

# SOCIALIST VOICE

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## The state continues its industrial sabotage of the ESB

**R**ECENTLY the Government requested the ESB to advance a €176 million dividend payout so as to subsidise electricity prices for a select number of customers, known as the Large Energy Users' (LEU) Group. What is curious about this request is that the members of the LEU group already have their needs supplied by competitors of the ESB.

Yet while the ESB is prohibited from cross-subsidising between its own activities, it is now being asked by the Government to subsidise the LEU group, 90 per cent of which are supplied by the likes of Viridian, Airtricity, and Energia.

This must be put in context. When the ESB recently proposed a further development of turf-fired stations the Government maintained that the sanction of the European Union was required before it could provide subvention for the projects.

Yet the Government seems to have little concern about issues of regulating state aid when it comes to supplying subsidies to a select area of the private sector. So ESB customers—principally small to medium-sized businesses as well as domestic customers, all of whom have their prices regulated—are now being asked by the Government to subsidise the non-regulated sector, whose prices are set by the open market.

If there is a valid case for the electricity industry subsidising electricity prices, surely the likes of Viridian and Endesa should be required to make their contribution.

The additional extraction of cash from the ESB will take place in a situation where the total and future demand for electricity is reducing. Con-



sidering the ESB's future financial commitments—such as further investment in the transmission and distribution networks and plugging a major deficit in the company pension scheme—this seems to be almost a form of industrial sabotage by proxy on the part of the Government. It is difficult to see how the ESB is going to meet many of its current and future financial obligations when faced when pressures of this sort.

Government strategy at present appears to revolve around transforming the ESB into something of a “cash cow” for the benefit of private industry. Workers' concerns and the strategic development of this important industrial sector have been consigned to a back seat under artificially contrived financial restrictions. In many

respects we have been down this road before, as our present incoherent national telecommunications network testifies.

The Irish political classes are continuing their utterly parasitic role in the affairs of the nation; they remain, as ever, a comprador gombeen class entirely subservient to servicing the needs of international finance capitalism.

What the CPI believes is required (see *An Economy for the Common Good*) is a coherent state strategy subject to developing the country's

needs in a way that meets the interests of the Irish people and our future. Such a policy remains the foundation stone upon which any strategy for democracy and securing the common good must rest.

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“ First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a communist;  
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist;  
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist;  
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew;  
Then they came for me—and there was no-one left to speak out for me.  
—Martin Niemöller ”

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# Fighting cuts in social welfare

**THE** Government is consulting the Combat Poverty Agency about the effects of proposed cuts in social welfare and eligibility for medical cards. This agency is part of the Government set-up, and so it will be constrained by the powers that control it. What is needed is a much stronger demand for an examination of the effects of the cuts, and transparency in how the assessment is made.

The Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI) and other NGOs point out that using the cost-of-living index as it is now calculated is not relevant to people at the bottom of the ladder: it includes too many non-essential items that are not bought by this group of people, as they spend almost all their income on housing and food. Instead people living on low incomes and on social welfare should themselves be asked how they manage. Sociologists picking out a typical shopping basket is not the way to see how people are managing, when instead they could be assessing the first-hand evidence of the people experiencing it.

One is reminded of a Government scheme for local communities a few years ago in the Camden Street area of Dublin in which a social worker recommended that people bake their own bread, which they did, only to find that when the ESB bill came it was beyond their ability to pay it.

Where are the forums of low-income and social welfare recipients? Where are the focus groups? Instead we have economists pointing to relative wages in other countries, such as Britain. They deliberately leave out the fact that the cost of living there is far lower than in Ireland. And in any case England has one of the most class-divided societies, with vast slum areas suffering shocking deprivation.

We get studies from around the European Union pointing out this or that relative difference, but all from the economists' point of view. Different indexes are used by the United Nations, such as the Gini coefficient, which measures inequality, and relative poverty indexes based on four or so areas of deprivation. NGOs use the relative poverty index, but while these are a very effective way of drawing attention to poverty they are used only in looking at macro-economic policy for states. The people themselves are just

numbers. If their voices were heard in representative groups that are consulted by Government agencies, and directly in the media, instead of the daily dose of prejudice by ill-informed people who love to go on about how social welfare recipients have such a good life, a true picture would emerge.

For those who attack the most vulnerable in society the answer is, if it is so good why don't they take it up, as they think firstly it so easy to obtain it and secondly so easy to live on it.

Let's have a proper assessment of what it is like for people to live on low incomes and on social welfare. Again and again people are divided by slanders that are orchestrated by the ruling elite and their accomplices in the media. When there are enough jobs for all at decent wages, then social welfare policy can be looked at anew. We look forward to such a time; but don't hold your breath.

[DUB]

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## Giving in to big business

**THE** capitulation by Dublin City Council to pressure by big business to reverse the introduction of a bus-and-taxi-only traffic flow in Dame Street is a micro-example of how capitalism can never solve its own inherent problems.

Here was a progressive move to get working people through a very congested area on their way to and from work, cutting between half and three-quarters of an hour off their journey time. But the demands of shop-owners in the city centre for the reintroduction of cars, because they claimed that sales were down, was what won the day.

Firstly, this is only an assertion, as they could not know definitely that this was the cause of the drop in sales. Sales have been down all year; and this was the time when schoolchildren and students were going back to school, so there is less money around. It took only a few weeks for this demand to be met—unlike when people march in protest about hospital services and are ignored. The Green Party say they want fewer cars on the streets but have done nothing to radically change the situation.

Secondly, the effect of the change on commuters was not assessed, nor were studies done to find out whether the shop-owners' analysis was correct.

A related example of the inability of capitalism to introduce measures that could save the whole planet from the disasters of climate change is the supposed solution to the collapse of the car industry in the United States. Obama is giving billions to the industry to go on making cars, while economists are saying that cars are the most serious cause of pollution and the most wasteful use of the remaining stocks of the world's oil.

The trade unions under a capitalist system have no choice but to defend the rights of their workers in this field, even though objectively it is bad for the planet. Each side is caught up in a system that is completely destructive.

A rational solution would be for a planned changeover to public transport, and for a cleaner means of transport where no other choice is possible. Then workers could be retrained and employed in the new systems, instead of being made redundant. But that would involve public ownership, and planning.

Nebulous ideas of individual freedom are what keep people from believing that such a society would be far superior. But freedom is relative: if you have no money and no say in how society is run, and control is in the hands of powerful business interests, then freedom does not exist in reality. One could hardly call being made redundant "freedom."

The constant refrain that a fairer society would be great but that it couldn't work in practice is hindering progress towards a better world. Inherently, people want a fairer and more just society, and they laud those people in the past who fought against injustice. These contemporary issues are also worth fighting for.

By mistakes we learn; by passive inactivity we allow a destructive system to destroy the lives of the majority of people on the planet.

Those in power want us to believe that we are powerless and that nothing can be changed; but we must prove them wrong.



# WORKERS IN STRUGGLE

## Putting the boot in

**A**S one of Ireland's leading and more profitable retailers prepares to put the boot in to its employees, Mandate is balloting its members for industrial action in that employment—Boot's pharmacies. It should not be lost sight of that, despite the economic downturn, this employer has reported incredible business performance over the last number of years, to the point where in March 2008 it actually posted Irish profits of more than €20 million.

Similarly, the company has cash reserves to the tune of €70 million; yet it shies away not only from paying its employees their due wage increases under the transitional agreement of "Towards 2016" but is also intent on unilaterally introducing reduced rates of pay and poorer terms and conditions.

While some employers exercise the "inability to pay" clause of the same agreement, Boot's flagrantly and unashamedly argues that its current programme—"our new employment package"—is to ensure that it is a "fit-for-purpose" company going into the future. This entails unilaterally introducing a new employee pay scale that effectually cuts wages for the great majority of its staff and certainly disadvantages any new employees entering the business.

The company is further unilaterally imposing pay freezes for all employees who are not affected by the new pay rates, introducing new Sunday and public holiday premium payments by reducing current premiums by 25 per cent, and imposing increased flexibility on all core business hours, which are to change to 7 to 10, and more Sunday working where previously some employee worked no or limited Sundays, etc.

Furthermore—and all the more worrying—all previous company-union agreements are to be de-recognised from the 17th of November 2009—the date for all these changes to be implemented.

Before these developments, Mandate and Boot's enjoyed good industrial relations and, whenever the need arose, were able to reach agreement on a wide range of issues that enhanced not only members' terms and conditions but their morale and subsequent performance. It appears that this historical legacy is to be kicked to touch!

The company also had to be dragged by its bootlaces

to the Labour Relations Commission, at which it refused to enter the standard joint session at the start of the conciliation process; and, when those talks were unsuccessful, they have snubbed the follow-on stage of the Labour Court.

Mandate is fully aware that, while its current campaign of action is with this one particular company, many Irish retailers are slavishly waiting in the wings to follow suit and appear to be following a coherent and co-ordinated strategy of attempting to break this union.

Company correspondence is worryingly along the same lines, to the point where it is more or less exact, bar the headings and the signatories.

Some might suggest that this is paranoia on Mandate's part; but, given the present climate, many trade unionists would and should be forgiven for feeling paranoid. The business community, aided by their chief supporters in the Government, are determined to claw back the hard-fought and well-won rates of pay, terms and conditions of Irish workers as well as to reduce and erode the future influence of trade unionism in Ireland.

Mandate has already embarked on a wide-ranging campaign to publicise the greed of this employer and its proposed plans. It is expected that a strong ballot in favour of industrial action, to be counted and declared on the 6th of November, will not only bring this company to its senses but will teach it and its business cohorts a meaningful lesson, which is: Mandate will not be going away, and certainly not without a fight.

### Get the latest news and information . . .

- Connolly Youth Movement: [www.cym.ie](http://www.cym.ie)
- Cuba Support Group: [www.cubasupport.com](http://www.cubasupport.com)
- International Brigades Commemoration Committee:  
[homepage.ntlworld.com/e-mckinley/ibcc.html](http://homepage.ntlworld.com/e-mckinley/ibcc.html)
- Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign: [www.ipsc.ie](http://www.ipsc.ie)
- James Connolly Education Trust: [www.iol.ie/~sob/jcet](http://www.iol.ie/~sob/jcet)
- Latin America Solidarity Centre: [www.lasc.ie](http://www.lasc.ie)
- Peace and Neutrality Alliance (PANA): [www.pana.ie](http://www.pana.ie)
- People's Movement: [www.people.ie](http://www.people.ie)
- Progressive Film Club: [www.progressivefilmclub.ie](http://www.progressivefilmclub.ie)

# Chickens coming home to roost

Over the last decade or so much has been said about taking the state out of economics and leaving everything to the market. A self-regulating market would make the necessary “corrections,” and all would work out perfectly. The European Union opposed state aid to state and state-sponsored companies, as that would constitute bias and would be unfair to private or monopoly companies.

Recently the EU Commission gave €54½ million to the Dell Corporation to develop production facilities in Poland, the result of which was the announced closure of the Dell plant in Limerick, with the loss of hundreds of jobs, and the opening a grant-aided plant in Poland. This was a case of a transnational corporation playing one country off against another and pitting worker against

worker in a race to the bottom—all facilitated by the EU Commission, the guardians of corporates interests.

The closure also coincided with Dell's buy-out of its competitor Perot Systems for \$3.9 billion, further monopolising computer manufacturing. The company that had massive amounts of money to buy out competitors and received tens of millions in grants had no money to compensate Irish workers.

It is a fact repeated constantly that a reserve army of labour is required in order to discipline those in work and to weaken and reduce their pay and conditions. Eastern Europe is now a 100-million-strong reserve army, to be exploited by European monopolies and to be used to break and undermine the advances made by workers over the last six decades.

## Na ciaróga ag tacú lena chéile!

**N**AACH iontach an rud é go raibh Brian Cowen chomh tapa sin ag tabhairt tacaíocht do Tony Blair mar ábhar uachtaráin ar Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh! Is ar éigean go raibh na boscaí ballóide agus na pinn luaidhe curtha i leataobh tar éis an reifrinn nuair a nocht Taoiseach na hÉireann a rogha don phost nua.

Is léir go raibh réamhphlé agus margadh déanta faoi rún i bhfad roimh ré. Ach cén margadh? Cén fáth a bhfuil Rialtas na hÉireann ag tacú le hiarrthóir na Ríochta Aontaithe? Is cinnte nach bhfuil aon éileamh i measc mhuintir na hÉireann go dtacófaí le Blair. Ní dócha ach an oiread go bhfuil aon tacaíocht ann do Blair i measc chúlbinseoirí nó bhaill Fhianna Fáil. Pé ar bith, níor cuireadh ceist orthu siúd fiú.

Uachtaránacht na Comhairle Eorpaí, is é sin, comhairle cheannairí na mballstát san AE, an oifig atá in ainm is a bheith sa phost nua, ach is féidir a bheith cinnte de go mbeifear ag tabhairt “Uachtarán na hEorpa” ar an té a cheapfar ón gcéad lá. In ainneoin gur baineadh na siombailí stáit ó



Chonradh Liospóin a thabharfadh le fios gur stát nó cónaidhm fheidearálach a bheadh á mhúnlú san Aontas Eorpach nua a thiofadh isteach tar éis dhaingniú na Seiceach ar Liospóin, brúfar na siombailí sin ar aghaidh, agus tá gné shiombalach ag baint le huachtarán a bheith “ar an Eoraip.”

Ach ar ndóigh tá i bhfad níos mó ná post siombalach i gceist. In ainneoin an íomhá ar mhaith le príomh-airí a chruthú, go mbíonn siad ag troid go dtí an dé deiridh ag cruinnithe na Comhairle Eorpaí faoi gach mionphointe, is í an fhírinn go mbíonn 90% den obair déanta ag daoine eile sula bhfágann siad baile. Bíonn ionchur anmhór ag an gCoimisiún Eorpach agus ag ard-státseirbhísigh na mballstát i ngach cinneadh. Ar lá an chruinnithe glactar leis an gcuid is mó dá mbíonn socráithe gan aon díospóireacht ar fiú trácht uirthi.

Go dtí seo ba iad feidhmeannaigh an bhallstáit a bhí ina uachtarán a dhéanadh comhordú ar an mionphlé seo i ngan fhios don phobal taobh thiar de dhoirse dúnta. Tá deireadh á chur leis an gcóras úd ina mbíodh téarma

uachtaránachta sé mhí ag gach ballstát. As seo amach is duine aonair a bheas i gceannas dhréachtú agus chumadh polasaithe, agus tugann sé sin an-chumhacht go deo don duine a ainmnítear. Amach anseo beidh an oifig seo ar cheann de na poist is cumhachtaí ar domhan, cé go mb'fhéidir nach mbeidh sé chomh cumhachtach le huachtaránacht an Choimisiúin.

Léiriú é seo ar an gcaoi a bhfuil daonlathas á mhúchadh taobh istigh den Aontas Eorpach. Is léiriú breise é ar an gcaoi a bhfuil an daonlathas cúngaithe in Éirinn gur féidir leis an Taoiseach vóta na hÉireann d'uachtaránacht an AE a shocrú gan dul i gcomhairle le haon chomhlacht thofa.

Agus, faoi mar a tharlaíonn, tá an vóta sin á thabhairt do dhuine a sheasann ar son leas lucht airgid agus gadaíocht acmhainní ón domhan atá i mbéal forbartha. Ba é Blair an tacadóir ba mhó ag George Bush. D'fhear siad cogadh gránna ar an Iaráic, agus is iad sa deireadh thiar thall atá ciontach as léirscrios a dhéanamh ar mhuintir na tíre sin ar mhaith le greim a fháil ar olacheantair.

Agus ina dhiaidh sin ceapadh é ina “thoscaire síochána” sa Mheán-Oirthear! Níl aon duine sa chuid sin den domhan róchinnte cad a dhéanann sé mar “thoscaire síochána,” ach is cosúil go bhfuil sé á lua mar dhuine a d'fhéadfadh Duais Síochána Nobel a bhaint amach sa todhchaí! Bhuel, d'éirigh le Kissinger, coirpeach cogaidh eile, é sin a dhéanamh, nár éirigh?

Níl ach áit amháin ar cheart Tony Blair a chur agus sin go dtí an Binse Idirnáisiúnta um Choireanna Cogaidh sa Háig.

[CDF]

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# Money producing money

**R**EADERS of *Socialist Voice* may be familiar with the oft-quoted formula presented by Marx, M-C-M, or money-commodity-money. This formula, for Marx, represented the basis upon which capital works, that is, accumulates itself. Money purchases commodities in the form of materials and labour, creating a product or service that is then sold, leaving profit—more money. Money, through the big C, is turned into even more money.

This is the traditional Marxist understanding of the process of accumulation and has for many years satisfactorily explained the inner working of capitalism. There is, of course, far more to this understanding, including the all-important exploitation of labour power, from which profit is derived; but for this article the explanation above will suffice.

Readers aware of this formula will then be interested in the following formula: M-M, or money-money. This formula was presented and articulated in a recent edition of *Monthly Review* in an article entitled “Monopoly-finance capital and the paradox of accumulation” by John Bellamy Foster and Robert W. McChesney. (The article can be read on line at [www.monthlyreview.org/091001foster-mcchesney.php](http://www.monthlyreview.org/091001foster-mcchesney.php).)

The writers argue that changes within the process of capital accumulation over the last few decades have given rise to a situation whereby money can be transformed into more money without any productive stage, the stage at which labour is employed. This process, called “financialisation,” is identified by the authors as the fourth definitive stage of accumulation within capitalism.

Stage 1 was mercantilism, beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing up to the eighteenth century, with accumulation taking place primarily in commerce, agriculture, and mining.

Stage 2, competitive capitalism, stemming from the Industrial Revolution, saw the accumulation of capital largely deriving from modern industry

and large-scale infrastructural developments. Stage 3, called monopoly capitalism—best described by V. I. Lenin—is marked by the end of “free and fair” competition and by the huge growth and centralisation of capital in corporations.

It is out of the stagnation of the 1970s—the lack of investment opportunity and return or, as Foster and McChesney put it, the worsening conditions for accumulation—that the turn to finance capital as the primary source of accumulation within capitalism took place. The writers argue that,

essentially, what occurred was this: unable to find an outlet for its growing surplus in the real economy, capital (via corporations and individual investors) poured its excess surplus/savings into finance, speculating in the increase in asset prices. Financial institutions, meanwhile, on their part, found new, innovative ways to accommodate this vast inflow of money capital and to leverage the financial superstructure of the economy up to ever greater heights with added borrowing—facilitated by all sorts of exotic financial instruments, such as derivatives, options, securitization, etc. Some growth of finance was, of course, required as capital became more mobile globally. This, too, acted as a catalyst, promoting the runaway growth of finance on a world scale.

Leaving aside the huge impact this fundamental change in the method of capital accumulation has had on levels of employment, economic equality, and financial debt, which requires further analysis and expansion, for this article it is worth noting the change in formula this analysis presents, from M-C-M to M-M.

So, it appears that it is no longer sufficient to talk merely of monopoly capitalism, as communist parties have done for the last century, but is more appropriate to understand struggle in the context of monopoly-finance capitalism. This appears to be the context in which establishment solutions are being conceived of and pursued.

Today’s neoliberal regime itself is best viewed as the political-policy counterpart of monopoly-finance capital. It is aimed at promoting more extreme forms of exploitation—both directly and through the restructuring of insurance and pension systems, which have now become major centers of financial power. Neoliberal accumulation strategies, which function with the aid of a “predator state,” are thus directed first and foremost at enhancing corporate profits in the face of stagnation, while providing further needed cash infusions into the financial sector. Everywhere, the advent of neoliberalism has meant an intensification of the class struggle, emanating from both corporations and the state. Far from being a restoration of traditional economic liberalism, neoliberalism is thus a product of big capital, big government, and big finance on an increasingly global scale.

There is no doubt that the governments of the major countries are aiming at restoring growth and accumulation through financial services and finance capital. If successful, this is sure to mean further, more devastating crisis than we are now living through, with working people in a less well-off position to cope.

Economic trajectories can, however, be altered by one thing: class struggle.

[GM]

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## November—a month for spoofs and chancers

**W**ELL, the clocks have gone back and winter time is fixed, and the cold nights gather apace. The children have lit their bonfires to see the spirits off to wherever they came from, or are going to. Young children have been suitably terrified by tales of witches, banshees, underworld spirits, enough to frighten them to death for another year and to make them snuggle up tight in bed with blankets pulled over their heads.

Just when you thought it was safe to come out and the gravediggers of history have been brought safely back under control, the storytellers of imperialism and its heavily controlled mass media, from the *Irish Times* and *Independent* to RTE and News Talk, once again attempt to exorcise the

spirit that they claimed died two decades ago: communism.

The twentieth anniversary of the breaching of the Berlin Peace Wall has provided yet another opportunity for them to proclaim that “communism is dead,” as they have done every day since the destruction of socialism in

eastern Europe. They seem to believe that if you keep repeating a lie it will somehow become the truth.

No, the Berlin Wall was not a pretty sight. Nor is the peace wall snaking its way across west and north Belfast; nor is the barbed-wire fence stretching across the Mexican-American border to

keep the poor of Latin America in their cages of poverty and preventing them from getting to the promised land and the home of the brave. Nor is the wall dividing the people of Korea (built, incidentally, by the United States), nor the wall stretching across occupied Palestine.

It is not often that we would quote John F. Kennedy; but in 1961 he said: "It is not a very nice solution, but it is a hell of a lot better than war." It was a barrier designed to protect and separate two Germanys. It kept two military alliances apart, NATO and the Warsaw Treaty. It was a barrier between infant socialism and mature, decaying capitalism.

We need to recount some historical facts in order to understand the origins of the wall and the world as it was then.

At the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945 the four main wartime allies, the Soviet Union, United States, Britain, and France, agreed to divide Germany into four occupation zones. The Federal Republic of Germany was established in the four western zones in May 1949—that is, six months before the German Democratic Republic in the eastern zone.

This was a little over three years after Europe had suffered the massive loss of tens of millions of lives, the destruction of hundreds of cities, of thousands of towns and villages. The Red Army had fought its way from Stalingrad to Berlin, suffering the heaviest casualties, fighting for every town, village and river crossing for 1,500 miles, liberating tens of millions of people from fascism. The Soviet Union suffered the loss of more than 20 million people and massive economic and social destruction.

It was on the eastern front that German fascism had concentrated the overwhelming majority of its forces. The Red Army fought and defeated not only German fascism but also its Ukrainian, Belarussian, Polish, Hungarian, Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Czech and Romanian fascist allies. Today, in those same countries, with the re-establishment of capitalism, the bitch that gave birth to fascism is again in heat, and those forces now openly walk the streets of eastern Europe and of Russia itself.

The defeat of German fascism by the Soviet Union was a frightening scenario for European and American imperialism and the worst nightmare of Cold War warriors such as Winston Churchill, who in 1918 had called for the European powers to "strangle the Bolshevik baby in its cradle" when fourteen foreign armies encircled Russia in their efforts to stop the birth of a new workers' state.

On the establishment of the West German state in May 1949 and subse-

quently of the East German state in October 1949, Berlin was divided in two, with East Berlin under the control of Soviet forces and West Berlin—while not legally part of West Germany—controlled by the United States, Britain, and France.

West Germany regarded the GDR as an illegitimate state right up to the early 1970s; then, in 1973, the West German social democrats adopted a "*Neue Ostpolitik*" (New Eastern Policy) in a move away from Cold War hostility.

We need to remember that it was the west that partitioned Germany, not the Soviet Union. In fact Stalin proposed in 1952 that all occupation powers should disengage from Germany and that a unified, neutral and disarmed Germany should be established, an offer that was rejected by the Western occupation powers. We need also to remember that NATO, established by the United States in April 1949, was a nuclear-armed alliance and that only four years earlier one of its main forces had used nuclear weapons against civilians in Japan and later threatened to use them in Korea. The Warsaw Treaty was not established until 1955.

From the very beginning the GDR was subject to attacks by fascist elements, including saboteurs crossing over from the West. Many factories and other buildings were destroyed by saboteurs as imperialism attempted to disrupt the rebuilding of the East.

The Berlin Wall was not built until 1961, nearly thirteen years after the GDR was established and at the very height of the Cold War. The world in which the wall was built had been shaped by the Second World War and

by post-war aggression, including such experiences as the suppression of the Greek revolutionary forces by the British army of occupation, the Korean War, savage British anti-communist repression in Malaya, the suppression of national liberation forces in Congo, and the brutal suppression of national liberation struggles around the world.

The following decades saw India winning its independence in 1947, ensuring the terminal decline of the British Empire, the overthrow of pro-western regimes in Iran and Iraq, the victory of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, and the defeat of French imperialist forces in colonised and occupied Viet Nam. Latin America witnessed a growing popular resistance against brutal repression and the establishment of fascist governments under the tutelage of the United States. Imperialism was also faced with the growing influence of communist and other left forces throughout western Europe. The imperialist world was under increasing strains and pressures.

No, walls and barriers are not nice, and the separation of peoples is not a good thing. But history is complex and at times contradictory, and social transformation is not without its ups and downs. Change is built upon the past; change is unpredictable and uncertain.

A hundred or two hundred people may have died attempting to cross the Berlin Wall. Regrettable though that loss of life, and of any lives, is, in the real world of intense class and anti-imperialist struggles we do not always get to choose the ground to fight on. We have to deal with a given situation as it is and not as we wish it to be.

What might have happened when two nuclear-armed military alliances faced each other if a physical barrier had not been erected? It is quite possible that the Berlin Wall saved tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of lives and saved the world from a nuclear war.

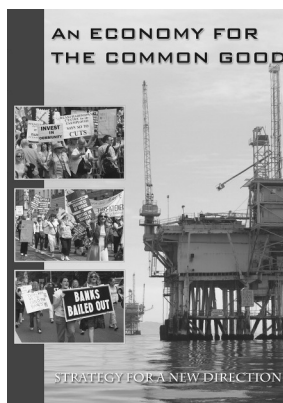
People should reflect upon the present aggressive nature of imperialism when it itself has claimed to have "won." Today it is fighting two major wars of aggression, costing tens of thousands of lives.

As capitalism slumps deeper into recession, workers' rights are under daily attack, and the very existence of life on our planet is threatened by environmental destruction from the very nature of capitalism itself.

**Anti-communism, whether from the right or the "left," is a weapon of the boss class. They are still haunted by the spectre of communism. As Marx and Engels wrote, "All the powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre."**

[EMC]

## *An Economy for the Common Good*



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# The Ukrainian famine and anti-Soviet propaganda

**I**T is accepted by credible historians that famine did occur in Ukraine in the early 1930s. There is, however, no consensus on the causes of what is known to many as the “Holodomor.” Within this debate, the objectives of anti-Soviet propaganda should be scrutinised when searching for the truth and not substituted as the truth.

The Ukrainian famine was not the first famine in the USSR. Russia itself endured 150 famines in its thousand years of recorded history.<sup>1</sup> The culmination of the disaster of Tsarist adventurism in the First World War, revolution, foreign military intervention, international political isolation, civil war and severe drought resulted in the famine of 1921–22. History cannot blame Bolshevism for this drought. When Spanish flu killed 20 million people in America and Europe in the years 1918–1920 nobody blamed the governments of those states for murdering their own citizens.

When the USSR tried to modernise its agricultural infrastructure in order to feed its 120 million peasants it unavoidably led to instability in the countryside. Previously, peasants farmed with methods that went back to the Middle Ages and even to Biblical times.<sup>2</sup> Farming methods were determined by religion. A. L. Strong notes that the dates for the planting of seeds were linked to certain holy days, regardless of consequences. Additionally, priests led farmers in stoning tractors as “devil-machines.” Opposition to the new farming methods thus became “a fight for religion.”

The conflict over collectivisation, which in some regions amounted almost to civil war, the sabotage by

those hostile to the Soviet state and drought have been played down as contributing factors in the cause of the Ukrainian famine.<sup>3</sup> Mario Sousa adds that the lack of food and undernourishment weakened people, which in turn led to an increase in the number falling victim to epidemic diseases.<sup>4</sup> It was only with the development of penicillin (which did not become generally available until the late 1940s) that such epidemics could be contained.

In relation to the causes of the Ukrainian famine, on the other hand, Soviet planning, excesses and mistakes have been exaggerated to the level of a man-made famine—genocide. The Sovietologist John Arch Getty noted in the *London Review of Books* (quoted by Jeff Coplon) that there “is plenty of blame to go around. It must be shared by the tens of thousands of activists and officials who carried out the policy and by the peasants who chose to slaughter animals, burn fields, and boycott cultivation in protest.”<sup>5</sup>

However, on the so-called man-made famine, Sousa traces the myth of deliberate genocide back to Hitler and the Nazi Party. In 1925, in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler proclaimed the Ukraine an essential part of German *lebensraum* (“living space”). Germany would “liberate” this territory in order to make space for the German master race, and the indigenous population would be enslaved in order to grow cereals for their Aryan masters. But the Nazi “liberation” of the Ukraine could come only with a war against the Soviet Union, and the excuse for such a war had to be prepared well in advance. The purpose of the genocide myth was to prepare world public opinion for the eventual Nazi invasion of the USSR.

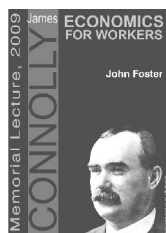
World opinion obviously did not include the people of the USSR. It was in the main directed at public opinion in the West, particularly in America and Britain. In the civil war that followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, military forces from up to fourteen countries (including the United States and Britain) were fighting against the fledgling Soviet state.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of the intervention was justified by the then British Secretary of

State for War, Winston Churchill: that Bolshevism must be strangled at birth. Thus the Cold War that predated the Second World War was the context in which the Nazis attempted to justify their ambition of eastward expansion.<sup>7</sup> The Nazis also needed to win the hearts and minds of their own citizens for any war. So the propaganda machine under Goebbels peddled the story of ethnic Germans starving in the USSR as a direct consequence of the Soviet five-year plan.<sup>8</sup>

To influence public opinion in the West the Nazis turned to their friend William Randolph Hearst, a multi-millionaire American media tycoon, the inspiration for Orson Welles’s *Citizen Kane* and the creator of “yellow journalism” (sensationalised stories of dubious reliability). Through his thirty newspapers and magazines Hearst exercised enormous political influence. He was totally hostile towards the Soviet Union and especially against Stalin.<sup>4</sup>

Hearst also tried to use his newspapers for overt Nazi propaganda purposes, publishing a series of articles by

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Göring, Hitler's right-hand man. The protests of many readers, however, forced him to stop publishing such items and to withdraw them from circulation.

After his visit to Hitler, Hearst's sensationalist newspapers were filled with "revelations" about the terrible happenings in the Soviet Union. Murders, genocide, slavery, luxury for the rulers and starvation for the people—all these were the big news items almost every day. The material was provided to Hearst by the Gestapo. We should not forget that these articles were read each day by 40 million people in the United States and millions of others around the world.

Hearst, who was known during the 1930s as "America's number 1 fascist," employed Benito Mussolini to write articles—paying him a higher salary than he received as head of the Italian state.<sup>3</sup> Hearst also had financial incentives in his dealings with Hitler: the Nazis agreed to purchase their foreign news through Hearst's International News Service, for a reported one million marks a year.<sup>3</sup> In August 1934 Hearst was reported in the *New York Times* as stating: "If Hitler succeeds in pointing the way of peace and order . . . he will have accomplished a measure of good not only for his own people but for all of humanity." Indeed, in his *New York Journal American* in 1941 Hearst advised Europeans—even those under Nazi occupation—to support the German invasion of the USSR, "to unite in the face of expanding communism."

While the myth of a deliberate famine was first concocted between the Nazis and their Western media sympathiser, it did not die with the defeat of the Nazi regime in 1945. Cold War warriors hostile to the idea of communism—whether Western intelligence agencies, sponsored academics, or Ukrainian ultra-nationalists (including ex-Nazis)—carried on the genocide myth for their own political agenda. They still do so today.

As already mentioned, there is a consensus that a famine did occur in the Ukraine. No agreement is forthcoming on its causes. Neither is there a consensus on the numbers that perished. But the victims are used as anti-communist propaganda to this day.

Writing in *Slavic Review*, the demographers Barbara Anderson and Brian Silver maintain that limited census data makes a precise death count impossible. Instead they offer a probable range of 3.2 to 5.5 million "excess deaths" for the entire Soviet Union from 1926 to 1939 . . . Which leaves us with a puzzle. Wouldn't 1 or 2 or 3½ million famine-related deaths be enough to make an anti-Stalinist argument? Why seize a wildly inflated



figure that can't possibly be supported?

The answer tells us much about the Ukrainian nationalist cause, and about those who abet it. "They're always looking to come up with a number bigger than six million," observed Eli Rosenbaum, general counsel for the World Jewish Congress. "It makes the reader think, 'My god, it's worse than the Holocaust.'"<sup>5</sup>

Felix Wemheuer notes that the literal translation of *holodomor* is "hunger plague"; and to Western ears it sounds like "holocaust." All this is part of an attempt to create a Ukrainian national myth that the famine was a deliberate genocide by Stalin.<sup>9</sup>

If anti-communists are so fixated on trying to top a death toll of 6 million they should look at the United Nations report *State of Food Insecurity in the World* (2004). This report states that "one child dies every five seconds as a result of hunger and malnutrition."<sup>10</sup> That's an annualised death rate of more than 6 million a year, every year.

(One child every five seconds is 12 children a minute, 720 children an hour, 17,280 children a day, and 6,307,200 children a year.)

**In memory of those who died in all famines, and in genuine concern for those still vulnerable to starvation, it is obligatory on us all to create a political and economic system that plans and shares its resources, not for the maximisation of profit but in order to eradicate once and for all the scourge of hunger.**

[JC]

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