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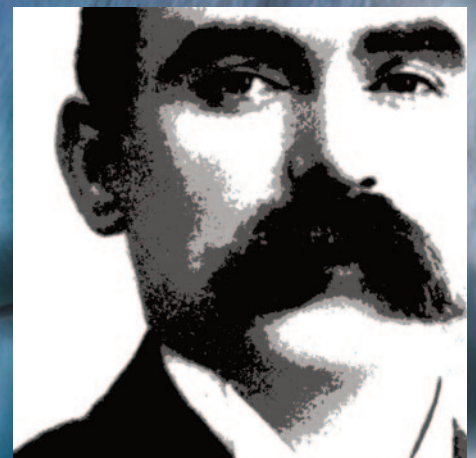
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NURSING HOME DEATHS

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"A people, who, secure in their own homes, permit their rulers to carry devastation and death into the homes of another people, assuredly deserve little respect no matter how loudly they may boast of their liberty loving spirit."

James Connolly

("The South African War,"
Workers' Republic, 19 August 1899)

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COVID DEATHS

Who is responsible?

As was reported in *Socialist Voice* in September 2020, the apparently systematic transfer of acute hospital patients to nursing homes, and the ensuing outbreaks and deaths, constitute a scandal of drastic proportions for the Irish state.

The facts surrounding this tragic situation require analysis, while official reports have been criticised for taking a conservative and uncritical approach to the role of the state and governmental decisions in creating or exacerbating it.

There is a common phrase about the transmission of covid-19 that we see repeated frequently by politicians and establishment figures, including the CEO of Nursing Homes Ireland,¹ the body that represents Ireland's 400+ private nursing-homes: that "the prevalence of covid-19 within the community" has a knock-on effect of high levels of the virus within nursing-homes and other care settings.

While undeniably true to some extent, this really only tells half the story, given that we now know that some 2,300 hospital patients were transferred to nursing-homes between January and March last year,² on the pretext of freeing up general ICU capacity, resulting in outbreaks that have ultimately contributed almost half the total covid-

related deaths in this country occurring in nursing-homes.³

There is community transmission—i.e. transmission that occurs as a result of the "normal" operation of everyday life, restrictions notwithstanding—and there is transmission as a result of decisions taken by the state, businesses and property-owners that create high-risk situations for the spread of the virus. Not surprisingly, it is only the former that we ever hear about, or that is subjected to scrutiny, particularly when the latter, being caused by exceptional, positive actions, are ostensibly more avoidable.

For example, alarmingly, the first term of reference for the Expert Panel tasked by the 26-county government with reporting on the response to covid-19 in nursing-homes was "to provide assurance that the national protective public health and other measures adopted to safeguard residents in nursing homes, in [the] light of COVID-19, are appropriate, comprehensive and in line with international guidelines . . ."⁴

Any sane person might expect an expert panel to be tasked with ascertaining whether the measures taken were appropriate, rather than providing assurance that they were. It is hard to imagine any other walk of life in which such a term of reference would be considered acceptable due diligence for a reporting body.

It is not until we get to the report's recommendation 4.1, more than a hundred pages in, that some culpability on the part of the HSE is (indirectly) identified, when it urges that it should "ensure [that] all new residents coming

from the community or proposed transfers from hospital are tested for COVID-19 prior to admission." It is notable that HIQA's own figures (see the graph) show a dramatic spike in reported deaths in nursing-homes that coincides with the mass inward transfer of hospital patients up to mid-March 2020 (week 13).⁵

Ireland's first case of the virus was reported on 29 February 2020, with new admissions to nursing-homes apparently continuing without mandatory testing up until June 2020, when the HSE's guidelines were changed.⁶ The increase in the "unexpected deaths" figure from week 13, as well as the generally accepted statistical lag of two to eight weeks from covid-19 cases to deaths,⁷ suggest that it is possible for covid to have made its way into nursing-homes earlier than, or at least contemporaneous with, the first reported case in Ireland.

Both the report of the expert panel and HIQA have been criticised, by Age Action among others,⁸ for failing to adequately investigate the circumstances surrounding nursing-home deaths, or to provide an analysis of the level of care made available to those who died with covid-19 in nursing-homes in the past year.

We are compelled to add the following questions: Why were high-risk patients transferred *en masse* from acute hospitals to nursing-homes, some of which had covid-19 outbreaks, in the first few months of the pandemic? Who then bears responsibility for the resulting deaths, which were by any metric



'Shared western values'

DECLAN McKENNA

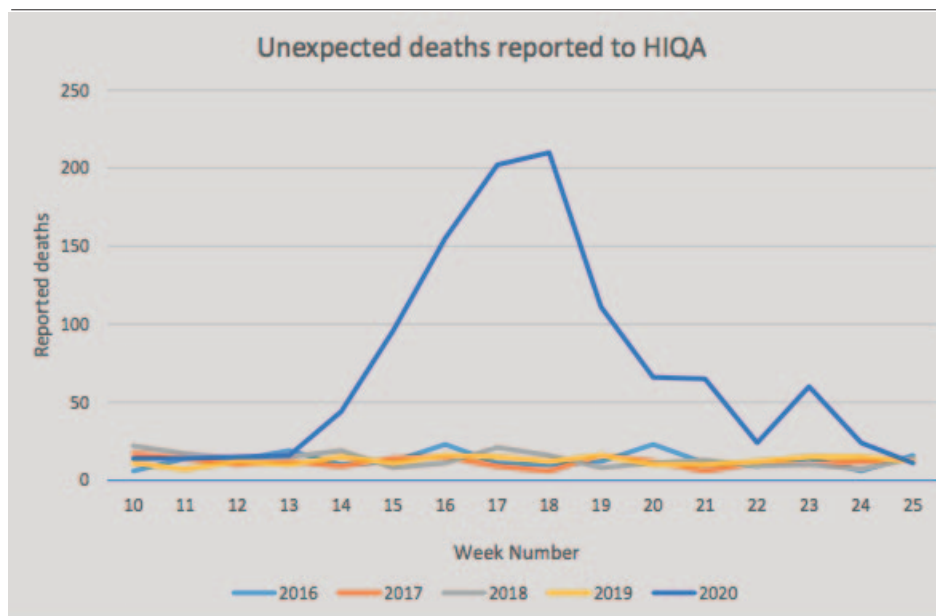
RICH COUNTRIES, with 14 per cent of the world's population, have secured 53 per cent of the "Western" covid vaccines. Meanwhile you have to search hard for information on vaccines being produced or tested in other countries, including Russia and Cuba.

Almost all the Pfizer-Biontech vaccines will go to rich countries. The Moderna vaccine will go to rich countries exclusively; it is not even being offered to the poor. In fact nine out of ten people in poor countries may never be vaccinated at all.

The United States is sitting on

Number of unexpected deaths in nursing-homes compared with data from the preceding four years

Source: HIQA



In fact all those efforts come to naught without commensurate responsibility being taken at all levels of society, but in particular by those who own the means of production, who coordinate legislation and travel, and who manage the complex but vital logistics of running a country. And if history has taught us one thing it is that those in power will not take action against their own interests unless they are made to by the force of the people.

Notes

- 1 Age Action, Submission to the Oireachtas Special Committee on Covid-19 Response, September 2020 (tinyurl.com/52d8cs5s).
- 2 Paul Cullen, "Patient transfers into nursing homes may have been as high as 2,300," *Irish Times*, 16 June 2020 (tinyurl.com/9hzrtt2).
- 3 Midwest Radio, "43% of all deaths from covid-19 associated with nursing home outbreaks," 12 March 2021 (tinyurl.com/fc4tkrhp).
- 4 Department of Health, "Covid-19 Nursing Homes Expert Panel: Final Report," 19 August 2020 (tinyurl.com/2vjau9fz).
- 5 Health Information and Quality Authority, "The Impact of Covid-19 on Nursing Homes in Ireland," July 2020 (tinyurl.com/5vysn55).
- 6 Paul Cullen, "New care home residents must be tested for covid-19 under rule change," *Irish Times*, 3 June 2020 (tinyurl.com/prd4e5r6).
- 7 Harvard University School of Public Health, "Data animation shows time lag between covid-19 cases and deaths" (tinyurl.com/ytpwba45).
- 8 Age Action, Submission to the Oireachtas Special Committee on Covid-19 Response, September 2020 (tinyurl.com/52d8cs5s).

avoidable and therefore all the more tragic as a result?

By the HSE's own figures there are 575 nursing-homes in the 26 Counties, comprising some 30,000 residents, of which 461 are private and voluntary nursing-homes. Covid-19 has now accounted for almost 2,000 deaths in these settings since the pandemic began—in other words over 6 per cent of the total number of residents. Comparatively, 4,610 people, or 0.096 per cent of the population of the state, have died from covid-19 at the time of writing (24 March 2020). Was this avoidable? Was it by design, or through human error?

If the latter, why no culpability still? Surveying the compliant national media, it is disturbing to note that "putting on the green jersey" extends to accepting,

ignoring or defending (as appropriate) any and all malign decisions taken by the state in its response to covid-19.

A convenient narrative of personal responsibility *über alles* has been peddled by the state, big business, and the media, characteristic of their general policy of only telling us half the story, in order to absolve the ruling class and their allies of any culpability in this crisis. We reject this simplistic line of thinking, not because personal responsibility is unimportant—human solidarity means we must do what we can to protect one another in our own lives—but because as Marxists we attest that, just as we cannot shop our way out of the climate crisis through "greener" consumer choices, we cannot hand-wash our way out of the covid pandemic. ★

vaccines, making sure no-one gets any as long as it needs them for itself. The European Union—priding itself on sharing vaccines—is actually hoarding; and while it has exported 34 million doses, most have gone to such places as Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong—places that would have no problem obtaining or paying for vaccines.

According to the Pakistani writer Fatima Bhutto, writing in the *Guardian*:

While western countries were bargaining ahead, stockpiling vaccine doses for themselves, China and Russia were practising vaccine diplomacy. China offered free doses of their vaccines to 13 countries; between the two of them,

China and Russia have supplied more than 800m doses to 41 countries. No one imagines they do this out of charity, but it's a clear, resounding sign of the changing world order. Eight hundred million to the EU's paltry 34m. The US and UK have given nothing at all.

It was the hyper-capitalists who spread the plague, got rich off the vaccine, and now will heal comfortably, first in the queue for the best vaccines that they don't even want. The poor who struggled to eat and survive, lockdown after lockdown, will wait in line and die. Covid-19 will destroy many things, but hopefully too the broken scaffolding of our moral imagination.

Don't mention the profits that

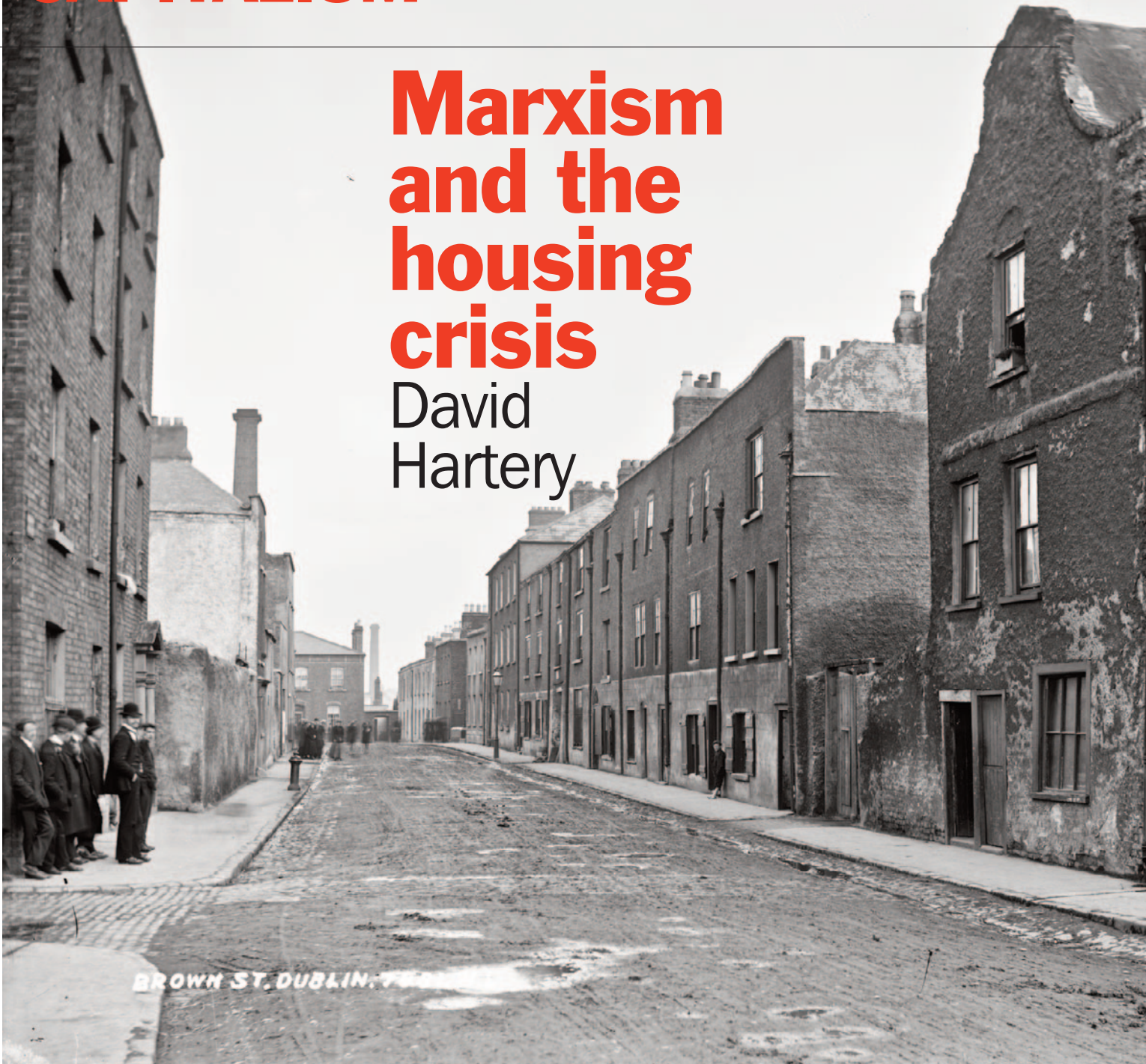
Moderna and Pfizer are in line for, while Astra-Zeneca charges poor countries multiples of what it charges richer ones. Don't mention Africa or any peoples impoverished by capitalism; and, of course, don't mention the disasters caused by our "humanitarian interventions" and sanctions.

Don't mention that Israel deliberately denies vaccines to the Palestinians whose land it occupies, that the United States and Israel continuously bomb Syria (among other places), and that Canada bought enough doses to vaccinate every single Canadian five times over.

Do mention our "shared western values," and everyone will be just fine. ★

Marxism and the housing crisis

David
Hartery



“Our cities can never be made really habitable or worthy of an enlightened people while the habitations of its citizens remain the property of private individuals. To permanently remedy the evils of city life the citizens must own their city.”

(James Connolly, Workers’ Republic, 18 November 1899)

“The so-called housing shortage, which plays such a great role in the press nowadays, does not consist in the fact that the working class generally lives in bad, overcrowded and unhealthy dwellings. This shortage is not something peculiar to the present; it is not even one of the sufferings peculiar to the modern proletariat in contradistinction to all earlier oppressed classes. On the contrary, all oppressed classes in all periods suffered more or less uniformly from it. In order to make an end of this housing shortage there is only one means: to abolish altogether the exploitation and oppression of the working class by the ruling class.” **(Frederick Engels, The Housing Question, 1872)**

THE SOUTH’S cities are in the grip of a housing crisis. With the spread of teleworking, bourgeois forecasters predict that this trend will expand to the larger county towns and internet-connected beauty spots throughout the country.

But why is housing so tied up in the contradictions of the modern Irish republic? To explain this we must turn to Marx, examining his theories of ground rent and fictitious capital. And in examining this issue we must remain aware that Ireland exists in a particular post-colonial situation, and imported analysis from Britain or elsewhere does not map perfectly onto the material circumstances of the modern Republic.



Slums, Dublin City, Co. Dublin Wikimedia Commons

Housing is unique in that it is a crucial element in the cost of reproduction of labour power—every worker must have a place to live—but yet is too expensive for any worker to buy outright. For the worker, rent is earned in one hat, as worker, but paid in another, that of the commodity consumer. This leads to a circumstance where alternative mechanisms are needed to house workers.

In Ireland, historically, this has taken the form of state-subsidised home-ownership (discussed in detail later), mortgages, and subsidised renting, both private and through social housing. However, the Republic's social housing model has always been based on a

transition to home-ownership, since before independence. It is important to underline this, as it is a crucial distinction between post-independence Ireland and Britain.

Another important factor in the housing equation is the role of the state. An unusual facet of the housing question is that it pits two elements of the bourgeoisie against one another: capitalists and landowners. Landowners own parts of the earth's surface, something that cannot be increased or produced. The state protects the exclusive right to this property, and it has value solely through this exclusion of others. It becomes a source of income for the owner because others, capitalists or tenants, need premises for business or to live in. The landowner charges a price—rent—for a temporary lifting of this legal barrier.

Here, one part of society demands a tribute from the others for the right to inhabit the earth, just like property in general, the right of owners includes exploiting the earth's body, the bowels of the earth, the air and thus the maintenance and development of life. (Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 782)

This rent is diverted from the profits of the capitalist, being a requirement for production. The state is required to mediate this conflict. High housing rents increase the cost of reproduction of labour power, hurting capitalists; but low rents hit landlords. For this reason, state intervention has been prevalent. However, even beyond mediating that intra-class conflict, the state has directly influenced the housing market through the regulation of standards, planning, by-laws, and indirectly through the regulation of different tenure categories (part 4 tenancies etc.).

What determines the price of rent is the purpose for which it will be used. The land can have some innate characteristics—good arable soil, for instance—but it is the potential that the land-users see in it that defines its price. There are three categories of ground rent, as Marx defines them: differential rent, absolute rent, and monopoly rent.

It is the land rent capitalized in this way that forms the purchase price or value of the land, a category that is

prima facie . . . irrational, since the earth is not the product of labor, and therefore has no value either. On the other hand, behind this irrational form, there is a real relationship of production.

(Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 636)

Differential rent occurs where there is a variance in the quality of land for production. Capital investment in good, well-drained land provides a better return than the same investment in less good land. This additional surplus value created is the differential, and the landowner charges a portion of it as an extra cost for the use of the land.

Absolute rent is the rent required by the landowner to release previously unused land. With barriers of entry of capital, due to the landowners' exclusive rights to the land, the landowner can demand some minimum return before providing access to capital improvement of the land. It is the price of land at the margin.

Monopoly rent is where the price is defined purely by supply and demand. There is some unique legal or physical characteristic that makes the land desirable, and the landowner can earn super-normal rents from the requirement of the tenant. Marx uses the example of a vineyard that produces a special vintage. This special property cannot be replicated, and so the rents on this property would be unnaturally high. It is this monopoly rent that we are most concerned with in the housing question, with such factors as zoning, amenities and location making housing a monopoly proposition.

It is the monopoly property of housing that allows the landowner to transform what is a purely rent-earning property into an asset: fictitious capital. The extrapolated value of the asset becomes divorced from its underlying rental value, in pure market terms, as it is now competing against changing interest rates and alternative asset investment. This is due to the monopoly properties allowing the landowner to anticipate the future attractiveness of the property, taking into account the competing speculation on these other variables.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

Continued Marxism and the housing crisis

Fictitious capital is the claim on future productive value; and, by treating the land as both a rent-bearing property and an asset, the landowner can use the monopoly provided by his exclusive legal claim to land to claim greater shares of future labour reproduction costs in the form of higher rents.

Thus it is not the competition between tenants for the use of land that is setting prices, as we can see from how far outside of reasonable affordability rent has become in our present situation: it is instead determined by the efficiency with which workers and capitalists can work off the interest demanded by landowners for the release of their land.

The fact that capitalised ground-rent appears as the price or value of land, so that land, therefore, is bought and sold like any other commodity, serves some apologists as a justification for landed property since the buyer pays an equivalent for it, the same as for other commodities; and the major portion of landed property has changed hands in this way . . . To derive a justification for the existence of ground-rent from its sale and purchase means in general to justify its existence by its existence.
(Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 637)

So, then, how does this apply to the Irish situation?

In the nineteenth century, Irish housing was fairly concordant with the British housing model. In tandem with rapid urbanisation and proletarianisation, infectious diseases began to run rampant in the clustered populations.

Engels wrote in *The Housing Question*:

Capitalist rule cannot allow itself the pleasure of creating epidemic diseases among the working class with impunity; the consequences fall back on it and the angel of death rages in its ranks as ruthlessly as in the ranks of the workers. As soon as

this fact had been scientifically established the philanthropic bourgeois began to compete with one another in noble efforts on behalf of the health of their workers.

This was also the case in Ireland, where the majority of those philanthropic organisations were Protestant social organisations. With the expansion of the franchise, among other concessions won by Irish Catholic nationalists, local authorities in most areas of the South began to be dominated by Catholics who aimed to step in as a counterpoint to Protestant philanthropy. In this way housing policy in Ireland began to diverge from the British system in the 1900s. One of the characteristics of this new nationalism was a historic compromise with the Catholic petit-bourgeoisie, which saw a highly rural emphasis on housing.

The Irish agricultural system was, until this point, dominated by a small class of mostly Protestant, oftentimes absentee, landlords, while tenant-farmers were largely Catholic. As the conflict between this largely Protestant landed class and the tenant-farmers grew, the British government sponsored a large buy-out of landholdings by the farmer-tenants. One of the consequences of this was generous subsidies to rural county councils to house rural labourers.

The contradictions at play within British imperialism resulted in a distinct rural housing regime emerging in Ireland, where an attempt to placate this rural unrest led to Catholic farmers getting generous grants for housing workers. However, to avoid this decision being interpreted as precedent in Irish cities (or, more importantly, for the British ruling class in British metropolitan areas), they were explicitly and solely rural in character. Between the 1900s and 1930s, between British rule and into the beginnings of Free State rule, a succession of housing legislation (Labourers Acts) and land reform legislation (Land Acts) kept this system distinct from the rules governing urban social housing (Housing of the Working Classes Acts).

The second major spin-off of land reform for social housing—its conversion into a route to home-ownership—emerged in the 1930s, though it took a further three decades

to fully mature and percolate through the system. The land reform catalyst for this development occurred in 1933, when, following campaigning by the anti-land annuities campaign, led by Peadar O'Donnell, the government was forced to take action and cut by half the outstanding annuities that farmers were obliged to pay arising from the Land Act settlements.

Complaining about the lack of even-handedness which this concession represented, rural social housing tenants campaigned for a right to buy their dwellings on similar subsidised terms. A government commission set up to examine this issue concluded that “it is scarcely necessary to argue the advantages of ownership” for rural social tenants, “since the freedom and security that go with ownership . . . we regard as basic and essential in any Christian state that bases social order on justice” (Saorstát Éireann, (1933:23).

It should be noted at this point that this philosophy echoes a passage that Engels quotes, in *The Housing Question*, from the Spanish newspaper *La Emancipación* of Madrid (16 March 1872):

The cleverest leaders of the ruling class have always directed their efforts towards increasing the number of small property-owners in order to build an army for themselves against the proletariat.

The bourgeois revolutions of the last century divided up the big estates of the nobility and the church into small properties, just as the Spanish republicans propose to do today with the still existing large estates, and created thereby a class of small landowners which has since become the most reactionary element in society and a permanent hindrance to the revolutionary movement of the urban proletariat. Napoleon III aimed at creating a similar class in the towns by reducing the size of the individual bonds of the public debt, and M. Dollfus and his colleagues sought to stifle all revolutionary spirit in their workers by selling them small dwellings to be paid for in annual installments, and at the same time to chain the workers by this property to the factory in which they work.

The full maturation of this system



'The main development to notice after 2008 is the increasing internationalisation of the housing market, with large vulture funds making up an increasing proportion of the ownership of housing and commercial property'

came with the Housing Act (1966), which unified the urban and rural housing codes and in the process applied the right-to-buy provisions of the rural code to the urban social housing sector. The result was that Irish social tenants enjoyed a universal right to purchase their homes long before their counterparts in Britain.

In urban areas the take-up of this right was limited at first, but it rose dramatically from the mid-1970s, when particularly generous discounts for purchasers were introduced. By the 1980s two-thirds of the dwellings built by local authorities had been sold to tenants, accounting for a quarter of the owner-occupied stock. We had moved from a situation where the ratio of private to public house construction was 1:1 in the 1950s, 50:1 in the 1990s, and 150:1 in the 2000s.

To do justice to the factors leading to the 2008 financial crisis in Ireland would require analysis well beyond the scope of this article, but Conor McCabe's incredible *Sins of the Father* (2011) is one of the finest pieces of scholarship available about the historical forces that have built modern Ireland. Suffice it to say that the 2008 financial crisis intensified the factors at play within the housing system as successive governments failed to tackle the underlying structure of the dysfunctional housing model, instead putting it on life support to attempt to nurse it through and prevent too many losses on the part of the Irish developer and landlord class.

The main development to notice after 2008 is the increasing internationalisation of the housing market, with large vulture funds making up an increasing proportion of the ownership of housing and commercial property. If we examine the components of rent discussed earlier we can understand the impact this has on housing prices, as these international funds do not require the same minimum price to make property available to the market. Not relying on the rental income as a primary source of income, they can hold out for a higher absolute rent and consequently earn a higher portion of future surplus value as fictitious capital. This has intensified the transformation of what

was still primarily rental properties into "real estate assets," which are now trained on extracting a greater and greater portion of surplus value in the future.

The intra-bourgeois tensions that are at play are already noticeable. We can see the seemingly bizarre situation of global tech companies in Dublin calling for rent relief—with their bottom line being hit by the cost of reproduction of labour power.

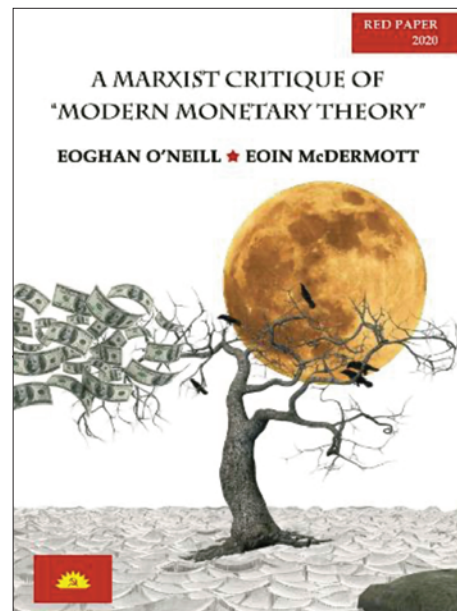
The Irish housing market is now so dysfunctional as to require radical correction. It is for this reason that such measures as cost-rental schemes are simply inadequate, tactically and economically, since a fundamental downward pressure on rents is needed to relieve the level of costs caught up in the maintenance of the current system. The state needs to fundamentally divorce rents from market forces and return it to a manageable relation to actual salaries. It cannot do this by competing on the same terms as REITs, which are expecting returns of many multiples of what cost-rental schemes are offering.

Cost-rental uses the relatively low cost of maintenance of existing housing provided by the scheme to subsidise the investment in future stock through the collection of rents that cover the overall costs of running the scheme. However, as we have clearly outlined, since rents are determined by the dual pressures of the opportunity costs of land use and a prediction of the future cost of labour reproduction, this necessarily runs up against affordability.

The Communist Party has previously presented an excellent analysis on the reality of the high costs of cost-rental to tenants in modern Ireland, and this fact cannot be avoided without avoiding large elements of basic Marxist political economy.

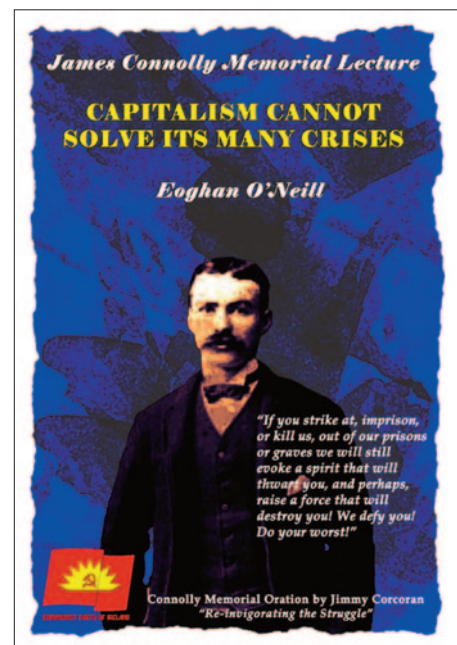
A radical retooling of the Irish housing market involves a large investment in replenishing the stock of public housing, with rents tied to income, not market rates—putting sizeable downward pressure on the market as a whole. It is a fiction to suggest that housing can be "self-funded," as the pressures of capitalist contradiction make this simply impossible. ★

New from the Communist Party



Marxist Critique of "Modern Monetary Theory"

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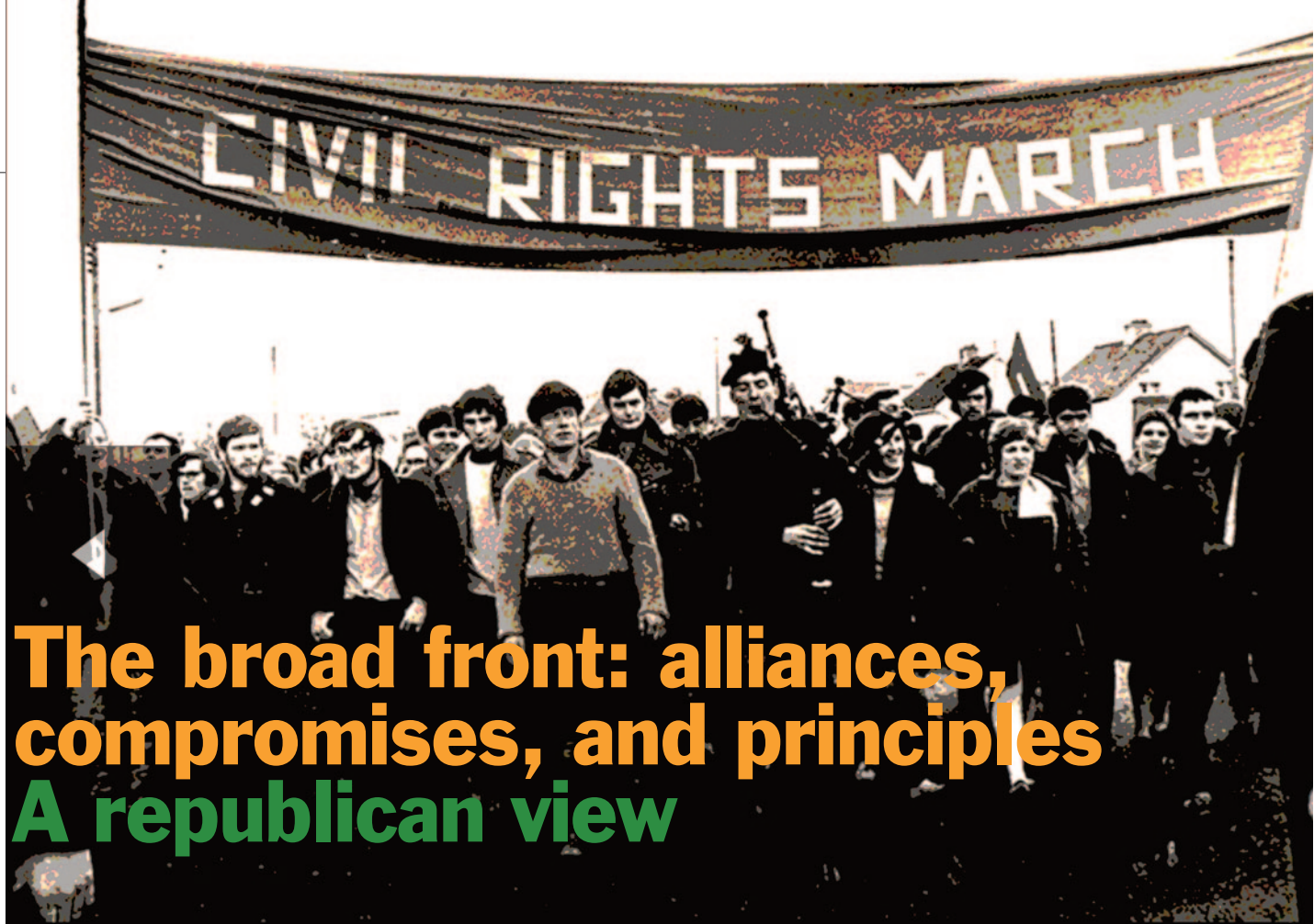


Capitalism cannot solve its many crises

by Eoghan O'Neill

From Connolly Books, 43 East Essex Street, Dublin D02 XH96.

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The broad front: alliances, compromises, and principles

A republican view

BARRY MURRAY

Socialist republicans and progressive forces are at a crossroads, at a time of potential momentous change in Ireland. And change, however slowly, always results in a reconsideration of positions previously taken.

HUMAN HISTORY is replete with the consequences and indeed the dialectic of change. It is only when we look back that we realise how much change has happened, even in our own lifetimes.

Technical developments and the advances in science in recent times have probably had the most profound changes on society that this generation has witnessed; and it is having a profound effect on how we live our lives, how our lives are controlled, and how we view the world, even from our parents' and grandparents' time.

Historical change has always had consequences for political directions, ideas, and how people live their lives. In fact how people "live their lives" must be the central tenet of how socialist republicans think about and navigate the political direction in the continuing struggle for an equal society for all. In

the context of Ireland, the only way that this will come to pass is when the people of Ireland establish a 32-county Irish socialist republic, a workers' and people's republic. Anything short of that will be an illusion.

But we are a long way from that place, and a lot needs to be done before we begin to see the "fruits of our labour." In the meantime we will continue to negotiate the political dynamics that are occurring all around us, not least those of Brexit.

For republicans in particular, Brexit has thrown up the potential for constitutional change in Ireland, namely the potential ending of partition. However, it is not a certainty or a utopia. And for socialist republicans, at least, it must pose the question, "What type of new, 32-county Ireland will arise from all this, and what should our part be in that potential for change? And how do we all work to prevent a defeat in the arena of potential victory?"

We need to factor into our thinking the reality, at this point, that republicans don't have unfettered access to where power resides. And would they want it? Therefore, we have to be strategic and tactical in everything we do in our actions to work with the people of Ireland to change the power dynamic. As Robert Taber said in his famous book on guerrilla strategy, "It's the war of the flea."* It is

"guerrilla politics." In turn, that will mean tactical and strategic compromises.

But whatever we do it must have the transformative objective and result of a 32-county Irish socialist republic, based on a participative people's democracy, as opposed to the present system of parliamentary and representative democracy. At all costs we must never go down the reformist road. That said, it will be necessary to travel through periods of "reform" to get to where we ultimately want to get to, never losing sight of the fact that we need to hold that reform to continuous account, and that our goal is transformative—that is, ending the need for any "strategic reform" by the ending of capitalism, to be replaced by socialism.

But there is no point in telling the homeless that one day down the road we will have an Ireland where everyone will have a house as of right. Those people need a house now. So, as activists, we do whatever it takes to get those people a place to live in today, but understanding clearly that what we are doing now is not a solution to what is actually causing the housing emergency or the many social problems and exploitation we all know about: capitalism.

A major part of strategic actions will have to include alliances with other

‘For republicans in particular, Brexit has thrown up the potential for constitutional change in Ireland, namely the potential ending of partition.’

activists and indeed political groups. This is a difficult arena that can, and does quite often, end in disaster. But, equally, it has the potential to raise smaller groups to new levels of effectiveness. Again, it has and it does. In fact there are few ways that small groups can gain the necessary traction to become a potent force except to make alliances, either with a small group or groups or potentially a larger one.

Inevitably this will result in ideological contradictions. The question then, from a republican viewpoint, becomes “Do we steadfastly retain absolutely our principles, or are we prepared to compromise strategically?”—assuming that compromise is not always bad. It may be worth noting that these contradictions will be true for all the groups in any alliances. It cuts both ways. A lethal mix in all this is, of course, personality clashes and the ego factor. It’s a human reality.

It is very likely, though, that the personalities and egos have more to do with our emotional abilities and a lack of a deep and clear political understanding. Our upbringing, education and the fact that we are conditioned to compete, as opposed to thinking collectively, is also a contributor to these conditions. Religion, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, neo-liberalism and the “battle to survive” in life are all factors and can hardly be ignored as catalysts that drive these “human conditions.”

In the case of Ireland and, in particular, republicanism, deadly feuds, armed struggle and sell-outs—real or imagined—have had a detrimental effect on our ability to take the wider view. Killings by loyalists or state forces also feed into the contamination of our ability to think strategically. And it feeds a “them and us” mentality. All the above, and more, certainly contribute to understandable “negative or isolationist thinking” when we have to consider alliances or broad fronts.

All of that, if we want to build the new workers’ republic, along with the people; it is going to be necessary to make alliances and to be part of a broad front—or a series of fronts—to gain the power necessary to achieve our goals in the short, medium and long term. It is inevitable and will have to be faced sooner rather than later if we are serious about changing who has

power in Ireland. We might note that “our opposition” have no difficulties with “alliances and tactical compromises,” and they will even co-opt us if we allow it.

I believe that, for the purposes of this article, there are two main parts to this power matrix. The first is the one we are governed by now. It is a parliamentary democracy, where “party politics” is the main driver, which ensures that power remains in the hands of the political and economic elite—that is, for the few at the expense of the many. Their councils and parliaments are designed to benefit the rich and powerful and to act on their demands.

The second is a new democratic paradigm—a new way of thinking about democracy, a “democratisation” of civil society. It is a people’s participatory democracy, where power resides within the general population, that is, a democracy of the 99 per cent and not just the few. That power comes from the bottom up and not, as it is now, from the top down. It is the latter model that socialist republicans must adopt; it is a strategic imperative. This community-led democracy is a potentially transformative shift on the road to an Irish socialist republic. The recent work on setting up local *Dálaí* in Cos. Tyrone and Fermanagh is a living example of what I am talking about.

So, what has that to do with alliances and broad fronts? Everything, I believe, in that it first of all drags power out of the parliaments and into the communities, thus breaking the grip of power of the elite few in society and reducing the power’s ability to divide and conquer. In turn, new rationales will prevail. Ordinary people will, over time, begin to see new ways of exercising power, understand that they can, and be better able to consider new alliances in their communities, if only to oppose the push back that will inevitably come from those who do not want any type of people’s democracy to prevail. We know this will happen, because the powerful and wealthy created class, racism, and sectarianism, and maintain them, at any cost, to keep the majority divided, so that they, the elite, remain in control.

To some extent we have to adopt the “model of power,” that we cannot allow friends, however well intentioned, or enemies, to impede our journey. In

effect we have “interests” that ultimately culminate in a 32-county people’s socialist republic, a republic for and by the workers. So the “them and us” must go, out the window, as it is an impediment to real progress.

The reality, however, is that there always has been diversity in society, and there will always be. We cannot expect that we are ever going to have homogeneity, either in society generally or even within our own group, or groups. It just does not exist. But that can and will work in our favour too.

It’s the knowledge that there is not, nor will there be, homogeneity that we can actually use to our advantage. There will be people in other political parties and groups who will identify with what our political ethos is and are not happy with where they are. There are always opportunities with this, and they should continually be developed. But there are going to be people, groups and parties that will never accept our ethos or ideology.

To make this a positive rather than allowing it to be a negative in society and democracy, progressive republicans have to come up with a way to negate the divisions that these ideological and religious differences make. And I am not talking about this “hands across the divide” illusion that is propagated by the Northern Ireland office, Dublin, London, Washington, and their self-serving lackeys.

We need something more concrete and real than that nonsense. We need to find a way to allow all the diversity within society, North and South, to express itself in a truly democratic way, that groups, political or otherwise, have autonomy but contribute to the bigger picture. We need a well-trained and educated vanguard to lead this.

That will mean difficult conversations outside our normal comfort zones. It will mean disagreements. It will mean that governments, and their agents too, will be hard at their disruptive work. It will mean setbacks and outright failures. But it must not mean that we get diverted or give up on the prize of an Irish socialist republic for all. ★

*Robert Taber, *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Potomac Books, 2002).



Left for unity: unity for strength

JIMMY DORAN

UNITY IS indeed strength. We must ensure that the strength gained from Irish unity is for the working class. The partition of Ireland was an imperial solution as a result of the British empire beginning to crumble at the beginning of the last century. The

British empire has been confined to the history books; the last vestiges of it will follow inevitably. Partition, the British answer to the “Irish question,” benefited the ruling elite in both jurisdictions: Big House unionism in the North and the gombeen-capitalist class in the South, both lackeys of British imperialism.

JIMMY CORCORAN

In part 1 of this article (*Socialist Voice*, March 2021) I used official statistics showing the gap between Travellers and society in general in health, employment, and educational achievement. Travellers die earlier, have greater ill-health, have lower educational qualifications, have higher unemployment and have more overcrowding and poorer housing than society in general. As well as this material discrimination, Travellers have seen their culture, language and history ignored and disparaged by the state. The Report of the Commission on Itinerancy (1963) saw nothing of value in the Traveller way of life.

Government policy up to the 1990s advocated the assimilation of Travellers into settled society. At present,

Like colonialism before it, this solution was destined to fail, as it would not fulfil the needs of all citizens. It was not designed for the benefit of citizens—quite the opposite, in fact: it was designed for the benefit of the landed gentry, property developers, beef barons, landlords, employers, and Britain, all feeding off the fruits of the labour of everyone else.

The ruling class, north and south, wanted freedom not for Ireland or Protestant Ulster but to take a bigger share for themselves. Britain was willing to concede this to remain in control. The new rulers in both jurisdictions equally enslaved the working class through debt, low pay, forced emigration, and poverty.

The working class were artificially divided along manufactured sectarian lines in the North by the new government treating nationalists as second-class citizens to maintain power. In the South the ending of British rule also ended sectarian division, as it was an artificial construct, a control mechanism of divide-and-conquer British rule.

The Irish working class, be they from the Shankill, the Bogside, Moyross, or Coolock, have one common enemy. It is not religion, culture, or tradition: imperialism is the common enemy. This is one class against the other. The capitalist class have been winning for centuries; reunification can and must change this.

The last acceptable form of racism Part 2

Government policy claims that integration, rather than assimilation, is the goal. It states that Travellers should be supported to develop, preserve and promote their cultural heritage. So far this seems to be limited to a promise to improve Traveller Pride Week and to “develop other supports for members of the Traveller community to develop new and ambitious initiatives exploring Traveller culture and traditions.”¹

The Government must be forced to go beyond the recognition of Travellers as an ethnic minority and legislate to formalise that recognition by clarifying the rights accorded to them and to ensure that these rights are protected and promoted. This must include official recognition of Traveller culture, history, and language.

The Travellers’ language, Shelta, as one of the two languages native to

'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'

A united Ireland must not be based on a division of Orange and Green, or the cobbling together of these two failed political entities. Irish unity must be a transformation of the lives of the ordinary working people, north, south, east, and west, from Derry to Kerry and Belfast to Cork, a united country with a united working class, all working together in an economy for the common good.

The working class must dictate the outcome of what will constitute Ireland after reunification. If we don't, the same ruling class will remain in control. Irish reunification will only happen once. We won't have multiple bites at the cherry.

If reunification doesn't transfer power to the working class it will fail, just as surely as partition and colonialism have, and would leave the majority of citizens stuck on the never-ending roundabout of poverty, inequality, division, and despair.

There must be a clear roadmap of what unity will mean for all citizens. The trade union movement, communities and the left must fight to be at the forefront of designing that roadmap for a new, united Ireland. If we don't, there are plenty of exploiters only too happy to design the future for themselves.

We need a shared political future for our class, not a shared geographical piece of earth but an equal share of the fruits of that earth and of the labour of our people to benefit the common good.

There is no doubt that the ruling

class, whether they say it or not, on both sides of the border, know and accept that the reunification of Ireland will happen, and they know exactly what they want to get from it. They will use every manner of means to divert and confuse the debate in order to achieve their aims.

They say that to plan or even talk of unity is divisive and offensive for minorities. We only have to look at the reality of one hundred years of partition to see how this imperial construct worked out for the contrived minority. This is an old and worn overplayed card. People must not continue to be fooled by this artificial division.

The only minority in Ireland is the capitalist class. They are the only ones with anything to fear or to lose from the reunification of Ireland.

Partition failed; Sunningdale, the Anglo-Irish agreement, thirty years of conflict, the Downing Street declaration, the Belfast Agreement—all failed the people of Ireland, just as the Act of Union failed before. It's been more than thirty years since the Belfast Agreement and nearly forty since the end of the military conflict in the North, and still Stormont cannot even agree on an Irish Language Act; one class divided into two communities, kept at each other's throats while both are being exploited through poverty, low pay, exorbitant rents and atrocious public services by the other class.

How long more must the citizens suffer under the jackboot of British imperialism and their lackeys in Dublin? Unity of the country and the end of British rule is the route to the unity of the working class

For centuries, Britain has stopped the people of Ireland from reaching our full potential. Others use EU membership to confuse and divert support from unity. We must remember that the gombeen political lackeys of Britain in Dublin were the ones that told the people of Ireland that if Britain joined the EEC, economically Ireland would have to follow, and that the EEC would bring Irish unity closer. It is ironic that it is Britain leaving the EU that has actually brought Irish unity closer. A partitioned Ireland is ripe for imperialist domination; a united working class are the incorruptible inheritors of the struggle for freedom.

British domination has lasted more than eight hundred years. The day is fast approaching when Britain will leave our shores; a united working class, free to run the country in the interest of all citizens, will not be slow in ending the mere fifty years of European domination to complete the job of building a new, independent, free Ireland.

The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. ★

Print Left is by the British communist artist Ken Sprague 1927-2004

Ireland, must be protected and supported. The Belfast Agreement states that all participants in the agreement recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to the languages of Ireland's various ethnic communities. Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority on both sides of the border and as such must have their language recognised. By virtue of being a signatory to international agreements on national minorities, Ireland has an obligation to support the expression of Traveller identity.²

Nomadism is still central to Traveller culture, and, though most Travellers do not wish to return to a permanent nomadic life-style, they do want to travel for part of the year. It is an issue that could potentially increase anti-Traveller sentiment. The Casey presidential campaign has shown that the racist right could mobilise a lot of support against

Travellers, and use nomadism as their excuse. State agencies such as the IDA would no doubt argue that halting-sites would deter foreign investment. But "it is not Travellers' nomadism that fuels anti-Traveller racism; it is their group identity."³ As an expression of Traveller culture, the state must allow nomadism and repeal or amend all legal barriers to the practice.

The Traveller Culture and History in Education Bill (2018), which lapsed with the dissolution of the 32nd Dáil, called for an amendment to section 9(f) of the Education Act (1998), which states that a school shall use its resources to "promote knowledge and understanding of the culture and history of the Traveller community." It must be reintroduced in the current Dáil.

History shows that minorities cannot depend on "enlightened" politicians to end discrimination against them. Most

candidates for election do not bother to canvass halting-sites. If anti-Traveller racism is to be defeated and Travellers' rights recognised and supported, the left must campaign alongside Travellers in their struggle for equality. We must raise the issue within the trade union movement, the women's movement, students' unions, housing and tenants' groups, etc. We must reach out to the Traveller community and Traveller organisations and incorporate their struggle for equality in all anti-racist campaigning. ★

Notes

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- 2 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, article 12.1.
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The militarisation of the European Union grows apace Part 2



DORIAN Ó SEANÁIN

ACCORDING to its high representative for foreign affairs, Josep Borrell, the EU at present has 5,000 troops stationed around the world under its aegis.¹ Most of its operations are based in Africa (as shown in part 1 of this article). However, the EU's most significant operation on the European continent is the advisory mission to Ukraine (EUAM).

EU member-states have been important backers of the regime in Kiev that took power in the 2014 coup. Since then the EU has advanced billions in loans to the country. The EUAM defines its role as helping the regime to create new state institutions in line with EU norms.² (It should be noted that there are Irish officials working in the EUAM's Lviv office.³)

In December 2020 Ukraine's national police launched two new data centres at undisclosed sites to bolster its surveillance capacities.⁴ The data centres were procured with EU funds. The medium-term goal is to have Ukraine join the bloc, where its weak economy will suffer the same deflation

and economic ruin that have befallen the other eastern European member-states, dominated by the imperialist core and representing a vast reserve army of labour for German industrial capital.

Not surprisingly, China is increasingly a central focus of EU foreign policy. The EU diplomatic corps' directorate for the Asia-Pacific region identifies China as "an economic competitor and a systemic rival."⁵ At the 21st EU-China summit in April 2019 the delegations agreed a framework for rules-based trade and a common position on reform of the WTO. The EU has been complaining for years that China provides subsidies for industry, and that EU companies do not have reciprocal access to Chinese markets. The hypocrisy inherent in EU accusations of unfair practices hides the fact that European companies are far less competitive than Chinese ones, despite the EU and its member-state governments regularly subsidising their own corporate giants (thereby giving handouts to their private shareholders); one need only refer to disputes between Airbus and the American aviation giant Boeing.

The nature of such EU-China negotiations nonetheless reveals that European big business, faced with declining rates of profit, is extremely keen to boost its commercial viability by breaking into Chinese markets. This contrasts with the extremely belligerent tone towards China from the new Biden government. After a meeting between senior EU and US diplomats on 25 March last, Borrell stated that there would be a co-ordinated approach towards China, while the US secretary of state, Anthony Blinken, insisted that NATO allies should mount a "pushback on Beijing," under American leadership.⁶

Blinken clarified that the United States would not force its allies into an "us or them" choice over China, suggesting that it is being careful not to alienate the EU, which is capable of pursuing an independent policy on China if it considers American policy to be counterproductive.

As seen in part 1, the EU is using the new powers conferred on it by the Lisbon Treaty to develop a European military-industrial complex. Initiatives such as the European Defence Fund (EDF) stipulate that for a project to



'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'



receive a grant it must involve at least three entities from at least three member-states. A report requested by the EU Parliament subcommittee on defence identified criticism of the EDF and similar initiatives by referring to the line of argument that “the major prime contractors in Western Europe will win all the high-tech work, leaving the other defence industries at risk.”⁷

The drive to create a single market for armaments procurement is presented as being a boon for small and medium businesses; however, the EU Commission’s own web site states that most of the companies forming commercial partnerships are concentrated in five member-states: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Sweden.⁸ Member-state governments are making funds available through such instruments as the EDF and the €2½ billion COSME programme, the latter exclusively aimed at small businesses, to bankroll the renovation and expansion of the bloc’s largest armed forces.⁹

For instance, the EU’s comprehensive annual defence review in 2020, the first of its kind, listed the upgrading of the main battle tank (MBT)

capability for high-intensity operations as a priority.¹⁰ MBT is a collaboration between French and German manufacturers to equip their armies with a future land warfare system, potentially including autonomous ground and aerial vehicles.

Furthermore, the EU has a certification scheme (Certider) for companies wishing to receive certain military-related products and obtain transfer licences for items on the common EU military list.¹¹ Out of the 87 certifications listed in Certider’s database, 52 are held by companies registered in only three member-states: France, Germany, and Belgium.¹²

Given that the EU is seeking to create an internal market for military procurement, it is not surprising that third countries face substantial regulatory barriers in access to EU funds for R&D projects. According to the report requested by the EU Parliament subcommittee, “the US has been lobbying heavily over participation criteria in EU defence projects, although these efforts have been largely unsuccessful.”¹³ The American Chamber of Commerce to the EU even warned that a “Buy European Act” would lead to the United States restricting European companies’ access to American arms markets.

This is yet further evidence of the growing divide between the ruling classes on either side of the Atlantic, as the EU’s policy of “strategic autonomy” (discussed in part 1) necessitates an unwinding of EU-US military integration.

Companies certified by the Certider scheme include Thales Group (France), Safran (France), Leonardo (Italy), Rheinmetall (Germany), Diehl (Germany), and joint ventures such as MBDA Missile Systems.¹⁴ Each of these companies has a turnover of several billion euros. It is clear which countries are laying down the terms for armaments initiatives at the EU level, from which these same countries’ “captains of industry” will benefit most.

The increased powers for EU institutions in matters of defence means that Irish defence policy is being shaped by decisions taken on the Continent. Seventeen PESCO projects were officially initiated by EU defence ministers in March 2018, of which the Irish state is involved in two: the EU Training Mission

Competence Centre and the Upgrade of Maritime Surveillance (UMS).¹⁵ As part of the former, the Defence Forces will send trainers abroad for “upskilling” so that they will have the expertise to prepare for future EU training missions. The latter is a surveillance project that will integrate land, air and sea systems to provide real-time information to member-states. Its emphasis is on “new and old threats”; in addition to security and defence matters, energy security is a central component of the UMS’s remit.¹⁶

Of the nine member-states participating in the UMS, seven border the Mediterranean, so it is clear that the Irish navy will be subservient to the geopolitical interests of France, Italy, Spain, and Greece, all of which are participants in the UMS.

These two PESCO projects are “legally binding” commitments on the Irish government, which must present a national implementation plan to the other member-states each year, outlining the progress made on the binding commitments it has undertaken.¹⁷

The Department of Defence is increasingly consumed by commitments to the EU’s military agenda. On 22 March last the EU launched its “European Peace Facility” (EPF), yet another “instrument” for advancing military initiatives under the common foreign and security policy. The fund will be worth €5 billion for the period 2021–27.¹⁸ It was reported last November that the EPF would have “significant cost implications for the exchequer.” With Britain no longer helping to foot the bill, the Irish state’s contribution will rise sharply from the outlay of €53.1 million for participation in overseas “peace support” missions in 2018.¹⁹

The white paper published by the Department of Defence in February further illustrates how the department will increase the state’s military capabilities by making use of EU subsidies for military research. The department has established a “Security and Defence Enterprise Group” to support Irish businesses in their efforts to gain access to programmes of the European Defence Agency (which helps to administer the EDF) and Horizon 2020.²⁰

CONTINUED OVERLEAF



OPINION

In defence of China

A response

DÓNALL Ó BRIAIN

THE ARTICLE by Alan Farrell in the March issue under the heading “In defence of China” raises some extremely important questions but offers answers that are unsustainable.

The writer asks three questions to represent the concerns expressed by many people, and proceeds to answer them. But the questions themselves are inadequate, as they do not accurately represent those concerns.

The article states that “broadly speaking, critiques of China from the left fall into three categories,” which are listed as:

- “(1) that the rapid growth and development of China is a cause for concern for environmental reasons;
- “(2) that China engages in quasi-imperialism or ‘social-imperialism’ (a criticism that was also levelled by some at the Soviet Union); and
- “(3) that China is a totalitarian state

that abuses the human rights of its citizens.”

But that is not at all an accurate summary of the criticisms of the Chinese state and its policies.

(1) The concerns widely expressed about the environment may or may not be attributable to China’s “rapid growth and development,” but they are legitimate concerns nevertheless, for which there is overwhelming evidence. The reference to “unsustainable growth” is absolutely valid: that is precisely what China is engaged in. And it’s not to raise the standards of life of the Chinese people but to compete with the West.

“Do the people of China, and indeed all the other countries of the Global South, not deserve to enjoy the simple dignities, such as public transport infrastructure, well-maintained roads, widespread broadband internet connection, etc., that we take for granted in the West?” The phrasing of that question is highly dubious, an

>> European Union militarisation

The white paper also states that opportunities for joint research between the Defence Forces, businesses and third-level colleges will be pursued. Projects still to be completed include expanding the state’s participation in multinational development projects “within the framework of the EDA” and the initiation of “joint civil-military training” to support the “EU comprehensive/integrated approach” to crisis management.

Such measures show a desire to increase the visibility and influence of

the Defence Forces in public life by advocating increased interaction between the military and the rest of society, particularly in commercial research ventures.

In conclusion: The Irish electorate decided in 2009 to vote in favour of a treaty based on lies proffered by the government and media with regard to the consequences for the state’s neutrality. As shown in this article, the Irish state is no longer just a conduit for US warplanes landing at Shannon Airport but actively implements legally binding military obligations to the EU, whether in the form of PESCO, submitting tenders to the EDF, or advisory missions such as the EUAM in Ukraine.

No part of the EU’s military

example of what is called the “straw man” argument: “Don’t put words in my mouth” is the spontaneous response of people being presented with that type of question. Who begrudges the Chinese people the desire for a better life? The question is how that is to be achieved—altogether a separate matter.

It is a well-established fact, acknowledged by many on the serious left, that China’s economic miracle is largely a consequence of the mass of industrial workers being paid slave wages—and in some instances, in fact, subjected to virtual slavery, with their human rights and needs not acknowledged, including being locked in their factories at night. (What would James Connolly think of that?)

And this is the means whereby the rest of the world (including Ireland) is flooded with Chinese consumer goods, at unbelievably low prices. It is virtually impossible to buy any consumer goods today, from soft toys to computers, that are not made in China. Thanks to the fact that both countries embrace “free trade,” these goods can be sold by China at prices at which they could not be produced in Ireland, or anywhere else. And free trade makes it next to impossible for other countries to create, or to sustain, industrial manufacturing or industrial development.

As to being the biggest manufacturer and buyer of electric vehicles in the world, unfortunately this claim comes up against the growing body of evidence

bureaucracy is accountable to voters in this state, while the largest member-states use it to advance their own imperialist interests and develop an EU-wide military-industrial complex directed by the largest armaments contractors.

The anti-war movement in Ireland needs to campaign against the state’s involvement in the entire gamut of EU military projects, which are even more pervasive than the use of Shannon by US warplanes.

Working-class and republican movements relate strongly to the anti-imperialist nature of struggles that define modern Irish history, and the demand to dissociate from the fledgling EU army is one that can win broad support. ★

'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 the virtue of electric cars is bogus.

(2) The suggestion that China is criticised by the left for engaging in “quasi-imperialism” or “social-imperialism” does not ring true. The serious left does not use the term “quasi-imperialism” (whatever it means) or “social-imperialism” (a term from the early history of the communist movement that later became part of Maoist vocabulary, intended to denigrate the Soviet Union); but it does use the unvarnished term “imperialism,” applying it in the sense in which it was used by Lenin and by communist parties since then.

The left (broadly speaking) criticises China precisely for abandoning socialist principles and adopting the “capitalist road.” This does not mean a capitalist road to socialism, which is an impossibility, but simply a road to capitalism. That is the road that China is on, and has been on for many years. No amount of wishful thinking can disguise this fact.

(3) Again, not many people on the serious left use the non-class term “totalitarian state” in referring to China; but we have to face the fact that the lack of human rights (and civil rights) is a reality in China.

As for the answers offered by the writer to his own questions, these narrow the scope even further, singling out individual issues that are not at all representative. There are no grounds for suggesting that criticism of

shortcomings in the treatment of the Uighur population is the essence of the critique of the status of human rights in China. The bulk of the published criticism in this area is indeed inspired by Western intelligence and propaganda; but who on the left said otherwise? It's not valid to raise a broad question and then provide a narrow answer on one selected aspect.

Of most concern is the positive attitude in the article, both expressed and implied, to Maoism and its influence. Older readers won't need to be reminded of the devastation caused to many countries (apart from China itself), and especially to communist parties, perpetrated by China during the Mao period. It would be laborious to list them all, but among the most significant are the attempts—in several instances successful—to split or to destroy parties by sponsoring “alternative” communist parties, some of which were spurred on to irresponsible adventurism, which often led to violent repression—and in at least one case with China changing sides and supplying arms to the state that was massacring communists.

China, under Maoism and later, clandestinely supported white Rhodesia and South Africa. In the 1960s and 70s it promoted the spurious Pan-Africanist Congress, set up to oppose the African National Congress. It sponsored and financed similar rival “liberation movements” elsewhere, whose only

purpose was to destroy the authentic liberation movements, then engaged in a life-or-death struggle against colonial and white-supremacist states, for the simple reason that they were perceived to be led by communists. In South Africa and Namibia it was only the internationalist intervention of Cuba that stopped these forces in their tracks.

And today China is the fifth-largest arms supplier in the world, as well as the largest supplier to Africa.

The assertion that “the central structural principle that underpins the country” is “the guiding principles of Marxism-Leninism . . .” is far removed from the reality. Here is the crunch of the matter. It is simply not true that Marxism-Leninism underpins China's official policies; and the use of the term “Mao Zedong thought” (the attempt to elevate Maoist opportunism to a status equal to Marxism-Leninism) must cause serious concern for those who remember the reality.

The Communist Party of Greece, which is known for the competence and the rigour of its Marxist analysis, has produced a comprehensive examination of the situation in China,* with neither undue harshness nor rose-tinted spectacles. Young Marxists would be well advised to read that analysis, and consider its conclusions. ★

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Stop pandering to the rich

DAMIEN MCKENNA

ON 11 DECEMBER 2019 the EU Commission adopted the “European New Green Deal,” with the aim of continued growth coupled to a climate-neutral, fair and prosperous society by 2050.

On 19 December the same year the Circular Economy Action Plan was passed by the Commission. Its aim is to replace the linear economy with a more local, “circular” economy, based on recycling and technology to allow increased production while reducing emissions.

THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY is the brainchild of Ellen McArthur, the record-holding British sailor. When she retired in 2010 she started the Ellen McArthur Foundation to promote a more sustainable economic order, with funds from her professional sponsors Renault and B&Q—Renault, the French car manufacturing company, which owns or partly owns not only the Renault brand but also Dacia, Autovaz (Lada), Nissan, Mitsubishi, Samsung Motors, Brilliance, JMEV, Dongfeng Auto, and Jinbei Auto. Not exactly known for their eco-credentials or their contribution to cleaner air!

B&Q—part of the Kingfisher Group—operates 1,300 retail shops in eight countries in Europe and Turkey. Again, not exactly what we would regard as “stay local, shop local.”

The sponsors listed on Ellen McArthur’s web site include Danone, DS Smith, Google, H&M Group, Ikea, Philips, SC Johnson, Unilever, the Eric and

Wendy Schmidt Foundation, Mava Foundation, and the Sun Foundation. Needless to say, this is a motley crew of scurrilous transnational companies whose only motive is to generate massive profits for their shareholders.

Danone, second-largest producer of baby food and owners of Cow and Gate, Milupa, and Nutricia, to name a few, was removed from the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition for promoting their products in Asia and particularly India. Sub-optimal breast-feeding is responsible for 12 per cent of deaths in children under five, while almost a quarter (23 per cent) of preventable deaths are due to lack of continued breast-feeding in the age group 6–24 months.

One of its production plants in Ukraine, Danone Kremez, is authorised to export to Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAR, Syria, Russia, and Moldova—not exactly “produce local”! It operates globally, with an income in 2019 of €25.3 billion. The only sustainability they care about is sustaining shareholders’ profits.

The H&M Swedish “fast-fashion” group, among its lesser crimes, was recently exposed as fraudulently promoting its “Conscious Collection” as sustainable, even providing recycling bins for customers to put their old clothes in, on the promise that they would be made into new garments. Fewer than 2 per cent were.

Clothes, not just fast-fashion, cheap or expensive, that are produced in grossly inhuman conditions in China (look up stone-washed jeans and health issues in

China), Bangladesh or somewhere else thousands of miles away from the end users, is not, and cannot be, sustainable. The raw materials are shipped there, and shipped again around the world when manufactured, by highly polluting container ships. The discarded clothes (long before they are worn out) mostly end up in landfill, with all the problems of seepage etc. that this entails.

Does anyone believe that H&M, Penney’s, Next or Brown Thomas give a damn about sustainability?

SC Johnson received the worst rating for environmental responsibility from *Ethical Consumer*, because it failed to set any targets for reducing its environmental impact. It continues to use all three of the toxins contained in cleaning products—parabens, phthalates, and triclosan. According to the BBC they paid \$417 million in damages to twenty-two women who suffered ovarian cancer resulting from its baby powder, and there are 9,000 cases outstanding. They knew about the problems with asbestos infiltration since the 1970s but failed to warn consumers about the risks. For good measure they openly test their products on animals. Well, they desperately need to improve their image somehow; so why not sponsor some fraudulent “green” foundation?

The other sponsor companies and foundations are similar. They are multi-billion-dollar companies that are greenwashing their images by bankrolling spurious “green” foundations.

All these companies have one thing in common: they obtain their raw materials from and they manufacture in low-cost manufacturing countries with extremely poor environmental standards, and pay wages at subsistence levels, where children, women and men have no protection and joining a trade union is a life-threatening decision.

Add the cost to climate and biodiversity by sustaining that level of consumerism in the First World, paid for in blood, sweat and tears in the Third.

The Ellen McArthur foundation is jointly sponsored by “green” charitable foundations, most notably the Eric and Wendy Schmidt Fund for Strategic Innovation. Eric Schmidt was CEO or executive chairman of Google and is now technical adviser at Alphabet. He was chairperson of the US Defense Innovation Board from 2016 to 2020

'In short, the circular economy is a charade promoted by the EU and its big-industry partners to hoodwink people who are really concerned for their future into believing that the EU and big business care.

(very sustainable and pro-human!); he was CEO of Google when he was the subject of the High-Tech Employee Antitrust Litigation case that resulted in a settlement of \$415 million paid out by Adobe, Apple, Google and Intel to its employees. He is worth \$14.2 billion (October 2019). I don't think being charitable has ever registered on his radar.

"Charitable foundations" are anything but charitable: they are tax-avoidance vehicles that allow the super-rich to avoid paying taxes to national governments, thereby depriving them of billions in tax revenue that should go to public services: health, education, etc. Instead the super-rich contribute (or not) to their pet schemes, which rarely include the really needy, while avoiding taxes and giving themselves, their families and friends unfettered access to tax-free millions. (For more information look up "How philanthropy benefits the super-rich" in the *Guardian*, 8 September 2020.)

In short, the circular economy is a charade promoted by the EU and its big-industry partners to hoodwink people who are really concerned for their future into believing that the EU and big business care, while leaving them free to continue plundering the earth's resources and the wholesale exploitation of our brothers and sisters in Asia, Africa, and South America.

Can you imagine Germany tying the hands of Bayer by forcing it to stop selling its pesticides, herbicides, and GMOs? It would just get up and go to the nearest destination that allowed it to continue its exploitation and destruction.

Likewise, will Germany, France or Italy put their car manufacturers in jeopardy by constraining their production to sustainable levels? The difference in sustainability between electric and oil-based engines is negligible. And it is simply not feasible for everyone in the world to have car ownership at the level of the First World—unless, of course, we believe that we are the chosen ones.

The First World has to face up to a period of degrowth. It's time to stop pandering to the rich and to co-operate in a new world without profit but with dignity and pride in our sustainable future. ★

Who said that?

"Again, it is important to highlight here that what failed was the state's management of public enterprises, not the capacity of society to manage its assets in a democratic manner. This is a country under a blockade and capitalists don't pay taxes!"

Pedro Eusse, Political Bureau, Communist Party of Venezuela, commenting on the growing contradictions in government policies.

"Americans and their allies are targeting the Syrian oil wealth and its tankers just like pirates."

Bassam Tomeh, Syrian minister for petroleum and mineral resources, noting that the United States controls 90 per cent of the crude oil resources in the north-east region of Syria.

"We're keeping the oil—remember that. I've always said that: 'Keep the oil.' We want to keep the oil. Forty-five million dollars a month? Keep the oil."

Donald Trump, October 2019.

"The wealthiest western nations have wiped their hands clean of any responsibility to slow a pandemic they helped magnify and spread."

Fatima Bhutto, Pakistani author, on the hoarding of vaccines by the "Western democracies."

Quito Canaveral "marked the turning point in the struggle to free the continent and our country from the scourge of apartheid."

Nelson Mandela, on the defeat of South African invaders at the hands of Angolan-Cuban armies on 23 March 1988. ★

Caomhnóir ina shabaitéir

DÓNALL Ó BRIAIN

An bhliain seo caite méadaíodh 74 faoin gcéad ar bhrabús an chomhlachta phríobháidigh otharcharr is mó sa tír, Lifeline Ambulance Service. Is le David Hall, a bhain cáil amach cheana mar fheachtasóir morgáiste, an comhlacht.

Caoga otharcharr atá á n-oibriú ag an gcomhlacht anois, a bhfuil 102 fhostaí aige. Méadaíodh ar an mbrabús carntha go €907,000, mar aon le cúlchiste de €1.05 milliún. Ba chabhair mhór chuige sin an tacaíocht a chuir an rialtas ar fáil do ghnóthais phríobháideacha i rith phaindéim an choróinvíris.

Thug an t úinéir creidiúint freisin

as fás an ghnóthais sa bhliain 2020 do "ghéilliúlacht" na Feidhmeannachta Seirbhíse Sláinte (HSE). Ansin tháinig iarstiúrthóir ginearálta an HSE, Tony O'Brien, isteach sa chomhlacht i mí Eanáir mar stiúrthóir neamhfheidhmiúcháin.

Sampla críochnaithe is ea seo den "doras rothlach" a oibríonn idir an tseirbhís phoiblí agus gnóthais phríobháideacha. An chéad uair eile a chloiseann tú oifigeach sinsearach ag moladh comhlachtaí príobháideacha agus na seirbhísí a chuireann siad ar fáil don phobal, cuimhnigh go mb'fhéidir go bhfuil sé ag machnamh ag an am céanna ar léimt ó bheith ina sheirbhíseach ag an bpobal go bheith ina bhrabúsaí, agus cá mhéad airgid a thuillfidh sé dá réir. ★



Join the fight for socialism
Join the Communist Party

No longer a peripheral issue

SAJEEV KUMAR

T. S. Elliott wrote in “Choruses from ‘The Rock’” (1934):

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

We have all the knowledge and information about climate change, but the capitalist system doesn’t allow us to act with wisdom. As a result we are now amid the sixth mass extinction, and this time a particular species is responsible for it: *Homo sapiens*.

Capitalism is synonymous with the mindless exploitation of nature and labour for the accumulation of capital.

The American economist Kenneth Boulding once said, “Anyone who believes that exponential growth can go on for ever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.”

So if the question is, Can capitalism give us a solution to the environmental crisis? then the answer is easy. No, capitalism cannot find the solution; in fact capitalism is the problem.

There are nine aspects to “planet boundary”—climate change, ocean acidification, ozone depletion, nitrogen and phosphorus cycle, global fresh water use, change in land use, biodiversity loss, aerosol loading, and chemical pollution—which are explained by John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff in their book *What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know about Capitalism*.

But oil barons, like the Koch brothers, spend millions to create doubts about global warming. The parliaments and senates are filled with an elite who don’t want discussion on climate change on their agenda. It’s an irony that our civilisation, which cannot protect life on this planet, is looking for life elsewhere.

Technology is fighting hard to find solutions, such as reducing global warming by capturing and injecting carbon dioxide into the oceans (which will cause acidification of the oceans) or reflecting light back, using sulphur dioxide in the stratosphere (which will cause acid rains) by the albedo effect. But the “Jevons paradox” explains that technology alone cannot solve the environmental contradictions of capitalism.

How long will they get away with it?

RAYMOND Ó DÚBHGHAILL

TWO INSTRUCTIVE headlines from the bourgeois financial news web site Business Insider give an indication of how the balance of global wealth has shifted since the covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020.

The first: “Billionaires made \$3.9 trillion during the pandemic,” informing us that the likes of the Victorian workhouse logistics baron Jeff Bezos and the Bolivian coup-mongering Boer Elon Musk saw their net worth rise by \$3.9 trillion over the past year.¹ And the second: “Workers lost \$3.7 trillion in earnings during the pandemic: Women and Gen Z saw the biggest losses,” indicating in fairly stark terms where the super-exploiters’ new-found increases in wealth came from.²

We can quibble about where the missing \$0.2 trillion came from another time—sheer ingenuity and force of will, perhaps—but the overarching message is clear: the past year has seen the world’s major capitalists pull off the greatest upward transfer of wealth in the shortest space of time in world history. Of course “upward transfer of wealth” is

simply a euphemism for the daylight robbery of the working class.

The figures referred to by *Business Insider* were taken from an Oxfam report on global inequality and unpaid work³ and a report by the International Labour Organization on the economic consequences of covid-19, both published in January 2021.⁴ The reports are worth reading for their stark findings, if not for their predictably disappointing milquetoast conclusions and solutions, concentrating mainly on quantitative taxing measures and woolly language about “equality” as a means of addressing the desperate situations they describe.

Liberals and reformists are at pains to deny what we as revolutionaries have known for over a century now and is borne out by historical fact: inequality is an inherent and unavoidable part of capitalism, and, by its own internal logic, in the pursuit of growth and profit in a world of finite resources it will only increase. In the immortal words of James Connolly, “the day has passed for patching up the capitalist system; it must go.”⁵

But what has the ruling class been up to while workers have been living under lockdown of one sort or another over the past twelve months? In Britain, the Tory government has moved to criminalise protest through a controversial new Policing Bill, justified in part under the pretence of protecting public health. As well as giving the police more draconian powers to crack down on public protest, the bill refers to protests that cause “an adverse impact to businesses.”⁶ Such a move could result in the criminalisation of economic boycotts, such as the anti-Zionist Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, among other things.

The effects of the bill would be far-reaching and have been summarised in the *Morning Star* and elsewhere; but we should be under no illusions: our political class will not be far behind their colonial masters in pursuing similar legislation here when the opportunity arises.

Discussion of climate change, undoubtedly considered the most pressing issue facing the planet in 2019, subsided greatly with the events of the past year. However, pollution, waste, war and the burning of fossil fuels still

'Can capitalism give us a solution to the environmental crisis? then the answer is easy. No, capitalism cannot find the solution; in fact capitalism is the problem.'

So, can capitalism "go green"? In 1999 the CEO of British Petroleum, John Browne, coined the slogan "Beyond petroleum." But the neoliberal economist Milton Friedman minced no words to say that "he can do it with his own money . . . He is an employee of stockholders, however elevated his position may appear to be. As such, he has a very strong moral responsibility to them." In other words, profit first, not the environment.

The (*Guardian* London) says, "Climate change catastrophe can be averted by greening consumer behaviour rather than by curbing economic growth and mass consumerism." The strategies of environmentalists that begin with the aim of protecting the environment end in protecting capitalism.

So the struggle to protect the planet has to undergo a metamorphosis to a direct fight against capitalism. If we are not contemplating ending capitalism we are contemplating ending life on Earth.

continue, as well as an estimated 4 billion disposable masks that are being discarded globally every day.⁷ The ruling class have wasted no time in capitalising on this, by investing in "green" technologies and, of course, buying stakes in the global water supply.

We must be clear: one of the central reasons for capitalists' moves to privatise water is the certainty of even more widespread water scarcity in the coming years, as a direct result of climate change. Indeed Oxfam estimates that by 2025, 2.4 billion people could be without access to clean drinking-water—a captive market that they intend to readily exploit.

Disappointingly, in the name of supporting measures taken to defend public health, many on the left have taken a reactionary position in relation to acknowledging the class dynamics of covid-related restrictions, both domestically and globally.

So-called "lockdown" has not meant lockdown for all. It must be remembered that essential workers in factories, food-processing plants, health services, public transport, delivery and logistics and many other industries are unable to do their jobs "remotely," working in a high-risk environment to provide the goods and services required for society to function. At the same time access to health, education and other essential services

Even when climate change was not a big issue the Soviet Union passed a decree on environmental policy for the conservation of nature. It was Vladimir Vernadsky in 1929 who coined the term "biosphere."

The anthropologist Jason Hickel says that Cuba leads in the sustainable development index (SDI), which is a ratio between the human development index (HDI) and "ecological overshoot." That is a carbon footprint /per capita/ exceeding the earth's natural limits; which means that Cuba develops without hurting the environment.

The United States, which imports from low-wage countries such as China, India and Bangladesh by offshoring production, has a carbon footprint /per capita/ of 27 tonnes. To maintain its imperialist hegemony it has eight hundred military bases around the world and the military logistics that add to the carbon emissions and increase in military budgets that can otherwise be

has been drastically limited for those without the financial means to gain access to private solutions. Practical supports for workers' mental health have been subsumed by "mindfulness" webinars and the likes, while "remote learning" has taken the place of real educational opportunities and access to libraries. "Lockdown," the public-health measure, presented an opportunity for capitalists that they readily accepted; and the scale of the crisis in which we are living—already well in train before 2020 began—has yet to be fully realised.

For one, we can be certain that the shift of office labour to remote working undertaken under covid-19 will mean further large-scale loss of jobs and the erosion of workers' rights, as well as significant effects on physical and mental health.

The dystopian future promised by climate change represents a very real public health crisis, which is already the lived reality for many in the developing world. At the time of writing more than 2.7 million people globally have died of covid-19 since the pandemic began. The only people to benefit from this global tragedy have been the ruling class, and they are in the process of consolidating their gains.

How long are we going to let them get away with it? ★

used for the people's welfare and investment in environmental protection.

The insane economic expansion of rich countries has to slow down to give room for the economic growth of poorer ones. Is this possible under imperialism?

The force has to come from the bottom of society to transcend the system. Climate change is no longer a peripheral issue: it is a central issue that communists have to take up in the fight against capitalism. Otherwise, as during the covid-19 pandemic, the working class will be the ones worst affected by climate change. ★

NOTES

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Drugs: A weapon of imperialism



Wikimedia Commons

GRAHAM HARRINGTON

NARCOTICS ARE, in some ways, just like any other commodity. Be it oil, natural gas, sugar, or coffee, under capitalism their purpose is to allow profits to be made.

Hyper-consumerism has led to unequal levels of development in the Global North and South, social alienation in domestic markets, and environmental damage. The production, sale and use of cocaine or heroin follow the same laws

as any other commodity. What separates them is their social effects.

The British East India Company was one of the most important and also one of the vilest institutions in history. It had its own army, diplomatic corps, and education system and was a crucial part of the British Empire.

In the eighteenth century Britain had an insatiable demand for tea from China, so much so that it developed a trade deficit with Qing dynasty China. The East India Company had the idea of smuggling

opium from Bengal into China and so making the Chinese population dependent; this would be a way for Britain to gain access to the resources it needed in China. It worked, and the result was the Opium Wars *pictured above*, in which Britain and others annexed parts of China—most importantly Hong Kong—and managed to control three-quarters of China's imports. China's population of addicts would skyrocket until the revolution in 1949.

The Treaty of Tianjin brought the

OPINION A view from rural Ireland

JOE HURLEY

THE CAP TALKS have stalled. That means no new environmental schemes until the powers that be, the parties to the negotiations, are all in bed with big-money capitalism. The result, of course, will benefit large corporations and factories, not small or medium farmers, meat-factory workers, or all the rural workers.

Now when the talks do start we need all the MEPs that are sympathetic to

workers' causes to let their voice be heard in the EU. We need more MEPs like Clare Daly and Mick Wallace.

Covid The situation in the meat factories concerning covid is the worst in the country. Accommodation for foreign workers is absolutely terrible, with four to ten people sharing a room and then working in different factories.

The plight of these migrant workers is a national scandal. The meat factories have turned a blind eye to workers' conditions long enough. Both they and the farmers are exploited beyond reason, and the Government won't say a word. The Government has not got the people's interests at heart. Capitalism is the enemy of both rural and urban workers.

Wind farms Coole Windfarm approached Westmeath farmers, wanting to put industrial wind farms on

some farms, and roads and bridges in others, totally disregarding drinking water, livestock, and the fact that extracting gravel and stone on farm sites puts the sheds in the farm in danger of collapse. So it was rejected by the farmers, and the project was ended.

But it came back, this time in the local bogs, with huge turbines and 950+ wind farms about 1 km from the local houses. North Westmeath Turbine Action Group was set up to campaign against industrial wind farms. Another group came into the picture, the European Platform Against Windfarms, which is active in more than thirty-six countries in Europe. It is affiliated with the North American Platform Against Windfarms; so this is essentially a world war against large-scale wind farms.

The EPAW believes in implementing the Aarhus Convention (2008) and the

'Drug problems cannot be solved by domestic legalisation while imperialism remains the *status quo*'

Opium Wars to an end. Britain was allowed a presence in China, and it managed to get the Qing to legalise the opium trade. This was a clear case of drugs, and their unique properties, being used to further imperialist objectives. But it was far from the last.

Contrary to the understanding of US imperialism's "War on Drugs," the reality is that what has existed is a war of drugs. After the defeat of Nazism in 1945 the Communist Parties of France and Italy enjoyed massive growth, thanks to their wartime role. As the Cold War began, the United States was not very happy about communists in the French and Italian governments. In Marseille a wave of strikes in 1947 led to the United States and its allies allowing Corsican gangsters to bring heroin into Europe, as long as they carried out attacks on communists. This was known as the French Connection.

In Burma the CIA backed anti-communists who smuggled drugs across Laos, Burma, and Thailand. This was largely controlled by the Kuomintang (National Party), the Chinese nationalists who lost the war to the communists. By 1973 these forces controlled a third of the world's opium supply.

During the military government's war against the Communist Party of Burma these forces would be important allies. Even some revolutionary groups in Burma fell into the trap of trafficking, and

reports of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment. Essentially, this is the right of citizens living in the vicinity of industrial wind farms to have full consultation and involvement in all aspects of the project, from beginning to end.

But the Coole Windfarm had no intention of abiding in full by the Aarhus Convention, so two groups strive to stop the wind farms or, at least, to ensure that the local community get full participation in all matters as well as a percentage of the wind farm's annual profits, to be used for local revitalisation; in other words, let this corporation know that rural areas are not there to be exploited by capitalist hyenas.

The first submissions to the county council ended in a No decision—a reasonable result. The second round of

splintered over drug disputes.

Burma was not the only example of the CIA supporting drug-trafficking in South-East Asia. During the so-called "secret war" against Vietnamese and Lao communists the US-backed drug-traffickers financed their own forces, led by Vang Pao, with drug money. In this they received full support from the CIA. And much of the opium trafficked in Laos through Thailand and Burma ended up in the United States itself.

In 1979 the USSR intervened in Afghanistan to support the Afghan socialist government. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, along with the United States, began to funnel billions to jihadists and fundamentalists, with not a few of the faithful warriors being drug-traffickers.

Opium production in Afghanistan exploded, from 200 tons to 1,600 tons, in the years of the anti-Soviet war. This increased again after the NATO invasion—in which they were allied with opium-traffickers—making opium profits about a quarter of the Afghan economy today. The largest markets for heroin are in Europe—the same regions where the French Connection opened trade links. Some of the biggest traffickers are collaborators with NATO. Nearly a tenth of the people of Afghanistan are addicts.

In Colombia, profits from cocaine allowed traffickers to buy large pieces of land, employing their own militias to attack peasant organisers and to bribe

submissions ended in a victory for the No groups. Now, despite the county council making a decision, Coole Windfarm goes straight to An Bord Pleanála, where there is another round of submissions. This time Coole Windfarm wins, making the county council almost irrelevant, a talking-shop, whose decision could be overruled if it doesn't adhere to government policy. So next is the judicial review. Fund-raisers were organised to raise the money—table quizzes, walks, etc.—and were successful. The judicial review is continuing.

The Coole Windfarm was taken over by a Norwegian outfit, Statkraft, who have links to the General Electric Company. They tried again, trying to run an underground cable to link the planned wind farms to the substation and the electricity grid. So another round

of submissions, and this time a victory for the Noes and the rights of the people.

the police and army into being the enforcers of the traffickers—in effect a powerful narco-bourgeoisie. Colombia is a crucial US ally in Latin America, and there are few differences between the hardened gangsters, fascist mercenaries, and the Colombian state. Indeed all three receive funds from the CIA in their war against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and left-wing political activists. All have committed massacres and horrific crimes against peasants.

After the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua the CIA encouraged the counter-revolutionaries (Contras) to traffic cocaine into Miami, something that has now been essentially admitted, even making it into some Hollywood films.

We could also add the use of loyalists and others in Ireland to smuggle drugs, such as ecstasy and cocaine, into the North, or the use of Colombian traffickers in the attacks on Venezuela, the terrorist attacks against Cuba in the 1990s, and the use of its Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) to destroy the Black Panthers in the United States by flooding black communities with drugs.

Drug problems cannot be solved by domestic legalisation while imperialism remains the *status quo*. ★

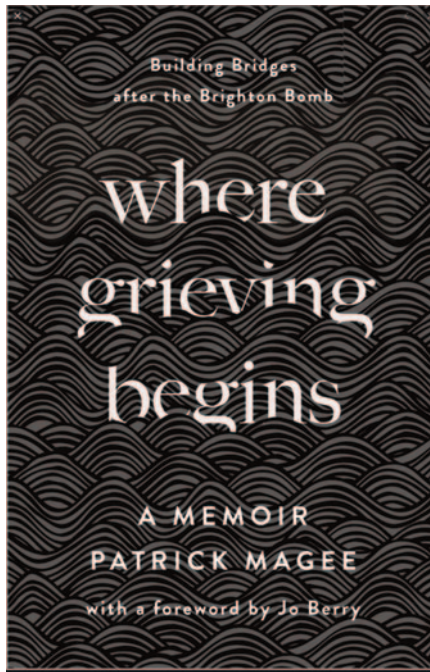
OPIUM WARS: Destroying Chinese war junks, by E. Duncan (1843)

of submissions, and this time a victory for the Noes and the rights of the people.

All in all, the people in this campaign have done very well. Four successes out of five is a good result; it shows that rural and urban communities and two separate No organisations, with different tactics, can produce very good results.

But this is only one battle in a world conflict, a people's global war against corporate government exploitation of rural areas, which are deemed irrelevant by the powers that be but whose resistance is like the people's struggle of the past. ★

■ A future article will talk about the socialist (not social) farming of the 1960s and 70s, the struggle to keep the local clinic against vultures, armchair farmers, and lots more!



A valuable contribution

TOMMY MCKEARNEY

■ *Patrick Magee, *Where Grieving Begins: Building Bridges after the Brighton Bomb* (London: Pluto Press, 2021)*

PATRICK MAGEE'S memoir is an insight into both his personal history and what was for decades the harsh experience of life for Northern Ireland's non-unionist community. Although he will forever be identified with the bombing of the Grand Hotel, Brighton, in 1984, there is much more to this account than that one attack, no matter how noteworthy.

While never callous or triumphalist, Magee remains adamant that his participation in the IRA's armed campaign was justified and indeed necessary. Consequently, he gives us an insight into the mind and world view not just of the thousands of young men and women who participated in that underground organisation but of the communities that supported them.

With an insider's understanding, he tells of the feeling of abandonment after partition and of the systemic discrimination practised against a community in order to maintain a "Protestant state for a Protestant people," a situation that resulted in the

ever-present threat of state-endorsed violence in order to sustain that undemocratic regime.

In spite of the fact that he spent many of his formative years living with his parents and siblings in England, Magee always thought of himself as a Belfast person—not only that but a particular type of Belfast person: a Catholic from the Markets district of the city, a district with a distinct culture and a troubled history, one of several small nationalist enclaves that had for decades been subject to sporadic attack, causing a pervasive apprehension among its inhabitants.

As the historian Eamon Phoenix told the BBC in a podcast about the violence surrounding the foundation of Northern Ireland in 1921, Belfast was the "fulcrum" of much of the bloodshed.¹ More than 450 people were killed in the conflict between June 1920 and July 1922. Nearly 60 per cent were Catholic, and the overwhelming majority were civilians. Nor did violence end in the 1920s. Even in the relatively peaceful early 1960s rioting broke out near the Market when, in June 1964, Ian Paisley led a group of loyalists hardliners to the edge of the district.

A feature of recurring violence was the role of the state's forces. At best neutral when nationalist areas were under attack, they were on many occasions party to the assaults. The decidedly British establishment figure Max Hastings recently wrote how in 1969 he witnessed "Protestant police hosing down a Catholic block of flats in Belfast with a heavy machine-gun, killing a nine year-old boy."²

Because of Northern Ireland's violent history, the IRA was viewed in many working-class Catholic areas of Belfast at least as much as their last line of defence as the armed champions of an all-Ireland republic. That much is evident as Magee writes about his grandparents and their contemporaries, several of whom were members of the IRA in the 1920s and imprisoned for their part in the organisation.

Not surprising, therefore, that with this folk memory, coupled with what he witnessed in the early 1970s, the young Magee would join the republican movement. Living not in the Markets but in the nearby and equally vulnerable

Unity Flats complex, he was to recount, among much else, the trauma of seeing lethal loyalist attacks on residents of the district, the brutality of the British army, and its shooting dead of his friend Louis Scullion.

Whatever others may consider the broader context for these occurrences, the author provides his readers with an accurate insight into what was a widely held view among his contemporaries in working-class nationalist areas of Belfast and elsewhere in the North—a viewpoint that goes a long way to explain the degree of community support enjoyed by the IRA, described here by Magee as he writes of open doors, children acting as lookouts, and middle-aged women storing weapons. It was from within these communities and their experiences that the Sinn Féin electoral machine was later to develop.

This too was the maelstrom that caused Magee to emerge from internment (and intensive police harassment thereafter) with his commitment to the republican struggle unchanged, a commitment that brought him, as the IRA would have seen it, to "take the war to Britain" and eventually to the Grand Hotel in Brighton, leading him to a famous trial and years of imprisonment.

Had the Magee story ended there he might well have eventually faded into the background, as others have done, a name to be searched for occasionally by journalists looking for a story. That this didn't happen is in no small measure due to his extraordinary meeting, and work thereafter, with Joanna Berry, the daughter of one of those killed in the Grand Hotel.

In a remarkable act of generosity, Berry sought not to excoriate but to understand what motivated those behind the bombing. Moreover, she persisted in doing so while Patrick Magee, notwithstanding his expression of remorse for her personal loss, remained, and remains, adamant that his cause and actions were justified. Together they sought to build bridges between the different protagonists in an effort to promote reconciliation. To do so they travelled extensively, speaking to audiences around the world. One such trip offered a rare insight into the extensive reach of US imperialism when,

‘Because of Northern Ireland’s violent history, the IRA was viewed in many working-class Catholic areas of Belfast at least as much as their last line of defence as the armed champions of an all-Ireland republic.’

despite extensive efforts, the US government prevented Magee speaking at a public meeting in Mexico.

However well-meaning they were, and remain, their best efforts have met with little success. The mainstream media in Britain and Ireland constantly focus on their unusual relationship, casting it as a “perpetrator meets victim” sensation rather than hearing their message of the need for real understanding and respect.

To a large extent the media are merely reflecting the views and interests of the British establishment, and in particular those of the British state. It was, after all, the powers that be in London that were instrumental in the creation of Northern Ireland in 1921. It was London that turned a blind eye to

Stormont’s anti-democratic practices for the following fifty years, and London that thereafter conducted a colonial-style thirty-year military campaign to contain the inevitable resistance to its misrule.

It would not profit the British state to acknowledge misgovernment on such a scale. To correct the narrative would involve revealing an appalling vista of contempt, duplicity, intrigue and the sponsoring of lethal “dirty operations” over decades, the consequences of which would further harm its image globally and also undermine its determination to influence Irish affairs into the future.

In spite of this caveat, Patrick Magee has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of a conflict that raged for almost three decades in the North of

Ireland. There is, nevertheless, another story to be told of the period that will reflect what Bertolt Brecht said to those who follow in our wake:

*Even anger against injustice
Makes the voice grow hoarse. We
Who wished to lay the foundation for
gentleness*

Could not ourselves be gentle
—“To Those Who Follow in Our
Wake” (1939) ★

Notes

- 1 Catherine Morrison, “NI 100: How Northern Ireland’s birth was marked by violence,” BBC News NI, 11 February 2021 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56018758>).
- 2 Max Hastings, “There will always be an England, but not a UK,” *Bloomberg Opinion*, 14 February 2021



The poster features a green background with a large red sun in the center. On the left, there are five wavy orange lines. On the right, there is a white starburst graphic. The text 'James Connolly Virtual Festival May 3-8. 2021.' is in the top left. The text 'Arts | Culture | Politics' is written vertically on the right. At the bottom, there is a photo of four people: Vijay Prashad, Sen. Eileen Flynn, Emmet Kirwan, and Lethal Dialect. Below the photo, the text reads 'Vijay Prashad | Sen. Eileen Flynn | Emmet Kirwan | Lethal Dialect + More.'

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'Peter and the Wolf' A work of socialist realism

JENNY FARRELL

ONE OF Sergei Prokofiev's most famous compositions is *Peter and the Wolf* (1936). Natalya Sats, then director of the Moscow Musical Theatre for Children, had commissioned this work to introduce children to some of the instruments of the orchestra, and to classical music.

Prokofiev had met Sats while taking his sons to her theatre in 1936. He wrote a draft for the piano in a few days, finishing the orchestration nine days later, on 24 April 1936. It was performed to great acclaim, with Sats narrating, at the Pioneer Palace in Moscow. Prokofiev later said: "In Russia today there is a great emphasis on the musical education of children. One of my orchestral pieces [*Peter and the Wolf*] was an experiment. Children get an impression of several instruments of the orchestra just by hearing the piece performed."

Prokofiev himself wrote the story, which is narrated by a speaker. First, the narrator introduces the characters with their musical motifs. In the course of the story the narrator explains what is happening. If you know which instrument belongs to which animal, the music speaks for itself.

All the people and animals in the story are played on different instruments:

Peter is represented by *strings* (including violins, violas and cellos), with their sweet, clear sound. Their light, high sound describes Peter as a happy and outgoing boy.

The confident, forceful *hunters* are

played by the *timpani and trumpets*, with the timpani and bass drumbeats enacting rifle shots.

The **bird** is characterised by the *flute*: fluttery, happy chirping.

The slightly nasal sound of the *oboe* suggests the quacking, waddling **duck**.

The soft, warm sound of the *clarinet* evokes the velvety, elegant and sneaky **cat**.

No instrument is better suited to the slow **grandfather** than the dark, low register of the *bassoon*.

The **wolf** is conjured up by three *French horns*. He is dangerous and lives in the forest; the French horn, with its large and deep sound, suggests this perfectly.

Peter, who lives with his grandfather on the edge of a forest, understands the language of the cat, the bird, and the duck. The animals are his friends. One day the wolf emerges from the forest and devours the duck in one gulp. Peter devises a plan to catch the wolf, with the help of the bird.

We hear about Peter's love for animals, about grandfather's worries, about birds arguing whether they should swim or fly, about the cat's unsuccessful pursuit of the bird, about the arrival of the wicked wolf, and, finally, how the bird and Peter catch the wolf, and everybody's triumphal procession to the zoo.

The story begins on a calm and sunny morning. Peter's strings play a happy tune; there are upward leaps in the melody, the flutes (bird) trill. When the birds argue, the mood becomes louder and discordant, with a back and forth

between the instruments. As the wolf appears, chases and catches the duck, the mood conveyed by the music becomes alarming, threatening; the rhythm becomes faster and the oboe (duck) climbs in pitch with anxiety; discord ends in loud alarm.

Following this crisis, Peter and the bird attempt to catch the wolf with a lasso. The mood becomes anxious, a sense of breath being held as the music descends in pitch. Soft strings pause before the brass blares loudly. When the wolf is caught it is taken to the zoo in a jubilant procession with all involved. The mood is happy, and we hear trills, and fast arpeggios on clarinet, strings, and flutes, and there is a sense of happy skipping.

This musical fairy tale is an example of socialist realism. It features a "group of heroes," not an individual one. Peter and the bird need one another to defeat the wolf. It is profoundly humanist: the adversary, the wolf, is not killed but put out of dangerous action and made available for educational purposes. There is an optimistic ending, in that the wicked wolf is defeated without bloodshed but also that the duck seems to have survived in the wolf's stomach. And all this is expressed in the music: the group hero idea while the wolf is captured, as well as in the tutti of all the themes in the procession to the zoo, and the duck's survival in sounding a very muted duck theme at the end—from the wolf's belly, as it were.

It is a happy ending indeed, celebrating friendship, courage and co-operation in the defeat of danger and evil.

Even if the haunting melodies seem simple at first glance, they are not. The musical story is vividly and beautifully interwoven, in word and sound, action and musical gesture, including many masterful tone paintings. Listeners learn that music can tell its own story, once you understand that themes can represent characters that are repeated initially until you get to know them. They then develop into variations. They can interact, they can struggle, they can harmonise.

This wonderful introduction to understanding classical music is not didactic, and it is not just for children. It is thoroughly memorable and enjoyable.

Peter and the Wolf, Sergei Prokofiev's best-known composition to this day, can be seen on line. ★