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FOR A WORKERS' RIGHTS ACT NOW!



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"Our ambition is big: to construct a global agenda around which we can unite the world . . ."

Tony Blair (letter to George Bush, 26 March 2003).

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An alternative to capitalist feminism

MIRANDA LYNCH
POLITICS

THIS MARCH, those of us who are “lucky” enough to work at liberal corporations, or are surrounded by liberal organisations, are once more sure to encounter “liberal” or capitalist feminism. Usually these corporations and organisations will drop the “Working” from International Working Women’s Day, which should give a hint to their position on workers’ rights.

In this article I will examine capitalist feminism and suggest an alternative, in the form of workers’ feminism. For this I will use the book *Lean In*, published in 2013 by an American business executive and billionaire, Sheryl Sandberg. Because it’s generally well sourced and has been influential, we can investigate her message as a

manifesto for liberal feminism.

Sandberg urges women to “lean in”—to advance their career in the company and to use their position to advance women’s issues. She talks about her experience as a pregnant woman working as an executive in a large American tech company. When she finds out there is no pregnancy parking she demands to see the CEO, who agrees with her. In Sandberg’s words, “Having one pregnant woman at the top made the difference.”¹

While this was a positive influence, the message that women’s equality will be achieved through female executives is reductive and unrealistic. High-ranked millionaire and billionaire women cannot represent the majority of working-class women, who are struggling with the reality of low pay, work-place harassment, and rising costs of living

....women’s issues are a political and not an individualist struggle

and health and child care.² This is doubly true for women of othered identities, such as migrant women and women with disabilities.

Her book started a movement where women joined “Lean-In Circles.” In these circles women mentor each other to advance in the work-place by learning to state their own achievements and to negotiate for a higher salary.

In practice this is a very individualistic approach and mostly benefits women who are already high-earning and in a position to bargain individually.³

Instead of an individualistic feminism that aims for upper-class women achieving equality with their male peers we need a workers’ feminism based on true solidarity between workers of all genders. Women should join trade unions to demand

Violence against women: A class question

THERESE MOLONEY
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

WHILE VIOLENCE against women cuts across socio-economic divides, working-class women are particularly exposed both to violence—especially violence from strangers—and to its economic effects.

Urantssetseg Tserendorj was an office cleaner who was attacked in the Financial Services Centre in Dublin as she made her way home from her shift in January 2021. She died from her injuries two weeks later.

Cleaners, health workers, pub and restaurant workers: it is working-class women who are most likely to have to walk or take public transport to and from their work late at night, exposing them to the kind of random attack that killed Urantssetseg Tserendorj.

Working-class women are also least able to escape situations of domestic violence and build new, safer lives for themselves and their children. The fewer a woman’s financial resources the less able she will be to gain access to support and alternative accommodation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in 2015 the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless found that violence is the most common reason for women

becoming homeless.

While a woman escaping domestic violence might stay for a short period at a women’s refuge, these services are under increasing strain, especially against the background of the covid-19 pandemic. There are nine counties in Ireland with no women’s refuge emergency accommodation, while others may have no available beds at any given time.

A woman may therefore be forced to stay in a homeless shelter or to obtain insecure temporary accommodation with friends or family. In the worst case she may be forced to sleep rough. Such circumstances inevitably undermine a woman’s ability to obtain or to keep a job.

Tackling violence against women and girls requires a collective approach.

We need to address the precursors of violence—the verbal aggression, the remarks, the “slut-shaming,” the everyday sexism—until they become unacceptable. And for this, women need men and boys to be our allies. We need them to shut down conversations that disrespect women. We need them to shut down the suggestive remarks. We need them to shut down the inappropriate messaging. We need them to shut down the social-media trolling.

That all-of-society approach must be

Violence against working-class women is further magnified by the economic power relations both inside and outside the domestic setting

underpinned by policy measures, and that means resources. It also means explicitly recognising the class dimensions of violence against women and its effects, and designing policy responses accordingly.

Paid domestic violence leave is one concrete measure that would help women to get out of an abusive relationship and find a new home for themselves and their children. In December 2021 the Department of Equality announced that a report on such a scheme was being prepared as a preliminary to a consultation process; and in January Sinn Féin tabled a bill that would give survivors of domestic violence a statutory entitlement to ten days’ paid leave.

In response, the Government has stated that it intends addressing the issue when enacting the EU Work-Life Balance Directive later this year. It will be up to socialists inside and outside the Dáil to ensure that this does not fall off the legislative agenda.

Paid domestic violence leave must be matched by social welfare provision. While the short-term rent supplement scheme for survivors of domestic abuse is helpful, it is available only for a limited period, and the protocol governing it is subject to interpretation by community welfare officers. If a woman is approved for either the rent supplement scheme or



better work-place conditions through collective bargaining, instead of hoping that their female boss will ask the CEO nicely.

Ultimately we should realise that women's issues are a political and not an individualist struggle. We should campaign to make sure everyone has access to high-quality health services and reproductive health, not just the few executive women who "leaned in." We should campaign for high-quality public housing to combat the rising costs of living that affect women. And we should stand in solidarity with women in the Third World, who are especially forgotten by capitalist feminism. ★

- 1 Sheryl Sandberg, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (introduction), New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013.
- 2 Kathleen Geier, "Does feminism have a class problem?" *Nation* (New York), 11 June 2014 (www.tinyurl.com/jeajkcw8).
- 3 Katherine Goldstein, "I was a Sheryl Sandberg superfan: Then her 'Lean in' advice failed me," *Vox*, 6 December 2018 (tinyurl.com/yck9yntn).

the housing assistance payment, a shortage of rental accommodation locally may still be a barrier.

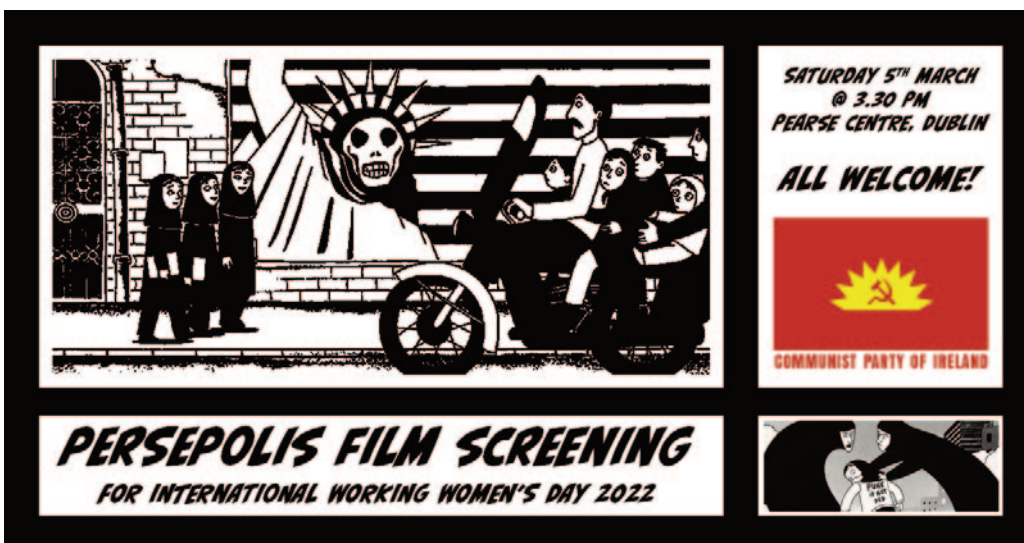
Even if a woman is able to obtain accommodation, the transition will inevitably entail costs, and women may fear that means-tested payments would still be assessed on their (former) partner's means.

Violence against women and girls may be understood as an expression of unequal power relations between women and men. In the case of Urantsetseg Tserendorj it is worth noting that the attack was one of random violence and not at the hands of her partner or even someone she knew.

Violence against working-class women is further magnified by the economic power relations both inside and outside the domestic setting. It is a lack of economic power that exposes women like Urantsetseg Tserendorj to a hazardous walk home after a shift cleaning offices, and that can make it financially difficult for a woman to escape an abusive relationship and find a place of safety.

The Government's promise to establish a new statutory agency to address domestic, sexual and gender-based violence is welcome. However, a policy response to gender-based violence that does not take account of, and respond to, economic power relations is unlikely to succeed. ★

Coming of age during the Iranian Revolution



LAURA DUGGAN IRAN

BASED ON Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel of the same name, the film *Persepolis* follows a young girl as she comes of age against the backdrop of the Iranian Revolution.

The film moves from her early childhood in secular 1970s Iran, where Marji's deepest desire is to be the next prophet, to the 1980s, where Marji now plays at being Che and Fidel and has nighttime conversations with Marx. As the last shah is sent into exile, she learns she would not be the first communist revolutionary in her family. Friends and family members return from the now-deposed shah's prisons to regale those who had been left behind with tales of their survival.

These joyful scenes of reunion soon sour, though, as the same friends quickly disappear back into jail or just disappear from the new theocratic Iran. Marji is forced to take the veil, is separated from her boy schoolmates, and begins her own journey of personal rebellion. She, like many others who could, is eventually forced to decamp for the west, in this case Vienna.

This transition for her is lonely, difficult, and fraught with identity and cultural clashes and reinvention, as is her eventual return to Iran. Back in Iran, she learns that she is not alone in her fight back. While never formally taking up struggle against the regime, Satrapi showcases the many ways for a person to win little victories, as well as showing us how easy it can be to win those at the expense of others.

While the film deals with the heavy and difficult subjects of violent political

upheaval, betrayed revolutions, and the tragic human cost of violence and war, it is not a story of misery. Rather this film is a very personal telling of a colourful life in very complicated circumstances. Moments of grief, sadness, anger and loss mingle with those of joy, hilarity, love, family and human connection. Satrapi can only offer her own point of view in such a personalised work, but it is not dogmatic. She has a clear side throughout the piece, but while mocking and highlighting the hypocrisy of the religious guardians it is also worth noting that Satrapi does not pull her punches in regard to the enlightened left either.

During a scene from her childhood in Tehran, Satrapi makes it clear that her solidly bourgeois left-wing parents may be progressive on a great many things but they still uphold and benefit from their own social class and at times will defend it. This hypocrisy is played out again in Vienna with her coddled anarchist friends. The west is no haven for Satrapi, and the moments of isolation and ill health captured during this period in her life leave the viewer with a very clear anti-capitalist message.

Presented in black and white, the style mirrors that of the original comics. This, Satrapi explained, was an intentional choice, so that the place and the characters would not look like foreigners in a foreign country but simply people in a country. The story may take place in Iran but, given the right conditions, it could be anywhere.

Persepolis had its premiere in 2007 at the Cannes Film Festival, where it jointly won the Jury Prize. It was nominated for Best Animated Feature at the 80th Academy Awards and has continued to earn universal praise from critics and audiences alike. ★

■ A free and child-friendly screening of *Persepolis* has been organised by the CPI Women's Committee, to take place on 5 March in the Pearse Centre in Pearse Street. Doors open at 3:30 p.m., and the film starts at 4 p.m. Refreshments will be provided, and all are welcome. The film is rated PG-13 and has a running time of 1 hour and 36 minutes.

■ Copies of the book *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return* are available in Connolly Books, and on line at connollybooks.org, for €12.





Holed below the waterline

TOMMY McKEARNEY
Stormont

THERE IT GOES, down again. Holed below the waterline, the leaking vessel Stormont is floundering once more. Yet, in spite of its official role as an integral part of overall United Kingdom governance, the British establishment cares little about the political apparatus in Belfast.

Underlining this reality was the spectacle of Ian Paisley Junior ruefully telling an almost empty House of Commons that Boris Johnson had not uttered a single word about the collapse of the Executive, which had occurred days earlier. Reinforcing this view was the fact that not one major British newspaper featured the Executive's collapse on its front page.

With so little obvious commitment from London to the Northern Ireland

Assembly, it is reasonable to ask what is happening. In many ways the real question should no longer be whether the Executive and associated institutions can be restored but how long the Six Counties can survive as a distinct political entity.

The latest brouhaha in Stormont is surely a symptom of the underlying malaise. Significantly, the staunchest supporters of maintaining Northern Ireland as a going concern are no longer capable of offering a coherent administrative package. Worse, from their point of view, they are now actively, albeit unwittingly, contributing to its downfall.

Amidst a long list of damaging political blunders, the DUP's mishandling of Brexit takes some beating. Presented by Theresa May with a golden opportunity to influence policy to their advantage, the DUP shot their

foot off. Within two years they had contrived to endorse a process leading to a protocol that created a regulatory barrier in the Irish Sea. Incredibly, the North's largest unionist party failed entirely to understand the political dynamic in Westminster. This blind spot has caused the party to suffer division-creating recriminations from within its own constituency.

Little illustrated this more starkly than the hostile reception received recently by the leading DUP politician Sammy Wilson while campaigning in the staunchly unionist village of Markethill in Co. Armagh. Long seen as one of the more hard-line members of his party, Wilson was subjected to constant heckling and abuse as he attempted to address an anti-protocol rally. Some of his critics went so far as to castigate him with the ultimate unionist insult, that of being a Lundy.

An urgent need for a political solution in Ukraine

Communist Party of Ireland

Statement by the National Executive Committee

26 February 2022

Today the world is closer to global war than at any time since 1962.

The two largest countries in Europe are at war. The immediate cause of this situation has been the expansion of NATO and its project to constrict its imperial competitor, Russia, by establishing large bases of troops and mass-destructive weapons along its western and southern borders and the massive arming and training of Ukrainian forces and paramilitaries, especially by the British.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that overt fascism is well ensconced in the political system of

Ukraine and in its military. In the last few weeks US and British arms have been imported on a massive scale to the Baltic countries, without regard to the financial or human cost.

It is clear that it will be the working classes of Russia and Ukraine that will pay the heaviest price in this continuing military conflict. The CPI expresses its solidarity with the working classes of Russia and Ukraine and with communists in both countries, and we share the heartbreak of soldiers and their families, victims of inter-imperialist warfare.

These developments show the baneful consequences of the expansion of the NATO war alliance. They also

represent the need for the governments concerned to draw attention away from their political and economic failures. The European Union in particular played a major role in the coup of 2014 to undermine Ukraine and continues to work to subsume that country into its construct.

Democratic forces in Ireland and throughout Europe must find unity and united action to demand the dismantling of the aggressive military alliance of NATO and to oppose the EU-PESCO military build-up. The hypocrisy of the western imperial power knows no bounds, in particular that of British imperialism and its role and interference in the affairs of the Irish people for



Undoubtedly many outside the unionist heartlands will be amused at the spectacle of an acerbic DUP politician being subjected to treatment that was once the forte of his own party and its founder. While it's difficult to resist smiling at the irony, we cannot overlook what this means for the North's body politic in general and for the largest unionist party in particular.

Because, in spite of its often high-handed behaviour, the DUP has over the last decade grown used to the perks and privileges of administering the North from the comfort of Stormont. No longer is it a protest organisation on the periphery but it is now the lead party in office. It has, therefore, a self-serving, vested interest in maintaining the Six County political institutions. That is, of course, for so long as it is possible for it to do so.

Now, however, as a result of its inept mishandling of Brexit and turbulence resulting from the protocol, the DUP has found itself forced to withdraw from the North's Executive—an action that puts the very future of devolved administration in the Six Counties in doubt, a real possibility already identified by the Ulster Unionist leader Doug Beattie, among others.

The Markethill demonstration, with its ominous reminder of the fate of previous unionist parties attempting compromise, has set out a marker for Jeffrey Donaldson. Provided that his leadership survives an accusation that he recently contemplated deserting the DUP in favour of the Ulster Unionist Party, he will face two equally desperate scenarios.

With so little obvious commitment from London to the Northern Ireland Assembly, it is reasonable to ask what is happening.

On the one hand, he must force the European Union to back down and abandon the protocol. The likelihood of the EU capitulating was always slim. With Boris Johnson now under pressure to maintain NATO unity in relation to Ukraine, the chances of Brussels rolling over are next to nil.

If, as seems likely, he fails to remove the protocol, Donaldson will be forced to continue boycotting the institutions. Otherwise he risks conceding ground to the neo-Paisleyites and is therefore caught in the classic dilemma of damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. The result is political deadlock, in the short term at least. Even should some contrivance facilitate the formation of a new Executive, its durability will always be in doubt.

In the light of the above, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion, identified on many occasions in the pages of this publication, that the North is a failed political entity and one beyond permanent repair. At the root of the problem is the fact that it cannot achieve the type of constitutional and governmental consensus that allows other political entities to function when under stress. With a large and ever-increasing percentage of the Six-County electorate rejecting the very legitimacy of the state, normal politics cannot happen.

Consequently, even mundane issues frequently acquire a distorted significance. Take, for example, the matter of retaining free access to lateral-flow tests. Notwithstanding being supported by most parties, including a

unionist minister of health, the aforementioned Sammy Wilson has argued for following the lead set by England and charging for the service. His thinking is not so much neoliberal-influenced as a desire to be seen to stay in step with the English.

Under such conditions, the Six-County entity will continue to stumble between administrative inertia and administrative fiasco until eventually and inevitably it arrives at a critical meltdown point. This final stage will come as a result of changing demographics and the fundamental, insuperable obstacles posed by irreconcilable constitutional objectives. This is not speculation: it is a hard-headed analysis based on readily available evidence.

How socialist republicanism responds to this situation is important. While nothing is ever inevitable, it is irresponsible to ignore concrete realities. Nor should there be room for wishful thinking. The North is a failed and dysfunctional political entity, offering no realistic prospect of an internal solution that can overcome its flawed creation.

The best contribution we can make at this point is to insist that this reality is publicly highlighted and expounded upon and to ensure that the implications are not ignored. In the course of this discourse we must seize the opportunity to promote the only permanent solution to the issue: an end to partition and the building of a workers' republic throughout the whole of Ireland. ★

centuries and which continues to deny the right of the Irish people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent, sovereign united Ireland.

The present situation confronts us with the spectre of an inter-imperialist nuclear war. There is an urgent need for neutral and non-aligned states to join together to work for nuclear disarmament and the dissolution of war alliances. There is a great opportunity for Ireland to use its membership of the UN Security Council to take an independent stand appropriate to a sovereign state.

In these dark days in Europe it should not be forgotten that western powers are pursuing their warring activities, supporting proxy wars, both large and small, as well as using illegal sanctions and subversion to advance and protect their economic, political and strategic military interests globally, such as supporting Saudi Arabia in its

The present situation confronts us with the spectre of an inter-imperialist nuclear war. There is an urgent need for neutral and non-aligned states to join together to work for nuclear disarmament and the dissolution of war alliances.

continual slaughter in Yemen and supplying it with bomber aircraft and armaments, resulting in the devastation of urban areas. Like the wars in Africa, that conflict is largely ignored by western media.

Hypocrisy and double standards are standard elements of imperialism. It has waged numerous illegal wars around the globe to advance and defend the interests of global corporations and monopoly capitalism. War and threats of war are constant tools of imperialist powers, for both economic and strategic reasons, attempting to undermine the sovereignty of Venezuela, Nicaragua, Iran and DPR Korea in particular. States of different ideological basis are subject to continual threats and harassment. Sanctions applied to these and other countries inevitably damage the lives of the very poorest of citizens. Such sanctions are often of dubious legality, especially when imposed by the European Union.

The Communist Party of Ireland calls for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and a political solution within the UN-negotiated Minsk Agreements of 2014. Such a solution would encompass a demilitarised, neutral Ukraine, with all foreign forces and mercenaries removed and the dismantling of neo-fascist paramilitary groupings.

In this critical period in world affairs the Irish state has abandoned all pretence of an independent foreign policy and takes its orders from a European Union that aims at making itself an even greater power within imperialism. A seriously neutral Ireland could play a positive role in fighting war hysteria and in working for global disarmament.

Our neutrality must be enshrined in Bunreacht na hÉireann to this end. Ireland must align itself with the peace-loving peoples of the world, not the armies of imperialism. ★





Are rights subordinate to class power?

Eoghan O'Neill and Eoin McDermott bring into focus the idea of “rights” and put forward the argument that the communist movement should not frame strategies within the language of rights: rather our analysis must be based on class power.

▲ **Liberty Leading the People** (1830), Eugène Delacroix

If our objective is to develop class-consciousness with our slogans as part of broader campaigns, the language of rights either brings us to moralistic appeals for what should exist, without an analysis of a means to get there, or falls into the reformist trap of appealing to the capitalist class to grant legal concessions without a means to win them by force. Only an analysis of power provides a way out of this cul-de-sac.

We can only advance our goal of facilitating awareness of class interests by exposing the divisions, contradictions and exploitation of the capitalist class and system. This can only be done by being involved in day-to-day struggles and putting forward an analysis that goes beyond the single issue, by helping people to see how their immediate grievances could be resolved, and by demonstrating how particular struggles share a common root with the capitalist mode of production. The central question that will be asked, therefore is, Does the language of rights help or hinder this process?

Rights are moral principles or behavioural norms that are usually afforded some legal status in a society. They tend towards normative ideals of what ought to be in some realm of human activity, as in the instances of basic

human rights, workers' rights, consumer rights, etc. Rights in a capitalist society carry the class nature of that society. Unless they are concretely enforced by institutions, in other words backed up by institutional class power, they will remain abstract ideals. For example, having the abstract right to a home or to not suffer from domestic violence is nothing but nice words to someone who is homeless or cannot afford to leave a situation of domestic abuse.

Marx correctly observed of the capitalist class as far back as 1844 that “the right of man to liberty ceases to be a right as soon as it comes into conflict with political life.” The capitalist class, always pragmatists, are not half as naïve as the idealist left, who insist on arguing about universal rights as an end rather than a means towards advancing some particular goal. For the capitalist class, rights are to be fought for or discarded insofar as they advance their class interests.

Marx goes even further in a scathing critique of rights in the *Gotha Programme* (1875), when he writes of them as

dogmas, ideas which in a certain period had some meaning but have now become obsolete verbal rubbish, while again perverting, on the other, the realistic outlook, which it cost so much effort to instil into the Party but which has now taken root in it, by means of ideological nonsense about right and other trash so common among the democrats and French socialists.

It would be a strategic mistake for the communist movement to concentrate on abstract universal rights instead of on class power, as now, as in Marx's time, rights do not inherently expose the conflict in the class division of society. Under certain circumstances the advancement of particular rights may be useful—as in the instance of advancing workers' rights to engage in a political strike—but it should not form the bedrock of our analysis for every issue: the question should always return to the issue of class power. Is it advanced, and, if so, is this the most effective way to do it?

The appeal to rights is deeply ingrained in our society, and it would be a mistake to discredit the importance people attach to rights. Mass movements that choose to concentrate on rights are spontaneously organised according to the particular issue being championed. In each case the demand is a response to burdens or restrictions placed on people in a wide cross-section of society.

The question for communists is whether these movements, or the demands they make, offer an opportunity to weaken or to strengthen the power of capital and the capitalist class. Within their analysis of a particular issue is there a transformative element that can be injected in order to expose the contradictions in class interests, thereby making use of the spontaneous element in order to advance a clear class-conscious position? If so, then supporting campaigns centred on rights will be strategically important and necessary.

However, the challenge for the communist movement is to fulfil our immediate goal of developing class-consciousness. So, our support for such campaigns and movements will need to include a supportive critique of the singular focus of the campaign, or at least offer an analysis that goes beyond the singular and spontaneous nature of the campaign or demand.

Under certain circumstances the advancement of particular rights may be useful—as in the instance of advancing workers’ rights to engage in a political strike—but it should not form the bedrock of our analysis for every issue: the question should always return to the issue of class power.

The more power the working class wields the more demands it can make on the capitalist state, heightening the contradictions of the capitalist system in pushing demands that go beyond rights, such as universal basic services, the public ownership of housing, utilities, infrastructure, finance, sectors of industry, agriculture, etc., to be used for the common good.

If we take the Right2Water movement as an example, it took root and succeeded in mobilising tens of thousands from towns and cities throughout Ireland. The Government didn’t back down on the introduction of water meters and the privatisation of water because it was won over by a rights-based argument, that every individual should have the right to water: it succeeded because the power of the movement forced the Government to back down, through consistent small and large-scale rallies, marches and local defences against the introduction of water meters and the ultimate goal of privatising this utility.

The movement itself was strengthened only when the demand became one of ownership rather than of taxation and payment. This was a clear development of class-consciousness within the movement. That slight but important shift in the demands and slogans of the movement unified and solidified the mobilisation of the people against the commodification of a basic human need. The relationship between power, demands and rights is very important here.

With the threat of an organised mass movement engaging in a campaign with clear demands, the capitalist state and its political representatives relinquished their plan to lay down the physical infrastructure for privatising water by means of water-metering (in the short term) and backed down in order to quell the mobilisation.

Following the campaign, by taking people off the streets and putting the matter into the institutional halls of the state, the ruling class were successful in dividing and ultimately squashing the movement. The subsequent Right2Change movement, which issued a programme based on abstract rights, fizzled out and never managed to hold on to its initial support.

If we can take anything from the Right2Water struggle and impart it to current and future struggles, such as housing, the health service, or the environment, it is that if we engage the class enemy on their terrain, i.e. in trying to justify our right to a home, the right to a free health service, the right to a clean and sustainable environment against the right to own property, the right to profit from ill-health, the right to profit from the plundering and destruction of the natural world, and the right to privately own the land, we will not advance our position one step: we will simply leave ourselves open to a quagmire of endless debates of morality, of thoughts and ideas about degrees and hierarchies of the rights of one section of society over another, in the halls and institutions of the capitalist state.

To emphasise this point: under the Constitution of Ireland we already have the right to undermine private property rights where they go against the “common good.” Article 43 states:

1.1° The State acknowledges that man, in virtue of his rational being, has the natural right, antecedent to positive law, to the private ownership of external goods.

1.2° The State accordingly guarantees to pass no law attempting to abolish the right of private ownership or the general right to transfer, bequeath, and inherit property.

2.1° The State recognises, however, that the exercise of the rights mentioned in the foregoing provisions of this Article ought, in civil society, to be regulated by the principles of social justice.

2.2° The State, accordingly, may as occasion requires delimit by law the exercise of the said rights *with a view to reconciling their exercise with the exigencies of the common good.*

This is a clear example of how rights are subordinate to class power. Two conflicting rights are presented; and it’s clear which is being upheld and which is being ignored in our class society. The right to private ownership trumps the common good. Our slogans should not be the “right to X” but clear statements of intent on the transition of private ownership to public ownership of the means of production for the common good, striking at the heart of the class division.

Demanding and putting forward a campaign for public housing using slogans such as “Public housing is the solution! Cap all rents to 10% of the average wage now!” moves the debate and the demand from being centred on rights to being centred on ownership and power. It does this firstly by focusing on the need for public housing, as compared with private housing built by developers and owned by vulture funds—this is the long-term aim; secondly, it places an emphasis on a short-term objective to alleviate the immediate pain felt by renters instead of the present policy of providing housing assistance payments, which act as a transfer of wealth from workers to landlords, further pushing up rents.

Both these demands, if they are met, objectively weaken the power of the capitalist class and strengthen the power of the working class.

If all that is on offer for people and movements led by spontaneous elements is “chasing” rights it will simply enforce the incorrect idea that the way to achieve social change is to organise to make appeals to the ruling class, issue by issue, and hope they grant us concessions. In contrast, by shifting the focus to class power we raise the potential strength of a class-conscious movement.

The more power the working class wields the more demands it can make on the capitalist state, heightening the contradictions of the capitalist system in pushing demands that go beyond rights, such as universal basic services, the public ownership of housing, utilities, infrastructure, finance, sectors of industry, agriculture, etc., to be used for the common good.

Answering the question whether the language of rights is a help or a hindrance to the communist movement is always dependent on circumstances. If it advances the interests of the working class we should not be squeamish about employing it as a tactic, but never as a strategy. If rights are the central focus of a spontaneous mass movement we must always meet people where they are instead of dictating to them from on high, as certain sects on the left tend to do; instead we must try to outline the limits of an approach based on appeals to rights and help to develop an understanding of why building class power in the institutions of the working class is the only basis for progressive social change. This requires work and a genuine commitment to addressing the issue at hand.

Finally, in our own analysis and slogans we should reject the language of rights from the outset and concentrate on concrete demands that can alter the balance of class forces. ★





Hostile city

LAURA DUGGAN
URBAN LIFE

HOSTILE ARCHITECTURE is familiar to most people as dramatic instances of anti-homelessness spikes, sprinkler systems, or directional speakers. These devices are placed outside shops and businesses to discourage people who sleep in the street from choosing this particular nook to shelter in, or to prevent teenagers from gathering.

Egregious examples garner some bad press, and the business either removes the implements or defies the

criticism; but either way the story is soon forgotten about.

In reality, these instances only make up a very small proportion of hostile architecture: architecture that shapes and controls our public space and our behaviour within it. Forms of it are so ubiquitous and part of the urban scenery that they can be easy to miss, or dismiss. The little bumps outside the shops in Grafton Street are only muted, stylised anti-homelessness devices. Windowsills with decorative spikes, and doorways with art deco gates, take away the only free shelter from rain or place to sit. Graffiti

replaced with advertising. Vacant, unoccupied plazas where handrails and steps are embedded with metal to prevent the use of skateboards or rollerblades. Benches at bus stops that are designed with a slope, intended to make them uncomfortable to sit on for any length of time. Benches in streets, where benches can be found, split with arm rests or gaps or bars, to create distance and an impossibility of lying down. The lack of free public facilities such as toilets forces people to pay for service in a shop or café to get access to these things.

Outside the cities, most hostile architecture has long been used to punish or inhibit the comfort and life quality of members of the Travelling community. Bollards placed at long-standing halting sites, areas of land covered over with boulders and rock debris to prevent stopping, the denial of access to water, electricity or basic sanitation at a site, and, in the most extreme and hate-filled cases, the intentional sabotage or removal of previously available facilities.

Hostile architecture in these cases is overt in its desire to strip a people of their humanity, the goal being to make them go, move, shift to somewhere else, preferably out of sight. The long-term result is the destruction of the culture and the alienation and social isolation of those who won't assimilate into settled culture.

Public housing is the solution

AARON NOLAN
RIGHTS

GOVERNMENT HOUSING policy is the cause of the housing crisis. Homelessness, waiting-lists and extortionate levels of private rent are the symptoms of policy designed to benefit speculators, landlords, and hedge funds—the business class.

The number of homes available to rent has fallen close to a historical record, while rents have increased sharply, just as the economy emerges from the restrictions of the pandemic. According to recent figures from the property web site Daft.ie, at the beginning of February a mere 712 properties were available to rent in Dublin, and 1,400 in the rest of the 26 Counties. This is the lowest since

their records began, in 2006.

This comes at the same time that we see a sharp spike in rents throughout Ireland. The lifting of a brief rent freeze during covid lockdowns resulted in an average rent increase of 4 per cent towards the end of last year. At present the average rent in south Co. Dublin is €2,258 per month, and €1,897 in the north. The average rent on Daft in the 26 Counties was €1,524 at the end of 2021—an increase of more than 10 per cent over the year.

The minimum wage remains fixed at €1,774.50 per month, while higher costs of living are emerging alongside the inflation crisis, from energy to consumer goods and everything in between. It raises the question, How much longer will we accept this?

The present system is not broken: it is designed this way. Government, vulture funds and landlords are its chief upholders. Indeed more than a quarter of TDs are landlords themselves!

Government housing policy has allowed Ireland's gombreen landlord class to do the dirty work, regularly increasing rents and hoarding large swathes of housing stock, and in doing so have laid the ground for vulture funds and cuckoo funds to run riot and assert their dominance over the "housing market."

Ireland's largest landlord, Irish Residential Properties PLC (IRES REIT), received €8.7 million in housing assistance payment (HAP) from Dublin City Council in 2021, an increase of €1 million from the previous year. This increase accounted for almost two-thirds of IRES REIT's increase in rental income.

Cuckoo funds are now outbidding households en masse by a massive amount, which is pushing families even



Hostile architecture intentionally inhibits the creation of community and shared space; instead it promotes an environment that serves business and profit. The use of this form of architecture reduces a cityscape to one that funnels commuters and consumers (rather than citizens) from business to business, to work or to spend money in. This under a capitalist system is deemed the most efficient and productive use of space.

It is not the physical architecture alone that creates this hostile environment but the infrastructure of the city itself, with transport routes, lighting and plant life and green areas, or lack thereof, all playing a part.

O'Connell Street in Dublin is a fine example of hostile architecture in action. This is a central thoroughfare in the city where it is not possible or comfortable to spend any time without engaging with consumerism. There is nowhere to sit or to rest, no way to enjoy the area or to take care of any human need without cold, hard cash available. As a result of this, the area has become rife with anti-social behaviour, and the atmosphere in the evenings can be openly hostile unless a person is seeking sanctuary in a place of business.

This hostile atmosphere disproportionately affects all minority groups and women and places them at risk of harassment, both verbal and physical. Studies conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality confirm that working-class women in general, but particularly those in service roles, rely on public transport to travel to cities and towns, their area of work.

Men are statistically more likely to be drivers, while women are more likely to use pavements, cycle paths, and public transport.

Women still do most of the maintenance of the home, such as laundry and shopping, as well as child-rearing, which includes ferrying children to and from school, appointments, and visits to friends and family. Women by and large spend more time using public space, because of their work both in and outside the private home; and these public spaces should be designed with them and their needs in mind. Instead cities can be difficult, or nigh on impossible, to traverse by wheelchair, for those with mobility difficulties, or with a pram or small child. There is nowhere to safely and comfortably nurse, change nappies, or have access to toilets; and women who can avoid the streets and public spaces at night do so, because of the danger that lurks there.

While men are more likely to be attacked in the street, it is women who have been taught to fear them, to know that these spaces are not built for them. This sentiment has been continuously challenged since the 1970s with the likes of Take Back the Night marches.

At present most architects, city and transport planners and policy-makers are still men, and this influences how they view the needs of a population moving through the city. These men end up giving priority to people like themselves: affluent men who drive and have limited requirements for public space. When they do have to interact

It is not the physical architecture alone that creates this hostile environment but the infrastructure of the city itself, with transport routes, lighting and plant life and green areas, or lack thereof, all playing a part.

with it they wish it to be devoid of anyone they might deem a nuisance or unsightly.

But this facilitating of a particular class of men has costs, both financial and social. Stockholm, for example, began engaging in “gender-equal” snow-clearing. This meant that paths, cycle lanes and public transport routes were given priority over roads for the clearing of snow. This need was argued on the grounds that the majority of the population rely on these routes, this majority including those who don't work outside the home as well as children, the disabled, and the elderly—people who hadn't been considered previously.

As a result, the city was made safer for working-class people, women and children in particular, with accidents decreasing by half and the local government being spared these costs.

Architecture and infrastructure under a capitalist system do not allow for any neutral space. No design or choice is accidental but is carefully constructed to serve a cause, making each and every inch of public space and public land a battlefield of ideology. While Dublin is not as hostile as the likes of Los Angeles, yet with the threatened loss of our cultural spaces, the invasion of hotels, unaffordable homes and hostile architecture becoming more pervasive, it's only a matter of time before we end up with a city sanitised of any of the complications and complexities of humanity.

Small victories in these areas may not shake the capitalist class to their core, but they make our lives more livable, and that is worth celebrating. ★

further away from home ownership.

It's their world: we're just living in it.

The limitations of meaningful change coming from the chambers of Dáil Éireann or Stormont have been well documented. Well-meaning politicians can bring as many motions as they like to the floors of government buildings, but history shows us that they'll be met with countless “solutions” from the ruling parties.

They will do everything but solve the crisis. They will do their level best not to interfere in the massive profits being raked in by their business cronies, those whose interests they really serve. It is now clear that the radical change needed to solve the crisis will come not from those in the halls of power but through a disciplined, well-organised people's movement with clear demands.

The CPI, through history and the recent course of events, has regularly called for a large-scale programme of public housing to solve the crisis.

Communities up and down the country have for a number of years seen unaffordable rents and the slashing of services and, in cities and towns, gentrification on a huge scale. Family life has been put under pressure, children unable to move from home or set up families of their own.

A programme of universal public housing, with the full involvement of communities, will serve to democratise housing and remedy the ills that decades of the current system have fomented. It will bring about reduced rents for all, reduce property prices, and force corporate investors out of the country (their significant amount of properties remaining to be added to our public housing stock).

It is now time for the labour movement, tenants' groups and political organisations to come together and fight for this change. The landlord class know very well how to protect their interests; it's time we did too. It is for communists to make the case for

Government housing policy has allowed Ireland's gombeen landlord class to do the dirty work, regularly increasing rents and hoarding large swathes of housing stock

universal public housing, and make no retreat—as many on the left appear to have done—towards forms of housing that have thus far stunted and sown confusion within the housing movement.

Our demands must be concrete and have the challenging of landlord power at their root. In the short run this will come from rent controls, a total ban on evictions, and an end to the selling off of public land. In the long run it will come from a large-scale public-housing programme, with rents linked to income. It will come from recognising, once and for all, housing as a human right, rather than a commodity to be bought and sold by the highest bidder, by enshrining the right to housing in the constitution.

Many of us will be familiar with the protest chant *Housing is a human right—This is why we have to fight*. Here's a new one:

Public housing is the solution. Put it in the constitution. ★





A life-or-death struggle

There are many things in life that we can do without—but food is not one of them. Along with food we need water, shelter, clothes and warmth to have any chance of survival as a species.

Barry Murray on the illusion of food democracy

AND YET we often take food for granted, and many don't even consider too much where food comes from, or what it contains, or who has food and who hasn't. As long as we can do our weekly shopping and have enough in the fridge to feed our children and ourselves, then, other than the price of it, further considerations are well down the scale of priorities.

The history of food, though, shines an interesting light on the historical-material development of the human race.

About 12,000 years ago we were still "hunter-gatherers" of our food. We lived off the fat of the land, and it was free. About 10,000 years ago

we developed farming and food surpluses. This had the effect of bringing about more permanent settlements, a major change in human survival strategies.

Rightly or wrongly, the Sumerian priests in Mesopotamia (4500–1900 BC) have been credited with the development of trading, weights and measures, and buying and selling. Once farming techniques developed sufficiently there was extra food after the family was fed. This meant it could be traded for other goods or for money. Once this happened, food was now a commodity.

Over the centuries since then, up to the present, humans have traded

food of all sorts and varieties. Trading food inevitably meant there were to be winners and losers.

But food was also to become a weapon in the earliest of human confrontations. Many a besieged city, stronghold or territory witnessed its inhabitants surrendering to their attackers because of starvation from food blockades. It surely featured in slavery, when slaves received food as payment and were fed only enough to keep them and their families alive for the purpose of retaining the labour force. They never benefited financially from the profits of food production: that was sold on by the slave-owners.

During feudalism the situation was similar: the serf was allowed enough land to feed his family. He worked one or two days for himself and the rest for the lord, who owned the means of production: the land and tools. No proper financial reward from the fruits of his labour for the serf in this case either.

The class war, though not yet expounded on, was alive and well. Profit and power have no mercy, even where human sustenance is concerned. Human history has seen countless famines, when those who own the means of production and distribution continue to profit while millions die.

And still, in the twenty-first century, one of the biggest causes of death and poor human health is lack of food, compounded by cheap, poor-quality food, even though we have the science and the machinery for producing vast amounts of food. However, the advanced science and technology is not for producing affordable nutritious food for everyone but for maximising profits, especially for retail giants and food manufacturers.

Farmers are caught in this capitalist trap too, just as the consumer is. Factory farming, where animals, fowl and fish are kept caged or housed in unnatural conditions, is the newest way for farmers to try to beat the squeezing of prices by the transnational food companies. To speed up the process of raw food production, "medicines" of all sorts are used in the drinking-water, with the heavy use of chemicals on land and in feeds, again not to increase food quality but to enhance profits.

But the adulteration of our food

does not end there. The biggest and most profitable side of food production now is not the production of raw food but of food ingredients. Enzymes, artificial flavourings, artificial colouring, artificial smells, even food texture can be created artificially. Food can even be made from carbon dioxide. In a food laboratory a long-dead woolly mammoth could be made to look and taste like an Aberdeen Angus steak. But from an economic, health and, especially, a climate viewpoint it's a race to the bottom.

Already Dutch scientists (among others) are actually growing meat in a laboratory from meat cells. No doubt vegetables, chicken and fish are heading for the Petri dish too. Is this the new opportunity for those who own the patents for this process to profit without the costs of farming? Will Tesco, ASDA, Lidl, Supervalu etc. all have their own in-house artificial food laboratories? Will they produce, at will, cheap food for the poor and better food for the rich? and control fully the means of production and distribution of food?

Who will this benefit—the consumer or the profiteer who owns all the patents? And what does it say to us about the struggle for food democracy or food sovereignty?

Over many centuries, and continuing now, humans have been divorced from their natural sources of food. They have lost access to the means of production and the ownership of their food—the land. Subsistence farming and small or even medium-sized farms were made no longer financially viable by

the race to centralise food production for profit. Urbanisation, the lure of a job and access to cheap food off the shelf, with no effort, hastened the demise of access to food sovereignty.

Can this position be reversed?

We have watched on our television screens the frightening images of starving people around the world, and this has spawned many calls for food democracy—the right to food. Clearly these demands have been ignored. The question arises then: Is it a case of “the right to benefit” or having “the ability to benefit.”* Who ensures the “right to food”? The state? But sure they are “the committees of the rich”: they take the side of capital.

A major issue that food democracy groups or social movements tend to ignore is the factor of state and class associated with the production, private ownership and access (or not) to food. Civil society groups calling on the state to regulate capitalist food production won't do it either: the state is complicit. About ten global companies control the production and distribution of food in the world. They are “food imperialists,” who exploit producers, especially in the developing world, and together have more power and political leverage than most governments or states.

So the neoliberal capitalist food monopolies and their financiers cannot be ignored, or just talked away. Minimalist concessions engineered between states and the food monopolies will only ever be window-dressing and never a permanent solution to food

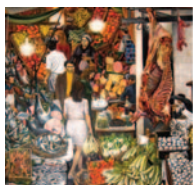
sovereignty. And while people may enjoy working with food co-operatives in community-led vegetable plots—and get good-quality, tasty food—it doesn't answer the central question: How do we tackle the issue of the absence of real food democracy, or food sovereignty, for everyone?

With nearly a million tonnes of food waste per year in the world, and millions upon millions of people malnourished, hungry, or starving to death, it means that something is seriously wrong with the concept of the “right to food.” But trying to build a campaign for true food sovereignty by looking at it from the viewpoint of “the people versus the food monopolies,” with the state as the honest arbiter, would be very naïve and fruitless.

Any serious campaign for real food sovereignty must consider that the state will use hegemony, coercion, imprisonment, co-option and division to defeat those who recognise that the underlying issue is the “state-capital” consensus on the ownership of private property, along with control by capital of the means of production and distribution.

Educating people through a radical transformative campaign for food sovereignty might give “food for thought” and add to the dynamics for a people's participatory political and economic democracy and, eventually, an end to capitalism. ★

* Jesse Ribot and Nancy Lee Peluso, “A theory of access,” *Rural Sociology*, vol. 68, no. 2 (June 2003).



La Vucciria
by Italian communist
artist Renato Guttuso
1974

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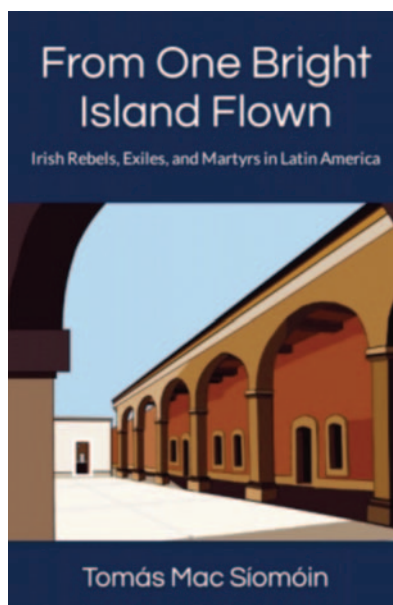
Tomás Mac Síomóin, *From One Bright Island Flown: Irish Rebels, Exiles, and Martyrs in Latin America* (Nuascéalta, 2022; €9.10 / £7.30). Available on line.

JENNY FARRELL

THE DEFEAT OF the Gaelic Irish, supported by Spanish forces, at the Battle of Kinsale in 1602 was the final blow in the English conquest of Ireland and a watershed in Irish history.

Following this defeat, a great number of the aristocratic and military leaders fled the country as the only alternative to submitting to criminalisation by the coloniser. This brought with it the rapid decline of traditional Irish society and culture, eventually leading to the near-destruction of the Irish language.

The majority of those who emigrated went to Catholic countries, above all France and Spain, though they also went to other European countries, such as Austro-Hungary, to serve in their armies and become military and administrative



advisers. The great lament “Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire” tells of the return of one such officer to Ireland, defying the British authorities and paying the ultimate price.

Tomás Mac Síomóin (who died in February), one of the foremost Irish-language writers and activists, had just published a book on the Wild Geese, as these emigrants are known. However, this is a book with a particular focus: on the men who went, via France and Spain, to Latin America and became Latino heroes in their own right.

Typically, they went first to Spain to study, work, or join distinct military units in the Spanish army, commanded by their own officers. Some travelled on to Spanish colonial countries in South America, in such roles as administrators, business people, or military men.

Frequently the men integrated and settled in their new homeland, indeed becoming involved in the fight for independence in those countries. A number became so famous that their names are known to this day. These are the stories Tomás Mac Síomóin tells in what he describes as an incomplete compendium. Nevertheless it is a start



Tomás Mac Síomóin (1938–2022)
Marxist writer, thinker, activist

MICHEÁL MAC AONGHUSA

THE DEATH of Tomás Mac Síomóin has caused much sadness to comrades and his large circle of friends as well as his family members, but his full, worthy life is a cause for celebration. He bequeathed to coming generations a legacy of powerful writing and thought.

Tomás was one of the greatest and

most important writers ever in Irish, or indeed in Ireland. On top of that he was a brilliant Marxist thinker, a language activist, and a distinguished biologist. He left his mark on every aspect of life he experienced.

Bhí a mhuintir, lucht feirmeoireachta i gCo. Ros Comáin, gníomhach i gCogadh na nDúchrónach. Rugadh i mBaile Átha Cliath é ar 18 Feabhra 1938. Agus é ar Scoil Uí Chonaill, Sráid Ristmeann Thuaidh, thosaigh sé ag cur spéis sa scríbhneoireacht, san eolaíocht, agus sa pholaitíocht. Bhí sé le maíomh aige go raibh sé “in Óglaigh na hÉireann, an dá cheann acu,” ina óige: an FCA agus an IRA a bhí i gceist aige.

Ag an tráth céanna bhí sé ina lúthchleasaí rathúil, go háirithe sa léim chuaille. Bhain sé céim san eolaíocht amach le hardonóracha i gColáiste na hOllscoile, Baile Átha Cliath. Ansin chuaigh sé go Nua-Eabhrac, mar ar bhain sé dochtúireacht amach in Ollscoil Cornell, ceann de na hollscoileanna ardchéime is mó sna Stáit Aontaithe.

B’in tús le saolré eolaíochta ina ndearna sé taighde ar ghnéithe den bhitheolaíocht sna Stáit Aontaithe, san Ísiltír, agus in Éirinn. Saineolaí ar an víreolaíocht a bhí ann. Bhí sé ina léachtóir le bitheolaíocht i gColáiste Ollscoile Chorcaí, Coláiste Ollscoile na Gaillimhe, Coláiste Réigiúnach Shligigh, agus Institiúid Theicneolaíochta Bhaile Átha Cliath, Sráid Chaoimhín, ag tráthanna éagsúla.

He was vigorously active in the Communist Party of Ireland in the 1980s and 90s and was a member of the party’s National Executive Committee for much of that time. In that position he demonstrated his acute aptitude for political analysis when it was needed at such a difficult point in history. His knowledge of Marxist literature, classical and contemporary, underlay that ability. He influenced greatly the development of party policy. Tomás translated the *Communist Manifesto* into Irish in 1986. His death will be mourned by comrades he befriended in many countries when he represented the party abroad. He was a regular contributor to *Socialist Voice* until affected by illness in the last couple of years.

There was never a wall between his political understanding and his creative writing, and that is obvious throughout his work, especially in his novels. He analysed some of the basic problems of 21st-century Ireland in a series of booklets published by Pádraig Ó Snodaigh of Coiscéim, his long-time loyal publisher and friend, ranging over the future of Irish, republicanism, and neoliberalism.

Under the imprint of Nuascéalta, which he set up with his wife, Karen, he wrote in English about the language question, cultural assimilation and the continual effects of colonialism in Ireland (and elsewhere) in *The Broken Harp: Identity and Language in Modern Ireland*

and an encouragement to future researchers to look further into the lives of those in the Irish-Latin American hall of fame.

Mac Síomóin introduces the reader to six of these colourful lives.

Liam Lamport was born in Wexford in 1615, later became Guillén de Lampart in Mexico, and ended up, intriguingly, as the inspiration behind “Zorro,” the fox. He is the only non-Mexican represented by a statue at the Ángel de la Independencia monument in Mexico City.

Alejandro O'Reilly too has left a mark in present-day Latin America: a street in Havana, Cuba, named after him. Born in Moylough, Co. Galway, in 1722, he fled with his family from the notorious Penal Laws and was taken to Spain as a child. A military man, he was sent to Cuba by the Spanish Crown in 1763 and from there continued his service to the Spanish monarch in Puerto Rico and Louisiana and back to Cuba and then Spain. Many other Irishmen are memorialised alongside him in this chapter.

Camila O’Gorman, on the other hand, was born in Argentina. She suffered the same Catholic prejudice

against women and those who opposed Catholic values, as so many women have done in Ireland. Aged twenty, and eight months pregnant by her lover, Father Uladislao Gutierrez, she was hounded and betrayed and suffered the death penalty for living outside the iron rule.

The next chapter explores the story of a group hero (as did some of the early ones), the St Patrick’s Battalion. Their deeds for Mexican independence are commemorated on a plaque at the San Jacinto Plaza in the district of San Ángel in Mexico City: “In memory of the Irish soldiers of the heroic St Patrick’s Battalion, martyrs who gave their lives to the Mexican cause in the United States’ unjust invasion of 1847.”

The chapter on Eduardo Bulfin acquaints the reader with the background to the largest Irish emigrant population outside the English-speaking world, in Argentina, which of course includes the family that brought forth Che Guevara. In this chapter, however, Mac Síomóin describes a family that returned to Ireland only to take part in the 1916 Rising. Both children of the family were actively involved in the Irish struggle for

Tomas Mac Síomóin (who died in February), one of the foremost Irish-language writers and activists, had just published a book on the Wild Geese, as these emigrants are known.

freedom: Eduardo, a Republican activist, and Catalina, secretary to the Irish revolutionary Austin Stack.

This small collection of outstanding Irish people with a Latin American connection concludes with the story of Rodolfo Walsh, another Argentine-Irishman, who saved the Cuban revolution. Rodolfo was a founder of Prensa Latina, the Cuban state news agency in Havana. He famously cracked the code that revealed the CIA’s intentions leading up to the Bay of Pigs. Consequently, Fidel Castro was able to defeat this assault on Cuban sovereignty.

Mac Síomóin points out that the book can only open a window on a fascinating connection between Ireland and Latin America. Many more stories await their telling, among them those of Daniel Florence O’Leary, aide-de-camp and chronicler of Simón Bolívar, William Browne, father of the Argentine navy; and Bernardo O’Higgins, Liberator of Chile. Ireland’s loss of its Wild Geese was the Hispanic world’s gain.

Karen Dietrich’s beautiful illustrations complete the book’s purpose of reimagining the lives of those who took their sense of rebellion to the new continent. ★

and *The Gael Becomes Irish: An Unfinished Odyssey*. In recent years he was much concerned with the effects of climate warming, modulated plants and food, and consumerism.

In 1995 he was a prime mover in establishing Cumann Gaelach Cois Life in Ballyfermot, Dublin. This was prompted by a request to set up an Irish class in Liffey Gaels GAA club. Tomás took the first class of four people on a Sunday morning, and the project grew from there. From the beginning the methods and approach were based on Cuban literacy campaigns of the 1960s, in which successful learners went on to become facilitators. This was achieved and continues in Ballyfermot to this day, where there are now four classes and a significant number of people throughout the area who have acquired fluency in the language.

Tomás Mac Síomóin played an important role in all the activities of the Cumann Gaelach in its early years, including organising weekend trips to the Gaeltacht. After his departure to Catalonia he always found a warm welcome in Ballyfermot on Sunday mornings when in Dublin.

Ghlac sé páirt lárnach san Fheachtas Náisiúnta Teilifíse, a raibh bunú Theilifís na Gaeilge (TG4 anois) i 1996 mar thoradh air. Bhí sé thar a bheith mórtasach as a pháirt sa chaithréim sin.

He went to live in Catalonia in 1998, and remained there until his death, apart from a couple of long periods he spent in

Cuba and a term as writer-in-residence in Áras Éanna, Inis Óir. His visits back to Ireland were usually to speak at political, literary and cultural conferences, and he always found time for one-to-one discussions with attendees. He integrated completely into Catalan society and often referred to Catalans in the first person, but Irish continued to be his prime medium in writing.

Le linn dó a bheith ina léachtóir i gColáiste Shráid Chaoimhín ghlac sé saoire ghairme le dul le hiriseoireacht, agus bhí sé ina eagarthóir ar an nuachtán seachtainiúil *Anois*. Níos déanaí bhí sé ina eagarthóir ar an iris mhíosúil *Comhar*. Lean sé leis an iriseoireacht go deireadh, agus ba mhinic é ag tuairisceoireacht faoi chúrsaí na hÉireann sa Chatalóinis, sa Spáinnis, agus san Ollainnis. Bhíodh sé ag plé go rialta le nuacht ón Spáinn ar Raidió na Gaeltachta.

Agus é ina chónaí i Sligeach chrom sé ar scríobh na filíochta. Foilsíodh ceithre chnuasach leis (*Cré agus Cláirseach*, *Codarsnaí*, *Damhna agus Dánta Eile*, agus *Scian*). Bhí sé aitheanta mar dhuine de na filí ba chumasaí sa Ghaeilge an-luath ina shaolré scríbhneoireachta. Chuir sé féin agus Douglas Sealy Béarla ar dhánta Mháirtín Uí Dhireáin don chnuasach *Selected Poems / Tacar Dánta*. Bhí sé an-mhór leis an Direánach agus leis an bhfile Marxach Albanach Somhairle Mac Gill-Eathain. Ina *21 Dán / Poemes / Poemas* foilsíodh rogha dá dhánta féin aistrithe go

There was never a wall between his political understanding and his creative writing, and that is obvious throughout his work, especially in his novels.

Catalóinis agus Spáinnis.

Bhuaigh a chnuasach *Cín Lae Seangáin* agus *Scealta Eile* príomhdhuais Oireachtas na Gaeilge don ghearrscéalaíocht.

Tar éis dó éirí as a phost léachtóireachta thug sé faoin úrscéalaíocht. Ar na húrscéalta a chum sé bhí *Inmhe, An Bhfuil Stacey ag Iompar?*, *Ag Altóir an Diabhail*, *Ceallaigh* (a scríobhadh i gCúba), agus *An Tionscadal*, a bhuaigh príomhdhuais liteartha an Oireachtais.

D’aistrigh sé filíocht le Ernesto Cardenal ó Spáinnis go Gaeilge in *Na Cathracha Caillte* agus úrscéal Juan Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo* (2008) agus, in éindí le Cathal Mac Gabhann, úrscéal ón gCatalóinis le Victor Mora, *Mo Chroí san Afraic* (2002). Aistríodh saothar dá chuid féin go Gearmáinis, Rómáinis, Rúisis, Slóivéinis, agus Sorbais. Fágadh a lorg ar a shaothar féin go raibh Fraincis, Gearmáinis, Seapáinis, Ollainnis agus Gaeilge na hAlban aige chomh maith le Catalóinis agus Spáinnis agus cur amach mion aige ar litríocht na dteangacha sin.

Réabhlóidí go smior a bhí ann i ngach a ndearna sé.

Gabhaimid comhbhrón ó chroí lena bhean chéile, Karen Dietrich, lena chlann, Aoife, Liadáin, Ruairí, agus Seónaidh, agus lena gharpháistí agus a gclann siúd in Éirinn agus sa tSeapáin.

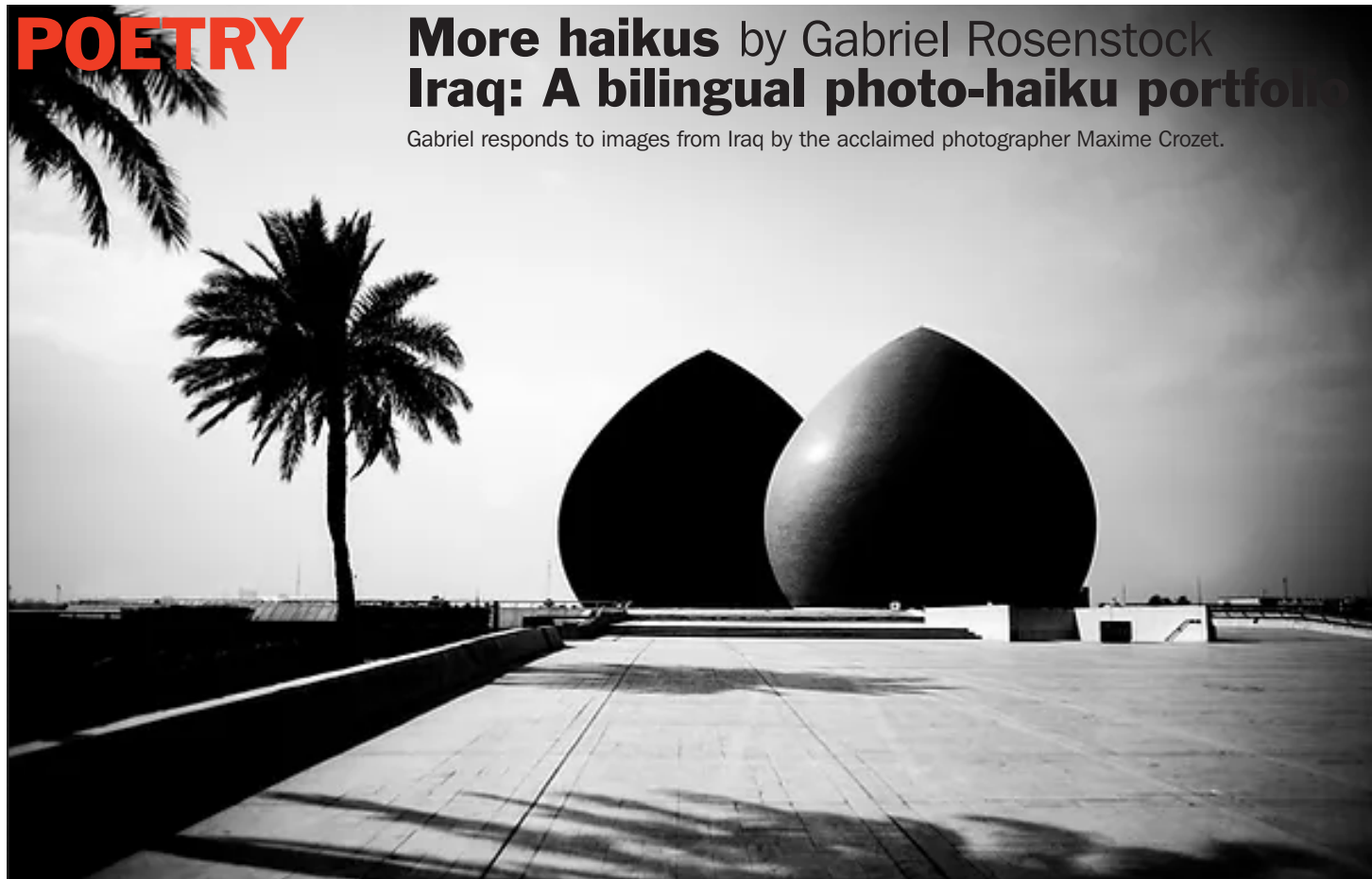
Bhásaigh Tomás Mac Síomóin in Valencia ar 17 Feabhra 2022.

Go dté tú slán, a chomrádaí. No pasarán! ★



More haikus by Gabriel Rosenstock Iraq: A bilingual photo-haiku portfolio

Gabriel responds to images from Iraq by the acclaimed photographer Maxime Crozet.



remember us
the martyrs say
remember remember
remember

cuimhnigh orainn
a deir na mairtíirigh
cuimhnigh cuimhnigh
cuimhnigh

pock-marked
with bullet holes . . .
West Mosul

crosach
i ndiaidh na n-urchar . . .
Mosul Thiar

ah, where is Tara
where is Troy?
Kirkuk . . .

á, cá bhfuil Teamhair
cá bhfuil an Traí?
Kirkuk . . .

Gabriel Rosenstock's latest book is a collection of satirical tales, *Mullah Nasrudin Is Alive and Well* (New York: Cross-Cultural Communications, 2022)



Iraq . . .
all that has gone
all that remains

an laráic . . .
a bhfuil imithe
is a bhfuil fágtha



mirage?
former palace of Saddam Hussein
in Babylon

ciméara?
seanphálás Saddam Hussein
sa Bhablóin



drithliú fós
ó na laethanta a bhí . . .
seancheárta

a light still glows
from former days . . .
old forge



strip Blair of his knighthood!
so say the winds
among ruins

bain an ridireacht de Bhlair
a deir na gaotha
i measc na bhfothrach



tae cumhra . . .
laghdaíonn sé bréantas
British Petroleum

scented tea . . .
lessens the stench
of British Petroleum





ABOVE
Trade Union Left
Forum poster



FRONT COVER
Passionate Journey
(1918) by Flemish
communist artist Frans
Masereel

JIMMY DORAN EMPLOYMENT

AT THE RECENT biennial delegate conference of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions a motion from Dublin Council of Trade Unions was passed to seek alternative legislation to restore all rights lost as a result of the Industrial Relations Act (1990).

The 1990 act was a direct result of the “social partnership” era, which included the largest shift in power from labour to capital in a century. Reassurances were given to the trade union movement by the then minister for labour, Bertie Ahern—a former union official—who was seen as a friend of the trade union movement at the time. He wasn’t: he was the epitome of poacher-turned-gamekeeper; his loyalty was always to himself, as later revelations about his financial affairs demonstrated.

The 1990 act took away union autonomy and, in doing so, took away workers’ power. It forced unions to adopt new internal rules, as set out in the legislation. It also put a ban on a lot of actions that were available to unions up until then by repealing previous employment legislation.

What follows are some of the rights that were lost by workers as a result of the 1990 act.

In relation to picketing, major restrictions were laid down in part 2, section 11, on where and when pickets could be placed. The decisions about where and when to picket must be returned to the trade union and its members, including

decisions on secondary picketing.

Support strikes, solidarity actions, political strikes, sit-ins and occupations are all now illegal. These actions were not taken lightly but must be available at the discretion of the workers in dispute. Solidarity action, support strikes and working-class unity are the bedrock of working-class power. Once it was outlawed, workers were isolated and divided. As a result, pay, conditions and union density plummeted.

The decision in relation to the length of notice given to an employer of pending industrial action must be decided by workers and their union. Employers use the notice period to put in contingency measures that demolish the effect of the strike.

In some disputes immediate action may be necessary, for example on a health and safety issue, in the case of an individual worker, or a situation similar to the closure of Clery’s department store. The Clery’s dispute is a clear example of why workers in dispute must be able to occupy a premises in the course of a dispute.

The definition of a worker must be altered to include bogus self-employed, contract workers, and those in the gig economy—that is, anybody who provides services to another, regardless of the nature of the contract under which they are employed.

In part 2, section 14, rules are imposed on unions in relation to ballots for industrial action. In fact this section completely ends union autonomy. The act lays down that trade unions must ballot “all members whom it is reasonable . . . for the union concerned to believe will be called upon to engage in the strike or other industrial action,” and the union will take reasonable steps to ensure that every member entitled to vote will vote “without interference from, or constraint imposed by, the union or any of its members, officials or employees and, so far as is reasonably possible, that such members shall be given a fair opportunity of voting.”

This is not just in the case of a strike but any industrial action, be it a work to rule, a ban on overtime, or any other type of action taken by workers to defend their rights.

When all the ballots are counted, seven days’ notice must be given to

the employer before the action can be taken. The wording of the act is so broad that it is open to multiple interpretations, and the scope for companies to seek injunctions for invalid ballots is limitless. We have seen by the number of injunctions granted to employers that the judiciary are no friends of trade unions or workers.

An ill-judged comment by a union official or union member during the period of the ballot could invalidate the poll as “interference.” If there is a low turnout a judge can decide that it is not credible that everybody entitled to vote was given a fair opportunity—which happened with airline pilots in Ryanair when there was a low turnout for a strike ballot.

To reverse these conditions on unions and return rights lost to workers as a result, section 14 of the 1990 act must be abolished. This section should be replaced with a new section that gives trade unions complete autonomy in setting all internal rules and regulations.

The Trade Disputes Act (1906) stated that anything done in a trade dispute, so long as that action was not illegal in itself, would be free of criminal and civil liability. This right needs to be reinstated, to supersede all conditions imposed on immunities under the 1990 act.

These changes will go a long way towards returning rights lost to workers as a result of the 1990 act; but on their own they are not enough, without the right to union recognition and union access to all workers, coupled with full collective bargaining rights.

If a Workers’ Rights Act, to include all the above, is introduced there will be a more level playing-field between worker and employer. With the balance of power more equal, levels of exploitation will drop drastically as employers realise that workers have the power to stop them. Employers who continue to exploit and mistreat workers will be taken on and stopped.

No employer has anything to fear from workers having rights if they are treating workers fairly. A fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay is all workers expect. Of course the reverse side of this is “An injury to one is the concern of all.” If you exploit us we will withdraw our labour and shut you down. ★

