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## Let us arise!

**Jimmy Doran** on Irish trade unions  
**Jenny Farrell** on realism in art



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## INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CONSULTATIVE FORUM A SHAM. A PRETENCE OF LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE STATEMENT BY THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND

24 JUNE 2023

**T**HE GOVERNMENT'S "Consultative Forum" rolls into Dublin today after its Cork and Galway sessions, meandering through the thoughts of aging generals, representatives of numerous think tanks financed by various foreign military intelligence agencies, and recipients of imperial honours.

The aim of the forum is to continue the process of attempting to condition tolerance among the Irish people for a sharp break with this state's traditional position of neutrality. While actually joining NATO may be their long-term objective, what is clearly under fire, and most critically at stake, is the "triple lock" regarding the deployment of Irish military



**A**S THE TRADE UNION movement gathers in Kilkenny for the ICTU biennial delegate conference, we must take notice of the changing demographics of union membership.

The average age of union members is 48. Only about 12 per cent of members are under 30 years of age.

Despite the number of people in the work force more than doubling since the 1980s, union membership is static, at around 780,000.

In the 1980s unions had power over their own destiny; workers decided when and for what they took industrial action. "Social partnership" put an end to that. The crowning glory of the social partnership era was the Industrial Relations Act (1990), which was the worst dilution of workers' rights since the foundation of the state. This legislation was designed purely to restrict workers' rights and tip the balance of power firmly onto the side of employers, with the judiciary as the adjudicators. The 1990 act has nothing to do with partnership and everything to do with the ruling class controlling workers.

After the twenty-three years of social partnership (1987–2010) the ICTU entered the new decade seriously weakened, with union density down to 31 per cent, compared with a high point of 62 per cent in the early 1980s. A decade later, density continues to decline and now hovers around 27 per cent.

The proportion of people under 25 joining unions has been falling for decades, leading to an aging membership. This is very concerning, because there is a strong association between joining young and remaining a

**The trade union movement must oppose legislation that weakens it. We must tip the balance of power back in favour of workers. We need to build union strength to give workers the power to win back lost ground and gain new victories.**

personnel overseas.

The removal of the triple lock would allow the Government to decide unilaterally which military operations it would back with logistical and military support.

The Government wants to drop any reference to a UN mandate for such deployment and to disregard the United Nations completely—which is in line with US policy regarding Iraq, Afghanistan, and other catastrophic adventures. The Irish state is already working behind the scenes with NATO and backing deeper EU militarisation in the form of PESCO.

Achieving the goal of global security and world peace requires demilitarisation and massive cuts in military spending globally. Demilitarisation and peace are also an essential element of tackling

**Achieving the goal of global security and world peace requires demilitarisation and massive cuts in military spending globally.**

member: people who do not join a union when they are young are much less likely to join later. The recruitment of more young people is therefore crucial for the survival of the trade union movement.

If this pattern continues there will be no trade unions in twenty years, as the bulk of the present membership will have aged out and retired—this at a time when Ireland has the second-highest level of workers on low pay in the OECD. Bogus self-employment, minimum-hour contracts, short-term contracts, the gig economy and part-time work are rampant. On top of this we have a housing crisis not seen since the 1930s, and over a million citizens on hospital waiting-lists.

The politicians have failed the people of Ireland; and there is no sign of that changing any time soon. The working class are crying out for change and leadership. With unions severely restricted by the 1990 act, all the trade union movement can do is hold marches on a Saturday against these crises in health, housing or the cost of living to lobby or put pressure on the political class, whose policies caused the problems in the first place.

This is instead of being able to flex our industrial muscle and take on the corporate backers at whose behest Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael impose these policies on our people. The huge tax marches of the late 1970s were not ignored when close to a million union workers walked off their jobs, shut down the economy, and forced the Government to take notice. Today we don't have the power to do this, because of the 1990 act.

The Dublin Council of Trade Unions motion unanimously passed at the last ICTU conference called for legislation to

replace all those rights lost by workers as a result of the 1990 act.

The campaign to get this legislation enacted, as called for in the motion, needs to be started. The Trade Union Left Forum have drafted legislation—the Fair Employment Bill (2022)—to do this. The groundwork has been done.

Trade unions need to get back to the foundations that Connolly and Larkin built them on. James Connolly said: "Legislation does not control the Lords of Industry; it is the Lords of Industry who control legislation." The trade union movement must oppose legislation that weakens it. We must tip the balance of power back in favour of workers. We need to build union strength to give workers the power to win back lost ground and gain new victories.

Jim Larkin famously said: "The great only appear great because we are on our knees; let us rise!" This is exactly where social partnership and the 1990 act have brought the workers of Ireland: back onto our knees.

Let us arise to the challenge in the DCTU motion from the last ICTU conference: "Conference recognises that the restrictions on trade union action in the 1990 Industrial Relations Act need to be opposed, and that the act should be reformed to restore rights which trade unions had before 1990. Conference mandates the executive to seek an alternative legislative regime which would allow trade union and industrial action for individual workers, for issues that concern workers across society and, across employers, and for effective solidarity to workers in dispute."

It is union policy.

**Trade unions must be radical or they will become redundant.**

climate change. Military spending needs to be redirected to social and economic development and to securing global economic justice. It is this inequality that lies at the heart of global instability.

The Communist Party of Ireland, and a wide range of democratic opinion, fully supports neutrality and will work with others towards further strengthening the triple lock.

- We demand a protocol recognising Irish neutrality in the next EU treaty.

- The Government, regardless of its composition, must return to a position of seeking global nuclear disarmament through the United Nations and other international bodies.

- Enshrining neutrality in Bunreacht na hÉireann and inserting a protocol recognising Irish

neutrality in all EU treaties is the only guarantor that would prevent the youth of Ireland dying on foreign battlefields defending the interests of global industrial and mining corporations.

Today in Dublin the CPI carried out actions to highlight our call for the defence of the triple lock and demanding the enshrining of neutrality in the constitution. Our banner on the Halfpenny Bridge carries the slogan and demand promoted by James Connolly over a century ago, and a long-held position of the Irish labour movement: "We serve neither King nor Kaiser, but Ireland," or, in the world of today, "We serve neither London, Brussels nor Washington but the Irish working class."





# IMPERIALISM CHALLENGED

## A TRANSFORMATIVE PERIOD IN WORLD HISTORY

**TOMMY MCKEARNEY**  
**GLOBAL SHIFT**

OVER THE past few months the public, or at least a section of it, has been watching with interest the trials and tribulations of two high-profile political demagogues. We refer, of course, to the arraignment of Donald Trump and the British House of Commons voting to censure Boris Johnson.

Yet in spite of what appeared to be damning indictments against both men, they have not been completely ostracised. Mainstream conservatives in both the United States and Britain have deliberately avoided outright condemnation of their actions. It is important to analyse the reason for this reluctance, as it casts a light on significant developments internationally.

The capitalist ruling class, led from the United States and embedded in Western Europe, has had more than two centuries to perfect techniques for retaining power. For the most part, they prefer to create the appearance of governing by consensus. They do, after all, control the means of production, giving them enormous influence over employment, thereby facilitating the divide-and-rule strategy used to split working-class communities.

Moreover, ownership of the mass media allows for the creation of a self-justifying narrative. Granting the people a vote every few years lends the appearance of legitimacy to all of this.

Yet since capitalism is crisis-prone, its masters always want to have options if and when the desired equilibrium is upended. At the extreme this means a resort to fascism. Before crossing that

particular Rubicon, however, they prefer the option of employing demagoguery, now known as populism. The objective is to bamboozle a critical number among the disenchanted and disadvantaged into supporting right-wing governments, even more so to endorse reactionary policies at home and abroad.

Global capitalism is at present experiencing just such a crisis. Unwilling to prevent price-gouging profit-making by private enterprise, the United States, the European Union and Britain are all, to a greater or lesser extent, experiencing persistent inflation. As a consequence, working-class people everywhere experience hardship. On the one hand they suffer as a result of the ever-rising cost of living; workers further suffer, as economic recession is deliberately induced by central bankers employing the blunt expedient of raising interest rates.

## LIVES IGNORED, PROFIT UPHELD

**CLOVER CARROLL**  
**DOUBLE STANDARDS**

THE RECENT EVENTS of June involving the death of five rich men dominated the media. As all eyes were on the Atlantic, in the Mediterranean those fleeing war, poverty and climate change were ignored as they drowned in the seas crossing to Europe.

According to the EU commissioner for home affairs, Ylva Johansson, the sinking of a packed migrant boat off the coast of Greece may be “the worst tragedy ever” in the Mediterranean Sea. The death toll stands at 82, with 104 survivors pulled from the water. However, accounts by witnesses report that many

more went down with the ship.

Johansson said that “unfortunately, we have seen this coming because, since the start of the year, there was a new modus operandi with these fishing boats leaving from the eastern part of Libya . . . and we’ve seen an increase of 600% of these departures this year.” Clearly, from this statement, it is not an issue of not having enough notice but a lack of wanting to help in any meaningful way.

Other global bodies, such as the International Organization for Migration and the UN High Commission for Refugees, called for “urgent and decisive action” to prevent further deaths in the Mediterranean.” They emphasised “the duty to rescue people

in distress at sea without delay.”

Tarek Aldroobi, who had three relatives on board, told CNN that they had seen the Greek authorities towing the vessel with ropes but says they were tied in the “wrong places,” which caused it to capsize. The Greek coastguard denies that they were responsible for the capsizing.

Thirty-nine migrants drowned when their dinghy sank in the Atlantic Ocean off the Canary Islands, the Spanish non-profit group Walking Borders said. The group’s founder, Helena Maleno, said the migrants had waited for more than twelve hours for assistance. A Spanish helicopter sent to the area in response to a request for help from the Moroccan authorities found the dead minor and



In the process it becomes clear that the free-market system is again faced with major problems. Worse still from capitalism's point of view is the presence of a viable alternative in the east, that is, the People's Republic of China.

The influence of China on the global stage is growing almost daily, both in its diplomatic clout and its economic prowess. Reflect for a moment on some of its recent achievements. Most notable was sponsoring an accord between Iran and Saudi Arabia—two major Middle Eastern countries that the United States had managed to keep at odds for years, and now the Chinese-inspired détente has potentially altered the balance of power in the region.

There was also the visit in April of the president of Brazil, Lula da Silva, on a state visit for talks with Xi Jinping, after which Lula criticised the United States for prolonging the war in Ukraine.

Then last year, at a meeting between Chinese diplomats and senior government ministers from several African states, including South Africa, a motion was endorsed reaffirming the One China position in relation to Taiwan.

By any reading of world politics, it is easy to recognise the significance of all this. China has now become a leading influence in three of the world's most important regions, and has done so without the use of military expansionism—a strategy that has avoided bloodshed, and therefore done without antagonising whole populations.

While undoubtedly of grave concern to imperialism's strategists, it is perhaps the Chinese economic model that is causing them the greatest worry. In a little over two decades China has become an industrial powerhouse, producing 18 per cent of global GDP,

**Confronted by the spectre of successful "socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era," the response of Western capitalism has been predictable. Widespread and unrelenting hostility towards China is now the order of the day as the groundwork is being prepared for a new Cold War.**

compared with 12 per cent for the United States.<sup>1</sup> It's not surprising, therefore, that this performance is sustained by one of the developed world's best rates of return on investment.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, China is also one of the world's chief creditors, providing capital for infrastructure and industrial projects to 148 countries. Equally significant is the fact, as recorded by the World Bank, that over the past four decades poverty has been eradicated in People's China.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, it is not just the growing diplomatic influence enjoyed by China that is alarming capitalist super-powers: a deeper concern is that the Communist Party of China has overseen the development of an economic template that is much more successful than that promoted by free-marketeers. For Western capitalism, this raises a disturbing scenario. They fear that, faced with periodic economic recessions, distressed working-class communities will demand the adoption of the Chinese economic model.

Confronted by the spectre of successful "socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era," the response of Western capitalism has been predictable. Widespread and unrelenting hostility towards China is now the order of the day as the groundwork is being prepared for a new Cold War. An era of McCarthy-like paranoia is being generated by insinuating the existence of an all-pervasive Chinese espionage capacity. Huawei, Tiktok and Wechat, for example, are deemed capable of monitoring the every movement and the correspondence of those using their technology.

Consequently, Washington, London and Brussels are co-ordinating efforts to

contain China's so-called ambition to expand its orbit. Whatever other differences exist between them, they are in agreement on this issue. Moreover, such is the degree of consensus over the entire gamut of capitalism's apologists that erstwhile political opponents find common ground on this issue. Donald Trump's hostility towards China is matched, if not outdone, by that of Joe Biden. By the same token, there is no criticism of China emanating from Boris Johnson that Rishi Sunak does not share.

Hence the constructive ambiguity employed by much of the establishment on both sides of the Atlantic in relation to the two loud-mouthed demagogues. They are viewed as an "ace in the hole" to be introduced if required to once again mislead sections of the working class.

There is a lesson in this for the left. The capitalist ruling class and its political front-persons are deeply conscious of the possibility, indeed probability, that we are experiencing a transformative period in world history. Whatever view we took in the past about the Chinese path to socialism, it is incumbent upon us now to give adequate consideration to developments in that amazing country where the East is still glowing red.

**1** *World Economics*, "China's share of global GDP" (<https://tinyurl.com/375xrk2>).

**2** John Ross, "Why China's socialist economy is more efficient than capitalism," *MR Online* ([tinyurl.com/yuuu2syp](https://tinyurl.com/yuuu2syp)).

**3** World Bank, "Lifting 800 million people out of poverty: New report looks at lessons from China's experience" ([tinyurl.com/mr2wuduf](https://tinyurl.com/mr2wuduf)).

saw no other survivors, a coastguard spokeswoman said.

Off the Italian island of Lampedusa more than forty people are missing after another shipwreck. A spokesperson for the International Organization for Migration, Flavio Di Giacomo, stated that the vessel, which left from Sfax in Tunisia, was carrying forty-six migrants from Cameroon, Burkina Faso, and Ivory Coast.

"It is unacceptable to continue counting the dead at the gates of Europe," the UNHCR representative for Italy, Chiara Cardoletti, wrote on Twitter, referring to deadly shipwrecks of migrant boats that have already occurred in Italy, Greece, and Spain.

The number of migrant shipwrecks has increased in recent months, while the number of migrants entering the EU via the central Mediterranean "more than doubled" in 2023 compared with

**Off the Italian island of Lampedusa more than forty people are missing after another shipwreck**

the same period last year, according to the EU border agency, Frontex, in mid-June.

The poorly made boats sinking with the slightest amount of damage can be compared with the ignoring of safety measures taken by Oceangate. The late CEO, Stockton Rush, ignored safety concerns brought to his attention by engineers working on the submersible *Titan*. He believed that being told he was going to kill someone was "baseless cries" and "personal insults." But the *Titan*'s design was unsafe, as the hull was too thin, and the submersible itself had no approval by a regulatory body.

Rush had been recorded as saying that regulations and safety measures got in the way of innovation. Capitalist innovation needs regulations removed in order to push forward. However, the *Titan* could hardly be called innovative, as it was cheap and unable to withstand

the pressure of the sea.

The need to ignore safety to make progress under capitalism leads to questions such as What if other companies followed suit and put their workers' lives at risk, ignoring the consequences?

Under capitalism, lives are ignored while profit is upheld as a deity. Those fleeing their homes and crossing the sea in dangerous conditions are fleeing conditions made by those who are exploiting the world's resources, including those of the countries that are being fled from, in order to cut corners and make a profit.

We saw at first hand the fetishisation of wealth as the sinking of three migrant boats was ignored so that we could all find out what happened to five rich men who each spent \$250,000 to prove that ignoring safety concerns has consequences.



## IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE A SCOURGE?

**SAJEEV KUMAR**  
**FUTURES**

IN THE PREFACE of his book *SuperIntelligence*, Nick Bostrom writes: “The human brain has capabilities that the brains of other

animals lack. It is to these distinctive capabilities (language, technology and complex social organization) that we owe our dominant position on the planet.” The question is whether these capabilities will lead to our downfall. Will our fate be decided by our own creation?

The intellectual community raises an alarm about three possible causes for the apocalypse: climate change, nuclear war, and artificial intelligence. The alarms raised by intellectuals when ChatGPT was introduced with great hype were: Will AI take away jobs? Will

## CHAT GPT SHOULD NOT BE YOUR BIGGEST WORRY

**FREDDY ANUBIS**  
**FUTURES**

IF YOU DON'T WORK in tech, most probably you have heard of ChatGPT, and thought that it's amazing. Actually many who do work in tech would share your amazement—a system that can mimic humans to the extent that, many argue, it can pass the Turing test, the gold standard for artificial general intelligence.

But several tech workers who did actually use it reached the conclusion that it's not as amazing as people thought it would be. This did not stop people oblivious of technology's inner workings overstating its impact on our society, to the extent that people who do exactly what the limits of this technology did join them in unison, singing its praises while pretending to warn the masses against the technology falling into “bad hands.”

It appears as if the likes of the CEO

of OpenAI are fear-mongering among the masses to put pressure on governments to pass new regulatory legislation that would give their corporations an unfair advantage. So, rather than open-sourcing the technology, so that it would become available to researchers, they would control it as a new means of production, accessible only to whomever owns the capital.

Tech workers who did actually use the technology years ago, before it even went mainstream, know how fickle and unreliable it is to be used in production, let alone replacing actual workers. They know it's just another false narrative propagated by Silicon Valley technology determinists to make it look as if this is the future that all Wall Street investors should line up behind.

ChatGPT as AI didn't replace workers; yet even though its underlying GPT technology was released a couple of years ago, it's just getting the

spotlight recently, because of it being accessible for non-tech people, so they would be able to talk to and make sense of AI for the first time in history on such a scale.

But you know which AI technologies did replace workers? The kind that you can't talk to or whose decisions you can't make sense of—better known as machine learning (ML) algorithms, built as an antithesis of classical computer science theory.

You see, in the beginning, computers as machines were meant to ingest data, and process it into information, so that it would provide a human being with knowledge that could support them in decision-making.

Let's say, for example, a sales manager is looking at information generated from data gathered from the market so as to make a decision whether to increase or decrease the price of a certain product. The assumption back then was that this







**Marx observed that automation breaks down all the manual tasks, such as spinning, and later weaving, into their components and then automates them. What automation does is to divide physical labour into smaller tasks and mimic them as a repetitive task.**

humans be made redundant by AI? Will clever machines create stupid humans?

Artificial Intelligence is when computers can learn by themselves and make decisions without human intervention, using enormous amounts of data, which the human brain cannot process. So it uses past data to create models that predict the future.

Critics say that AI is not all that intelligent, in that it only mimics the data already created by humans, and lacks human understanding. Noam Chomsky has said that AI, like ChatGPT, is “the banality of evil: plagiarism, apathy and obviation,” and that it lacks morality and rational thought.

One of the main features of capitalism is that it incessantly revolutionises the means of production; but the motive is to increase productivity, thereby depreciating the value of commodities. This helps the capitalist to sell the commodities more cheaply and so get ahead in the competition to capture market share.

The automation of factories has been taking place ever since capitalism became a major mode of production. Marx observed that automation breaks down all the manual tasks, such as spinning, and later weaving, into their components and then automates them. What automation does is to divide physical labour into smaller tasks and mimic them as a repetitive task. The same can be done in mental labour as

individual’s experience is irreplaceable, and the machine can only support them in taking those decisions.

That, however, wasn’t the case with many ML implementations, where decisions were reached directly from massive amounts of data gathered from online users. No information was generated in the process; therefore those models didn’t provide any reasoning behind their decisions. So, in the process, the irreplaceable human was replaced by a machine.

Unlike ChatGPT, you can’t talk to these machines, but you can see them in action on online retail web sites, such as Amazon. They might not look as smart as GPT derivatives, but, thanks to loopholes in American legislation, established by lobbyists to gain an unfair advantage by evading taxes, these machines were placed in a near-monopoly market position to extract data from online users and turn it into profit, in the process abusing suppliers and destroying bricks-and-mortar competing retailers.

One visit to any bricks-and-mortar retailer and you will realise that they are fighting a losing battle. No wonder that many of them had to either downsize or totally shut down, even with their futile

well, which means breaking down the way we think and process megabytes of information, then creating algorithms for a particular task.

The working class have always regarded automation with detestation, as automation is followed by the loss of jobs. Some workers in the early nineteenth century destroyed machines in the factories, thinking that machines were the reason for their unemployment. Marx later criticised that approach, explaining that automation per se is not the reason for their unemployment but the social relations that enable a particular class to acquire private ownership of the means of production, which is the cause of their misery.

The essence of Marx’s explanation regarding revolutionising the means of production is “too many useful things results in too many useless people.” What he meant here is that previously the means of production were used by the labourer to create use values, but in the capitalist mode of production the means of production use the labourer to absorb his or her labour to produce surplus value. So the labourer loses their creativity and becomes a mere appendage of the machines.

Marx was never against science and technology; in fact he embraced science and its innovations with joy, studying every invention and discovery during his time with enthusiasm. He was very clear that it is not the machines but the social

attempts at digital transformation to compete with Amazon online.

And if this was the case for large retailers, how about small shops? They wouldn’t stand a chance, given that now everyone’s preference is to shop online.

So where can these ML algorithms be found elsewhere? Oh, well, they are ubiquitous. In every industry you will have a few of them consolidating the market and causing mass unemployment, or near-enslavement working conditions: Uber for transport, Deliveroo for catering, Youtube for entertainment, AirBnB for accommodation, and Facebook for media, to name a few. For each of these industries they would manage by gathering the data and ingesting it into ML models to place themselves in a monopolistic market position, in many cases without even owning the physical assets they are managing.

You see, these are the new means of production. Creating such a new class of assets is better known as Uberisation, which was the rage in the business world a decade ago.

The Uberisation fad did fade, but it left a legacy behind, with corporations entrenched in near-monopolistic market positions while continuously applying competition-stifling manoeuvres to

relation to the means of production that is the threat to humans. It is peculiar to the capitalist system that the machines that were supposed to make life easier for workers and provide them with more leisure become a nightmare, which threatens their job. Capitalism uses the machines produced by the dead labour of workers and turns them against living labour to exploit it, because the means of production are the private property of the bourgeois class.

AI will increase productivity and reduce the value of all commodities, including labour power, which under capitalism has become a commodity for the first time in history. At the same time AI will create a large reserve army of labour and precarious jobs and will cause a downward pressure on wages, greater exploitation, and a dangerously unequal society.

The danger is not just for the working class: the contradiction in capitalism is that the increased productivity through the use of machines will reduce the profitability of capital. The result is crisis.

AI is not a problem in itself: it is the underlying social relation with respect to the means of production that is the threat to humans. The social change that alters this relation and creates the social ownership of human inventions is the solution. We have come to a point where it is a choice between socialism and extinction.

perpetually consolidate the markets while in the process either fixing prices or wages or, usually, both! All this while not owning the actual assets being used or doing the actual work on the ground. It’s simply people having to pay them rent to use their online platforms.

Obviously such a problem on such a scale can’t be resolved on an individual basis, and it’s the same governments that created such fertile environments for capitalistic parasites that should intervene and drain the swamps, by adopting legislation to force the transparency of those ML black boxes.

In the meantime, don’t feed the beast! Encourage small businesses, and stop using those rent-seeking platforms whenever possible. If you are a techie, then try to find alternatives that are open-sourced and decentralised, then spread them into your community. The acid test is that if it’s harder to find alternatives, then you should avoid it. Having little or no alternative means that they had killed the competition already.

In my own experience, I’ve found that doing this is most rewarding, whether for health and well-being, richness of life, or ultimately not to mention all this while having a good cause.



# POLITICS CHALLENGES FACING RURAL IRELAND



**ANTHONY MCGUIRE**  
**BIODIVERSITY**

**T**HE BIG ITEM of conversation within the farming and rural community is the “Nature Restoration Law,” which is the EU Commission’s plan to restore more than a fifth of the EU member-states’ land and sea area by 2030.

This is the first biodiversity law since the “Habitats Directives” in 1992; it follows the commitments made by the EU Commission in the EU’s “Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.” Essentially, what it will do is:

Increase biodiversity: To secure the things nature does free, for example rewetting bogs, restoring forests, protecting natural areas (such as old quarries), cleaning and restoring rivers,

and other matters of rural rejuvenation.

Limit global warming to 1.5 degrees: So these look like a positive step. For farmers in general it will mean they will be paid to maintain and protect natural areas within their farms; that is what they are doing with the ACRES scheme.

ACRES (the Agri-Climate Rural Environmental Scheme) is the latest environmental scheme, following from REPS (the Rural Environmental Protection Scheme), AEOS (Agri-Environment Options Scheme), GLAS (Green Low-Carbon Environment), etc.

This is the most broadly ranging scheme since TEPS. However, farmers’ views on it are mixed. Some view it as all right, and get improvement financially on the proceeding GLAS; others feel it reduces production. Farmers’ reaction to

the Nature Restoration Law is what we will discuss now.

The simple fact is that farmers are fearful that their lands will be taken away compulsorily to be rewetted. Now, Mick Wallace and Clare Daly and the Nordic Left Group in the EU Parliament, who are at the cutting edge of negotiations on this forthcoming law, stated that the governments and subservient media’s interpretation of this law is a blatant lie—a lie deliberately pushed by the governments.

Let’s look at the basis of the law and what the EU wants done to the land and bogs if they are to be rewetted back to their natural state. They are to be turned back into natural bog. The figure quoted is 116,000 hectares. That is not a final figure but is up for negotiation over the

## FARMERS AND THE ‘GRAVY CHAIN’ OF FOOD PRODUCTION



**BARRY MURRAY**  
**FARMING**

**F**ARMERS ALWAYS give the appearance that the last penny is in their pocket. Or better, hasn’t reached it yet. They might have 500 or 600 acres and they would still say, “It’s only a hobby.” No money in it, and talking about “giving it up” for fifty years.

And yet all is certainly not well in the farming sector. The bigger farmers on the better land have potentially more income, where the smaller farmers on wet and hilly land have only

a subsistence return for their efforts. Many of these small-farm incomes are boosted by either partner, or indeed both, working in another job, sometimes part time. And yet all are governed by the same farming regulations, or supposed to be.

All farmers, like all businesses, are at the mercy of the market. And, like all producers around the world, they are exploited the most. When supermarket chains cut their prices to compete in the market they pressure the wholesalers, who in turn pressure the beef factory, the creamery, or wholesale vegetable supplier. They





**Is it not surprising that the Government sides with transnational companies, to the detriment of the environment, scaring the rural populations with fantasy stories in order to get what they want? The farming organisations and independent rural TDs (more about them later) sing off the same hymn sheet as the Government.**

next couple of months.

The lands and bogs in question will be state lands from Bord na Móna and Coillte. The rumours spread among the farming and rural communities of enforced seizure of land for rewetting, which are causing so much consternation, are a lie. It's as simple as that.

Now, one would think that it could be a simple misrepresentation of the law because of a lack of understanding, and that we can trust our elected representatives and the media to accurately report the facts. Well, a quick answer to that is a big No. They do not. Consider that the interests of the rural community and the environment are irrelevant unless it's for profit.

The simple reason they don't want this law to pass is that they want the bogs and forests to be sites for giant industrial wind farms and solar farms; massive corporations coming in that have no respect for nor interest in rural areas: all they are interested in is maximum profits.

For example, take a look at north Westmeath, a once-beautiful area completely destroyed. That is what capitalism does: it swoops in like a vulture, exploits everything and everyone, and moves on, leaving a wasteland. That's what happened in north Westmeath.

Is it not surprising that the Government sides with transnational companies, to the detriment of the environment, scaring the rural populations with fantasy stories in order to get what they want? The farming organisations and independent rural TDs (more about them later) sing off the same hymn sheet as the Government.

We, the farmers, have been in the forefront of the environmental struggle

for decades, since the introduction of REPS from the early 1990s. We farmers have been involved in several environmental schemes, including AEOS, GLAS, and the one that came out this year, ACRES.

Now, through participation in these schemes the farming community has worked hard to farm in harmony with the environment. We understand that humans are not above nature nor are its master; the truth is that nature and the environment are humanity's master. We must work alongside the environment and in harmony with nature, respecting its laws.

That is what we farmers understand. Now rural areas will have to be rejuvenated, and we will step up to the task.

The problem with climate change is not the fault of the farming or rural community. For years we have been made the scapegoats, and easy targets for the sorry state of the ecosystem and environment of this planet.

Capitalism is the true culprit in this sorry situation: corporations laying waste to rural areas globally, polluting rivers, destroying bogs, cutting down millions of acres of forest to create ranches for producing more cattle to flood the European market and put more pressure on the farming community, who cannot produce beef at the prices that South America and Asia can produce it. Our government doesn't care.

There has been talk of creating a new farmers' political party. Now here is the real question: Would they be able to create the changes needed? The quick answer is No. What would happen is that they would probably get a few elected, then be overwhelmed by the system and toe the line.\* Another question must be asked: Who will they represent—small

and medium farmers and rural workers? Well, the answer is again No. Their allegiance (like the IFA and the other farming organisations) would primarily be to the large farmers and factories.

An example would be where in a recent television programme Michael Fitzmaurice, the TD behind the idea, was defending the Government's stance on the Nature Restoration Law against Clare Daly, who was trying to explain the reality of the laws to the public. How, after that, can any farmer trust these people with those interests?

Another issue in rural areas is the planned culling of 60,000 cows per annum. (I will go into that in detail in a later article.) 130 large-scale farmers produce 30 per cent of the country's beef. They have a special deal with the factories; the rest of the smaller farmers with cattle ready for the factory cannot avail of these prices and have to chance their hand in the marts and hope for the best.

This is the future of this country, which reflects the capitalist world in general: a small wealthy elite dominating the market and making a healthy profit, with governments co-operating, while the rest of the people struggle. This is the sad situation we face in the modern era.

Ireland is a country with great resources; yet the majority of working people are in dire straits, trying to survive, the means of production, the food chain, increasingly in the hands of the minority. This has to change.

★ Editor's note: A Farmers' Party existed in Ireland, 1922–1932, winning seven seats, representing the interests of large farmers. Like all things under capitalism, you can't remove class and different class interests from economic and social questions.

**All farmers, like all businesses, are at the mercy of the market. And, like all producers around the world, they**

then pressure the farmers to take less for their produce. Where supermarket chains deal directly with farmers they just tell them they can no longer pay the previously agreed prices.

Either way the farmer is squeezed, while the people appear to get cheaper food.

But what is the real cost of all this? It guarantees that there is a friction between the wealthier farmers and in turn all other levels of farmer in the "pyramid." It prevents any potential unity of farmers to get better prices, for one thing. Who does this suit? Can't help feeling there's a class issue here? But try explaining that to a poor "mountain farmer" in the wilds of Leitrim, Donegal or Fermanagh struggling to pay diesel and fertiliser bills.

The upshot is that the farmers have to do all they can to make it pay. The

main thing is to increase stock, so that they have more to sell, to compensate for falling profits. This means that land is then overstocked. To produce the grass to feed extra stock will need all kinds of fertilisers, slurry, and high-yield grasses.

So now the waterways are more polluted than ever. Therefore humans are affected. But the biodiversity is also affected. The natural insect, bird and animal food chain is seriously disrupted. All of this contributes to climate change as well.

Then there is the ultra-processing of foods to make new types of food: additives to sweeten or not, additives to boost colour, taste, texture, or longevity, to mention a few. Once again all this is geared for profit, not health.

When food was no longer produced to feed but became a commodity for profit it was inevitable that there would

be pollution, and more hunger than ever in the world. Now many of the procedures, causing harm to human health and the environment, to increase profits "from farm to fork," are being seriously questioned. But guess what? The wealthiest farmers, the food manufacturers and major retail chains want to retain the status quo. They don't want any interruption to their gravy trains.

Meanwhile European money now contributes up to four-fifths of farm income. Surely they too know the real story of food production? They have seen the critical reports by scientists, as we all have. But then, it's not about food, it's about profit. And if a little bit of "corporate socialism" has to be introduced to keep the wheels of capitalism going, then so be it. Health, hunger and heartlessness are only collateral issues.



# ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI: PIONEER OF REALIST ART



The emergence of the bourgeoisie between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries from traders, merchants and artisans marked the beginning of the modern, capitalist era, beginning in Italy writes Jenny Farrell.

This new social class, seeking political power to underpin and further its growing economic might, found expression in the Renaissance, which displayed its confidence and its philosophical and artistic as well as scientific achievements.



The Reformation, originating in Germany in 1517, represented religious emancipation from strict feudal hierarchies. The Reformation weakened Catholicism throughout Europe. During the period 1555–1648 the Counter-Reformation took place, characterised by Catholicism's political and military actions to thwart the effects of the Reformation, not only in central Europe.

In Europe the Baroque developed in tandem with the Counter-Reformation, glorifying the absolute power and outward splendour of the ruling class, while realist works of art reflected democratic tendencies.

In art, Caravaggio blazed the trail of realism, greatly influencing many painters. Among these was Orazio Gentileschi, father of Artemisia, who also stood firmly in the realistic tradition of Caravaggio.

Artemisia Gentileschi was born in Rome on 8 July 1593. Her first masterpiece was *Susanna and the Elders* (1610), above, after the Biblical story. It was painted in Rome when she was only seventeen. It is a close-up composition, focusing on the figure of Susanna. She is seated on a stone bench, vulnerable, all but nude. Her whiteness, her innocence, is emphasised and contrasts sharply with the fully clothed, leering men, who have crept up behind her. Susanna's upper body is twisted away from them in shock, her fearful face turned as far away from them as possible. Her distress is accentuated by the desperate yearning of her hands to push the men away as their hands perilously encroach upon her.

While Susanna is alone, the men form a treacherous unit, one man's arm around the other, whispering, the second man holding his index finger vertically to his

In art, Caravaggio blazed the trail of realism, greatly influencing many painters. Among these was Orazio Gentileschi, father of Artemisia, who also stood firmly in the realistic tradition of Caravaggio.



lips to seal the pact of silence.

Artemisia uses chiaroscuro to deepen the dramatic effect of her narrative. Natural light shines on Susanna's torso and the sheet, which are the men's central interest.



This colouring, along with the massive weight pushing down from the sinister predators, intensifies the emotional atmosphere and highlights Susanna's isolation and vulnerability.

Another popular Biblical subject Artemisia turned to was that of Judith slaying Holofernes *above*, from the Book of Judith. Artemisia painted *Judith Slaying Holofernes* twice. The second painting (1620) has gained in realism. Artemisia assigns both women an active role: the maid holds down the powerful man while Judith performs the actual killing. Artemisia presents a young woman, whose full bodily weight and strength is required to pin down Holofernes. An incredible force emanates from Judith.

The power, energy and sheer strength of these two women in action is almost peerless in the history of art. They have come to do a job; we witness them doing it, at the height of the action. Their fully extended arms push down on the general with great force. True to the Bible, Judith is dressed in her finest clothes (she needed to impress Holofernes), down to the bracelet—which, according to some experts, depicts Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and of chastity.

The women are splattered with blood; Holofernes' blood spurts from his neck onto the bed and the women. Their faces capture the intensity of the moment. The composition, with the sword at its centre, creates a sense of immediacy and emphasises Judith's determination.

Finally, let's look at Artemisia's self-portrait as *The Allegory of Painting* (1638–39), *above right*, painted in London while she stayed with her father, when she was in her mid-forties.

This picture is both allegory and self-portrait. Unusually for a self-portrait, the artist does not look at the viewer. She is completely focused on her creative activity, shown in a most unusual perspective—one that required two angled mirrors to allow observation of this posture. The painter is positioned to the side of the canvas, with a diagonal running from top left to bottom right of the picture, along her painting right arm and her chest. This off-centre positioning creates a singularly dynamic and unconventional composition.



The sleeve of the right arm is rolled up; she is wearing a brown apron over her dress: she is working. In her right hand she holds the brush that is about to touch the canvas. In her left hand the artist-subject holds the rectangular palette, resting on a simple support. In keeping with the intense concentration on her work, the painting is bare of any detail.

Artemisia is both the subject and the object of the picture. Gravity causes a pendant to hang away from the angled body, thereby attracting attention. The pendant represents a mask, saying that what we are shown in art is only the image of something, not the actual thing.

The entire focus is on the person of Artemisia. In the background there is a vertical line, separating two brown tones. The lighter shade probably signifies the grounding of the canvas before the imminent application of other paints by the artist. As we witness the artist touching the surface we behold the moment of creation. Both canvas and wall are bare, suggesting that the painting is not finished but in the process of creation. This is the allegory of painting at work. It is an amazing work of art.

As one of the great disciples of Caravaggio, and although well known, Artemisia received no public commissions while resident in Rome, Florence, or Venice, as her realism must have been seen in conflict with the Baroque ideals. Naples was more open to it, and it was here that she spent the last twenty years of her life and that she died, possibly during the plague of 1656.

All but forgotten for centuries, her realist art was rediscovered and celebrated in the twentieth century.





# MUSIC

## LISA LAMBE'S IMPRESSIVE 'NIGHT VISITING' TOUR

Michael Healy  
IRISH SONG

The show began at the Riverbank Arts Centre in Droichead Nua, with Lisa supported by a group of very talented musicians as she read stories and letters, from a large old-style book, about a time before electrification, radio, and the dance hall, an emotional performance that also included songs from as far back as the Famine, such as "Skibbereen," which brought a standing ovation from the audience.

Lisa is probably the best traditional Irish vocalist I've seen for long time. It's no wonder the *Irish Times* described her as "the finest singer of her generation."

According to her web site, "Night Visiting" reconnects us to the social role that night-time social house visits once played in our oral traditions and folklore, and in the preservation of our songs and stories, from tender love songs to songs of loss and longing, to create an evening celebrating the old songs, stories and tunes from around the hearth, bespoke for each location she visits. Based on her work with the National Folklore Collection and her recent MA in Irish folklore, "Night Visiting" was commissioned by the National Famine Museum in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon.

For those who did not catch the recent tour they will never know what they have missed.



## CONNOLLY BOOKS

Connolly Books is named after James Connolly, Ireland's socialist pioneer and martyr



12 *Socialist Voice* July 2023

# POLITICS

## QUEER ALT PRIDE

MIRANDA LYNCH  
PRIDE

### History

THE THEME of this alternative pride is the radical history of pride. As many people know, modern queer pride started in 1969, when queers, including many people of colour and then called transvestites (now you would say drag queens and trans people) fought back against a raid by the New York police of their space. The message was clear: the police are holding us down, and we are no longer going to take it!

Dublin pride has a similar history. The first queer march in this city was held to protest against the judgement in the murder of Declan Flynn. The gang of five young men who beat him to death received no jail time, only a suspended sentence. The ruling was seen as basically giving "queer-bashing" gangs the right to intimidate, beat and even murder queer people as they see fit.

In this country, homosexuality was illegal until 1982 in the occupied Six Counties and until 1993 in the 26 Counties. People were arrested in this country for having gay sex during my lifetime! With a history like that, how can the queers that live in this country feel that the Gardaí can be trusted?

You might say that's all in the past, and the Garda Síochána is not as bad now. I wish that were true. Last year the Connolly Youth Movement, supported by the Communist Party of Ireland, also held an Alternative Pride event. At the same time comrades at the "Radical Queer Pride for Housing" were harassed by the Gardaí, and three people were arrested for having closed cans of alcohol in their bag! People were walking all over town with full pint glasses and open bottles of whiskey, but if you're too radical and too queer at pride you still get arrested on spurious grounds.

The Garda Síochána proudly marched in uniform at the pride parade while their colleagues harassed and arrested queers. And even more recently, gardaí escorted far-right agitators into a local library, helping them harass staff over the library's inclusion of "this book is gay."

### Capitalism

On another note, look at all the corporations marching again at pride this year. Take Ryanair, famously known for cutting corners on safety and employees' wellbeing, and for trying to make strike action illegal in their sector. In their thirst for revenue they have deemed it profitable to put on a queer-friendly façade. We know this will not last, as we have seen in the United States, as companies drop their LGBT-friendly face as soon as it hurts their profits.

Airlines and car companies are marching, partying while knowingly contributing to the climate crisis that disproportionately hurts the working class. At this very moment the North Atlantic Ocean is going through an unprecedented heat wave, with the very extremes of 5 degrees above normal right at our coast. We are entering uncertain times, with unknown effects while the companies marching here are looking the other way. Are they proud of our dying world?

We have the big banks here too. They are waving their progress flags, despite upholding the capitalist system that disproportionately hurts queers, and especially young queers. We are at a higher risk of homelessness or unsafe housing situations. If we are contract it's easy for homophobic and transphobic bosses to fire us. It's difficult to access health care, especially for trans people, who have to deal with the dysfunctional National Gender Service, with waiting-lists up to nine years.

Meanwhile we are facing attacks by the far right, calling us pedos and poisoning people's minds with conspiracy theories.

As radical queers, we have to be anti-fascist and anti-capitalist. At this point it's a simple matter of survival. Make sure to get involved in the fight! Join a radical party, your union, and your tenants' union. And let's make our voices heard this year and do some chants. No pigs, no corps, no terfs!

★ Irish history ★ politics ★ Marxist classics ★ feminism ★ environment ★ progressive literature ★ trade unions ★ philosophy ★ radical periodicals

43 East Essex Street, Dublin between Temple Bar and Parliament Street. Tuesday to Saturday 10.00 to 17.30