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The savagery of capitalism

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The failure of unionism

Another year has passed, and Brexit, like the pandemic, appears to be with us for ever.

Eugene McCartan reports

The Government, in the person of the minister for foreign affairs, Simon Coveney, continues to speak and act as if the Southern establishment have real or significant influence in the negotiations between the European Union and the British government on the terms and conditions of the divorce settlement between the two.

The stumbling-block would appear to be the role of the EU Court of Justice as the final arbiter on EU law and regulations. Coveney continues to present himself as a “player” on the chessboard of diplomacy, speaking as if

his words mean something or have an impact. He gave a relatively positive assessment of critical talks between the two sides, led by Britain’s “Brexit” minister, David Frost, and the vice-president of the EU Commission, Maroš Šefčovič .

In all these international trade agreements there are quasi-courts of international arbitration as a central part of the agreements for settling disputes. But they are not courts—such as the District Court or the High Court that we know—but are more like the Special Criminal Court, or the old “Diplock” courts, where many appeared on trumped-up charges.

These “international courts of arbitration” are strictly for arbitrating between states and big monopoly corporations. The imperialist countries and blocs, such as the the United States, the European Union and Britain, use them to bully and to leverage against small, economically weaker countries.

The British don’t want the ECJ as the final arbiter on matters with the EU, because they know that, for a change, the cards are stacked against them. The EU wants the ECJ to be the final arbiter, because it’s the ace in their hand.

Any weakening of the ECJ would be a significant weakening of the evolving federalist structures of the EU and would weaken the power of European monopoly capitalism. The ECJ is a cornerstone of this plan, the means of imposing EU directives and treaties. It protects the “interests of the market.”

These negotiations will conclude

INDIA A victory against fascism

SAJEEV KUMAR

ONE OF THE largest and longest mass mobilisations the world has ever seen has forced the right-wing government of the Indian People’s Party (BJP) to repeal the three agriculture laws, and forced the prime minister, Narendra Modi, to apologise to the nation.

It is evident that the apology is only a political expedient, as elections are coming up in a few states. In fact Modi has not apologised for a lot of things: for calling the farmers anti-nationals,

terrorists and traitors and for the death of more than seven hundred farmers during the protest, including four farmers and a journalist massacred when a minister’s son’s car ran over a group of peaceful protesters.

So what does this victory mean for the working class in India and people all over the world involved in class struggle?

Noam Chomsky wrote that “the Indian farmers’ struggle is a beacon of light for the world in dark times.” This victory has shown that fascism, though monstrous, can be brought to its knees by organised, united and disciplined struggle.

It can be an encouragement to people around the world who fight against “austerity” (Europe), indigenous people who fight for their habitat against big companies that displace them to loot their resources (Latin America), people who fight against the super-exploitation of labour (Asia), and those who fight for environmental conservation against the capitalist exploitation of nature. The victory of the

protest has emphasised the necessity of organisations and united struggles.

The farmers are not ending the struggle—for two reasons. Firstly, they have no faith in the prime minister until the laws are actually repealed in the parliament and, secondly, because the repeal of the laws is only one of their demands. Their other demands are ensuring minimum support price (MSP) for their produce; scrapping the Electricity Amendment Act, which cuts the subsidy to farmers for electricity they use for agriculture, which will drastically increase their input costs; withdrawing the reform of forty-four labour laws to four labour codes, which will take away the hard-won rights of industrial workers; and stopping the privatisation of government assets.

Modi came to power promising development, 20 million employment every year, and corruption-free government. What he produced was a fall in GDP after demonetisation, 45-year record unemployment, and corruption.

The farmers’ protests brought about

with a deal, regardless of the pretended input from Coveney or this bankrupt Government. They are mere pawns and useful fools for imperialism to practise on. The British continue to threaten to trigger article 16 of the Northern Ireland Protocol, on the grounds of defending the territorial integrity of the “UK.” It’s simply all about what will be the “special relationship” that Britain has with the EU.

Britain wants maximum access to the EU market, with as few restrictions as possible, while the EU wants a reciprocal arrangement but can’t appear to let the British go unpunished for Brexit, which has destabilised the whole imperial bloc. Nobody is going to get out of the EU jail scot-free and unpunished: they have to make an example to the other imprisoned nations and peoples.

Meanwhile unionism, and in particular the DUP, stumbles around under the burden of its old illusion: that it actually has influence in London, that its opinions matter, or that it is part of the greater “British nation.”

The DUP started out demanding that the whole protocol be scrapped. They dumped Foster, then elected Potts as a strong man to get the protocol scrapped; he was quickly ousted by Donaldson to get the job done, but in fact he was put in to stop the whole DUP imploding as an electoral machine.

Donaldson threatened to pull out of the Northern Executive and bring the institutions down by the end of November. November has passed, and

the DUP are still working the institutions. The Executive and Assembly will cease in effect anyway in March, and new elections will take place in May, as scheduled.

Donaldson’s position is reduced to getting rid of the “Irish Sea border.”

Donaldson’s DUP, like the rest of unionism, are mere bystanders, reading the papers like everyone else to see what may or may not be happening in the continuing saga that is the British-EU divorce settlement. He has now reduced the DUP’s position to “The sea border must go” rather than the protocol itself. He is attempting to position unionism as having secured something in relation to the outcome of the talks, of having influence.

It is now agreed by both the British and the EU that there should be minimum checks on goods crossing to the North of Ireland through British ports. So, out of significant defeat for unionism, the DUP wants to enter the forthcoming election with a pretend victory under its belt and the protocol scalp secured. Was it ever otherwise, with unionism living off the scraps of imperialism and feeding its supporters illusions of superiority.

The Orange Order opened up its doors to get people to sign its petition calling for the scrapping of the protocol. It was first put up on line, but very few signed it, bringing it down to the grass roots, where people are more susceptible to arm-twisting and bullying—the hallmarks of the Orange Order.

The leader of the Progressive

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Unionist Party, Billy Hutchinson, said at their recent conference that they could no longer support the Belfast Agreement if the protocol remains. A few weeks later one of the chief spokespersons for the PUP, John Kelly, was reduced to calling for the removal of the “Irish Sea border,” while the leader of Traditional Unionist Voice, Jim Alister, has been left on his own, swinging in the breeze, with his legal challenge to the protocol.

The campaign by the “Loyalist Community Council,” a front for loyalist paramilitaries, petered out, reduced to burning a few buses and a demonstration by a couple of hundred paramilitaries and supporters being addressed by one of the leaders standing on a wheelie-bin.

Unionist calls and campaigns against the protocol have failed to deliver, while those influenced by unionism in the past must look on in dismay and wait until May to pass their verdict, when the most likely beneficiaries will be the Alliance Party.

Sinn Féin meanwhile continues to appeal to its gallant allies abroad, in the form of EU and US imperialism, to back its position. The Irish Government whistles in the dark outside the negotiating room, responding to whatever whispers may leak from under the door.

History keeps repeating itself. Imperialism doesn’t have friends, only interests. And it’s getting plenty of practice on the fools of Irish nationalism and unionism. ★

the consolidation of a worker-peasant alliance against neoliberal policies, which had increased wealth for a few and caused misery for the many.

Lenin wrote that “fascism is capitalism in decay.” Capitalism, which has an innate tendency to get into crisis, needs to subject the working class to more exploitation in order to come out of crisis. Capitalism needs brute force to suppress the resistance of workers when they are subjected to more and more exploitation.

That force is provided by the fascists, such as Modi and Bolsonaro, who have no respect for democratic values or human rights.

When the working class in their united struggle fail to fight the reactionary measures of the bourgeoisie in the preliminary stage it will lead to victory for fascism.

But fascism, though brutal, is unstable, because of eroding support from the masses, thanks to its anti-people policies; and in regaining the people’s support it indulges in igniting nationalist feelings. It attracts working

people by rhetoric and demagoguery but eventually exposes its class basis. As Mussolini himself testified, “fascism is the complete merger of the state and the corporate.” That is where strong organisation, unified struggle and the leading role of the vanguard party is of great importance.

In India the left parties are in the forefront in creating a worker-peasant alliance. That is the reason why severe attacks are unleashed by the lumpen elements of BJP against communists all over India and draconian laws are used to arrest civil rights activists.

The Indian farmers’ protest has shown that unjust laws passed in the parliament can be undone on the streets. Let the spirit of resistance spread across the world for democracy and against authoritarianism!

A two-day worker-peasant strike is planned by the central trade unions and left parties for February 2022.

The victory is a battle that is won, but the war demands a protracted fight, and the peasants are showing the way. Long live worker-peasant unity! ★



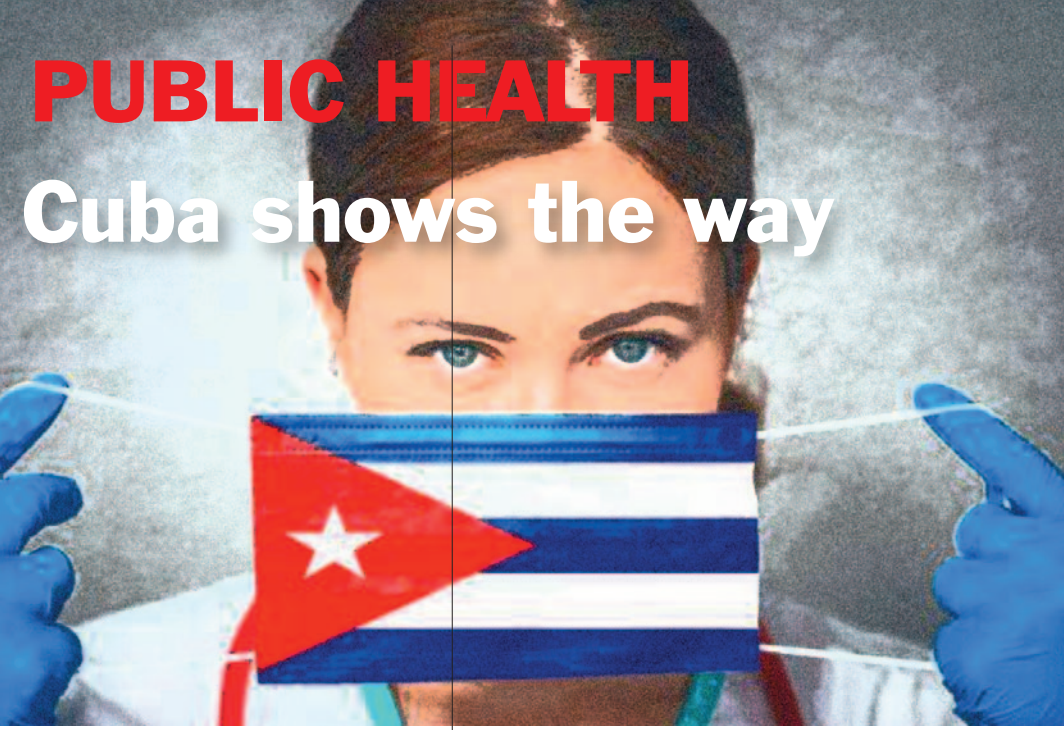
Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;
Teach him, that states of native strength possess,
Tho’ very poor, may still be very blest;
That trade’s proud empire hastes to swift decay,
As ocean sweeps the labour’d mole away;
While self-dependent power can time defy,
As rocks resist the billows and the sky.

Oliver Goldsmith,
The Deserted Village (1770)



PUBLIC HEALTH

Cuba shows the way



JIMMY DORAN

WE HAVE TWO health services in Ireland, and both are on the verge of collapse. Since covid exposed their existing inadequacies, very little capacity has been added to either service in preparation for the next wave. We should have been building and training staff for several new hospitals. In fact bed numbers have been slashed in the last twenty years.

In 2000, when the population in the South was under 4 million, we had 23,000 hospital beds; today, with a

population of 5 million, we have only 14,500. Instead of improving and expanding the system they cut services, postponing elective procedures, appointments, operations and consultations to deal with the pandemic, both here and in the North. Despite this drastic action, both health services are still in daily danger of being overwhelmed. Only the heroic efforts of our exhausted health workers have kept these two sinking ships afloat. This cannot continue indefinitely. Meanwhile the waiting-lists grow as procedures are postponed.

The cost of the new children’s hospital spirals on the money carousel, for developer, banker, politician, and profiteer. It is boom time for private hospitals, which are expanding, now flush with public money thanks to the extortionate sums paid to them by the state for their temporary use by the public service during peaks of covid.

These hospitals should be seen for what they are: they are but leeches on society, making millions for their wealthy owners on the back of an underfunded public health service. At the start of the pandemic, when the extortionate rates demanded by these private hospitals became known, it should have been exposed. They should have been nationalised for the treacherous extortion they foisted on the people of Ireland at the height of the pandemic.

Wishful thinking! Here in “the best small country in the world to do business in,” we reward greed. Millions continue to be handed over daily to the wealthiest elite in fees in the middle of the deadliest pandemic in over a hundred years. There should be no place for these bloodsucking parasites to hide.

The crisis continues with the establishment narrative that Sláintecare, along with the NHS in the North, is the silver bullet, the future for health services in their vision of a reunified Ireland. This is the establishment’s solution.

Great as the NHS was at one time,

Nuclear energy is not “clean”



CLOVER CARROLL

THE LEADERS OF the world gathered their propaganda machine last month to discuss what lies to tell the working class about how they will combat climate change.

Britain was among those at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (nicknamed COP26) in October and November. With a history

of polluting industry as well as coal and iron mining, it has also invested in “clean” nuclear energy. But just how clean is this energy if they speculate about places in Ireland in which to dump the waste?

In 2019 the BBC reported that “Northern Ireland tourist sites are among the potential locations for a nuclear waste dumping ground.” The potential sites included the Giant’s

Causeway and the Sperrin Mountains. This show of continued British imperialism was not welcomed by the local councils or the working-class population, as mass protests took place. The district councils of other counties were asked to join in protesting against the construction of these waste facilities.

The nuclear power industry has been looked to as a source of “clean” energy, as it does not produce carbon dioxide. However, waste is created as the uranium becomes depleted but is still radioactive. If this radioactive waste is preferable to an environmental disaster, why must Britain find somewhere outside Britain in which to dump the waste? It’s nothing short of Britain’s continued imperialist interests within the working-class communities of Ireland.

Britain’s first nuclear plant was Calder Hall, now called Sellafield, in Cumberland. In November 2020 a report was published on the British government’s web site (gov.uk) that said that “plugging a leak has set Sellafield on a path to a safer future.”

it is now on its knees, with longer waiting-times, fewer hospital beds and a worse doctor-to-patient ratio in the North than the HSE provides in the South.

The fact of the matter is that we have two two-tier health systems, both north and south. The use of private medicine in the North has exploded as a result of the length of time people have to wait in the NHS. GPs, dentists, dispensing pharmacists and opticians are, and always have been, profit-making businesses, supplying services under contract, often at the same time using the facilities of the NHS for their private patients. This practice is now in overdrive as they pick the bones of the once-mighty NHS.

We need to decolonise our minds and go much further than the NHS: set our goals much higher, and mirror the Cuban model.

We need a fully funded, publicly owned all-Ireland health service, free at the point of entry, from the cradle to the grave, from creche to care home, incorporating research and development, based on the Cuban system, where public health is the first and only priority—not a second-rate two-tier system forced as a compromise from capitalism.

Forced compromises are always temporary. Only five years from the founding of the NHS the British Labour Party attempted to impose charges for its services; and it has been under attack ever since. South of the border,

Noël Browne was defeated by church and state in his attempt to bring in a similar, though much more limited, health system, which led directly to the two-tier health service in the South.

Capitalism is ideologically opposed to a public health service. It was always a forced compromise after the war and to compete with the services provided in socialist countries.

So what of the Cuban model? Cuba continues to increase the ratio of doctors to population, which now stands at 8.4 doctors for every 1,000 citizens. Ireland's HSE has 3.3, the NHS has 2.9.

Cuba has 5.3 hospital beds per 1,000, the HSE has 3, and the NHS has 2.5.

If an impoverished Third World country like Cuba, suffering the effects of an economic blockade for sixty years, can provide a First World health service for its people, surely this should be the foundation stone on which to build the unity of our people.

And Cuba doesn't stop at having more hospital beds, or a better doctor-to-patient ratio: it applies to every aspect of the health system, as health is given priority by the state. The high doctor-to-patient ratio is a result of in-house training provided by the Cuban health system, which also provides training for thousands of doctors from all over the world.

The HSE and the NHS scour the world for qualified doctors, who were trained at enormous expense in Third

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World countries, so depriving those countries of doctors as well as saving the HSE and the NHS the expense of training them.

As a result of this practice there are more doctors from Malawi in Manchester than there are in Malawi. There is just one doctor for every 40,000 people in Malawi, and life expectancy is a mere 64, with infant mortality among the highest in the world.

Cuba is not only one of the few lower-income countries to have vaccinated a majority of its population (ranked ninth in the world, with 78 per cent of its people fully vaccinated) but the only one to have done so with a vaccine it developed on its own.

Cuba has developed a suite of five vaccines, two of which—Abdala and Soberana 2—received official regulatory approval in July and August. They are developing a vaccine that can be given nasally; another is a universal booster for people originally vaccinated with other vaccines. And some of their vaccines can be stored at room temperature, which will get over the problem for many poor countries that do not have electricity supplies available everywhere, so enabling vaccination in the remotest parts of the world.

This is what can be achieved when health is the priority, not profit.

If covid has taught us anything it is the importance of public health. We must aim for the highest standard for our people. ★

But what about its unsafe past? In Dundalk, the number of cancer cases rose by 12 per cent after a fire in the power plant in 1957. British scientists and nuclear enthusiasts have denied the possibility that Sellafield could have caused this. A nuclear engineer, Paul Howarth, has also rejected the possibility of Sellafield causing problems on Ireland's east coast, despite research by Prof. Peter Mitchell of UCD that says otherwise.

Howarth also failed to acknowledge the leakage of nuclear waste in 2005 when the British government removed 20 tonnes of uranium and plutonium. It has claimed that it would be too dangerous to decommission Sellafield; what does that say about the so-called clean energy of nuclear power?

The resources that are used within nuclear power plants are uranium and plutonium, which is mined by American and Canadian corporations in Africa and South America; and while those places have the resources, the transnational corporations get the profits.

If we look at France, which exports energy throughout the European Union,

with the massive amount of energy made by nuclear power, even during the current energy crisis its resources for this power come from the exploitation of Africa.

The Canadian nuclear energy company Orano operates the mines of the Société des Mines de l'Air (Somair) in Niger. It extracted 1,900 tonnes of uranium in 2018, with more than half the company's income going to France. It is projected that the use of plutonium in France will be as high as 11 tonnes by 2025.

Plutonium and uranium come from Africa and are finite resources, showing capitalism's huge lust for the planet's resources and the uncaring nature of the system we live under. The continued exploitation of countries in such places as Africa and South America by American, Canadian and European powers for their own prosperity leaves those countries with nothing but devastation.

This is partly why Ireland cannot look to nuclear power. We cannot become part of the imperialist problem by looking to Africa, South America and

Ireland must look instead to actual renewable and clean energy, such as solar and wind power and hydro-electricity. We must protect our natural landscape from becoming waste facilities, and we must protect Earth's resources from being further overexploited by capitalism

eastern Europe for the resources we would need. Ireland's resources are already being used and looked at by the imperialist powers of Britain, the United States, Canada, and the European Union. The British plan for dumping-grounds in such places as the Giant's Causeway and the Sperrin Mountains shows us where we would have to look to dump our waste.

Ireland must look instead to actual renewable and clean energy, such as solar and wind power and hydroelectricity. We must protect our natural landscape from becoming waste facilities, and we must protect Earth's resources from being further overexploited by capitalism. Only a socialist system can truly create the energy systems that we need to combat climate change and the plundering of Earth's natural resources.

But this socialist system has to be based upon a working relationship with the Earth system. We cannot make the same mistakes that socialist countries made in the past, nor can we continue to consume the amount that the capitalist system does. ★



A unity programme Weakening the structure of capitalism in Ireland



EOGHAN O'NEILL

TWO RECENT articles in *Socialist Voice*—“On the need for a focal point,” parts 1 and 2—attempted to deal with the importance of directed, planned and conscious interventions in the class struggle. The articles put forward a framework for thinking about capitalism in Ireland as interrelated but distinct pillars, with which to focus our weight and forces on specific targets, in order to maximise the strength of our blows and to exploit points of weakness in Ireland’s capitalist structures.

As important as it is to focus on specific targets, it is equally

important to outline and adopt a road map in pursuit of the greater socialist project, so that we don’t lose our course, as so many have done, in the tall grass of daily struggles and campaigns, where opportunism can entrap movements in a labyrinth designed and controlled by the ruling class.

With this in mind, and expanding on part 2 concerning how we build a united front, the idea of a Unity Programme—a minimum programme with the goal of gaining maximum support—which is the subject of this article, may be a project that other anti-imperialist, socialist, left and progressive forces could get behind.

▲ No longer legal tender!

A Unity programme would entail a strategy whereby the full-scale nationalisation of banks and essential industries is created for full employment.’

The essence of a Unity Programme will call on the support of all progressive allies within the trade union movement, the environmental movement and local communities as well as political allies who are willing to build a united front, committed to working towards the fulfilment of shared strategic objectives and pursuing the material basis for a united Ireland in a planned, democratic and participative manner, where each party or group can maintain its autonomy but remain committed to the programme.

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 within a necessary time limit to alleviate the worst projections of climate chaos. At its core, this Unity Programme must be anchored by the daily struggles of workers, cognisant of the environmental emergency on our doorstep, reflective of the growing aspirations and calls for ending partition and British rule in Ireland, and ushering in a new Democratic Republic, for the people and by the people.

The proposal is that this programme would be based on these three fundamental elements, on which we would seek to unite all progressive and democratic forces to meet the challenges and mounting attacks on the environment, on our democracy and sovereignty, and ultimately on our future and those of generations to come.

Just as Irish capitalism is structured around three interdependent pillars, a Unity Programme would be based on three core pillars, namely an all-Ireland environmental plan, an all-Ireland universal public services plan, and an all-Ireland industrial and financial plan.

Glasgow COPOUT Statement by the Communist Party of Ireland

THE JAMBOREE THAT was the COP26 climate conference closed and a statement was issued to the press. With their carefully choreographed opinion pieces, the television news showed how “western democracies” are leading the fight to save the planet, parcelling selected nations as villains into neat packages to reassure the gullible that it is not capitalism that is the problem.

Nothing has fundamentally

changed. The political leaders of capitalism have once again put the interests of global corporations far ahead of people and the environment. Once again, people are left deflated and let down.

In all the corporate media spin by these leaders of global capital there is no mention of the most environmentally destructive forces that continue to do enormous environmental damage and to waste precious resources: militarism and war.



1. An all-Ireland environmental plan

This is the linchpin of the Unity Programme, whereby the reality of environmental destruction and climate change must be central to our vision for a united Ireland. It is a united and strategic approach for a rapid transition to an environmentally sustainable economy, with particular emphasis on the agriculture, energy and construction sectors. This plan can focus campaigns on energy, food production, waste and water management, imports and exports, construction of urban and rural areas, etc. It is a plan for transitioning our production, distribution, consumption and waste economy to become environmentally sustainable.

2. An all-Ireland universal public services plan

Rather than being seduced by the false lure of a universal basic income, the public funding and expanding ownership to create universal health, transport, housing, education, welfare and infrastructure systems, with the purpose of securing the necessities and basic needs, would be a great benefit to all. This plan can focus campaigns on such crucial areas as health and housing, with an emphasis on the ending of private companies operating and profiting from the provision of these essential service industries within the economy.

3. An all-Ireland industrial and financial plan

If we are to make the transition to a sustainable economy, it must be backed by an industrial and financial policy for the proper regional development of the whole country. This is a strategy whereby the full-scale nationalisation of banks and essential industries is created for full employment, in line with units 1 and 2.

Any all-Ireland industrial policy that is centred upon workers must coincide with the establishment of a new Bill of Rights for workers. The plan facilitates the transfer of workers displaced in the process of transitioning to an environmentally sustainable economy. This requires a reorientation of finance and industry towards meeting the needs of citizens and moving our economy away from the triple-lock dependence.

Although this is only an outline of the basis of the Unity Programme—which will be part of the robust internal debate leading up to the CPI’s coming national congress in 2022—what is central to it is that it will require a fundamental shift from economic markets with capitalist class relations dictating government policy towards economic planning intervening and replacing private markets in the provision of services, infrastructure projects, essential industries and financing in a just transition towards a sustainable, democratic 32-county republic. This phase will lay down in real, material terms the essential foundations, tools and practice in the further advancement towards a planned socialist economy.

That is why it is important to reiterate that insisting at this stage on a maximum socialist programme, or calling for “revolution,” which will only garner minimum support, is infantile and will lead nowhere. It is also why the hollow “anti-establishment” rhetoric of the right-wing nationalists who try to cash in on the anger of the people will only lead them down a rabbit hole filled with hatred and violence, with no chance of actually challenging the established ruling class.

As was mentioned in the previous article, one can

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objectively work towards the establishment of a 32-county socialist republic without demanding that it be a necessary precondition that all parties involved who work with us on particular issues sign up to the same goal. Conversely, our allies can link the single-issue campaigns to the broader struggle with the support of such a programme without having to declare their intention of establishing a 32-county socialist republic.

Finally, the strength of this programme, or any similar initiatives, will not be determined by the number of political parties willing to work towards a united front, in a top-down framework: the success of a Unity Programme, of creating a united front, must be built from the ground up, from grass-roots movements, from the workers’ movement, both urban and rural, from the environmental movement, from the trade union movement, from the myriad of community activists and campaigns driven to action by the deteriorating material conditions created by the contradictions and antagonisms of the capitalist mode of production.

The objective of the CPI is to instil a class-consciousness into these movements, to try to steward a united front, and in time, if the party gains the trust of the people, ultimately to lead the working class in a struggle and war against the ruling capitalist class.

Our job of work today, however, is to publicise our analysis, to be active on the ground in daily struggles, to outline our strategy and present a programme that is in line with the hopes and aspirations of working people and families throughout the breadth and width of the country, from Cork to Derry, from Dublin to Galway. ★

Imperialist wars, both large and small, have inflicted mass suffering and destruction on many nations and peoples around the globe.

No mention and no strategy presented to end the plunder and robbery of nature by global monopoly corporations. No talk of how we can or need to end this invasive economic system, that it is this economic system imposed upon us that is the root cause of the environmental abyss that humanity now faces.

We simply cannot have permanent economic growth on our planet of finite natural resources.

Capitalism needs permanent growth and growing profits, otherwise it goes into crisis and recession. No “green capitalism” is possible. We have reached the turning-point in human development, a global fork in the road.

The choice is stark: we either begin to move beyond capitalism, begin the necessary but difficult

task of building a socialist future, or we face greater barbarism and extinction.

We need to plan our future, to democratically plan the use and development of all natural resources so that they benefit everyone on our planet and not just the few. If we don’t, humanity will be dragged into the environmental abyss by the capitalist mode of production.

The future belongs to socialism and to those who fight for it. ★





Reaping the bitter fruit

RAYMOND Ó DUBHGHAILL

As increased “lockdown” measures by the Government are on the horizon again, it appears that the extent of the bourgeois state’s ingenuity as regards battling the novel-coronavirus pandemic remains to repeat the same failed tactic over and over again: more vaccines and restrictions, no capital investment, no infrastructure, no sickness pay, and no new jobs.

It is vital now that we consider critically whether the vaccination and lockdown programme has been successful, and whether other strategies might be more effective in dealing with the situation. To do so properly it is useful to examine the wider context in which all this has taken place.

Globally, over the past twenty months the ruling class and their clerks in government have facilitated the greatest upward transfer of wealth in human history, while more than 5 million people have died. Workers have been impoverished, laid off, undersold and exploited while multi-billionaires blast into space on vanity projects in between lecturing us on how we need to change our behaviour to protect the planet.

Domestically, we have reaped the bitter fruit of a shamefully

neglected and underfunded health system, subject to privatisation, overcrowding, over-reliance on pharmaceutical treatment, and a generally reactive, short-termist and non-holistic approach to medicine: in other words, a capitalist health system. (See Fig.1)

Successive capitalist governments have relied on “current” spending to paper over the cracks of much deeper social problems. Consider the housing crisis and the ever-increasing reliance on HAP payments to landlords; the use of hotel accommodation to temporarily shelter the homeless; the rental of private hospital space at the outset of the covid-19 pandemic; contracting private businesses to provide public transport—the list is practically endless.

Two things these tactics have in common:

(1) they avoid sensible, long-term solutions, mostly requiring capital investment, in favour of costly continuous pay-outs to private business interests, and

(2) they ultimately prolong and exacerbate the problem they claim they are intended to solve.

The tactic as regards covid has been vaccination-uber-alles, bought at a premium, with the occasional lockdown. There has been no regard for significant capital investment in

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increasing hospital and ICU capacity (both of which are a small fraction of what they were twenty years ago, with a greatly increased population in the meantime), the provision of statutory entitlement to sickness pay, the development of virus-proofed public infrastructure, retrofitting buildings for proper ventilation, radically increasing the frequency and capacity of public transport, and making quality health services free and accessible to all. The tactic, needless to say, has failed.

Or perhaps it has succeeded, if we consider that the objective of those in power has been to maintain a state of perpetual crisis on a number of fronts while ensuring that the upward flow of wealth continues unabated, facilitated by the state taking on enormous debt, which will, of course, be undersigned by the working class. (See Fig. 2)

There are many otherwise conscientious people who have been cowed into tacit support for the government’s anti-human policies because they consider any and all opposition to these to be the realm of “anti-vaxers” or similar. It is vital that we recognise this sleight of hand for what it is: a naked attempt to smuggle reactionary policies into public acceptance under the banner of the necessary and only possible measures to address a pandemic.

In this country, as in many others, the government has erected a conservative, neurotic public morality around the coronavirus, necessary for the maintenance of retrograde measures such as “lockdowns,” curfews, covid passports, etc., in place of any real structural solutions to the problems we face with a now endemic virus.

The working class must put an end to the endless cycles of demonisation of our fellow-workers that has characterised the past two years. Let the reactionaries fixate on restrictions and people “breaking rules”—dead ends that lead nowhere but to a feedback loop of the same failed measures that got us to this point in the first instance.

We must advance our concrete, transformative demands for a greatly expanded, free and universal 32-county health service that treats its workers fairly, with a public infrastructure that is built to cope with the pressures of an endemic respiratory virus, with a statutory entitlement to sickness pay for all. Everything else is just window-dressing. (See Fig. 3) ★

Fig. 1. Hospital bed capacity in the 26 Counties, 2000–2019

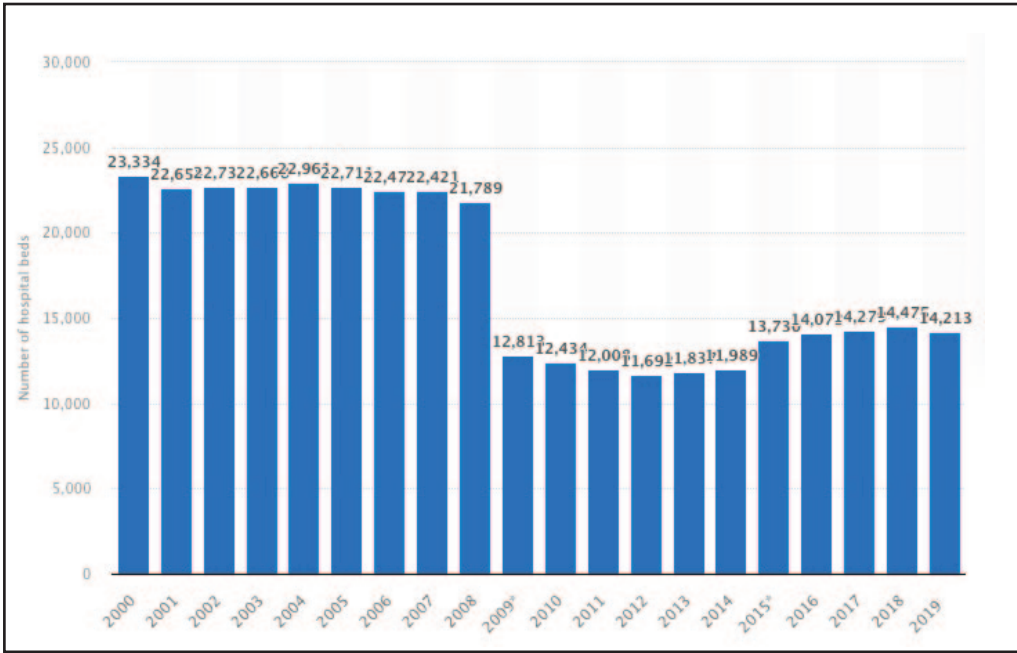


Fig. 2. Hospital beds per 1,000 people, 26 Counties, 2000–2018

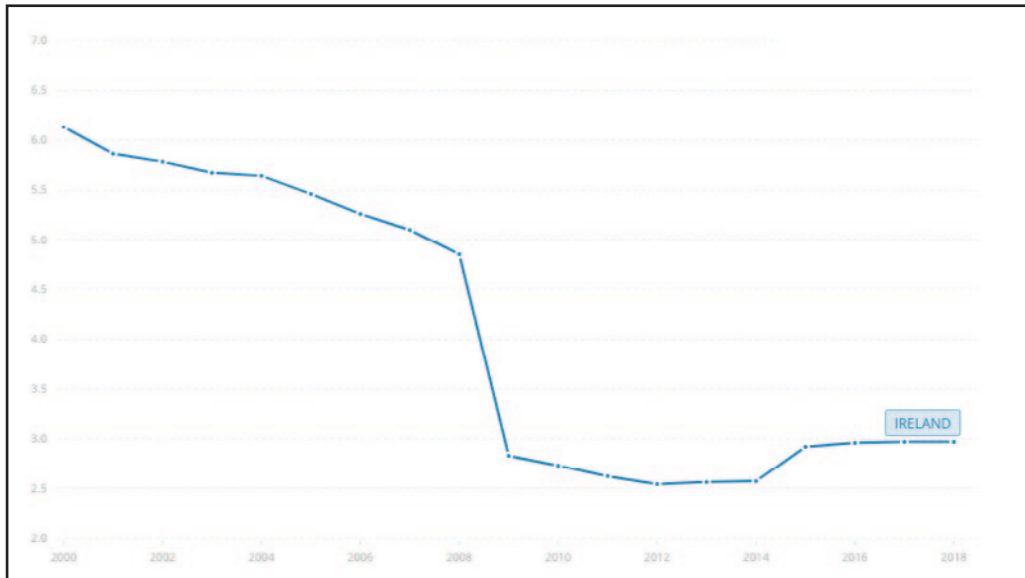
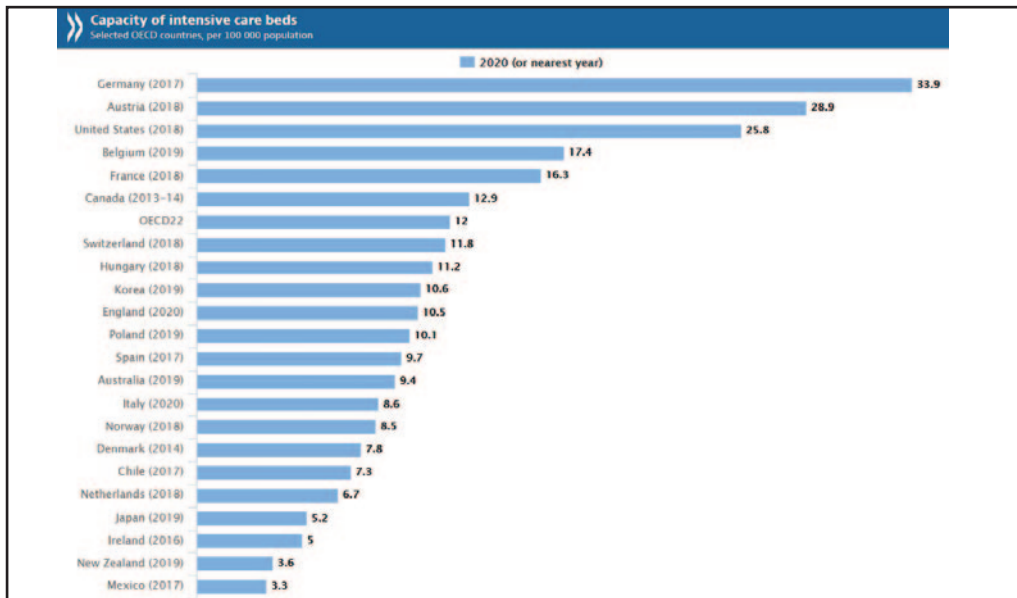


Fig. 3: Ireland’s ICU capacity is less than half the OECD average per head of population



Communist Party of Ireland Statement

The savagery of capitalism

17 November 2021

It will hardly come as a surprise to working people in Ireland, and in particular workers living in Dublin, that the management of Dublin City Council have concluded, or are about to conclude, a deal with the pension fund of the British arms manufacturer BAE Systems.

The agreement is to lease for social housing a number of houses in the Kimmage-Crumlin district of Dublin as well as a significant number of apartments, including a mix of newly built apartments and houses as well as renovated houses.

This company makes billions manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. Its shareholders, the owners of capital, live well on the back of the death and injuries of millions of working people and the poor.

Saudi Arabia has bought hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of weapons for its war in Yemen, which has resulted in thousands dead, tens of thousands injured, and millions now starving as a result of famine resulting from this war.

We have one group of workers, the aristocracy of labour, as well as the professional manager class of BAE Systems, securing their pensions at the expense of low-paid precarious workers in Ireland. Their pensions are also the result of massive profits accruing from the imperialist global war strategy and global imperial plunder. If this deal is like previous ones, this vulture pension fund will lease its properties to the city council on a long-term lease, with regular rent review (always upwards), and will have the properties maintained and returned to them in accordance with the time the lease was signed.

Continued on Page 11





Are there two faces to consumerism?

BARRY MURRAY

MY TEN-YEAR-OLD granddaughter announced that she was going on her first shopping trip with her mother.

Apparently it was a counterbalance to a trip her younger brother had to Manchester to see Man U (as those in the know call them).

I enquired, playfully, what type of shopping it was. She informed me that it was an important shopping trip for her (wait for it) “autumn collection.” At ten years old! It instantly struck me that the marketing people have her in their net already.

I decided I would probe a little, just for the fun of it. “And what about your winter collection? Will you be going shopping then too?”

“Well, maybe if I need them, or if I don’t have the winter style,” she said. So now there were two hooks from the marketeers: the seasonal change of clothes, and the style factor. And when I asked if there was such a thing as a “spring collection” and “summer collection”—“Yes, of course there is, Papa” (Granda), she quipped and smiled benignly at me.

When I probed further about who decided that there should be autumn, winter, spring and summer collections she crumpled her face and said, “Sure it just is, Papa. Everyone knows that.”

I was becoming a bore at that point, so I quit while I was ahead.

But it is an interesting, if disturbing, revelation about the effectiveness of marketing and the ultimate—but not the only—outcome of consumerism.

It will not be very long until the fashion bug and the oft-quoted “retail therapy” take over the thinking of children at increasingly earlier ages. No

doubt it has already. Both are just master strokes from the marketeers, who, along with the manufacturers, fashion houses and myriad of clothes retailers, have drilled right into the psyche of young and old about what they “must” have—or, equally, must not have.

They must fit in and be part of the style, colour and seasonal changes. It’s a never-ending treadmill for the fashionistas.

Of course this is equally true of all consumer items. The phones, the cars, the furniture, the houses, and even the holidays—all are sold as “must haves,” with all the possible “tweaks to difference” implemented to make them either more desirable or, better still, obsolete. Either way it’s a profit for an unending chain of vultures. The marketing psychology behind all this is mind-blowing.

From the left viewpoint we see this “consumerist debauchery” as a travesty. Millions on top of millions of people are exploited at the production and retail stages alone to satisfy this ever-increasing market—not to mention the catastrophic climate effects.

Later on I began to wonder if it was possible to get my granddaughter not to be a “blinded consumer.” The more I thought about it the more I began to realise that this tsunami of consumer goods and consumers was not going to be simple to change or likely to go away any time soon.

Socialists and communists rail against the consumer industry. And while it appears that there is a justifiable case for that, it began to dawn on me that there might just be another side to the story.

What would happen if we owned the means of production and distribution?—had a house that had a minimal rent,

PAUL DORAN

UP TO 2017, 8,300 million tonnes of virgin plastics have been produced, exceeding the quantity of almost all other human-made materials.

The production of plastics, and petrochemicals in general, like the testing of nuclear weapons, represents a qualitative shift in human relations with the earth. It has resulted in the spread of a host of mutagenic (causing genetic mutation), carcinogenic (causing cancer) and teratogenic (causing birth defects) chemicals, particularly harmful to life because they are not the product of evolutionary development over millions of years. Many of these harmful chemicals are characterised by bio-accumulation (concentration in individual organisms) and bio-magnification (concentration at higher

levels in the food chain), representing increasingly pervasive threats to life.

Microplastics actively absorb carcinogenic persistent organic pollutants within the larger environment, making them more potent and toxic. Plastics are durable and resistant to degradation, properties that make these materials “difficult or impossible for nature to assimilate.” The omnipresent character of plastics in the earth system is evident in the massive plastic gyres (circulating patches of waste material) in the sea and by the existence of microplastic particles in nearly all organic life.

Writing more than sixty years ago, Rachel Carson in her seminal work *Silent Spring* (1962), said:

Sprays, dusts and aerosols are now applied almost universally to farms, gardens, forests and homes—non-selective chemicals that have the power



Environmental degradation A matter of life or death



Socialists and communists mostly use the critical theory approach to attack consumerism and, by extension, to attack capitalism. However, Marx (in Grundrisse) took a wider view and saw the “great civilising influences of capital” in relation to consumption and the expansion of needs.

free education, free health service, and the income of all workers was, say, doubled or trebled. We would clearly be much better off and have a lot more disposable income to spend—but on what? Surely we don’t want to fight for a bigger share of the pie and then stop consumerism?

To add to my dilemma I realised that socialist countries, such as China and, increasingly, Vietnam, produce a lot of this stuff. Granted that Ireland is only a tiny fraction of their production, if the “reduction concept” of consumerism was applied on an increasingly global scale it would create a disaster for their production. So it appears to be production versus consumerism.

And culturally we might now have a major battle on our hands. What happens in the new socialist Ireland if the people demand more consumer goods, not less, through their needs, wants, and desires? Better still, if they could afford them and would have a lot more free time as well? To resist consumer demands could well result in what the American sociologist Daniel Bell referred to as a “revolution of rising entitlements.”

Capitalists already restrict our needs, wants and desires but continue to accumulate for themselves. Surely that’s not what our struggle is about?

Socialists and communists mostly use the critical theory approach to attack consumerism and, by extension, to attack capitalism. However, Marx (in *Grundrisse*) took a wider view and saw the “great civilising influences of capital” in relation to consumption and the expansion of needs. He went further when he wrote that

these objects are objects of his need, essential objects, indispensable to the exercise and confirmation of his

essential powers. To say that the human being is a corporeal, living, real, sensuous, objective being with natural powers means that he has real, sensuous objects as the object of his being and of his vital expression, or that he can only express his life in real, sensuous objects.

And on production:

Production thus produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption, not only objectively but also subjectively. Production thus creates the consumer. Production not only supplies a material for the need, but it also supplies a need for the material . . . Thus production produces consumption (1) by creating the material for it; (2) by determining the manner of consumption; and (3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer.

It is still difficult not to be opposed to what is often termed created or artificial or false, even superficial, needs being created just for the business class to exploit and profit from. Does this rampant consumerism change people’s attitudes to humanity? Does it reinforce the individualist mentality?

The trail from natural resource to consumer is filled with inequalities and exploitation. It causes stress and depletes mental health. Could it be considered the genesis of the rat race—the “we must have” mentality? The wealthy have access to their high levels of consumption; should the working class not have access too?

I may have to go back to my granddaughter and see if I could enlist her help with a higher form of communism, defined as consummunism! ★

CPI Statement

continued

They will be guaranteed rental income—i.e. profit—and will get their assets back as new and can realise the increased value since they purchased it—a complete win-win situation for the vulture and a lose-lose situation for working people of Dublin.

It is now open season on Irish workers by global vulture funds to make vast easy profits. Our lives have been reduced to permanent precarious employment, precarious shelter, precarious health services, and precarious old age.

It’s time to end this nightmare for workers, time to end these parasites leaching off us. We need to demand the building of large-scale public housing at affordable rents, to break the grip of finance capital over the housing market. It’s time to establish an all-Ireland public construction company to build public housing and public infrastructure.

Get the vulture out, get the speculators out! We need an Ireland fit for working people, not an Ireland of speculators, vultures funds, and bankers. We need a workers’ Ireland.

We need real democracy at all levels of our country. ★

Cover Image British Armed Forces Minister Mark Lancaster told parliament that Britain’s Royal Air Force (RAF) was providing ‘engineering support’ and ‘generic training’ to Saudi Arabian military in its war on Yemen.

Capital accumulation requires the continual expansion of the division of nature as well as the division of labour

to kill every insect, the “good” and the “bad,” to still the song of the birds and the leaping of fish in the streams, to coat the leaves with a deadly film and to linger on in the soil—all this though the intended target may be only a few weeds or insects.

One or two writers had previously suggested that modern pesticides posed dangers. We all know that, well before this, Marx and Engels saw all this going on in the mid to late nineteenth century and wrote extensively about it.

As you drive along the M50 motorway, as far as the eye can see there are these ugly cement barriers, costing approximately €400,000 per kilometre. “Current concrete bollards have a terrible carbon footprint, as each tonne of cement emits 900 kg of CO₂.” The state’s data centres have sought 1,000 MW of additional power in the space of twelve months, at a time when

total energy demand in the 26 Counties is 5,500 MW. Egrid has also called for a review of data centre policy and say the centres would represent up to a third of all our electricity consumption by 2030, based only on existing connectors.

However, a major barrier to environmental politics that takes history seriously is the persistent segregation of the environmental movement and the prevailing belief among mainstream environmentalists, especially in wealthy countries, that a reformed capitalism can solve these problems. Probably because they themselves are unlikely to bear the cost of these crises, too many environmentalists and policy-makers have failed to face the violence and injustice behind the environmental devastation now dispassionately reported by such organisations as the United Nations and the World Bank and many environmental NGOs.

Capital accumulation requires the continual expansion of the division of nature as well as the division of labour. The division of nature, however, is no longer a social division of nature, in which the earth’s different landscapes and species are used by human beings within a context that maintains the reproduction of nature itself: instead it is a detailed alienated division of nature that breaks the circle of natural processes, creating environmental rifts. Nature is remade in such a way as to promote a single end: the accumulation of capital, irrespective of the lessons of rational science and conditions of sustainability.

We have a job of work to do in highlighting the sheer task ahead of us, but what has gone before in terms of “protest” did not work.

This is life or death, and the paradigm must change. ★



Unsettling the equilibrium but not breaking the mould



Special Criminal Court (SCC) sittings are usually held at the Criminal Courts of Justice complex in Dublin
Wikimedia Commons

TOMMY MCKEARNEY

GOVERNMENTS ARE not formed on the basis of opinion polls. Nevertheless it would be unwise to discard their findings, especially when a consistent trend is emerging.

With this in mind, it is difficult to deny that Sinn Féin is gaining ground and establishing a strong, some might argue unassailable, position. Should this trend continue, there is every likelihood that the party will have a decisive influence over the formation of the next Government in Dublin. Such a significant change in the political landscape requires serious analysis.

Reflect for a moment on what has happened in the party-political

arena over the last decade. From the formation of the 26-County state, every Government has been led by one of two parties. Since 2016, however, these two parties have been growing ever closer, first with a “confidence and supply” agreement and then together in coalition since 2020.

For decades the dividing line between Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael was the Civil War. It now appears that this is no longer a cause for enmity—not between the parliamentary parties at any rate.

Significantly, the ending of this decades-old animosity has been facilitated by a shared hostility towards Sinn Féin. While this mutually accepted consensus has the immediate rationale of a strategy

aimed at maintaining parliamentary supremacy, more fundamentally it has involved one party in particular relinquishing certain long-held positions.

In its struggle with Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil has abandoned any pretence of being a republican party and is now simply Redmondite. Moreover, after several years of collaborating closely with its one-time Blueshirt rival there is now no divergence between the parties on social or economic issues.

In short, there is no compelling reason why most people should vote for Micheál Martin rather than for Leo Varadkar. The evidence so far suggests that this is having a disproportionately detrimental effect on Fianna Fáil. While the wealthier, conservative section of society continues to support Fine Gael, the less well off are deserting Fianna Fáil.

There is, of course, no guarantee about how this will play out in the next election, or that it will necessarily result in a Sinn Féin government. Nevertheless it is important to explore that possibility, and especially in the light of how the party has been positioning itself of late.

Take for a start the comprehensive report last month in the *Business Post* describing the level of Sinn Féin’s extensive engagements with big business and finance.¹ This continuing round of consultations even included meeting a vulture-fund lobbyist. When asked to comment, party spokespersons claimed that these were merely listening sessions, designed to exchange points of view, with no commitments entered into.

EU court is not an upholder of democracy



JIMMY CORCORAN

THE DECISION of the EU Court of Justice on 27 October ordering Poland to pay the EU Commission a daily penalty of €1 million for failing to comply with an order of the court in July was welcomed by the slavishly pro-EU Irish media as a victory for “democracy” and the “rule of law.”

The narrative in the media was that the right-wing Polish government, which had severely curtailed women’s rights and those of the LGBTQ community, was intent on another anti-democratic move by breaching a fundamental rule of the EU, and that the Commission, like a knight in shining armour, had come to the rescue.

However, the fact that the Polish government is reactionary and xenophobic should not be allowed to

cloud the issues involved. The issue is straightforward. In July, Poland’s Constitutional Tribunal ruled that the ECJ could not impose interim measures pertaining to Poland’s judicial system; and in October it ruled that several articles of the Treaty on European Union were inconsistent with Poland’s constitution. This was a serious challenge to the ECJ’s claim that it has primacy over all national courts in the EU.

Despite the howls of anguish from our pro-EU media, Poland is not unique. In July 2020 the German Constitutional Court ruled that it had the authority to ignore an ECJ decision. Courts in the Czech Republic, Italy, Denmark and Spain have also upheld the authority of their national courts. It should also be noted that this presumption of supremacy enjoyed by the ECJ was not granted by any treaty but instead was claimed by the

A sceptic might well ask, though, how many meetings it takes to tell speculators and landlords that they have no place in a country that has a housing crisis or indeed no proper policy on public housing.

Revealing also is the party's attitude towards health. Its spokesperson on health, David Cullinane, states that if in government he would allow consultants to carry out private work—in other words, a continuation of the two-tier health service that is at the root of so many problems and simultaneously reinforces inequality throughout society.

This is against a background of support for the market-driven European Union, now planning to expand its military capacity. Worryingly, too, there are strong indications that in office the party would not move to prevent the US military using Shannon Airport as a stopover.

Perhaps the most telling development in Sinn Féin's recent journey occurred at the recent ard-fheis. Delegates voted to abandon the party's long-standing opposition to the use of the non-jury Special Criminal Court. In reality, the dramatic U-turn was a cosmetic exercise, aimed at gaining favour among right-of-centre electors.

The decision to end decades of opposition to this draconian legislation had ominous echoes of another party in a neighbouring jurisdiction. It was disturbingly similar to Tony Blair's "clause 4" moment in 1995, which signalled a move to the right by the British Labour Party.

There is one factor, however, that complicates this assessment. Sinn Féin remains committed to its position on Irish unity. While its demand falls far short of the requirement for a workers' republic, it does nevertheless keep a crucial issue centre stage, an issue whose realisation will not be easily contained within centrist social-democratic parameters. A quotation from a former general secretary of the CPI, Seán Murray, in the November issue of *Socialist Voice* spells this out succinctly, in which he said that the national question "is the most powerful weapon in the hands of the working class in Ireland."²

Objectively speaking, therefore, we have to review what is the overall Sinn Féin impact. While not launching a socialist initiative, it has nevertheless helped disrupt the political stasis afflicting the Republic for years. The old cosy 2½-party system has broken down. It is now possible to think outside the Fianna Fáil / Fine Gael box, and no-one knows where that will lead.

And, as mentioned above, its highlighting of the national question unsettles the prevailing equilibrium while also raising questions about the make-up of a new Ireland. In short, while not breaking the mould the party has helped open the door to change.

So we are presented with a conundrum—or are we? Clearly no serious socialist could give uncritical or unqualified support to Sinn Féin. Mary Lou McDonald and her colleagues are eager to enter high office and, as outsiders, have found themselves benefiting

Perhaps the most telling development in Sinn Féin's recent journey occurred at the recent ard-fheis. Delegates voted to abandon the party's long-standing opposition to the use of the non-jury Special Criminal Court. In reality, the dramatic U-turn was a cosmetic exercise, aimed at gaining favour among right-of-centre electors.

from conditions that demand change. Inadequate housing, health, education and training, workers' rights and safety and care for the elderly are all areas crying out for fundamental improvement.

The problems outlined here cannot be overcome while adhering to the constraints imposed by a market-led economy, even with a government adopting social-democratic or Keynesian policies. Sinn Féin's economic strategy will fail, because the party organisation is unwilling to contemplate the steps necessary to implement meaningful change that is possible only with a thoroughgoing socialist programme.

The challenge for the left is to recognise the positive yet inherently limited nature of the Sinn Féin programme and to continue pressing forward when it eventually and inevitably stalls. In its place it is imperative to convey a clear socialist message, unambiguously and convincingly, to Ireland's working class.

To do so it is necessary to reinforce the network capable of delivering the message to every part of the country and to equip activists with the arguments and the medium with which to achieve this objective. ★

Notes

- 1 Michael Brennan, "How Ireland Inc is changing tack as Sinn Féin's path to power opens up," *Business Post*, 21 November 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3DTeb1N>).
- 2 Graham Harrington, "The CPI as a product of Irish conditions," *Socialist Voice*, November 2021 (tinyurl.com/2p8btu9s).

court for itself in two landmark cases, *Van Gend en Loos* (1963) and *Costa v. ENEL* (1964).

What, then, is the situation regarding the Irish courts? Article 34.5.6° of the Constitution, which deals with the courts, clearly states: "The decision of the Supreme Court shall in all cases be final and conclusive." However, far from upholding the constitutional position and defending the independence of the Irish courts, in *Meagher v. Minister for Agriculture and Food* [1994] the Supreme Court ruled: "It is well established that Community law takes precedence over our domestic law. Where they are in conflict, it is the Community law that prevails."^{*}

But the pro-EU (or EEC, as it was) forces were determined that the Constitution could not be used to defend sovereignty. Article 29.4.6 states: "No

provision of this Constitution invalidates laws enacted, acts done or measures adopted by the State, before, on or after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, that are necessitated by the obligations of membership of the European Union." In the Dáil debate on 2 December 1971 Justin Keating of the Labour Party said:

In one sentence, we have this incredible and extraordinarily comprehensive sweeping aside of very large parts of our Constitution on the one hand, while on the other hand there is an extraordinary and comprehensive acceptance of laws, or rules and of actions taken by the Communities which were not responsible to any democratic organisation. We are rubberstamping undemocratic and bureaucratic decisions.

Article 29.4.6 trumps any constitutional provision that could deem

an act of the Oireachtas or measure taken by the Government to be unconstitutional if the said act or measure was necessitated by membership of the EU.

The Constitution is the basic law of the Irish state. It is far from perfect, and we have seen mass mobilisations to build on the freedoms it proclaims. The existence of article 29.4.6 means that we have not been a sovereign republic for the past fifty years. It is time this continuing assault on Irish democracy was removed from the Constitution. As long as it exists, any future progressive changes to the Constitution, such as neutrality, or nationalising water, will be open to attack if and when the EU Commission makes more changes to the requirements of membership. ★

^{*} *Meagher v. Minister for Agriculture and Food* [1994] 1 IR 329, at 360



Land of the Ever Young

■ Jenny Farrell (editor), *Land of the Ever Young: An Anthology of Writing for Children by Working People from Contemporary Ireland* (Culture Matters, 2021; €12)

IF THE CULTURAL mainstream is an expression of the ruling ideas in a society, and therefore the ideas of the ruling class, then children's literature is not exempt from this.

Mainstream children's literature extols the middle-class family, its superiority and its values as unchangeable. The many children living in poverty do not find their life experience reflected in such books.

Land of the Ever Young is the final volume of a set of three anthologies of working people's writing from contemporary Ireland published by Culture Matters. It contains thirty stories and poems for children, to help them understand the world around them and give them the confidence that injustice can be tackled, and that the world can be changed.

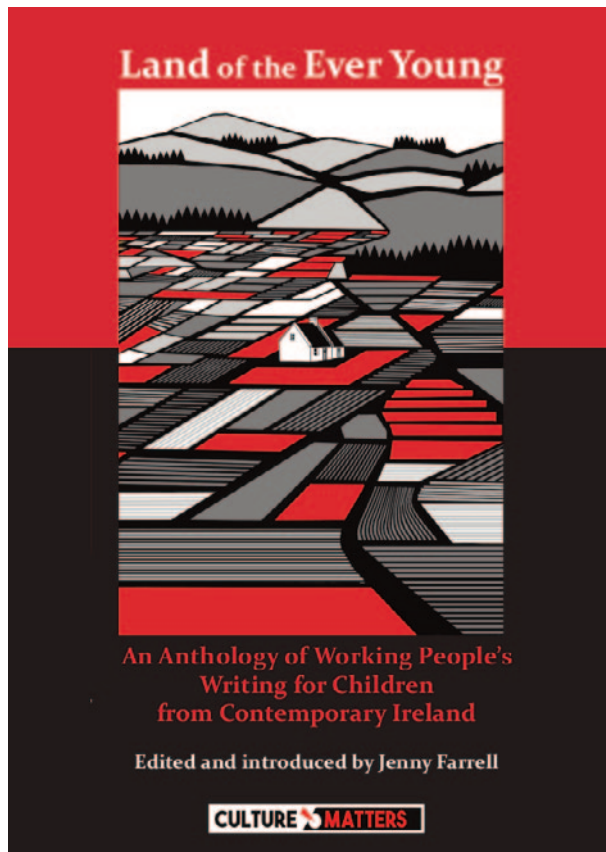
As in the two preceding volumes, this anthology includes texts in Irish as well as English, emphasising the Irish-language tradition in working people's

writing. This includes Tomás Mac Síomóin's poem "An Teachín Liath / The Grey House," an appeal to the radical power of imagination. To find your utopia you must think outside the box, not be confined by "stale formulas or with words | Prayers also will not serve, | the laws obscure the way | only the stairs of your heart's desire | can bring you to his secret."

James O'Brien's autofiction "A Little Table for Packy" describes a childhood experience that children who have witnessed the current pandemic can easily relate to: "An epidemic of diphtheria had broken out across the city and claimed scores of lives." Packy's father cannot visit him, despite his life-threatening illness, because he has to work in England.

Also set in a hospital is Alan Weadick's "Four Eyes." The boy at the centre of this contemporary story also is away from home, the safety of his world shaken, with a dawning realisation of another, not entirely benign reality outside his own mind.

Several writers retell older texts, both Irish and European. Ross Walsh reimagines three fairy tales popularised by the Grimm Brothers, writing grim tales of today. "Puss in Boots and the Ogre" begins: "Once upon a time, there was a big tall apartment block in a huge city. Most of the people



Rogha Ghabriel Sleachta as saothar Ghabriel Rosenstock

Zuckerberg

Zuckerberg
Zuckerberg!
Sliabh siúcra.
An ordaíonn do shloinne dhuit
an tseirbhe a fholú orainn?

Ní searbh a bhí na déagóirí sin
sular tháinís-se, tú féin
is do chomlachtsa, Instagram,
a d'fhág suaite faoina gcolainn féin iad.
Mark, nach eol duit gur istigh ionainn atá an áilleacht lonnaithe?

Facebook, cad atá istigh ann? 'Bhfuil anam ann?
An eol dó conas breathnú ann féin?
Taispeáin anam Instagram dom, Mark.
Cad go díreach atá ann? Algartaim?
Táim ag smaoineamh ar na déagóirí sin, Mark,
agus ritheann línte de chuid Hanshan liom:

A pháistí, impím oraibh,
amach libh anois, tá an teach trí thine.

Extracts from the works of Gabriel Rosenstock

Zuckerberg
Zuckerberg!
Mountain of sugar.
Has your name determined
that you must forever sweeten the pill?

Those teenage girls were sweet enough
before you came along
before your company, Instagram,
made them feel insecure about their bodies.
Mark, don't you know that beauty comes from within?

What's inside Facebook? Has it got a soul?
Does it know how to look into itself?
Show me the soul of Instagram, Mark.
What does it consist of? Algorithms?
I'm thinking of those teenage girls, Mark,
and some lines come to me from Hanshan:

Children, I beseech you,
get out of the burning house now.

who lived in these apartments did not have much money.” A female cat helps these people set things right. In “The Blue Lighter” a magician helps a worker to help the workers in a factory. In Walsh’s version of “Little Red Riding Hood” both Wolf and Grandma act decisively when faced with a present-day dilemma.

Eileen Keane tells of a small sheep farmer’s relationship with his young daughter, teaching her about the work, folklore and traditional songs of north Connemara. The people who work the land are its true inheritors. Anne Mac Darby-Beck’s story “The Fairy Fort” tells of a child’s courage in defeating superstition, showing that a human child can conquer a fairy king.

Gabriel Rosenstock shows in “The Blind Ones” how superstition and prejudice blind people and removes them from their true heritage.

Blindness is also at the heart of Michael Casey’s “Fabled Isle,” where only a boy can see what is happening: “He wondered how it was that no one else on the island had known what was going on under their very noses.”

Frank Murphy’s story “A New Deal” shows the decadence and hollowness of the ruling class in the tradition of Dickens and Tressell.

Alan O’Brien in “The Old Man and the Blackbird,” and Moya Roddy in “Seagull,” explore the kindness of an old man and a young girl towards injured birds.

People’s bond with nature is a theme in many of the stories, including Anne Mac Darby-Beck’s retelling of Oscar Wilde’s story “The Nightingale and the Rose.” Kindness to animals and to nature is a measure of humanity.

Several writers explore aspects of Irish history. Gráinne Daly reimagines the famous meeting of 1593 between the Connacht chieftain Gráinne Ní Mháille and the English queen Elizabeth.

Liz Gillis takes a look at more recent history in her story about three young girls involved in the Irish Revolution, “working-class girls who wanted to and did, make a difference.” Celia de Fréine’s “Wearing the Trousers” propels readers into 1950s Ireland and the prejudices against women at that time.

Several writers set their stories in schools, or on the block, such as Karl Parkinson’s “Blockhood,” Declan Geraghty’s “Saturn 2000s,” and Camillus John’s “The Sponsored Cat-Squeeze.” Moya Roddy imagines Galway children’s action in helping to save the environment in “Your House is on Fire Your Children will Burn.” The

Mainstream children’s literature extols the middle-class family, its superiority and its values as unchangeable. The many children living in poverty do not find their life experience reflected in such books.

covid pandemic and its impact on the lives of inner-city Dublin children is the theme of Cathy Scuffil’s essay “Children Making History.” “When we look back at historic events, we very rarely hear or read of the experiences of children, especially children from working-class areas.”

The heroines and heroes confront wrongs, challenge superstition and injustice. Together they possess the qualities necessary to make society a better place, a home for a happy future, a Tír na nÓg. Karen Dietrich’s illustrations expand the humanist themes in the stories and help make them truly memorable, for children and adults alike.

The project is a pioneering venture that has been fully supported by the trade union movement in recognition of the importance of creativity and the right of the working class to express the wealth of their culture and to articulate their experience of life. ★

■ *Land of the Ever Young* is available from Culture Matters (www.culturematters.org.uk), Connolly Books, Dublin (www.connollybooks.org), An Ceathrú Póilí, Belfast (www.anceathrupoili.com), and Charlie Byrne’s (charliebyrne.ie) and Kenny’s Bookshops

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Standing up to Poppy Day

SV

CLOVER CARROLL

THE 11TH HOUR of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 witnessed the signing of the armistice, bringing an end to the First World War, which later resulted in unconditional surrender by Germany. The day is now celebrated as Poppy Day in Britain, Canada and Australia and as Veterans' Day in America.

The red poppy became the symbol of remembrance for the soldiers who fought in the war, with the Royal British Legion collecting donations. These soldiers mostly came from a working-class background and were sent to fight a war for imperialists against fellow-members of their class. While the red poppy was a symbol for remembering these working-class men who lost their lives in an imperialist war, it has since become a symbol of remembering the imperialist wars themselves, and for supporting the imperialist interests of Britain.

The people most affected by the wars of the past and today are those who did not take part: the civilians who are victims of mass bombings by imperialist countries, such as Britain and the United States. Wars are not fought by imperialists for righteous reasons, even if they claim they are: wars are simply fought for profit and resources. The civilians of such countries as Afghanistan are ignored by those dropping bombs.

Where is the remembrance day for

them? The red poppy shows support for the wars fought for profit, resources, and the destruction of the most overexploited countries around the world. When these countries fight back against the imperialists, as we have seen in South America, the imperialists support right-wing insurgents to take back power and allow the exploitation of their people through cheap labour and the extraction of resources.

If we look at Ireland we can see that the imperialist power of Britain has refused to leave. The existence of the border between north and south is a showing of the continued power of imperialism in Ireland. But the red poppy doesn't remember those who fought against that imperialism but instead remembers those who upheld it, such as the Black and Tans.

The people who were affected by the violence of the Black and Tans and the B Specials are especially forgotten during Remembrance Day. The British ruling class care only about their image and the image of the imperialist wars they wage upon the working-class populations of the countries they continue to exploit.

Britain has been involved in some capacity in fifty-two conflicts since the First World War. The working-class people who will be sent to the front lines of further conflicts will be added to those simply remembered on Poppy Day, while the ruling class line their pockets with the profits of war.

Every socialist must stand up against the warring powers of the world and the wars around the world being waged for profit and resources. As James Connolly wrote, "there are no humane methods of warfare, there is no such thing as civilised warfare; all warfare is inhuman, all warfare is barbaric; the first blast of the bugles of war ever sounds for the time being the funeral knell of human progress."

The continued support for British imperialism through Remembrance Day cannot be what any socialist does. We must take an anti-imperialist stance. We cannot put British imperialism, which has affected every worker of the world, in a good light. We must oppose imperialism; we must oppose wars that benefit the ruling class but are a detriment to the working class; we must stand up for those most affected by these wars.

It is not enough to be neutral: we must be anti-war.

While the men who marched to the trenches "for king and country" are remembered by the modern working class, we must remember the people whose lives and homes were destroyed for the king and that country. Today the king has simply been replaced by the ruling class. The profiteering from the senseless killing of the working class of different nationalities must not be watered down to simply be Poppy Day, and those most affected must not be forgotten or ignored. ★

**"Then came August 1914 and England began a war for the freedom of small nations by postponing the freedom of the only small nation in Europe which it was within her power to liberate with the stroke of a pen."
Robert Lynd**



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