

# Socialist Voice

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"When 95 per cent of our potential customers live abroad, we must be sure that we are writing the rules for the global economy . . ."

**Barack Obama**

(president of the United States),  
message to US Congress,  
16 April 2015.

## Green shoots on the industrial front

**Jimmy Doran** on the rising tide of militancy *Page 2*

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## Green shoots



JIMMY DORAN

### CLASS STRUGGLE

AS WE LEAVE behind 2021 and the continuing pandemic, some green shoots have appeared on the industrial front.

Workers at Dunne's Stores represented by Mandate have received a 10 per cent pay increase, which could only have been dreamed about a couple of years ago.

Unite had significant victories, securing €6,500 greasing money for crane-drivers and pay increases for Derry dock workers, forced from the employers by workers taking industrial action.

Connect has also secured pay increases and improvements to pensions, sickness pay and working conditions for electricians in the construction industry with the signing of the new statutory

instrument to the sectoral employment order which a short time ago was being challenged by employers in the courts.

In the Stormont assembly a Trade Union Freedom Bill will be debated in January that, if passed, would significantly improve workers' rights in the North; if not it will expose which side politicians are on: either on the side of the majority of people, the working class, or against us. It's that simple.

At the recent biennial delegate conference of the ICTU there was a game-changer when a motion was passed that now makes it Congress policy to actively campaign to have all the rights lost by workers under the Industrial Relations Act (1990) restored and reinstated—this by the body that originally signed up to the act.

Workers and trade unions should gain confidence from these victories and organise to grow these green shoots into the rebirth of radical trade unions. All workers must join

## Where to now for union organising and bargaining?

This article will update readers on a couple of interesting and important developments for unionised workers in both the South and the North of Ireland.

NICOLA LAWLOR

### UNIONS

TWO POSITION papers have been published in the last couple of months on union recognition, collective bargaining, and the right to organise, and one piece of important legislation has been brought forward in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

As readers will know, the Government in the South has instituted a high-level working group to review collective bargaining (including the ICTU) which will specifically look at the question of union recognition as well as wage-setting mechanisms. While we are not holding our breath, it does represent a further development and occurs in a context of mounting pressure and momentum elsewhere on these issues.

In the United States small unions are being formed in universities, coffee shops, breweries, the media, and

warehouses. The Biden regime has put forward the Protecting the Right to Organize Act (now held up in Congress).

New Zealand has amended legislation that already grants unions a right of access, requiring employers to provide new employees with a copy of the relevant collective agreement and details of union contacts and how to join their union alongside their individual contract of employment, and providing paid time for union reps to do their duties in work. And the government has introduced a new Fair Pay Agreement, which strengthens sectoral pay bargaining, to come into force in 2022.

The EU directive pushes on with the Minimum Wages and Collective Bargaining Directive, though it is not without its problems.

These are just some of the policy moves that capital is making around the world to address imbalances and inequalities that threaten periodic crises of over-production and over-accumulation within the system. Such policies are the "better" form of managed capitalism.

In Ireland, repeated legal actions by employers (clearly demonstrating the class nature of the legal system and judiciary) have undermined industrial relations law and institutions and have left many people in the trade union movement looking to the EU and the potential EU Directive on Minimum Wages and Collective Bargaining as the solution.

This largely comes from frustration within the movement. However, where workers struggle, ideas and hope will always exist, and another way forward is being suggested. Daryl D'Art, a lecturer in employee relations at DCU, has argued that the prevailing conservative legal view is wrong and that the constitutional argument is really a bogeyman used to discourage legislators, and indeed the trade union movement, from trying to act. In this regard it has been very successful.

D'Art argues instead that if one takes a "purposive" approach to the interpretation of the right to join a union enshrined in the Constitution of Ireland that right is meaningless without a concomitant right to collectively bargain. This is a position supported in recent times by a number of rulings by the European Court of Human Rights.

The Financial Services Union has issued a pamphlet, *Unionising and Collective Bargaining*,\* which calls for the right to join a union. It states:

*All workers in Ireland have the constitutional right to join a trade union, but this is often frustrated, discouraged, or even penalised by some employers. It is time to change this and make it easier and safer for all workers to join a trade union. The greatest obstacles to joining a union from workers is fear of employer hostility and not being encouraged to join.*

The document argues for legislation to

and actively campaign within trade unions to abolish anti-worker laws and to use this new-found confidence and momentum to build rank-and-file unity, to tip the balance of power towards workers and the trade union movement.

The anti-worker legislation on both sides of the border was introduced to cripple, handicap and stop trade unions in our task of defending and advancing workers' interests. This must be opposed, abolished and replaced with Workers' Rights Acts, in both jurisdictions.

The trade union movement was built on struggle and industrial action. The rank and file and shop stewards must organise to unite and drive this force for change, to win back workers' power from the boss class.

We must organise from the bottom up, be relentless in organising the membership to fight, campaign and win back our rights and turn the ICTU policy into a reality with the restoration of all our rights lost as a result of anti-worker legislation.

We must once and for all ensure

*provide trade unions (staff and elected officers) with the right to access all workplaces to educate workers on their basic entitlements, including joining the trade union and discussions on workplace issues and collective bargaining. Union Representatives must also be provided statutory facilities time and support, including digital means, to carry out union duties including the recruitment of new members into the union.*

*These facilities should extend to workplaces where unions are not recognised. Union Representatives must be allowed discuss all workplaces matters including pay and conditions and must be provide meetings rooms and email access to arrange both physical and digital workplace meetings. These meetings can be held on paid working time. Union Representatives must be provided induction time with all new employees.*

The pamphlet argues for legislation so that

*workers who so wish can have trade union subscriptions deducted by their employer with the relevant details and the correct subscription passed to the designated trade union. Any employer refusing to give the right subscription should be liable to pay any arrears to the trade union and be in breach of the law and so fined. The threat or practice of removal of at source deduction needs to be removed from the bargaining table*

that employment legislation is enacted to protect workers against the onslaught of employers—not the other way round. Unity will be our strength; class solidarity is the rustproof weapon of our class. We must always remember who our enemy is: it is the ruling class. We must unite against them and not be diverted by the divisions they sow in our ranks.

Those who consistently mock the trade union movement from outside it do nothing for class unity—quite the opposite, in fact. One must ask, Is that their real purpose?

The trade union movement is the membership. It is up to the membership to get actively involved, to force the changes necessary to advance our interests. Nothing will ever be handed to the working class: every single right we enjoy has been fought hard for.

We must create the conditions and raise class-consciousness, which will lead to the necessary changes in policy. No more must we go down the path of “social partnership,” which always results in social betrayal of the working class by our enemies.

*and legally protected.*

On victimisation and unfair dismissal, the FSU document calls for *strong anti-victimisation measures . . . including immediate reinstatement, pending case, and significant financial penalties if proven. Union Representatives must have the strongest protections to be able to carry out their role free from fear of employer retaliation and employers must be disincentivised from doing so.*

The FSU also did some polling, in which 1,292 people took part. They were asked: “Currently employers are not legally obliged to negotiate with the trade unions of their employees. Should employers be legally required to negotiate with their trade unions if employees wish them to do so?” 74 per cent of respondents said Yes, 17 per cent No, and 10 per cent replied Don't know.

There were two other important features. Between age groups the answers remained remarkably consistent, showing no less interest in collective bargaining among younger people than among older generations. And, based on voting intentions by political party, a majority of voters of all parties in the Dáil support the legal right of unions to negotiate if employees wish them to. The weakest support was (no surprise) among Fine Gael voters, at 56 per cent Yes, and the strongest among Labour Party voters, at 95 per cent. This

## **Workers and trade unions should gain confidence from these victories and organise to grow these green shoots into the rebirth of radical trade unions.**

Covid-19 has exposed the reality of life and the social betrayal of working people in Ireland. Let this be the catalyst that reinvigorates workers and unions to end poverty wages, insecure employment, and the housing and health crises. These are all inextricably linked, all created by the ruling class for their benefit. Poverty wages create higher profits for business-owners; the housing crisis gives massive profits to the property classes, through state subsidies and exorbitant rents; the health crisis is bonanza time for private hospitals and private health insurance—one class always benefiting, the smallest class, the few, while the vast majority, the working class, suffer as a result.

There must be no going back to their “normal.” The green shoots are beginning to appear in the trade union movement. These shoots must be nurtured and built into a militant working class, united against our common enemy, to build an economy for the common good, a new Ireland, united and independent, where all the children of the nation are cherished equally. ★

## **All workers in Ireland have the constitutional right to join a trade union, but this is often frustrated, discouraged, or even penalised by some employers. It is time to change this and make it easier and safer for all workers to join a trade union**

suggests significant support for a legislative approach to rebalance power in the work-place more towards organised workers.

In line with this kind of thinking, Gerry Carroll MLA (PBP) has brought forward a Trade Union Freedom Bill, which seeks to do a number of positive things to undermine Thatcherite legislation from Britain, namely:

- 1 repealing the ban on secondary picketing,
- 2 providing for electronic voting in ballots,
- 3 reducing the period of notice of the start of a ballot given to employers from seven days to two days,
- 4 reducing the employment size required for collective bargaining from over 21 to 5, and
- 5 expanding the definition of collective bargaining to include “terms and conditions of employment” more broadly.

These are all initiatives that communists and all readers of Socialist Voice should support. While not an end in themselves for the working class, they will, if secured, redefine the balance of power in work-places for organised workers and organised labour. ★

\*Available at [https://www.fsunion.org/assets/files/pdf/fsu\\_unionising\\_collective\\_bargainin\\_g\\_final\\_version.pdf](https://www.fsunion.org/assets/files/pdf/fsu_unionising_collective_bargainin_g_final_version.pdf)





# PUBLIC HEALTH

## We can't go on like this

RAYMOND Ó DUBHGHAILL

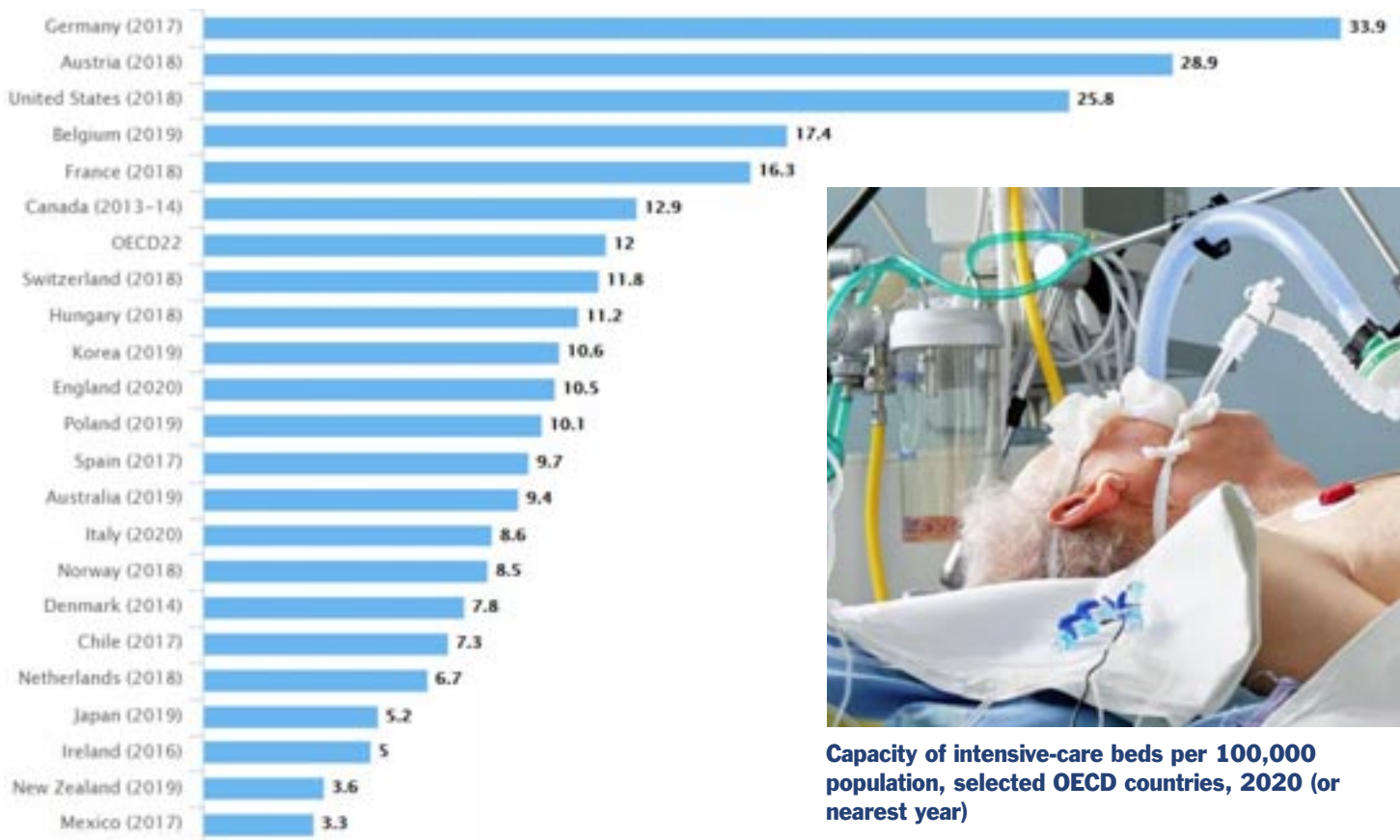
### COVID-19

**T**WO YEARS into the novel coronavirus pandemic and the end seems further away than ever. At the same time it is clearer than ever that the capitalist economic system is hampering our ability both to live with the virus and to mitigate its worst effects.

Decades of government policy

have been designed with a view to promoting and subsidising private health and the purchase of private health insurance by citizens. Income tax relief for the purchase of private insurance accounted for approximately €½ billion per year before the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Under-resourcing the public health system creates an incentive for people to aspire towards private health, thereby ensuring that private profits can be wrung from what should be a public service.

The ignorance of this particular policy decision has been clearly exposed by the pandemic, with panicked Government decisions to restrict people's movements and close down sectors of the economy etc., designed in large part to avoid overburdening a creaking public system. The tension that exists between public freedoms and levels of virus transmission, and therefore the number of individuals in hospital and intensive-care beds, is well established at this point.



Capacity of intensive-care beds per 100,000 population, selected OECD countries, 2020 (or nearest year)

## Individualism versus the common good

JIMMY CORCORAN

### COVID-19

**T**HROUGHOUT THE West, since the onset of the covid pandemic, extreme right-wing forces have given political leadership and muscle to much of the anti-mask-wearing, anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination protests. They do so by trading on a genuine distrust of Big Pharma and on an increasing alienation from bourgeois democracy,

which is more and more exposed as rule by the rich for the rich.

The anti-restrictions movement has also pushed the fringe views of anti-vaxers into the mainstream. Anti-vaxers are an extreme manifestation of the individualism deified by capitalism.

The cult of the individual goes hand in hand with capitalism and is an increasing phenomenon within society. Individualism breaks the bonds of society and makes us into consumers, eager to snap up the "needs" created by capitalism as we attempt to create

our own version of the ideal lifestyle manufactured by advertising companies. It is used to break the bonds of solidarity that are the only weapon working-class people have had in their struggle against capital.

Solidarity formed the basis of the trade union movement and the socialist and communist movements. In rural Ireland, solidarity was the basis on which the Tithe War and later the Land War were prosecuted. All progress has been the result of solidarity, of class struggle.



It is this tension that has driven Government decisions to “lock down” society to some degree or other on multiple occasions since the beginning of 2020.

Ireland boasts one of the highest levels of vaccination in the world, but it also has an extremely low level of ICU capacity, at 5 beds per 100,000 population—less than half the OECD average of 12.<sup>2</sup>

The Government’s strategy of deflecting attention away from this obvious and embarrassing fact has been to solely blame unvaccinated people for the struggles of the health system, with compliant media more than happy to oblige in promoting this hysteria. Aside from the fact that anger and recrimination, the typical poses adopted when speaking about those who are hesitant, for whatever reason, to be vaccinated, are not typically persuasive when trying to have people come round to your thinking, it should be noted that Ireland’s high level of vaccination (95 per cent of adults<sup>3</sup>) is probably higher than the Government could possibly have imagined at the start of the programme (Britain is closer to 75 per cent<sup>4</sup>); and yet we are still in dire straits.

While the solution is clear—public-hospital and ICU capacity must be drastically increased—it is equally clear that there is more than one way of achieving this goal. An immediate means of increasing acute capacity would be to take private hospital capacity into public ownership. In a Special Committee debate in June 2020 the total public-hospital capacity was stated as 12,000 to 13,000 beds and the private capacity as 2,000 beds.<sup>5</sup> The seizure of private bed capacity could mean generating approximately 2,000 new beds in the public system overnight.

There have always been workers who rejected trade-union solidarity and scabbed on their fellow-workers. During the Land War, land-grabbers put their individual needs above those of the community. Today many workers will engage a solicitor to pursue an issue with their employer rather than rely on a trade union. They have come to accept the concept that they have an individual “relationship” with their employer. However, the working class can only make advances by acting not as individuals but as a class.

Anti-vaxers are an extreme manifestation of individualism. The “scientific” basis of the original anti-vaccination campaign has long been

By way of context, the highest one-day total for people in hospital with the virus in the 26 Counties was 683, in November 2021.<sup>6</sup> If the period we are now living through does not seem to be enough of an “emergency” to justify the introduction of such a radical measure, consider that the Government has locked down large parts of society multiple times in the past two years because of lack of capacity in the public system, with huge effects on people’s day-to-day lives, not limited to employment, security, and mental health. If not now, then when?

With public good will and enthusiasm diminished since the beginning of the pandemic, and lockdowns still apparently a part of everyday life, despite high vaccination levels, it is clear that we cannot go on like this indefinitely. Covid-19 is now endemic in society, and we must learn to live with it, and minimise its impact on normal life as best we can. To do so we must demand the following:

- (1) a free, universal all-Ireland health service, paid for by the state and accessible to all;
- (2) a great increase in hospital and ICU capacity, by major capital investment in the medium to long term and by the seizure of private hospital capacity for the public good in the short term;
- (3) the launch of a large-scale recruitment campaign in the public health system, including universal improvements to pay and conditions for new and existing workers;
- (4) the immediate introduction of sickness pay legislation, to ensure that workers can stay at home when they are ill and not risk financial penalty or dismissal; and
- (5) the removal of all copyright and patent laws on vaccines, so that generic versions can be produced and distributed globally through public systems.

discredited and exposed as a sham; but it doesn’t matter that the pseudo-science on which they based their arguments has been discredited: they still claim that they are motivated by the desire to protect themselves and their children, and so they refuse all vaccinations.

That might be all right if they lived in isolated family units; however, they live in society, and, to paraphrase the poet John Donne, “No-one is an island.”

While they may not articulate it as such, their ideology is a rejection of society and the bonds of solidarity. They really are the children of neo-liberalism.

Anti-vaxers are prepared to pursue their right to stand against society even

**Ireland boasts one of the highest levels of vaccination in the world, but it also has an extremely low level of ICU capacity, at 5 beds per 100,000 population—less than half the OECD average of 12**

The public health system in Ireland is dysfunctional and under-resourced. As a result it is not able to cope with the inevitable pressures of an endemic respiratory illness such as covid-19, nor was it able to cope with the demand on its services before the pandemic struck. Waiting-lists for procedures now total roughly one million people,<sup>7</sup> with 97,000 of those children.<sup>8</sup>

We need to drastically overhaul, expand and rethink the system, by any and all means necessary. The two-tier system cannot continue: the health and safety of an entire people depends on it. One thing is certain: we cannot go on like this. ★

## NOTES

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**Anti-vaxers are an extreme manifestation of the individualism deified by capitalism.**

if it means pushing our health system to breaking-point, so endangering the well-being of others. Their pursuit of individualism leaves them open to the ideology of the extreme right. Like Thatcher, in deed if not in word, they believe there is no such thing as society.

The pandemic, and indeed the environmental crisis, has shown the danger to society of the individual’s “right to the pursuit of happiness” against the common good.

Instead of dismissing anti-vaxers as misguided innocents who are entitled to their opinions, the ideology behind the phenomenon must be confronted and defeated before it fuels an even bigger fascist movement. ★



# HEALTH

## Covid and mask-ularity



LAURA DUGGAN

### COVID-19

THE IMPACT of capitalism on women has been discussed in these pages previously, as has the increased risks that women face, both on a personal and a social level, during times of crisis.

Women face increased risk of violence from intimate partners during large sports events, are disproportionately affected by negative economic circumstances, such as recession, the dangers of harassment in service industries, and infection risks through health work during the covid pandemic.

It must be acknowledged that these effects do not happen in isolation—they are the direct result of a number of overlapping and intersecting spheres—but the root is always patriarchal

capitalism. We must also recognise that often men are the mode through which these effects are delivered.

The point of this article is not to place all blame for gender-based inequality at the feet of all men, nor to suggest that all women are victims, nor that men are solely responsible for all evils in the world: the aim is to investigate the way in which masculinity is expressed by men under capitalism, and the effects that the accepted and normalised forms of this gender expression and behaviour have on the world at large.

Working-class men are exploited by capitalism: they are damaged by patriarchal norms, are at higher risk of suicide, homelessness, and drug-dependence; but they also repeat the same damage and exploitation on women of the class, be they actively engaged in violent, sexist or misogynistic behaviour or not.

While in the case of violence by

intimate partners the link with men's behaviour is very clear, it is perhaps not as clear in others. For example, the Road Safety Authority reports that most women killed in road crashes die at the hands of a male driver, and that men are the drivers in 80 per cent of fatal road crashes. A high proportion of these crashes result from drink driving but also from aggressive and over-confident driving. In more than half of driver deaths the driver was not wearing a seat belt.

This is the result of gendered social norms: men being reckless, and women paying the price. There is no biological imperative for men to drive fast, only a desire born from social expectation and acceptance of the behaviour.

Covid has shown that the social understanding "to 'be' or act like a man is to show a lack of concern for care of the self" still rings true.<sup>1</sup> Outside crisis periods, this lack of care can be displayed in several ways, such as delays in dealing with routine health issues, engaging in risky behaviour, dismissal of their own emotional needs, and even mocking educational attainment as feminine and therefore lesser. With regard to covid, as shown by Mahalik,<sup>2</sup> stereotypes of masculine behaviour also encapsulate a distinct lack of care or concern for others, or at the very least a blindness to the fact that their behaviour affects others, who are just as important as themselves.

Men are less likely to engage in correct, effective or regular mask-wearing, less likely to regularly wash their hands, less likely to use social distancing,

## Build on the needs of the children

CLOVER CARROLL

### EDUCATION

WE ARE TOLD that public education is free. However, you don't need to look very far into how the public education system works to see that this simply isn't true.

The public school system, which is supposed to be financed by the tax that working people pay, is filled with further payments, such as for new books and uniforms, which are needed each new school year. These fees are a further burden on the working class and create a block to further education, as the fees for entering third level are the highest in Europe.

In late November students around

the country, in protests organised by the Union of Students in Ireland, stood up against these fees.

Not only is it not free but public education is also influenced by the state in shaping how the youth of the country view the state and, more generally, the world. Within the teaching of Irish history we are never told of the socialist ideas of the Marxist James Connolly. James Connolly's leadership of the Irish Citizen Army, an army composed and led by the Irish proletariat, is omitted from the curriculum, as is the event that led to its founding, the 1913 lockout.

The role the Soviet Union played in the Second World War in holding the eastern front and pushing back against Germany is understated, and its fighting against Japan is omitted. The advances that the Soviet Union made industrially

and socially before, during and after the war are not taught; instead, unsubstantiated lies are pushed into the school curriculum.

The 1960s civil rights movement in America and its progressive outcome, we are told, were from peaceful protests and speeches that combated the status quo but did not interfere with the general working of the state. But the riots throughout America that interfered with the workings of the state are the reason for the social change at the time, and not liberal ideas that the morals of the state were changed.

The socialist leaders and theorists throughout history are vilified by the state for succeeding and their assassination celebrated by the same state.

The influence of the ruling class on the education of our country's youth can





and more likely to see others wearing masks as weak, and to voice these opinions. This creates a self-perpetuating system where men requiring validation from other men fall to peer pressure and engage in behaviour that places others at risk.

With the high level of contagion associated with the omicron variant of covid-19, one must ask whether displays of “toxic masculinity” now also carry a biological threat. Not wearing a mask might be contagious, and while it isn’t sexist in itself its impact certainly is.

More women have been diagnosed than men since the beginning of the pandemic, even though women have higher vaccine uptake rates than men in all age groups other than 65-plus, where the rates are equal. This is because engaging in care of the ill, be it in a professional or a personal setting, places those doing the caring at an extremely high risk of contracting the disease themselves.

The majority of care work in both spheres is carried out by women, placing them and the others they care for at greater risk. According to HSE figures, the proportion of women infected is disproportionately high (78 per cent) among health workers when compared with non-health workers (50 per cent). This is most probably because of many health specialities, such as nursing, being dominated by women. Health work in this definition also includes those carrying out housekeeping and other non-medical tasks in hospital, clinics, and patient-care settings. These staff members are also disproportionately women.

CSO figures show that more men than women have been confirmed dead from covid-19 (the inverse of the

percentage of confirmed cases by gender: 47 against 53 per cent). More men are admitted to hospital with severe covid than women. Men, when they become ill with covid, are more ill than women, and then rely predominantly on women to care for them.

Some research shows that the difference in death rates is a result of biological differences in hormone levels, with higher levels of testosterone being a risk factor,<sup>3</sup> thus making a lie of cis-men’s defensive posturing about how they are unlikely to get “a bad dose,” or are “probably immune anyway.” With the finding that men are less likely to engage in preventive measures, this reveals a failure to recognise the responsibility they have to others in keeping themselves safe and the shared social responsibility not to infect others.

It is a quiet callousness or lack of empathy that allows a person to place their own immediate comfort and convenience—the inconvenience of a mask versus possibly spreading a preventable illness to another—above the health and safety of others. This is individualistic in the extreme. The form of masculinity celebrated under capitalism promotes this individualism, and the toxic results should be no surprise.

While many expressions of femininity under capitalism are also very individualistic, the concept of care for others is also interwoven into this understanding, making femininity often more toxic to the individual than to society at large.

The challenge of building a new and different world is one we all have to take personal responsibility for, in all aspects of our lives. The destruction of capitalism necessitates the disruption of all its

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aspects, and this means challenging what can appear to be benign or inconsequential social norms, often disguised as individualised desires. To challenge gender disparities and allow for unified class struggle it is imperative that we honestly examine the subjects of gender and gender expression under capitalism. This may be uncomfortable and challenging work, but it is deeply necessary.

It is not possible to have clean hands under capitalism, but it is hardly too much to ask that we do not unnecessarily dirty them. ★

■ Figures and percentages are taken from reports by the Health Service Executive, Central Statistics Office, and Road Safety Authority, accessible through their web sites.

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be seen throughout primary, secondary and third-level education. However, the Catholic Church’s influence on primary and secondary education cannot be ignored. Its effect on science subjects and on sex education has been a hindrance to Ireland’s youth for many years. They are denied a full, expansive education in the sciences, as parts fundamental to biology are overlooked because they go against the Catholic Church’s teachings.

The Catholic Church’s influence over school also alienates those of other religions, as even learning about religion concentrates mainly on Christianity through a Catholic view. Such religions as Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam are overlooked in the education system, even though the morning, lunchtime and evening prayers have nothing to do with non-Christian religions.

In Russia before the October Revolution illiteracy was more than 60 per cent. After the revolution the new

socialist government began making changes to the education system to promote literacy throughout the population. Preliminary exams required for entering university were abolished, and all lectures were made free to attend. Native languages were taught in schools to pupils who were not native Russians.

The Soviet Union was the first socialist state. Its reforms in the education system were an inspiration to other socialist states, such as Cuba. In Cuba before Fidel Castro led the workers against Fulgencio Batista the literacy rate was 77 per cent, but when Castro took power he believed all people in Cuba should be able to read and write. In 1960 the Cuban literacy campaign began, with the aim that all adults would be literate within a year. Schools were built throughout the countryside, and literacy grew among the Cuban people.

Today, according to UNESCO, the literacy rate in Cuba is 99 per cent—the

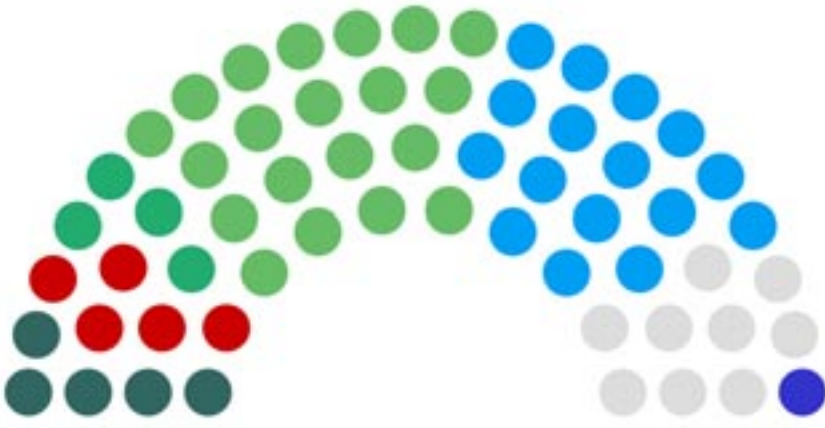
**The public school system, which is supposed to be financed by the tax that working people pay, is filled with further payments, such as for new books and uniforms, which are needed each new school year.**

same as the rate in Ireland. Schooling in Cuba is free for all children, with no exception. The school system provides a scholarship plan that guarantees accommodation, food and, in cases where they’re needed, uniforms, all free. Cuba also has one of the highest teacher-to-pupil ratios, with 1 teacher to 20 pupils. Many of the schools open from 6:30 a.m. and don’t close for twelve hours, providing free morning and after-school care for the children of working parents.

The education system of Cuba is built upon the needs of the children and the working people, not the needs and wants of the state.

We must look at how our education system is run, what influences it and how we can change it so we can have an education system made within working people’s interests. Access to education should not be limited by one’s wealth but should be free and open to all. ★





## What is the purpose of Seanad Éireann?

**TOMMY MCKEARNEY**

### CONSTITUTION

**D**OES ANYBODY know what real purpose Seanad Éireann serves? Not only is its membership appointed by a flawed and undemocratic process but its programme is erratic and tendentious and frequently overlooks crucial issues.

Little illustrates this better than its agenda last month. While giving prejudicial vent to its hostility towards China, it failed to mention an important issue relating to policing in the Southern Irish jurisdiction.

Twice within the past four years the

current Garda commissioner, Drew Harris, has been severely criticised for major errors of judgement in relation to important, sensitive issues. In 2017 Mr Justice Seamus Treacy ruled in the Belfast High Court that the decision by Harris to shut down the Historic Enquiries Team, investigating state collusion with the Glenanne gang, was an “extreme” abuse of power.

Then last month the Supreme Court in London ruled that the decision by the PSNI in 2014, also made by Harris, not to proceed with an investigation into the maltreatment of internees known as the “hooded men” was flawed and irrational.

One could surely be forgiven for thinking that there is, at the very least, a serious absence of priorities by our

unelected senators when they could devote their attention to self-serving allegations of events 5,000 miles distant yet overlook a serious and well-authenticated operational deficiency by a holder of high office in the Republic.

There is, however, the hard reality that these political manoeuvres in Seanad Éireann are not random acts or egregious aberrations: rather they are part of a right-wing, pro-imperialist strategy being promoted by well-connected members of Ireland’s ruling class.

These reactionary advocates have two main concerns and objectives. On the one hand they are determined to maintain, at all costs, the present social and economic free-market capitalist status quo throughout this country. This, they believe, can best be guaranteed by preventing constitutional change that would challenge Ireland’s position within the imperialist matrix.

The Irish bourgeoisie’s concern with China is generated by their slavish adherence and dependence on the needs and demands of American capital. The North American superpower is in decline. Of course it has a massive military capacity, but its economy is faltering and its population riven with dissent. As a consequence of building an economic system concentrated on reaping ever-increasing profit for an ever-smaller number of people, much industrial production has been outsourced overseas, with the inevitable loss of what once was well-paid employment.

## Undoing the Conquest

**GRAHAM HARRINGTON**

### OUR HISTORY

**I**RISH REPUBLICANISM has always had a weak spot when it comes to history. While we can name every battle, every martyr and graveyard in this country’s perennial struggle for sovereignty and independence, we fail to look at the bigger picture and learn the lessons of that history.

Much will be made of the Civil War period as being the result of a sell-out. In reality the Irish ruling class has always been consistent in its principles. Its interests have never been with an independent and united Ireland. The Free State represented the interests of that class of ranchers, big-house

aristocrats and industrialists and the gombeenmen who always acted as the servants of imperialism.

Not for nothing was the newly formed CPI the first party to oppose the Treaty. Marxism offers a powerful means of understanding the broader political struggle. Republicans such as Tadhg Barry and Liam Mellows learnt through the independence struggle the famous maxim of Henry Joy McCracken that “the rich always betray the poor.” But the poor can only be betrayed if we put our faith in the rich in the first place.

Among those most opposed to the Treaty were Cumann na mBan and Fianna Éireann. Women and youth were the ones most opposed to the counter-revolution, and it was they who were the most oppressed by the state that emerged in the 26 Counties, as

exemplified by the mother-and-baby homes.

The labour movement stood aside from the Civil War and declared a general strike “against militarism.” It was the failure of the workers’ movement as much as of the republican movement to see the class interests behind the Treaty that allowed the carnival of reaction to triumph.

Connolly’s lesson on how the national struggle and class struggle need to be intertwined was lost amid a non-materialist and simplistic struggle between economism and nationalism. We have not yet learnt the lessons of our defeat a hundred years ago and, as Irish unity draws closer, are sleepwalking into the same mistakes.

There are those who oppose a united Ireland because it will not be a ready-made socialist republic, treating socialism as just a slogan rather than something substantial. The excuse is the





Mellody Hobson, chairwoman of the Starbucks Corporation and a director of the investment bank J. P. Morgan Chase, stressed the difficulties facing the American economic model in an article last month in the *Financial Times*.<sup>1</sup> Writing that “systemic inequalities exist,” she mentioned the fact that in the 1970s, 61 per cent of American households lived in middle-income households, while that figure is now 51 per cent and falling.

In contrast to the faltering American economy, China is growing all the time. Significantly too, and in spite of disapproval by the White House, America’s financial sector recognises this fact and is eager to invest in China.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the People’s Republic is increasingly seen as offering an alternative to the US-led economic bloc, both as a successful, sustainable model for economic development and as a valuable trading partner.

It hardly requires a great deal of imagination, therefore, to understand why Ireland’s bourgeoisie would be determined to bad-mouth the Chinese government. A prospering state led by a competent communist party could, and most probably would, set an example for others to follow. This would be especially so in a country with a festering housing crisis, an iniquitous two-tier health system, and structural inequality, together with an unresolved national question.

Unwilling to risk contesting the arena with China in the area of economic development, Seanad Éireann’s right wing has opted instead to try to blacken the country’s reputation through reference to events in Hong Kong and criticising China’s

**The Irish bourgeoisie’s concern with China is generated by their slavish adherence and dependence on the needs and demands of American capital. The North American superpower is in decline. Of course it has a massive military capacity, but its economy is faltering and its population riven with dissent.**

long-time “one China” policy in relation to Taiwan. In doing so the Seanad was demonstrating not only astonishing arrogance but also contempt for the history of colonial exploitation.

For more than a century China suffered what its people call the “hundred years of humiliation,” when the country lost territory, including Hong Kong, to Western powers and control over its own governance. Just how humiliating, not to mention damaging, this period was can be gauged by the fact that in the nineteenth century British gunboats bombarded China’s east coast to force Chinese people to buy opium from British merchants.

Interestingly, when spokespersons for China talk about Hong Kong and Taiwan they speak in terms of national reunification. Indeed when the Chinese embassy in Ireland issued a statement critical of the anti-China motion recently adopted by Seanad Éireann it drew a pointed parallel with Ireland’s own and long colonial experience.<sup>3</sup> With a powerful reference to Ireland’s past, it requested that Irish politicians respect the Chinese people’s aspiration to realise national reunification as much as they (the Chinese) respect the Irish people’s aspiration to realise national reunification.

Let’s be clear about what motivates the Irish bourgeoisie’s fixation on China—and it’s not concern for human rights. If that were the case there is a long list of violators (beginning with the United States and Britain) demanding censure well before the People’s Republic might come up for mention. The reason is the changing balance of power in the world.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, those benefiting from the current US-

dictated imperialist world order (including the Irish ruling class) are determined to preserve the status quo.

There is nothing new in this tactic. Every progressive development in human history has been vilified by a reactionary ruling class—from Spartacus to the Jacobins and then the Bolsheviks, to name but a few.

Little of this will come as surprise to most readers of *Socialist Voice*. However, it is worth reminding ourselves that many well-meaning people are misled by the establishment media, both print and broadcast. It is important that we maintain and where possible increase our drive to correct this false propaganda. In the course of doing so it would also be worth raising a few queries about Seanad Éireann’s odd position in relation to the British state’s employees condoning of torture and collusion in the Northern jurisdiction. ★

#### Notes

- 1 Mellody Hobson, “The US must confront financial illiteracy head-on,” *Financial Times* (London), 18 December 2021.
- 2 See, for example, Steve Johnson, “Investors shrug off Beijing intervention worries to pump money into ETFs,” *Financial Times*, 22 December 2021.
- 3 Xinhua, “Chinese embassy in Ireland expresses opposition to China-related motion passed by Irish Senate,” 3 December 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3EtE2MV>).
- 4 Zanny Minton Beddoes, “Rivalry between America and China will shape the post-covid world,” *Economist* (London), 14 November 2021.

lack of radicalism within Sinn Féin.

This gives Sinn Féin too much credit, in all honesty. While Sinn Féin is high in the opinion polls, and likely to be in government, north and south, after the next general election in the 26 Counties, there is a difference between being in government and being in power.

It might surprise those not familiar with Irish history to learn that Fianna Fáil in the 1930s was to the left of the party now led by Mary Lou McDonald. Fianna Fáil was red-baited by the Blueshirts with anti-communist and “shadow of the gunman” propaganda because it provided council housing, state companies and a basic welfarism while undoing the more unpopular aspects of the Treaty.

It’s no surprise that this Fianna Fáil was able to win the support of a large section of workers and small farmers, much like Sinn Féin now. Its role was exactly that: to get the working class to

**Connolly’s lesson on how the national struggle and class struggle need to be intertwined was lost amid a non-materialist and simplistic struggle between economism and nationalism.**

buy in to the state. The priority was developing a native capitalism that could get more concessions from Britain—hence the maintaining of parity with the English pound.

It was Fianna Fáil that delivered the 26 Counties into the EEC (now the EU) and opened the country to the primarily American transnationals. Today the Irish ruling class has made a show of criticising the British while using the Americans and EU as allies. To reduce the struggle against imperialism to one just against Britain is to miss the point. The Irish Citizen Army declared *Neither King nor Kaiser but Ireland*, yet today some of those who claim its legacy try to use Washington and Brussels to bring about a united Ireland.

Fianna Fáil used republicanism as a tactic rather than a principle; and there is reason to believe they will not be the last to do this. The question remains concerning when Sinn Féin will reach its

SYRIZA moment. Who can forget the cries of *óchi* [no] around Europe only to see SYRIZA capitulate to its EU creditors!

A united Ireland is the future, so we must build it today. Our opponents will negotiate their united Ireland in back rooms, business forums, and the columns of the *Irish Times*. Our united Ireland has to come from going to our people and be built in struggle with them.

To an extent we already have an Ireland united, a people that—north and south, Catholic, Protestant, and neither—are united in their alienation from the political establishment acting against our interests, united in their lack of a say in what is decided for us in London, Brussels, or Washington.

We have to learn from history and organise as a class to bring about a republic worthy of the name. ★



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## Summit of hypocrisy



SAJEEV KUMAR

### IMPERIALISM

“The white man’s burden” was a phrase used to justify colonial aggression, which meant it was the duty of the white man to teach civilisation to the world. But what actually happened was unprecedented atrocities, unknown in the history of human civilisation.

Now the United States has taken up the burden of spreading “democracy” and “freedom” by

intervention in other countries. But wherever it has intervened it has only created refugees, and not democracy. The “war on terror” has only created Isis and invigorated Talibans.

The word “democracy” is misused by imperialism to camouflage its war crimes against countries that oppose imperialist hegemony.

An international summit on democracy was called by Joe Biden on 9 and 10 December that had nothing related to democracy except an attempt to create a bloc against

Russia and China, thereby initiating a new Cold War. It is an indication of the frustration of the United States at its diminishing hegemony and a realisation that the earth under its feet is fast eroding.

This summit was happening when there was a stepping up of tension on the Ukrainian border. When the Soviet Union crumbled, an assurance was given to Gorbachev that NATO forces in Europe would not proceed an inch eastwards, and he was naïve enough to believe it. Now NATO forces are moved to the Ukrainian border to threaten Russia. Gorbachev, now at ninety years of age, is lamenting that the United States is becoming arrogant after the Soviet collapse.

This summit aimed at manufacturing consent to justify military spending of \$768 billion for the new Cold War, which Democrats and Republicans have agreed upon.

It’s interesting to notice the peak of hypocrisy when we look at the countries that participated in the “summit on democracy.” India (which has been downgraded as “partly free” by the American organisation Freedom House) was one among the participants, where, interestingly, a Nazi-type oath was taken by right-wing Hindutva fanatics to commit genocide against Muslims, like the one against

## Danger: The brain drain and human resources

HEDELBERTO LÓPEZ BLANCH

(Red en Defensa de la Humanidad, Cuba)

THE CORONAVIRUS pandemic has proved disastrous for all the nations of the world, and especially for the less-developed ones, which are now facing another serious economic threat: the theft of brains and human resources by developed countries.

An article in the *New York Times* of 24 November 2021 (of six in a row devoted to emigration) emphasises that covid kept many people locked up at home; and now several developed countries, facing an aging work force and labour shortages, are rushing to recruit, train and integrate foreigners. Until recently, with underhand

propaganda manoeuvres, the plundering of talent and graduate professionals in Latin America and the Caribbean was already becoming a deadly epidemic for the development of those nations.

Before the pandemic a report by the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) indicated that in recent times Latin America had been the region of the world with the greatest increase in emigration to more developed countries. The figures are economically damaging for countries that, with few resources and enormous efforts, train their professionals while others, despite having greater potential, take them away, at no cost.

Between 1990 and 2010, SELA reported that 4.1 million Latin American doctors, engineers, cyberneticists,

mathematicians, architects and other professionals emigrated to the United States and 1 million to the European Union. The curtains that were used to hide these thefts have fallen, and the actions are being carried out openly.

“It’s a war for young talent,” asserts Parag Khanna, author of the book *Move* (2021), who has advised governments on immigration policy. “There is a much clearer ladder and codification of residency levels as countries get serious about having balanced demographics and meeting labour shortages.”

The *New York Times* article notes: “As the global economy reboots and tries to put the pandemic aside, a worldwide battle for the young and the skilled has begun. With fast-track visas and promises of permanent residency, many of the wealthy nations driving the global economy are sending a message to skilled immigrants around the world: we are offering you jobs.”

It reports that in Germany the authorities admitted that they need



Rohingya Muslims in Burma. Israel, another participant, even denies basic necessities, such as food, water, and medicines, to the Palestinian people. Authoritarian states such as Duterte's Philippines and Bolsonaro's Brazil were also among those invited.

The US penchant for democracy is evident when it refuses to lift the economic blockade on Cuba in spite of 184 countries in the UN General Assembly supporting the removal of the ban.

Nicolás Maduro was elected democratically as president of Venezuela, but the United States refuses to recognise his government and does not allow Venezuela to use its own gold, worth £1.4 billion (which the country wants to use for covid relief), stored in the Bank of England, instead recognising the imperialist pimp Juan Guaidó, who wants the gold to stay in the Bank of England's locker.

What is the state of democracy in the United States? Black people got voting rights in the United States only in 1965, when black women also got the right to vote. But movements such as Black Lives Matter originated because black people "can't breathe" under the racial discrimination of US "democracy."

This "democracy" holds the record of having the largest number of people in prison as a proportion of the population. Most of the people languishing in prison are black people, falsely implicated and

made to work as slaves—slavery in essence but different in form. Guantánamo prison is considered by Amnesty International a notorious example of American violation of human rights, where innocents are detained without trial in the name of anti-terrorism.

If democracy is rule by the people, on how many issues affecting the people has the United States conducted referendums? In the United States, electoral democracy is only a method of choosing one of the two parties with the same policy; this is the reason that there is a decline in the proportion of the people participating in the democratic process, as the public feel they have no say in policy-making. In other words, US "democracy" is an electoral autocracy.

Has there been a reckoning in US "democracy" for the mishandling of covid-19, which killed so many people in spite of the country's developments in science and technology?

How does US "democracy" value labour rights? American "democracy" denies Amazon employees the right to unionise. Over a period of one year six workers died in an Amazon warehouse in Alabama because of inhuman working conditions, and the corporate giant is trying to cover it up. In Edwardsville, Illinois, after a tornado hit an Amazon warehouse, six employees died.

## **The US penchant for democracy is evident when it refuses to lift the economic blockade on Cuba in spite of 184 countries in the UN General Assembly supporting the removal of the ban.**

This is the way the United States, which preaches democracy to the whole world, treats its own people.

The summit began with Joe Biden's words, "A free and independent media is the bedrock of democracy." On the other hand, Julian Assange, who exposed the lies and war crimes of the US government, is being harassed. Each year \$300 million (\$1.2 billion in four years) is spent on "countering Chinese influence," which means that anything to vilify China will be published, without research or verification of its authenticity. Gallons of crocodile tears will be shed by the corporate media for the Uyghur Muslims while not a word will be published of US war crimes against innocent Muslims in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Fidel Castro, speaking in the Central University of Venezuela in 1999, several years after the ending of the Soviet Union, emphasised the "battle of ideas." US propaganda, which is financed in billions, should be countered by an ideological battle.

When Francis Fukuyama celebrated the fall of the Soviet Union as "the end of history," Fidel countered: "You tell about the failure of socialism, but where is the success of capitalism?"

This propaganda to expose capitalism has to be taken up, and hollow lectures on democracy should be deflated. ★

400,000 new immigrants a year to fill various jobs and are offering expedited visas to individuals and six months to visit and find sources of employment.

Canada, which for the fifth consecutive year had a decline in births, plans to grant residence to 1.2 million new immigrants; and New Zealand announced that it will grant a permanent stay to hundreds of holders of temporary visas. Belgium, Finland and Greece granted work rights to foreigners who had arrived on student visas or other categories.

The writer adds that in Australia, where mines, hospitals and bars are short of labour after almost two years with the border closed, the government intends to double the number of immigrants, while Britain, which has suffered a drain of workers after Brexit and the pandemic, will admit the arrival of workers from different countries.

The United States, the largest recipient of immigrants, ensures the

admission of specialised personnel through various schemes established for decades, such as the "green card," and gimmicks such as the so-called "bombos," Parole and others without excluding the millions of temporary workers who work in agriculture, services, and construction.

The reality is that with the brain drain the country of origin loses the investment in higher education of these professionals, as well as the social capital of which the individual was a part, which reduces the economic possibilities and development of the country.

A report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states that between 2015 and 2017 a total of 866,000 Mexicans emigrated, among them "scientists, technicians, and highly qualified personnel." Mexico is followed by Colombia (364,000), Cuba (345,000), Jamaica (271,000), Brazil

(266,000), Peru (251,000), Argentina (222,000), Venezuela (199,000), Dominican Republic (168,000), Ecuador (160,000), Haiti (157,000), and El Salvador (125,000).

The Republic of Cuba has been a special political case for the United States, which for more than sixty years has imposed a suffocating economic-financial siege and, in an attempt to destroy its revolution, offers ample emigration facilities to any citizen of the country, the only one in the world to receive these "benefits."

After the lack of qualified professionals, because of different factors, that developed countries are now suffering from, they have swooped down like vultures on developing countries to extract their professionals. Once again the rich are raging against the poorest, making it increasingly necessary to create a fairer and more just world for the good of Humanity. ★



## Liam O’Flaherty and the Irish Free State



JENNY FARRELL

### CULTURE & NATION

**L**IAM O’FLAHERTY is one of the foremost Irish fiction-writers of the twentieth century. Like none other, he commented in his work on the early years of the Irish state following its incomplete independence from 1921.

Betrayal of the ideals of 1916, betrayal of the ideals of the War of Independence, is the paramount theme in O’Flaherty’s novel *The House of Gold* (1929). Its significance lies in the way it exemplifies and typifies for Ireland, and by extension for other post-colonial countries, how the newly empowered, corrupt native bourgeoisie has replaced the British ruling class, headed by the money and power-hungry Ramon Mor Costello and his clerical abettors.

*The House of Gold* is O’Flaherty’s only novel in which a gombeenman figures in a leading role; and O’Flaherty states unambiguously in the novel: “in every little town in Ireland you will find a man like Ramon Mor.”

Rather than follow a strictly chronological, traditional plot curve, events take a back seat to the

relationships that are revealed in the novel. The social panorama of the town unfolds as all are shown, each in their dependence on the tyrant Ramon Mor.

As in other O’Flaherty novels, there are no heroes, no characters the reader is invited to identify with; instead, in Brechtian style, readers are kept at an emotional distance, which encourages them to view the scenes with a detachment that allows for critical thought and reflection.

The novel’s expressionist style was widespread among modernist left-wing writers at that time. In this respect O’Flaherty proves himself part of the European modernist avant-garde and must be classified along with Brecht and other left-wing modern early twentieth-century writers.

The essential truth about the Irish Free State was, as Liam O’Flaherty saw it, that the new Irish bourgeoisie have simply stepped into the shoes of the English and Anglo-Irish landlords. They have literally moved into their big houses and continue to exploit the working population in the same way as before.

Ramon Mor Costello, and many of the characters around him, are damaged by the times of their own making, deprived of their humanity in diverse ways, out of touch with



## An independent entertainer

MICK HEALY

It’s worth recalling that one of the highlights of the 2016 James Connolly Festival was the music performed by Bad Sea, which closed the festival with an incredible performance from Ciara Thompson, who lifted the roof with her magical voice.

Ciara Mary-Alice Thompson, or CMAT, the moniker she has adopted, is a singer-songwriter of exceptional power and maturity who has never been afraid to reinvent herself, beginning her career at seventeen as one half of the since-disbanded Bad Sea. CMAT abandons the gloss of her contemporary music counterparts in favour of crafting songs filled with what she describes as “brutal

honesty about her own experiences as a young woman.”\*

CMAT entered the Irish singles chart in April 2021 with “I Don’t Really Care for You,” which rose to No. 1. Her debut album, *If My Wife New I’d Be Dead*, will be released on 25 February.

What’s more, with a constant stream of well-produced videos and singles, and the livestreaming of Ciara’s performances, especially during the lockdown, it’s no wonder this independent artist has sold out shows in both Ireland and England.

The public being unaware of female talent was almost expected, CMAT declares; after all, how are most people going to discover new music if the radio stations aren’t playing it? “There are some male acts getting so much radio play and they can’t sell tickets to gigs,” she says. “Stations say they’re playing what people want to hear, but who wants to hear it? There’s such a disparity between who’s being played on radio and who’s actually selling out venues.” ★

\*Hot Press, May 2019.



themselves and their own people. So at this metaphorical level O'Flaherty shows that independence has not brought about a freer society. Ramon Mor's political power serves only to increase his power over his people, to make them miserable. Their lives are unchanged.

In addition to this, readers see the influence of the Catholic Church, never far away from or independent of Ramon Mor. The doctor comments: "The Church is more sacred than the law, and the citizen has very few rights where the clergy are concerned."

Many of the impoverished ordinary folk, the people living in the mountains, emigrate. They are Francis O'Neill's people, among them a big man who damns the new state and Ramon Mor.

In another encounter, this time between Ramon and his own villagers, the parallel character to the big man in the previous scene is Tommy Derrane, who challenges Ramon directly.

These ordinary people see through Ramon Mor, understand his nature, and know they can neither trust him nor expect to be treated any better than they were under colonial rule. They have energy, and insight, and are unafraid, yet isolated, and the majority of the people around them are subservient to Ramon.

The town is destitute, the inhabitants overcome with a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness. The

middle-class characters in the novel are ineffectual, often too afraid of Ramon and his power to act decisively. This fear has an impact on a latent resentment that fails to spark into rebellion.

Great is the combined power of church and state. When the doctor suggests setting up a library, the townsfolk comment: "How are ye going to have a library, when Fr. Considine'd come and burn the books? Not that I want a library. That man Ramon Mor has this town sucked dry. Along with taking the people's money, he has taken their hearts as well."

The hearts that struggled for independence have been taken away by this unholy alliance. The ideals of 1916, the ideals of 1921, have been sold out. Instead the Free State has become a neo-colonial backwater ruled by the gombeenmen, and created a system where even access to literature and thought is censored.

Typical for O'Flaherty novels of his time, there is no hero, no one person who truly grasps the situation and attempts to change it. The central character is a villain. The majority of the people we encounter appear traumatised by the loss of the ideals for a society that would treat "all the children of the nation equally," as the 1916 Proclamation had determined.

Demonstrating the absence of a united force capable of bringing about change also defines the realism of O'Flaherty's work. A sense of petrification prevails. ★

#### LEFT

Portrait of Liam O'Flaherty by Harry Kernoff RHA (1900-1974)

#### BELOW RIGHT

Charlie Chaplin as a young man

## Greed A found poem

### CHARLIE CHAPLIN

Greed has poisoned men's souls,  
has barricaded the world with hate,  
has goose-stepped us into misery  
and bloodshed.  
We have developed speed,  
but we have shut ourselves in.  
Machinery that gives abundance  
has left us in want.  
Our knowledge has made us cynical;  
our cleverness, hard and unkind.  
We think too much and feel too little.  
More than machinery,  
we need humanity.  
More than cleverness,  
we need kindness and gentleness.  
Without these qualities,  
life will be violent and all will be lost.



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## Lulled into acceptance

ALAN FARRELL

### COVID-19

FOR MOST of the pandemic we have been lulled into acceptance; what would have been unthinkable in the past has now transformed into expected repeated public health strategy.

Lockdowns, when introduced, were intended as a time-saving measure to “buy the Government time” to prepare hospitals and health infrastructure. Two years later we have had no significant improvement in investment, nor are there plans for any real expansion.

As has been noted in *Socialist Voice* and in many other publications, the Government are little more than bookkeepers for the ruling class. While the first lockdown might have had a wider remit and kept most businesses closed or working from home, subsequent lockdowns were essentially only for service industries and for tourism, restaurants, and pubs. While it may seem to the middle classes that we have all been working from home for two years, many large businesses<sup>1</sup> (including factories and meat-packing plants) stayed open, while delivery drivers, hauliers, teachers and health workers continued to go to work, thereby allowing the economy to function while giving the gloss to the urban elite that the Government were applying measures to stop the spread of the virus.

What should be abundantly clear now, as we experience our fourth wave, is that lockdowns (especially those that apply only to offices and to hotels, restaurants, and pubs) do little if anything to ultimately mitigate the spread of covid.

However, these semi-lockdowns do have more troubling effects. Apart from instilling a generalised fear of socialising among the population, they inevitably come down hardest on the most marginalised groups in our society. Mountjoy Square, one of the only public places in one of the poorest parts of Dublin, was patrolled endlessly and aggressively by gardaí during the first lockdown, even being threatened with closure if people didn't meet arbitrary public health guidelines that had little or nothing to do with stopping the spread of covid. This was not the case in the

leafier suburbs. These aggressive public measures inevitably only exacerbate existing class divisions.

When covid vaccination passes were introduced as an “emergency” measure at the end of the summer of 2021 we were assured that it would be only temporary; indeed the Government had to agree to a human rights assessment to determine whether the invasive measure was merited. So far they have done no such thing and have only renewed it twice, the only plan regarding these passes being to make them no longer valid for someone after nine months without a booster.

Again it should be apparent that this measure has had no effect on the spread of covid, yet it seems, as with rolling lockdowns, a measure that is here to stay. Once again it is a measure that disproportionately affects the most vulnerable in our society. The lowest vaccine uptake was in sections of our society that, for a variety of valid reasons, are sceptical about those in power. Travellers, immigrants, the urban poor—these are all groups that have been shown statistically to be resistant to taking the vaccine and are therefore the most disproportionately affected by the passes.

Even more extreme measures are being introduced throughout the European Union, with well-publicised vaccine mandates due to come into effect in Germany and Austria in the spring of 2022. The characterisation by the mainstream media of those who would oppose such measures is generally that of the far right. While it is true that many on the right use criticisms of such measures to further their cause, there nevertheless remains a principled left-wing and materialist critique of them. Fundamentally, that is to always ask ourselves, “Cui bono?” (To whom is it a benefit?).

However, the silence from the left has been deafening. Indeed many on the left seem hesitant to criticise any of the above measures for fear of being seen as right-wing, a “conspiracy theorist,” a crank, etc. The Trotskyist left go even further, with TDs from People Before Profit routinely calling for stricter lockdown measures and stricter applications of the covid passes.

Why has the left not challenged any of these measures? They have been abundantly beneficial for the ruling

classes, allowing those already powerful and wealthy to increase profits and shore up power. They have also failed to do the very thing they were apparently introduced to do: to stop the spread of the virus.

We are two years into this pandemic and we have not seen any real benefit to working people. Vaccine mandates, passes and lockdowns do more harm to the most vulnerable in society and serve only to enrich our powerful elite. Things that would really, significantly improve the lives of working people while also curbing the spread of the virus have routinely been dismissed, namely increased ventilation infrastructure, proper, full statutory sickness pay,<sup>2</sup> free antigen tests, and massive capital outlay on what was already an underfinanced and overstretched health service. We should not let the far right co-opt criticisms of pandemic mitigation that quite nakedly benefit the ruling class at working people's expense. ★

### Notes

- 1 Businesses that employ 250 or more people, which account for only 0.2 per cent of active businesses yet accounted for 63 per cent of total gross value added (GVA) in 2018.
- 2 The state plans to introduce three days of up to 70 per cent of pay as the statutory minimum in 2022, a measure so laughably ineffective when it comes to the amount of self-isolation etc. that is now required for this pandemic that it barely merits a mention.

