

Firstly, that the rapid growth and development of China is a cause for concern for ecological reasons; secondly, that China engages in quasi-imperialism or “social-imperialism”, a criticism also levelled at the Soviet Union; and thirdly, that China is a totalitarian state that abuses the human rights of its citizens.

PICTURE ABOVE: Staff members check the body temperature of a worker at a construction site in Wuhan, central China’s Hubei Province, March 26, 2020. (*Xinhua/Cheng Min*)

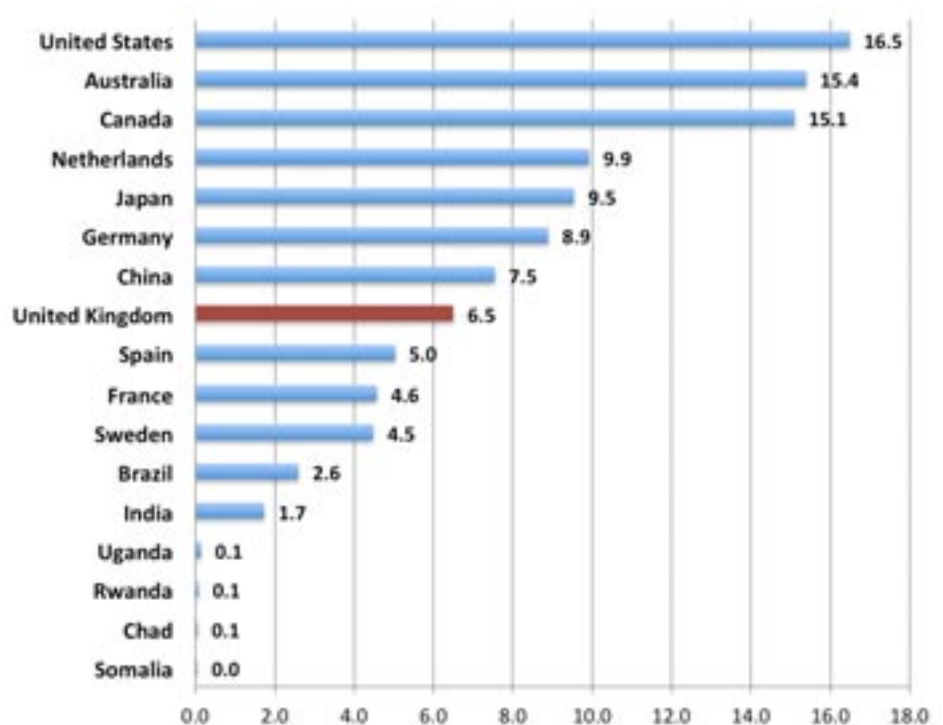
The environmental question

A common criticism levelled at China from those in the West, on both the left and the right, is that it is engaging in unsustainable growth, which is leading to irreparable damage to the global environment.

If we look at bulk numbers of emissions, it’s undoubted that China places a heavy burden on the global

environment. However, given its present population of approximately 1.4 billion, an examination of any per capita chart will show that China is still far behind nearly every country in the west.¹

Ultimately, a country’s borders are fairly abstract, so in gross numbers the country with the most people will always produce the “most” waste. This is why a measure per capita is important.



Carbon dioxide emissions (tonnes) per capita, selected countries

Source: World Bank

'China's approach to the very loud and apparent needs of environmental and climate reform is only possible through the central structural principle that underpins the country'

Additionally, while calling for China to curb its growth because of the "ticking clock" of inevitable global catastrophe is understandable, this ultimately ignores the centuries of enormous growth and consumption, which still continues, in the West. Do the people of China, and indeed all the other countries of the Global South, not deserve to enjoy the simple dignities we take for granted in the West, such as public transport infrastructure, well-maintained roads, widespread broadband internet connection, etc.?

The myth of global overpopulation is a commonly used bourgeois criticism of the developing South. This, however, ignores the waste inherent in an ever-expanding capitalist paradigm. We already produce more than enough food and commodities for the global population, and most forecasts show that the global population is levelling off. It therefore follows that the problem isn't with a billion Chinese people wanting a moderate standard of living but rather with ceaseless expansion in the pursuit of profit, driven by political and economic interests based in the West.

It is also important to examine China's response to the climate crisis relative to that in the West. In recent decades China has been able to marry a reduction in emissions with continuing alleviation of poverty. While the Western world prevaricates and hopes for a free-market solution to our climate crisis, China has orchestrated a number of large-scale and strategic environmental projects.

These include an ambitious national reforestation policy (with hundreds of billions of trees planted so far)² and a de-desertification effort that restored up to 40 per cent of forest in some former desert regions.³ It has developed the world's largest green-energy sector, by several metrics,⁴ and is the biggest manufacturer and buyer globally of electric vehicles. It also has the largest and most sophisticated high-speed training network. These demonstrable, measurable efforts far outstrip those in the United States, Britain, and the EU.

China's approach to the very loud and apparent needs of environmental and climate reform is only possible through the central structural principle

that underpins the country. That is, through the guiding principles of Marxism-Leninism alongside socialism with Chinese characteristics and Mao Zedong thought. Only in a dictatorship of the proletariat, where the power of the state apparatus is guided by the fundamental needs of the working class, is it possible to achieve this desperately needed and profound change.

The imperialism question

"Socialist in words, imperialist in deeds" was Lenin's critique of European countries before the First World War and specifically a criticism of the chauvinistic attitude of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Later this same critique was used by Mao and Enver Hoxha to attack the Soviet Union, eventually leading towards the Sino-Soviet split. Ironically, many today see modern China as very much embodying this criticism.⁵

However, deeper analysis will show that there are qualitative differences between the imperialism of the West and the trade deals and infrastructure-building projects in the global south that constitute part of China's "Belt and Road" programme. Consider, for example, trade partnerships between China and Africa. The former Liberian minister of public works Gyude Moore, speaking at the Paulson Institute in Chicago in 2019, laid out the broader African viewpoint on these partnerships, revealing the continuing legacy of colonialism and imperialism on the continent (\$1 trillion worth of natural resources, still in the ground, belongs to 101 companies listed on the London Stock Exchange) and how, beginning at the start of the millennium, the trade deals with China offered a completely new experience for political leaders on the continent.

There remain some reasoned critiques of these enormous trade deals, namely that they stymie domestic development and saddle countries with large amounts of debt. However, it is important to note that they provide a way for the continent to break out and develop an infrastructure that is not based on old colonial lines of linking peripheral resource sites with central exporting areas. Instead, there is a chance to develop fully integrated

road, railway and other networks that serve the needs of the African people.

On the question of debt it must be noted too that China regularly forgives these huge loans, which are invariably interest-free. This is a significant change to the previous paradigm for most African countries, where the rates of servicing loans to businesses in the West were (and still are) so high that they were unable to develop in any real sense.⁶

The human rights question

Some final words on Xinjiang and the claims of human rights abuses in China. You would be hard pressed to avoid some of the recent sensational claims made about the westernmost region of China, home to one of its fifty-five officially recognised minorities, the Uighur people.

These include the claim that up to 3 million Uighurs are detained in purported concentration camps. The great majority of these articles and claims can be traced back to one person, Adrian Zenz, a senior fellow at the explicitly pro-imperialist and anti-communist "Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation." His method of obtaining his statistics is notoriously flimsy, and the way he applies this data is equally crude. Zenz manipulated data to try and claim that the Uighur population was decreasing in Xinjiang as part of the evidence that a genocide is taking place; the reality, however, is that the Uighur population is growing rapidly, far outstripping the increase in the Han population in the same region.⁷

Recently the International Criminal Court (not a noted pro-communist or pro-China organisation) concluded that there was insufficient evidence that China is carrying out a genocide in Xinjiang.⁸ This was recently echoed by the US State Department.⁹ Indeed China has been largely transparent in its anti-terrorism exercise, inviting delegations from majority-Muslim countries to inspect its work,¹⁰ describing the facilities in Xinjiang instead as "re-education" facilities to bring Uighurs away from Islamic extremism and offering them opportunities for employment and education.

Continued overleaf

Memorial to a forgotten revolution

Laura Duggan



SUOMENLINNA is a beautiful little island off the coast of Helsinki. A regular boat service (part of the public transport system) ferries residents, navy cadets and tourists alike to the island in about fifteen minutes. On the trip across, depending on the time of year, you can be met by seal pups, flocks of different birds, or the remains of ice floes that ice-breaker ships have left behind.

But the little time capsule of an island hides a dark past; and away from the main route you can find a small memorial to the prisoner-of-war camp that was here from 14 April 1918 until 14 March 1919. The camp was a remainder and a reminder of the civil war that was fought for a little over three weeks in 1918 between White Finland and the Finnish Socialist Workers' Republic.

The camp on Suomenlinna was one of thirteen large camps scattered about the country. At their peak these camps held about 80,000 prisoners of war, including 5,000 women, 1,500 children, and 8,000 Russians. About 10,000 members of the Red Guard and suspected sympathisers were interned in the camp on Suomenlinna alone.

In total, 68,000 of the prisoners were convicted by field court-martial for treason as a result of their membership, or assumed membership, of the Red

Guards; 39,000 were released on parole, and 555 were sentenced to death, of whom 113 were executed.

The mortality rate for prisoners was astronomical, with approximately a tenth of the prisoners dying of starvation and diseases alone. Deaths were compounded by the angry, punitive and callous treatment of the prisoners by the White Finnish state.

The visibility of the abject horror of the camps and their hopeless conditions affected the minds of many people much more deeply than the war itself and increased support for the Reds throughout Finland, with people in the vicinity of the camps attempting to sneak food and other comfort to the prisoners.

Even with this change in public attitude, the camps were totally ignored for decades by the White interpretation of history, and it took until 1927 for the last fifty prisoners to be pardoned and full rights returned to the Reds. The Finnish government finally paid reparations to 11,600 former prisoners of war in 1973.

The memorial, unveiled on 28 September 2004, consists of two rocks, one natural and one quarried, engraved with the years 1918 and 1919. It can often be found adorned with candles and flowers, in remembrance of those who fought for a different world.

In defence of China *continued*

(It should be noted that this is extremely similar to an approach taken by France in recent years,¹¹ though it has not been subject to the same level of international scrutiny or criticism.) There is a global divide, with North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and Japan (i.e. the West) actively condemning China's actions while many in the Global South and other noted antagonists of the West support them. Notably, not one Muslim-majority country in the world condemns what is happening in Xinjiang, suggesting that, as ever, Western cries about human rights

abuses may function as a proxy for other, more fundamental divides.

What unites these criticisms and attacks? They all originate from the West, and they all seek to discredit China on the world stage. However, as we should all know by now, the West lies. It lies to foment war, it lies to destabilise countries, it lies to deflect criticism. It lied about incinerators in Kuwait, it lied about nuclear weapons in Iran, it lied about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. It is now lying about China, and will continue to do so as long as China presents a fundamental challenge to its authority and a threat to its political and economic system.

A powerful state apparatus, ideologically guided by the science of Marxism-Leninism, that remains true to the working class of a country is the only hope for our planet to

escape the never-ending boom-bust cycles and environmental catastrophes that come with it. All on the left should look unambiguously to China as a country to defend, and as a country that demonstrates a real alternative to the power structures we have here in the West.

This does not mean that China should be exempt from reasoned critiques, or that we should invest blind faith in the country; but our critiques should come from a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint, a perspective that understands that the road from capitalism to socialism is an uneven one, fraught with contradictions. If ever there was a clear signpost that they're heading in the right direction, however, surely lifting close to a billion people out of extreme poverty in forty years is a good indication that China is on the right path.¹² ★



‘... two peoples living in the same space, ruled by the same state, but with profoundly unequal rights. This is a vision of a 21st-century apartheid.’

Israel judged an apartheid regime

DECLAN MCKENNA

THE ISRAELI Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, B’Tselem, has judged Israel to be an apartheid state, bent on perpetuating the supremacy of Jews over Palestinians.

“Israel is not a democracy that has a temporary occupation attached to it,” said the body’s executive director, Hagai El-Ad. “It is one regime between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, and we must look at the full picture and see it for what it is: apartheid.”

The report claims that Israel has created a system over all the territory in which Jewish citizens have full rights. Meanwhile, it argues, Palestinians are divided into four tiers, with various levels of rights according to where they live but always below Jewish people. At the lowest end are the roughly 2 million Palestinians in the deeply impoverished

Gaza Strip, governed by Hamas but over which Israel has “effective control” because of its ruthless blockade.

Above them, B’Tselem said, are the roughly 2.7 million Palestinian “subjects” in the West Bank, who live in “dozens of disconnected enclaves, under rigid military rule and without political rights.”

Next on its hierarchy are the roughly 350,000 Palestinians who live in East Jerusalem. Israel has offered citizenship to these residents, though many have refused to apply on principle, and for those who try the rejection rate is very high.

The highest tier—Palestinian citizens of Israel, also called Arab Israelis—have full citizenship and make up about a fifth of Israelis. Even at that, B’Tselem said they are also kept below Jewish citizens, pointing to land discrimination, immigration laws that favour Jews, and other laws that afford Jews extra political rights.

On top of that, forty-seven of the independent “special procedures mandates” appointed by the UN Human Rights Council concluded that Israel’s intention to annex more areas of the West Bank “would be the crystallisation of an already unjust reality: two peoples living in the same space, ruled by the same state, but with profoundly unequal rights. This is a vision of a 21st-century apartheid.” ★

LETTER

Humanitarian intervention

Thanks to SV for disclosing the truth about Samantha Power. Biden is making many hawkish appointments to his foreign policy team. Power is one of them, though she always proclaims her alleged “humanitarian” motives. The Agency for International Development, which she will head, funds many US interventions in the Third World. In her 2019 memoir *The Education of an Idealist*, Power records [p. 106] that when NATO began bombing Sarajevo she shed “tears of relief.”

Joe Jamison
New York

NOTES

- 1 World Bank, “The World Bank in China” (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC>).
- 2 Michael Shermer, “Why Malthus is still wrong,” *Scientific American*, 1 May 2016 (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/why-malthus-is-still-wrong/>).
- 3 Bloomberg News, “China’s 40-year, billion-tree project is a lesson for the world” (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-09-14/china-s-40-year-billion-tree-project-is-a-lesson-for-the-world>).
- 4 World Bank, “Curbing desertification in China” (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/07/04/china-fighting-desertification-and-boosting-incomes-in-xinjiang>).
- 5 Xinhua World News, “Factbox: Achievements in China’s energy development,” 21 December 2020 (http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-12/21/c_139607437.htm).
- 6 Communist Party of India (Maoist),

“China: A modern social-imperialist power,” 21 September 2018 (<https://anti-imperialism.org/2018/09/21/china-a-modern-social-imperialist-power-cpimaoist/>).

- 7 Anastacia Promskaya, “France still robbing its ‘former’ African colonies,” *Pambazuka News*, 25 September 2015 (<https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/france-still-robbing-its-former-african-colonies/>).
- 8 Gareth Porter and Max Blumenthal, “US State Department accusation of China ‘genocide’ relied on data abuse and baseless claims by far-right ideologue,” *Gray Zone* (<https://thegrayzone.com/2021/02/18/us-media-reports-chinese-genocide-relied-on-fraudulent-far-right-researcher/>).
- 9 Patrick Wintour, “ICC asks for more evidence on Uighur genocide claims,” *Guardian* (London) (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/11/international-criminal-icc-china-ughur-genocide-claims>).
- 10 Colum Lynch, “State Department lawyers concluded insufficient evidence to prove genocide in China,” *Foreign Policy* (Washington), 19 February 2021

(<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/19/china-ughur-genocide-us-pompeo-blinken/>).

- 11 Karen Leigh, “China takes diplomats to tour ‘re-education camps’ as pressure builds over mass detention of Uighurs,” *Time*, 7 January 2019 (<https://time.com/5496435/china-12-diplomats-tour-xinjiang/>).
- 12 Adam Sage, “France fights terror with camps for re-education,” *Times* (London) (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/france-fights-terror-with-re-education-camps-plan-7wg9vrrgd>).

Further reading

“Gyude Moore: ‘China in Africa: An African perspective’,” Youtube.com.
“The Chinese ‘debt trap’ is a myth,” Theatlantic.com.
“Curbing desertification in China,” Worldbank.org.
“China’s 40-year, billion-tree project is a lesson for the world,” Bloomberg.com.
“China to forgive interest-free loans to Africa that are coming due, Xi Jinping says,” Scmp.com

IMPERIALISM

Understanding the past to unlock the future



Dialectics says that everything is changing and everything is evolving. Capitalism is no exception—so can tactics for abolishing capitalism be the same asks **Sajeev Kumar**.

CAPITALISM WAS nascent during Marx's time; and by the time Lenin arrived it had evolved into imperialism, which he said is the highest stage of capitalism. Marx's assessment was that revolution will take place in a well-developed capitalist society, such as England or Germany, where there was a strong working class. Lenin did the

“concrete analysis of the concrete conditions” in Russia and then created the tactic that showed that, thanks to uneven development in the capitalist world, a revolution could be possible in the weakest link.

The Leninist party was able to overthrow the Russian bourgeoisie, built on the ruins of the feudal Tsar regime, because it didn't have the time (between February and October 1917) to build a bourgeois state machine, whereas in Britain the bourgeois state machine was strong, and therefore could sabotage Ireland's heroic 1916 rising. As Lenin said, “the misfortune of the Irish is that they rose prematurely, when the European revolt of the proletariat had not yet matured.”

So the tactics in each case against imperialism have to be based on concrete conditions.

Capitalism is based on overproduction; and colonisation was carried out to accumulate the resources (both raw material and labour) needed for production and for discovering new markets to trade off the commodities.

Colonialism was carried out in the name of civilisation. It was the “white man's burden” to civilise the world; but the plunder and atrocities had no indications of civilisation. Even Marx thought Britain's colonisation of India (which he called the “Ireland of the east”) an “unconscious tool of history”; but his later assessment in relation to India was that “the autocracy wanted to conquer it, the moneyocracy wanted to plunder it and the millocracy wanted to undersell it.”



Another phoney celebration

DÓNALL Ó BRIAIN

JUST AS it did with St Patrick's Day, the state has decided to take over the 1st of February—the beginning of spring, traditionally known as St Brigid's Day—and convert it into another cheap stunt for promoting tourism and “selling Ireland.” (The only wonder is that there's anything left to sell.)

The first day of spring is recorded from earliest times as Imbolc, a term of uncertain origin but probably meaning

'Modern imperialism is not like colonialism or just military coercion but is for imposing neoliberal policies and using globalisation to shift labour-intensive work to countries with cheap labour, to provide those commodities to its population so that they can keep the real wages'

The footprints of imperialism

Imperialism uprooted Africans from their countries and made them toil in the sugar-cane fields of the Caribbean so that Europe could enjoy the taste of sugar. Imperialism destroyed Indian agriculture and made the country grow cotton, which could be fed to the factories of Manchester, and the product then sold to Indians cheaply to destroy the local weavers.

Even in Ireland the plantations were methods of creating the "primitive accumulation of wealth" in order to uproot Irish people from their land so that they become cheap labour to operate massive machines in the factories.

Imperialism threatens other countries that get in its way in its plundering of the world. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not to defeat Japan but were a warning to the Soviet Union, which was rising as a superpower.

As it's the nature of a river to flow into the sea, capitalism inevitably runs into the quicksand of crisis. Every day, attempts to recover deepen the crisis. The trade union movement involved in day-to-day struggles against capital should simultaneously lead the working class to the understanding that capitalism comes out of every crisis by subjecting labour to greater exploitation and turning more people from the middle classes into paupers. The "American dream" for the middle classes is turning out to be a nightmare.

The solution is to shatter the system and build a new one devoid of exploitation and to abolish wage slavery, which will

emancipate the working class. The working class, nurturing the illusion that it can ameliorate the conditions, should be made to realise that bourgeois "democracy" is fragile and will last as long as the ruling class allows it to exist.

And if it is no longer possible to rule by the old method there is always room for fascism. As Antonio Gramsci said, "fascism is an attempt to solve the problems of production and exchange with machine guns." Fascism has a material base: it is used by the bourgeoisie when everything else fails, unleashing fatal attacks on trade unions and workers' rights.

Modern imperialism is not like colonialism or just military coercion but is for imposing neoliberal policies and using globalisation to shift labour-intensive work to countries with cheap labour, to provide those commodities to its population so that they can keep the real wages stagnant in their own countries. Any government that doesn't allow its resources to be extracted and labour to be exploited is labelled "undemocratic" and will be destabilised by sponsored rebellions or threatened with sanctions.

The fight against imperialism

The bourgeoisie promised liberty, equality and fraternity during the French Revolution but could not implement it, because if it did the bourgeoisie could no longer exist. Only by transcending the capitalist system will we achieve liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Working-class issues of the global south, where capital exploits the labour in

sweatshops, reminds us that what Engels mentioned in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* should be taken seriously and internationally. The shifting of production to low-wage countries results in race-to-the-bottom wages and the weakening of trade unions all over the world.

Ireland's shift from being neutral to being a partner of imperial warmongers should be opposed. Military expenditure should be questioned, and more spending on people's welfare, such as education, housing, and a free universal health service, should be demanded.

Initiatives for creating international pressure to lift sanctions on developing countries that fight against imperialism and protect their sovereignty should be supported. Environmental issues are no longer at the periphery of the class war: they have become a central issue in the fight against capitalism. "Green capitalism" is an oxymoron.

The neoliberal agenda of imposing "austerity," which is a euphemism for class war declared by the bourgeoisie against the working class, must be fought.

We can be sure that the forthcoming congress of the Communist Party of Ireland will analyse the concrete conditions in Ireland so as to design the tactics for unlocking the imperialist triple lock of Britain, the United States, and the European Union. ★

LEFT: *Work* 1865 painting by Ford Maddox Browne depicting navies at work. 250,000 migrant Irish navies built Britain's railway network at the height of the British imperial project.

the season of pregnancy and birth, especially of domesticated animals. In the Early Christian period the event, like so many others, was taken over by the Church and turned into a holy day, this one in honour of Brigid (Modern Irish Bríd), a pagan goddess who was then reinvented as a Christian saint.

The Department of Foreign Affairs is the organiser of a programme of "global St Brigid's Day events," claiming that the day "has long symbolised hope, renewal, and the feminine," which will come as a surprise to Irish people. A group made up of officially approved intellectuals and carefully selected bourgeois women will

be trotted round the world, just as the usual suspects have been on St Patrick's Day, to promote the export of this non-existent festival.

Utter nonsense has been invented by the state to promote itself and to project its contemporary stance backwards a thousand years, making the non-existent saint sound like a 21st-century politician. Michael D. Higgins (or his scriptwriter) was carried away: "We celebrate the courage and commitment of St Brigid in her day . . ." Irish women have benefited from the "inspiration and legacy" of this non-existent personality, who "dedicated herself to innovation in the realm of

education . . . in seeking to ensure that her voice was heard in a male-dominated world."

Practically every facet of traditional culture has been allowed to die out, when not actually exterminated; but any scraps that can be sanitised and repackaged as harmless nonsense have been turned into commodities that the gombeen class and its state can hawk around the world to help make Ireland "the best small country in the world in which to do business." The best small country in the world in which to live and have a decent life, however, is not part of the agenda. ★

CAPITALISM

€38.04 an hour?

The upper limit of a transformative wage demand



Eoin MacDermott

A TRANSFORMATIVE strategy is “a means by which to expose the antagonistic contradictions between capitalism and the working class and, in so doing, to undermine capitalism and present the potential for a socialist alternative.”¹

While an increase in the minimum wage from €10.20 to a “living wage” of €12.30² would undoubtedly improve the lives of many, and should be supported, it poses no threat to the reproduction of capitalist social relations. So, what would count as a transformative wage demand?

To understand this we need to determine the average amount of value produced by a worker each hour. We can then approximate the hourly wage that would make, under present conditions, capitalist production relations impossible, given that workers would be remunerated for the full value of their labour.

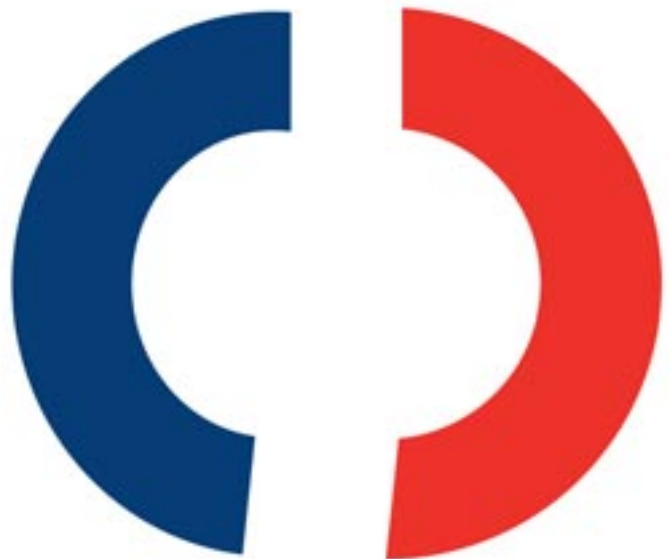
That breaking-point for capital is the €38.04 worth of value created each hour in 2018 by the 189.3 million workers in the EU-27, as seen in table 1. This means that the median (a better assessment of the “average” than the mean) Irish worker is paid €34,754 to produce €73,569 worth of value each year. In other words, a surplus of somewhere around €38,815 per worker is usually being produced over and above what is being paid.

This is what Marxists mean when the matter of exploitation is discussed. It is not a subjective feeling of being treated badly by one’s boss: it is the concrete figure of €38,815 that represents a surplus of labour that was not paid for under capitalist production relations.

Table 1: EU-27 aggregate data, 2018³

Net national income	€13,929,602,801,250
Employed work force	189,298,000
Net national income per worker	€73,586
Average hours worked per week	40.3
Weeks worked per year	48
Total hours worked per year	1,934
Average value created per hour per worker	€38.04

What happens to your €38.04 of value in Ireland?



■ €17.97 (47.24%)
median hourly earnings
(excluding apprentices)

■ €20.07 (52.76%)
worth of surplus is
usually stolen

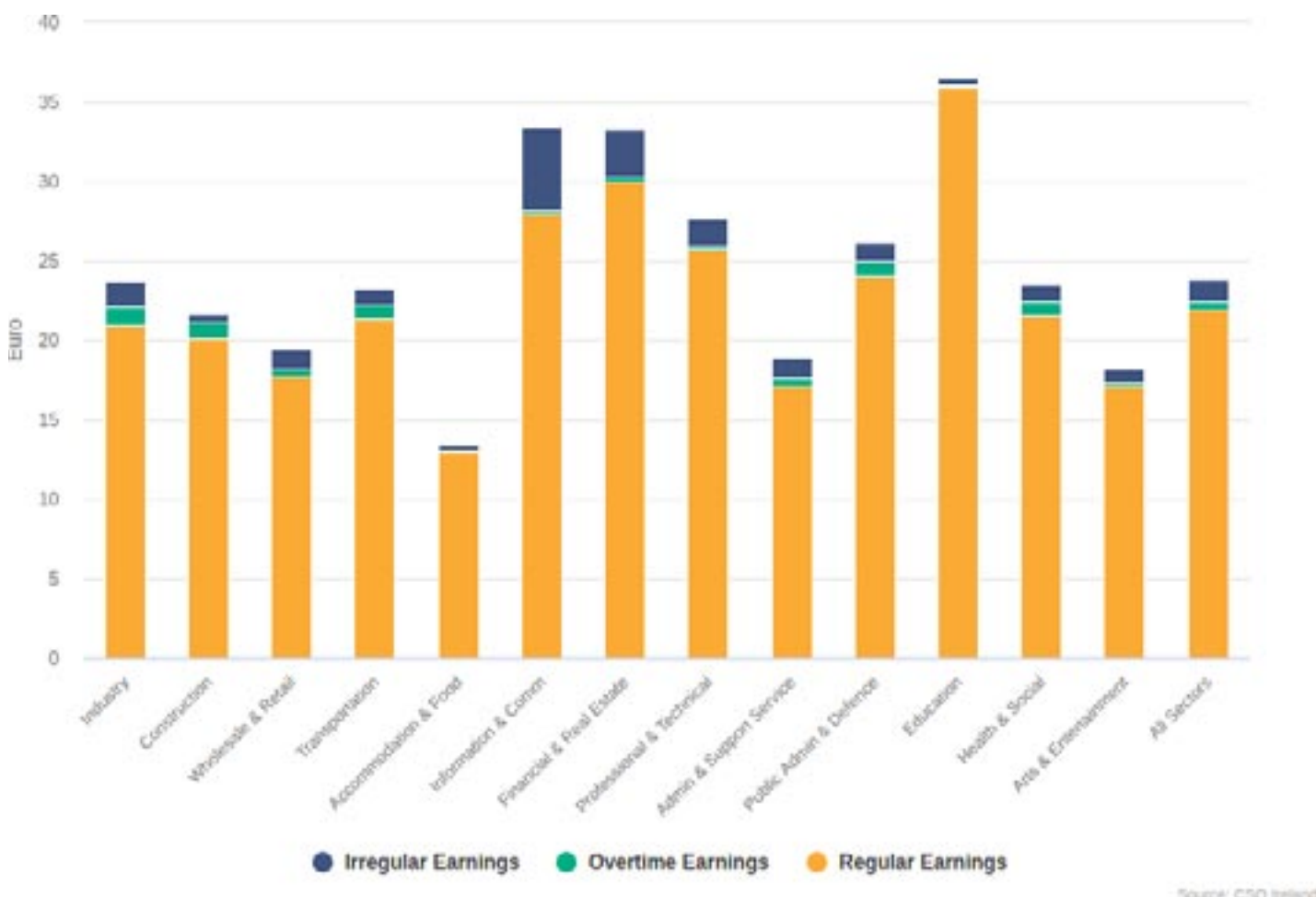
Sources: OECD, Eurostat, CSO.

During simpler times, this type of exploitation was easier to see. A peasant farmer would plant a field in the spring, tend to it in the summer, then harvest and store the grain in the autumn. At the end of the harvest the church might take a quarter of the total grain produced, the landlord would take another quarter, and the poor peasant would be left staring at half of what they harvested, praying that it would sustain their family until the next year.

Thanks to the opacity of wage labour today, we’re not even given the dignity of seeing the surplus we create being taken from us. Yet the surplus is created, and the Irish worker is left with a little under half of what they produce each year.

Detractors will cry that it is “unrealistic and unreasonable” to demand €38.04 an hour. But we must remember that all progress depends on the unreasonable person. The detractor

‘Thanks to the opacity of wage labour today, we’re not even given the dignity of seeing the surplus we create being taken from us. Yet the surplus is created, and the Irish worker is left with a little under half of what they produce each year’



would be quite right: it does seem quite unreasonable—as it should be. We are demanding what is impossible to concede under capitalist production relations, thereby showing its limits.

Furthermore, we should not be seeking to adapt ourselves to the point of being seen as reasonable or legitimate within the confines of an ideology that, quite unreasonably, legitimises the theft of more than half a person’s work each year to further enrich an obscenely wealthy minority

Let us leave that politics of respectability to our moderate friends, who may be fond of red flags but not the politics they symbolise. Our goal is to demonstrate this obscenity and show that there is an alternative. How unreasonable this idea is in society simply shows how much ground we have yet to cover.

After all, there is nothing unreasonable about expecting to be remunerated for the full value of your labour, and there is no sector in Ireland in which the average employee would not benefit from a socialist economy that achieves this. It is also no surprise that the sector in which the average wage is closest to reaching €38.04 an hour, education, is also one of the most highly unionised.

None of us are passive spectators in our future. With mounting debt and unemployment we cannot afford to give a subsidy of almost €95 billion each year to a parasitic class that lives off our labour. Only a socialist economy and a unionised and organised working class can help us plan our

work in a way that allows us to tackle the many crises we are facing while ending this type of obscene exploitation.

Ireland is not a poor country incapable of providing ample housing, medical services and education for its citizens—despite what we are told by the establishment. The idea that we cannot provide these services is simply a lie. It is in our interests, both collective and individual, to build an economy that is democratic, capable of planning to meet the basic needs of our citizens, and willing to remunerate each for the full extent of our labour.

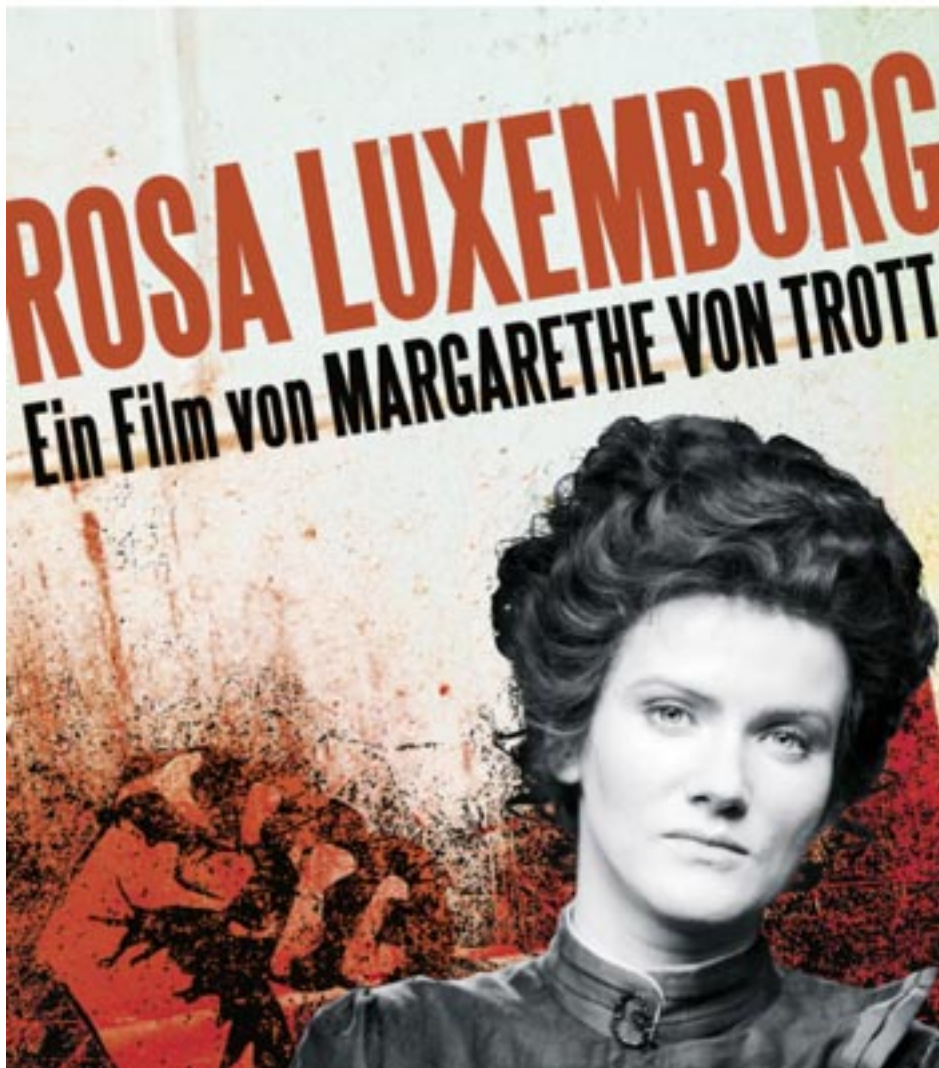
These are not just reasonable demands: they are increasingly urgent to realise for our collective future. ★

NOTES

- 1 CPI, “Developing and building a coherent strategy for socialism” (2017) (<https://www.comunistpartyofireland.ie/c-2017-02-13.html>).
- 2 James Ward, “Government to examine introduction of living wage, Taoiseach says,” *Irish Examiner*, 27 December 2020 (<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40197090.html>).
- 3 From Paul Cockshott, “Who benefits from socialism?” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zfHV0y>). When European figures are used as a proxy to estimate the value produced by an Irish worker over the course of a year, as a comparable calculation, using Irish national income statistics, gives a figure close to €67 per hour. This is a figure that is distorted considerably by our status as a tax haven, even when using adjusted measures such as gross national income.

“A social order worthy of the human race”

The 150th birthday of Rosa Luxemburg



JENNY FARRELL

On 5 March 2021 we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Rosa Luxemburg’s birth. No-one who wishes to get a sense of Rosa Luxemburg as a person, both political and private, will regret watching Margarethe von Trotta’s meticulously researched film of the same name, made in 1968. It is available with English subtitles.

THE FILM begins on 7 December 1916 with Rosa Luxemburg in Vronke prison, cutting back to this location again and again. Von Trotta uses Luxemburg’s prison letters to her good friend Sonja Liebknecht like a leitmotif right through the film to paint a very sensitive and personal portrait of this Polish revolutionary. From this prison the viewer relives many episodes of Rosa’s life in flashbacks. Some of these evoke the more personal aspects of Luxemburg’s life. Early childhood is touched on.

Some of these sequences are in Polish, adding greatly to the authentic feel of the film. Throughout the film

Luxemburg occasionally speaks in Polish, especially to Leo Jogiches, her close comrade and lover of many years. Her letters reveal her love of nature, of animals, and her prison “garden,” for children and her close friends, creating the sense of a profoundly humane person.

Von Trotta magnificently brings together important stages in Luxemburg’s political career. The main parts of the film deal with Luxemburg’s political activity in Berlin. Considerable time is devoted to her growing disillusionment with the leadership of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). Poignantly, the SPD leader Friedrich Ebert says to Luxemburg at a dinner party that events in Russia have ultra-radicalised her and continues, in chilling foreshadowing, “We will hang you.”

From early on she senses and tackles the reformism of the SPD leadership. The complete betrayal by the social-democratic leadership becomes shockingly clear in the scene where Karl Liebknecht emerges from the Reichstag to tell her that all SPD parliamentarians had voted in favour of the granting of war funds. Liebknecht was the only member of parliament in 1914 to oppose these. National chauvinism, as a direct result of this party’s reformism, drives them into their disastrous support for the First World War.

Luxemburg unmasks time and again the profoundly inhuman nature of war as the senseless slaughter of working people in the interests of power and profits. Her anti-war struggle becomes a central theme of the film, and her speeches apply uncannily to our own times: “*European problems and interests are now fought out on the world seas and in the by-corners of Europe. Hence the ‘United States of Europe’ is an idea which runs directly counter both economically and politically to the path of progress.*”



‘Luxemburg unmasks time and again the profoundly inhuman nature of war as the senseless slaughter of working people in the interests of power and profits’



Canalside memorial to Rosa Luxemburg in Berlin

Following her arrest for speaking at an anti-war rally in Berlin in 1913, she defended herself in the courtroom: *“When the majority of working people realise . . . that wars are barbaric, deeply immoral, reactionary, and anti-people, then wars will have become impossible.”*

Faced with the betrayal of the SPD leadership, Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Zetkin discuss the need for a new party, the Spartacus League, which went on to become the Communist Party of Germany. Luxemburg is put in “protective custody,” imprisoned from 10 July 1916, and released on 9 November 1918. During this time she is allowed books and letters and secretly passes visitors her contributions to the “Spartacus Letters.”

On the day of Luxemburg’s release the Kaiser abdicates and the SPD politician Philipp Scheidemann proclaims Germany a republic, with the SPD leader Ebert taking power. He prevents the country from turning into the soviet socialist republic that Liebknecht proclaims on the same day. The Communist Party of Germany is founded on New Year’s Day 1919. Uprisings in Berlin against the Ebert government follow in the second week of January.

Luxemburg and Liebknecht do not see eye to eye in the analysis of the rising. They are now “wanted.” They are betrayed, tracked to their hiding-

place on 15 January 1919; and the rest is history.

The film does not make clear Ebert’s final betrayal of his erstwhile comrades. An officer of the General Staff, Captain Waldemar Pabst, informed the Reich government at an early stage about the arrest of the two. Pabst lived until 1970 in West Germany and in old age maintained that the SPD leadership, in the person of Gustav Noske and in all likelihood Ebert, had agreed the killings.

Expressing her profound belief in the eventual and unstoppable liberation of humankind, Luxemburg declares:

The day approaches when we who are at the bottom will rise! Not to carry out that bloody fantasy of mutiny and slaughter that hovers before the terrified eyes of the prosecutors, no, we who will rise to power will be the first to realise a social order worthy of the human race, a society that knows no exploitation of one human by another, that knows no genocide, a society that will realise the ideals of both the oldest founders of religion and the greatest philosophers of humanity. In order to bring about this new day as quickly as possible we must use our utmost powers, without looking to any success, in defiance of all public prosecutors, in defiance of all military power. Our slogan will become reality: The people are with us, victory is with us! ★

Irish as spectacle

DÓNALL Ó BRIAIN



Manchán Magan, *Thirty-Two Words for Field* (Dublin: Gill Books, 2020).

This acclaimed book ostensibly celebrates the Irish-speaking community in Co. Kerry, where the author spent his holidays as a young man.

He explores the rich vocabulary of traditional Irish-speakers and their words for natural phenomena: the weather, the sea, plants, animals—and fields. But it’s all presented as an oddity, a peculiarity, something to be marvelled at as a kind of aberration, and even a source of amusement. His readers, mostly no doubt monoglot English-speakers, are presented with a dizzying array of vocabulary, sometimes differentiated but more often as a mere list, as if all the words were synonymous. This is inevitably contrasted, at least by implication, with English, the language of precision, reason, and civilisation.

The *Irish Times* described the book as “a rip-roaring archaeological exploration of the lyricism, mystery and oddities of the Irish language.” But the Irish-speaking community are not lacking in recognition for their “lyricism” or oddities but rather for their civil rights.

Why would any functional society present one of its languages almost as a freak show? The question answers itself: this is not a functional society but a deeply dysfunctional one, shaped by centuries of colonisation, followed by a century of self-colonisation.

It’s impossible to avoid the suspicion that the book was inspired by the notorious “fifty Eskimo words for snow,” long exposed not only as offensive but as complete nonsense; and there’s no doubt at all that this is what prompted the publishers’ choice of title.

This book, whatever the high principles of the author, is firmly in that tradition. ★



International Working Women's Day 2021

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE, CPI

The 8th of March each year has continued to grow in popularity around the world as a day on which to recognise and celebrate women in general. But this increase in popularity stems from a growing disconnection from the radical socialist roots of what was once widely known as International Working Women's Day.

The origins of the day can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when women began protesting en masse for equal rights. In 1911 Clara Zetkin was a leading organiser of the first International Working Women's Day demonstration, which took place on 19 March; by 1914 the 8th of March had become the internationally recognised date.

Zetkin, like her contemporary Rosa Luxemburg, believed that women's oppression was linked to the class nature of society, and that women could only be liberated through the destruction of the capitalist system, of which patriarchy is just an inter-related component.

In 1917 tens of thousands of women marched in Petrograd above (later Leningrad, now St Petersburg) demanding an end to the First World War and the consequent food shortages. This demonstration is considered to have marked the beginning of the Russian Revolution, causing a massive shock to the global capitalist system and fundamentally changing the geopolitical landscape.

The foundation of the USSR led to hugely transformative changes for Soviet women, living under a socialist system with equal rights enshrined in the new constitution.

More than a century since the first

demonstrations organised by Clara Zetkin and her contemporaries we have seen the removal of the word "working" from the title of the day, under the guise of including women who are not in paid employment. This doesn't lead to a more equal and inclusive celebration of women: it simply shows that women who work inside the home or in unpaid caring roles are not considered to be "working women" in a capitalist economy. We reject this sanitising of a proudly socialist, working-class day; we recognise that all work undertaken by women—inside or outside the home, paid or unpaid—is work in its own right.

Bodies such as the United Nations, NGOs, trade union federations etc. have co-opted the day, wrapping it up in the concepts of bourgeois-liberal feminism, such as "leaning in" or "breaking the glass ceiling." Apart from being devoid of any transformative possibilities for the majority of women, these messages are in fact often reliant on the outsourcing of oppression, from women in the global north to those in developing countries or immigrants. How many Hillary Clintons or Cheryl Sandbergs have to clean their homes, take care of their children, or care full-time for an elderly relative? It's easy enough to break a glass ceiling when you're standing on the backs of low-paid female domestic workers!

Therefore, it is in the tradition of Zetkin and Luxemburg that we organise and celebrate International Working Women's Day. Our aim is the reorganisation of society under a socialist economic system, and to use the liberation of the working class from capitalist oppression to begin to dismantle the inter-related system of patriarchy which now supports it, to truly emancipate all women. ★

Who said that?

Declan McKenna

"It's a small nation with a strong identity, but it jumps like a puppy desperate for attention from one of the big boys—in this case, Biden. His PR team have played the Irish like a Stradivarius."

Chris Sweeney author and columnist, on Ireland's "relationship" with Joe Biden

"Ah, yes, America. The country where Republicans spend all day screaming that socialism is happening and Democrats spend all day making sure it never does."

Caitlin Johnstone Australian journalist

"No government can justify from an ethical point of view that the vast economic and technological strength of a superpower, like the United States, can be deployed over 60 years to subject to economic strangulation a relatively small nation with limited natural resources."

Miguel Díaz-Canel president of Cuba

"A foolish faith in authority is the worst enemy of truth." **Albert Einstein**

"Partisan myopia simply won't let people understand the magnitude of what is on display here: utter moral bankruptcy of the entire US political and media establishment."

Nebojša Malic Serbian-American journalist, on the nature of the US establishment

"My overall reaction is one of sadness to see a country as global and as dominant as the United States—in terms of its role in the world to protect democracy and the fundamentals around democracy—deteriorate into complete chaos at the heart of its capital."

Simon Coveney minister for foreign affairs, showing why he is perfectly suitable for the position he holds

"The books had opened my head, the movies opened my heart."

Walter Bernstein, blacklisted screenwriter, who died in January, on reading Marx and Engels, Steinbeck and Dreiser and watching films by Sergei Eisenstein and other Soviet directors. ★

