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Defend neutrality

Jimmy Cocoran argues that the struggle for neutrality is central to the national question and to the struggle for democracy and socialism

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DEFEND IRELAND'S NEUTRALITY

JIMMY CORCORAN
NATION

THE ISSUE OF Irish neutrality has begun to gain political traction. In August the Communist Party of Ireland organised a public meeting on neutrality in Belfast, took part in a protest against the pro-NATO theme of the MacGill Summer School in Co. Donegal, and held a demonstration outside the Department of Foreign Affairs at which a letter of protest was handed in.

As the Irish ruling class, through its political parties, media, and academic institutions, continues its attempts to fully integrate the Irish state in NATO, there is the beginning of a campaign in defence of neutrality.

Why is the CPI in favour of neutrality? Do we believe that the Irish ruling class can be won to a progressive position? Is the focus on neutrality a distraction from class politics?

An article in the British publication *Weekly Worker* argued that the campaign to defend Irish neutrality "is

a form of small-nation patriotism. Internationalism is replaced by a nationalism founded on myths and lies."¹ To bolster her argument the writer quotes from Lenin's critique in 1917 of the position of a section of the Swiss left who supported its bourgeoisie in positioning troops on its borders to defend Swiss neutrality.²

While the main target of the article is People Before Profit, the position adopted by the CPI is also attacked. I believe her argument is wrong, and the lesson she derives from Lenin is also incorrect.

The CPI believes that the struggle for neutrality is central to the national question and to the struggle for democracy and socialism. The 101 years since the creation of the Irish Free State has proved the truth of Connolly's oft-quoted warning that "if you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her

landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country . . ."³

Since the decision by the Irish ruling class to open up to American capital and to join what was then the European Economic Community, the national question has become more complex. At present the Irish state is politically independent, but that independence is limited. The state is subservient to the triple lock of imperialism: Britain, the European Union, and the United States. State institutions, such as the courts, uphold the laws generated at the EU level, they uphold the rights of transnational corporations in relation to their tax contributions and their labour contracts, and they abide by British policy in the north of Ireland.

The increasing penetration of the economy by American monopolies is matched by the growing influence of such organisations as the US Chamber of Commerce in Ireland in shaping the state's economic and political policies. Irish foreign policy is dictated by the

interests of imperialism.

The dominant position of the Irish ruling class is dependent on its relationship with imperialism. It supports the so-called “rules-based international order,” by which imperialism, led by the United States, maintains control over the world’s resources and continues to extract surplus value from nominally independent countries.

Official thinking in the 26 Counties is dominated by Atlanticism, which views the world through the prism of NATO, an instrument of US foreign policy. Neutrality is seen as a hindrance to further integration. Completely abandoning neutrality would strengthen imperialist control over Ireland and with it the position of the Irish ruling class.

It should be obvious to all that the Irish ruling class do not support neutrality. Campaigning for neutrality means campaigning against the interests of the Irish ruling class. It means confronting imperialist control over Ireland. It does not mean that we “rally to the flag of our own bourgeoisie”: it means we force the ruling class to concede ground and open up new opportunities for revolutionary advance.

Protecting neutrality means inserting it in the Constitution. To give effect to such an amendment, article 29.4.6° of the Constitution, which states, “No provision of this Constitution invalidates laws enacted, acts done or measures adopted by the State, before, on or after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, that are necessitated by the obligations of membership of the European Union referred to in subsection 5° of this section” would have to be repealed, opening up the possibility for democratic advance against EU control.

The abolition of NATO is an anti-imperialist position; the campaign for neutrality is part of the same struggle. We can only perform our internationalist duty on the national stage. Yes, we can go to rallies calling for the abolition of NATO. However, our prime task in relation to NATO is to campaign for neutrality and the closing of the NATO base in Shannon.

Notes

1 Anne McShane, “Defending neutrality,” *Weekly Worker*, 3 August 2023.

2 V. I. Lenin, “Defence of neutrality,” *Collected Works* (1964), vol. 23, p. 260–261.

3 James Connolly, “Socialism and nationalism,” *Shan Van Vocht*, January 1897.

CPI defends neutrality

COMMUNIST PARTY STATEMENT

FOLLOWING A protest organised by the Communist Party of Ireland outside the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin to condemn the Government’s decision to provide weapons training to the Ukrainian armed forces, the following letter was handed in to the minister for foreign affairs, Micheál Martin.

The Communist Party of Ireland condemns the Government’s decision to order Irish troops to provide weapons training to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. This decision dangerously increases Irish involvement in the war and is another calculated attack on Irish neutrality. It is also designed to ensure that the war will continue, resulting in increased death and destruction.

We call on the Government to immediately rescind this decision and instead to add its voice to the majority of the world’s nations that have called for a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement.

Article 29.2 of the Constitution of Ireland is quite clear on the duty of the Irish state to seek a peaceful resolution to international conflicts: “Ireland affirms its adherence to the principle of the pacific settlement of international disputes by international arbitration or judicial determination.”

This constitutional imperative cannot be squared with Government policies since the beginning of the conflict in 2014, and in particular since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The decision once again highlights how Irish foreign policy is dictated by the needs of imperialism and how the Atlanticist policy of the Department of Foreign Affairs runs counter to article 29 of the Constitution.

The decision also does not reflect the wishes of the majority of the people of Ireland, who in a number of polls support a negotiated settlement to the war.

In line with article 29.2 of the Constitution, the Communist Party of Ireland calls on the Government to end its military support for the Ukrainian Armed Forces and to work with those countries calling for a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement of the issues at the heart of the conflict. This will put Ireland in line with the majority of UN member-states. What is needed is a de-escalation, rather than contributing to the escalation and prolongation of this destructive and senseless war. ★



Indigo girls’ recent Dublin concert

MICHAEL HEALY
MUSIC

Indigo Girls (Amy Ray and Emily Saliers) opened their recent show in what was without doubt an incredible performance, singing a combination of folk-protest songs and country music in a sold-out National Concert Hall, Dublin.

They performed without orchestral accompaniment or flashing lights: just two women with acoustic guitars playing an amazing set. Among the songs performed were “Fill It Up Again,” Shame on You” and the lesbian classic anthem “Closer to Fine,” a 1989 American hit that features vocal and instrumental contributions from Hothouse Flowers, Liam Ó Maonlaí and Fiachna Ó Braonáin. (Brandi Carlile covered this song in the Warner Brothers’ film Barbie.)

In 1989 their debut album sold more than two million records under the power of “Closer to Fine” and turned Indigo Girls into one of the most successful folk duos in history. Over a thirty-year career that began in clubs around their native Atlanta, the Grammy-winning duo has recorded sixteen studio albums (seven gold, four platinum, one double platinum) and sold more than 15 million records.

Amy Ray and Emily Saliers are committed activists, supporting such issues as immigration reform, LGBTQ advocacy, Native American rights, and Black Lives Matter.

What’s more, *It’s Only Life, After All*, a documentary about the lives and careers of Indigo Girls, produced and directed by Alexandria Bombach, had its premiere at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival.

★





JIMMY DORAN UNIONS

THE INDUSTRIAL Relations Act (1990) was designed to control workers, and it attacked the trade union movement at its very core by making solidarity between workers illegal. This was done by restricting workers taking industrial action together, dividing workplaces into separate grades, and banning support strikes.

Solidarity is the foundation stone of trade unionism. The ending of support action on the front line for over thirty years has led to divisions growing within the movement.

Some unions are manufacturing discontent and ridiculing other unions publicly and on social media in an attempt to appear more radical than other unions, and thus to poach members, at a time when union density is at its lowest point.

As it stands, just one in four workers are members of a union; 1¾ million

workers are not. To build workers' power, these workers must be recruited and organised. It makes little sense for unions to spend time and resources on poaching other unions' members, which only creates division and weakens the movement.

Warren Buffett famously said, "There has been a class war going on for decades, and my class is winning." We will not turn the tide on this class war by fighting among ourselves. The 1990 act is the jewel in the crown of that class war.

Many of the lowest-paid workers, with the poorest working conditions, are not members of a union. A recent survey found that 64 per cent of people said that if they were asked to they would join a trade union.

Unions have to start a major recruitment campaign among the unorganised. This will be hard graft, and time-consuming, but with the average age of trade union members now standing at forty-eight, and only 12 per cent of members under thirty, we have reached a

CLIMATE CRISIS THE DYSTOPIA THAT AWAITS OUR CHILDREN, AND THEIR CHILDREN

NICOLA LAWLOR FUTURES

THE LADDER Has been well and truly pulled up on younger generations—and not just that, but the earth around them has been set on fire.

Not everyone shares equal blame for this; and not every state shares equal blame. It is a class system, and a class-divided world, combined with dominant global states and dominated nations and peoples.

But now young people everywhere face a dystopian future of crisis, chaos, ignorance, hatred, war, poverty, and very probably climate catastrophe.

The rate of warming is now twice what it was for the preceding hundred years. A conservative estimate has global temperatures rising by 1.5°C by 2050; other estimates suggest it will be over 2°C, and some warn of an

increase of 4°C by the end of the century. Tipping-points are being well and truly passed.

An increase of 2°C would see glaciers melt more rapidly, and seas rising and becoming more acidic, killing off many species and much food. Much of the oceans would become dead zones, incapable of sustaining life. 70 per cent of coastlines would become flooded, making many parts of the world uninhabitable. Islands would vanish. Many water supplies would become undrinkable as a result of salinisation.

Basic food crops, such as maize, rice, wheat, and cereals, would fail, and yields would significantly decrease. Heat waves would make some places uninhabitable. Extreme weather events would increase, causing millions of deaths and much destruction. There would be an unprecedented migration of human beings and animals.

BRICS SUMMIT STRENGTHENS THE BLOC

NICOLA LAWLOR MULTILATERALISM

THE 15TH SUMMIT Of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) was held in South Africa in August under the slogan "Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development, and Inclusive Multilateralism."

More than sixty countries from around the world participated in this summit, which made the momentous

decision to admit into full membership, from January 2024, Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

President Xi of China in his speech at the summit noted that "the Cold War mentality is still haunting our world, and the geopolitical situation is getting tense." He continued: "I am glad to see the growing enthusiasm of developing countries about participating in BRICS co-operation. And quite a number of them have applied to join . . . We need

tipping-point for unions. The trade union movement must go to where the working class is, listen, engage, and recruit new members to rebuild workers' power and the trade union movement.

SIPTU's screening of the Women's World Cup soccer matches in Liberty Hall is an innovative initiative that will get hundreds of people into a trade union building for social gatherings. The women's soccer team are an excellent starting-point of engagement.

It could be said that this marks the return of the women's soccer team to Liberty Hall. A dramatic press conference took place there in April 2017 when the team went on strike and outlined a list of grievances with the FAI, which made headlines around the globe; and following intensive talks involving SIPTU, PFAI and FAI officials it resulted in a spectacular industrial relations victory for these young women.

This needs to be highlighted, and on their return they should be given a reception by the trade union movement,

A recent survey found that 64 per cent of people said that if they were asked to they would join a trade union.

where they can recount their battles on and off the field.

Instead of unions squabbling among ourselves we must promote each other and build on the victories that are won. We must be inventive in our approach and think outside the box.

We must take on the naysayers who attack trade unions at every opportunity. We must build on the many successful campaigns led by unions. We must get back into communities.

We must learn from defeats but concentrate on our victories—and there are many. Mandate got zero-hour contracts banned; SIPTU stopped the Government increasing the pension age to sixty-seven; Unite got tip theft outlawed; Connect successfully defended the construction sectoral employment orders (SEOs) in the courts; FSU got the protocol for the right to disconnect introduced. These were all victories that improved conditions for workers.

The Industrial Relations Act restricts solidarity between workers and the ability

to decide when and how to take industrial action.

Since 2021 it is the policy of the ICTU to have all rights lost as a result of the 1990 act restored. This will increase workers' power and make working-class solidarity legal again. A lot of work has already been done on this. The Fair Employment Bill (2022) was drafted by the Trade Union Left Forum and is ready to go.

The next union-led campaign must be to rearm workers and restore the rights lost under the 1990 act and to implement the unanimous decision of the 2021 ICTU congress to get the necessary legislation enacted. This will tip the balance of power firmly on the side of workers. It will make solidarity between workers legal again, build confidence, and bring unions together again where seeds of division have been growing.

Unity is our strength, and workers' solidarity is the rustproof weapon of our class. ★

It is estimated that 1½ billion people will be forced to migrate by 2050 as a result of climate change, at first from rural to urban areas but increasingly from the global south to the north. Power supplies and power stations will be particularly vulnerable and at risk of catastrophe, killing many but also disrupting energy supplies.

This description of the impact we face could go on and on; but the message is pretty clear.

We are already seeing a re-emergence of a fascist right, well funded, around the globe, exploiting inequality and fear for their own narrow ends. This will continue as migration increases and the existing housing, health and low-pay crisis becomes unimaginably worse. The right will grow, and get into government, and militarised borders will increase. We will witness many more children being pushed back to their death in the sea

An increase of 2°C would see glaciers melt more rapidly, and seas rising and becoming more acidic, killing off many species and much food.

or locked up in mass prison camps. Hatred and lies will spew and spread by means of communication technologies.

People will suffer like never before. Drug addiction and suicide will rise and depression spread. Wars will be constant and fought for every scarce resource, with the south bled by the global north. Those opposed to this world will be rounded up and, at best, imprisoned but probably "disappeared."

This won't happen in one year or one bang. We can actually see it happening around us today, but, like climate change itself, it will continue and strengthen unless confronted and stopped. The far right and climate change are two sides of the same coin. No social system has ever faced anything like this, and no existing social system will be able to cope with the multi-layered, multiple and interrelated crisis, including

consequences not known, that is being unleashed.

None of this, however, is pre-ordained, predetermined, or guaranteed to happen. We have agency. Though much of the planet has been destroyed by a class of human activity and social and environmental relations, the metabolic rift, the planet can also be saved by human activity. We don't necessarily have a blueprint for that, though we certainly see a blueprint for a dystopia emerging all around us.

Capitalism may be in crisis, but it can still rule us, and nothing yet has emerged to replace it. Our struggles, fights, reforms, transformations, changes must be with a view to replacing the rule of capital, its social relations and systems of governance, and undoing the rifts it has created environmentally and socially. ★

to accelerate the BRICS expansion process to bring more countries into the BRICS family."

In addition to this, India also proposed that the African Union—made up of fifty-five countries and 1.3 billion people—be admitted as one block into the G20, similar to the way in which the EU sits within the G20. This would no doubt strengthen the position of countries such as South Africa and the other individual BRICS countries within the G20, shifting the balance of power

"We repudiate any kind of conditionality."

within that structure.

Seen as a clear jab at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the new president of the BRICS New Development Bank, Dilma Rousseff (former president of Brazil), was quoted as saying, "We repudiate any kind of conditionality. Often a loan is given that certain policies are carried out. We don't do that. We respect the policies of each country."

President Lula and President Putin

in their speeches both noted the need to de-dollarise international trade and develop a new reference unit to increase trade within the BRICS countries and also those working with the New Development Bank.

These developments are likely to frustrate Washington, Brussels, and Tokyo, as a powerful alternative for political co-operation and economic development is strengthening outside their control. ★



POLICING IS NO LAUGHING MATTER IN THE NORTH

▲ Riot police and burnt out car in Ardoyne, Belfast
8 August 2011

TOMMY MCKEARNEY
THE STATE

IT HAS OFTEN been said that the nature of a country is reflected in the state of its prisons. We should add to that by including the nature of policing in any society.

Think, for example, of the Six Counties before the Good Friday Agreement and its police, the RUC, a force that epitomised the essence of the political entity it served: heavily armed, aggressive, and determined above all else to maintain unionist

ascendancy, rather than a commitment to civil justice, an organisation well suited to the Northern Ireland state that had created it.

The successor to the RUC offers a similar insight into the condition of the North's body politic, although from a somewhat different angle. The PSNI's current casebook is reading more like a recurring soap opera than a coherent account of law and order in the field. And yet it would be unwise not to put this latest episode in the context of an armed organisation answerable to a failing political entity.

Let's briefly recap.

In April this year PSNI documents that included a rough itinerary of President Joe Biden's visit to Belfast were found lying in a street in the city. At the time a police spokesperson said an investigation into the breach was under way. Just so, you might say. Nevertheless, a mere two months after that a laptop and documents containing sensitive information about two hundred PSNI personnel were stolen from a parked car belonging to a senior member of the force.

Then, of course, came the

WORKING CLASS UNITY

CLOVER CARROLL
CLASS

LAST MONTH'S *Socialist Voice* had an article on "learning with the people." The writer made the point about its content that "is anything being said that hasn't been said a thousand times before? Almost certainly not."

While that may be true, it seems that it's often forgotten. Socialist movements are made by the working-class communities, and it won't advance anything if we don't start in those communities when it comes to

combating capitalism and the far right. Throughout Irish history there have been a number of times that the workers have come together in solidarity. The numerous strikes, and movements such as the rent strikes of the 1970s and the Right to Water campaign, were brought about by working-class solidarity.

Most recently, the plague on working-class communities is a right-wing one. With the recent attacks on libraries around the country, we've seen the communities of Limerick and Leitrim band together to protect library workers. Dublin Communities Against

The DUP, the largest unionist party in the North and supposedly a staunch advocate of the sovereignty of the British Parliament over Northern Ireland's affairs, now stubbornly refusing to accept the House of Commons' overwhelming vote in favour of the Windsor framework; a unionist party dedicated to maintaining the constitutional position of the Six Counties within the United Kingdom while in effect undermining this very objective.

spectacular accidental disclosure of ten thousand police names in early August. This gaff was followed by the news that yet another senior officer had blundered by setting a laptop and files on the rooftop of his car before driving off, scattering computer and documents across the M2 motorway.

Nevertheless, and in spite of this series of unsettling setbacks, the surefooted and steady chief constable, Simon Byrne, knew exactly what to do. Unselfishly cutting short his family holiday, he flew back to Belfast and immediately took advice from his PR consultants. Using the old stage magician's stratagem of diverting attention from the core matter, Simon quickly gave a press conference and altered the focus. Rather than offering a credible explanation for the utter incompetence of his organisation, he solemnly informed his listeners that the leaked information was in the hands of those awful "dissidents."

Fortunately for the chief constable, he was not left to shoulder all the responsibility alone. The cross-community, all-party body charged with supervising the activities of the PSNI and its management, the Policing Board, met and reaffirmed its confidence in the chief constable and his senior staff.

Worryingly, though, this farce is far from comical. The PSNI is a several thousand-strong armed body with a sometimes questionable record. While not nearly as toxic as its predecessor, there remain concerns relating to its impartiality as well as its competence.

Over a five-year period, 2016–2020, close to twice as many Catholics as Protestants were arrested and charged—and that was according to the PSNI's own statistics.¹ As a spokesperson for the human rights group Committee on the Administration of Justice said at the time, the figures showed a stark disparity on the basis of community background.

Then there was the ominous

disparity between the treatment of different protesting groups. In June 2020 seventy fines were handed out to Black Lives Matter demonstrators for allegedly breaching covid-19 containment regulations.² Six days later a Save our Monuments protest in Belfast organised by British army veterans and loyalists passed off without the police issuing any fines.

It would be wrong, however, to view the practice of policing in the Six Counties as an aberration of itself. Because this latest policing mess is not something out of keeping with how the administration of the Six Counties is functioning, or malfunctioning, to be more exact.

For starters, the devolved administration at Stormont is once again in lock-down, this time as a result of the DUP's objections to the well-forecast and detailed implementation of Brexit. This was—difficult though it may now be to believe—a deal the party greatly favoured. Not only did it financially assist the leave campaign but thereafter it supported the Tory government's "Get Brexit done." Yet, as a recent article in the *Financial Times* put it, "the UK's Brexiters pursued a form of Brexit and made promises that could only result in weakening Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom."³

Let that sink in. The DUP, the largest unionist party in the North and supposedly a staunch advocate of the sovereignty of the British Parliament over Northern Ireland's affairs, now stubbornly refusing to accept the House of Commons' overwhelming vote in favour of the Windsor framework; a unionist party dedicated to maintaining the constitutional position of the Six Counties within the United Kingdom while in effect undermining this very objective.

The latest episode in the DUP's continuing drama has echoes of the one affecting the PSNI. Recently the

communiqué of the party leader, Jeffrey Donaldson, to his members was leaked to the media. Though probably leaked deliberately, it showed an organisation in deep disarray and one without a clear, agreed strategy on how to break out of its self-inflicted cul-de-sac.

All very amusing for those of us who don't vote DUP, but only up to a point. The North now appears to many on the outside to be settled and peaceful almost to the point of being boring. Appearances, however, can be deceptive, and especially so in a contested space such as the Six Counties.

Rapidly changing demographics—as evidenced by the latest census, a Sinn Féin first minister elect, a British public and its government indifferent to Northern Irish affairs—are unsettling factors for a significant section of unionism, a section of the community agitated by such mundane happenings as bilingual road signage or GAA matches being broadcast on the BBC.

Consider, then, how much more disturbing for these people it would be if the first minister and her party's reasonable request for a border poll were to be granted. Consider, then, the prospect of the armed PSNI under the command of its current management and supervised by the Northern Ireland Policing Board dealing with a situation such as that.

Maybe now you can see why policing is still no laughing matter in the North. ★

1 Rory Winters, "Almost twice the number of Catholics than Protestants arrested by PSNI," *Irish Times*, 10 December 2021 (<https://tinyurl.com/ms3ej559>).

2 Julian O'Neill, "PSNI chief 'sorry' over policing at Black Lives Matter protests," *BBC News*, 22 December 2020 (<https://tinyurl.com/525fe6xc>).

3 Stephen Bush, "British neglect risks Northern Ireland's future," *Financial Times*, 16 August 2023.

Racism (DCAR) has been doing great work getting into their working-class communities and combating the lies pushed by the far right specifically regarding refugees.

Workers in Ireland are not inherently racist: they are being infiltrated by these far-right groups, and hate is being spread. It is only through going into our communities and working on having solidarity as workers that we begin to see why the far right pitting us against each other serves the ruling class.

The current coalition government's

housing policy is to blame for the rising costs of housing and rents, not refugees. The buying up of housing estates for private renting or Airbnbs, and land for the development of new private estates, has contributed most to the increase in homelessness. With 16,000 properties for Airbnbs seemingly being ignored by the far right, it's easy to poke holes in their lies.

Airbnbs are so popular for private owners because they can charge more than double what they would rent it for, making huge amounts of money while leaving people without anywhere to go.

The Community Action Tenants' Union (CATU) has also been doing great work within communities, most notably in Dún Laoghaire and Swords recently.

The current government works for the landlord and capitalist class. We have the information to prove this freely available, and we can use this in our organisation within our communities.

Radical action driven by the workers of Ireland has time and again been shown to be a powerful force for change. We as activists must learn from our successes in the past. ★



FOR AN INVERTED THEATRE BRECHT AND RADICALLY PROLETARIAN ART



LUKE CONDRON
THEATRE

THE MAJORITY of theatre broadly falls under the umbrella of dramatic theatre. It will have a linear plotline, actors who wholly inhabit well-developed characters, structured, thought-out themes, etc. Bertolt Brecht, the German Marxist playwright, would call it escapism.

Brecht held that “art is not a mirror with which to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it,” which is essentially a reformulation of Marx’s statement that “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point, however, is to change it.”

These two quotations demonstrate Brecht’s intention: constructing a dialectical theatre.

In the late nineteenth century Henrik Ibsen, author of *A Doll’s House*, and others, pioneered a type of theatre that Brecht viewed as entirely bourgeois in its delivery, mainly because of its insistence on the audience experiencing a sense of catharsis (a great release of repressed emotions).

Such theatre perpetuated a rigid distinction between audience and stage and allowed the viewer to disappear into an “empathic” but inconsequential relationship with the

MULTIPOLARITY AND THE BRICS

NIAL CULLINANE
OPINION

A CURRENT FASHION within the left is the championing of multipolarity. It assumes a bloc of states in different countries, some with more mixed economies than others, as objectively “anti-imperialist” insofar as they present a threat to the American hegemon.

Some of this interpretation is jaundiced, especially when one considers the equally compelling narrative that such states, after recent decades of rapid, sometimes primitive accumulation internally, are now in a position to recycle surplus capital abroad in a way that advances their geopolitical interests. Indeed a Marxist analysis of the situation might ask what is the character of some of these states, whose interests do they represent internally within their own societies, what is the class structure of

those societies, who controls the economic surplus, how is it distributed, and so on.

Most of this is ignored, and unfortunately so. If such care was taken we might see the situation less as some global anti-colonial struggle with Yankee imperialism and something closer—if not quite exact—to the decades preceding the First World War, indeed with its own scramble for Africa being replicated.

Yet if the multipolarity leftists overlook much in their political analysis, the same is true of their economics. This is most notable in claims about de-dollarisation. The BRICS are understandably resentful of dollar dominance. Trade wars and economic sanctions have encouraged Russia and China to push de-dollarisation.

At present the dollar, for the foreseeable future, remains the world’s most effective reserve currency. It is accepted globally for trade, investment,

and servicing foreign debt. Dollars serve as the de facto central bank reserve across the world, thereby bolstering respective domestic currencies.

The BRICS have given signals that they are thinking about a BRICS currency for internal trade. That would enable them to avoid clearing transactions in US dollars. The question is, Would this work, and would it make much difference?

Much depends on China. China’s goal is the internationalisation of the yuan, a strategy that has hitherto proved unsuccessful, because most countries have no use for yuan. As indicated previously in *Socialist Voice* (“Dollar dominance,” June 2023), the Chinese financial system is completely different from the American. It does not offer foreign holders of the currency the same benefits that holders of dollars get, and cannot, unless there is major structural and political change in China.

Ultimately, no BRICS country will



Brecht held that “art is not a mirror with which to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it”

victim of tragedy. Brecht insisted that an individual attending a production of *A Doll's House*, for example, is offered the opportunity to live out their sympathy for Nora and their shame for her circumstances and, crucially, to share in her melancholic triumph, leaving the theatre feeling that they have washed their hands clean of the events through their empathy—a testament to their “exemplary” moral standards in the face of an evil world.

Brecht would not stand for this; he insisted that we are all plagued with the disease of inaction and apathy. He replied with a movement of his own—epic or dialectical theatre, a theatre that would force the viewer into uncomfortable engagement with theatrical depictions of class struggle and exploitation to awaken a sense of class-consciousness through forced criticality, ideally.

Estrangement was achieved using two crucial techniques, most relying on stage dynamics for full effect, the most important of which is *Verfremdungseffekt* (the alienation or estrangement effect). The aim is to make the audience aware that what they view is false and merely a means of demonstrating a particular lesson by means of relentless cognitive disruption. Actors would not assimilate with their characters, so little that they would often play multiple characters: they are only the deliverers of a tale (the actor is not X, they show X).

Stage dimensions would often be

jarring and uncomfortable on the eye. Devices were often used to minimise the emotional impact of the events as much as possible; for example, before each scene in *Mother Courage and Her Children* a summary of what happens in the following minutes is delivered blandly by a narrator, to reduce shock and keep the audience focused and critical. Characters would frequently break the “fourth wall” and address the audience on the happenings of the play and sometimes appeal to their reason.

In one simple sense, these techniques keep the audience awake. But they also radically invert the nature of theatre, from a place of entertainment, where a political or sociological message may merely support the theatrics, to a place of education, where politics takes precedence, where an atmosphere of curiosity and rationality is encouraged, rather than one of emotion and catharsis.

The other primary component of Brecht's theatre was historicification. Considering what was just said, you might expect a Brecht play to take place in the reality of the time he was writing, perhaps in the ruins of a post-war German town or on the desolate plains of the war-weary USSR. But they occur in environments unfamiliar to the audience, at least insofar as they would not have experienced them.

Mother Courage takes place during the Hundred Years' War, *The Threepenny*

Opera in nineteenth-century London, and *The Good Person of Szechwan* in pre-industrial China.

The purpose of this is to highlight the mechanisms of class conflict more vividly. The point is not to show which class dynamics affect the viewer's life in the present but to show that class dynamics do shape material existence, and have done so ever since the genesis of class-based society.

Brecht was not interested in finding the root of anything universal to human existence, often the objective of dramatic theatre. He saw this as inward and ignorant of the ever-fluctuating existence mediated by the machine of class warfare. ★



Brechtian apparel available from www.manifestopress.coop

The BRICS have given signals that they are thinking about a BRICS currency for internal trade. That would enable them to avoid clearing transactions in US dollars.

give up its sovereign money to use yuan. In any case, to trade in yuan and not the dollar while limiting US influence would simply increase China's control over their economies (hardly the stuff of anti-imperialism). If you are a multipolarity advocate this might not be too bad: as one rose-tinted *Socialist Voice* article recently claimed, China has expanded “without the use of military expansionism—a strategy that has avoided bloodshed, and therefore done without antagonising whole populations” (“A transformative period,” *Socialist Voice*, July 2023).

That might be news to our Vietnamese comrades. Indeed it might be news to our African readers, who'll no doubt know that when the terms of credit on those “developmental loans” for infrastructure aren't made, the Chinese banks quickly acquire the property rights of various airports, ports, and railway lines—as they have already done in several cases (see, for example, Wale Ajetunmobi, *African Liberty*, 10 September 2018*). To be sure, China is no “Great Satan”; but let's give it a few

more decades of monopoly-finance-capital export abroad (as opposed to a decade or so, coming, as it is, from such a low base) and we'll see if the PLA fighter jets aren't out, or coups aren't engineered to defend Chinese global oil and gas interests.

Of course those Chinese military bases in Africa might already give a sense of where the trajectory lies. Perhaps before parading quotations from Xi Jinping in future (*Socialist Voice*, April 2023) we might remember Karl Marx, who said that materialists “distinguish . . . the phrases and fancies of parties from their real interests, their conception of themselves, from their reality.”

Returning to the BRICS, assume one has a BRICS currency for settling internal trade, where each participant country keeps its own money; that presents significant problems. Assume the currency is backed by gold; it is likely that many of the BRICS do not have sufficient gold reserves to do this meaningfully. We know from the EU that monetary union without fiscal union

cannot hold.

A BRICS euro would also confront similar problems to the Chinese yuan in terms of usability. When a country exports goods or services to another outside their currency zone they receive US dollars in return. As indicated above, the dollar is highly flexible. It can pay for imports throughout the global marketplace; it is (for now) perceived as safe from long-term fluctuations or devaluations; it can service foreign debt.

A BRICS currency could do none of these things. Unlike the dollar, it would not make an effective global reserve currency, because it lacks convertibility and possesses limited usability. At best it will operate at the margins, and does not herald a new transformative period in global geo-politics. ★

*Wale Ajetunmobi, “Like Zambia, Sri Lanka also handed over port to China to pay off debt” *African Liberty*, 10 September 2018 (<https://tinyurl.com/uvva6n33>).



IRISH COMMUNISTS' VISIT TO CHINA

The Communist Party of Ireland recently accepted an invitation from the International Department of the Communist Party of China to attend the 3rd Communist Party Leaders' Delegation of North American, Oceanian and Nordic Countries at three venues in Guangdong Province, Guizhou Province, and Beijing City. In part 2 of a their report, Gearóid Ó Machail, member of the National Executive Committee of the CPI, who travelled to China with the general secretary, Jimmy Corcoran, provides an account of the delegation's remaining time spent in Guiyang and Beijing.

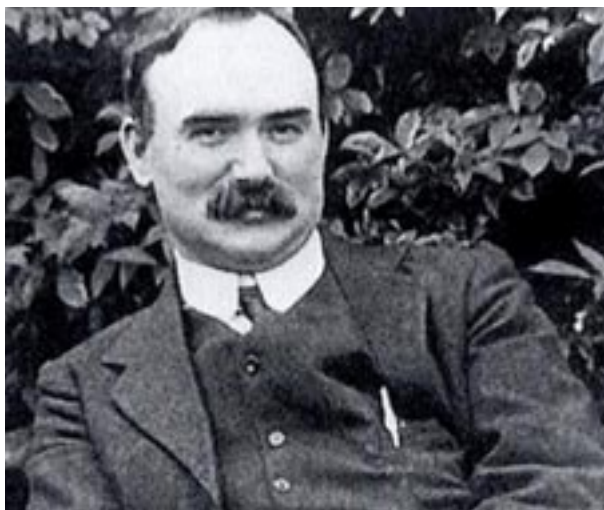


GEARÓID Ó MACHAIL
SOLIDARITY

The final day of the international delegation of communist leaders' visit to Guizhou provided an opportunity for a cultural tour of Qingyan Ancient Town, a famous historical and cultural town in the southern suburb of Guiyang. Qingyan was originally built in 1378 and is an attractive destination for numerous domestic and foreign tourists. Religious culture here is also quite rich, including Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, and Christianity. Contrary to the constant disinformation put about in the Western media, China celebrates both its ancient culture and its religious and ethnic diversity.

Our eventful three-day stay in Guiyang was rounded off with a presentation ceremony back at the CPC Party School, where the international delegates were presented with a photograph album and video of their action-packed and educational stay in Guizhou province before flying to Beijing in the evening.

The first engagement in Beijing was a visit to the impressive central offices of the International Department of the Communist Party of China, where delegates had discussions on "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" and the global geo-political situation with the director-general, Zhou Rongguo, Comrade Wang Yingchun, and young members of the Bureau for North



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Religious culture here is also quite rich, including Buddhism, Taoism, Catholicism, and Christianity. Contrary to the constant disinformation put about in the Western media, China celebrates both its ancient culture and its religious and ethnic diversity.

American, Oceanian and Nordic Affairs.

The international delegates were then guests of honour at a dual ceremony presided over by Minister Liu Jianchao, Vice-Minister Guo Yezhou, Vice-Minister Li Mingxiang, and Assistant Minister Zhu Rui of the International Department.

The International Department presented commemorative medals to senior Chinese party comrades with more than fifty years' membership, followed by an oath-swearing ceremony by a number of new party comrades before all members present renewed their oaths to the party, and all those in attendance sang "The International."

Delegates then met Vice-Minister Guo Yezhou before a conference and Q&A with the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China. The busy afternoon concluded with a meeting and Q&A with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

A definite highlight of the ten-day trip came the following day, on the 102nd birthday of the Communist Party of China, as comrades embarked on a visit to the extremely impressive Museum of the CPC before visiting and climbing a section of the Great Wall of China. Before the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China, and after nearly 1,000 days of construction, the Museum of the CPC, a site devoted to permanent and comprehensive exhibitions of the party's history, was inaugurated on 18 June 2021, with its first visitors, including Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee. The museum's construction involved nearly 50,000 people. A total of 276 exhibits tell the story of the CPC's hundred-year struggle for the well-being of the Chinese people and national rejuvenation.

On the day that we visited, the museum was packed with Chinese tourists, school parties, and visitors from all walks of life, evidently enjoying the enormous range of artefacts and some very powerful virtual reality based

immersive experiences. Definitely a must-see for anyone visiting Beijing.

The following day, Sunday, offered another glorious sightseeing opportunity with a trip to the Imperial Palace in the Forbidden City before the international comrades were offered the opportunity for some free time and relaxation.

The penultimate day of the trip began with a briefing to the visiting delegation by Professor Guo Qiang, Deputy Director for Teaching and Research of Scientific Socialism at the Party School of the CPC Central Committee, on Chinese Modernisation and the Establishment of the Xiong'an New Area—a new city development aimed at improving quality of life, easing traffic congestion, relieving housing pressures and reducing environmental pollution in the capital city, Beijing.

Professor Guo reiterated that China's path to modernisation has several characteristics distinguishing it from the Western path to modernisation. It is the modernisation of a huge population, with common prosperity for all, harmony between humanity and nature, and material and cultural-ethical advancement, and is based on peaceful development. The professor gave an overview of the main objectives for the coming five years, including achieving greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, further enhancing the institutions, standards and procedures of whole-process people's democracy, enriching the intellectual and cultural lives of the people, ensuring that personal income grows in step with growth, ensuring much more equitable access to public services, substantially improving both urban and rural living environments, and making notable progress on building a "Beautiful China," continuing to promote green development, renewable energy, and the protection of biodiversity.

After lunch, delegates were transported to the China National Archives of Publications and Culture

before joining the Chinese Vice-President, Han Zheng, and foreign dignitaries at the opening ceremony of the 3rd Dialogue on Exchanges and Mutual Learning among Civilisations and the 1st World Conference for Sinologists.

So ended the 3rd Communist Party Leaders' Delegation of North American, Oceanian and Nordic Countries, organised by the International Department of the Communist Party of China. International delegates exchanged contact details and agreed to deepen and strengthen cordial relations between their respective parties. The International Department of the CPC urged delegates to report back to their national parties on the facts pertaining to the "Modernisation of China," the evolution of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," and China's role in promoting international peace, the pursuit of common prosperity, global civilisation, and economic and social progress in developing countries.

The Communist Party of Ireland extends our greatest gratitude to Comrade Wang Sitian and her colleagues at the International Department for the opportunity to witness their country's remarkable progress and achievements and wishes our comrades in the Communist Party of China continued success in leading the Chinese people of all ethnic groups in a concerted effort to realise the party's Second-Centenary Goal of building China into a great modern socialist country and to advance the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on all fronts through a Chinese path to modernisation.

In the words of the leader of the International Delegation, Robert Griffiths (Communist Party of Britain), "You have shown us a tantalising glimpse of the future and what a peaceful, modern socialist world will look like. Long live the Chinese Revolution! Long live the CPC! Long live the international communist movement!" ★

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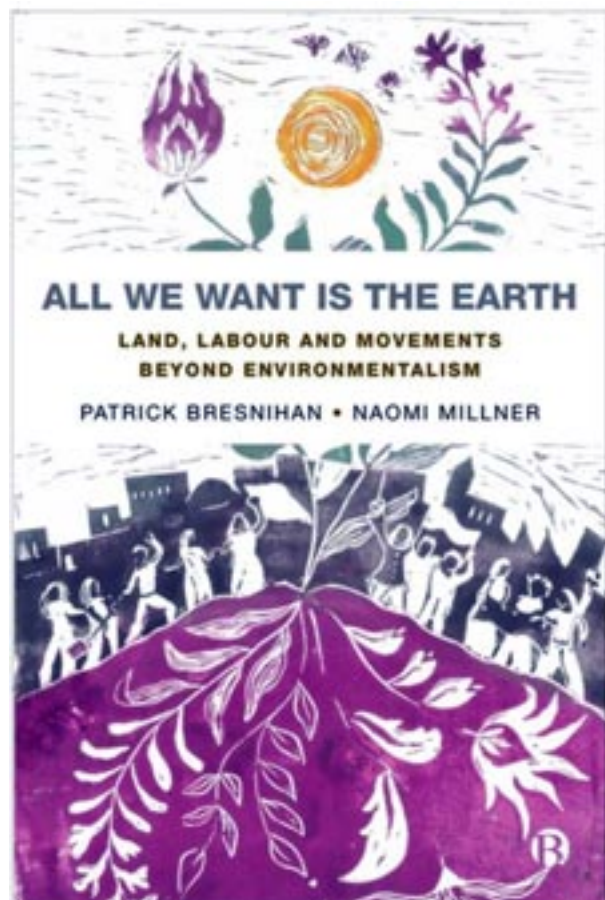
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ENVIRONMENTALISM, CAPITALISM, AND VIBES



RICHARD MULLEN

IN THE AGE of social media, the term “vibe” is often used as shorthand for aesthetic, often with the substance shifted into the background and just picking up on the visual, sensory or language aspect of an object, movement, culture, or politics.

I was reminded of this term when reading the excellent new book from Patrick Bresnihan and Naomi Millner, *All We Want Is the Earth: Land, Labour and Movements Beyond Environmentalism* (2023). This is a serious study of the vibes of modern mainstream environmentalism (that part of the book feeds the pessimism of the intellect) and how the different alternative movements with strong environment bonds resonate in their ideas, challenges, and methods (feeding the optimism of the reader's will in the process).

Admittedly it was the concept of resonance that got me thinking of vibes. Millner and Bresnihan fit their analysis between two extremes: on the one hand, conflating different struggles

and contexts in a reductionist way, and on the other hand surrendering to the complexity of relations in the world system, denying any ability to analyse and relate.

To resonate, explain the authors, there needs to be a difference and a distance (just like a good rhyme). This is the lens with which the authors take us from Amílcar Cabral and Ken Saro-Wiwa to Shell to Sea in Co. Mayo and Zapatistas. The expertise of the authors, both experienced geography academics, brings us in close contact with otherwise ignored times and spaces in mainstream environmentalism; the accounts of Central and South American practices and struggles are particularly illuminating and detailed.

Mainstream environmentalism in the second half of the twentieth century saw a transition into environmental management, the authors claim, with a well-structured set of evidence presented through a compelling narrative of often unquestioned idealisations of environmental struggles of the old. This consolidated the

CONFRONTING THE CLIMATE CRISIS WITH

RICHARD MULLEN
CLIMATE

ON 13 JULY, An Taisce hosted Kevin Anderson's talk “A Velvet or Violent Climate Revolution: Which Will We Choose?” in the Tailors' Hall in Dublin. Anderson was introduced as a climate scientist “telling it as it is,” a tagline reinforced by his opening slide, in which he warned the audience that his presentation was not for the faint of heart. It is “red-pilled,” Anderson explained, using a reference from *The Matrix*; he would not hold back, no matter how uncomfortable the truth was.

Anderson made it clear that his presentation was aimed at those who already acknowledge the human-made climate change, and that it would reveal how governments and corporations are not doing enough to address it. He did so with no mentions of the word “capitalism” and no understanding of the concept of revolution. This curious approach, certainly tailored to the

audience in the Tailors' Hall, could not maintain a coherent flow throughout the 90 minutes of the talk and Q&A.

Throughout the presentation Anderson correctly observed that the climate emergency is not to be observed disentangled from housing, public health and labour issues. He also recognises the rampant inequality in the ownership of the means of production and pollution; he calls for “moving resources and labour from the private luxury of a relative few to public wellbeing for all.” If the top 10 per cent, he explained, cut their emissions to the EU mean, and the rest did nothing, that alone would deliver a one-third cut in global carbon dioxide.

Those who set the green agenda, as Anderson put it, are in the top 1 per cent of emitters, “or clamouring to get there”: the politicians, the academics, the financiers, the CEOs, and the list goes on. They, naturally, prefer to maintain the status quo, refuse conversations about a redistribution of power, and look for economic repackaging of the crisis in the form of carbon taxes, offsetting, and

technological products.

The analysis so far maps important components, but it does not really ask the question “Why are they connected?” and it most certainly does not mention the word “capitalism.” In failing to do so it sets the stage for never touching the production relations and not recognising the class struggle anywhere beyond “poor” and “rich” individuals or countries.

Where does that take us in the alternative futures in Anderson's view? “It's too late for non-radical futures,” Anderson spelt out, recognising how excited his audience is for “radical” and “progressive,” as alternative to status quo, would be, at least verbally. The choice, he continued, is between a “velvet revolution” of a “deep, rapid, fair and organised decarbonisation of modern society” and “a violent revolution,” with “ongoing lies, rhetoric and delay as temperatures rise.”

He acknowledged that some consider revolution a dirty word, and invited the audience to replace it with a

'This is a serious study of the vibes of modern mainstream environmentalism (that part of the book feeds the pessimism of the intellect) and how the different alternative movements with strong environment bonds resonate in their ideas, challenges, and methods'

imaginaries of environmentalism, what the environment should be like, what wilderness is, and what environmentalist struggle should look like.

And then there is the environmental struggle in the Global South, born out of necessity, which is often not dubbed environmentalist, as it picks up on all the interconnected challenges of colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism.

The authors also deliver an important critique of the one-worldism in the mainstream media and messaging from large international organisations: Anthropocene on the surface accepts the human responsibility for the climate emergency but at the same time dilutes and equates everyone's contribution, refusing to recognise the class issues and capital burning the world

On the day I wrote this review the *Guardian* published a climate change story headed "'Off-the-charts records': Has humanity finally broken the climate?" This is just one illustrative example of how the "unity" of humanity aims to absolve the guilty and demoralise others.

Political aesthetics of environmentalism is the tagline we could put on this book. The authors

actively explore what gets to be called and painted as environmentalism and environment, what is mainstream and what is left in the Arguably, where Bresnihan and Millner choose to frame their argument in terms of Jacques Rancière's notion of disagreement; similar arguments could be made in terms of Marxist contradictions.

This is left as an exercise to the reader: the authors are not going into political analysis of the movements. They clearly spell out, however, the issues of capitalist exploitation, and how these issues cut deep into environment, public health, and the relationship communities have with the places and spaces.

The authors correctly recognise the co-opted "First World" environmentalist language picked up by corporations and states in the commodification and disaster-capitalist visions of climate change, opposing it to community organising in the "Third World," coinciding with anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements rising after the Second World War.

There is a gap that might need filling in another book: the "Second World." There are no references to environmental movements in the socialist states, or how the planned economy and post-revolution

reconstruction of socialist states dealt with environmental issues. A modern example that comes to mind is that of Cuba's "Tarea Vida," well presented in Helen Yaffe's documentary *Cuba's Life Task: Combating Climate Change*.

The artistic thread throughout the book is a vital component of it, both in describing various artistic interventions and providing illustrations (and refreshingly uplifting prose). ★

All We Want Is the Earth: Land, Labour and Movements Beyond Environmentalism
by Patrick Bresnihan and Naomi Millner will have its Dublin launch on Tuesday 26 September at 7 p.m. in Connolly Books, East Essex Street

OUT CONFRONTING CAPITALISM

Those who set the green agenda, as Anderson put it, are in the top 1 per cent of emitters, "or clamouring to get there": the politicians, the academics, the financiers, the CEOs, and the list goes on

word of their choice. Evoking the image of the Czechoslovak "velvet revolution," Anderson proceeded with it as the preferred outcome to the violent revolution scenario (which was not elaborated at all but rather left as "anything could happen").

This is where the slides of the presentation feature Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Michael D. Higgins, with a call for "Rooseveltian leadership for the 21st century" and "a new Marshall Plan." Presumably this is the vision of the velvet revolution and the revolutionary leaders unrolling the large co-ordinated plan of addressing the climate crisis.

How does this happen? What the Rooseveltian Michael D. Higgins does to convert the present state of affairs into the "velvet revolution" vision remains very much unclear. What sort of an economic change in ownership and management happens also remains unclear.

The lack of clarity was mirrored in the question-and-answer session that

followed, with the added element of the audience looking for their agency. What is the role of activists in the velvet revolution, how are the industrial lobbies to be countered, and what can be learnt for organising in the series of referendums on marriage, abortion, etc.? What is the role of social media, and what about degrowth? When is the climate emergency going to become really dangerous (sic!) for us?

When answering these, Anderson was conscious of the existing liberal bias; he warned that social media activism is not enough, and that "when is it going to affect us?" is a question with very little sense that only serves the purpose of revealing how relative is the meaning of "we/us." When asked about degrowth Anderson pointed out that basing the economy on something other than such metrics as GDP was crucial for the future, but yet again he failed to label capitalism, or its alternative (or alternatives).

When speaking about the climate activism of Just Stop Oil and similar

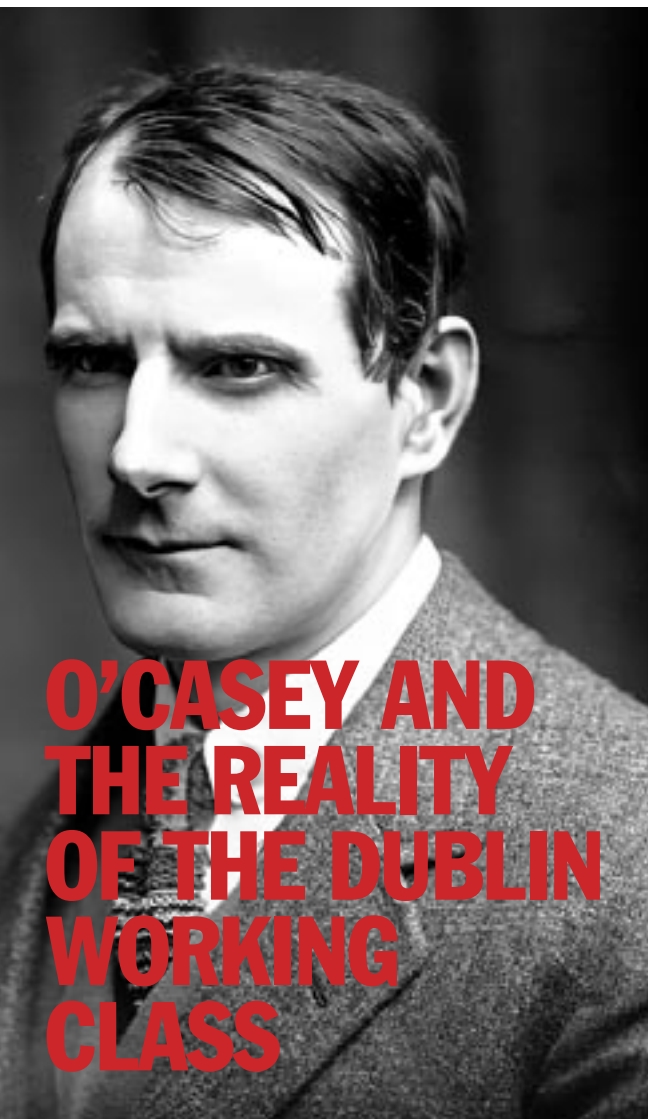
organisations, Anderson admitted that he changed his opinion gradually, from being somewhat against it to recognising its role and how it complements the work of others in raising the alarm.

While some credit can be given to Anderson for going this far with the audience he attracted to the Tailors' Hall that evening, the vision of the "velvet revolution" very much leaves them in the dark. Even leaving aside the ahistorical romanticising of the Czechoslovak events, there is no mechanism leading to the envisaged climate future without dismantling the capitalist system.

In that sense, Anderson is technically and literally correct: revolution is the only future. However, the revolution is achieved neither by the ballot for the new Roosevelt nor with activist adventurism without organising the working class.

In the core of the revolution is the party, and a lot of the questions raised in the discussion after Anderson's talk would find answers in a framework of a revolutionary party organising. ★





O'CASEY AND THE REALITY OF THE DUBLIN WORKING CLASS

JENNY FARRELL

SEÁN O'CASEY—the first proletarian dramatist writing in English—made his theme the struggle for the emancipation of the Irish people and, by extension, of all working people.

In Ireland, O'Casey is (unfairly) best known for his first three plays, examining the Irish working class at crucial moments of history. *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) is set in the midst of the War of Independence, *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) at the time of the Civil War, and *The Plough and the Stars* (1926) in the months leading up to and during the Easter Rising. This autumn the acclaimed Druid Theatre Company are putting on all three plays in Ireland and the United States, both singly as well as, in an abbreviated form, as a one-day theatre marathon.

In the decade 1913–1923 Ireland was a centre of revolution. In 1922 the Irish people had been dealt the Irish Free State, resulting in a civil war. Seán O'Casey's Dublin trilogy was written during the Civil War (*The Shadow of a Gunman*) and in the very early years of this Free State.

Connolly's Irish allies were obvious on the first step in this venture, Irish independence: the

“advanced nationalists” of the conspiratorial Irish Republican Brotherhood. O'Casey, whose formative experience had been the historic Dublin lockout of 1913, dismissed this strategy of a broad anti-imperialist alliance. Blinkered by his anti-national prejudice against Connolly's non-proletarian nationalist allies, he failed to see the momentous significance of Connolly's strategy of a democratic revolution.

This attitude is reflected in his Dublin trilogy. O'Casey presents us with an isolated, leaderless working class that was unable to rise to the challenge of the times. His disparaging assessment of the Easter Rising allows him to ignore the 1916 Proclamation and its vision of an independent Ireland, a society working in the interests of the common people.

In Connolly's analysis, national and social liberation were each the condition for the other. O'Casey disagreed and therefore only saw a part, not the whole.

The Dublin Trilogy

In all three plays we meet working-class and lumpenproletarian Dubliners who live in tenements in the most deprived of circumstances. Their class-consciousness is not highly developed. The absence of

MICHAEL PARENTI

BLACKSHIRTS & REDS

Rational Fascism
& the Overthrow
of Communism



MATTHEW O'BRIEN

■ Michael Parenti, *Blackshirts and Reds* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997)

IN THE thirty-two years since the Soviet Union was dissolved and Fukuyama's “end of history” began, more and more young people are becoming communists. Multiple failures of capitalism—runaway rent and housing costs, and unabated climate disaster—are bringing young people to the realisation that there is no future in this system.

The propaganda campaign to undermine and demonise socialism and communism has been virulent and effective. Parenti's book is important because it dispels many of the misconceptions about socialism, exploring its positive elements and highlighting the repressive nature of capitalism and imperialism.

In the second chapter, entitled “Let us now praise revolution,” Parenti discusses the benefits of socialism. He explains how socialist

countries are not inherently aggressive and confrontational. He maintains that “revolutionary governments like Cuba, Libya, Vietnam, and North Korea were—and still are—eager to trade and maintain peaceful relations with [the United States].”

These countries never have posed, and still don't pose, a threat to the West: they only pose a threat to Western financial capital.

Parenti goes on to list the benefits of actually existing socialism. He looks at the radical policies in relation to land reform and advances in education, housing, and health services. Socialist states also ended patriarchal and class oppression.

Cuba under Fidel Castro is a great example of socialism working to better the lives of the people. Parenti notes that “infant mortality in Cuba has dropped from 60 per 1000 in 1960 to 9.7 per 1000 in 1991, while life expectancy rose from 55 to 75 in that same period. Smallpox, malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, polio



‘... the proletarian O’Casey presents the Irish working class as ultimately able to revolutionise reality.’

leadership, organisation and an all-embracing working-class philosophy is evident as they reach various levels of understanding but little will to act against their dire circumstances.

While in each of the plays upheavals outside the slums have an impact on their lives, the movement at the heart of the struggles outside seems to have little connection with them and their needs, and acts independently of them.

In *The Shadow of a Gunman* the Gunman passes through this community unrecognised and indirectly causes the death of Minnie Powell. In *Juno and the Paycock* this movement claims the lives of two young men, one of whom had already withdrawn. In *The Plough and the Stars* the movement is portrayed as a disembodied voice calling for blood sacrifice. No truly positive representatives of this movement appear on stage. Jack Clitheroe (*The Plough and the Stars*) is a member of the Citizen Army but is not depicted as a person who will move the class forward.

One of the most class-conscious characters in the trilogy, Fluther Good, is not a member of the organised movement and represents a pragmatic and grounded perspective. While he supports the nationalist

movement, he is critical of the leaders and of what O’Casey sees as the romanticised ideals of the Rising.

The slum-dwellers are presented as people who thrive on illusions and myths about the heroic past. We find this in Minnie Powell (*The Shadow of a Gunman*), and Boyle (*Juno and the Paycock*), and those who wish to escape the greater world around them, such as Nora Clitheroe (*The Plough and the Stars*).

On the other hand, it is among this very community that all the ingredients necessary for a conscious working-class movement are found: despite their weaknesses, they are resourceful, creative and realist and can produce potential leaders, such as Seumas Shields and Donal Davoren (*The Shadow of a Gunman*), Juno (*Juno and the Paycock*), and Fluther Good (*The Plough and the Stars*), people who under the right circumstances could combine all that is necessary, appreciate the needs of the people, and act in their interests.

So, despite these illusions and weaknesses, the proletarian O’Casey presents the Irish working class as ultimately able to revolutionise reality. Any production of the trilogy must accentuate this potential.

O’Casey’s portrayal of the Dublin working class in his trilogy sparked controversy and criticism for

depicting them as ignorant and disconnected with the national movement of the time. It caused outrage for being dismissive of the leaders of the Rising. These plays are nevertheless worth seeing today. By examining the lives of the working class, O’Casey sheds light on the struggles and needs of ordinary people during this revolutionary period in Irish history.

Depicting the harsh realities in the Dublin slums, he invites a critical examination of Irish society at a time of revolution and war, and raises important questions about the impact of deprivation and ignorance on a revolutionary situation. The characters and their vivid, creative and powerful language express their potential for creating a better world for working people.

Issues of social inequality, political disillusionment and the struggle for social justice continue to resonate with audiences all round the world. The plays are a significant contribution to modern Irish drama and prepare the ground for O’Casey’s magnificent body of work to come. ★

■ The O’Casey trilogy is being staged by the Druid Theatre Company in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, 26 August to 16 September.

The propaganda campaign to undermine and demonise socialism and communism has been virulent and effective.

and numerous other diseases have been wiped out by the improved living standards and public health programs.”

Chapter 4, titled “Communism in Wonderland,” looks at the faults of some socialist projects. The book is not blind propaganda and is open to discussing what worked and what didn’t work. It talks about the overwhelming bureaucracy, and how in agricultural policies where food was demanded by quantity, and not quality, many took advantage by producing poor-quality food.

This chapter also talks about how people in the East were susceptible to propaganda that romanticised the West. People had their basic needs satisfied, and wanted more. The big problem faced in Eastern European states was the socialist generation, who saw such things as free university education and took it for granted. They didn’t fully grasp that they were the first or second generation in their entire family line who would have been able to go to

university.

The youth started to fetishise capitalism because of not understanding it. They heard the slogans about the problems, but many genuinely believed that if they worked hard under capitalism they would become rich.

The book cites an article from the *New Yorker*. When the socialist system in Poland collapsed and the free market swooped in, a reporter asked a Polish worker what he would do if his factory was closed, to which the worker replied, “The state will find us some other work.”

The people of the socialist states wanted the security net of socialism but with the consumer goods and the perceived mobility of capitalism.

Many who emigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe complained about the crime, working conditions, lack of communitarian spirit, and the ignorance of Americans, among other dissatisfactions.

Chapters 6 and 7, “The free-

market paradise goes east,” I and II, show how oppressive and exploitative the free-market system was when imposed on Eastern Europe. The average Eastern European saw their quality of life dramatically diminish. In Russia, living standards were virtually halved with the economic reforms. There was “a dramatic rise in unemployment, homelessness, air and water pollution, prostitution, spousal abuse, child abuse and just about every other social ill.”

Blackshirts and Reds offers a lucid, engaging and often humorous exploration of the benefits and flaws of socialism. It functions as a refreshing antidote to the ahistorical anti-communist propaganda pumped out by right-wing think tanks and the mainstream media.

It is essential reading for everyone born after the fall of the Soviet Union who wants to engage with and understand the socialist project in good faith. ★



BOOKS

THE EAST IS STILL RED



If China is capitalist, then this presents major challenges to the Marxist understanding of capitalism.

GRAHAM HARRINGTON

Carlos Martinez, *The East Is Still Red* (Glasgow: Praxis Press, 2023)

The *East Is Still Red* is a very readable and able defence of the current People's Republic of China. The basic argument of the book is that China is on the right path with regard to building socialism, despite the controversy a statement like this causes among the Western left.

The Chinese Revolution of 1949 put an end to what Chinese call their "century of humiliation," the period of the Opium Wars, Japanese colonialism, famine, and warlord rule. It was also the culmination of decades of struggle by the Communist Party of China, which had endured massacres and guerrilla struggle before the revolution.

The new People's Republic managed to unite the country, double the life expectancy of China's people, end horrific misogynist practices such as foot-binding in some areas, and eliminate

landlordism and inequality. This was despite failures and mistakes, such as the Great Leap Forward.

For the author, China's achievements are not just historical but in fact continue to this day. The reform and opening-up period did not mark a break with socialism in China. At the time of Mao's death the People's Republic had achieved many advances. Its economy had impressive successes in heavy industry, but the majority of its people continued to languish in objective poverty, and it was this fact that made the CPC examine the direction of the country.

Essentially, the argument of the CPC for reform was that if poverty remained in the country it would threaten socialism. In the 1970s China's neighbours, including Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia, were experiencing economic booms, while China's citizens lived on state rations. The leadership felt that this was a threat to the existence of the People's Republic. Foreign investment was encouraged, as was a domestic private sector. The rest is history. China is now the world's second-largest economy.

Despite the huge increase in inequality, the author argues that the reforms were still necessary for development and people's needs. The strongest argument for this is that China has taken some 800 million citizens out of absolute poverty. The reforms did indeed create billionaires, but they also eliminated absolute poverty. If China is capitalist, then this presents major challenges to the Marxist understanding of capitalism.

We may add the existence of the second economy in the socialist states, past and present, as documented in Roger Keeran and Thomas Kenny's book *Socialism Betrayed* (2010). The second economy incorporated the black market, those who hoarded state-subsidised goods and in effect provided the material basis for the destruction of socialism in the country where it was born. In no country today is there a perfect socialism, where there is no private sector or markets. Martinez writes how carefully the Chinese leadership analysed the defeat of the USSR.

Along with several quotations from Mao in the PRC's early days, Martinez gives a quotation from Lenin in 1921 to show how the CPC's post-reform thinking was not something new: "What we must fear is protracted starvation, want and food shortage, which create the danger that the working class will be utterly exhausted and will give way to petty-bourgeois vacillation and despair."

While China's recent trajectory is not popular among leftists in the West, the author believes it should perhaps give us some reason to examine how Western leftists can over-idealise socialism into a utopia, while countries such as China or Vietnam have to provide for their people's basic needs after decades of imperialist underdevelopment. Given the lack of any revolution in the West, we should perhaps not be so dismissive of what has been achieved in China, or look at China from an ivory tower.

The environment, and specifically China's response, is looked at in a very important chapter of the book. While China's economic boom produced much pollution, China now produces more solar panels than any other country, and is first in investment in renewable energy. It has also doubled its forest coverage.

Additionally, it is noted that China's pollution cannot be compared with historical pollution by the likes of the United States and Britain. Per capita, China's emissions are similar to those of Ireland and Austria. A huge amount of greenhouse gas emissions is in fact caused by production for Western consumption: American and Canadian households emit nine times the emissions of the average Chinese household. In effect, the West has exported its polluting to China, leaving it with the blame.

The book does not pretend to be a comprehensive overview of China, nor a justification of every policy taken. It seeks to examine China and explain why we need to examine it seriously, not rating it out of ten but instead seeing how China has remained much closer to its original path than Western leftists believe it to be. ★

