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## Government housing policy is the cause of the housing crisis

Homelessness, waiting lists and extortionate rents are the symptoms. Universally accessible public housing is the cure, the solution, to permanently end the housing crisis writes **Jimmy Doran**



"I have a hatred of tyranny, and a contempt for its tools . . . I cannot sit quietly down under the claims of barefaced power, and I have tried to expose the little arts of sophistry by which they are defended."  
**William Hazlitt**, *Political Essays* (1819).

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## Public housing is the solution

**G**OVERNMENT HOUSING policy works very well for those it is designed to benefit: the speculators, landlords, hedge funds—the business class.

Developers are charging Fingal County Council €554,842 for three-bedroom apartments, €427,887 for a two-bed, and €282,323 for a one-bed, according to planning documents lodged with Shoreline's Strategic Housing Development (SHD) for the €464 million, 1,221-apartment scheme it is planning for Baldoyle in north Co. Dublin.

The Ó Cualann Housing Alliance, a co-operative housing body, built an estate of forty-nine houses in Ballymun,

with prices starting at €140,000 for a two-bedroom apartment, €160,000 for a three-bed, and €199,000 for a four-bed. It can be done even more cheaply if the state builds directly; it has the land already.

The largest private landlord in the state recorded a 5.9 per cent increase in rental income in the first half of 2021. IRES REIT, which owns almost 4,000 properties, mainly in Co. Dublin, made a profit of €27.4 million. Its income from investment properties increased by 5½ per cent, to €39.4 million. Occupancy remains “robust,” at 98.6 per cent, while residential rent collection rates were stable, also at about 99 per cent for the period.

A REIT is exempted from paying corporation tax on its rental income, and it does not pay capital gains tax on

profits from property disposals. Multiple purchases of apartments are exempt from the new 10 per cent tax introduced by the Government. This was to create the illusion that the Government want to stop hedge funds buying up rental properties in bulk. That's all it is: to create confusion and give the vulture funds a free hand, tax-free, in the rental market.

A recent report by the Residential Tenancies Board revealed that landlords believe it is “prudent” to leave houses empty, “to see how the market responds.” Large landlords controlling thousands of homes have the financial clout to leave them empty rather than reduce rents, and believe it is “prudent” to do so.

The market responds by raising the market rates for rented accommodation,

# Housing for whom, and for what?

**AARON NOLAN**

**A**T THE BEGINNING of September the coalition government published its long-awaited final, final, final housing strategy, “Housing for All,” to solve the deepening housing crisis.

Thousands are on local authority housing lists, and tens of thousands are trapped in rising rents which are completely unsustainable from the renter's point of view, though not from the position of landlords, both domestic and international corporate investors.

There is no commitment or strategy to enforce rent reductions or controls. Priority will continue to be given to the private provision of shelter for working people. It is the Government's responsibility to provide the best conditions for making profits (accumulation of capital); it is the

Government's responsibility to produce the best regulatory conditions for the process of harvesting the maximum by those who invest in order to accumulate more.

Speculation in property is now a major source of profits globally for finance capital. The push to accumulate more and more profits is driving the housing crisis not only in Ireland but throughout Europe and in the United States.

The “Housing for All” strategy paper clearly emphasises the protection of private and corporate investors, to make sure there is no disruption in that sector, to incentivise the private speculative investors to provide shelter for rent.

This policy is for sustaining private and corporate investment. This, in turn, can only be done by ensuring that rents grow, that investors are guaranteed a return (profit) year after year, to make sure it's

attractive to invest in the Irish “housing market.”

Over the last three years the number of tenancies in the 26 Counties has dropped, from 313,000 to 298,000, resulting from the supply of new properties not matching rental properties withdrawn from the “market.”

“Housing for All” has laid out a strategy for an annual increase of 6,500 “new private rental homes” up to 2030. Even the suggested 2,000 per year up to 2030 at cost-rental rents will not increase supply: they are only working to reduce the HAP-subsidised private tenancies and so appear to be “doing something.”

Cost-rental will not reduce rents, nor is it designed to. Cost-rental will not be in competition with nor challenge the private rental market. It will not affect private rents, and will not be allowed to

The housing crisis ends with universally accessible public housing, and with it all the social problems it creates. Who benefits? The ordinary working people. Who loses? The builders, speculators, landlords, and bankers.

thanks to the “shortage” created by the landlords.

**Government housing policy is working as it was designed to: to line the pockets of landlords, builders, speculators, and developers.**

A home or shelter is one of the basic necessities for sustaining life. It should not be a commodity to use as a weapon against ordinary people or for extracting subsidies from the state, to swell the massive profits of business corporations. Every euro of subsidies to landlords is a euro less for public health, education, transport, housing, and dealing with the effects of climate change.

It’s time for change: to run the country in the interest of the people living here, not the business elite; to build an economy for the common good; an Ireland with a right to housing enshrined in the constitution, whereby the state must provide a suitable home at rents linked to income for all citizens who wish to avail of them.

The state must launch a massive house-building programme to build enough homes for all citizens and end the housing crisis permanently: universally accessible homes, publicly owned—a new housing service, similar to health, education, or transport.

The rents will pay for these homes over time, and the state will own these housing assets in perpetuity. It will end the boom-and-bust in the building industry, with good, permanent jobs for building workers. With an abundance of property available, the price of property will fall (this is why the Government don’t want to do it) for those who want to buy; all others can rent a home from the state. With council rents typically 15 per cent of income, this will leave families with more disposable income to spend in the local economy, creating more jobs.

The housing crisis ends with universally accessible public housing, and with it all the social problems it creates. Who benefits? The ordinary working people. Who loses? The builders, speculators, landlords, and bankers.

There lies the reason why Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and those who prop them up will come up with a myriad of “solutions” that do everything but solve the housing crisis or damage the massive profits for their business cronies.

For those who say it cannot be done overnight: there were 92,000 housing units built in 2006 in Ireland. All it takes is political will. ★

## Scandal!

**As we go to press, a three-bedroom house in the Ó Cualann housing project has been sold for €325,000—an increase of more than 90 per cent, less than four years after it was originally purchased for €170,000 under an affordable-housing scheme.**

**Under the scheme, those who sell within ten years would have to pay a clawback payment related to the discount at the time of purchase. In this case €57,353 goes to the co-op, leaving €267,647 for the sellers. While it is likely that there is a remaining mortgage on the house, it is expected that the vendors will see between €115,000 and €150,000 in profit. This exposes the inadequacy of the scheme.**

**Public housing is the solution, not “affordable housing,” “social housing,” “shared ownership,” “co-living,” or any of the other smokescreens created by the Government to subsidise private wealth. ★**

affect either private or institutional investors.

International research shows that profits for investors in the Irish housing “market” (rents as a percentage of the purchase price) are nearly twice as high by international comparison. Evidence shows Ireland to have the highest rental profits in the EU, based on apartment size (120 sq. metres). Ireland has the eighth-highest rental profits in the world, with an average rental return of 6.6 per cent.

Throughout the EU a similar trend is growing in relation to the private rental sector. The EU Commission has developed a strategy of opening up housing to greater speculation. Ideologically they are opposed to rent controls, as they see it as interference in the “market.”

The institutional investors and larger private landlords are the benchmark and provide the “muscle” for small local landlords, who benefit from this strategy. It is they who set the rental benchmark.

Current rent restriction do not apply to new lettings. The institutional investor—the vulture and cuckoo funds—are the rental benchmark as (a) they have the capital to invest and to secure properties to rent at any price and (b) this provides a shield for small parasitic local landlords to secure higher rents.

The vulture and cuckoo funds have the capacity to secure high rents and to sustain them against any possible downward pressure. This allows smaller landlords a shield to keep rents only going upwards. They allow the institutional investors to do the heavy lifting.

It’s clear that this government will not do anything to upset the institutional investors, because they have based their whole housing strategy on encouraging even more private investors to build and provide people’s shelter for rent. This means that rents can only go one way, and that is up. It is built in to the government strategy.

The solution lies in a full-scale public

house building programme. Only public housing at affordable rents, based on people’s ability to pay, can challenge the private and corporate landlord class.

Universally available public housing will bring about reduced rents all round, reduce property prices, and force private and corporate investors out, with a significant number of their properties becoming vacant.

**Universal public housing at rents commensurate with people’s ability to pay is the one way to break the landlords’ grip, to end the power and control of speculators and private corporate builders.**

In a society organised and structured around the creation of ever-increasing profits out of people’s basic needs, housing is merely the latest vehicle for capital accumulation.

The last word to James Connolly: “Yes, friends, governments in capitalist society are but committees of the rich to manage the affairs of the capitalist class.” ★





## A sign of things to come

**TOMMY MCKEARNEY**

LAST MONTH Kathy Sheridan, writing for the *Irish Times*, opined about the dilemma faced by Ireland’s middle class as they agonise over whether or not to vote for Sinn Féin. The problem, it would appear, relates to the fact that while the party is promoting progressive policies, it simultaneously glorifies what the writer describes as “killers.”

Sheridan described the case of a well-educated young man who has publicly declared his intention of joining Mary Lou McDonald’s organisation, notwithstanding the fact that Sinn Féin is unapologetically commemorating those

who died on hunger strike.

It would seem that there is concern that a section of Irish society that has voted for Fine Gael and its predecessor since the foundation of the state might be seduced by Eoin Ó Broin’s critique of government housing policies. Having spoken fondly for years of how Grandpa used to canvas for Kevin O’Higgins, innocent middle-class youngsters may now elect people who once supported the use of armed force.

Nor is Sheridan alone in drawing attention to the alleged discrepancy between Sinn Féin’s current activities and the policies it promotes. The minister for justice, Heather Humphreys (Fine Gael), recently accused the Shinners of hijacking history and weaponising it for their own political ends. She was addressing her party’s annual Béal na Blá commemoration for the one-time IRA director of intelligence Michael Collins. In a speech that is beyond parody, she told her listeners that she shared a view of history similar

to that of the “Big Fella.”

Telling history to suit one’s political objectives is nothing new, nor is the practice confined to any one party or group. Sinn Féin is not the first to interpret the past to its own advantage. However, that is not the real reason why the party is subject to endless accusations and a constant tirade about its ethics, its past, and its internal organisational structures. Its recent electoral successes have drawn attention to something much more profound than spin-doctoring with the facts of history.

Irish society, north and south, is in a process of transformation. Over the course of recent decades the Republic has introduced legislation providing access to contraception, divorce, same-sex marriage, and abortion. Taken in isolation from other events, these socially liberal reforms would not necessarily challenge the status quo. However, other significant happenings have created conditions and circumstances that are making old

## Texas leads against women’s rights

**LAURA DUGGAN**

ON WEDNESDAY 1 September 2021 the most restrictive abortion law in the United States, the Texas abortion law known as Senate Bill 8, came into effect.

This bill amounts to a near-complete ban on abortion in the state. It prohibits abortion as soon as cardiac activity in the embryo is detectable. This activity is the result of electrical activity in the semi-formed heart: it is not a heartbeat and does not indicate viability of the embryo. This activity normally occurs about five to

six weeks into pregnancy and before most women know they are pregnant.

The law provides no exception for women impregnated as a result of rape or incest, and allows for anyone in the country to sue abortion providers or others who help women obtain the procedure after the six-week time limit.

Abortion up to twenty-five weeks has been legal in the United States since *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark Supreme Court ruling in 1973. While this ruling has been challenged several times, Bill 8 is the first instance of an extremely restrictive anti-abortion bill being upheld

by the Supreme Court and coming into effect.

Margaret Atwood’s book *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) is often invoked when restrictions on access to abortion loom. But the situation in Texas is far more devious and sly than the fictional world of Gilead. The first-of-its-kind language in Bill 8 allows anyone, even those outside the state of Texas, to sue abortion providers or others who help women get abortions after the six-week limit, and seek \$10,000 per defendant, plus legal fees. The person suing does not need to be connected in any way to

## Changing demographics, perfidious British Tories creating a regulatory border in the Irish Sea and, most recently, having its devolved government preside over the worst covid rate in western Europe makes for a deeply unsettled Six-County political entity.

fixtures difficult to sustain.

The economic crash of 2010 has had a lasting impact. The extent of system shock took the establishment some time to recognise. In the early days it seemed that the population of the 26 Counties was prepared to passively accept the imposition of austerity and the concomitant neoliberalism. For a period it looked as if the working class would stay silent and meekly pay the gambling debts of Irish and European bankers.

Slowly but surely that position changed. First came the grass-roots movement against household charges. Then came the massive, popular and largely successful movement against the imposition of water charges. Significantly, this campaign was reinforced by support from organised labour. Then, in the arena of parliamentary politics, this period has also witnessed an end of the long-standing two-and-a-half-party system as new faces arrived on the scene.

It was the general election of February 2020, however, that underlined the extent to which old certainties have changed. Sinn Féin achieved a remarkable result, obtaining the largest vote for any single party and in the process forcing the conservative parties of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael into a marriage of convenience.

Most worrying for the establishment was the profile of the Sinn Féin vote: young and geographically well spread, seemingly little concerned with the past

and motivated by socio-economic and climate issues.

And then came covid-19 to expose still further the bumbling incompetence of a hapless coalition. Moreover, where the tripartite government did manage a success, it has the effect of raising other questions. There is, for example, the highly efficient, well-run and free covid testing and vaccination service, something that only went to demonstrate the contrast with the iniquitous two-tier health service advertised so often on the state broadcaster.

Adding to underlying instability is the situation in the North. Changing demographics, perfidious British Tories creating a regulatory border in the Irish Sea and, most recently, having its devolved government preside over the worst covid rate in western Europe makes for a deeply unsettled Six-County political entity. It remains a reality that major events in the North can quickly have an impact on the South and possibly even more dramatically now that Sinn Féin is such a significant presence both sides of the border.

In the wider sense, this all raises the question whether Sinn Féin poses a threat to the existing economic and power system or whether it merely challenges the current parliamentary hegemony of the two main coalition parties; hence the relentless pressure from different quarters to try to ensure that the party mellows into the type of conformity long practised by the Labour Party.

Time alone will tell how Sinn Féin develops. What is beyond question, though, is the existence of a new, young and as yet unquantifiable element within Irish society. In fact this is a phenomenon not necessarily confined to Ireland. A recent article in the *Financial Times* viewed this as an almost global reality.\*

While only a newspaper article, the *Financial Times* comment nevertheless raised an issue that is most probably of concern to the establishment here and of interest to many of us who are not part of the ruling class. It noted that many among the younger generation are losing confidence in the bourgeois parliamentary process; instead they are turning to grass-roots activism devoted to a range of causes, such as the above-mentioned socio-economic and environmental issues.

Although still on a relatively small scale, we saw some evidence of this last month in Dublin. A group of activists from Co. Tyrone protesting outside Leinster House against goldmining in the Sperrins was joined by activists from different parts of Ireland. Noteworthy was the number of young people involved and speaking powerfully; equally noticeable was the absence of representatives from any of the main political parties in either jurisdiction. It was grass-roots activism of the empowering kind. A sign of things to come? Well, why not? ★

\*"Losing the generation game: Could economic setbacks radicalise graduates?" *Financial Times*, 24 August 2021.

any of the defendants but can be a passer-by or eavesdropper who happens upon the information.

By encouraging citizens to hand each other in for a tidy sum, the state has neatly abdicated any responsibility for the banning of abortion. The ban will be slowly implemented through civil cases that will cost abortion providers (regardless of the outcome of the case) large amounts in legal fees. The expectation is that providers will be sued out of existence as well as creating a fear surrounding the provision of the medical service.

Targets of legal cases could include not only the organisations that help pay for abortions and practical support groups that provide women in need with

transport, lodging, recovery care and child care but also doctors, nurses, domestic-violence counsellors and even friends, parents, partners and clergy who give aid, such as driving a woman to a clinic or providing counselling about whether to have the procedure.

Targets of a prosecution can also be picked by multiple people for the same action: for example, Mary helps Susan to get access to an abortion after six weeks; Mary can now be sued by everyone and anyone who finds this out, regardless of whether they know this information at first hand or not, regardless whether they know Susan or Mary in any way.


The bill coming into effect through civil cases also means that providers

and campaigners will have much greater difficulty challenging the implementation of the bill and resulting cases. Activists, feminists and women's groups have been protesting on the streets and organising in whatever way they can to at least make implementation of the bill as difficult as possible. A national day of action has been planned for 2 October, and they have been flooding the recently established "Pro Life Whistle Blower" web site, which enables Texas residents to report people for potential violations of the law, with false tips and leads.

To argue that this legislation is for protecting unborn life or honouring women is nonsense.

Continued overleaf





## People and communities suffer as a consequence of the 'sectarian game'

**BARRY MURRAY**

THERE WAS a great discussion recently with representatives of the Protestant/loyalist community about sectarianism and its roots, among other things, and the obvious effects on people and our society. That set me thinking about potential strategies.

Socialists and republicans lay the blame for sectarianism at the door of British colonialism and imperialism, which is correct. (And we know too that Yankee and European imperialism has also a detrimental effect on the standards of living in all of Ireland and

around the world.) We blame education and religion—both correct. Class especially is also a major factor.

But the Protestant/loyalist section of our society, though treated as serfs by Big House unionism, largely has little understanding of class. Except in the privileged sense. And all those effects and consequences in the North are self-evident. The question is, How do we begin to, or can we, tackle it?

A lot of bourgeois fixes have been tried over the years, both in education and with employment legislation. But it never seems (or was intended) to gather any real momentum or show any signs of

diminishing the cancer of sectarianism. So, what if we looked at at least one of the areas where sectarianism is being used to gain advantage, where it is constantly used as a manipulative tool for frightening people about the “other side”?

That place is in politics here in the North, especially, but again not exclusively, by Sinn Féin and the DUP.

So could we start to promote the idea of a people’s participatory democracy, instead of the representative democracy of power, as a method of undermining their sectarianised parliamentary strategies, and also their organised grip on power? Can we build a parallel people’s democracy?

Sectarianism has been and is also used by those who control the wealth of the North (and further afield) to prevent any kind of unity within the work-place, when workers agitate for proper pay and conditions. That’s another area; and there are more. But let us focus on the political arena for the purpose of this article.

If, in principle, we were able to make people aware of their potential power by strengthening their understanding of democratic participation in our local areas and in the first place at the community level, could we pressure and, hopefully, break the politicians’ use of sectarianism to make or maintain political gains—the “*vote them in to keep the other side out syndrome*”?

They are using sectarianism to secure votes every five years (or less) so that they can control power between them, promise the world, and live in the lap of luxury on the people’s hard-earned taxes. They call it representative

## TEXAS CONTINUED

It is about control, control of women specifically. If abortion was the issue, the most successful ways to reduce the need for access to abortion in the first place is complete and full sex education and access to contraceptives in all forms. However, Texan public schools are not required to teach sex education

at all, and if a school chooses to cover the topic they are required under state law to stress abstinence “as the preferred choice of behaviour in relationship to all sexual activity.”

Texas, as a result, consistently has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the United States, and is one of only two states that do not

include birth control for pregnancy prevention as a benefit under the Children’s Health Insurance Plan (state-provided medical insurance for families that do not qualify for Medicaid—the government scheme that helps with medical costs for some people with limited income—but also cannot afford private health insurance).

Sectarianism has been and is also used by those who control the wealth of the North (and further afield) to prevent any kind of unity within the work-place, when workers agitate for proper pay and conditions.

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democracy . . . hardly too representative: just look around you. By this cruel tactic they fool the people about their actual living conditions and keep their exploitation hidden. The reality of neoliberal capitalism never gets a mention, only the orange or green colours of Northern politics.

The stronger that democratic participation by the ordinary person in the street becomes (by means of a participatory democratic system) the more the people might well begin to see their power growing to influence events in their lives and to expose the trickery of sectarianism. They will experience input and the ownership of their lives. It is worth remembering that the working-class Protestant, the unemployed Protestant and the poorer Protestant is no different from their Catholic equivalents, though they have difficulty rationalising that, which some will admit in discussions.

Nevertheless, all people feel pain, suffering, and exclusion. Brexit and the actions of the British in recent times have shocked the Protestant section of our Northern statelet. And it has hardened sectarianism, creating an even greater reason to break the use of sectarianism by those in power.

Even if only the nationalist elected representatives can be exposed and challenged on sectarianism and forced to desist from it, even in one small council area (e.g. Erne East, Co. Fermanagh), it could easily have a domino effect on other nationalist politicians. Given time, it could well put the local Protestant politicians in an awkward place too if they decide to continue with sectarianism in politics. In fact it could create a dilemma for all the power-brokers in the “political bedfellow” network, to look seriously at their old divisive tactics.

I think we need to build towards an

*action team or vanguard* that begins to get people to expose and confront the use of sectarian politics in the North and other anti-people activities by politicians. Can we work towards a situation where a community group invites politicians to a community hall and, with the evidence in hand, confronts them at election times about what they have *not* done, and, most importantly, be told what the people want them to do in the future? I think it can be done, *and* I think the people, with a bit of direction, would be up for it. Why not do this bit on an all-Ireland basis even?

If we keep copious records of the politicians’ failures—and there are and will be many—we could have such a forum ready for the future elections. Any apparent “successes” by them would need to be acknowledged, but only within the context of a “people’s charter,” based on the parameters of a people’s participatory democracy.

We might not have it perfect to begin with but it would be a start, and we would learn something from it. If they refuse to meet—brilliant; they can take what they get after that. So they won’t meet the people—imagine where that could go. It could well be the dynamic for more focused activism.

So how do we get people to journey along with us on this? There is no magic formula. But if we gain the respect of the ordinary citizens by embedding ourselves in our communities and working to improve their day-to-day lives the people will see that we are genuine and want change for them and that we are not vote-catching in order to be elected and join the gravy train. We need to be respectful of our communities, everywhere and at all times. Do not insult or ignore the source of real change and potential power.

But as well as action in our communities we must get people (1) to understand, through publicity, their involvement in workshops on participatory democracy, understanding class and their empowerment, to believe that change is possible, and (2) to understand and have the belief in themselves that *they* are actually the ones who can make real change happen—contrary to what they are told and educated for; that it is not the politicians, not even us, and certainly not those who pull the levers of power and wealth in favour of themselves, who will drive transformative change. That process of learning will, however, be no easy task.

But, as progressive republicans, socialists, and community activists, that is our duty: to *transform* society, not to reform it only. That’s what community work must always be about. Thirty years of armed struggle and twenty-plus years of a “pacification process” have done nothing to improve ordinary people’s lives in the North of Ireland. And it certainly has not reduced the cancerous tumour of sectarianism. Left to the politicians and power brokers, it will only get worse.

Maybe there are the very rough bones of a plan here and a potential strategic direction. In the North it would be hard for anyone to be against a strategy for ending sectarianism, except those who benefit from it. The wider population would identify with such a strategy. If it undermined the sectarian strategy of power and empowered the people, what would be wrong with that?

This is by no means a definitive document or a blueprint. We need to read this with an open mind and add or take away from it. Further debate and discussion might help us to see where we can actually go with it, if anywhere. ★

Employers can also opt out of covering birth control from their employees’ insurance scheme if they “morally object” to it.

The research is clear. Difficult-to-access and restrictive abortion services lead to higher numbers of unsafe and dangerous underground abortions. Roe v. Wade was motivated by the horrific and lonely deaths of a

number of women from botched abortions. To open the door to this again is beyond monstrous, is regressive, and will hurt and endanger working-class women the most.

When women in the United States are consistently targeted by regressive and minority-led religious-based laws, laws that diminish them and their ability to control their own lives and

their own bodies, the disgusting lie of feminist motivations behind US imperialist foreign policy and warmongering is laid bare.

***Solidarity with the pro-choice campaigners in the belly of the beast! Women’s bodies are not battlefields to be fought over, and will not be used to justify US imperialism! ★***



## Beginning of the end of US hegemony



▲ CIA Rendition Plane N71PG at Shannon  
3 December 2007

**SAJEEV KUMAR**

There is a sense of *déjà vu* in the events that took place in Afghanistan, reminding us of what happened in 1975 when the United States was defeated in Vietnam. However, the outcomes are as different as chalk and cheese. If the outcome in Vietnam was a socialist government, which nationalised resources and cared about its people, what happened in Afghanistan during the last fortnight is a nightmare.

## The media and Afghanistan

**JIMMY CORCORAN**

ONE WOULD imagine that the chaotic scenes that accompanied the ending of the NATO occupation of Afghanistan would be followed by reflection and analysis in the Irish media. That was not the case.

Their initial concern was the threat to women's rights under the Taliban—and of course the threat the Taliban pose to Afghan women is real. However, the overthrown puppet government and the NATO troops in Afghanistan were not champions of women's rights. Tens of thousands of women were killed and homes and livelihoods were destroyed by the occupation forces and their Afghan puppets.

Nowhere in the media was there any reference to these facts, nor any mention of the full equality enjoyed by Afghan women under its communist government before the Western subversion that ultimately led to the Taliban taking power in the 1990s.

The media then turned to the fate of those Afghans who collaborated with the occupation and who may now have to face the consequences of their actions. No analysis of what collaborating with the occupation entailed: all we got was a reprise of the NATO handouts churned out daily by the BBC and the British press. Once the military occupation ended, Afghan collaborators were surplus to requirements, with many of them

being abandoned by NATO.

Worse was to come. The call went out to send Irish special forces to Afghanistan to repatriate Irish citizens still in Kabul. It was suggested that Free State military officers would be able to help because of links they had forged with NATO troops in Afghanistan.

Instead of questioning the role played by Irish troops in the illegal occupation, the media called for the procurement of transport aircraft for future military adventures. An RTE reporter on "Prime Time," while interviewing Simon Coveney, made the ridiculous comment that Ireland could not be a credible member of the UN Security Council because it lacked this



It also stated that Ireland was not a protagonist in the NATO war in Afghanistan. But Irish Rangers were deployed with NATO troops in Helmand, and Shannon Airport was a major link in the supply of occupation troops to Afghanistan. That's being a protagonist.

After spending trillions of dollars towards the occupation, and bombing Afghanistan to eliminate the Taliban, what has happened is that the country is going back to square 1, with the Taliban coming back to power.

This proves that imperialism has never solved any problem, it only exacerbates them. Arundhati Roy once said, "War is terrorism on a larger budget." There can never be a solution to terrorism using the same methods; and war is the biggest act of terrorism.

These wars and military spending have been the reason why empires collapsed. As Engels pointed out, "a nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations." The force needed to oppress others in the end will turn against them.

The Roman empire collapsed under the weight of maintaining a big army to control vast areas of land. The British empire, on which "the sun never set," lost its past glory after the two world wars, which happened as a result of the greed of imperial countries in dividing the world into colonies among themselves.

The US aggression after 11 September 2001 could be the beginning of the end to its hegemony. The occupation of Afghanistan was

not based on love for the Afghan people, which was evident when the American plane took off with innocent people clinging on to it.

In fact imperialism has no regard for people above the ground: it has only an obsession with resources under the ground. It would rather support Talibans or fascist forces than a socialist government that uses the resources for the benefit of the people.

Imperialism is always under the compulsion to create enemies to justify the military budget. If the "threat" was cold war in the 1960s and 70s, it was the "war on terror" after 2001; and the latest enemy is China.

The United States is never a good model of democracy, as it claims to be. Apart from the discrimination against black people, the American public has no say in military spending (eight hundred bases around the world), which drains the citizens' money to oppress the people of Africa, Latin America and Asia to extract the surplus for transnational corporations.

Those trillions of dollars could be spent on education (which causes a debt trap for people), health services (which were exposed during the covid pandemic), providing housing and investment in green energy.

**"The invasion was supported by 'neutral' Ireland which supplied military personnel and invited US planes, flying to and from the war, to re-fuel at Shannon. Over 14 years, some 226 Irish troops served under Nato command."— Patrick Murphy, *Irish News* (Belfast), 28 August 2021.**

The solution would be an anti-war movement ignited in the imperialist countries to employ the resources for the people's welfare and working-class support towards that movement from other countries by creating a network of co-operation.

As far as Ireland is concerned, the increasing alignment with NATO forces and using Shannon Airport as a base should be questioned. When the planet is on the brink of environmental disaster as well as pandemic, we can't afford to waste resources that are limited.

For the first time in the history of the planet, a single species is responsible for climate change; and, shamefully, it is the humans. And military logistics is the greatest cause of carbon emission.

We have enough ammunition to destroy the planet many times over; why spend more? And during the pandemic, when health services need more attention, why spend less? ★

"essential" military equipment. The *Business Post* went further and suggested that the failure of the NATO invasion and occupation meant that Ireland should now increase its military budget and accept its share of responsibility for "Europe's security."\*

It also stated that Ireland was not a protagonist in the NATO war in Afghanistan. But Irish Rangers were deployed with NATO troops in Helmand, and Shannon Airport was a major link in the supply of occupation troops to Afghanistan. That's being a protagonist.

The main point of the *Business Post* editorial was the need for Ireland to build up its military capabilities and become more integrated in "European defence." It claimed that Ireland must be prepared to defend its vital interests. What vital interests? Where

does the threat to Ireland come from? Over the last fifty years the only state that engaged in bombing and murder in the 26 Counties was the United Kingdom, our gallant "ally" in Afghanistan.

And it was a Tory MP, Priti Patel, who urged the British government to use the threat of a food embargo to force the Irish government to accept British Brexit proposals. Perhaps she hoped for a rerun of An Gorta Mór. It was the EU Commission that forced the Irish state to accept liability for the debts of European banks.

It is in our vital interest to break away from imperialism, not to join it in its wars of aggression.

It is the duty of the left to publicise the imperialist nature of NATO and combat all the calls for "liberal intervention." Unfortunately, the

"liberal left" are at one with the most pro-imperialist forces in believing that the EU and NATO are forces of enlightenment and progress. One might see a condemnation of an exceptionally grave atrocity if evidence emerged; but by and large their role is to give a "left" veneer to imperialist aggression.

Ireland once pursued a non-aligned foreign policy. EU membership has put an end to that and has moved us closer to full NATO membership. We must not meekly accept this outcome. We must begin to mobilise now to ensure that any future Sinn Féin-led government will reassert an independent foreign policy. ★

\*Editorial, *Business Post*, 29 August 2021, p. 22.

**IRELAND'S**

**HOUSING**

**CRISIS**

**PUBLIC**

**HOUSING**



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# CULTURE/COMMODITY



## Streamers v. socialism and media sovereignty

DENNIS BROE

THE “EPIC” BATTLE being waged—or rather being reported on in the corporate entertainment press—is between streamers and cinemas, or between various streamers. However, this is a battle now being fought not just in the United States—Netflix is already losing American subscribers to its rivals Disney+ and HBO Max—but throughout the world. Only through global subscriptions can these companies, most of which have run up huge debt, stay one step ahead of their creditors.

It is also through global profits that the companies, most now flush with

cash but with the pressure of debt and increased competition always looming, can outmanoeuvre any single country that attempts to compete.\*

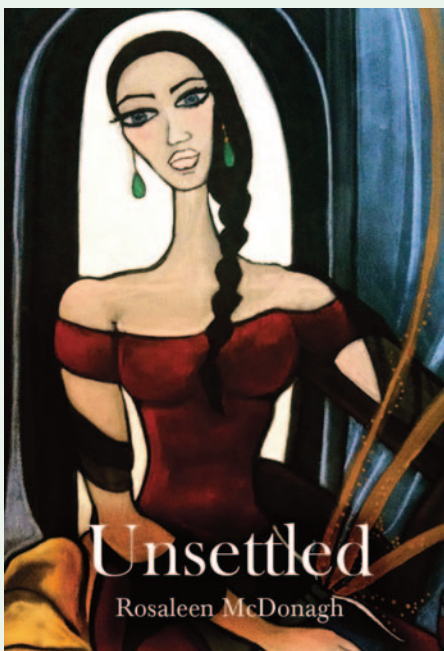
In the United States these companies are private, but in the rest of the world complicated systems of financing of film and television, and increasingly of alternative streaming services, usually feature a healthy amount of government funding. This funding in many cases helps account for more progressive and socially imbricated films and programmes.

So this battle for the soul of popular media is actually between neoliberal, utterly profit-driven conglomerates and

national governments and individual creators who are attempting to retain some shred of their own culture and potentially to address problems endemic to them.

More and more, though, the power of the American streamers is forcing national films and television series to dilute their content in order to also reach a global audience, which they now also increasingly need in order to compete.

These limitations aside, Netflix and the other American streamers following in their wake are adept at outmanoeuvring local producers and governments, with examples abounding in Britain, Italy, Australia, and Spain.



### Unsettled

This month Connolly Books is delighted to announce the launch of Rosaleen McDonagh's new book, *Unsettled*, published by Skein Press, at 6 p.m. on 30 September in Connolly Books, Dublin.

*Unsettled*, Dr Rosaleen McDonagh's first book, is a collection of short essays, poems and vignettes from her life as a Traveller and disabled woman. While the topics covered are hard-hitting and include difficult issues, such as the experience of discrimination, ableism, racism, and abuse, the book is also filled with moments of love for her family, of resistance and celebration, often in defiance of a world and society that would sideline her.

There are proud celebrations of her heritage in this work alongside nuanced discussion on the loss of connection or displacement from it. This sense of displacement is one that Rosaleen has had to contend with on multiple fronts, each aspect of her identity coming into conflict with another. She explores, head on, what intersectionality means in a personal way. She is both the sum of all these experiences and identities and so much more; she is not a person to be easily defined, and has no desire to be.



■ Available in Connolly Books and on line at [connollybooks.org](http://connollybooks.org), priced at €12.95. The book has also been selected for this month's Kathleen Lynn Book Club.



More and more, though, the power of the American streamers is forcing national films and television series to dilute their content in order to also reach a global audience, which they now also increasingly need in order to compete.

In Britain, where the steamers Britbox (a combination of the programming of British public and private channels) and BFI Player attempt to counter this influence, “the Red Devil from Los Gatos”—as Netflix is sometimes described on the Continent—early in its run employed in Britain nine hundred engineers, a huge number and comparatively, in terms of Europe, “more than any channel in France can mobilise.” British regulators are also incensed about a Netflix button on the standard remote control of any television, so that viewers can bypass British public television and go right to streaming.

In Italy the government is watching its industry being outflanked, thanks to its extremely generous 30 per cent tax rebate for streaming service shooting, which results in some temporary job creation but no sharing of residuals. The Italian pay-on-demand channel Chili is now giving Apple iTunes a run for its money in Italy, but partially because it has cash from the American rivals Warner Brothers, Fox, and Disney, which are attempting to outflank Apple.

### **Government attempts to stem the tide**

Governments and national film and television industries are beginning to realise that their own films and series will be swept aside if this onslaught continues unabated. In Australia there is now an attempt to address

an imbalance where the local streamer Stan is required to give over half its time to Australian programming, but the foreign global streamers are under no such restriction. One proposal would require that any streamer with more than 500,000 subscribers invest 20 per cent of its profits in the Australian film and television industry.

South Korea, the Asian leader in television series, in attempting to withstand a Netflix investment of \$500 million in the industry, wants to charge the other streamers and Netflix—which plans on extensive production in the country, as it has already leased two studios near Seoul—“network fees,” so that they contribute to supporting local television.

France has perhaps the most extensive system of protection but still seems stuck in the cinema model only, as none of its films were released to streamers during the year-long lockdown and now have come barrelling into cinemas at the same time as new restrictions, including a fifty-person-per-screen limit.

France has the largest investment requirement and is now negotiating with Netflix, asking for 25 per cent of its French income to be reinvested in French production, along with the Netflix one-time down-payment being replaced by rights-sharing. In return the country would relax its three-year restriction of a Netflix film in cinemas and allow Netflix

films to play on television in one year.

The streamers, and their attack on the last vestiges of social responsibility and media sovereignty, are the ultimate expression of the neoliberal ethos, globally plundering the world, with weakened governments now barely able to react. The answer, as the effect of the neoliberal system—which is endless and increasing poverty and precariousness—becomes more apparent, is a new organisation of civil, social and governmental society in which the natural tendency of creators, supported by governments and thus freed from the dreadful imperative of the profit motive, can begin to truly look around them and put on display the ravages of this system.

In the end, telling the truth will be the most effective counter to global corporate palliatives to power that, in the ever-worsening situation that threatens us all, still go under the misnomer “entertainment.” ★

\*See Dennis Broe, *Diary of a Digital Plague Year: Coronavirus, Serial TV and the Rise of the Streaming Services* (Pathmark Press, 2021).

Dennis Broe, who has taught television studies at the Sorbonne (University of Paris), is the author of *Maverick, or How the West Was Lost* (2015) and *Birth of the Binge: Serial TV and the End of Leisure* (2019).

## Kathleen Lynn Book Club

The Kathleen Lynn Women’s Book Club meets in Connolly Books, East Essex Street, Dublin, on the last Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. The aim is to highlight women’s voices through their literary works; this runs the gamut from political theory, women’s liberation and feminist politics to memoirs and novels, modern texts addressing the problems women face today.

All levels of experience and knowledge are welcome, and we’ll have copies of sections of the selected book to read for anyone who doesn’t have the funds to purchase. Just email [connollybooksdublin@gmail.com](mailto:connollybooksdublin@gmail.com) to book a place and we can send you extracts in advance. ★

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## An incremental shift in organising

NICOLA LAWLOR



against the worst ravages and exploitation of employers and bosses. It is workers coming together to have a collective voice at work to defend and, where possible, improve working conditions.

In many ways this simplicity, or clarity if you'd prefer, was eroded through the regulation and institutionalising of conflict at work. Increased legislation to control unions and increased processes and procedures to control conflict or disputes, coupled with government-led "social partnership," have diluted and weakened our trade union movement organisationally and its focus and aspiration.

We often hear the paraphrased quotation from Marx about how unions are schools of socialism. And maybe they were when he wrote this, but it is more accurate now to say that unions have the *potential* to be schools of socialism if they act in a particular way.

**A**S COMMUNISTS we understand the importance of the trade union movement. It is, first and foremost, simply the work-place or industrial collective organisation of the working class. Its most important function is as a working-class defence

Otherwise they actually tend to reinforce or mimic "consumer" behaviour and ideology and therefore are closer to schools of capitalism than of socialism.

What Marx meant was that when workers are organised at work and are in conflict with their employer we learn about labour and capital: we learn about capital's efforts to increase its profits at our expense, we learn about the power that we have as workers when we act together, and, if the state intervenes (as it often did and does on the side of the employer) we learn about the class nature of the state and the arms of the state. This is a basic schooling in the struggle for socialism.

However, when conflict at work is outsourced to industrial relations machinery, and the government is presented as a neutral player, or possibly an ally, the accuracy of Marx's observation must surely be challenged.

Since the great financial crisis of 2008 and in Ireland the collapse of "social partnership" we are seeing an incremental, rather than monumental, shift by workers towards organising, unionising, and strengthening our collective. There are examples among most unions and workers in entirely new sectors of the economy building



## Rayner O'Connor

MICHAEL HEALY

**R**AYNER O'CONNOR LYSAGHT, who regularly attended events organised in Connolly Books, passed away on 2 July 2021 in Beaumont Hospital, Dublin, after a prolonged illness. His funeral took place at Glasnevin crematorium, the coffin draped with the Starry Plough flag. Because of illness, Aine, his wife of forty-eight years, could not attend the funeral.

Rayner was born into an affluent family in Cardiff on 30 January 1941. He was the eldest



Since the great financial crisis of 2008 and in Ireland the collapse of “social partnership” we are seeing an incremental, rather than monumental, shift by workers towards organising, unionising, and strengthening our collective.

their own collective space and structures. There are also now renters collectively organising in CATU. This is all positive incremental change.

But we, as communists in the movement, have to ask a number of crucial questions:

- Are activists organised well enough within unions to stand for positions to strengthen this incremental move?
- Are activists organised within unions so that experiences can be shared, lessons learnt, and confidence gained?
- Is training sufficiently structurally integrated in our activities?
- Do union officials do enough to support members who want to organise?
- Are sufficient resources invested in organising from within union budgets?
- What role can the TULF play to enhance this debate among trade union activists and structures?

The trade union movement is never by definition “good” or “bad”: it is broadly reflective of its membership. But if members and workers become more structurally organised and focused, unions can, will be and are incrementally shifting; and who knows but one day this may revive Marx’s adage about schools of socialism. One day the incremental may become monumental. ★



**The Trade Union Left Forum** was formed in 2012 on an all Ireland basis, by a number of union activists from both public-sector and private-sector unions. They believed that trade unionists needed a space, both physical and on line, in which to debate the burning issues of the day.

The Trade Union Left Forum aims to stimulate class-based critical debate within the trade union movement and to foster trade union and community organising for a meaningful transformation of Ireland towards socialism.

The TULF uses its web site and social media to encourage critical thinking on trade union, community and workers’ issues as well as hosting meetings where activists can come together for honest and comradely discussion.

So far a number of successful forums and events have been held, and discussion documents have also been produced and distributed.

We oppose anti Union legislation, social partnership & EU membership. Our demands

- ★ Universal Public Housing
- ★ All Ireland universal public health
- ★ End Precarious work
- ★ Abolish 1990 Industrial Relations Act
- ★ Right to Union recognition
- ★ Right to Union Access
- ★ Full Collective Bargaining Rights.
- ★ Immunity from prosecution during a dispute so long as the action is not in itself illegal.

We encourage all workers to join a trade union and to campaign to have the 1990 industrial relations act abolished in the South & the equivalent anti worker legislation in the North. Workers should lobby within your union to adopt this as policy. Abolishing anti-union legislation will tip the balance of power away from employers in favour of workers. It will empower workers and give them the ability to fight for much more than a pay rise.

We call on people to vote for left wing candidates in elections North & south. We are separate to political groupings, our role is to simulate the trade union movement and build it back into the force that it once was. Trade unions must become radical or they will become redundant

To get involved, email [tuleft@gmail.com](mailto:tuleft@gmail.com) and you will then receive e-mail notifications of events. We also encourage activists from the community and trade union movements to submit articles to us for publication on our web site: <http://www.tuleftforum.com/>

## Rayner Lysaght (1941–2021)

son of Arthur Lysaght, a surgeon, and Jacqueline, leader of the Conservative Party in South Wales.

While a student in Trinity College, Dublin, along with Seán Edwards (CPI), Rayner became interested in left-wing politics. He graduated in 1964 with honours in modern history and political science.

He became a member of the left-wing National Progressive Democrats and worked in Noël Browne’s re-election campaign in 1961, then joined the Labour Party in 1965 after Noël Browne

had done so.

In May 1967 he left Dublin for London, where he became involved with the Irish Workers’ Group, a decision that would change his life for ever. The membership of the IWG included such figures as Eamonn McCann, Phil Flynn, and Máirín Keegan, who introduced Rayner to her sister Áine, whom he married in 1973.

It is worth noting that as secretary of the IWG he played a major role in dissolving the group. Subsequently, in 1972, he founded the Revolutionary

Marxist Group, the Irish section of the Fourth International.

However, it is not for his sixty years of political activism that Rayner Lysaght will for ever be remembered but as the author of *The Irish Republic*, published in 1970 and regarded as an important Marxist work, and *The Story of the Limerick Soviet* (1979).

Like the late Tom Redmond, Rayner enjoyed the company of younger activists and, in the same way as Tom, inspired them in demanding equity for the working class. ★

# IMPERIALISM



## Complex struggle over simplified characters

Already the big intellectual guns of US imperialism—powerful professors and leading editorial writers—are being hauled out to tell us that there will not be a “new cold war” with China.

PAT DELANEY

SOMEONE SHOULD have told the lackeys that their masters have actually increased the pace of the military, economic and ideological war with People’s China while they were busy pumping out their propaganda.

Military provocations are one part of the new cold war with China: antics in the South China Sea and a ramping up of the “Quad Alliance” of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States. All this and much more are just rather clumsy and obvious attempts to trap China in a military-spending spiral—a ruse used against the USSR in the first cold war. After all, who was it that spent nearly \$1 billion on their military while nearly 12 per cent of their population continue to live in poverty? Not the country that announced the complete eradication of extreme poverty back in February, the result of seventy years of struggle since the Chinese Revolution in 1949.

And the economic and trade war against the People’s Republic continues full blast as well. Up to now, sixty-one countries have “agreed to” (been strongarmed into) dropping the Chinese tech giant Huawei as their preferred 5G supplier. In addition to successfully cutting off Huawei from its semiconductor suppliers. And attempting to extradite the chief financial officer of Huawei, Meng Wanzhou, from Canada on charges of “bank and wire fraud”!

And these are just a few examples.

## Solidarity with Nicaragua

Paper given by Philip Kelly, Greater Belfast Branch, CPI

Today I joined comrades from around Latin America and Europe in a meeting with the Foreign Ministry of Nicaragua. Below is the text of my contribution.

Brothers and sisters, comrades of the Sandinista Revolution,

I speak to you today from Ireland. Separated by an ocean but linked by the same historic struggle, I humbly apologise that I cannot address you in Spanish or one of the many languages

protected in your country. Another shameful legacy of empire is that I, like many Irish citizens, cannot speak my native language.

But I address you knowing we share the same language of struggle, that our voices join in a united revolutionary language that confidently proclaims We will win.

My friends, you know only too well that it is difficult to be free. To be a sovereign independent nation in this world is to place yourself in the crosshairs of the US empire. To choose the path of freedom you make yourself an enemy of the imperialist powers.

Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela are no-one’s “back yard”: they are the front line of a global struggle, a struggle that humanity must win.

The Irish people know what it is to stand against an empire. Our history and our people are shaped by this struggle. Ireland remains scarred by the Great Hunger, when the British government used hunger as a weapon against the Irish people, a policy to starve the native people into the grave or onto migrant ships.

Let me be clear: sanctions and blockades are crimes. They are murderous acts of war. Using hunger as



The main point of this tempest in a teacup is to extend the ideological war against China beyond the constant bombardment of anti-China news and anti-China social media to Irish social reality.

After all, US imperialism has long practice in conducting boycotts and embargoes against countries that “threaten” it with models of real democracy (i.e. socialism) and not the phoney stuff it peddles.

Viva Cuba!

On the ideological front there is also no let-up. The phoney “human rights campaign” drummed up by the far-right Christian fundamentalist Adrian Zenz and backed by a coalition of the United States, the EU, NATO, the arms industry and a plethora of right-wing and militarist think tanks continues unabated. The Hong Kong “freedom” movement sideshow (organised and financed by the United States) also continues its run.

As for social media—well, just turn off your phone if you have a low tolerance for lies and hypocrisy, because this hybrid war allows no rational discussion of China in imperialist-controlled spaces.

In fact these psy-ops even extend to Ireland. Take the Leaving Certificate examination. An exam in Chinese was introduced a few years ago, when capitalism still thought it was useful for future entrepreneurs to learn a bit of Chinese. This was also about the time when a few universities here set up “Confucius Institutes” to teach Chinese.

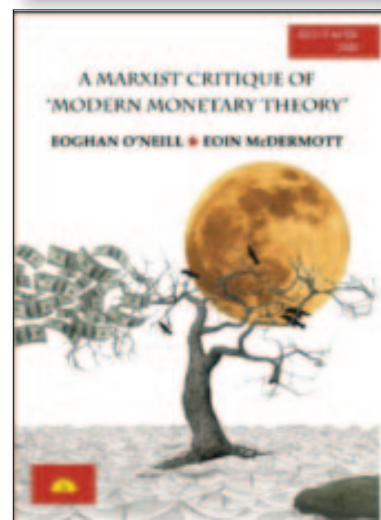
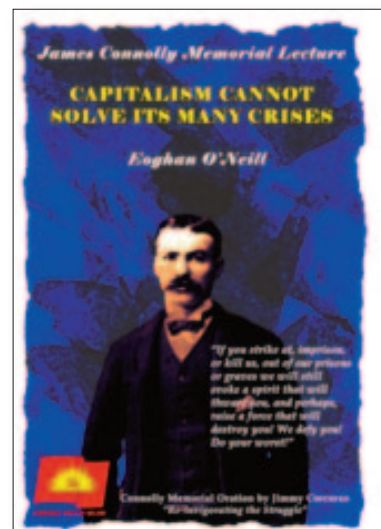
Now the universities and those behind the exam are being accused of being tools of the Chinese government! The issue? It seems the course designed

and examined by the Department of Education makes use of the simplified Chinese characters introduced in the People’s Republic of China in order to eliminate illiteracy in a country where an estimated 85–90 per cent of the population were unable to read at the beginning of the twentieth century. (It was a success, by the way, and has been called “the greatest educational effort in human history”!)

The simplified characters are used in the People’s Republic (population 1.4 billion) as well as by Chinese populations in Malaysia and Singapore. Protesters claim that the use of simplified characters discriminates against those children with roots in Taiwan or Hong Kong (which still use the so-called traditional characters), who are not familiar with the simplified characters.

The main point of this tempest in a teacup is to extend the ideological war against China beyond the constant bombardment of anti-China news and anti-China social media to Irish social reality. And the ultimate goal is to cut off any errant independent thought in regard to the People’s Republic of China and ensure that the Irish people are marching in step to the imperialists’ anti-Chinese tune.

We who march to a different drummer will of course continue to obtain our info from untainted anti-imperialist sources and to form our own independent opinions on the People’s Republic of China. ★



**Two books on political economy from the Communist Party of Ireland available at [www.connollybooks.org](http://www.connollybooks.org)**

a weapon of regime change is not a foreign policy tool, it is a *crime*. Depriving sovereign nations of access to medicines or medical supplies is not a foreign policy tactic, it is a *crime*.

But empire at its dark heart is a crime against humanity.

Your comrades here in Ireland, in Europe, are duty-bound to use truth to combat the lies of imperialism, which are employed to justify the aggression of sanctions. Too many, and indeed those who imagine themselves “leftists” in Europe, view Nicaragua through the fog of smears, lies, and propaganda.

So we need clarity. So let us speak clearly for those who stand in that mythical “middle ground,” the delusional “no man’s land” in this struggle.

*You are a Sandinista or you are a Somozist.*

*You are a Sandinista or you are a Contra.*

*You are a Sandinista or you are an imperialist.*

As Che said, the “great dividing blow” is struck, humanity faces a stark choice: stand with the oppressor, or stand with the common people.

My comrades and I in Ireland stand with humanity, we stand with the Sandinistas.

The Sandinista Revolution offers hope to the world. A revolution forged by dreamers, those who in the darkest, coldest night of the Somoza dictatorship could still dream that another world was possible. Who, through revolution and in government, every day turn those

dreams into a new concrete reality, to the benefit of the Nicaraguan people.

In all areas—housing, health, education, women’s rights, indigenous rights, and defence of the environment and natural world—you prove that a better world is possible.

This new reality that is created under the Red and Black banner of the FSLN will be defended—defended not just in Nicaragua but by all across the world who refuse to surrender their dreams of a better tomorrow. As Che said, “I will always dream and will never stop until I am dead.”

Your struggle is our struggle.

Until forever we will proudly proclaim ourselves comrades of the Sandinistas, shoulder to shoulder on the barricades in this fight for a better world for all. ★



## Caravaggio and the Reformation

JENNY FARRELL

Born 450 years ago, on 29 September 1571, Caravaggio lived during the Counter-Reformation. The art form of that time, with a specific political function, was the Baroque.

THE DEVELOPMENT of the new middle class—the bourgeoisie—brought with it the dawn of the modern, capitalist era. The artistic expression of this new era of middle-class confidence was the Renaissance. The Reformation was its religious expression.

This new class needed to legitimise its claim to political power at all levels. Protestantism replaced the strongly hierarchical feudal Church with one that did away with the middlemen structures. This reflected the new thinking that challenged the established political hierarchy and aspired, theoretically at least, to political power for all.

The Reformation had forced Catholicism to retreat in many parts of Europe. However, outside Britain no successful bourgeois revolution consolidated the growing economic power of the middle class that would have eliminated feudalism. Instead feudal absolutism emerged. The nobility remained the ruling class, although



increasingly capitalist forms began to shape economic life.

The Counter-Reformation was the mainly political and military actions of Catholicism, between 1555 and 1648, aiming to reverse the conditions created by the Reformation in central Europe. Its leading force was the Jesuits. The Counter-Reformation led to the resurgence of Catholicism, to significant shifts in political power in Europe, and to the reclamation of Austria, Bohemia and Poland for Catholicism.

The Counter-Reformation and the Baroque went hand in hand. If the Renaissance had been a violent time, the Counter-Reformation was even more so.

▲ St Nicolas' Church, Prague: statues of clergy stabbing rebellious peasants/

The arts reflected the disparate character of this age. However, an unprecedented class differentiation in art developed. In addition to the ruling culture of the nobility, bourgeois-democratic and upper middle-class forms of culture evolved. While the interests of the upper middle class, associated with the nobility, are reflected in the Baroque, democratic tendencies were expressed in realist works of art.

In 1591 a young painter from northern Italy came to Rome. His name was Michelangelo Merisi, but he took the name Caravaggio from his birthplace.

## Climate destruction will not be challe



JOE HURLEY

OVER THE past few weeks farmers were given the opportunity to have their say in a full, nationwide consultation process concerning the recent CAP agreement.

During this process a few issues cropped up. These were:

**1** During the on-line meetings farmers felt that their various questions concerning their future under the new CAP agreement were not properly addressed by the

government representatives and agricultural organisations present.

**2** Another problem was that questions had to be submitted more than a week before the meeting. This was frustrating for the farmers, as, on the day, concerns were not discussed.

**3** The deadline for submissions concerning the CAP agreement has been extended by two weeks, as the general reaction among the agri-community has been very slow. It is a good and rare opportunity to have

Caravaggio revolutionised art in Europe. His sense of reality, his this-worldly sensuality, re-established and further developed the realism of the early Renaissance.



Caravaggio revolutionised art in Europe. His sense of reality, his this-worldly sensuality, re-established and further developed the realism of the early Renaissance.

Caravaggio's painting *St Matthew and the Angel* (1602) above was intended for the main altar of the Cappella Contarelli in San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. It is a picture that famously exists in two versions.

In this first painting, St Matthew is dressed in short workman's clothes, leaving his arms and legs bare. His legs are crossed, and his left foot almost breaks through the painting at the point where a priest would hold up the host at Mass. To make matters worse, Matthew is flat-footed, with dirt under



his toenails.

He seems to have difficulty writing, his hands unused to holding the quill, as he peers at the pages; even his writing appears too big. The angel helps him to write the Gospel. The viewer looks on the scene from above.

The clergy rejected Caravaggio's interpretation of the saint as an illiterate peasant and objected to the intimate relationship between the apostle and the angel holding his hand. He had to paint a second picture. Above.

This is less realistic. Matthew is biblically dressed and towers above the viewer. The angel hovers over him, there is no physical contact, and Matthew writes by himself.

Caravaggio's sense of realism stood in the way of painting idealised forms. His real-life models came from among

the ordinary people; these were the people who mattered, who life was all about, as far as Caravaggio was concerned.

Caravaggio worked mainly for the Roman clergy. Consequently, most of his works have a religious theme, yet they are profoundly humanist. This painter rejected the highly ornamental, empty and often triumphalist Baroque manner. He painted everyday reality, the ordinary people he encountered on the streets of Rome, including the most deprived: beggars, prostitutes, criminals. Even his religious paintings are always linked to the violence and deprivation Caravaggio saw all around him. He was unwilling to look the other way.

This is the life we encounter on Caravaggio's canvases; this is his time that he could not escape from. Life around him was full of pain, and Caravaggio's insistence on realism emphasises this; and for that reason he cannot be counted as a Baroque painter. The realists of the following centuries could justifiably refer to him.

When Caravaggio killed a man in a quarrel on 28 May 1606 he was forced to flee Rome, and he spent the rest of his life on the run, spending time in Naples, Malta, Messina, and Palermo, leaving behind masterpieces that lastingly influenced seventeenth-century European art.

Caravaggio died in exile, soon after arriving in Porto Ercole, on 18 or 19 July 1610, aged only thirty-eight, and was buried in an unmarked grave. ★

## nged while billions are to be made

their say, and they should take the chance presented.

The winners in the CAP agreement are small and medium farmers who farm in an environmentally responsible way. The losers will be larger farmers, armchair farmers, multimillionaires and large corporations that previously had bought up land to avail of large grants.

The large suckler herds will face both the reduction in grants and the cull in beef herds. The large dairy concerns will be affected by the drastic cut in nitrate use.

Now, while this country plans nothing but cuts, Brazil plans to expand its cattle numbers to a massive 24 million head by 2030. The latest surge has come at a massive cost to the environment. Recent deforestation levels are a calamity; in 2020 the destruction of the Amazon hit a twelve-year record, with an area of a combined size of Cos. Mayo and Galway being completely destroyed to create more cattle ranches and farms.

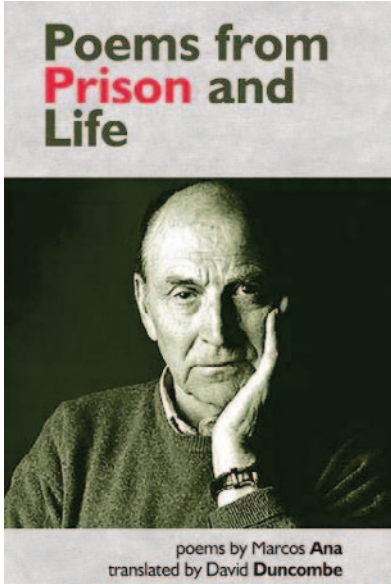
Reducing the Irish beef herd will not solve the global climate crisis, considering that South America and Asia

are producing with no heed of any restrictions, and when you have massive corporations avoiding penalties by buying credits from less-polluting companies. This, taken together with the destruction of the rainforests, means that you have the eradication of the Amazonian indigenous people. The lack of TB and brucellosis testing is a serious health hazard to us all. And the problem of climate change will not be solved while there are billions in profit to be made, and the destruction of our world becomes a sad fact of life. ★



## A poet who fell foul of Franco

GABRIEL ROSENSTOCK



*Poems from Prison and Life* by the Spanish communist poet Marcos Ana (1920–2016), translated by David Duncombe and published by Smokestack Books, fills one with hope and despair. Hope comes from the motto found in the author’s note to the book: To live for others is the best way of living for oneself.

This wonderful sentiment is inspiring and gives all of us, whatever our political or

spiritual values may be, some cause for hope. As we read on, however, gloom sets in: “These poems were written in prison, in the depth of night, by the poor light of a peculiar lamp, assembled from an old inkwell, a little alcohol that I smuggled from the sick bay and a wick plaited from the lace of an espadrille . . .”

Ana was Spain’s longest-serving political prisoner, wrongly convicted, he claimed, for the murder of a priest, a postman, and a farmer.

Marcos Ana makes no great claims for his poetry but prays that his poems might “open a path of fire and rebellion in the hearts and minds of the new generation . . .”

Marcos spent twenty-three years in Franco’s prisons. *Poemas de la Prisión y la Vida* was published when the author was ninety-one. The Irish-Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara had his poems with him when he was executed by the Bolivian army.

Here is an Irish version of Ana’s poem “Autobiografía,” followed by the original. It’s short enough to make an effective postcard or poster-poem:

### Dírbeathaisnéis

Is uafásach é an peaca atá déanta agam:  
Theastaigh uaim croí an duine a líonadh le réaltaí.  
Dá dheasca sin, ar feadh seacht ngeimhreadh déag  
anseo laistiar de na barraí  
chailleas-sa earrach i ndiaidh earraigh.  
Im’ chime dom ó laethanta m’óige ar aghaidh  
agus daortha chun báis,  
loinnir mo chuid súl ag meath  
in aghaidh na gcloch.  
Ach níl rian dorcha ar bith  
de scáil ardaingéal an díoltais i m’fhéitheoga:  
níl ach scairt amháin—an Spáinn—  
ó arraing mo bhrianglóidí . . .

### Autobiografía

Mi pecado es terrible;  
quise llenar de estrellas  
el corazón del hombre.  
Por eso aquí entre rejas,  
en diecinueve inviernos  
perdí mis primaveras.  
Preso desde mi infancia  
ya muerte mi condena,  
mis ojos van secando  
su luz contra las piedras.  
Mas no hay sombra de arcángel  
vengador en mis venas:  
España es sólo el grito  
de mi dolor que sueña.

■ Gabriel Rosenstock is a bilingual poet, tankaist, haikuist, playwright, translator, novelist, short-story writer, essayist, and children’s author.

Blog: <https://roghaghabriel.blogspot.com/>.

Web site: [www.rosenstockandrosenstock.com/](http://www.rosenstockandrosenstock.com/).

His latest bilingual volume of poems is *Conversations with Li He: Comhrá le Li He* ([tinyurl.com/cscha9w](http://tinyurl.com/cscha9w)). ★

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