

Socialist Voice

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SVI

Time to step up the struggle for water

IT IS A MATTER of urgency for working people once again to mobilise, to get back on the streets to press home our demands for an end to water charges and, most importantly, for a constitutional amendment to enshrine the people's ownership of water—not state ownership, because the state belongs to the rich and powerful.

Regardless of the negotiations now under way about the formation of a new government, which will only continue the policies of the previous two, we must not allow ourselves to

bargain away all our hard work, the early-morning blocking of the installation of water meters, the local and national mass demonstrations.

Water activists urgently need to rally together to impose our agenda on the current political flux, and not allow them to impose their agenda on us. Fianna Fáil say they want to postpone charges for five years and to break up Irish Water; this is only a tactical matter for them in order to squeeze the momentum out of the mass mobilisation. *continued*

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People are waking up to the fact that social democracy is not a viable option. For those who have tended to identify social democracy with socialism, there seems to be no other alternative to capitalism—in fact no alternative to the more inhumane, neo-liberal forms of capitalism. So the loss of social democracy is for them indeed an awesome one. It is for them a more cataclysmic and perhaps even final loss than for those who, while certainly supporting the welfare state or any amelioration of capitalism's destructive consequences, have always doubted the long term sustainability of capitalism “with a human face.” Those who used to place all their hopes in social democracy are inclined to explain their awesome loss not by conceding that a humane capitalism was never sustainable in the long term but by invoking some massive epochal shift which had destroyed what used to be, but no longer is, a real possibility. **Ellen Meiksens Wood**

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The establishment is mounting a counter-attack on those opposed to water charges. Its strategy is to play the long game and break the people's resistance. Although the manner in which this valuable resource is managed is important, it is not the central question we face. What is central is the ownership of our water resources.

Our demand is therefore for a constitutional amendment. This is the only way to block privatisation. It becomes even more urgent when we realise that the TTIP and CETA, once enacted, could make this impossible.

We have to take advantage of the current political situation and use it to our advantage. Teachtaí Dála have been elected on the promise to end water charges and secure a constitutional amendment. They must be held to account. We cannot allow our struggle to be wasted on tactical manoeuvring for perceived political advantage, nor to be sidetracked by political sectarianism and petty point-scoring.

As the dust from the elections begins to settle, a number of things are becoming much clearer. Certainly the continued growth in the anti-establishment vote is to be welcomed, especially if we add to it the significant numbers of people who did not come out to vote at all because of their disillusionment with the politics presented to them.

All the main electoral parties and blocs, including those that stood on an anti-establishment platform, argued very much within the existing system. They allowed themselves to be corralled within the narrow ideological framework, some of them presenting their alternative economic and social policies with the boast that they had been fully costed by the Department of Finance! This implies that the Department of Finance and the state in general are neutral, above the cut and thrust of politics, above siding with any particular class interests. The reality is that the Department of Finance is the guardian of the interests of the economic system as a whole, that it takes direct orders from Brussels and Berlin.

A big effort now, especially before a new government emerges from the whisperings in Leinster House, can achieve not merely a moratorium on water charges but a major victory, consolidated with a constitutional



Eoghan Ó Néill

CAPITALISM AND democracy may be a contradiction in terms; however, capitalism does well out of elections. Elections bestow legitimacy on the capitalist system.

Rarely if ever do elections focus on the validity of capitalism: instead they are more about how we rearrange the furniture than they are about real change. Despite all the hyperbole about “seismic change,” in reality the 2016 election has changed nothing. At best this election has delivered a partial realignment of the existing politics, and the re-emergence of Fianna Fáil from the sin bin.

Social-democratic politics are framed within capitalist economics, and any realignment within that framework will be subject to the same capitalist economic pressures. Whether it is a coalition of Fine Gael and Labour, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil or Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin, the economic realities, priorities and objectives will be determined not by any social-democratic government, whatever its make-up, but by the capitalist class in whose interest they govern.

As things stand, the only viable coalition is one between the two right-wing parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Neither much likes this idea, as it would leave the opposition in the hands of Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin's left rhetoric will be a strategy of attacking and undermining a right-wing government with the intention of mopping up left-wing and disaffected votes in the next election, delivering for Sinn Féin a strong shot at becoming the major partner in a

future coalition government.

However, Sinn Féin as an opposition-leader peddling a left-wing agenda could potentially help move public expectations to the left. But expectations are one thing and are of themselves quite delicate; such expectations are not built upon a strong foundation of class-consciousness but on a belief that capitalism can be reformed and reconfigured to benefit working people.

It is because they are derived from a simple desire for “fairness” rather than a class analysis and understanding of the existing economic, political and social environment that this desire for fairness is so frail, and must fail. Nonetheless the raising of expectations provides the opportunity for socialist intervention.

The Right2Water campaign provides not so much a blueprint as an illustration of how we may progress a campaign that the working class identifies with. This is something that Right2Change failed to do. Right2Water not only mobilised the working class but presented an opportunity to radicalise limited sections of the working class. For the most part, Right2Change left the people in a place of opposition without a full understanding of what it was they were opposing, or a clear idea of what they wanted in its stead.

This is in part the reason why the movement to Right2Change did not advance class-consciousness. Listing ten reasons why we should be angry is

no substitute for an understanding of why these issues exist in the first place.

The other reason why Right2Change did not deliver is that it is essentially contained within a reformist agenda. It talks about ideals such as closing the democratic deficit and about the principles of equality, democracy, and social justice—all very laudable, but it is how it seeks to achieve this that betrays its limitations. An alternative Ireland will not be brought about through playing around with the capitalist tax system. Allowing the transfer of wealth from workers to the capitalist class to continue and then asking them to give a little of it back, in order that the rest of us can live a tolerable life, is not an alternative.

Right2Change describes very well the ills behind its ten demands, but it fails to pose the question why it is that these ills exist. What is it about our society, our political system, our economy, that gives rise to these ills? For instance on debt it calls for debt justice but fails to explain that debt itself is a necessary ingredient of capitalism, that capitalism *requires* debt in order to maintain consumption at a level at which capitalists can make exaggerated profits; that debt allows capitalists to ignore the mythical “self-regulation” of the markets by way of prices and instead provides the means for monopolistic and oligarchical control of the markets. The same limited analysis is applied by Right2Change to its other nine demands.

That being said, Right2Water and Right2Change have provided an excellent starting-point. They have crystallised aspects of the capitalist economy into ten areas that the working class can identify with. That understanding has to be deepened. The ten issues need to be for more than generating anger: they ought to be the starting-point of an active programme of consciousness-raising, of working with workers to identify the reasons why these issues exist.

The heart of the matter is the exploitative capitalist system and the fact that the politicians in Dáil Éireann are merely the middle management of that system. The people of this nation require a real alternative. Offering them ineffectual reforms in pursuit of electoral results is not enough. What is required is to begin the hard work of engaging with workers in a shared understanding of the capitalist system, and offering the only real alternative: socialism.

The EU and the future of European nations

Eoghan O'Neill

SOMETHING IS changing beneath the surface. Like the currents under the surface of the water, there is a strong current of change in the people's attitudes and beliefs regarding the EU, its legitimacy, and its future.

This was made clear at the Right2Change conference held in the Mansion House in Dublin on 13 February, and has since been solidified in the debates regarding a British withdrawal from the EU. That the debate is even happening, never mind gaining traction, is something that five years ago would have been unthinkable, although many pages in *Socialist Voice* have been dedicated to just such an issue.

Before we have that honest and much-needed debate, we have to put the European Union—its origins, its expansion, its treaties, its *raison d'être*—into historical context.

The official line on the setting up of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950 was that it would “make war (i.e. between European states) not only unthinkable but materially impossible,” because it would “neutralise” the competition for resources between those countries. This is quite telling, because one of the main reasons for the two world wars was not so much competition for resources among the European states themselves but for the control of the territories and colonies and the resources they possessed.

The vision of a common market, and then a supranational or federal state, was seen as the best way to advance European societies that were ravaged and scarred by two world wars. It was clear from the point of view of the architects of the ECSC, EEC and EU that if they worked as a bloc they would be more powerful—in exploiting other nations and continents—and less likely to have internal wars between the powerful European states. War of itself was not seen as unthinkable, only war *within*

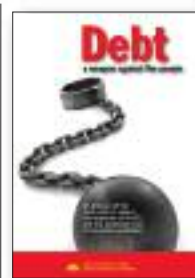
itself.

When the Soviet Union and the other Allies defeated fascism, the United States almost immediately reverted to its pre-war hostility towards the state that “tore the guts out of the German army” (in the words of Winston Churchill). The unfounded fear of Soviet expansion into western Europe drove the Marshall Plan for the rebuilding of Europe on US imperialist terms. The Marshall “aid” was not given as loans, as there were stipulations attached to it. These were to ensure that the influence of the victory of the Soviet Union, the successes of the centrally planned economy and the rise of communist and workers' parties in the West were to be countered by capital to enhance free-market and free-trade policies. The coal and steel industries—the powerhouse of European industry—therefore were the first to amalgamate on a Europe-wide monopoly basis.

In Ireland the Marshall aid that was given had the real effect of making Ireland abandon any notion of developing its own indigenous industries, instead favouring foreign direct investment. This in turn led to the government of the day joining the EEC in 1973 as a way to solidify this economic policy. As the treaties consolidated European monopoly capitalism, Ireland's trajectory as a facilitator between American and European capitalism was copperfastened by the introduction of a single currency, the euro, which would eventually lead to the virtual collapse of the Irish economy.

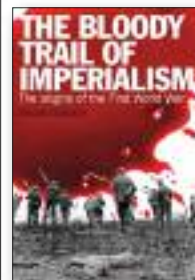
Let us be clear: the ECSC, the EEC and then the EU were always derived from and driven by the interests of finance and industry. The EU institutions have never been about democracy but about trade, and strengthening the hand of European imperialism in the global economy. As monopoly capitalism advanced, and finance and debt became a bigger driver of economies, the European monopolies regained their pre-war strength.

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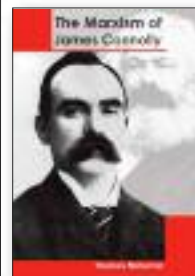
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The EU and the future of nations

This helped with the concessions given to labour and the welfare rights of European citizens, who saw their fellow-citizens in the east gain so much in this field: a free health service, free education up to third level, social housing with small rents, guaranteed jobs, holiday leave, sickness leave, maternity leave, social insurance, and a host of other welfare benefits.

While world events took hold and the decades rolled on, various EU treaties were passed—the Treaty of Rome (1957), the Single European Act (1987), the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the Amsterdam Treaty (1999), the Nice Treaty (2003), and the latest Lisbon Treaty (2009), all of which further consolidated the institutions, assuming supranational powers over those of the sovereign European states and integrating the economies of Europe in a power bloc.

What they also enshrined was the economic models of all states within the EU, which is based on the tenets of capitalism: free trade, competition (leading to monopoly), privatisation, and—most importantly—profit. The inevitable conclusion of this state-building would be the introduction of a functioning yet undemocratic legislative, executive and judiciary and a single currency. An armed force and a central police force are next in line, and are high on the agenda, because of the increased violence and war within and beyond the EU.

In 2016, as the dust settles from the general election, we can see that in just two years the class-consciousness of the Irish people has taken a huge leap forward. The troika parties no longer exclusively hold on to power within our communities, as they, or their counterparts, have done for the past century. However, the conclusion of our elections will not change the trajectory of our economic and social policies: legally they can't. So long as we are in the European Union we must abide by EU rules, rules that have been developed for the past sixty-five years to benefit monopoly capitalism, not the peoples or democracy.

Some people—Varoufakis leading the charge—have laid out a choice for the future of Ireland and other European nations: either we democratise the EU or “retreat” into the “cocoon” of the nation-state. This is a false dilemma, and therefore a

fallacy. You cannot democratise the treaties, the very fibres of the EU, as they are not designed for democracy but to enhance European capital.

The CPI has already issued a comprehensive statement on why we cannot democratise the EU. The other option of retreating into the “cocoon” of the nation-state is a straw man. No-one, least of all the CPI, believes that nation-states can survive in complete isolation. No nation is a self-sufficient island, cut off entirely from every other nation on earth. There are certainly some that are isolated, but none are cocooned.

No nation wants to be isolated either. The social productive forces that have developed over many centuries are interconnected at the global level. Certain geographical areas lend themselves better than others to the extraction and production of resources for the needs of the global society, whether it is oil, gas, coal, steel, gold, iron, copper, rubber, silver, diamonds, water, trees, plants, animals, fish, fruit, vegetables, or a whole list of other materials and natural resources; they form the basis of present-day needs that no single state can fully provide from its own soil. Historically it was pillage, rape and plunder that secured the resources for the most ruthless militarily and technologically advanced nations—Britain, Germany and France being the flag-bearers of Europe, of course.

If we are truly to advance to a higher level of class-consciousness, of solidarity among nations, of independence, sovereignty, democracy, and social justice, then we do need to take a step back—not in the way envisaged by EU “reformers” and their “cocooned nation” theory but by the vision of socialist republicans, such as James Connolly, who saw the nation-state as the protectorate of the people. Its role is to provide for the material, cultural, social and mental well-being of each citizen and to ensure that the people have a democratic say in the economic, political and social aspects of their daily lives.

This the EU was never designed to do. No form of supranational state can guarantee this until we guarantee it and enshrine it for ourselves first within a democratic socialist republic.

The EU is a barrier to the establishment of European socialist republics; and for any self-respecting socialist or republican it has to be opposed.



Vote for withdrawal from the European Union!

Statement by the Communist Party of Ireland

1 March 2016

THE COMMUNIST Party of Ireland expresses its solidarity with all progressive forces in Britain, and in particular with the Communist Party of Britain, in the forthcoming campaign for Britain to withdraw from the European Union. In particular we call on working people in the north-east of our country to vote for leaving the EU.

A vote to leave can be a vote for a different way forward, a vote against the deepening global militarisation of which the EU is one of the driving forces—not alone within the wider European continent but around the world.

A vote to leave would also call into question the southern Irish state's continuing membership of the EU and reopen

opportunities for working-class struggle on the national level.

We should not be distracted by the fact that very reactionary and chauvinist forces, nostalgic for the days of the British Empire, are also opposed to the European Union. We support the demand for withdrawal not on some narrow nationalist grounds but rather from a working-class internationalist position. There is a need to break the unity of the European monopolies, to break the unity of the European employers' network of control, by dividing them, which can only weaken the whole. A withdrawal by Britain could well trigger a response from working people in other member-states to campaign also for withdrawal. It would break the fear that the EU has so successfully propagated, that outside the EU lies economic disaster.

The deal worked out between the British state and the EU institutions is a further attack on the rights of workers throughout Europe, especially migrant workers, the most vulnerable section of the working class.

The struggle against the European Union is essentially a struggle for democracy and sovereignty. It is an anti-imperialist struggle, one that some formerly anti-EU forces in the north-east of our country have walked away from, retreating into an idealised "critical engagement" with imperialism.

We reject the illusions being peddled in support of these arguments. They undermine the potential for bringing unity to our people on a progressive basis. It is wrong to present the idea that the EU is a potential bulwark against attacks on workers and environmental rights. These are false arguments. The EU and the treaties since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 have been for institutionalising austerity, consolidating the interests, influence and power of the big European monopolies specifically but also monopoly capitalism in general.

The attacks on workers in all Ireland will continue, inside or outside the European Union. Membership does not guarantee protection from attacks on workers' rights and conditions—far from it: all the central institutions are above democratic control and are accountable to no-one, as designed by treaty.

The EU Central Bank, which is the central institution for imposing EU economic and monetary policy, is run by and for finance houses and big banks. The EU Commission is the guardian of conformity with the fiscal, political and military strategy of the EU. Attacks on workers, fiscal control and the primacy of the "market" above all else are hot-wired into the EU.

We do not accept that the EU is the source of, or has the potential for, progressive social and economic change, either at a transnational or the national level. EU laws, directives and institutions are designed to prevent and block change at the European and the national level. The Lisbon Treaty of 2009 consolidated the power and ideological influence of big business over the policies and the institutions of the EU. It enshrined the primacy of EU directives (i.e. laws) over national laws, in effect making illegal any progressive alternative economic or social policies. As far as the EU is concerned, there will be no way back to any serious democracy at the national level. The anti-democratic nature of the EU and the absolute power of European big business over it will be further consolidated with the adoption of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

The Communist Party of Ireland calls for the broadest coalition of progressive forces to campaign for British and also for Irish withdrawal from the European Union.

International Women's Day Statement by the Communist Party of Ireland



8 March 2016

TODAY, 8 MARCH, the Communist Party of Ireland expresses its solidarity with women throughout the world. We salute your courage and bravery in the face of the inhuman burdens placed upon working women. Women still bear an uneven burden and suffer super-exploitation and are a significant source of massive profits for monopoly capitalism.

In this, the centenary year of the 1916 Rising we salute the women who contributed so much to the seminal events in the long struggle of our people for independence, democracy, and sovereignty. The defeat of those goals has led to a century-long carnival of reaction, borne in particular by the working women of Ireland as well as the working class as a whole.

Today women are in the front line of the struggle against imperialism and for peace and social justice. We salute the courageous women of Palestine, suffering untold violence from the Zionist state of Israel. We also express our solidarity with the women of Syria and Yemen, suffering greatly from the violence inflicted on them by the proxy forces controlled, financed and armed by the Western powers. To all women fighting against physical and sexual violence, we stand with you to end the scourge of imperialism and the culture of machismo.

Today here in Ireland the water resistance is sustained and maintained by thousands of women within their communities. The success of the Right2Water campaign is due in large part to the tenacity and ingenuity of the women water warriors. To those women in the forefront of the campaign to repeal the 8th Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland and for the right of women to choose and to avail of safe abortion, to all women in Ireland active in the water struggle, active in their trade union, within their communities, fighting to keep services open and available to all, on this International Women's Day we once again express our admiration and our solidarity.

Capitalism is incapable of providing a society of equality, of justice or of solidarity. It is based, by its very nature, on division, exploitation, violence, and backward cultural values. It propagates division and policies of divide and rule.

We aspire to an Ireland of equality and justice, an Ireland that is independent and sovereign, where the people are sovereign in all economic, social and political decisions. Only with a fundamental radical challenge and a radical departure that places the people at the heart of all decisions can we begin to bring about real and meaningful equality. Women have a central role in bringing that new Ireland to fruition.

We salute them.

The “Democracy in Europe Movement, 2015”

Old wine in new bottles

Statement by the Communist Party
of Ireland 12 February 2016



▲ COMMITTED TO THE EU

German finance minister Schäuble and his Greek counterpart.

As working people throughout the European Union are beginning to question its role and even its very nature, and whose interests it serves, another new grouping emerges to sow confusion and throw sand in their eyes.

The “Democracy in Europe Movement, 2015,” the latest grouping to parade itself as the people’s saviour, has sparked interest by the attendance of a representative of Right2Change at its founding meeting in Berlin on 9 February. On 13 February the Right2Change conference in Dublin will be addressed by video link by one of its founders, the former Greek minister of finance, Varoufakis. He will also be travelling to a number of peripheral states to promote this new group.

“Democracy in Europe Movement” is a gathering of individuals and failed politicians from the social-democratic (Labour Party) tradition. Varoufakis is not the only former minister involved: another prominent founder-member is Arnaud Montebourg, a former minister in the French government, also vice-president of the Habitat chain stores and a member of the strategic orientation committee of the Talan company (France).

Before the formal launch in Berlin the group issued a manifesto in which they declared that the movement’s aim or strategy is to “democratise” the European Union. They pose this “democratisation” against two “dreadful options”: a retreat into the cocoon of the nation-state, or surrendering to the Brussels democracy-free zone.

Their initial demands call for full transparency in decision-making, with live streaming of meetings of the EU Council, the Council of Finance Ministers, and the Euro Group, full disclosure of trade negotiations, minutes of the EU Central Bank, etc.

While it would be useful to know what they are planning, we know from experience that the real and important decisions are made off stage: on the golf course, in expensive restaurants, or in the corridors of parliaments patrolled by the corporate lobbyists.

This latest grouping wants the existing EU institutions to target resources and implement policies to address the crises of debt, banking, investment, poverty, jobs, and migration. Firstly, this programme implies that these institutions make “bad” decisions because they operate behind closed doors or negotiate in secret, rather than the simple fact that these institutions represent, reflect and work in the interests of real economic forces. They are not neutral, nor above serving class interests.

These institutions and the individuals who populate them did not make bad decisions: they made the correct decisions for advancing the interests of the big corporations and finance houses. These structures were developed, and are constantly being refined, to ensure control and compliance with whatever strategy is required at any given time for the ruling elite while presenting a formal democratic appearance.

“Democracy in Europe” also want to convene “a constitutional assembly where Europeans will deliberate on how to bring forward, by 2025, a fully fledged European democracy, featuring a sovereign EU parliament that respects national self-determination and shares power with national parliaments, regional assemblies and municipal councils.” The long-term goal, in other words, is “to bring about a fully democratic, functional Europe by 2025.”

What does this democratic-sounding people-empowering, dressed in such fanciful language, really mean? They want a European “parliament” with

“sovereign” powers: so what they are calling for is for all fiscal, monetary, economic and social decisions to rest in this enhanced “parliament.” They want all power to be given to this new parliament while at the same time “sharing” power and “respecting” national parliaments and regional assemblies.

What exactly would they be “sharing” with national parliament? Clearly, if you have a “genuine” and democratically legitimate European Parliament then you must have a “European Government” to give expression to this new democratic institution. They want a “left” federalist integration strategy, which they prefer to the existing process of intergovernmentalism, where representatives from the member-states’ governments make decisions.

So the Irish people could vote for whoever they wished at the national level but would be unable to effect change at that level, because all the real power and decision-making, according to this group, would be decided in this new “democratic” European parliament.

Significant policy decisions are already out of the hands of member-states, and we already have a form of “European government,” where small circles of a politico-economic elite—such as the European Round Table of Industrialists—decide what needs to be done; so in this group’s view it’s just a matter of democratising this process.

Here we need to draw upon the recent experience of the debt burden imposed upon the Irish people by the ECB and EU Commission, as well as the “Programme for Ireland,” requiring the privatisation of public assets, including water and public companies.

This is a false presentation, under the guise of supposedly greater democracy, that some sort of



▲ AGAINST AUSTERITY AND PRIVATISATION

Railway workers protes in Brussels, Poertuguese protest at the EU 'Pact of Agression', Greeks against the Troika

enhanced EU Parliament is better than the present rule by an economic elite and its technocratic bureaucracy, which indeed it would be unlikely to challenge, even if it could.

Even if we took this idea at face value, there is simply no possibility that it would have legitimate support from the people in order for them to accept a majority vote in a revamped EU Parliament in a way similar to the existing position within independent states, where the people allow themselves to be governed by majority decisions taken by national parliaments.

If the existing balance of political representation in the EU Parliament were to emerge in this proposed rebooted parliament, where the majority Christian Democrats and other conservative parties are backed up by a social-democratic minority, which shares their outlook on fiscal and economic policy, they could “democratically” vote in austerity and impose the massive corporate debt upon us.

Does “Democracy in Europe” seriously believe that in a rebooted EU Parliament such policies would be more acceptable to the working people of Greece, Spain, Portugal, or Ireland? Like the establishments throughout Europe, they wish to depoliticise democracy, to depoliticise economic and fiscal decisions, in fact to depoliticise the nation-state itself, claiming that nothing can be done at the nation-state level any more, that nation-states are redundant as regards fiscal, economic and social policy.

It is simply impossible for a parliamentary form of EU government to gain popular acceptance, for a number of reasons. The different sizes and economic strengths of the member-states, and the heterogeneous make-up of national populations, make this impossible.

The EU parliament, as it stands, is a

façade, a pretence of democracy, which serves to hide the undemocratic workings of the system. It serves also as propaganda for a “European identity” as a disguise for the neo-colonial relationship that exists between the powerful core states and the periphery. This is a lesson that many nations seeking separation from existing multinational states, such as Scotland, Catalunya, and the Basque Country, need to learn. There is simply no independence to be found within the EU.

The proposals of “Democracy in Europe,” increasing the apparent powers of the parliament, would only redecorate the façade and would do nothing to alter the imperialist character of the EU, both internally and externally.

This demand or strategy for further integration, even with some sort of enhanced electoral-representative component, is not the same as more people’s control. It is not for a fundamental shift in power from the corporate board rooms and finance houses to working people, as it simply ignores, or fails to understand, the nature of political and economic power, the nature of the state and the institutions of governance and control.

The hollowing out of representative democracy following from the adoption of the many EU treaties would be further advanced if and when TTIP is adopted. The EU treaties were for removing all fiscal, economic and social policy decisions away from the national level to ensure that they could not be influenced by national class struggles, to permanently ensure that a progressive government elected at the national level would be severely restricted in what it could do. The fiscal and economic straitjacket is firmly tied.

The ruling elite, particularly at the EU level, have depoliticised fiscal and

economic decisions to mere technical matters. This also applies to the depoliticisation of the individual states. Just like the ruling elite, “Democracy in Europe” claim that problems cannot be solved at the national level: they can only be solved at an international level, conveniently letting the Irish ruling class off any responsibility and denying the possibility of change.

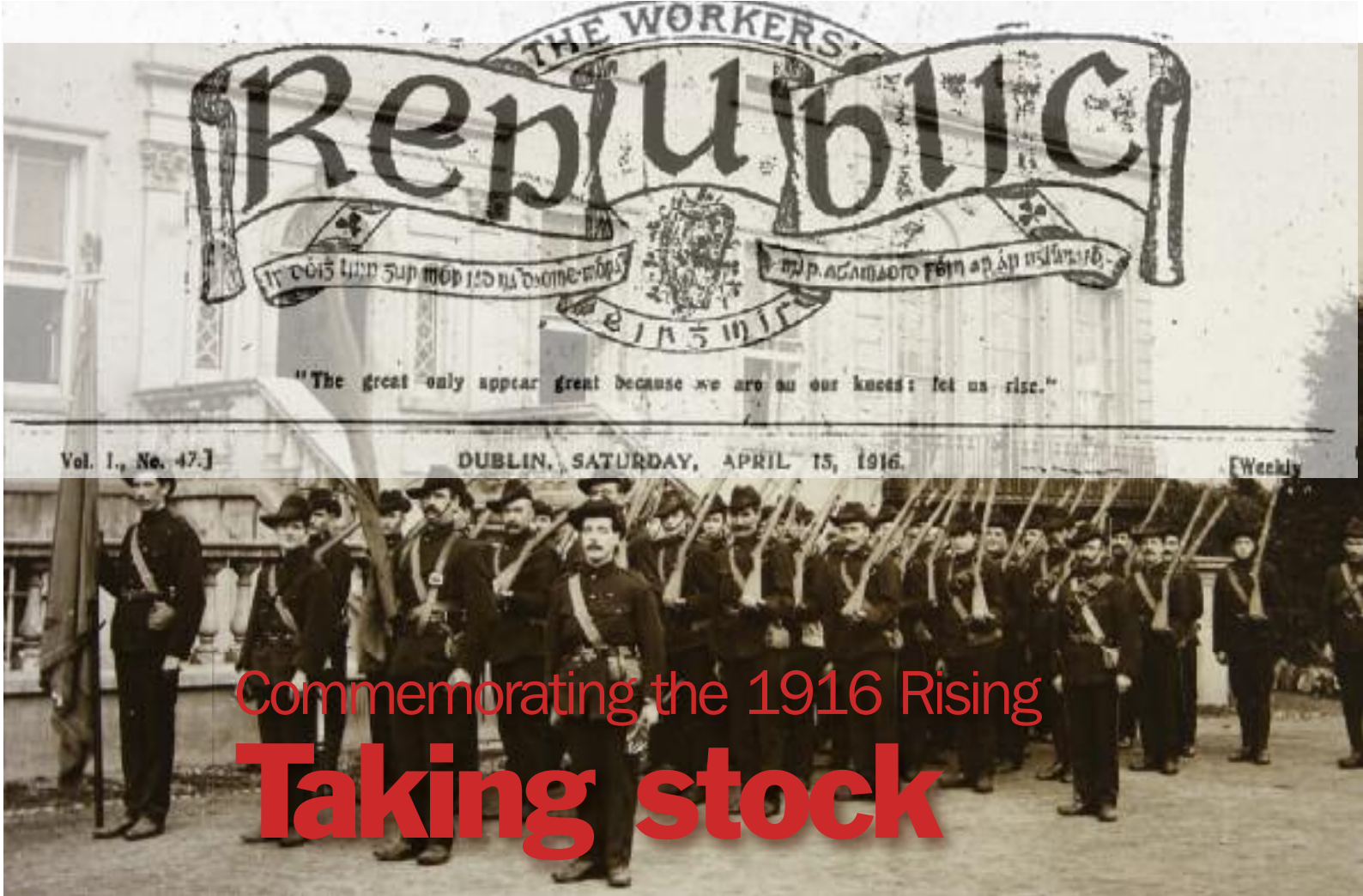
The handing over of sovereign powers from the national to the international structures by national ruling classes can only be understood as part of the process of rolling back democratic, economic and social gains won by working people from their own ruling class.

What Varoufakis and others like him are advocating is a form of democracy without the people, a further erosion of national sovereignty and national democracy, and the erection of new obstacles to any possible radical transformation of economic and social structures at the national level.

Individuals like Varoufakis and groups like “Democracy in Europe” are just the latest in a long line of those who have attempted to put a human face on an inhuman system and its institutions of control, such as those of the European Union. In this they are emulating the successful campaign of SYRIZA in Greece, which mobilised popular forces in order to lead them to defeat and disillusionment. That is the mission of Varoufakis, now on the European stage.

What is being offered is simply more of the same: just old wine in new bottles. There is a growing need for much more radical surgery if we wish to build and live in a decent society, where solidarity and economic justice between people is the cornerstone, a society where the “market” must be subjected to the people, rather than as it is now, where the people are subjected to the “market.”





Commemorating the 1916 Rising **Taking stock**

Finbar Cullen

WRITING IN the Workers' Republic in early 1916, James Connolly set out the task facing Irish socialism: "The Labour Movement of Ireland must set itself the Re-Conquest of Ireland as its final aim . . . The re-conquest involves taking possession of the entire country, all its powers of wealth-production and all its natural resources, and organising these on a co-operative basis for the good of all."

At much the same time Patrick Pearse published his pamphlet *The Sovereign People*, in which he argued that "the nation's sovereignty extends not only to all the material possessions of the nation, the nation's soil and all its resources, all wealth and all wealth-producing processes within the nation. In other words, no private right to property is good as against the public right of the nation."

The Proclamation of the Irish Republic, which Pearse read outside the GPO in Dublin on 24 April 1916, was based on these principles. "We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible."

At the beginning of March 2016, four weeks before the centenary commemorations at Easter and a further month before the centenary year's Republic Day, it is a good moment to take stock of the preparations for the commemorations.

The core principles of the Rising—democracy, sovereignty, and independence—are the yardstick against which the condition of Ireland today and the political content of the various commemorative programmes and events should be measured.

Marxism understands that political ideas and ideology are carried and propagated by all the social processes in society, not just through the formal political processes. Cultural forms and expressions, the law, the media, the education system, sports, fashion and everything else in capitalist societies are imbued with ideological messages about how we should understand society and how that society should be organised. While many of these messages seem and become the "common-sense" view of the world that most people share, they are in fact one of the most important means by which the dominant class in society exercises control.

Those of us who enjoy Hollywood films are well aware of the baggage of

contentious political messages that these films carry, from the equation of freedom with bourgeois democracy and capitalism, and of tyranny with socialism and communism, to the relentless promotion of the lone saviour-hero above any idea of collective action and resistance, to the endless hammering home of gender stereotypes. Anyone who has ever been involved in left-wing politics or a social or community campaign knows how difficult it is to get any kind of hearing in the mainstream media, and how strongly those media promote a narrow consensus that favours the establishment adherence to free-market capitalism and bourgeois democracy.

Elsewhere, the law normalises the expropriation of socially produced wealth that is embedded in private property; the education system turns fields of study and exploration into "disciplines" that regulate which ideas and interpretations are "correct" and can reasonably be held and which are to be rejected; and the fashion industry vigorously polices ideas of gender and sexuality.

Commemoration is not a neutral or politics-free action. When considering any commemoration (like any other cultural or social practice) we must ask what is being commemorated, and by whom; what the political content is,

In Ireland in 2016 there is a “struggle for control of public memory,” and it is particularly evident in the contest over ownership of the 1916 Rising and its legacy.

and what the political purposes involved are; and what is being omitted, and who is omitting it. Commemoration happens in our “now,” not in the past, so it will always be related to contemporary political conflicts. In examining a commemoration we should look at how it is mobilised to support and legitimise different positions and groups in conflicts over sovereignty, for example, or identity, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or religion.

In class society there will always be a struggle over social and cultural actions and expressions. For Marxists, the ideas of the ruling class (the capitalists) will inevitably be the dominant ideas in society: while these ideas may be contested and vigorously opposed (this is part of the class struggle), the dominant ideas generally achieve a level of hegemony in society and shape the “common-sense” world views that most members of society hold. It is no different with commemoration: a political and class struggle is waged over what is commemorated and how.

In a class society, such as capitalism, there is an unavoidable and unsolvable clash of interests between classes. The state arises from this irreconcilability of class antagonisms: that is, the interests of the capitalists and the working class cannot be met at the same time. While the state is put forward as a neutral set of institutions to arbitrate between interests, it is in fact a means of implementing the rule and interests of the dominant class in society. When we discuss state commemorations we should bear this in mind: the state is prosecuting the class struggle and advancing the interests of the ruling class in society.

All around the world, we are familiar with states’ commemorations of their founding events and important moments in their histories. Independence Day in the United States, Bastille Day in France and Remembrance Sunday in Britain are well recognised far beyond the borders of their own countries. Disappointingly, there is a tendency among Irish republicans and nationalists to look at these commemorations uncritically and to point to the absence of similarly unapologetic commemorations of Ireland’s seminal historical events, particularly the 1916 Rising. What such states are doing is drawing legitimacy from crucial historical events, consolidating their hegemony by demanding national unity around

their interpretations and commemorations of the events, and creating an ideological underpinning for their positions. Because class society is unavoidably subject to continuous class struggle, it is necessary for the state to continuously shore up the position of the ruling class.

For the state, it is not important whether the interpretation of a historical event is historically or politically accurate: all that is important is that its version (real or invented) can be used to further its own present needs and objectives—of course the closer the state’s version is to the historical evidence the stronger it will be as a carrier of ideology. The state may promote different and even contradictory versions of the same event: the Rising itself has been both promoted and undermined by the state at different times according to political need, and both at the same time on occasions.

In its commemorations the state also advances the unity of an undifferentiated nation: nationality becomes the only legitimate identity at the point of commemoration, and class, gender, ethnic and other categories are suppressed and subsumed into the monolithic nation. The pursuit of class interests, the challenging of gendered roles for the sexes and the demand for ethnic rights are delegitimised and subordinated to the interests of the nation. While the nation is a real thing, based on a set of social relations created by the actions of men and women in society, socialists must exercise great care that co-operation with nationalists and republicans does not subordinate the class struggle to the national struggle.

The idea of base and superstructure is an important one, but because of the ways in which it has been misused and misrepresented, caution is essential when discussing it. It has become difficult to use this terminology because the idea has been employed in untenable and un-Marxist ways by those who have adhered to a reductionist and undialectical determinism, in which all the other features of society are merely the reflections of the economic base and the organisation of production. This is not what Marx argued, and it flies in the face of our experience of the world we live in.

Marxism is a theory of human action: men and women make the world through acting together to produce the means of existence and

reproduction. In so doing they create both themselves and society; men and women, through their actions in society, make history and social change. Marxism without the bedrock of human action is meaningless and impossible.

But it also stands on a structural understanding of the world. Human action takes place within the structures of society that human action has created: we are free to act in the world as we find it, but we are also constrained by the material realities of that world. Freedom and determination are both features of human existence in society, but they are in a continuous dialectical relationship, and neither one can ever completely govern the other.

There is a similarly dialectical relationship between the base and the superstructure. How human beings organise the production of the means of existence and reproduction is the base out of which all society grows. In the superstructure, all the other features of society appear: politics, the state, the law, family, gender, sexuality, nations and nationality, education, culture—everything that is part of society. Marxism says that, in this sense, the economic base (the mode of production) is primary in a real way in the creation of society, and that the other features of society are in a real way derived from that organisation of production.

But the relationship is not one-directional or rigidly deterministic: instead there is a never-ceasing dialectical relationship between the base and the superstructure. Everything that human beings do in the superstructure—in politics, culture, the legal system, the education system, the family, gender relations, everything—reflects back and acts on the base as well, shaping the organisation of production at the same time as being shaped by it. Indeed it is difficult to see how there could ever be social change or meaningful human action if it were otherwise.

These ideas about class struggle and the relationship between base and superstructure are important when we try to understand commemoration as a feature of the society in which it occurs. Commemoration cannot escape any of the social relations we have discussed: like all the other features of the superstructure, commemoration is an arena of struggle and of class struggle, whether this is consciously acknowledged or not.

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In Ireland in 2016 there is a “struggle for control of public memory,” and it is particularly evident in the contest over ownership of the 1916 Rising and its legacy. As has always been the case in class societies, this struggle does not take the form of an ideologically clear contest between the capitalists and the working class (the producers in society), between the ruling class and the people: instead it is waged by nationalists, republicans, socialists, workers, feminists, women, capitalists, academics, intellectuals, artists, writers, and others, and often not in ideologically clear ways.

Many socialists, for example, have sided with the bourgeois commentators, finding common ground in their disdain for nationalism; and many in the capitalist class have supported the national part of the struggle so long as the social content is suppressed. It is a confused and confusing struggle, and it requires political and ideological clarity to tease it out and understand it.

Before we can discuss the commemorations of the 1916 Rising in a meaningful way we must put forward our understanding and interpretation of its political content. To do this we must first locate the Rising in its own time and material context, and try to understand the social conditions and circumstances in which it occurred. In different language, we must look at the Rising in terms of developments in the economic base and the relationship between it and the social formations and relationships in the superstructure that characterised society and animated social change at that moment.

The Rising occurred at a time when capitalism was in the process of taking on the form of imperialism. Imperialism meant, in the first place, the concentration of both productive and finance capital into monopolies and cartels. Finance capital then became dominant over industrial capital, and the export of finance capital (investment across borders) surpassed the export of goods. These developments led to a new economic division of the world and a new division of labour. A corresponding political division of the world by the big powers accompanied this.

This was a significant change from the older practices of colonial exploitation. Instead of direct colonial rule, the extraction of raw materials and the creation of new markets for produced goods, now countries and regions were incorporated in the

system of a globalised capitalism. Direct rule became anti-systemic in many ways, and although dismantling the older forms was often brutal and bloody, native governments that were committed (sometimes under duress) to keeping their countries within the imperialist system emerged throughout the twentieth century.

At the same time the direct incorporation of the local economies in the imperialist economic system, albeit usually very much as junior partners, created new obstacles for those seeking real freedom for their countries and peoples. Replacing colonial political institutions with local rule no longer guaranteed much in the way of substantial freedom for the people or the working class: it would also be necessary to challenge and defeat capitalism and imperialism.

While Ireland in 1916 still exhibited many of the characteristics of the older colonial model of economic exploitation—a weak native capitalism, less-developed industry, and a role as provider of raw materials (food) for the coloniser—it was also tightly bound into the emerging imperialist system in which British capital was a central force.

If this was the economic underpinning of society and social change in Ireland in 1916 at the level of the superstructure, everything was in movement and flux. New thinking, organisation and activism flourished as established structures and practices were challenged within the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Nationalism, republicanism and separatism played a central role in this upheaval, and it was and remains largely through their perspectives that struggle and change in this period is understood.

But many other actors contributed significantly to events and movement in the revolutionary years. The labour movement, trade unions, and socialism; the women’s movement and feminism; pacifism and the anti-war movement; the language movement; the literary revival; the co-operative movement and the self-help movement; the GAA and continuing land agitation were all factors in the making of the Irish Revolution.

James Connolly claimed a place for labour at the heart of the national struggle in 1916, where its interests and programme could be best advanced and ensured. The subsequent retreat of the labour leadership after the Rising was a historic mistake, and it is essential

that we continue to analyse this if we want to understand the dynamics of the Revolution and learn the lessons for our struggles today.

Alongside this radical activism, the Irish Parliamentary Party continued to dominate Irish nationalism into 1916, as it campaigned first for Home Rule legislation in the British Parliament and then for it to be implemented by the British government. Unionism in Ireland organised against Home Rule and established the Ulster Volunteer Force to resist it, supported by important elements of the British Conservative Party and military.

Britain itself was striving to maintain its empire and fight off growing challenges to its economic and political power, not least from a rapidly rising Germany. The First World War began in August 1914 as the Great Powers fought for dominance and leadership in a world increasingly subject to imperialism. Relinquishing Ireland in these circumstances was not an attractive option for Britain.

These forces and developments at the levels of both the base and the superstructure, and the complex dialectical relationships between them, are the material circumstances in which the 1916 Rising occurred, organised by determined activists and revolutionaries. At the core of the Revolution was the demand for democracy, sovereignty, and independence. Because of the immediacy and obviousness of the superstructural relationships and the comparatively opaque role of the economic base, it should not surprise us that many failed to grasp the fundamental connection between economic freedom and political freedom and understood their oppression in terms of national oppression alone. An understanding of complex social relations does not arise spontaneously and has been achieved only through decades of thought, analysis, theory, debate and struggle conducted by many thinkers and activists.

But the chief architects of the Rising had a clear grasp of the complexity of these social relations, the forces ranged against the Revolution, and the need to pursue economic as well as political freedom. The writings of Connolly and Pearse and the lines from the 1916 Proclamation quoted at the beginning of this article show an understanding that a real democracy in which the people had control over all aspects of their lives, in which political and cultural independence



could be achieved and in which social structures would allow fully human lives and relationships to flourish could be achieved only by the people taking full control over the economy and all the wealth of the country.

It should also be recognised that the Proclamation of the Irish Republic drawn up by the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1867 repeatedly connected the social struggle to the political struggle, and so this was not a new idea for the IRB leaders who planned the 1916 Rising.

Democracy means that the people have real decision-making power over their own lives and all aspects of their society. This includes the economy as well as the political, social and cultural spheres. Sovereignty is the ability of a people or state to govern and make the laws within its territory; without this, no democratic decision-making is possible. Independence is the exercise of democracy and sovereignty free from outside constraint or interference—not in isolation from the wider world but acting freely within it and interacting with others on our own terms.

This was the programme of the 1916 Rising, and it is in the light of how the commemorations deal with the principles of this programme that we should understand and assess them. So far, none of the commemorative events or programmes has shown much concern with these principles. What we have instead is a struggle for ownership of the Rising and its legacy: this is primarily about legitimising institutions, organisations and political positions today and also about vindicating the past on the basis

of various political, personal, family and emotional connections and affiliations.

There is an assumption among many republicans and socialist republicans that the state and the government parties (past and present) have no interest in commemorating the Rising and that they will only do so grudgingly and under severe pressure. However, this ignores a number of historical facts and political realities. The Irish state clearly locates its foundation moment in the 1916 Rising; and, like all states, it claims legitimacy from it and wants to control public understanding of its political meaning. The precursors of the three mainstream establishment parties were all present in the GPO during the Rising, and most of them are proud of this fact. (John Bruton is a maverick on this and not representative of the majority.)

The long war in the North, the modern Troubles, is of course the elephant in the room here. The concern of the Irish state and its establishment after 1970 was how to contain and defeat the republican movement, in practice the Provisional movement. The problem, as they saw it, was that hitherto accepted nationalist understandings of the Rising and the Revolution might well be taken as an endorsement of the Provisionals, their goals, and their methods. The answer was to both undermine and suppress that nationalist understanding of Irish history; and, as the long war dragged on, this ideological struggle became increasingly bitter and disconnected from either historical perspective or

political realities. As 26-county politics shows, this bitterness continues to poison Irish politics twenty years after the second ceasefire.

As the peace was established in the North, the Southern establishment was freed of this dilemma. Garret Fitzgerald (whose parents participated in the Irish Revolution and were both in the GPO in 1916) was one of the first to reassert the validity and idealism of the Rising and reclaim the legitimacy that it bestowed.

In 2016 the dilemma for the Southern state and establishment has been how to contain the disruptive potential of the principles of the Rising for their political projects while continuing to assert ownership over it. The 1916 Rising was about taking Ireland out of the sphere of imperialist control and building an independent sovereign democracy, an Irish Republic; the project of the Irish establishment today is to claim a place in the imperialist order of the twenty-first century as (very) junior partners and to share in the spoils of its exploitation of the peoples of the world, including the Irish people. This involves membership of the EU and the euro zone; facilitating capital and the markets in overriding the democratic will of the people; support for the political and economic policies and interference of imperialism throughout the world; full acceptance and implementation of the practices and ideology of free-market capitalism; and the abandonment of even lip service to the idea of an independent, sovereign Irish democracy.

In recent years we have witnessed efforts to rehabilitate Irish involvement in the imperialist slaughter that was the First World War; to reconcile Irish nationalism and unionism without addressing the material circumstances and the political and ideological differences that have brought them into conflict; to develop a new alliance and friendship with the British monarchy and the British state while suppressing any interrogation of past and present British interference in Irish democracy; and to assert a fawning deference to the United States through a claimed “special” relationship with that country. This is the ruling class waging class struggle, and the core ideological message is intended to undermine the idea of an independent, sovereign Irish democracy and to normalise the idea of Ireland resting comfortably within the sphere of imperialism.

The first strategy of the establishment in trying to reconcile the



irreconcilable—commemorating the Rising and the struggle against imperialism while supporting an Ireland subordinated to imperialism—was a Decade of Centenaries, in which the commemoration of anti-imperialist events would be “balanced” with commemoration of pro-imperialist events. It proved impossible to make this strategy work, and nobody was satisfied, neither those who favoured anti-imperialism and the Rising nor those who preferred imperialism and the First World War. The debacle culminated in the awful “Ireland Inspires” promotional video for the official commemorations of the Rising released in November 2014.

Putting pragmatism and self-preservation above principle, the government put its preparations on hold and went into listening mode while it consulted widely about the plans of other groups and interested parties. It came back later in 2015 with a new programme, which treated the Rising in a largely positive manner and decoupled its commemoration of the Rising from the commemorations of the Battle of the Somme and other events in the imperialist war.

This pragmatic change in the state’s approach to its Decade of Centenaries is not accompanied by a change in its ideological message—on the contrary,

it has made it easier for the state to claim the principal ownership of the Rising while continuing its normalisation of imperialism and support for Ireland’s place within it. And herein lies the challenge for everyone else commemorating the Rising: what are we commemorating, and for what purpose, today? Do we share the state’s support for imperialism and its abandonment of the principle of sovereignty? Or do we stand with the Proclamation of the Republic and the vision of the Rising?

The core principles of the 1916 Rising were sovereignty, democracy, and independence, and a commemoration that is true to the goals of 1916 cannot but be anti-imperialist in nature. The various commemorative programmes are reaching their high point now as we enter March of the centenary year, with Easter just a few weeks away and Republic Day, 24 April, a month later on. We should assess what takes place primarily according to where these events and programmes stand on these principles.

There is a huge amount of pride among the citizens about the Rising: in large numbers, they regard it as their Rising and a pivotal moment in the struggle for national independence. To the extent that all the commemorations mobilise that popular sentiment among the people, this is a good thing. However, there is also a great danger that some of the programmes will point the people towards acceptance of imperialism and abandonment of the idea of sovereignty, while others will focus on the paragraph in the Proclamation guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens while ignoring the central declaration of an independent, sovereign Irish democracy.

The political and ideological thrust of the Proclamation is clear and unequivocal. Without sovereignty and independence the people cannot govern themselves and determine their own lives and the society they live in. Without sovereignty, independence and real democratic control the citizens and their Republic cannot resolve the social problems that beset them and create a good life for all. It is clear from the Proclamation and the writings of Pearse and Connolly that for them democracy meant the people having control over all aspects of society, the economy as well as politics: “all the material possessions of the nation, the nation’s soil and all its resources, all wealth and all wealth-producing

processes within the nation.” If we are to be true to this vision of a radical Irish democracy, sovereign and independent, we must address these issues.

What would a truly democratic, independent, sovereign Irish Republic look like today?

- Is membership of the EU and the euro zone compatible with sovereignty? The EU makes most of our laws, while the euro zone dictates the boundaries of economic policy.

- Do the institutions of government allow the citizens any real control over decision-making in society? Voting every few years to choose which party will govern us does not provide citizens with much democratic control.

- Is any democratic control exercised over the economy and over capital? The surrender to free markets and unimpeded capital suggests not, while the burdening of the people with the private banking and speculative debt is further evidence of the absence of any control.

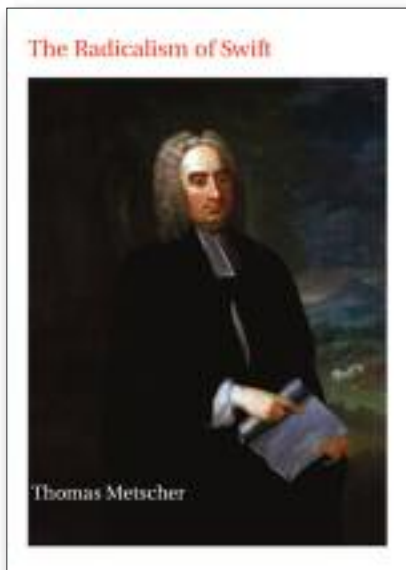
During the recent election campaign and the current manoeuvring to form a government, the abandonment by the Irish state of the principles of the Rising is obvious. The political and legal commitment of the EU to free-market capitalism, the control over interest and exchange rates exercised by the European Central Bank and the euro-zone rules on budget deficits and state debt circumscribe all policy aimed at meeting the vital needs of the people in health, housing, education, and social welfare. European Commission directives dictate policy on many fronts, notably now on water charges. Irish democracy is subordinated to rule from Brussels.

The 1916 Rising aimed to establish an independent, sovereign Irish democracy as the practical means of meeting the needs of the people and creating a decent society for all. In the centenary year of the Rising we should hold true to this vision and put these principles into our commemorative programmes and back onto the agenda of the people’s movements and the people’s struggles. Anything short of this is a step backwards from 1916 and a move away from the vision of Pearse, Connolly, and the other revolutionaries.

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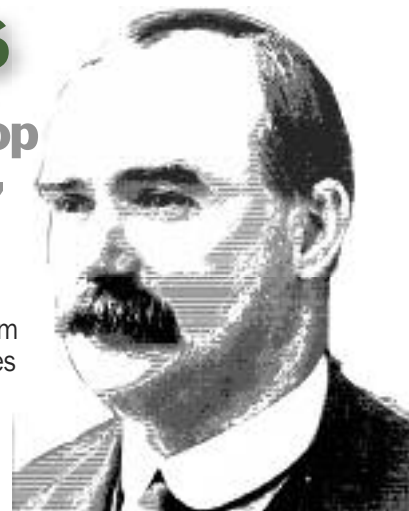
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Time to halt the drift and pull together

Tommy McKearney

BACK IN 2012, *Russia Today's* celebrity economist Max Keiser, an iconoclastic and caustic wit, commented on Ireland's economic plight. He described the Irish people as "good peasants who prefer to starve rather than refuse to pay their landlords' rent . . ."



Starting with a campaign against household charges, a very significant mobilisation of people began throughout the Republic. Thereafter the struggle against water charges energised tens of thousands of citizens, and the follow-on Right2Change initiative, in spite of difficulties, offered the vision of a possible path to progress. All of which confounded the cynical coalition partners, who tried to convince themselves that Irish working people were passive, subservient, and unwilling to protest.

The Right2Change movement alone made a meaningful impact on the political landscape of the Republic over the last few months. Elected representatives and community activists were brought together, and for the first time in many years important trade unions have become involved in the leadership of a mass social movement. The group has launched huge street demonstrations and encouraged local communities to organise at the grass roots. It has laid out an agreed set of principles, arguing for an economy more conducive to the needs of working people than the neo-liberal programme now in place. The old 2½-party system that existed since the 1920s has been undermined, and where once there was political rigidity

we now find an encouraging degree of fluidity.

Nevertheless, while there is undoubtedly a large degree of fluctuation throughout the political landscape, there is ambivalence about the direction in which the popular movement is going. In the absence of a clear and stated determination to fundamentally restructure the economy, there is a distinct possibility that the status quo will emerge relatively unchanged. New personalities may enter the political arena and some parties gain greater strength, but, unless challenged meaningfully, market economics, with the inevitable consequences for workers, will prevail.

Let's not forget that there have been large protest movements in the past, only for them to dissolve as energy drained away and momentum was lost. These failures often came after activists found themselves drawn into debilitating, not to say divisive, struggles to gain a parliamentary presence. This is not to say that popular movements should not contest elections, but it is necessary to remember the limitations of a one-dimensional parliamentary strategy.

While there is always a temptation to try building a new political movement rapidly in the midst of turbulent social

The pensions "time-bomb"

Alan Hanlon

ON 29 APRIL 2015 the Irish Independent reported that the government "wants to siphon billions in taxpayers' money into a special fund for public sector workers in a bid to avoid a 'pensions time-bomb'." This came as the then government was announcing €1½ billion in tax cuts and extra spending for its well-heeled supporters.

There were other dire warnings about the future of state pensions along the same lines. Then in January 2016 the Irish Association of Pension Funds issued a statement describing the "country's ticking pension time-bomb" as "one of the biggest crises facing Ireland." There is a clear agenda of undermining the provision of state pensions and forcing people to take out private pensions.

The "pensions time-bomb" is an alarmist scare tactic used by the pensions industry and neo-liberals to undermine and erode support for the state retirement pension. The idea behind it is that at present about five workers support one pensioner. On the grounds that people are living longer and workers are getting older, we will end up in a situation some time in the future where there are not enough workers to support those in retirement.

This is neo-liberal propaganda that is seeking to undermine the provision of state pensions and force people to take out private pensions, with the consequence of passing billions into the hands of the private insurance companies. So far the pensions industry has lost billions in value from pension funds. The burden of sustaining those pensioners who have

lost their pension funds will fall on the state, not on the pensions industry.

The private sector has been crying wolf over this so-called "time-bomb" since at least 1995, that is, more than twenty years ago. It is believed that if it is repeated often enough the lie will be believed. The Green Paper on Pensions (2007) regurgitated the myth on behalf of the pensions industry. It predicted that the population over sixty-five will have tripled by 2060, according to 2006 figures, and the pension support ratio (the number of workers supporting a pensioner) will have decreased from 5.6 in 2006 to 1.8 in 2060.

Therefore, the idea goes, the burden of taxation on the worker will be unsustainable, and so everyone should take out a private pension. The failure to increase state retirement pensions as part of the campaign of "austerity"

conditions, this often leads to confusion and disillusionment. Lessons about marrying in haste and repenting at leisure can be applied to politics as well as matrimony—or, as Michael McGahey, vice-president of the National Union of Mineworkers during the 1984–85 miners' strike in Britain, once cautioned his friends, "Don't mistake a mass meeting for a mass movement."

In spite of the undeniable progress made in developing the type of progressive mass movement necessary to deliver change, the general election results have revealed problems. As is often the case with broadly based alliances brought together on single issues, differences cannot be concealed indefinitely and will come eventually to the surface. This is now beginning to affect the broad popular movement against austerity.

There are, of course, the expected disagreements over tactics and strategy. Ultimately, though, the real differences centre on political analysis and how groups relate to and deal with the crucial issues of class, capitalism, and imperialism. Certain issues cannot be fudged, such as how a movement or party relates to the European Union, to NATO, or the IMF. Some believe, for example, that the EU can be reformed and democratised, thinking that there exists the possibility of a kinder, gentler form of capitalism, apparently unaware that the EU Council of Ministers acts as a committee for managing the common

affairs of the whole European ruling class.

These are vital issues that determine how a political movement will deal with matters of vital interest to working people. Left unresolved, they will inevitably produce the type of debacle and setback brought about by SYRIZA last year as it went from posturing to capitulation in a matter of days.

In the final analysis, creating the type of coherent and unified movement capable of bringing about a fundamental change in society requires time and effort. A consensus has to be built up among the participating activists on an agreed programme and thereafter the need for an accord on tactics and strategy. Moreover, and just as important, there has to be a continuous engagement with working people—firstly to highlight and expose inadequacies in the existing system and secondly to convince a critical proportion of the population that not only is the status quo incapable of reform but that a viable alternative exists.

There is little new in this observation. It is only necessary, for example, to reflect on the gestation of the revolutionary period in the Ireland of the early twentieth century. The events of the decade 1913–1923 did not spring from a void or happen overnight. Diverse political, social, economic and cultural currents with their origins in the previous decades converged to create

the environment that give rise to the revolutionary events. More ominously, the failure or inability of the organised working class to take the lead during that period led to the installation of a series of deeply conservative governments ever since.

Whatever difficulties exist in relation to the development of a popular movement dedicated to building a workers' republic, there remains encouraging evidence of a desire to do so. Several candidates from different parties endorsed the need for such a movement before and during the election campaign. The sizeable street protests and refusal to pay water taxes indicate the potential support for a new departure. What has to take place now is the extensive and intensive round of discussion and debate that will produce a clear programme and a consensus about how to achieve it.

The Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum offers one such model for how a constructive round of discussion might occur. The Forum doesn't claim a monopoly over discussion or debate, or indeed claim possession of a unique key for progress: it does, nevertheless, illustrate a path forward and simultaneously challenges socialists and republicans to either engage or demonstrate an alternative.

There always comes a time to halt the drift and pull together; and with current developments, that time is

was both a stealth tax and part of the programme of undermining its value.

In 2014 the CEO of Mercer, Tom Geraghty, was making similar dire warnings about the time-bomb, predicting that 1 in 5 thirty-year-olds would live to the age of one hundred and there would be only two workers for every pensioner, compared with five in 2014. (Needless to say, Geraghty made no mention of the fact that workers at present with no private pensions are supporting private-sector pensions.) According to Geraghty, this showed the "urgency for the Government to continue to push ahead with its planned introduction of auto-enrolment and ultimately mandatory pension saving."

Most people think they are paying towards their pensions when they pay PRSI. However, no mention of this by Geraghty.

More than half of all European occupational pension schemes are domiciled in Ireland, so there is a huge

interest by the pensions industry in having appropriate legislation at both the EU and the national level. Brian Hayes, a Fine Gael member of the EU Parliament, leads the negotiations on the Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision (IORP II) Directive. In Ireland 41 per cent of the working population have a private pension in addition to the state pension. Hayes wants this to change so that everyone within the EU has a private pension. He also wants to "free up" pension funds in the area of investment. Barriers that at present restrict such funds, such as ensuring that a scheme is fully funded, would be removed.

The pensions industry and the Green Paper all assume that the population will follow a linear path to a particular level and age distribution in accordance with current data. No account is taken of emigration resulting from financial crises in capitalism, or even refugees fleeing imperialist war zones. The chaos caused by capitalism

and by imperialist wars is so unpredictable that it is impossible to say what will happen next week, let alone ten or twenty years from now.

No account is taken of alternative data. The EU statistics agency, Eurostat, predicted that the population of the 26 Counties in 2060 would be 6.7 million (at present 4.6 million), with a pension support ratio of 10 for 4, i.e. the same as the present one.

The problem for the pensions industry is that the dire predictions in relation to the state pension apply equally to private pensions. At present everyone without a private pension supports the funding of private-sector pensions through the tax system. The OECD advocated reducing tax relief, but the Fine Gael and Labour Party government, in league with the pensions industry, refused to remove this stealth tax. In the long run, private-sector pensions are both inefficient and unsustainable.

The privatisation agenda

When abnormal becomes normal

Jimmy Doran

THE CPI uses the slogan “Irish Water, open your eyes, they just want to privatise” on the Right2Water marches. Well, we have to open our eyes to a lot more, as corporations are privatising everything—some more obvious than others, but they are creating income streams everywhere.

Banks are now pushing the “cashless society” agenda. It may sound abnormal at the moment, but they are well on the way to making it normal. When they achieve this the benefits to banking will be serious. Every time you buy something there will be a transaction fee. Some banks will have a set fee, for others it will be a percentage of the transaction.

Banks will also, in their quest to bring in a cashless society, charge you for lodging cash in your bank account. In the same way it will come to the stage that it will be of no benefit to keep money or to save money in a bank, as there will be negative interest

rates, which will lead to more people being encouraged by financial institutions to invest in their various investment schemes to make more money.

The banks never lose in these investment schemes: the risk is always with the investor.

Another way that corporations are creating income streams is consumerism. At one time, when people wanted to do a bit of exercise they went for a walk, a run, or a swim. The way consumerism has gone in western “civilised society,” to go for a run you have to have a certain brand of running gear, special footwear, an app for your smartphone, and a sweat band.

Then of course you need water; so you buy a bottle of water. Remember how everybody thought it was hilarious on the Late Late Show when the guy from Ballygowan said he was going to bottle water and sell it! See what I mean about strange things becoming normal?

You could of course use tap water, but then you would have to put that

into a special bottle that clips to your special belt for your run. Everything is fair game for corporations. That’s just a simple run; there is a whole different world out there if you go down the route of gym membership and personal trainers.

Did I mention that all this paraphernalia carries corporations’ logos, so you are advertising them as well? Normal or abnormal?

So that is a simple run. There are many similar examples of how consumerism has gone mad. Privatisation is what Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil and their friends in big business are all about. If they get their way they will do the same with the health service, education system, transport, and so on. It will become normal to have to pay for private health and education. They’re half way there with fees for visits to hospitals, fees for universities and apprenticeships, prescription charges, voluntary contributions for schools, and so on

These are all accepted as normal now. It’s time we opened our eyes!

Cuban congress aims to perfect socialism

Ernesto Vera, Prensa Latina

BETWEEN 16 and 18 April this year the Cuban Communist Party was engrossed in the continuous assessment of its programme. Following an extensive popular consultation process, the one thousand delegates elected this time around will evaluate the implementation of the Economic and Social Guidelines of the Party and the Revolution, approved at the First Conference of the Cuban Communist Party five years ago.

The last congress, held in 2011, adopted measures to guarantee the deepening, sustainability and prosperity of the system for development chosen by Cubans more than fifty years ago.

Although every economic and social sector, including the non-state sector, will be represented, on this occasion delegates for agriculture will account for a majority of the thousand

participating. Indeed the essential requisites of the selection process ensure that all the country’s communist activists are represented, and that participation increasingly reflects respective areas of origin.

Since 1 March last year delegates have organised meetings to consult on documents for consideration at the party’s highest forum, to be held at the Havana Convention Centre.

Deputies of the National People’s Power Assembly (parliament), union leaders, young people, representatives of social and mass organisations and leaders of administrative and other institutions will participate in these debates.

In June 2015 all PCC cells began to nominate delegate candidates, and it is from within these same structures that propositions are first conceived. Later, party municipal committees become responsible for the selection of a Candidate Commission to consider those nominated and to seek the views of their fellow-workers.

As a result of this process, 43 per

cent of delegates are women and 84 per cent are university graduates. Their average age is 48, and 55 are less than 35 years old.

This selection phase followed workplace meetings and municipal, district and provincial party structured elections between September and December of last year.

With the participation of 1½ million people—not all of them party activists—these meetings made a general evaluation of compliance with the Guidelines and the objectives approved at the PCC’s First Conference. They also looked at work with the younger generation and the confronting of manifestations of subversion and other negative tendencies, such as corruption, illegalities, and social indiscipline.

The examination of these issues, with a focus on the responsibility of the party, will undoubtedly form part of the forthcoming Congress.

(Translation from Spanish by Seán Joseph Clancy)

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