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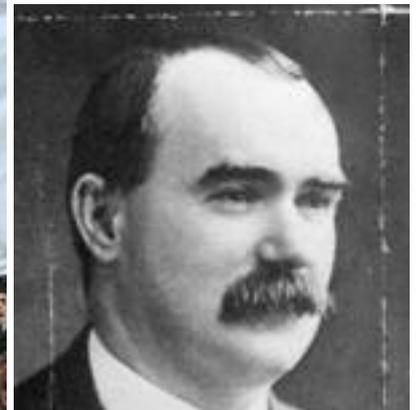
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"Our curse is our belief in our weakness. We are not weak, we are strong."

James Connolly

(Irish Worker, 30 August 1914)

Public housing – not *social* housing

As a solution to the housing, rent and homelessness crisis we need a massive public housing plan, with both new construction and the conversion of NAMA property into public housing argues **Nicola Lawlor** Page 2

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HOUSING

THE ADVANTAGES of public housing to working people are many. It would not just resolve the present crisis—a national emergency on any sober reflection—but also strengthen communities and the working class.



“Social housing” is defined generally as housing provided by government agencies or non-profit organisations for people on low incomes or with particular needs. In Ireland it is specifically defined by the state as housing provided by a local authority or a housing association to people who cannot afford housing from their own resources.

Property rented or leased from the private sector by local authorities or voluntary housing bodies is now also included in Ireland’s social housing sector. So, in essence, the Irish definition of social housing allows a private-sector space, and can create a dependence by the state on the private sector, as the state ultimately doesn’t own the houses. This creates vulnerability.

Unlike the Continent, Ireland’s renting from private landlords was seen as short-term leases with no long-term rights for tenants, mainly for students, and entirely at the discretion of the landlord. Rented accommodation was almost entirely furnished accommodation, and usually of a very low standard.

While this has changed in recent times, rented accommodation still carries this hostile attitude socially. And while there has been recent legislation guaranteeing some rights to tenants, the law is heavily loaded in favour of landlords. Throughout the EU the rights of tenants who previously enjoyed protection have been deregulated, with the “market” deciding the availability and rights of tenants.

Social housing is specifically aimed at low-income people or those who cannot afford it through the “normal” market mechanisms. Public housing, on the other hand, is housing owned by the state and available for rent. It can be aimed at all and should be made available to all as a right. Any person should have the right and choice to rent from the state in a long-term and secure way if they do not wish to become indebted to, and live at the mercy of, the banks and the finance industry.

The advantages of public housing include:

- Quality homes are made available for rent from the state in a long-term and secure way
- Housing is de-financialised
- It is provided as a right for all and as an option for all
- It reduces workers’ dependence on banks and lenders
- It reduces household indebtedness, leading to an increase in workers’ militancy and industrial action
- There is less fear or risk of eviction for working people and their families.

These are just some of the advantages of a public housing solution. While costly to the state, it is—as right2change recently stated—a political choice, and the right political choice for working people.

Appollo House A housing crisis by design



THERE ARE now 6,847 people without a home in Ireland. Nearly 2,500 of these are children. Furthermore, there are 105,603 people in arrears with their mortgage and who are in danger of losing their home.

Meanwhile rents are on course to increase by 25 per cent over the next two years, with some tenants experiencing increases of up to 60 per cent.

As the Government pays lip service to the crisis, it continues to support landlords and to inflame the housing problem. In the last budget the Government increased the amount of tax allowance landlords can receive, from 75 per cent of their mortgage on rental properties to 85 per cent, with the intention of raising it to the pre-crash rate of 100 per cent.

The latest package offered by the Government included a guaranteed 4 per cent increase to landlords for each of the next four years—at a time when inflation is running at 0.10 per cent. Meanwhile NAMA holds a huge portfolio of unoccupied dwellings. According to Focus Ireland, the dwellings held by NAMA could house more than half of those homeless.

Despite the plea of poverty from landlords, and the alleged flight from the sector, CSO figures show that the number of private rented properties in Dublin has increased by 43,000 and outside Dublin by 24,000. There has been a 27 per cent increase since 2011 in the number of landlords with twenty or more tenancies. Hardly a flight from the market!

There are 198,358 empty dwellings in the Republic—more than enough to accommodate everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness. The state, on the other hand, has disinvested from public housing, opting instead for what is in effect the privatisation of public housing.

Between 2008 and 2012 state investment in public housing was cut by more than 70 per cent, a cut that has never been reversed. On top of this the minister for social protection, Joan Burton (Labour), capped the amount of rent support to those on social welfare. Burton disparaged the warning of housing organisations that this would

Frustrated at the failure of governments to tackle the problem of homelessness, a number of organisations under the umbrella of Home Sweet Home, including the Irish Housing Network, trade unions, and artists and musicians, have taken on the Government in an organised act of civil disobedience.

Eoghan M. Ó Néill
reports.





lead to further homelessness, which raises questions about the Government's agenda in regard to public housing.

The housing crisis needs to be seen in the context of what is happening internationally. In 2005 the United Nations estimated that more than 100 million people were homeless; in 2015 Habitat for Humanity estimated that this had jumped to more than 1.6 billion.

What is more interesting is what is happening in the imperialist centre. Figures published by Habitat for Humanity show an increase in homelessness throughout the imperialist world.

The figures in the table are conservative, because of the differences in how different states measure homelessness. However, the trend is upwards, reflecting the neo-liberal agenda implemented since the 2008 crisis.

Successive Irish governments since the 2008 crash have been actively encouraging transnational investment in the Irish housing rental market. This has included a range of tax incentives to real-estate investment trusts (REITs). In addition to the tax incentives the state

has had to allow the increase in rents in order to make the potential profits attractive to REITs. This meant disinvestment in public housing, thereby increasing the demand for private rental houses. It also explains the Government's mantra of not introducing rent regulation—a big disincentive to REITs.

In April this year the minister for finance, Michael Noonan, stated in relation to this favourable tax regime:

This intervention has been successful in encouraging large-scale investment into the commercial and residential property markets. There are currently three REITs operating in Ireland . . . [and] it is estimated that the market capitalisation of the three REITs is now approximately €2.3 billion.

Irish Residential Properties, which is a subsidiary of the Canadian group CAPREIT, took in a net income of €5½ million between July and September 2016—an increase of 53 per cent on previous months. The Price Waterhouse report *Europe, 2017: Emerging Trends in Real Estate* demonstrates how the Government has been attracting international capital into the Irish housing market.

One of the biggest changes is the way that residential is now viewed by institutional investors and their desire to have at least part of their portfolio in this sector. In addition to established multi-family markets in Germany, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, an institutionally backed build-to-rent, or private rented sector (PRS), is beginning in Ireland.

What is happening in Ireland and in the rest of the world is a deliberate policy of reducing public housing and enlarging the private housing sector. This explains why the Government failed to list public housing as a protected sector within CETA. It explains why the Government has failed to invest in public housing, and has sought to inflate the private rental sector through increasing rents, tax subsidies, and other loopholes.

The housing crisis in Ireland is part of the global crisis of capitalism. **The actions of those involved in Apollo House have revealed the inability of the Government to deal with issues such as homelessness.**

It also demonstrates the comprador nature of the Irish government, whose actions are in the interests of global monopoly capital rather than those of its own people.

Monopoly capital, the budget, and housing in Dublin

A SMALL NUMBER of builders and developers own the land zoned for housing around Dublin. They are the suppliers of housing, and they have control over supply. As monopolists or semi-monopolists they have a vested interest in the high and rising prices for new houses. If prices rise, their profits rise.

The new scheme introduced by the Government gives a 5 per cent rebate of tax, up to €20,000, to spend on new houses priced up to €400,000 and €20,000 on new houses priced between €400,000 and €600,000.

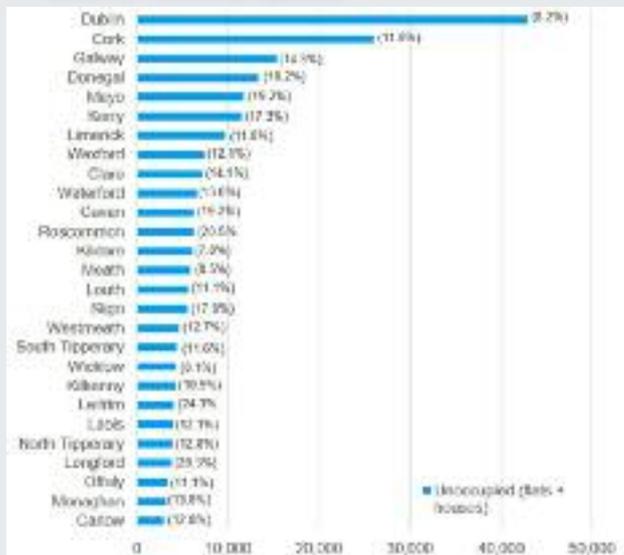
This will bring more people into the market, as it will increase people's ability to get the 20 per cent deposit required by the Central Bank. So demand will go up. If supply were to rise by the same amount, prices would remain the same.

But the monopolist suppliers—the developers and builders—want increased prices. So the increase in demand will not be matched by a similar increase in supply, and prices will rise because of the scheme.

In a similar scheme in 1997, when a grant of €1,000 was given to buyers, builders increased their prices by €1,000. This new scheme will cause an increase in the size of mortgages and mortgage repayments. So in the long run buyers may be worse off. It is a subsidy to monopoly.

The only real solution is a massive public house-building programme run and controlled by local councils or by a specialised publicly owned and controlled house-building company.

Breakdown of the number of vacant homes by county, excluding holiday homes
Source: Housing Agency



| Country | Homelessness | Year |
|------------------------|--------------|------|
| Britain | 0.2% | 2012 |
| France | 0.21% | 2012 |
| Germany | 0.47% | 2016 |
| Netherlands | 0.19% | 2015 |
| Czech Republic | 0.28% | 2014 |
| Croatia | 0.23% | 2015 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 3.73% | 2010 |
| Greece | 0.18% | 2013 |
| United States | 0.18% | 2015 |
| Australia | 0.43% | 2012 |

Soviet Union – a loss to peoples everywhere

This year, workers and people all over the world will celebrate and look back to the great Russian Revolution of 1917, the victory of the Bolshevik Revolution, and the creation of a people's socialist state.

Nicola Lawlor reports



SOCIALIST VOICE will no doubt publish many articles analysing the USSR and socialism more generally in the twentieth century, while the mainstream media will roll out a host of politically motivated anti-communists, concentrating on some real faults and failings but more often than not just spreading outright lies.

But in some ways we have to start the year by beginning at the end of its existence: at the victory of the counter-revolution. On 25 December 1991 President Gorbachev announced his resignation and essentially the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a process that had been under way for some time, arguably for decades. So not only is this year the 100th anniversary of the birth of the socialist state but it is also the 25th anniversary of its dissolution and counter-revolution.

And what a 75 years it had!

The Soviet Union's contribution to progress is momentous, its achievements many. While this will no doubt be a feature of more detailed articles, let us just think for a moment about these victories: the first country to achieve the full literacy of all its people; free and universal education and health systems; life expectancy doubled and infant mortality reduced to one-ninth of what it was; the first state to give full equality to women, both formally and in reality; the electrification of a massive multi-ethnic state; the defeat of Germany in the Second World War and saving Europe from Nazism; sending the first satellite and the first person into space.

A lot more could be said. And all this was achieved under both hot and cold attacks from imperialism.

So what went wrong? How did this all fall apart?

The short answer is that the reforms introduced by Gorbachev unleashed class forces, allied to American and European capital, that took advantage of national and ethnic differences to tear the state apart, for their own gain. But how and why this happened requires a longer, more complex answer.

Over the recent Christmas period Conor O'Clery of the *Irish Times* wrote of the hours after the Gorbachev announcement:

Others were seeking to exploit the chaos. The same afternoon, in a dacha in Vedentsovo, a region outside Moscow, 30 or so tattooed men were completing the task of dividing the prostrate USSR into regions of influence. They were leaders of Vorovskoy Mir (Thieves'



World), professional criminals anticipating vast profits from the imminent sell-off of state assets.

This class of capitalists had already existed in the Soviet Union; and that is the key to understanding the victory of the counter-revolution. A counter-revolutionary class existed—and not only existed but occupied leading and powerful positions within both the party and the state apparatus.

The best available book on this is Roger Keeran and Thomas Kenny's *Socialism Betrayed*. (An interview with Thomas Kenny is available at <http://politiceconomy.ie/?p=908>.)

In essence, they see the right wing of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union having won leadership of the party and the state through the policies of Nikita Khrushchev and through decades of the “reforms” and changes that were allowed, even encouraged, including an illegal black market (one that was virtually wiped out by Stalin) allowed to grow and develop. This gave rise to an increasingly powerful capitalist class, which was essentially legalised and then established as the ruling class through the Gorbachev reforms and later the programmes of privatisation introduced by the International Monetary Fund and the European Bank for Development.

The counter-revolution was completed.

Understanding this and how this happened will make the construction of socialism in this century better and stronger. Why did the CPSU become virtually inseparable from the state? What were the consequences of this merger or blurring of lines? What

happened to internal party education? How did the party become so far removed from ordinary citizens? How did the right wing win? And where was the opposition to Khrushchev and, later, Gorbachev?

These are all important questions to ask and then try to answer. But it seems a further reminder that there is no other capitalism, no nicer, more friendly social-democratic version, than monopoly capitalism.

There is no going back to competitive capitalism; there is no de-financialising the system; there is no better “third way”: there is just monopoly capitalism, in all its brutality, or else the difficult, contradictory task of building socialism out of its ruins.

The right wing, the social-democratic political wing, of the CPSU unleashed monopoly capitalism in Russia, taking on a gangster-capitalist form, given its conditions; but that is the reality of monopoly capitalism. And in doing this their achievement is the weakening of workers all over the world and the strengthening of this rotten system.

The loss of this great state was enormous. Telesur produced an excellent short video over the Christmas period on this subject, available at www.facebook.com/telesurenglish/?fref=ts; and a few facts from this are telling.

Within two years, 15,000 state companies—that is, the citizens’ wealth—were privatised, at a small fraction of their value, immediately turning a small number of gangsters into billionaire thieves.

Today 110 individuals control 35 per

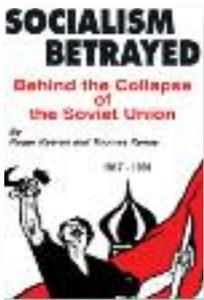
cent of Russia’s wealth. The country’s GDP dropped by more than 40 per cent in four years. Money was moved offshore, and tax avoidance was rampant—all done with the co-operation of global banks and accountancy firms.

It’s no surprise, then, that surveys and opinion polls in Russia (and eastern Europe) increasingly point to a desire to return to socialism, and an appreciation that life under socialism was better than life under monopoly capitalism.

Rarely talked about here in Ireland or elsewhere in Europe was the reality that the existence of socialism was the bulwark upon which the European “social model” existed. This was the real-life threat to capital everywhere. It strengthened workers’ and people’s movements, materially but also ideologically, all over the world. Capital compromised to avoid socialism.

No such threat exists today on this scale, and so capital is free to operate more as it wishes. Workers’ rights and employment conditions are attacked everywhere. The environment is increasingly commodified and sucked into the realm of capital, with no consideration for its reproduction and consequently for the reproduction of humanity.

Socialism in the twentieth century had many faults. Serious mistakes were made. People died unnecessarily. But its contribution to humanity and progress is unmatched, and its loss has set our struggle back significantly. Those who fail to recognise this will repeat again and again the mistakes of social democracy, strengthening the very system that is killing us.



Socialism betrayed: behind the collapse of the Soviet Union. Roger Keeran, Thomas Kenny. International Publishers, 2004



DEMOCRACY AND STRUGGLE

Make 2017 a year of hope, a year of resistance!

Eugene McCartan

ARE WE Now at the beginning of a growing and deepening political crisis of the system? There are growing signs that the old order is under increased strains and pressures as working people feel the impact of austerity and a growing feeling that there is no end in sight.

People's living standards have gone backwards, personal debt has grown, work is being speeded up, young people increasingly find themselves locked in dead-end, precarious employment. People are working harder and longer, pensions are in decline, there is a growing number of cases of pension theft by corporate raiders, and the age of retirement is on the way up. Working life is becoming harder and harder and is taking a heavy toll.

The lives of working people never appear on our television screens, and their difficulties find little coverage in the mass media. Yet resistance is growing, both in Ireland and throughout the European Union. That resistance is expressed in industrial struggles and resistance as well as politically through the ballot box.

People are increasingly disillusioned with the daily diet of non-news and fake news churned out by RTE and the

corporate media, most of which are owned and controlled by a few individuals. The world presented on our television screens and through the newspapers appears to be stumbling from one political crisis to another, crises supposedly created either by irresponsible voters within the British state voting to leave the EU or "deplorables" who voted for Trump.

The same shallow analysis applies to developments throughout the EU, where people are either infected by anti-liberal ideas or vote for populist right-wing parties led by demagogues. The perpetual wars of the United States and its allies are waged for "humanitarian" purposes, and the war propaganda is repeated as "news."

Working people throughout Europe have responded to the pressures on them and in their experience of the economic crisis—and have reacted in different, even contradictory, ways, voting to the left or the right of the established parties. Millions have voted for SYRIZA in Greece, for Podemos in Spain, for Corbyn in Britain, or for the Five Star Movement in Italy, in search of a left alternative.

In France we can see the rise of Marine Le Pen and the growth in the forces of the right in the Netherlands, Austria, Hungary, Germany, and elsewhere, while in the United States

millions of workers, disillusioned with the Democratic Party and its failed and broken promises and experiencing their living standards rapidly declining, plumped for Trump, more out of desperation than anything else.

The system is facing a deepening crisis of disillusionment among growing sections of society, not only among workers but also among small business owners and growing sections of the middle and professional classes, who have seen their interests and needs being sacrificed. The system was acceptable so long as someone else was paying the price. As the crisis deepens, wider sections of society are feeling that their material position is increasingly precarious.

Into this confused swamp appear forces that articulate the deep frustrations and alienation felt by working people, small business owners, and the lower professional elements, presenting themselves as both anti-establishment and pro-establishment at the same time. None of the forces that claim to speak for the people—not Trump, Farage, nor Le Pen—have expressed any anti-capitalist analysis of the problems the people face as problems of the system.

For decades, relative class peace in the developed capitalist states was bought by the strength of organised workers, winning concessions and small advances, coupled with the existence of the socialist bloc of countries, in particular the Soviet Union. Socialist-democratic ideas and values (Socialist

An impediment to capitalism

Eoghan M. Ó Néill

"The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."

MARX WROTE these words in the Communist Manifesto in 1848 and in so doing accurately described the role of capitalist liberal government. Over a century and a half later, some argue that we have moved on and that Marx's description is no longer relevant. After all, we now have an almost universal franchise. We have a multi-party system, from which we elect a "representative" government, which operates "in the interests of the nation."

But form is not the same as substance. As the dynamics of capitalism have driven changes in the form of production without altering the exploitative nature of capitalism, so too have these same dynamics changed the form of the state while continuing to reflect the interests of the capitalist class.

The universal franchise was not a natural development within capitalism but was something that was hard fought for by the working class, and one that the bourgeoisie reluctantly conceded. We may choose parties, but we have no say over policies. Democracy ends at the ballot box.

Just as the process of production remains in flux, so too has the form of the state, which must remain in keeping with the needs of the capitalist class. Despite the myth, the capitalist class is no longer made up of individual industrialists, struggling in competition. The capitalist class is now transnational corporations, with monopolistic control, led and controlled by large block votes and management teams rather than individual shareholders.

Disguise it as best they may, the power of national governments has waned and is under continuing pressure

to withdraw from the economic arena. The continuing crisis of capitalism has accelerated the dynamics of globalisation. In turn, the national management of economies is being restructured to reflect the material conditions of a globalised economy. The contradiction between democracy and capitalist accumulation can no longer hold.

The impact of this global capitalist transformation has thrown light on the precariousness of liberal social democracy, particularly so here in Ireland. The Irish state has been hit by a triple whammy. Firstly there is the continuing colonial relationship with Britain. British partition of Ireland and its continued control of the north-eastern counties has distorted the economic development of both the Republic and the northern statelet.

Historically, industrial development in what is now the Republic was constrained by British imperialism, even after national liberation. Partition and the

and Labour Parties) found fertile ground in societies where the hard edge of capitalism appeared to be smoothed over and gains made.

The same parties accepted and even implemented the colonial and neo-colonial super-exploitation of the global south, which made these concessions possible. Even corporations willingly put on the veneer of presenting their “charters of corporate responsibility.”

This contributed to a weakening and blurring of class understanding. If this were not the case, the ideas of the ruling ideas would not be as strong as they are among a very significant portion of the population.

Working people experienced a major crash of the system in 2007–08. The crisis was not just a financial one but was combined with a slump in production and an over-accumulation of capital: too much money and insufficient avenues for productive investment and instead further wasteful financial speculation. Consumption was fuelled by unsustainable personal debt.

The crisis was not a one-off but rather is just one more crisis within a system prone to crises, which are becoming ever more frequent and profound. Even before the crash, people throughout the capitalist world were experiencing austerity and savage attacks on their wages and conditions and on welfare benefits.

In the more developed capitalist societies, thanks to the historical legacy of savage anti-communism, illusions and

shallow anti-establishment rhetoric held sway, fostered by social democracy and liberalism, as well as the state itself promoting the idea that there was simply no alternative to capitalism but capitalism. Individual rights were promoted as superior to collective rights.

These and other factors contributed to the fragmentation of organised politics and the growing fragmentation of society, politics being reduced to a matter of identity politics or single issues and most importantly the constant refrain that our societies had passed beyond class.

Trade unions were a particular target. Always under attack both from within and externally, they became just another “service” for workers to avail of if they so wished, not an instrument with which to organise, mobilise and harness the combined strength of workers, to articulate a different understanding of how a better society could be organised.

Membership declined, resulting in a decline in influence, coupled with the de-industrialisation and the shipping abroad by monopoly capitalism of millions of jobs to low-wage and heavily exploited work forces in the global south, as well as China, together with the victory of the counter-revolution in the Soviet Union. (Socialism did not collapse: it was overthrown from within.)

If the left is to advance and give expression to the concerns of working people we need to seek to present a way forward that challenges the pillars holding up the system. Within the EU this will require the left to abandon the illusion

separation of the more industrialised north east continued to negatively affect the economy of the emerging Republic. In the north-east, economic development remained subject to British control and interests. It was the British state that decided on the destruction of the industrial base in the north-east of Ireland, not the people of the north-east, nor the people of Ireland as a whole.

Secondly, the Irish state’s membership of the EU has brought a loss of economic and political sovereignty. EU membership brought with it the surrender of control over fisheries and agriculture, the loss of budgetary control, loss of control over competition, loss of control over the raising of state borrowing, and the surrender of control over negotiations on international trade agreements. Furthermore, the Republic is coming under extensive pressure to surrender control of some of its tax policies. Ireland was also bullied into accepting the lion’s share of private debt from European banks.

Thirdly, there is the power of American transnational corporations, which are demanding the surrender of natural resources, such as gas and oil, and which wish to introduce fracking into Ireland. Meanwhile they continue to move production processes out of Ireland, leaving only shell companies, which act as a conduit for the repatriation of global profits for the purpose of tax avoidance.

Transnational corporations also use Irish financial services to move the criminal proceeds from international tax evasion and corruption. They determine the tax status of their subsidiaries in Ireland, and also determine the actual rate of corporation tax they pay. These corporations have also sought to constrain the struggle for trade union recognition, have supported anti-union laws, and have increased the precariousness of employment.

As capitalists seek to address the continuing crisis within capitalism by means of a globalised economy,

that the EU can be reformed from within and instead to confront the very nature of the EU itself and the corporate interests that it serves.

Here in Ireland we need a strategy that can offer a way forward, a strategy that combines extra-parliamentary struggles (primarily) and electoral campaigns. Having merely an electoral strategy and not a clear political programme for building the people’s strength can only end in failure.

The water charges campaign and the housing campaign show the possibility of advance: that people can organise and mobilise to defend their interests. Both these movements have caused serious worries to the establishment, and have given confidence to working people.

The CPI believes that we need a transformative strategy that will strengthen the power of labour (workers) and weaken the power of capital (imperialism), an all-Ireland strategy in both form and content, a strategy based on the empowerment of workers that is both profoundly democratic and environmentally and economically sustainable.

We have reached the point where capitalism and imperialism are now the major obstacle to human survival itself. Socialist and anti-imperialist forces have to overcome their disorganisation and confusion if they are to present a credible programme for change to working people, to chart a way out of the crisis facing humanity—to confront not just the crisis of capitalism but capitalism itself.

impediments to that process, such as national sovereignty, must be reduced if not fully removed. States will be compelled to open up the public sector to privatisation as capitalism demands new markets. Governments must surrender control over economic, environmental and industrial relations legislation to transnational corporations, which will design and vet such legislation.

Despite the franchise, we have no control over economic affairs, and never had. The state may allow us to decide on the voting age of the electorate but will not allow us any say on important international trade agreements.

The Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly cannot be described as sovereign. The peripheral states of the EU, Ireland included, cannot even claim to be managers of their own economies. They have been reduced to nodes in globalised supply and value chains. They have been reduced to the status of comprador, answerable not to their own people but to their imperial masters.



More than an energy crisis

Tommy McKearney

THE POLITICAL crisis enveloping the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive is the result not only of an ill-designed and poorly administered grant for renewable energy but the inevitable product of a failing political entity.



This “cash for ash” scandal, as it is called, is the latest in a series of questionable projects and practices that go beyond merely undermining confidence in the North’s institutions. What the fiasco surrounding the renewable heating incentive (RHI) demonstrates is that the Six-County state is more an arrangement than an administration. It is an arrangement that depends for its survival on a form of sectarian clientelism, profoundly inimical to the well-being of working-class people.

In a society where conventional class politics have been ruthlessly curtailed through the cultivation of sectarian politics, there is a long history of rewarding important sections of the community from the public purse. Since the foundation of the northern state, government contracts were directed towards certain industries, construction projects were awarded to favoured companies, and some farmers benefited disproportionately from exchequer largesse.

There was also a degree of subtlety to this that may surprise many outsiders. In the days before the civil rights movement James Craig and his successors bought the Catholic hierarchy’s acquiescence by granting them control of their congregation’s education, a measure that simultaneously increased clerical

influence through their power to award school-building contracts.

Since the Belfast Agreement this previously informal understanding has in effect been formalised into a designated structure that recognises and accommodates sectarianism rather than replacing it. As a consequence, political advantage accrues to those who are seen to provide best for their own supporters. This has led in turn to a series of squalid deals that have involved, among others, the dubious sale of NAMA property and the provision of a controversial £80 million social investment fund that in effect is controlled by the ruling DUP-Sinn Féin coalition as well as the now infamous RHI scheme.¹

Exacerbating this clearly unhealthy situation is the fact that under Assembly rules and procedures it is virtually impossible either to prevent unregulated practices happening or to punish those who benefit from the flawed system. Any party commanding 30 votes (the DUP has 38) can issue what is known as a petition of concern, preventing any piece of legislation being enacted or criticism recorded. This device has been used 115 times in the past five years and ensures that the DUP, in particular, is immune to censure.

As the RHI scheme was designed to encourage businesses and other non-

Father Marx and the 8th amendment

Dan Taraghan

A “Code of Law is the blunt, unmitigated, unadulterated expression of the domination of a class.” (Frederick Engels to Conrad Schmidt, 1890.)

THE DRIVE for abortion legislation in Ireland originated in the United States. American capitalists have an enormous influence in Ireland.

Paul Marx (1920–2010) was 15th in a family of 17 children from

Minnesota. He opposed all forms of contraception. He founded Human Life International and established “pro-life” organisations among middle-class Catholics in the ninety countries he visited.

In the early 1970s he toured Ireland, visiting schools—mainly girls’ schools—with what he claimed was a foetus in a jar. It was probably a plastic doll; it looked like a baby, and the idea was to frighten schoolchildren into opposing abortion. There was no interference by the Gardaí or the state to check whether there was a foetus. Contrast this with the actions of the attorney-general in the X Case and other cases of crimes against children.

Nor was there any opposition to the manner in which Marx was allowed to groom children. In fact the bullying and intimidation had the widespread support of the hierarchy at the time.

The case of Roe v. Wade (1973) in the United States was the catalyst for the right wing in Ireland to seek an

amendment to the Constitution of Ireland in relation to abortion. The Supreme Court in the United States essentially granted the right to abortion, even though the right was not expressly mentioned in the constitution. As a direct reaction, the Irish right wing, inspired by Father Marx, decided that they needed to stop a similar development here by inserting a specific amendment to the Constitution forbidding abortion.

The 8th amendment was an attempt to rewrite the Roe v. Wade judgement. An important aspect of Roe v. Wade had been a consideration of when the foetus could live outside the womb. Hence in the Irish amendment there is a reference to the “unborn,” so that the foetus would be protected regardless of viability.

The amendment was an attempt by a right-wing conservative bourgeoisie, headed by lawyers, doctors, and academics, to impose an idealistic view of Irish society on the Constitution

domestic users to move from using fossil fuels to renewable heating systems, we can be sure that poor pensioners, single mothers and just-about-managing families will not feature among the beneficiaries; and this fact takes us to the heart of the matter. This scheme was seen by several of the Stormont political parties as a means by which they could win favour with the small and medium business community. That they were doing so by what amounted to, at best, sharp practice was seen simply as how the game is played through the judicious distribution of grace and favour.

However, while the DUP in general and its leader in particular cannot escape responsibility for their part in this latest debacle, other parties in the Assembly have questions to answer. How, for example, did this clearly defective project pass unnoticed by Stormont's 108 MLAs until the BBC "Spotlight" programme drew it to the public's attention?

How did the Enterprise, Trade and Investment Committee scrutinise and approve the legislation before its chairperson, Patsy McGlone (SDLP), told the Assembly that "committee scrutiny of the development of the renewable heat incentive has been considerable and reflects the importance and long-term nature of the proposals . . ."

Why is the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister now so reluctant to publish a list of RHI beneficiaries when, for example, in what may be considered an appropriate comparator, the National Lottery furnishes a comprehensive list of its prizewinners?

Nevertheless, it is how the Stormont Assembly is dealing with the affair that has done most damage to its already meagre reputation. The first minister, Arlene Foster, is being accused of, at best, incompetence through mishandling the introduction of the RHI scheme. While she does not dispute authorising the initiative while she was minister at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, she insists that her officials did not properly brief her about the potential pitfalls inherent in the legislation.

Just how threadbare this explanation is has been exposed by no less a source than the staunchly pro-Unionist *News Letter* and its political correspondent, Sam McBride.² Writing before Christmas, he reported that in April 2012 Foster had signed a note in relation to the RHI that said: "I have read the Regulatory Impact Assessment and I am satisfied that the benefits justify the costs."³

Yet in spite of what appears to be the proverbial "smoking gun" (in fact there are several) the first minister remains in office and appears

determined to do so. Moreover, other parties in the Assembly, and the DUP's coalition partner, Sinn Féin, in particular, appear reluctant to take decisive action to bring this crisis to a head. Public ridicule may in time force these parties to take a firmer stand, but they have already sent a message that they value the status quo more dearly than principled politics.

As a consequence there is little risk that the institutions established by the Belfast Agreement will collapse in the near future, or that civic peace is endangered by these Stormont shenanigans. The Assembly and its Executive will most probably carry on, albeit with less credibility than ever and with what credit they retain diminishing by the day.

Nonetheless, this continuing situation of cynical manipulation of the system must surely have long-term consequences as the authority of the Six Counties' political institutions are being steadily eroded. This may not be of immediate importance but would be significant if a more serious constitutional crisis were to occur. And such a scenario can never be ruled out in a society as divided as the North.

For the sake of the long-suffering working people of the area, it's surely time to begin thinking of a viable alternative to what is now in place in Stormont.

1 See "DUP and Sinn Féin votes stop bid for independent Social Investment Fund review," *Belfast Telegraph*, 6 December 2016.

2 See for example, Sam McBride, "Official explanation for catastrophic RHI decision is not remotely credible," *News Letter*, 19 December 2016.

3 Sam McBride, "RHI scandal: Foster signed key costs declaration," *News Letter*, 19 December 2016.

so as to impose their own morality on the working class and on society at large. This was done with the connivance of the Government of the day.

The X Case in 1992 threw the bourgeoisie into turmoil. This arose following the rape of a child who subsequently became pregnant. Her parents decided to take her to England for an abortion. The parents also contacted the Gardaí to see what evidence would be needed from the abortion to help convict the rapist. The attorney-general obtained a High Court injunction preventing the victim of the crime and her parents from going to England, using the 8th amendment.

At this stage the parents were already in England, but they returned to Ireland when they heard of the injunction. They were then immersed in the Kafkaesque world of Irish jurisprudence. Mr Justice Declan Costello upheld the injunction and in effect ordered the child to have her

rapist's baby.

There was outrage at the blatant injustice and inhumanity of the decision. Schoolgirls walked out of their classes, under threat of expulsion from the same nuns who had welcomed Father Marx and his pickled "foetus." There were widespread demonstrations.

What was worse for the bourgeoisie was that the international media took up the story, so they were exposed as inhumane sectarian bigots.

The state had failed to protect the "Kerry Babies," or Ann Lovett (a fifteen-year-old who died alone in childbirth in dreadful circumstances in 1984), not to mention the failure to prevent the organised grooming of children in state-financed schools by paedophiles. Yet here it was prosecuting the child victim of a crime.

The political establishment was frightened. People throughout society were questioning the very nature of a state that would employ all its might to

prevent the child victim of a crime leaving the country and in effect protect the criminal. It looked as though the state was run by a mediaeval priesthood.

The child involved in the case was now suicidal at the thought of being forced to continue with the pregnancy. The case went to the Supreme Court, which overturned the High Court decision. However, the Supreme Court analysed the 8th amendment, and its judgement was far wider than simply the issue of suicide. That is the simplification that the bourgeoisie and the yellow press like to focus on. Mr Justice Séamus Egan, for example, pointed out that the words of the 8th amendment meant that the mother also had a right to life. In effect it was not an outright ban on abortion.

Right-wing politicians have completely failed to address the implications of the Supreme Court judgement. On that basis alone it is now time to repeal this amendment.



CONSTITUTION

Submission of the Communist Party of Ireland to the Citizens' Assembly on the eighth amendment to the Constitution of Ireland

16 December 2016

THE COMMUNIST PARTY of Ireland requests that the Citizens' Assembly give consideration to our views in your discussions on the eighth amendment to Bunreacht na hÉireann, its legal and human consequences, and how we should deal with these.

The Communist Party of Ireland participated in the original campaign in 1983 to oppose the eighth amendment, which inserted article 40.3.3 in the Constitution. The lived experience of tens of thousands of women in the subsequent decades has shown that our opposition was indeed correct, both morally and democratically. Our position, therefore, in favour of the removal of this article is born out of that experience.

This is a fundamental question of democracy and the democratic right of women to decide what is in their best interests, both as individuals and as part of a family group. Women's rights should be primary and superior to, and not circumscribed by, their social or biological role within social relations.

Under article 40.3.3, and subsequent judgements, the opinions of doctors and experts have been placed in a superior position to those of the women concerned. This is an unacceptable undermining of women's democratic rights.

Once again we need to draw upon the past historical experience of women and children—and not only them—at the hands of an uncaring state and religious institutions. The neglect and abuse meted out to vulnerable women and children leave those institutions with no moral authority to decide upon, restrict or impose boundaries on women.

The removal of article 40.3.3 should be the first step in the decriminalisation of abortion and in affording women the right to choose what they do with their bodies while pregnant.

We believe that a woman is best placed to decide what is in her or her

family's interests—not doctors, judges, or institutions. Article 40.3.3 reduces women's rights, treats women with disrespect, and places them in an inferior position to that of men in society. Men have no restrictions placed on them regarding what they may or may not do when confronted by deeply personal decisions, medical or otherwise.

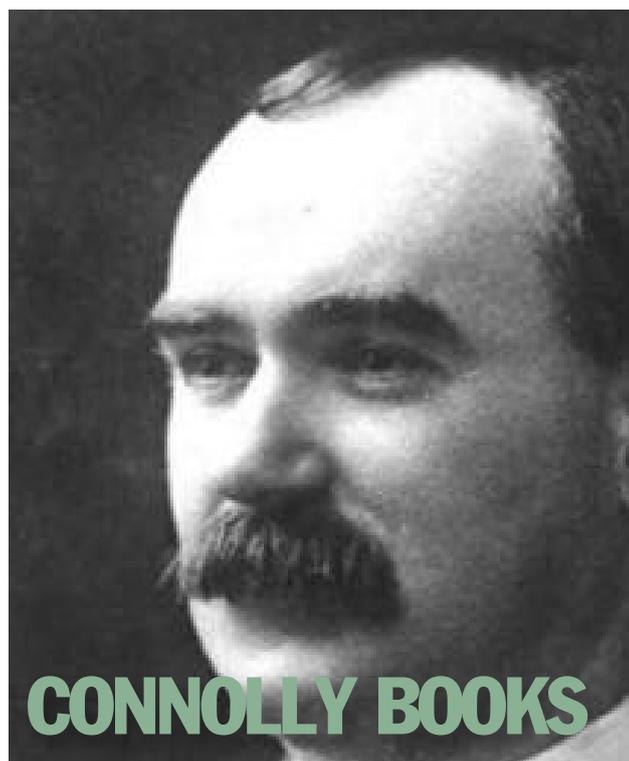
This society has sacrificed generations of working-class women, reducing them to poverty and to second-class citizenship. The state gives priority to private child care and has abdicated all responsibility for providing publicly financed and publicly organised child care for working mothers, making it available only to those who can afford it. It has taken a similar approach to the provision of public housing, leaving families at the mercy of banks and speculators. Once again this state has no moral authority to tell women what they should do.

We also believe that the formulation of legislation on the subject of abortion is a matter for the legislators, that is, for Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, and that it is not necessary or desirable to prescribe or limit their power in this regard by a constitutional requirement.

We believe, therefore, that article 40.3.3 should simply be removed, not adapted, and the responsibility for legislation on abortion be given to the Dáil and Seanad.

Many views have been expressed on the subject of abortion and on what laws on the subject are desirable; and no doubt all or most of these views will be represented in your assembly. Your discussions will help to promote a rational debate, which can inform the political decisions that have to be made.

To arrive at a consensus, or even a majority view, would be a difficult task. However, even if you can do so it is our view that proposing a new version of article 40.3.3 would be a mistake—possibly leading to a repeat referendum in the future. We believe that the Constitution is not the appropriate place for legislation in this regard.



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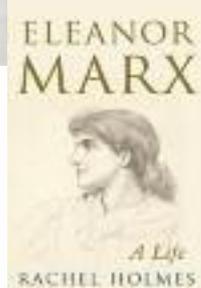
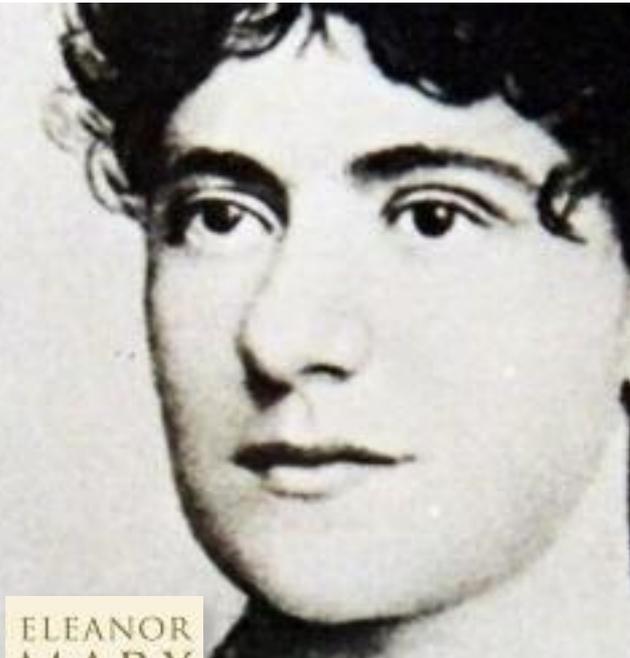
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'Tussy is me'

Jenny Farrell

REMINISCING ABOUT Karl Marx in a letter to her soulmate Olive Schreiner, Eleanor Marx wrote: "Our natures were so exactly alike . . . I remember his once saying . . . talking of my eldest sister and of me . . . 'Jenny is most like me, but Tussy (my dear old home name) is me.'"



Rachel Holmes, *Eleanor Marx: A Life* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014).

Eleanor, youngest daughter of Karl Marx, has been the fascinating topic of several biographies. For two reasons. Firstly, there is the interest in the everyday life of the Marx family. Secondly, Eleanor Marx—or Tussy, as she was called by her family and friends—played a distinguished role in British socialist history. Following the biography by the Japanese historian Chushichi Tsuzuki in 1967, Yvonne Kapp brought out her two-volume life in 1972 and 1976. Recently, in 2014, Rachel Holmes published her account, entitled *Eleanor Marx*.

Eleanor Marx's life and work is worth keeping in public awareness. It allows the generation of the twenty-first century a close-up look at this family, with whose name is linked the birth of scientific communism, the discovery of historical and dialectical materialism, the laws inherent in capital. In the person of Eleanor in particular, the modern reader learns something of how this theory was implemented in the practice of nineteenth-century Britain and the working-class struggle. As Holmes puts it, "to say that Eleanor Marx grew up living and breathing historical

materialism and socialism is therefore a literal description and not a metaphor."

Rachel Holmes's biography of Eleanor Marx is not a through-the-back-door biography of Karl Marx, and his writings are mentioned only in relation to the life of his youngest daughter.

The account is unashamedly partisan and concentrates on the feminist viewpoint. It takes Tussy's point of view from beginning to end and alerts the reader to the "baddies" and the "goodies" in her life as they appear. This takes away a little from the book's value as a piece of historical research but has the advantage of making it a "good read" for those who simply want an informative and entertaining introduction that will engender further interest and reading.

There is much to be discovered by the newcomer to Tussy's life and the British working-class movement in the nineteenth century. The Marx family lived in poverty, and Engels was instrumental in Marx's survival and work in many ways. Tussy, like so many women of her age, was educated at home. What this schooling entailed is noteworthy. At the age of nine she wrote the following to her great-uncle during the Polish insurrection: "I hear from Papa that you are a great politician, so we are sure to agree. How do you think Poland is getting on? I always hold up a finger for the Poles, those brave little fellows."

The principles of capital, surplus value and alienation were told by Marx to his daughters in the famous endless family story about Hans Röckle. Tussy writes:

Hans Röckle himself was a Hoffmann-like magician, who kept a toyshop, and who was always "hard up." His shop was full of the most wonderful things—of wooden men and women, giants and dwarfs, kings and queens, workmen and masters, animals and birds as numerous as Noah got into the Arc, tables and chairs, carriages, boxes of all sorts and sizes. And though he was a magician, Hans could never meet his obligations either to the devil or the butcher, and was therefore—much against the grain—constantly obliged to sell his toys to the devil. These then went through wonderful adventures—always ending in a return to Hans Röckle's shop.

As a matter of course she was brought up on Shakespeare and Shelley, and international politics, and knew personally many of the great activists of her age.

The Paris Commune was one of the central historical events of the Marx family lifetime. Eleanor also took a fervent interest in Ireland and the Irish struggle, largely thanks to her friendship with Engels's partner Mary and subsequently Lizzie Burns. She was a personal friend and peer of George Bernard Shaw. She knew Karl Liebknecht as a child. Further, she did a great deal to promote the work of Ibsen in Britain and was actively involved in working-class education.

Her supreme work in the collection and protection of Marx's legacy, along with Engels, her active involvement in trade unionism and the socialist movement, all form an insightful part of Holmes's book.

Holmes focuses in particular on Tussy's experience as a woman in these struggles, and on her theoretical writing on women's emancipation, which she deemed an integral part of the liberation of the working class as a whole. She was conversant with and built on the seminal texts on women after the French Revolution, when the idea of human equality was put on the historical agenda, beginning with Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* (1879)—banned in Germany—and Frederick Engels's *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). Tussy's own text is entitled *The Woman Question* (1886) and was written jointly with Edward Aveling (a serious baddie). And, of course, she experienced at first hand the treatment of women in the nineteenth century, and her emancipatory, truly Marxist stand on this pervaded her whole life and writings.

The secret about Freddy Demuth is no longer a secret, of course, but I will not reveal "spoilers" here, only that Tussy herself commented on him thus in a letter to her sister Laura in 1892: "I know I always meet Freddy with a sense of guilt and wrong done. The life of that man! To hear him tell of it all is a misery and shame to me." Towards the end of her life (I withhold more "spoilers"), Freddy became Tussy's closest friend.

Do read this book to gain an insight into the history of socialism as it happens in the life of one of its great proponents.

A new geological epoch

Seán Edwards

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCHERS studying climate change have come to the conclusion that the effects are so great that the earth has entered a new geological epoch, which they have named the Anthropocene. Ian Angus, in this book, sets out to explain the reason why.

The existence of global warming and the threat of catastrophic climate change is now generally accepted as fact. Governments, as represented at international conferences, have reluctantly recognised the need for action—not that they ever fulfilled their commitments. The Paris conference in 2014 was hailed as a breakthrough, as it appeared at last that they were getting serious.

Even so, the commitments made there are certainly too little and possibly too late. There continues a well-financed campaign of climate change denial, which featured largely in Trump's election campaign in the United States and threatens to derail even the inadequate response that has been promised.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century scientists have expressed concern over the damage to the environment caused by modern industry and agriculture. As evidence mounted in the twentieth century that the damage was on a planetary scale, this concern turned to alarm. From the 1980s, scientific workers have involved themselves in internationally organised intensive research projects in the study of climate change. In 1986 the International Council of Scientific Unions set up the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme to "describe and understand the interactive physical, chemical and biological processes that regulate the total earth system."

This group came to co-ordinate the work of thousands of scientists internationally. It has come to the conclusion that the effects of human activity are so great as to begin a new geological epoch, which they call the Anthropocene. After thirty years' work, the programme closed at the end of 2016.

Human activity has influenced the climate, at least locally, since we learnt to cultivate the land some 10,000 years ago. The Holocene epoch, with the end of the Ice Age, brought in a relatively stable climate, which made agriculture possible. Throughout history, though, the impact remained local—until the Industrial Revolution began the burning of fossil fuels. First the steam engine, then the railway, steamships, motor cars and aeroplanes consumed coal, oil and gas at an ever-increasing rate. Ian Angus calls it "fossil capitalism."

In the 1950s there was a great acceleration in the rate of production of carbon dioxide and the consequent rise in temperature. First in North America, then in western Europe, there was a massive increase in car ownership and the accompanying build-up of suburbia. Air travel became commonplace, and trade expanded. Agriculture became more mechanised, using more fertilisers and pesticides, to the extent that the energy input is ten times greater than the food energy produced.

All these required vast quantities of oil, while the military industry, the greediest and dirtiest of all, grew out of all proportion.

The carbon dioxide produced is a "greenhouse gas," which has the effect of holding the heat in the earth. Were it not in the atmosphere the earth's temperature would be 35° lower; with too much it would be unbearably hot. The greatest concentration of carbon dioxide reached in the Holocene was 300 parts per million; in 2015 it reached 400 ppm, the highest level for hundreds of thousands of years. Consequently, the average earth

temperature is also outside the range of the Holocene; in fact it is at the highest level in human experience.

A rise of 1°C does not sound much, but it entails much greater extremes in the weather, more heat waves, hurricanes, droughts, and floods, which we are already experiencing. The melting of glaciers threatens some of the major river systems of the world.

The Paris agreement set a target of an increase of less than 2°C above the pre-industrial level. According to Ian Angus, in the unlikely event of all the commitments made there being fulfilled, there is a 90 per cent chance of the temperature rising by more than 2° by 2100. If business as usual continues it could rise by 4° by 2080.

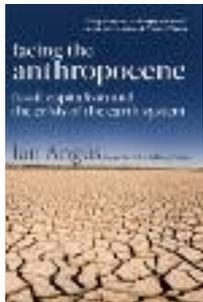
A rise of 2° or more would have disastrous effects on the poorer, tropical countries of the world. The people who contributed nothing to the problem are the ones suffering the greatest hardship: the world's wealthier countries produced 80 per cent of the carbon dioxide and the poorest countries less than 1 per cent. Some see this as a security problem: how to keep immigrants out, whether they are fleeing the consequences of global warming or the wars created by the imperialist powers, which are also about oil. The climate crisis becomes an argument for militarism.

Is there a fix? Looking at it as a purely technical problem, Ian Angus answers, "Perhaps," and examines a proposed project (Deluchi and Jacobson, 2009) to replace oil, using millions of wind turbines and solar panels. Angus thinks this is politically impossible: "Fossil fuels," he writes, "are not an overlay that can be peeled away from capitalism, leaving the system intact." The British Empire was fuelled by coal; oil made America great; what fed them has now become toxic.

And the capitalist imperative is accumulation. If capitalism is not growing it is in crisis. "Green" policies proposing limitations to growth (for example Richard Douthwaite in *The Growth Illusion*) are incompatible with capitalism. Capitalist states and the capitalist system are neither willing nor able to face up to finding a solution to the crisis of the earth system.

The solution, if we can make it in time, can only be a socialist one or, as Ian Angus calls it, "ecosocialist."

Socialists, including communists, have given insufficient attention to the climate crisis. This book provides a much-needed education and a call to action. Read it.



Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016)

