

Socialist Voice



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Low pay is widespread

but it pays to be in a union
argues Eugene McCartan

AS WE move out of the period of pandemic, we would all like to establish some form of normality in our lives. But one thing is certain: workers must resist any return to the pre-covid “normal.” That was an economy based on low pay, with precarious employment, precarious shelter, a precarious health service, and an education system overcrowded and underfunded.

Many young workers may have received more under the pandemic emergency payment than they received working long hours and experiencing poor working conditions. What the pandemic exposed was the scale and extent of low pay and the extensive abuse of young workers and migrant workers.

The centrepiece of the anti-worker laws is the Industrial Relations Act (1990).

For young workers up to the age of thirty, the ratio of average hourly earnings to average earnings in Ireland is the second-lowest in Europe; and since 2006 this gap has widened more in Ireland than in any other of eleven high-income EU countries. In 2006 the average Irish full-time worker under thirty earned 72 per cent of the average; in 2018 it was 65 per cent.

What this means simply is that the rate of exploitation of young workers is intensifying.

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IMPERIALISM



The war on Socialist Cuba

GRAHAM HARRINGTON

ON 11 JULY the world's media gleefully reported that there were protests in Cuba. As expected, no context was given, just flippant explanations about shortages leading to "historic unrest." It is astounding that the media managed to miss the fact that Cuba is in a situation of enduring the effects of economic warfare.

As the first socialist revolution in the Western hemisphere, the Cuban Revolution has always been a thorn in the side of the United States. The revolution of 1959 took place in a

situation of widespread illiteracy, racial segregation, almost non-existent health and educational services, precariousness in employment, and a brutal dictatorship by America's ally Batista. Havana was an outpost of the Mafia, who turned it into little more than a brothel and casino.

This ended with the revolution.

The small number of Cubans who profited from the selling of their country's dignity fled to Miami, where they collaborated with the United States to destroy the revolution. In an internal US State Department memo the reasons for the blockade of Cuba were made clear: "Every possible means should be

undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba . . . a line of action which . . . makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government."

Cuba was assisted through the support of the socialist camp, led by the Soviet Union; but after the counter-revolutions in 1989–1991 the country lost 85 per cent of its trade. The United States intensified the blockade throughout the 1990s, through the Torricelli and Helms-Burton Acts as well as an increase in terrorism against Cuba

Solidarity statement Communist Party of Ireland

13 July 2021

THE COMMUNIST PARTY of Ireland expresses its unbreakable solidarity with Revolutionary Cuba, with the Cuban people and the Communist Party of Cuba.

The Biden government is continuing with its illegal blockade of Cuba. It has further strengthened the blockade at a time when the Cuban people are fighting a pandemic and when tourism—a major source of national income—has been severely reduced because of the global impact of the

pandemic on international travel.

The Biden regime carries on the strategy of US imperialism of global domination, in particular to crush the resistance of the peoples of Latin America who are asserting their independence and sovereignty. US imperialism sees Cuba as the epicentre of that resistance to imperialist hegemony. Not alone in Latin America but around the globe, socialist Cuba stands out as a beacon of hope, a light of solidarity in a sea of darkness, of national oppression, a defender of national independence

and sovereignty.

The blockade has done untold damage to the Cuban economy. It has prevented the Cuban people getting access to many necessary and life-saving goods and equipment; it has prevented Cuba from securing loans for necessary economic and social development; it is hurting the Cuban people hard.

We show our solidarity at a time of renewed resistance to imperialism. We also note that the imperialist states, headed by the United States, are attempting to shore up their declining

It is our duty, as it is the duty of all democratic and left forces, to rally to the Cuban people, to rally to the Cuban Revolution



led by CIA front groups—Alpha 66, Omega 7, and the F4 Commandos—all co-ordinated through the Cuban American National Foundation. Thousands were killed in terrorist attacks, led by veterans of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.

The Miami émigré community has a disproportionate amount of influence on US Cuban policy, thanks to Florida's importance as a "swing state" in the electoral college system used in presidential elections. There are only 1½ million Cuban-Americans in Florida, many of them being recent emigrants who left for economic reasons, not necessarily counter-revolutionaries. Indeed a brave number are revolutionary, although they face intense opposition in the émigré

economic power, their growing weakness, in the attempt to impose their will upon the people, both at home and internationally.

It is our duty, as it is the duty of all democratic and left forces, to rally to the Cuban people, to rally to the Cuban Revolution. The Irish trade union movement has a good record of solidarity with Cuba; but now is the time to do more. Our contribution to sustaining the Cuban people's chosen socialist path is to build solidarity, to struggle even harder to end the illegal blockade, to maximise whatever material and political solidarity and support we can offer.

US imperialism and the other imperialist blocs can delay the course

community, controlled by the US intelligence services and former Batista collaborators. Nevertheless they do not represent the overwhelming majority of 11 million Cubans.

It is the former that were responsible for the "SOS Cuba" hashtag campaign, which manipulated small demonstrations as supposedly being a massive uprising. This proved to be a laughable example of the closed-mind nature of the counter-revolution.

The blockade prevents Cuba from gaining access to essential medical, food and energy supplies as well as basic raw materials. What makes it a blockade rather than an embargo is that it uses America's economic power to prevent other countries from doing normal trade with Cuba. The United States, in effect, holds a gun to the head of others to make them do business with the United States rather than Cuba. It is nothing less than economic warfare.

Salim Lamrani's book *The Economic War Against Cuba* (2013) gives a comprehensive insight into the blockade. It was reinstated by Trump's government, putting an end to the brief "thaw" under Obama. This, coupled with the effect of the pandemic, particularly with the collapse in the tourist industry, has led to one of the most difficult periods in Cuba's revolution. The United States has given millions to counter-revolutionary groups in Cuba, which have minuscule support among the Cuban people but enjoy support from CIA fronts, the likes of the National Endowment for Democracy

of history for a while, but they cannot stop it; they cannot halt the desires and the struggles of working people or the oppressed from fighting for, from demanding and for setting about the economic, political and social transformation their nations and peoples so badly need.

US imperialism is using the difficult conditions experienced by the Cuban people resulting from the decades-old blockade and now accentuated by the covid pandemic to undermine and weaken the Cuban Revolution. This strategy is applied to progressive governments around the globe but in particular against progressive governments in Latin America.

Hand in hand with the economic

and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

The so-called San Isidro Movement is the result of this small number of what Cubans call "gusanos" (worms), who can't even win support from their own people but must instead sell themselves to the empire to the north. The fact that the Miami media tried to show images of crowds in Egypt, Catalunya and Argentina as well as of revolutionaries who took to the streets to defend the revolution, in an attempt to manipulate public opinion globally, shows their lack of integrity.

In fact the sending of supplies from Mexico and Nicaragua shows how solidarity works both ways. Now the United States is the one that is isolated in Latin America, with the growth of left-wing movements on the continent. Like all cornered rats, the American empire will only react with desperation.

Socialism is not a romantic thing, where everything is perfect and everything is in abundance; but what we must acknowledge is that Cuba has a right to dignity, to sovereignty, and has an immense number of achievements and lessons for us all, that it has given enough international service and service to its own citizens to deserve the unconditional and unswerving solidarity of all truly revolutionary-minded people. ★

IMAGES:

Above left End the US blockade
Above right US-backed counter revolutionaries captured by Cuban forces during the Bay of Pigs invasion

pressures is the global media offensive against Cuba conducted by the imperialist media, distorting the lived reality of the Cuban people.

The counter revolutionaries operating within Cuba—organised and financed by the United States—will not pass! These counter-revolutionaries belong to the past: they wish that the proud revolutionary people of Cuba should once again be subservient to the needs and interests of US imperialism, a plaything for the rich and other parasites. They have been met by the robust and united actions of the Cuban government, Cuban communists, and Cuban people. We stand in solidarity with them.

End the Blockade! ★

In support of sovereignty



EOGHAN O'NEILL

THE DOG-WHISTLE calls of “Freedom for Cuba” that reverberated round the world on 11 July, emanating from a mix of forces in Cuba, which were carefully manipulated and crafted by the CIA and US anti-Cuban forces abroad, shed a great deal of light not only on US foreign policy hypocrisy but on left-wing hypocrisy and impotence, both here in Ireland and elsewhere.

This is not the first time that those who are deemed to be on the “left” have come out in support of the imperialist narrative, cloaked in their insistence on supporting the “real workers” or the “real democratic movements,” as if, in the case of Cuba, the up to 7 million people (7 out of 8 voters) who voted to support the Cuban government and continued revolution are mere pawns while the few thousand dissenters are the tortured voices of the oppressed workers under a communist dictatorship hell-bent on suppressing the working class.

Of course it's all too easy to be hoodwinked by imperialism, to support an imperialist agenda and narrative; but for those who claim to be “Marxist” and “anti-imperialist” it is unforgivable. A more optimistic opinion might be that exposing hypocrisy may help recalibrate their analysis of imperialism, as Marxism

without an understanding of imperialism is like beating a drum with no skin: it just rings hollow.

However, the point of this article is not to point fingers about the statements and position of parties, groups or individuals when it comes to imperialist hegemony and foreign policy objectives but rather to highlight how deeply that hegemony is instilled and to articulate a united anti-imperialist position that attempts to circumvent that hegemony.

Since the dismantling of socialism in eastern Europe in the early 1990s, the United States, together with its NATO allies, has created what Vijay Prashad, director of the Tricontinental Research Institute, terms a “unipolar” world, an imperialist hierarchy with the United States at the helm, where, above all else, the capitalist mode of production dominates the global economy, whereby a small minority leeches on the material and intellectual resources of the vast majority.

Within those thirty years or so we have witnessed at first hand, on our television and our phones, the bombing and destruction of cities and civilisations, where any threat or any sovereign move by a country to forge an independent path outside the influence of US hegemony and its dollar currency

has been met by interference, sanctions and, where necessary, military interventions and invasions.

They have, without any hesitation, punished non-compliance, through aggressive economic and diplomatic sanctions, embargoes, and blockades, causing untold torture and turmoil to the local population.

The United States and its allies, again without any qualms, bomb and invade outright defiance either through direct military action or through supporting, financing and arming their domestic allies, no matter how reactionary or extreme those allies are. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the United States spends more on “defence” than the next eleven countries combined, with expenditure for 2020 reaching \$778 billion.¹

This massive stockpile and investment in military and defence ensures that the United States rules supreme. It maintains more than eight hundred military bases around the world, and more of the focus and concentration of those bases is being directed eastwards, where “the United States currently has four hundred military bases and some 375,000 command personnel (military and civilian) in the Indo-Pacific encircling China, including more than eighty thousand troops stationed in Japan and South Korea.”²

The United States is shifting its forces from the Middle East further eastwards for very good reason. Since the Great Recession in 2008 a shift in the balance of global forces has appeared, whereby the United States and other Western capitalist economies have been receding or have remained stagnant while China, with its economic success, both in growth and in lifting more than 850 million people out of poverty since 1972³ and, importantly, in being able to insulate itself from the effects of the financial crash, has meant that the balance of forces has begun to shift towards a more “multi-polar” world, where the dominance and hegemony of the United States and its NATO allies is under threat and beginning to wane.

China, along with other countries in



What Cuba and other countries under the domination of US imperialism need more than anything is for us to undermine capitalism at home and develop our own strong, disciplined anti-imperialist forces, which weaken the position and control of imperialist hegemony.

both the global north and south, are not toeing the line in relation to what the United States terms a “rules-based international order” (i.e. rules based on what Washington dictates). Instead China is advocating “a broad UN-based order of sovereign states underpinned by international law (traditionally referred to as the Westphalian system).”⁴

This shift in rhetoric and diplomatic relations has signalled what John Bellamy Foster, in the July–August edition of *Monthly Review*, has forecast as the “new cold war on China,”⁵ where China is not willing to bow to US pressure but instead is insisting that it will pursue a policy based on the principles of equality and sovereignty, rather than supporting the US policy of interference in the internal and sovereign affairs of states that don’t comply with its international rules.

It could be argued that the crux of the problem for many on the left, especially in Western countries, Ireland included, is that the focus of attention is on the country in the cross-hairs of imperialism and what it is or isn’t rather than on the aggressive imperialist agenda in order to maintain hegemonic power; that is to say, there is a clear lack of understanding of imperialism and, conversely, anti-imperialism.

What the Chinese socialist project is or isn’t really is not our main concern in our own anti-imperialist struggles. Absolutely there are things to be learnt from the lived experience and revolutionary lessons of other countries, and it isn’t to say we must blind ourselves to what is going on within the balance of forces of other countries; but at the end of it all it is only an academic exercise, as we do not control or have influence on the development of those countries.

In fact no socialist project, no matter its infancy or level of development, should be the centre of our concern, and in a lot of ways taking hard-and-fast stances in a unipolar era, without a clear understanding of imperialism, will only lead to exploiting divisions within our own ranks, causing splits and other organisational hazards, ultimately stunting the growth and development of our own anti-imperialist movement.

What is of real benefit to other countries that have and will be targeted by imperialism is not our analysis of their

country, of their political system or socialist project, but having a deeper understanding of the nature, influence, strategy and tactics of imperialism and the imperialist powers, which have constantly and historically undermined the sovereignty of states, which seem to come out of a one-page playbook of US imperialist intervention.

What those countries need is for us to give real material support for their sovereignty, their insistence on self-determination, their dignity to live among the nations of the world without fear of interference, domination, or threat of war and invasion.

We witnessed this type of solidarity in the call for support for Cuba by the Cuban ambassador to Ireland, Hugo Ramos, as the CPI, the Cuban Solidarity Forum, the Peadar O’Donnell Socialist Republican Forum, Sinn Féin, the Workers’ Party and other left forces rallied in numbers all over Ireland in late July, defending the Cuban government and its revolution.

What Cuba and other countries under the domination of US imperialism need more than anything is for us to undermine capitalism at home and develop our own strong, disciplined anti-imperialist forces, which weaken the position and control of imperialist hegemony.

As a communist party, as a left-wing anti-imperialist movement, it is our duty to understand the balance of forces, both nationally and internationally. Since the demise of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc as a counterbalance we have witnessed the era of perpetual wars. Countries in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Asia and indeed some of the former socialist bloc have had to endure this rule in some of the harshest and cruellest forms imaginable, employing the most violent mercenary, fascist and other extremist forces, through variations of economic starvation, regime-change wars and insurrections, to the bombing and destruction of entire cities and infrastructure, causing untold hardships for the citizens of those countries.

Now is not the time to be hesitant about supporting nations that are trying to break or de-link with that unipolar world, no matter how “socialist” or “Marxist” we conclude them to be or not to be and whether or not we deem them

worthy of support. Now is not the time to cast moral or intellectual judgement on the purity of anti-imperialist struggles or socialist projects that are under way in many regions round the globe. Our goal is to bring an end to the barbaric capitalist system, and our duty must be to give support to those countries that are being targeted by US imperialism, whether that is Cuba, China, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Syria, Palestine, or any other country within the crosshairs of the United States and its allies.

Our support should be given to the sovereignty of those nations that are attempting to create, first and foremost, a multi-polar world, a world of economic alternatives, to weaken the hegemonic rule of the United States and its allies, to stop them suffocating popular and democratic people’s movements and to let them live.

If these political movements and governments are given the political and economic space in which to advance without fear of interference, sanctions, blockades, embargoes and invasions, then not only does it allow economies to develop unhindered but it also opens up the opportunity for more socialist projects to be ignited. We can, without much controversy, affirm and unite to support the broad UN-based order of sovereign states, underpinned by international law of sovereignty and equality, rather than supporting a US “rules-based international order,” without undermining and splitting our own forces in the process. By upholding this as a basis for an anti-imperialist position we can, as a starting-point, be able to begin to circumvent and undermine US imperialist global hegemony and declare that another world is possible. ★

1 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “World military spending rises to almost \$2 trillion in 2020” (April 2021) (<https://sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/world-military-spending-rises-almost-2-trillion-2020>).

2 John Bellamy Foster, “The new cold war on China,” *Monthly Review*, July–August 2021 (<https://monthlyreview.org/2021/07/01/the-new-cold-war-on-china/>).

3 John Ross, *China’s Great Road: Lessons for Marxist Theory and Socialist Practice*, New York: 1804 Books, 2021.

4 Foster, “The new cold war on China.”

5 Foster, “The new cold war on China.”

Worldwide Carabobo! Solidarity and resistance in the Americas



AARON KELLY

AT THIS YEAR'S Féile an Phobail in Belfast the Irish Chapter of the Network in Defence of Humanity convened a special panel on anti-imperialism and the Americas, which is to be screened on 6 August through the festival's web site and Youtube channels.

The participants in the discussion were the executive secretary of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America and the People's Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP), Sacha Llorenti; the ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Ireland, Rocío Maneiro; the Nicaraguan ambassador to Ireland, Guisell Morales-Echaverry; and the Cuban ambassador in Ireland, Hugo Ramos.

It was important to have Sacha Llorenti's input as head of ALBA, which is, as attested to by the commentary from all the ambassadors, the most vital, primary means by which the revolutionary governments of the continent seek to assert unity of purpose and collective strength.

Brazil

One of the reasons why the massively unpopular American puppet Bolsonaro in Brazil is now trying to find excuses to postpone presidential elections—with the assistance of the CIA and European liberals and neo-Nazis, who

have all been paying him visits in the last month—is that Lula is poised to win by a landslide.

Lula's impending victory will not only be of great relief to the vast majority of ordinary Brazilians but will also tip the continental balance of power back in favour of progressive, anti-imperialist forces and pave the way for an expansion of ALBA, or a newer decolonising structure of regional unity.

In her contribution, the Venezuelan ambassador, Rocío Maneiro, affirmed: *"If you look at the current political landscape in Latin America and the policies that are coming from the north, you can only conclude that Washington is at war with progressive forces in the region."*

While there is, rightly, an established focus in Ireland on the impact of the criminal US blockade of Cuba, it should and must be added that the blockade of Venezuela is just as punitive and destabilising. This particular blockade began in March 2015 following Obama's deranged declaration that Venezuela constitutes "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the USA." Since that point, as with Cuba, the Bolivarian Republic has had its international assets stolen, its economy besieged, and its routes to international trade closed down; it has been invaded by US-backed mercenaries several times, and there has been a further attempt to assassinate President Maduro.

As ever, the United States, whose colonial policy as a rule is based on exploiting human misery, has disgraced itself still further during a global pandemic by seizing Venezuela's payment for COVAX vaccines, so that the country is embroiled in lengthy legal battles either to receive the vaccines or to recover its funds.

Nicaragua under siege

Nicaragua is also the focus of economic warfare, blended with other hybrid forms of aggression that will attempt to delegitimise the elections in November and unleash street violence through US-funded paramilitary and drugs gangs in the service of an oligarchic elite and the extreme right. The imperialists will never win at the ballot box, and the most favourable outcome for the United States is a failed state and protracted, needless death and suffering.

Such is the mentality of an empire that mistakes its domination for freedom and good order.

However, as the ambassador, Guisell Morales-Echaverry, affirms, the Sandinista revolution has strong popular support, which will defend Nicaraguan sovereignty and continue to play a strong internationalist role in opposing imperialist aggression in the region and around the world. She confirmed that the FLSN will continue to make



“If you look at the current political landscape in Latin America and the policies that are coming from the north, you can only conclude that Washington is at war with progressive forces in the region” Venezuelan ambassador, **Rocío Maneiro**

Nicaragua “a free, sovereign and independent country which develops its political, economic and social growth without the need for Washington’s permission . . . It will be Nicaraguans who vote and decide their future, regardless of whether or not it complies with the White House agenda. The Sandinista project will continue to confirm, to friends and enemies, that Nicaraguan democracy is popular, a democracy of the people, and it is no longer in the hands of the elite.”

Anyone naïve enough to believe the US-led campaign of misinformation against Nicaragua—regurgitated, of course, by NGOs whose sources of funds should make people aware that there is nothing “non-governmental” about them—must answer some important questions. Precisely why do you feel entitled to overthrow the sovereign, popular will of the Nicaraguan people? Why do your supposedly progressive, liberal or “leftist” aims align themselves so readily with imperialism, with fascist gangs, with disgruntled bourgeois poseurs, and with neoliberal fanatics who privatise primary-school education?

Cuba’s ambassador, Hugo Ramos, placed the current aggression against his country in the continuum of history and reminded counter-revolutionaries and their Yankee sponsors that “we come from a long history of struggle.” While the empire can spend tens of millions manufacturing a fake hip-hop scene and disorder disproportionately magnified around the world by mainstream media and social media giants, this stage-managed “spontaneity” will not dislodge the deep-rooted resolve and foundations of the revolution and its popular aims.

The executive secretary of ALBA, Sacha Llorenti, also punctured the hypocritical veneer of imperialist posturing over freedom and human rights. He eloquently assessed how notions of humanitarian assistance, human rights or democracy are embedded in a very specific and contradictory phase of imperialist attack designed to employ these concepts as weapons, at the very same time that the United States does not itself uphold such ideals internally, let alone overseas. In fact imperialism voids terms like “democracy,” “freedom” and

“human rights” of their meaning, and the appearance of such words in the lexicon of empire is merely a dissembling disguise cloaking the Yankees’ real goals.

Monopoly

As Sacha Llorenti points out, the United States wants a monopoly on the natural resources of the Americas, to use our region as a market for their products and to have us as the cheap labour manufacturing those goods, to make themselves the central benefactor and controller of all our commerce and trade, and of course to assert unipolar, geopolitical control.

However, despite the renewed imperialist aggression, Sacha Llorenti paid tribute to the countries that have given ALBA its strength and its vision—Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia—and noted how it has been the countries that have been most attacked by the United States that have offered the most strength and courage. “We are looking at a continuous attack against many of our member-states. It is not sporadic: it is part of that huge plan that has the goal of provoking ‘regime change,’ as they have done in different parts of the world. But the huge difference—and this is why they will fail—is that the revolutions in our countries are deeply popular, are dependent on the people.”

As with the current popular defence of the Cuban Revolution discussed by Hugo Ramos, Sacha Llorenti acknowledged how, in his own home nation, Bolivia, it was the people who brought the revolution back to power following the fascist coup that unseated Evo Morales in one of the most heroic actions of mass resistance this century, in spite of the military violence of the state, the backing of the biggest empire in the history of the planet, and the complicity of western liberals.

As with all the contributors, Sacha Llorenti invoked centuries of liberation struggle and historical consciousness as the lifeblood energising the continuing projects of the present. The recent celebrations of the bicentenary of the Battle of Carabobo are very instructive, particularly as a response to anyone who would seek to belittle the achievements of the revolutions in Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela or Bolivia

or to couch them in terms of a purely national or regional resonance, since all these necessarily national revolutions are also already internationalist and cross-continental.

Carabobo was a battle that did not solely secure the independence of Venezuela: it was a continental victory in keeping with the vision of Simón Bolívar of decolonised and anti-imperialist Americas, a vision that has continued through the likes of José Martí, Augusto Sandino, Hugo Chávez, Che Guevara and Fidel and that most certainly shines through the actions of the progressive governments and alliances today.

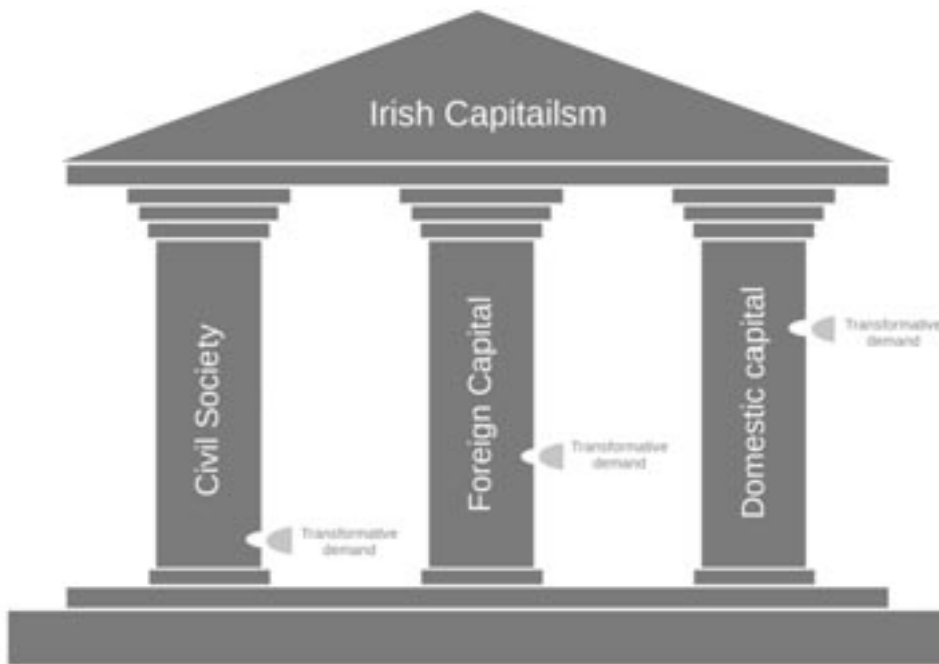
As a rebuttal to those doubters who felt that the continental unity embedded in ALBA would wane in the face of the US blockade of the Venezuelan economy and its oil revenue, Sacha Llorenti insists: “*Our alliance is stronger than ever . . . Our alliance is based on principles that are impossible to eradicate.*”

All anti-imperialists around the world must mobilise in defence of those principles and these revolutions. If people had the courage and consciousness to organise themselves into international brigades in the 1930s to defend the Spanish Republic from fascist assault through their understanding of the world-historical importance of that struggle, then only metropolitan provincialism would prevent them from recognising that fascism is fascism everywhere it rears its ugly head; that fascism—and the imperialism that facilitates it—is to be fought, whether it is on the streets of Madrid in 1936 or the towns of Bolivia now.

The revolutionary movements in the Americas are valiantly holding the front line in the worldwide battle against imperialism and neoliberalism, and they are the cutting edge of the resistance. We must join them in struggle and back them to the hilt.

As Sacha Llorenti affirms, “*our countries represent a material, real example that a different kind of world is possible, that we can build a different society that goes against the neoliberal model, against capitalism. So, there is an alternative, and they want to destroy the alternative. They want to destroy a different model that really works.*” ★

On the need for a focal point



EOGHAN O'NEILL AND EOIN McDERMOTT

Continuing with the analogy established in the preceding article, we can think of the specific structure of capitalism as resting on three pillars: civil society, foreign capital, and domestic capital.

If we think through this heuristic model we begin to realise the enormity of the task, but conversely we also have a defined and tangible point of focus. This raises the issue of which pillar to focus on; not all pillars are equally stable and there will be, at any moment in time, one area that will offer the best opportunity for us to deepen cracks and fractures by driving a wedge.

Therefore it is a strategic rather than a political question, and we must evaluate the position of class forces in society and the areas of weakness and strength both within our own movement and within the structure of Irish capitalism. These actions are required to make a decision on how best to plan our offensives in the months and years of struggle that lie ahead.

Focus on first pillar

Two of the largest concerns facing the Irish people, according to an Irish Times opinion poll in 2020,¹ are

health and housing. These issues are linked with the first pillar: the structure of civil society. Part of the Irish capitalist class's ability to maintain their hegemonic position in society has been through their successful strategy of dividing and co-opting sections of the working class to align their interests with those of capital. The private provision of both health services and housing has tended to offer a successful example of this, where privileged segments of the working class have been pacified by being provided with a means to purchase their way out of collective social problems wrought by a lack of investment in public health and housing.

As the crises of housing and health continue to unfold and these issues increasingly find common ground because of the pandemic and the intensity of the housing crisis, they present points of potential unity through which the logic of capital accumulation can be counterposed against a "common good" and so challenge the hegemony of the capitalist class.

If the reader considers the issue of housing, the policies of the government not only fail to resolve the crisis but continue to make it worse. Government policy, in other words, serves the interests of investors and landlords, both

foreign and domestic; it does not serve the interests of the average citizen who should have affordable access to a home. Housing, therefore, presents a point where we might concentrate a weight of effort in the hope of creating further fractures and opportunities.

Focus on second pillar

The second pillar, foreign capital, raises the issue of the triple lock of imperialism in Ireland theorised by the CPI. The triple-lock concept emphasises that Ireland is dominated by and dependent upon three separate imperialist powers, which have used this country in different ways to pursue their respective interests. These are:

1. The United States in the industrial field through our dependence on transnational corporations.
2. The European Union in relation to monetary policy, regulation and legal matters, which lock us, like other peripheral countries, into a neoliberal chain of dependence that benefits mostly German capital.
3. Britain in the direct occupation through the institution of partition.

As with all models, including the one we are presenting here, we are making an abstraction to help identify the various strands of foreign capital, which are woven into the structure of Irish capitalism. In reality imperialist interests overlap in both complementary and conflicting ways. For example, Britain also exerts economic and legal influence, and its role cannot be reduced to that of partition.

Saying that, we can summarise that these are the primary contradictions presented by each of the three imperialist forces. Each exerts political and economic influence to varying degrees, which in turn has an impact on the political, economic, social and cultural development of Ireland.

If we are to assess how best to attack the second pillar we should consider levels of popular support in relation to each of these imperialist blocs. This can help orient our blows towards the weakest link in the chain, or the most vulnerable cracks.

Britain never really paid any attention to the internal workings of the Six Counties, as long as the region was stable and under its control, as exercised through unionism, and its strategic interests were secured.

Examining these three issues separately, recent opinion polls show that Irish support for EU membership is still high, at 84 per cent,² which would indicate that at this particular juncture a prolonged campaign to highlight the detrimental aspects of EU membership would require much effort with little hope of tangible results.

In relation to the United States, during the height of the Great Recession two-thirds of the people surveyed did not wish to see an increase in the rate of corporation tax,³ and current debates over increasing corporation tax to 15 per cent have not garnered widespread public support. However, with international pressure to introduce a minimum rate of global corporation tax, this may offer opportunities in the future.

The weakest link in the chain can be seen in the North. The Irish Independent/Kantar poll found that in the Republic two in three polled, 67 per cent, supported a united Ireland, compared with 16 per cent who were opposed. In Northern Ireland this poll suggested that while 35 per cent of adults were in favour of a united Ireland, 43 per cent were against—although, significantly, one in five did not express an opinion.

Despite that difference of opinion on a united Ireland between North and South, the survey suggests that seven out of ten voters—in both jurisdictions—wanted a reunification referendum within five years.

There is clear support within the next five years for a border poll to unite Ireland, which would have an objective effect of challenging British imperialism. We can clearly identify this as a weak spot on which to focus our weight of effort.

The key to this is not the border poll itself, as if we are under the delusion that the path to Irish unity is is a neo-Redmondite strategy of pressuring London and Dublin for a referendum. Rather the border poll can act as a focal point that enables us to co-ordinate a host of transformative demands into a powerful wedge.

The border poll is a point of focus to facilitate calls for transformative demands that lay the material foundations for a unified Ireland. Such transformative demands may include

all-Ireland solutions to areas of weakness in the other pillars, such as an all-Ireland public health system and an all-Ireland public housing scheme. This has the potential to seriously undermine a central pillar, which may open up new fractures and points of weakness for the future.

Fig. 2 offers a visual representation of how we can think about co-ordinating a series of interrelated transformative demands into a single campaign. Such a campaign would be directed upon a single point of weakness. The broad campaign (a united Ireland) can act as a central goal, and supporting campaigns could be oriented towards that central goal.

This type of strategy has central, supporting and reserve roles, hence being able to apply a weight of effort against an area of weakness, giving it the greatest chance of success. In the broader context, the end goal isn't a united Ireland, but a united Ireland will help to further weaken the existing structure of Irish capitalism and open new opportunities for socialist interventions.

Focus on third pillar

In regard to the third pillar, the structure of indigenous capital,

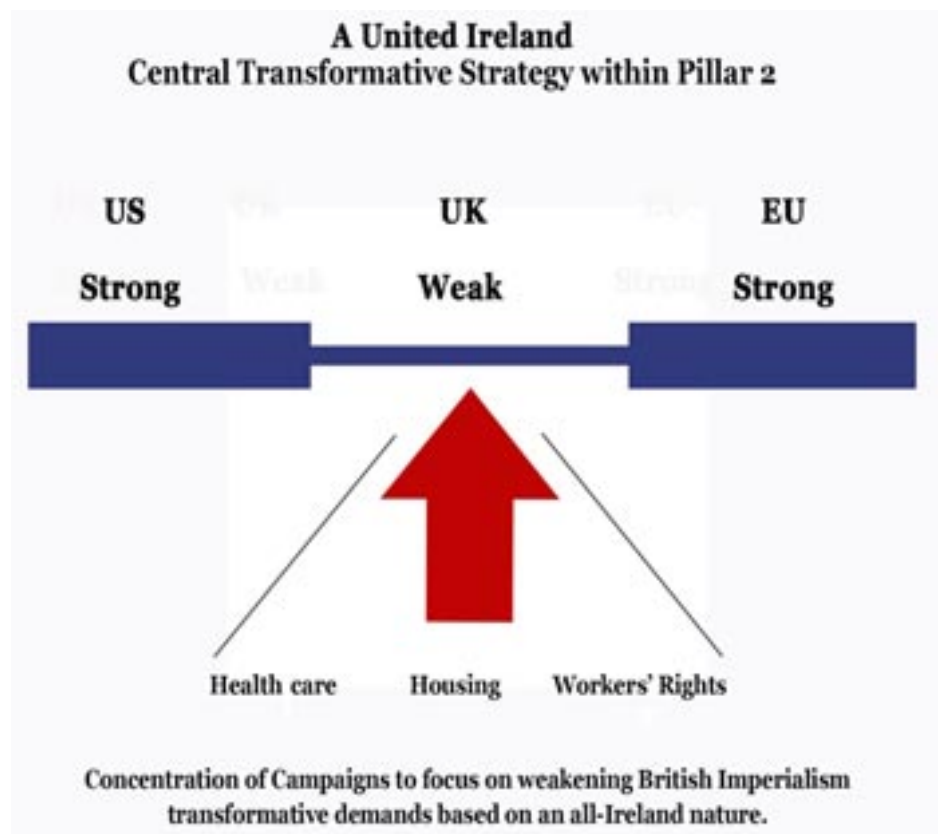
domestic capital depends in a large part on the role of international capital within the Irish economy. To this extent they are separate entities but it is difficult to convey the relationship in fig. 1. Areas of vulnerability that can be central to weakening this pillar can be found in relation to improving workers' rights and increasing wages and levels of labour organisation, with particular emphasis on the negative effects that the Industrial Relations Act (1990) has had on workers.

In the light of recent events on the global taxation front, we might also consider the role of building support for long-neglected domestic industrial policy based on public ownership of infrastructure and means of production. Both these examples of structural weakness in domestic capitalism could also include an all-Ireland element, reinforcing the weight of effort in the offensive against the other pillars.

Weakening the structure

This article is simply outlining a number of possible focal points towards which to funnel our energy and resources.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



Political power-brokers and avaricious corporations



TOMMY MCKEARNEY

“People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices.”—Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776)



APOLOGIES TO our readers for quoting the talisman of neoliberalism, but it seemed fitting in the light of the fall from grace of the Tipperary man Declan Kelly, chief executive of Teneo, a global company that describes itself as the world’s pre-eminent CEO advisory firm.

While always having access to the coercive arms of the state, capitalists prefer to adopt less abrasive, more PR-savvy methods when possible. This is where Kelly and the Teneos of this world come in.

The multi-million company promoted itself as a firm providing advisory and troubleshooting services to chief executives of the world’s most powerful conglomerates. It did so by its mastery of media spin-doctoring



DÓNALL Ó BRIAIN

JUVENILE AND other immature males seem to have a morbid fascination with fascism, or rather with the trappings of fascism: uniforms, flags, marching, and of course shouting and threatening. But they are only trappings. There’s more to fascism than that.

In various European countries where “normal” capitalism is collapsing, fascism—the naked rule of capital, without bourgeois democracy, or bourgeois decency—is being cultivated, to stave off the inevitable. And now we see the beginnings of this in Ireland.

To organise those mostly working-class or unemployed people who feel no hope and, through no fault of their own, see no alternative (and the establishment and the media make sure they don’t), scapegoats must be found. In other

The true face of fascism



and even more so by its astonishing range of influential contacts, many employed on large retainers. This network included well-known entertainers and sports people, senior officials in worldwide NGOs, retired high-ranking military and intelligence personnel, and one-time leading politicians.

For a number of years before disagreements caused a break-up, Teneo's most powerful connection was with the former president of the United States Bill Clinton, after whom the Clinton Foundation is named. Ostensibly designed to address global poverty and inadequate health services, the foundation held annual conferences attended by politicians and business leaders. All the while in the background was Teneo, facilitating the CEOs of vast transnational networks and striking deals while consorting with such figures as Barack Obama, George Bush, and Tony Blair.

As its relationship with the Clintons soured, Teneo cultivated a position within Global Citizenship, an organisation based in New York engaged, in its own words, in "targeting world leaders to end extreme poverty by 2030." It's not clear, though, what level of poverty it tolerates. However, to carry out its mission Global Citizenship stages high-profile pop concerts where big business meets powerful politicians

countries and times it might be different racial or national identity, or religious beliefs; today it might be anti-vaccination and other ignorant ideologies. It doesn't much matter, because the substance is the same, and the externals are only a trap for the unwary.

Fascists fish in muddy waters. Any grievance will do—so long as it's not a grievance against capitalism. But behind the scenes there are those who know precisely what they're doing, aided by so-called journalists, greedy for novelty and quite prepared to give the "oxygen of publicity" to the most appalling anti-social activities.

Between 1940 and 1945 about 1¼ million people, including a quarter of a million children, were slaughtered at Oświęcim in Poland (called Auschwitz by the Germans). When the Red Army liberated the camp in 1945 they found

meet mega-celebrities, all in an informal setting. Whether eliminating "extreme poverty" or promoting excessive profits is the real agenda, we trust our readers can make up their own mind.

With much happening behind the scenes, this year's public face featured the singer Jennifer Lopez and other mega-stars. Notables endorsing the gathering included Joe Biden, with Harry Windsor and his wife, Megan, attending in person. It was at this grand bash that the career of Teneo's CEO, Declan Kelly, imploded after allegations of inappropriate behaviour towards women present led to his resignation. As a consequence, the company's prospects are now in doubt.

Although the difficulties faced by Teneo and its shareholders, or the troubled personal life of Declan Kelly, are not the main issue, the story nevertheless offers an insight into how the system works. Ostensibly concerned with the well-being of the world's disadvantaged, these networks play a significant role in helping maintain capitalist hegemony. While promoting a myth that transnational corporations working with imperialism have an interest in solving global poverty, they simultaneously facilitate discreet networking between political power-brokers and avaricious global conglomerates.

Although usually played out on a

that the fascists, with notorious German efficiency, had kept detailed records of their victims, including biographical information, and photographs. So, thanks to German efficiency, we know who the girl in this photograph is.

Her name is Czesława Kwoka. She is Polish, and she is fourteen years old.

On 12 March 1943 this beautiful child was dead—murdered by German doctors, three weeks after her mother, probably with an injection of phenol into her heart.

Challenge any fool who is flirting with fascist ideology to look into this girl's eyes. She is terrified, obviously. Her hair has been crudely cropped. Her face is dirty, probably from crying, and she has cuts round her mouth, having just been beaten with a stick by a female *kapo* (trusty). This is known from an eye-witness account.

global stage with the world's most powerful people, it would be a mistake to believe that this story has little relevance for Ireland. Kelly always retained an interest in Ireland. A main sponsor of the Tipperary hurling team, he also recruited well-known Irish personalities to work for Teneo. Moreover, in 2009 Hillary Clinton appointed him US economic envoy to Northern Ireland.

While there is no direct evidence to link Teneo or Declan Kelly to economic activity in Ireland, it raises the question whether his network played a role in some of the harmful interventions by transnationals and in particular vulture funds. For example, most of the NAMA cut-price sell-off went to American speculators. And the scandal continues as the right-wing triumvirate governing the Republic recently exempted vulture funds from a 10 per cent stamp duty surcharge on the bulk buying of houses.

Of course the root cause of this evil is not, strictly speaking, Teneo and Kelly. They simply illustrate the method, as others would happily fill their shoes. At the heart of all this malpractice is capitalism and the class system sustaining it.

The answer to that problem remains, as always . . . socialism.

COLLAGE LEFT draws together Teneo power brokers and Adam Smith

But mainly she's baffled. *Why am I here? What's happening to me? I don't understand.* She's here because she's Polish, and because German fascists had chosen Slavic nationality as one of their scapegoats. It could be any other formula to create a false enemy. Today it might be immigrants, or doctors who carry out vaccination, next month maybe people with red hair. Almost anything will do.

John Waters, Gemma O'Doherty and Dolores Cahill may be fools; but they're culpable fools. And Justin Barrett is worse than a fool, for his infatuation with German fascism is explicit, revealed by his attendance at rallies of a German Nazi party and its youth wing in 1999 and 2000. These people know what they're doing. They're opening doors for further horrors in the future.

They must be stopped.

CAPITALISM



Why do we work? Part 2

BARRY MURRAY

WORK, LIKE INEQUALITY, appears to be a permanent feature of human existence into the foreseeable future. Psychologically, humans do not feel well if they are not working. Or so the story goes.

CONTINUED

The breaking of British imperialism, the abolition of the Industrial Relations Act and demands for public housing and health on an all-Ireland basis all present potential opportunities as transformative demands, each of which has the potential to be interlinked and reinforcing.

These transformative demands can act as wedges that can be hammered constantly and repeatedly in order to create bigger fissures than would otherwise be possible. Pinpointing these strategic areas opens three major fronts on the three pillars for a conscious, broad working-class offensive against

And work, as we said earlier, is continually reinforced by the language of power. “An honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay.” Ask the working poor about that. Then we hear, “He or she is a great worker”—ironically, a common refrain after someone dies.

On average, two days’ work with your employer covers your wages; and the rest of the money you generate for the next three or four days goes to the boss. Is there anything honest about that?

It’s amazing how many people who are employed are startled when you say that to them. They never quantified it quite like that. Why? They were never told; and because they need a job to survive. They are under pressure with living every day and have no time for “fancy analysis.” And even if or when they did work it out, what are they going to do about it? They have to go to work!

They are in a trap—a wage trap and, worse, a debt trap. Debt seriously curtails the notion of revolution.

And then, when workers find themselves unemployed they are under even more pressure to pay bills. So another job is not a case of “some time, maybe”: it’s vital. But that’s not the case for the average business or employer.

Once a business runs into difficulties there are many options for survival or graceful exit. There’s the “socialism of government” for business for a start. Or another business buys it. The banks or investors can come to the rescue. Or the owners just go bankrupt, pay no-one, and walk off into the sunset with, potentially, accumulated profits and the working capital from the business, then

capitalism in Ireland.

These actions in themselves will not knock the capitalist structure down; it is a bit enthusiastic to assume that such a feat is possible even for the Irish left in its present state, much less the CPI. However, it would begin the process of creating new points of weakness where further cracks will emerge, forcing us to reconsider our focal points and assess where new weights of effort can be applied to continually and consciously undermine the strength and integrity of capitalism in Ireland. As has been said from the outset, the most important thing is pinpointing where we concentrate our blows.

pop up under a new business name shortly thereafter.

These moves are usually well planned in advance. The latter tactic is as old as industry and capitalism itself; and it’s facilitated by laws and government. There are no such choices or avenues for the now unemployed workers.

As we saw in the recent Debenhams’ case, not even the rightful redundancy will be paid. The state, its henchmen and police will enforce the will of the company concerned, and they do. We see this also in the case of the proposed Dalradian gold mine in Greencastle, Co. Tyrone. The PSNI take the side of big business. They try to harass, intimidate and prosecute those opposing a highly polluting industry. But that’s not because they have the workers’ interests at heart. No consideration there of the effects on people’s health, or the serious damage to our climate by capitalism.

How many workers over the centuries have been quite simply worked to death? This is another part of work that is deliberately kept under the radar. Asbestosis was one of the earliest consequences of long-term industrial damage to workers. But how long was it hidden, and by whom? Did science know about it very early on? Did doctors notice it too? Was there a conspiracy of silence? How many workers, builders, farm workers and even non-workers have been poisoned or debilitated by industrial chemicals and other industrial processes? How many are now, or will be in the future?

It is well known that, as far as the health and safety bodies north and

The next logical step for the CPI and the broader anti-imperialist movement that is serious about transformative and revolutionary change is to set short, medium and long-term goals to meet these strategic objectives. This is exactly what the CPI intends doing at its 26th National Congress next year. This has to be met with a serious attempt at collaboration with allies who are willing to build a broad front, where each party or group can maintain its autonomy but remains committed to working towards the fulfilment of shared strategic objectives derived from an agreed focal point.

For such co-operation to be possible



What if a new type of society, a way of living, along with a new type of democracy, was arrived at? We know we want to end inequality, which leads to poverty. We want to end exploitation in any new society that we might strive for our new normal.

south are concerned, business, not the workers, comes first. There are any number of potential cover-ups and “nothing to see here” decisions, fuelled by brown envelopes. And all this in the name of profit and greed. The trick is to keep the workers producing ever more profit for the employers and the shareholders.

Surely there must be another way to organise a humane society for all?

At one side of this “work equation” is the worker’s income, such as it is. But the other side is the expense of living.

What if a new type of society, a way of living, along with a new type of democracy, was arrived at? We know we want to end inequality, which leads to poverty. We want to end exploitation in any new society that we might strive for. And we want proper human and social rights for everyone. If the engineered “debt trap” was eliminated or drastically reduced, that surely would make a significant difference in how we live our lives and co-exist.

Consider what it might be like if everyone was entitled to a house as a right when they needed it; that they would pay a nominal rent according to their ability to pay. They would have that house for life as of right. Their child or children could automatically inherit the house. People could move house, “upsized” or “downsized” according to need; all houses built at cost by the state, even one-off houses up in the mountains.

Next, everyone is paid above the living wage. Employers would surely say, “Oh, no, we can’t afford that.” That’s

fine; we make your business a worker-owned co-op. The owners can work there too, but not to take all the profits and pay the minimum wage. If you don’t want to work there, that’s fine too. You will get a state pension above the living wage, and off you go.

And if you don’t accept either option then you will be taxed at a level whereby the state can top up workers’ pay to above the living wage, from your tax contributions. Tax based on turnover, by the way, not on profit; and no government-supported loopholes either.

So how happy would the majority, the poor and working poor be now? Those two moves alone could begin to transform society. The need to work incessantly under duress might well become obsolete. And it would certainly have the potential to end inequality and exploitation.

The question is, Would such changes be transformative reforms? Would people begin to see that a new way is possible?

Anyway, the days of the nonsense about employers “providing jobs” must come to an end. The myth of the great “entrepreneur” is another misnomer, used to justify the enslavement of the poor and working poor. Businesses are established for workers to generate money for the rich and ensure profits, full stop. This guff about “creating employment” and “giving back to the community” is just that: guff, and insidious guff at that. We are cajoled, brainwashed and enslaved into thinking that the “trickle-down” system will raise all boats, even though we and they

know very well it never has, and is not even designed to do so.

Do they, or will they, teach these facts, or contradict this narrative, in our schools and universities? No. And why not? Might it be that the coming generations would say, Stop! Enough is enough; and be fully versed as to why they were saying Stop; that “meritocracy” is a myth; work might just become an anathema, a life of personal development and enjoyment might beckon?

They might decide to learn about co-operation rather than competition. They might even learn about a new type of democracy, a people’s participatory democracy, power from the bottom up, not from the top down. Might they even learn about humanity, and end the scourge of the 200-year-old capitalist system we live under? They might even have time to confront the ravages of capitalism on our climate.

Would they decide to take matters into their own hands and secure the means of production? The narrative of power could well be replaced by that of the workers.

In time, maybe humans might decide to thrive rather than just survive, have better physical and mental health, have the time to educate themselves as adults too, have time to work in and build within their communities. Maybe we can turn the developments of automation and artificial intelligence to the advantage of workers? Will not being forced to work to live but instead living a happy, contented, fulfilled life become

there needs to be agreement on a minimum programme with maximum support. For example, a minimum requirement might be support for a united Ireland, an all-Ireland public health service, an all-Ireland public housing scheme, and an all-Ireland campaign to abolish anti-union legislation—all points that organisations that proclaim some support for socialism should consider uncontroversial. Insisting on a maximum programme, which would necessarily lead to minimum support, is infantile and will lead nowhere. One can objectively work towards the establishment of a 32-county socialist republic without demanding that it is a necessary precondition for all parties that

work with us on point issues to sign up to the same goal.

This may be one of the most difficult aspects in trying to form a broad strategy and build a coalition, as electoral politics and rampant opportunism have historically hampered collaboration on the Irish left. Without a minimum programme agreed upon by the broadest spectrum of left forces in a disciplined but unified front, it is hard to see how we will move from spontaneous to conscious blows against capitalism. In the years ahead we hope that the CPI can move towards playing a leading role in addressing this issue and engage in mutually beneficial working relationships with all fair-minded progressive forces. ★

Notes

- 1 Pat Leahy, “Irish Times Poll: Health and housing most important issues for voters,” *Irish Times*, 5 February 2020 ([tinyurl.com/um75u95j](https://www.tinyurl.com/um75u95j)).
- 2 Irish Council for the European Movement, “Ireland and the EU Poll” ([tinyurl.com/zwdawea5](https://www.tinyurl.com/zwdawea5)).
- 3 Conor Ryan, “Leave taxes alone and cut spending, warn public,” *Irish Examiner*, 4 December 2010 ([tinyurl.com/3kscr6zt](https://www.tinyurl.com/3kscr6zt)).
- 4 Fionnán Sheahan, “Majority favour a united Ireland, but just 22pc would pay for it,” *Irish Independent*, 1 May 2021 ([tinyurl.com/hzykmu6e](https://www.tinyurl.com/hzykmu6e)).



Homes for all – or seats in the Dáil

JIMMY DORAN

FIANNA FÁIL, at 5 per cent, had a record low share of the vote in the recent by-election. The response of their director of elections, Jim O’Callaghan, was, “We must do better on housing.”

This is their strategy: lead people to believe that this was a wake-up call, leading to a turning-point in Fianna Fáil’s policy programme. Fianna Fáil, along with the other establishment parties, are all about running the country in the interests of business. **“Doing better on housing” has nothing to do with ending the housing crisis: it’s all about how we adapt our housing-policy language to get more TDs elected.**

Fianna Fáil are experts at this; hence their latest housing proposal, which they call “Securing homes for all,” in reality their latest strategy for “Securing more seats in the Dáil,” which would allow them to continue to carve up Ireland’s wealth and resources among their rich and powerful financiers.

Government housing policy is working perfectly well for landlords, builders, speculators, and developers; that is who it is designed to benefit. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are in office to benefit them.

The business class in reality rule, just as if they were in the Dáil themselves. That onerous task they leave to their political puppets, who dutifully make Ireland “the best small country in the world in which to do business.”

The crises in housing, health and employment are three of the main weapons capitalism is using in Ireland today to control the citizens and to transfer wealth upwards to the business class from the ordinary working people. Where do the massive profits made on the backs of low wages go? Who owns and profits from private hospitals and health insurance? Private rented accommodation is the main form of tenure in our cities and towns—who owns it?

We have a one-policy capitalist state. The politicians and parties that describe themselves as “left,” “left of centre,” “social democratic” etc.—the so-called “parties of change”—promote their various solutions with one thing in common: the solutions are all within the confines of the capitalist system.

There are many well-meaning members in these “parties of change” who believe they can actually change or reform the system for the better. Unfortunately, history tells us that capitalism is willing to make reforms and

Brexit and reunification

JIMMY CORCORAN

FIVE YEARS after the Brexit referendum, its effects on the relationships between the Irish state, Britain and the European Union continue to evolve.

As a direct result of Brexit, the issue of Irish reunification has become “respectable” and is no longer confined to Republicans and the Communist Party. However, others who long proclaimed their belief in a united Ireland have begun to make their support for unity conditional.

A number of former members of the CPI, based around the newspaper *Unity*, fall into this category. They claim to support unity, but only when a majority of the unionist population support it, and when Ireland leaves the EU.

On 17 June the CPI restated its position that it was time for the British government to declare its intention to withdraw from Ireland in an orderly fashion. This elicited a response in *Unity* to the effect that “[those] demanding the British government unilaterally withdraw from the North are on a road to nowhere.”¹

A fine sentiment; but who exactly is

demanding a unilateral withdrawal? The writer was setting up an Aunt Sally to give political cover to his pro-imperialist views. The group’s support for a unionist veto was made clear in a letter published in the *Morning Star* (London) on 12 June by Ernest Walker in which he stated that “until a significant number of unionists/loyalists see their future in a united Ireland, something not on the cards at the moment, a border poll now . . . will just be a sectarian headcount.”

This ignores the fact that Ireland was partitioned on the basis of a sectarian headcount, and suggests that even if a

The crises in housing, health and employment are three of the main weapons capitalism is using in Ireland today to control the citizens and to transfer wealth upwards to the business class from the ordinary working people.

concessions when its interests require it to, but they are always only temporary.

We can see many of the gains made by workers since independence being taken away or whittled down to a level where they are of little or no value any more, for example an end to the building of public housing, the privatisation of state assets, continuous cuts in services, and the decimation of workers' power through the likes of the 1990 Industrial Relations Act.

Reduced workers' rights open the door to precarious work and low pay, leading to debt, and puts owning a home beyond the reach of the vast majority of working people—all to the benefit of the business class.

The “parties of change” react to the narrative created by finance capital and promoted by their puppets in the Dáil and the media. They make demands for compromise or reform within the capitalist system: “social and affordable housing,” instead of “building universally accessible public housing,” and not just on public land for low-income families.

“Social and affordable housing,” with the “market” deciding what is affordable, gives a blank cheque to private capital to draw from the resources of the state to subsidise citizens so they can afford the purchase of a home from the private sector in a direct transfer of public wealth to private hands.

The “rental sector” solution is an even bigger con job, the flavour of the month being the “cost-rental model.”

majority vote in favour of unification, unless a majority of the unionist community agree the vote is void.

Joe Bowers was more explicit when, in an article headed “Trapped in history,” he rejected the idea that 51 per cent in favour of reunification is enough.² When he was in the CPI, Joe supported Brexit and correctly rejected the argument of pro-EU political forces in Britain that a 51.9 per cent vote in favour of Brexit was not enough. But when it comes to Irish unity, Joe demands a weighted voting system!

Despite his claim to support Irish independence, there is more than a hint of condescension in Joe's attitude to the Republic. He says the Republic embraces the EU like an “obsequious child.” The Irish ruling class accepts its

Houdini himself couldn't have imagined a more perfect trick: to conjure up an illusion whereby, in the name of affordable rents, the tenant, through the rent, pays the full cost of building, maintaining and even paying into a back-up fund (to cover the cost of any major structural repairs that may occur), without ever actually owning the home. No ownership would be by the city or county council.

Reform is akin to loosening the chain of a slave or making it a bit longer—an easing of the burden, but still a slave, without independence or power, free only within the confines of the master. The citizens' master is the capitalist class.

We have seen many, some well-meaning, parties and independents of the left entering government with great expectations only to be forced in some cases, and more than willing in others, to compromise, to water down demands and reduce the expectations of their supporters by hiding behind excuses of the “national interest,” “competitiveness,” “debt levels,” “market forces” or some other ruse or irrelevance once they get their seat in the Dáil and get sucked in and consumed by the system.

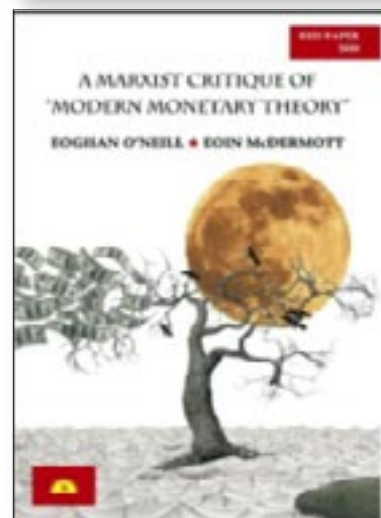
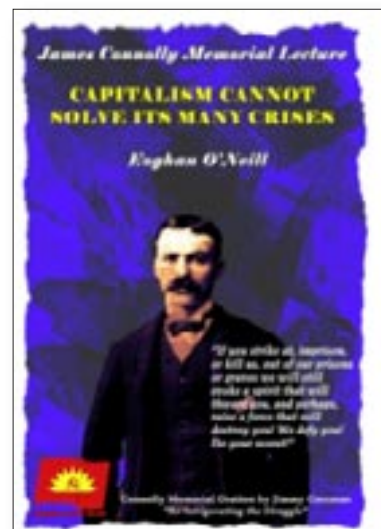
In the words of James Connolly, “all bourgeois movements end in compromise, and the bourgeois revolutionists of today become the conservatives of tomorrow.”

We need system change, not government change. ★

dependent position vis-à-vis EU, British and US imperialism; and while there is a general acceptance of EU membership, anti-EU sentiment is growing.

Joe seems unaware of the widespread opposition, led in part by the CPI, to the EU debt imposed on the Irish state. More importantly, the Republic can leave the EU by means of a referendum. British imperialism has had to be forced out of each of its former colonies.

The arguments being put forward by the *Unity* grouping are aimed at thwarting a border poll because, in the event of a referendum, they will have to get off the fence. If they oppose reunification they will jettison any pretence of supporting Irish unity and independence. To support it means



Two books on political economy from the Communist Party of Ireland available at www.connollybooks.org

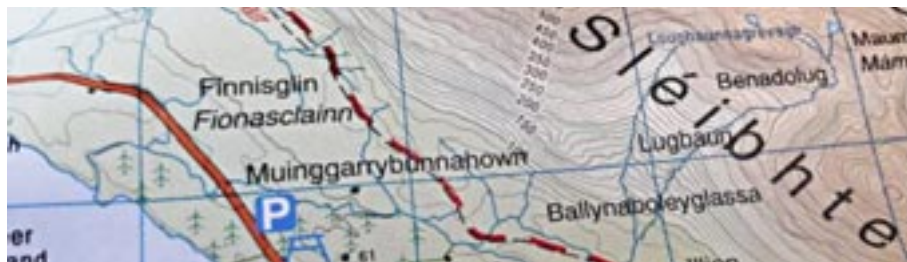
campaigning for unity and independence within the labour movement.

Joe closes his article by stating that labour must not wait again. I agree, and the way to ensure that the interests of the Irish working class, north and south, are central to a campaign for Irish unity is to campaign within the labour movement, north and south, for national unity, independence, and socialism.

Campaigning for an all-Ireland free and universal public health system is an issue that can unite workers, north and south. That is the role of a communist vanguard. ★

1 *Unity*, vol. 33, no. 24.

2 *Unity*, vol. 33, no. 25.



Laughing at what we are

DÓNALL Ó BRIAIN

In what other country would there be web sites offering the equivalent of “funny Irish place-names”?—which in fact are not Irish at all but corruptions. And the great majority of these are not even corruptions in the usual linguistic sense—i.e. changes made over time by the usage of people (in our case colonists and planters) who can’t speak the local language—but invented in cold blood in the nineteenth century by people who did, in fact, know better.

The Ordnance Survey, a branch of the British army, was given the task of surveying the whole country and producing large-scale maps. This they did with great precision, producing maps of extraordinary quality, some of which can still be seen and appreciated today.

In addition, the Topographical [i.e. place-names] Branch of the Ordnance Survey was given the task of recording place-names for printing on the maps. For this purpose the Irish scholars (and they were scholars) employed by the Ordnance Survey compiled a list of officially corrupted components to use when the only names that could be collected from local people were Irish ones, which was the case in the greater part of the country in the 1820s, when the first surveys were carried out.

So, for example, *Baile* (settlement) was to become “Bally,” while *Béal* (river mouth) was to become “Bel”; and there were dozens of others. Kill, Drum, Beg and numerous other meaningless syllables were contrived, many of them with an accidental resemblance to English words, prompting the mirth of foolish people.

In this way monstrosities were created that are neither Irish nor English but meaningless and often unpronounceable gibberish, which now

litter the countryside on official road signs. So let’s have a good laugh at Mickeen (Co. Galway), or Ballymuckleheany (Co. Derry), not to mention Muckanaghederdauhaulia (Co. Galway).

The gombeenmen and philistines may say, “But I can’t pronounce Muiceanach idir Dhá Sháile!” Well, I can’t pronounce “Muckanaghederdauhaulia,” so we’re quits. And in the first case at least they can find ready assistance—and help to keep the community’s self-respect.

Most authentic place-names describe the landscape, or refer to a mythological figure, or to an Early Christian whose cell became the centre of a settlement and later a town. A comrade who grew up in Grennan, Co. Meath, delights to remember that the authentic name is *An Grianán*—the sunny place. Who would not prefer to know about, even perhaps to be proud of, such names?

The few campaigns to defend or promote the authentic names are now met with a torrent of abuse as well as active hostility from local gombeenmen, because “the tourists wouldn’t like it.” (The same tourists don’t seem to have much difficulty in France or Germany, or indeed in Wales, where the Ordnance Survey mainly took a different approach; or at least—being, after all, guests in another country—they understand that they have to put up with it.) In some instances the gombeenmen have succeeded in recent years in overturning the authentic name where this had been made the official name.

In a world in which authenticity is now valued, with countries as diverse as India and Canada, not to mention post-colonial countries such as South Africa, reinstating native names, it’s depressing to think that there are Irish people who will go to the trouble of collecting the worst of these monstrosities, then to the expense of setting up a web site, to invite others to laugh with them at Ireland’s sad history and betrayal of its culture. ★



JENNY FARRELL

■ Douglas Stuart, *Shuggie Bain* (New York: Grove Press, 2020)

Douglas Stuart won the 2020 Booker Prize for his debut novel, *Shuggie Bain*, set in his home town, Glasgow, in the 1980s. Like many working-class writers, Stuart found himself doubting the value of his story. “I used to ask myself, ‘What right do I have to write this?’ *Shuggie Bain* is about a voice from the margins that doesn’t get heard often . . . Working class voices are still struggling for representation in a middle class industry.”

The bulk of the novel relates the experience of growing up at a time when Thatcherite policies devastated Scotland’s industries, with a stark rise in unemployment. The once-thriving Scottish steel, car, shipbuilding, mining and engineering industries were destroyed, and with them the communities that worked in them.

“No. No more school. We need the money.”

“Aye. The state of the day’s world ye’ll be supporting any man ye do get.”

The women all had men at home—men rotting into the settee for want of decent work.

Few women work either. They buy items they cannot afford from the Freemans catalogue and find themselves ever deeper in debt, with large families, and the last holiday most of them had seen was a stay on the Stobhill maternity ward.

Nan applied the pressure, as she



He comes from “a long and proud tradition of slaters and joiners and tradespeople.” He takes pride in his class and says that, despite an absence of books in his childhood and youth, “it didn’t make us any less caring, any less empathetic.”

had a thousand times, and went about collecting money from all the women and marking it in their books. It would be an eternity to pay off a pair of children’s school trousers or a set of bathroom towels. Five pounds a month would take years to pay off when the interest was added on top. It felt as if they were renting their lives. The catalogue opened to a new page, and the women began fighting over who wanted what.

The novel portrays this working-class experience through the eyes of Shuggie, in particular growing up with an alcoholic mother, Agnes.

The reader is introduced to the working-class circle around Agnes. Her father had been a labourer; these were hands that had loaded grain trucks for twenty years, hands that had laid pungent tarmacadam, hands that had killed Italians in North Africa. He was one of the few who returned—there were many sons from Glasgow, from Inverness and Edinburgh, who had sacrificed and would never be coming home.

Despite their common lot, the working people are shown to be divided along denominational lines, Catholic and Protestant, with the same prejudices as across the Irish Sea. Agnes’s first husband and the father of her older children was a Catholic working man, whom she leaves for the sexier Eugene Bain, a Protestant hackney-driver and father of Shuggie. This second husband moves the family out of his in-laws’ council flat and into an equally deprived mining community, before abandoning

them. Part of the reason for this is Agnes’s drinking.

The reader gets the close-up view through young Shuggie’s eyes of his mother’s complete unravelling and the suffering it brings to her children. His older siblings at first help to protect their mother but ultimately realise that they cannot save her. Her condition thwarts their potential: Shuggie’s schooling and Leek’s artistic talent.

Despite an interlude of hope with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous, a job, and her children at school and happy, this does not last. Alcoholism and its effect on people and communities is explored in detail from the viewpoint of a loving and protective child, who observes all the secrecies, shame and suicidal self-hate that it brings.

Agnes is not alone, either with this ravaging illness or in the support offered to her by people close to her. The addiction, it seems, is endemic in this community and an expression of its own destruction.

Douglas Stuart knows intimately what he writes about. His mother struggled with alcoholism and died when he was sixteen. And while what we read is fiction, it is deeply informed by Stuart’s own childhood. He comes from “a long and proud tradition of slaters and joiners and tradespeople.” He takes pride in his class and says that, despite an absence of books in his childhood and youth, “it didn’t make us any less caring, any less empathetic.”

Stuart writes this into the book. There is a strong sense of solidarity and

community. By writing this story he shows that this community is an important subject of literature and art.

In its 52-year history, Stuart is the second Scottish writer to be awarded the Booker Prize. The only other Scot to win it, James Kelman, also a working-class writer, programmatically writes in the idiom of his people. The novel that controversially won him the prize, *How Late It Was, How Late*, is a stream-of-consciousness narration of an unemployed alcoholic Glaswegian, in and out of jail, battered and blinded, disregarded by society and yet somehow a resilient survivor.

For Stuart, Kelman’s prize was seminal. It showed him that the Glasgow vernacular had a rightful place in literature, and that literature was not the preserve of the middle and upper classes but must be owned by the working class as one way of telling its story.

“It changed everything in literature for me,” he says. “Not only was it about working class people, it was written in a broad Scots dialect. That’s how people around me talked, but you rarely see that in literature, rarely see it celebrated. It was an affirming moment for me.”

While neither Kelman’s nor Stuart’s novels indicate characters and ways of combating the outrageous economic and cultural deprivation of the Scottish working class, they nevertheless describe this class with insight and regard, indeed love, as a class that is entitled to their equal share in the nation’s wealth. ★



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Tackling the slow death of Mother Earth

PAUL DORAN

OVER THE period 2010–19 the expansion in the dairy industry in the 26-Country state, thanks to the quota restrictions being lifted by the business organisation known as the EU, has resulted in an increase in the land area allocated to dairy farming. At the farm gate level the expansion has resulted in an increase in nitrogen surplus, increases in nitrogen use efficiency, and lower emissions of nitrogen per unit of production.

Over that nine-year period, grass utilisation increased by 19 per cent. 31 per cent of the increase originated from increased chemical nitrogen, with the remainder coming from increased grassland efficiency. The most recent report of the Environmental Protection Agency on water quality (2013–18) found that 53 per cent of surface water bodies assessed are in satisfactory environmental health, being either “good” or “high” environmental status. The remaining 47 per cent are in “moderate,” “poor” or “bad” status. This compares with 55 per cent at “satisfactory” status for the last assessment period, 2010–15, a decrease of 2½ per cent.

Technologies in relation to incorporating white clover in existing pastures, increased soil fertility (including soil acidity), the use of low-emission

slurry spreading and greater use of precision grazing management have the potential to elevate these negative economic impacts of reduced chemical nitrogen at the farm level. This will require a significant scheme of knowledge transfer over a number of years to get these technologies adopted at the farm level

Grass-based systems into the future need to concentrate on maximising grass production and use, increasing the efficiency of nutrient use, and minimising the amount of feed imported onto the farm. This is both more profitable and environmentally more sustainable.

A move to lower grass production carries the risk of increased importing of feed onto the farm, which will lead to reduced profitability and a deterioration in environmental sustainability, as has been demonstrated around the world. The effects mentioned above have serious consequences for the future health of our citizens and for the general maintenance to our rivers, to fish stocks, fauna, and all the negative side effects due to the overwhelming use of nitrogen.

We are now witnessing the earth system’s gradual dying, because of the failure of capitalism and the capitalist world economy, particularly in the decades since the middle of the twentieth century. Capital itself can be described as a social relation of self-expanding economic (commodity) value. Capitalism, or the system of capital accumulation based on class exploitation and conforming to laws of motion enforced by market competition, recognises no limits to its own self-expansion. There is no amount of profit,

no amount of wealth and no amount of consumption that is “enough” or “too much.”

In this system, the planetary environment is not viewed as a place with inherent boundaries within which human beings must live, together with Earth’s other species, but rather as a realm to be exploited in a process of growing economic expansion in the interest of unlimited acquisitive gain, most of which ends up in the hands of a very few. Businesses, according to the inner logic of capital, must either grow or die—as must the system itself.

Capitalism thus promotes a “madness of economic reason” that can be seen as undermining the healthy human metabolic relationship with the environment. The mere critique of capitalism as an abstract economic system, however, is not sufficient in addressing today’s environmental problems: it is necessary to examine also the structure of accumulation on a world scale, coupled with the division of the world into competing states.

Our planetary problems cannot realistically be addressed without tackling the imperialist world system, or globalised capitalism, organised on the basis of classes and states and divided into centre and periphery. Today this necessarily raises the question of imperialism in the Anthropocene epoch.

It is our duty to rise above ourselves, to step out of our comfort zones and to tackle the meandering slow death of Mother Earth. We must do whatever is necessary—yes, whatever is necessary, so that our children’s children can live in harmony with nature. ★

The common agricultural policy and small farmers

JOE HURLEY

HERE I attempt to explain the new common agricultural policy (CAP) deal that will be implemented in 2023. First I will give a basic description of the CAP agreement:

1 There will be a linear cut of 25 per cent of direct payments. These cuts will be put towards an environmental fund of €300 million for co-schemes. However, it is not revealed how much farmers will be compensated for participation in these new schemes. To obtain full payments they will have to be

involved in some environmental measures.

2 The minimum rate of convergence has been set at 85 per cent. Convergence aims to redistribute €12 million annually from above-average entitlements to below-average entitlements. That means that large farm grants will be cut and redistributed among smaller medium-sized farmers, and that is a good thing.

3 Ireland will have to submit a full strategic plan by the end of 2021. Every member-state will have a say what plan they want implemented; but before coming to that decision there must be a full nationwide discussion among all



“I still hate fighting but this time it has to be done, unless fascism is beaten in Spain & in the world it means war and hell for our kids.”

Letter from Galway

IN THIS seemingly never-ending “Decade of Commemorations,” with such highlights as the recent commemoration of partition (!), some things seem to get forgotten (besides truth and common sense)—things close to home and things far away.

Close to home, here in Galway, it won't be the execution of Commandant Liam Mellows on 8 December 1922 that we'll be forgetting. In reprisal. Revenge. Plans are already under way. Liam Mellows not forgotten. ¡Presente!

And far away: we won't be forgetting the bombs that were dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 either. For nearly twenty years now the Galway Alliance Against War has been a thorn in the side of capitalist complacency, reminding us and them that US imperialism is not gone away, reminding any who care to listen that today's imperialist wars have roots, that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not a military necessity or a way of “saving lives” (the cynicism!) but, among other things, the opening salvo in the Cold War.

100,000+ Japanese were sacrificed to show the victorious Red Army that they needn't advance from Manchuria and turn their focus on Japan now that they had liberated Berlin. A sign to the world that the world's policeman had a new club, and wasn't afraid to use it. Experience gained in the carpet bombing of Dresden and other civilian refuges now put to good use in the fight against communism.

A Japan occupied by a resurgent Soviet Union, with a communist-led national liberation struggle morphing into revolution just across the Sea of Japan, was the red nightmare that US imperialism just didn't want. Bad enough that communists in France and Italy and Greece and Yugoslavia were champing at the bit. Capitalism was throwing everything it had into dispersing, confusing and destroying the victorious revolutionary working class of Europe and their parties. There had to be an end to it, and a warning to any other working-class or national liberation forces that lives were no object.

As we know from Marx, for the capitalist the god of profit is worthy of any sacrifice. “100% will make it ready to trample on all human laws; 300% and there is not a crime at which it will scruple . . . if turbulence and strife will bring a profit, it will freely encourage both” (Marx, quoting P. J. Dunning, in *Capital*, vol. 1).

So, like the veteran anti-fascist fighters of the GDR, the GAAW has kept up the cry against imperialist war for twenty years come September: “Nie wieder Krieg! Nie wieder Faschismus !” [Never again war! Never again fascism]. But, as the PRO of GAAW, Niall Farrell, says, is it really something to commemorate? “It is hardly an anniversary we can boast too much about. While it is recognition of our endurance it is also a stark reminder of how we have failed to end Ireland's complicity in US imperialist war.” Because Shannon Airport is still a hub of the US war machine: 3 million and

counting the number of US troops ferried through Shannon to the latest killing fields (shannonwatch.org).

Children, my own included, have grown into adulthood knowing nothing but continuous US-led imperialist war, with Shannon Airport an integral “part of the US military conveyor-belt of death” (former UN weapons inspector Scott Ritter), encouraged and facilitated by successive Irish governments. Irish neutrality in tatters.

Not forgotten: the lives and the lies, from 1922 until today. How about we commemorate this: the working-class struggle to save this planet and everything on it. Except capitalism.

A luta continua! ★



The outgoing chief of staff of the Defence forces, Vice-Admiral Mark Mellett, described his “being part of a NATO mission, when he was despatched to Afghanistan to help make the elections in the country free and fair, as one of the highlights of his career.”—So much for Ireland's neutrality.

farmers on the deal. Only then should the full agreed plan should be submitted.

Just like the strategic environmental assessment, where the public in the general area of a major development have full rights of consultation on all aspects of the project, and where they fought so successfully against industrialised wind farms, now it is imperative for all farmers to air their opinions on this CAP deal and ensure a fair deal for all.

4 There will be a 10 per cent linear cut to all payments to finance top-up for small farmers. That said, however, it is written that convergence and capping

could reduce the cut, thus reducing the top-up, and an eye needs to be kept on that.

5 There will be a decision on what an active farmer is. That is a simple answer: this would be a farmer that who is producing. Part-time farmers who are producing cannot be excluded.

There are some positive aspects to the new CAP agreement; but, as said before, the farmers and workers need to have their say. There must be full discussion and debate. While It is good to see environmental schemes being implemented across the board, and that is a very positive development, CAP

cannot let down small and medium-sized farmers.

Unfortunately the proposed Climate Bill (which is separate from CAP), which seeks to reduce beef breeds, will be disastrous for Irish agriculture. I will get into that in detail in the next article. I hope to give readers a good understanding of the basics of this important deal for all.

I also wish to state that the contribution of left parties and individuals in the EU, among them Mick Wallace, Clare Daly, and Luke Flanagan, has been crucial, and they deserve thanks from all farmers. ★

ENDNOTES

Low pay

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

Much of this is due to low trade union density, combined with the difficulties experienced by unions in gaining access to work-places and extremely restrictive workers' rights. Only 33 per cent of Irish employees are covered by a collective agreement, compared with 90 per cent in Sweden and 99 per cent in France.

This growing intergenerational inequality applies across the board, including those associated with amount of education or training and level of wages. Having a third-level education does not save you from super-exploitation. The proportion of younger workers with third-level qualifications continues to grow. Wage levels that young graduates might hope to achieve having secured a third-level education have not lived up to their aspirations.

This exposes the establishment economic narrative that you will be well rewarded for your study. It reveals the illusions peddled by establishment economists and media pundits.

As a recent article by the Nevin Economic Research Institute put it, "Ireland has a relatively high share of workers in low pay (up to 2/3's of the median), of young workers in low pay and is an outright outlier in the share of tertiary graduates working in jobs with low pay (13.0 per cent). Estonia is the only other country in double digits out of 30 in the entire sample and the share of Irish workers with high levels of education in low wage jobs is 8-9 times the rate in Finland and Sweden (1.5 per cent)."

The policy of the current and previous governments has clearly discriminated

against workers, driving down wages and creating more precarious employment, which benefits employers, large and small, the impact of "austerity," and the deliberate strategy of wage suppression.

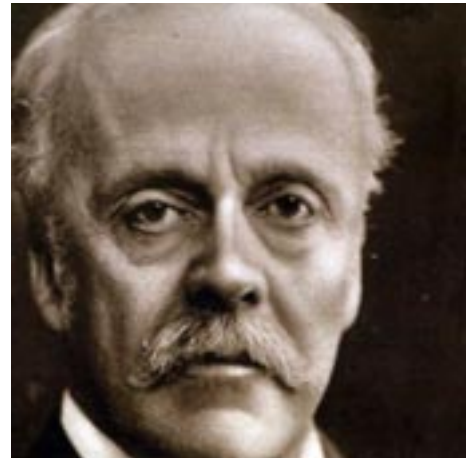
When you have no control over your currency, the levers are limited.

Since 2007, all the various combinations of parties that formed governments in this state, both Fianna Fail plus Green and Fine Gael plus Labour governments, targeted younger workers, which has been a central policy plank of earnings inequality in Ireland. This will not change under the current two-party coalition government.

Research shows that where trade union organisation is weak or non-existent, wage levels are much lower than in sectors that are well organised and where trade unions are strong. Higher levels of collective bargaining lead to lower levels of inequality throughout the system. That is why the present and previous governments have shackled workers and trade unions.

There can be no return to employers' normal. Instead the pandemic has shown that workers need to be better organised, and that trade unions need to step up their activities among the unorganised. This requires spending resources in serious organising and not just "servicing" workers.

It is in the trade union movement's own self-interests to do this. It also needs to take more seriously the necessity to campaign for the repeal of the 1990 act and its replacement with legislation that guarantees workers' rights, including the right to join and be represented by a union. Workers, in particular low-paid workers, need a pay increase to bring the the minimum wage up to €15 per hour. ★



"In Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country."

Arthur Balfour, prime minister of England, 1919.

SV

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