

# Socialist Voice

Communist Party of Ireland  
Páirtí Cumannach na hÉireann  
Partisan Patriotic Internationalist  
Number 173 July 2019 €1.50  
www.commmunistpartyofireland.ie



Page 2 **Housing for all**  
Page 2 **Water charges by stealth**  
Page 4 **Repeal the IRA**  
Page 6 **Britain's ruling class**  
Page 6 **Swiss women strike**  
Page 8 **Drugs: who benefits?**  
Page 8 **The new scramble for Africa**  
Page 10 **Republicanism and socialism**  
Page 12 **Super-expolitation**  
Page 14 **The working class and art**  
Page 16 **Kildare anti-fascist remembered**



Rotten potatoes and sea-weed, or even grass, properly mixed, afford a very wholesome and nutritious food. All know that Irishmen can live upon anything, and there is plenty of grass in the field though the potato crop should fail.”—  
**Adolphus Frederick Hanover,**  
“Duke of Cambridge,” January 1846.

## Housing for all!

Vulture funds have become passé, reports **Laura Duggan**. The latest fad taking hold in the property market is the cuckoo fund—aptly named, as they push the individual or family buyer out of their potential nest. *Page 2*

# SV

**Socialist Voice**  
43 East Essex Street  
Dublin D02 XH96  
(01) 6708707

ISSN 0791-5217



9 770791 521008

## Repeal the IRA! *page 4*

# EXPLOITATION

OFFICIALLY CALLED private rented sector funds, they are institutional investors backed by the likes of large pension funds. They work by buying up whole developments, such as apartment blocks, typically buying in cash and in bulk, elbowing out family buyers before letting out the same units to the same families for a tidy rental fee.

The first investments of this type began in Ireland about 2013, only becoming of interest recently because of their unexpected growth. According to a report this year from Savills, between 2012 and 2018 block purchasers bought 9,291 units in Dublin—8 per cent of all the residential properties that have been purchased. The majority of these cuckoo fund purchases—almost 3,000 units—took place last year alone, with €1.1 billion invested.

By the first of May there were 2,834 proposed units between Dublin city centre, Santry, and Dún Laoghaire—all planned for rental investors only. Under new design standards for apartments introduced in March last year, developers who opt for PRS-specific planning designation can benefit from “flexibility” on internal storage, unit sizes, unit mix and minimum car-parking provision—meaning they can make smaller

apartments, with lower requirements.

It is now common also to include a clause in these developments to ensure that the block will remain in the ownership of a single corporate entity for at least fifteen years. Institutional landlords already hold approximately 4½ per cent of all tenancies nationally, heavily concentrated in the principal rental areas, such as Dublin.

It must be noted that this carries with it the risk that these monopolies will be able to engage in price-fixing in high-demand areas and their peripheries, driving up rents as they wish.

One of these cuckoo funds, the American firm Kennedy Wilson, is able to charge an average of €2,049 per month in Dublin—€300 more than in Los Angeles. Cuckoo funds are a lucrative money-spinner, with a high and quick return, making them particularly appealing. Dublin being such a profitable market, it is one that these companies are happy to expand within as the “rental philosophy” takes hold.

This “rental philosophy” has been touted as the Irish finally updating their attitude to property and embracing a more Continental approach. In reality this attitude is little more than an atmosphere of desperation and shortage, one that is

being cultivated in a country where 1 in 10 renters are paying 60 per cent of their earnings in rent.

With growing homelessness (now more than 10,000 people in emergency accommodation in the 26 counties, 4,401 of these in Dublin), longer housing waiting-lists (in Dublin 31,196 households), daft.ie advertising bunk beds, and much worse, it’s small wonder that renters are grateful to get anywhere at all, and are afraid to buck the trend.

This is where another housing fad makes its entrance: “co-living.” Niche Living has two such developments planned in Rathmines and Dún Laoghaire, with a third at Cookstown, near Tallaght, just being refused planning permission. Depending on your point of view, co-living can be described as “campus living for the socially minded” or modern bedsits with a shiny gloss.

**Co-living bedspaces are marketed with the language of social consciousness and environmentalism and promoted as a new, alternative way of living.**

Those seeking to rent one of these co-living spaces rent only a bedroom, or “bedspace,” as Niche Living terms them,

## Water for all

**Dan Taraghan**

IN THE WAKE of the local and EU elections it was reported in the *Irish Times* (10 June) that up to 70,000 households could be charged for wasting water from next year. Charges could be as much as €500 for a household.

The proposal to charge for wasting water has been made by Irish Water to the Commission for the Regulation of Utilities. This quango was set up in 1999 as the Commission for Energy Regulation and was rebranded in 2017. The senior management of the CRU seems to be made up of people with a background in energy markets and the privatisation and deregulation of utilities. There is no mention of any senior managers from the

trade union movement.

The CRU’s web site talks of protecting “customer interests” in relation to Irish Water. There is no mention of citizens’ right to water. Consequently, it is highly likely that the CRU will accede to Irish Water’s request.

Since water charges were suspended following widespread protests that brought thousands of workers onto the streets, there has been a drip-drip feed of neo-liberal propaganda emanating from the state broadcaster and other media in the form of asides during panel discussions such as “People in towns don’t want to pay for water.” There is never any clarification that workers do not want to pay twice for water, as they already pay through their taxes.

Needless to say, for some RTE broadcasters who have set up a limited company to channel their fee income the idea of paying taxes under PAYE is

probably a vague concept. Citizens’ rights, and in particular having the right to water, is probably an alien concept.

This plan to re-impose water charges by stealth as a “charge for excessive use of water,” *mar dhea*, is a carefully thought out plan by the bourgeoisie. The idea is to divide and weaken potential opposition by portraying this as a measure to stop “excessive use,” whatever that’s supposed to mean.

Without a doubt, the newly elected Green Party councillors and MEPs will be enthusiastic for any of these measures, under the guise of conserving water.

It’s unlikely that Irish Water will be put under any pressure to solve the leaking-pipe problem, where 50 per cent of water is lost at present, before there is any attempt to impose water charges on domestic users. It is surely a fundamental requirement that the infrastructure be upgraded.



# Co-living marketing is slick and stylish, but without it, co-living looks an awful lot like the despised family hubs.

with a fold-down bed, and with access to communal kitchen and laundry facilities. In Dún Laoghaire this communal kitchen will be shared among forty-two bedspaces. Without the need for individual cooking facilities, more bedspaces can be squashed onto the same floor.

As co-living is supposedly intended only for short-term leasing, a few months to a year, these units also have lower requirements for light and space than standard one-bed apartments, and look more like hotel rooms than flats. Starting at €1,200 per month, these spaces are far from affordable for the majority of workers and totally unsuitable for those with children. With a shrinking number of affordable apartments and houses available, however, they may become the only option for many.

The rise of Airbnb was the first beginning of landlords siphoning off residences from the long-term rental market to the more lucrative and exploitable realm of short-term leasing. Rental postings began to shrink in Dublin as short-term leasing exploded; and co-living is the next step. With the Rathmines development at 104 bedspaces and Dún Laoghaire at 208, this is co-living on a scale not previously

seen in Dublin.

Co-living bedspaces are marketed with the language of social consciousness and environmentalism and promoted as a new, alternative way of living. But the push to accept co-living isn't for forming communities, saving the planet, or developing social connections, any more than renting is for having freedom. The drive behind them is to normalise the switch from tenant to contract-holder, without any of the rights or protections—meagre as they are—of those with conventional renting leases.

It's all about applying pressure on renters to accept lower and lower standards and security in housing for ever-increasing rents. It's about commodifying the basic human need for shelter, and using that need to ruthlessly exploit workers.

Co-living marketing is slick and stylish, but without it, co-living looks an awful lot like the despised family hubs.

The minister for housing, Eoghan Murphy, has publicly spoken of his support for both cuckoo funds and co-living apartments. Both of these, he has argued, are good for tenants, as they are supplying a desperate need in the market.

What he refuses to acknowledge is

how this need has been manufactured and exploited by the ruling political parties, working in tandem with the landlord and developer class. The Government has been accused by the United Nations of facilitating the “financialisation of housing” through preferential tax laws and weak protection for tenants. This can hardly be surprising when more than a fifth of the Dáil's 158 TDs are receiving income from properties they own and are renting out.

According to Engineers Ireland, more than 600,000 people are living in poor housing conditions, with leaks, damp, and rot, while it is estimated that nearly 2 million homes will require retrofitting within the next decade.

To solve this crisis we do not need investors playing with properties as profit dictates, or trendy new ways of living that force lower-earners to accept lower standards: what we need is universal public housing. It is only through every citizen having the right to a home, rented for a set and fair percentage of their income, supplied by the state, that we can fight back against the intensifying forces of neo-liberal capitalism and the total commodification of our homes. ★

It's also unlikely that our esteemed politicians will do anything to stem the growth of Dublin by investing in towns outside the Dublin area. Consequently, it's more than likely that Irish Water will continue with its plan to take water from the Shannon rather than fix the pipes.

How has this situation come about? Following the virtual abolition of water charges as a result of the protests, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil entered into a coalition, the so-called confidence and supply agreement of 2016. (Neither party wants to describe it as a coalition, because that would expose how little democracy exists here.) Under the terms of this agreement it was decided that there could be a charge for excessive use of water in order to comply with the EU's Water Framework Directive. Both parties refused to include the right to water and the public ownership of water in the Constitution.

David Gibney, co-ordinator of

Right2Water, pointed out in a letter to the *Irish Times* (15 June) that there is no requirement under the directive to impose charges along the lines now planned. He went on to say that there is no evidence that there is “excessive” use of water by households: in fact households use only 12 per cent of treated water, as against 38 per cent by industry.

Gibney makes the valid argument that the cost of administering Irish Water's plan would probably be greater than the revenue it would produce.

On top of this, the bottled-water industry is allowed to extract unlimited amounts of water from the water table, free of charge. For the bourgeois parties, any idea of limiting capitalists' rights in the interests of the common good is sacrilege and not to be even contemplated.

This move to reintroduce water charges by stealth, despite the

widespread democratic opposition, will be possible because the protests that took place in 2014 and 2015 did not produce a swing to left-wing politicians that would give a voice to working-class demands. The recent local and EU elections showed a low turnout around the country. In effect, in many constituencies the working class did not have an opportunity to vote for any candidates other than representatives of the bourgeoisie.

The “left” in Ireland is now divided into at least six different parties, whereas the bourgeoisie has two main parties, which maintain a phoney war as a pretence for democratic debate. They achieve state power and rule on an effective minority vote.

It is necessary that all means of legal campaigns, including elections, are used to develop the position of the working class in opposition to the current dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. ★



## Abolish the Industrial Relations Act

Falling union density and the high age profile of the membership are serious concerns for unions. Major changes are needed to reverse this trend  
**Jimmy Doran**  
reports

**T**HE BIENNIAL delegate conference of the ICTU is being held in Dublin on 2, 3 and 4 July. It will debate and formulate policy and goals for member-unions for the next couple of years.

When trade unions originated back in the mid-1800s they were considered, and even referred to in law, as criminal conspiracies. Employers at the time were openly hostile to sharing profits with their workers. The advent of trade unions eventually gave some power to workers and weakened the position of

the employers, but they were not defeated; and it was only through many years of struggle by organised workers that gains were eventually made.

Times and terminology may have changed, but relations between employers and employees have not. Employers' sole purpose is to maximise the profit from employees' labour.

Employers have learnt over time how to achieve this less controversially, but the results are the same. Today, inequality is at a record level, with no end in sight. According to the Central Bank, the richest 10 per cent of Irish-resident financial asset-holders (those with shares, financial investments, or deposits) now have €50 billion more than at the peak in 2006. So "austerity" worked very well for them.

At the same time as this growing inequality and erosion of working conditions, union density is at its lowest. And these two facts are related.

Little by little, the rules of engagement were changed. The carrot-and-stick approach was used to lull workers into a false sense of security. They are allowed to join unions—but employers don't have to recognise them. "Social partnership" was agreed between unions, the state, and

employers' organisations. National pay agreements were entered into. This led to an end to negotiations on a company-by-company basis. This in turn led to less industrial action and fewer strikes.

The jewel in the crown was the Industrial Relations Act (1990), which took large areas of control and decision-making away from unions and their members and left them in the hands of employers and the courts. It also banned many of the tactics used by unions to achieve the gains won in the past, such as secondary picketing, support strikes, sit-ins, political strikes, and a plethora of other methods that had been successfully used in struggle.

The velvet war against union power was complete. Unions were no longer in the front line of struggle but had morphed into a support service for workers. This weakened the unions as they became involved in cosy national negotiations. They took their eye off the ball as, bit by bit, working conditions were eroded, inequality skyrocketed, and precarious employment replaced the permanent, pensionable jobs that had been secured through years of sustained union struggle.

With short-term contracts, minimum-hours contracts, bogus self-employment,

## Stop wage theft!

**JIMMY DORAN**

**T**he National Minimum Wage (Protection of Employee Tips) Bill is a welcome development, as no employer should be permitted to retain gratuities meant for workers.

It is a reflection of where we are as a society, and where the balance of power exists between employers and workers, that legislation is needed to stop employers stealing this money from those it is intended for. The contempt in which the working class are held by sections of the ruling class is also exposed, as some politicians will actually vote against this bill, while



# It's time for the trade union movement to go back to basics. We need to fight precarious working conditions, as our predecessors did.

and the "gig economy," conditions have come full circle. Employers have brought working conditions for the majority of those now entering the work force right back to where they were when workers began to organise 150 years ago. The present generation of workers have no experience of radical union struggle and its victories.

It's time for the trade union movement to go back to basics. We need to fight precarious working conditions, as our predecessors did. These battles will not be won in the board room but on the shop floor.

For workers to tip the balance of power away from employers, the 1990 act has to be abolished so as to give workers power over when and where they take action.

But there is nothing like poverty wages and poor working conditions to radicalise workers. History has a habit of repeating itself, and we must learn from it. Four unions have passed motions at their delegate conference calling for the 1990 act to be abolished: Mandate, Connect, Fórsa, and Unite.

The narrative has developed that the right to union access, union recognition and full collective bargaining will solve all our problems. These rights are certainly necessary for workers to tip the balance of power in their favour. We also need weapons to fight with, and that weapon is the right to strike, when and where

others have to be lobbied and put under pressure to vote for it. Occasionally the politicians are forced into a compromise and have to vote against their own class interest.

We cannot accept the culture where the kindness or whims of customers is used as a method of subsidising low pay, as is the norm in other countries, such as the United States, where tips are considered a part of wages.

The tourism industry has some of the lowest pay rates and poorest working conditions in the country, with the majority of employees on the minimum wage and minimum-hours contracts. It is important that these rates are increased and employment conditions improved to reflect the massive profits made by restaurants and hotels.

workers choose to—not at a time that best suits employers.

Profit is the goal of employers. If unions have the power to hit their pockets by not allowing them to prepare in advance through excessive notice periods and endless court injunctions, they will have to take notice of demands. The threat alone will force them to take notice.

Working conditions are not the only thing that is destroying the lives of working people. The crisis in housing and in the health service and the slashing of all state services have pushed living standards back to levels not seen for fifty years. Back in the 1970s unions successfully called workers out onto the streets to demand tax reform. That was when union density was high, before the 1990 act, when unions could strike for political reasons and had the confidence to do so.

Unions need to lead from the front: to be seen to be confident, strong, and

willing to fight for their members, and not only on pay but on all aspects of workers' lives. We cannot do this unless we have the power to do so. Union recognition on its own is useless if our hands are tied behind our backs by legislation.

Politicians have abandoned ordinary working people. It's up to the trade union movement to fight for decency in workers' lives, along with better pay and conditions, to end the crisis in housing and the health service, to bring an end to precarious employment. Then, once again, workers will be proud to wear their union badge, as they were when Larkin and Connolly instilled pride, hope and confidence in the working class.

**An extra 1 per cent in a pay deal helps workers. Abolishing the Industrial Relations Act will empower them.**

Unions will have to become radical or become redundant. ★

## Workers' rights v. anti-union legislation



### Fringe meeting

Wednesday 3 July, 1:15 p.m.

Pearse Centre (27 Pearse Street, Dublin)

Speakers include

John Douglas (Mandate),

Gareth Murphy (Financial Services Union)

Organised by the Trade Union Left Forum

### Tips should never be seen as a substitute for proper rates of pay and proper conditions.

The theft of tips by employers is only a symptom of the exploitation of workers who are already some of the most exploited in the country. The work that has been done by Communities Against Low Pay in supporting these vulnerable young workers is to be commended. These workers should gain confidence from the solidarity action taken by CALP and know they are not on their own and that their exploitation has been noticed.

The next step in building on their strength and public support is for the workers themselves to get organised, join a union, and hit the employers where it really hurts: their profits. They

need to ballot for strike action and to place permanent pickets on the restaurants until such time as their demands are conceded.

After all, they are not looking for anything above what they deserve: a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. And if customers feel happy with the service they provide and give them a gratuity, they are giving it to the staff and not to supplement the profits of the business.

Rogue employers, such as the Ivy Restaurant in Dawson Street, Dublin (part of an English chain), need to be exposed for what they are. The best way that customers can support the workers is by not going to restaurants that steal employees' tips; by going there you are supporting this practice. ★





## No real differences among the British ruling class

**Tommy McKearney**.....

**I**N SPITE of lurid headlines about his private life, Boris Johnson remains the man most likely to be Britain's next prime minister.

Tousled hair, pompous accent, indiscreet and bullying behaviour, not to mention taking part in egregious self-promoting photo opportunities—yet nothing appears to damage his popularity

among the Tory faithful. There is often, though, a perception beyond the Conservative Party membership that “Bojo,” as he is sometimes called, is something of a clown and therefore not to be taken seriously.

Any such reading would be a mistake. It's worth keeping in mind that a similar dismissive assessment was made of Donald Trump during his campaign for the presidency of the United States in 2016.

The reality is that neither man is a jester, nor indeed a completely free agent: instead they are the personification of underlying trends in their respective countries—trends that we in Ireland ignore at our peril.

The global economic centre of gravity is slowly shifting away from the United States and its European allies and moving eastwards, towards China and its partners in Russia, Iran, and elsewhere. The hegemony exercised for so long by western states is undergoing a challenge, and their position as the axis of world power is no longer as permanent as it once was. As a consequence, we are now seeing the aggressive behaviour of US-led imperialism towards those states they consider competitors.

Little surprise, therefore, when we see the slavish and uncritical support given by Britain to the foreign policy of what Boris Johnson calls “our number 1 ally, the USA.” Just think too of how those contesting the Tory party leadership vied with each other to condemn Jeremy Corbyn when, understandably, he asked last month for credible evidence that Iran had attacked oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman.

It is reasonable to assume, in the light of this, that a significant section of the British ruling class deem its self-interest to be best served by an ever-closer alliance with the United States rather than the European Union. And, just as in North America, elements within British society are happy to have this still somewhat disguised agenda promoted on the back of a populist wave, much of which results

## Swiss women strike

**Laura Duggan**.....

**O**N 14 JUNE women throughout Switzerland took to the streets in a national women's strike. It took place to coincide with negotiations at the International Labour Conference in Geneva on international rules for tackling violence and harassment at work.

Among their national demands in Switzerland, women called for equal pay, investment in the care sector, recognition of the real value of unpaid women's work at home and in the community, and zero tolerance of



# One thing we can be quite certain of is that the Irish ruling class will not do the right thing and reject imperialism, in whatever guise it assumes.

from genuine grievances within working-class communities.

So what might we expect from Boris Johnson if he occupies 10 Downing Street? And what might be the significance of his premiership for Ireland?

In the first instance, there is every likelihood that he will be forced to implement Brexit on 31 October; otherwise his credibility would be irretrievably damaged, if not altogether destroyed. Moreover, failure to deliver on his promise to leave the EU would probably split the Conservatives, and possibly allow Nigel Farage's new party to form the official opposition following the inevitable general election. Worse still from the point of view of the ruling class would be the possibility of a government headed by Jeremy Corbyn.

In the event of a no-deal Brexit, economic instability in Britain, if not outright turmoil, would be practically unavoidable, in the short run at least. The financial sector would experience destabilising turbulence, investment would surely slow down, and some industries would leave and move overseas.

While there is an unimpeachable case to be made for a socialist-led break with the European Union, the benefits of such a departure would require some time before being realised, and then only if directed by a left-wing government.

To offset criticism and to retain power Johnson and his supporters would have few options other than

playing the populist card. Cue a series of crude domestic policies designed to appease readers of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sun*. Migrants, trade unionists, welfare recipients, feminists, climate-change activists and other *bêtes noires* of the reactionary right would be designated for particular attention.

Don't think either that Ireland, north or south, would be unaffected in this case. What steps might a Johnson government take in order to retain the support of the DUP in the House of Commons? What would his relationship with Dublin be like when the Dáil objects to the absence of a "backstop"? A little bit of Paddy-bashing might even be popular with his grass roots.

It is impossible to predict what other strategies he might adopt; but war—the great fall-back of prime ministers in difficulty—cannot be ruled out. What would be the response from the Government in Dublin in the event of a major conflict involving British support for an American offensive? What then would be its reaction to the movement of US soldiers through Shannon Airport? What if the powerful American-owned digital corporations based in and near Dublin were facilitating a cyber-attack on infrastructure targeted by the Pentagon? How would the Taoiseach respond to questions from those being attacked about Ireland's so-called neutrality?

Such a scenario raises still more profound questions for the Republic's relationship with imperialism and its bed-fellow, free-market capitalism. The

26 Counties' ruling class will agonise long and hard over such a dilemma. Should they stay with the European Union and its more selective support for NATO, or simply throw their lot in completely with Britain and the United States? Either option would involve a cost for the southern privileged class; and they will undoubtedly attempt to remain affiliated with both if possible.

One thing we can be quite certain of is that the Irish ruling class will not do the right thing and reject imperialism, in whatever guise it assumes. It is important, therefore, that anti-imperialist Ireland takes notice of these developments and continues working to overcome their detrimental impact. Quite simply, we must bring together those forces willing and capable of establishing an independent sovereign republic throughout the entire country.

Finally, let's dispel any notion that this analysis will be fundamentally altered should Jeremy Hunt succeed in displacing Boris Johnson. He, after all, was the person who led the verbal onslaught on Corbyn's demand for credible evidence about the Gulf attack, while insisting that no other state or non-state actor apart from Iran could possibly have been responsible. He ended his tirade by claiming that Corbyn "can never bring himself to back British allies, British intelligence, or British interests."

As the saying goes about Britain's imperial ruling class, there are often distinctions between them but seldom any real difference.

gender-based violence.

In the wake of #MeToo, which highlighted the global scale of the violence and harassment that women endure, these women also demanded effective measures to prevent both psychological and physical harassment.

While both women and men experience violence and harassment in work, unequal status and power relations in society result in women being more exposed to violence and harassment. Gender-based violence remains one of the most tolerated violations of workers' human rights.

According to statistics, 35 per cent of women over the age of fifteen have experienced sexual or physical violence at home, in their communities, or in the place of work.

Higher rates are consistently recorded in transport, health and social care, hotels and restaurants, the media and entertainment, agriculture, and in domestic work. Violence and harassment at work can come from managers, supervisors, fellow-workers, and customers. Abusive work-place practices also contribute to work-related stress, which is now at a record level.

Progress towards gender equality has stagnated over the past decade, and today the number of women who have experienced violence and harassment stands at 818 million.

However, women are responding, and over the past twenty-four months they have led historic mobilisations around the world.

From the extension of paid maternity leave in the Philippines to new legal measures to protect workers from the misuse of non-disclosure agreements in Britain, women and their unions have achieved real progress in the world of work. ★



## The new scramble for Africa



Niall Farrell

FAILING TO SEE the irony, the Government and Fianna Fáil voted—on World Refugee Day, of all days!—to send fourteen members of the army’s Ranger Wing (Ireland’s SAS) to war in Mali.

The minister for defence, Paul Kehoe, told the Dáil that the country was a victim of “terrorism,” and we must play our part.

Mali is not just some poor country plagued by “terrorism.” It’s worse: it’s a poor country plagued by imperialism.

The nineteenth-century scramble for Africa by the “great powers” carved up that continent into artificial states and spheres of influence, causing drastic divisions and consequences for tribal peoples that have been compounded by impoverishment and discrimination.

Mali is the tenth-poorest country in the world; but the Tuareg people in northern Mali, thanks to government discrimination, are even poorer. In neighbouring Niger their tribal folk’s fate is similar: super-exploited in the uranium mines, a vital source of France’s nuclear energy programme. This was the main



the United States launched its “Plan Colombia,” ostensibly to target cocaine production but in reality targeting the FARC. Given the forced displacement of Colombian peasants and the neo-liberal reforms, many of those in poor rural areas were forced to engage in coca production as the easiest way to survive, which meant that drug production increased. Outside the areas controlled by leftist guerrillas, the conditions of these workers is abysmal, with many working under armed guard by right-wing paramilitaries, who depend on drug income for their campaigns of assassination against trade unionists and social leaders throughout Colombia.

The use of drugs is not just a foreign-policy weapon of the United States but also a domestic one. The United States consumes half the drugs produced on the planet, with more than two-thirds of its prisoners serving sentences for drug-related offences, the majority being Black Americans.

As well as being a source of

Graham Harrington

IT IS OFTEN claimed that the “War on Drugs” has failed, and that in response the use of illegal drugs should be permitted.

There are several serious issues with this thesis, the first being the question of what evidence exists that there has been a “war on drugs.” In fact the

evidence suggests the opposite: that what has existed since the 1960s has been a war of drugs, used against the working class, in the service of monopoly capitalism. For instance, after the NATO-led invasion of Afghanistan—the world’s leading producer of opium—drug production increased 16-fold.

Another example is Colombia, after



# Mali is not just some poor country plagued by “terrorism.” It’s worse: it’s a poor country plagued by imperialism.

reason why France sent a significant military force to Mali when the discontent burst into rebellion.

This uprising was exacerbated by the West’s overthrow of Gaddafi’s Libya in 2011. Well-armed Libyan Tuareg soldiers fled from the insurgency in Libya and joined forces with their brethren in Mali. A year later these rebels were to be superseded by a more powerful jihadi force.

In February 2013 the French intervened, and by 2015 a peace agreement with Tuareg forces had been agreed. France also engineered the military support of the “G5 Sahel,” five former colonies in the Sahel-Saharan region: Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Mauritania, and Chad. An estimated 18,000 foreign troops are in Mali today.

The intervention in Mali is showing clear similarities to the Afghan war. It was possible to wrest northern Mali from the control of jihadi militias, as it was to temporarily put an end to Taliban control in 2001. Nevertheless intervention forces—the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali—which include a large German contingent as well as the French

“anti-terrorist” *Opération Barkhane* force—are regularly under attack.

Also, serious acts of violence are happening in central Mali. Here the Puelh, mostly shepherds, have constantly suffered state oppression. A growing number of the Puelh have risen up against the discrimination and as a result have been the victims of massacres.

A United Nations report in 2018 accused Malian troops of having committed regular massacres; and since late 2016 these forces have allegedly carried out “extrajudicial killings,” arbitrary arrests, torture, and the enforced disappearance of men accused of supporting Islamist armed militias. These are the very same soldiers who are being trained under an EU training mission, which includes Irish, British and German military trainers.

None of this information was forthcoming in the Dáil. Instead the minister hypocritically spoke of Mali needing to return to “civilian rule,” ignoring the fact that the forces that Irish soldiers have been training since 2013 are the very ones that overthrew the democratically elected president in 2012.

It is within this bellicose maelstrom that the Irish special forces will join the German army contingent to carry out “reconnaissance” missions, presumably targeting villages or specific areas for drone attacks. That is not peacekeeping, that is war, and a blatant breach of our neutrality.

Besides, this war is unlikely to succeed. In November 2017 the International Crisis Group, a pro-western think tank, stated that this regional conflict can be solved only if the deep-seated socio-economic causes are dealt with. And while the Malian people are poor, their country and region are rich in natural resources.

However, a military strategy is the preferred EU option, and especially for Germany, as it expands its operations in Africa. This dovetails nicely with the EU’s “permanent structured co-operation” (PESCO) and the development of an EU army.

You can rest assured that our political and military elite won’t allow a trivial matter such as Irish neutrality to get in the way of rubbing shoulders with their betters. ★

immense profit for the prison-industrial complex, it is also a tactic for keeping the most subversive elements pacified. As part of the “COINTELPRO” policies for attacking the Black Panthers, drugs were flooded into black communities, with the police turning a blind eye and leaving those communities to become infested with drugs as a result of deliberate under-development and a lack of sustainable employment.

During the 1980s the US war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua allowed the CIA to facilitate the Contras in trafficking drugs, in the full knowledge that their destination would be black working-class communities in the United States.

The demand for the legalisation of drugs is a blanket slogan that fails to properly understand the complexities of the issue, and can even be used for outright reactionary, neo-liberal results, regardless of the intentions of those calling for it.

Drug-trafficking is a major capitalist enterprise, the second-largest in the

world, even ahead of oil. Were narcotics to be made legal, the massive international monopolies would in fact find it to be a formality. Given their immense economic power, it follows that they also have immense political power. Throughout Latin America and Asia, drug barons find that the law means little to them, with some even having success in taking the next step up from bribing law-makers to becoming law-makers themselves, as in the case of Pablo Escobar. Legalisation would only give them the means to become as corrupt as their allies in the legal pharmaceutical industry.

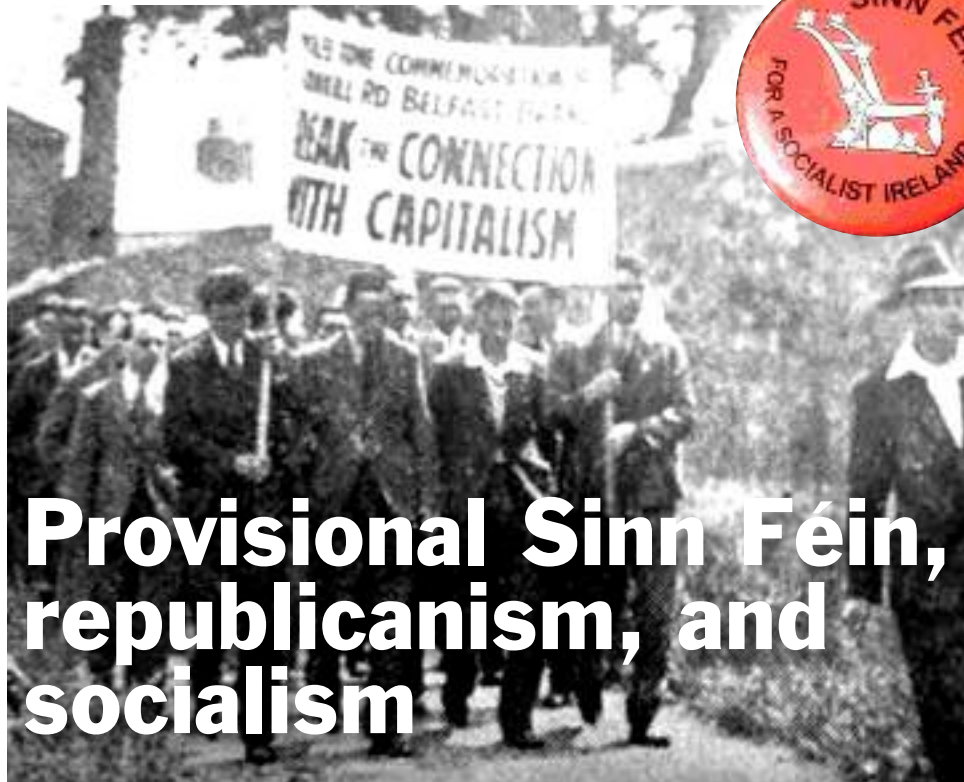
Ultimately, legalisation would inevitably lead to an increase in drug-taking and the normalising of drugs. Consumption would overwhelmingly be centred on the imperialist core, with an extremely exploitative dependence for those in the Global South who are forced to produce them, instead of more sustainable and ethical projects. After cannabis was legalised in some parts of the United States, arrests

relating to drug crime actually increased, tripling in Washington and increasing by 26 per cent in Colorado.

As is always the case under capitalism, someone is making a profit. Altria, the parent company of the tobacco giant Philip Morris, has invested more than \$2 billion in the fledgling cannabis industry. Their paid promotion of studies extolling the virtues of cannabis has a close resemblance to the campaigns those companies carried out at the turn of the century to promote cigarettes as being harmless.

The use of drugs, including alcohol, only pacifies resistance to capitalism. It is a barrier to working-class struggle and the strengthening of workers’ power. It is a victory for individualism in its worst form. Rather than relying on drugs to allow our people to scrape a living under capitalism, revolutionaries should instead be working to smash the system and in so doing break the source of people’s dependence on drugs.

Then again, maybe that’s the point? ★



## Provisional Sinn Féin, republicanism, and socialism

Eddie O'Neill and Mark Hayes

**B**Y ANY relevant psephological indices, it is absolutely clear that Sinn Féin did exceedingly poorly—perhaps disastrously—in the recent local and European elections; and the results have clearly precipitated some reflective introspection by various party members.

For example, a defeated Sinn Féin candidate in Dublin, Lynn Boylan, has called for dialogue and co-operation with other “left-wing parties” in future, arguing that competition for votes had handed seats to Fianna Fáil and Fine

Gael. She claimed: “I am a republican, I am a united Irlander, but I am a left wing activist.” Indeed she went on to claim: “That’s how we were able to stop water charges—it’s because the left came together and worked together.”

Let’s just leave aside Sinn Féin’s specific role in the campaign against water charges, which is contentious, and concentrate on the more significant ideological proposition about Sinn Féin and its relationship with “the left.”

Over the years the Provisional movement has undoubtedly flirted with

socialism as an ideology. For example, the original Éire Nua programme articulated by the Provisionals had a reasonably well-defined social component, with the emphasis on a more equitable and decentralised distribution of resources. By the late 1970s, under a new “Northern” leadership, this trend was accentuated. This was perhaps most vividly expressed in Jimmy Drumm’s speech of 1977 (apparently written by Adams et al.) which stressed the need for social liberation and the importance of standing in solidarity with workers against British colonial rule and the “fascist” Free State. (The speech also, incidentally, rejected a reformed Stormont and power-sharing.)

In this period Adams not only criticised capitalism, he was fond of quoting Connolly, while Sinn Féin explicitly identified itself with the ANC, PLO, and Sandinistas. Some commentators even detected the influence of Marxism; and though this was hugely exaggerated, there was a sense in which Sinn Féin identified itself as an integral part of a global “left” movement. It undoubtedly established its radical credentials through community work and activism in working-class areas.

However, there was always another, more pragmatic and opportunistic dimension to Sinn Féin strategy. This could be detected during and after the Hunger Strike, when the process of politicisation sought to reconfigure Sinn Féin as an electoral force. It was confirmed in a very personal way to one

## CPI summer school: An assessment

**Paul Doran**

**T**HE RECENT CPI national school on 21–23 June began with the national chairperson giving a good introduction, which was followed by a brief talk on Irish history, with a different slant on the roles played by the state and its allies the church and its sycophantic followers. Questions were posed to the audience about how we can change the tide of political discourse and about recent phenomena, such as Does the role of Greta Thunberg teach us anything?

Next was a talk, attentively listened

to, by two stalwarts of our party on the all-Ireland nature of our struggle: Contemporary challenges: Partition, Brexit, the EU, and the border poll.

Comrades were keen to get into their discussion groups to dissect the opinions heard, and this was brought back to the meeting. Fascinating stuff!

On Saturday afternoon we discussed the class structure of Irish society. Who are the ruling class, north and south? How are they linked to imperialism? The comrade presenting this topic was well prepared with various visual images that caught our imagination and the questions that are at the core of our basic understanding of all



# Compromise with the most reactionary representatives of Loyalism, Unionism and the British Establishment was always likely to end badly.

of the writers of this article when a letter was smuggled out of Albany prison in 1983 (written by Eddie O'Neill and Ray McLaughlin, and signed by other Republican prisoners). This missive explicitly addressed "the left" and urged all comrades to show solidarity with the Irish revolution while calling for a "broad front" of left progressive forces to form a common platform against imperialism.

The correspondence was completely disregarded by the Republican leadership at the time. The writing was on the wall: Sinn Féin was moving towards conventional constitutional politics. It eventually came to see itself as the natural repository for middle-class Catholic votes and positioned itself as the successor to the SDLP as the primary representative of the "Nationalist" community.

In relation to the north, Sinn Féin eventually adopted the diplomatic strategy of "pan-nationalism," which not only led to the so-called "peace process" but meant succumbing to a political process that was inevitably dominated by bourgeois nationalist elements in Dublin, the SDLP, and the "Irish lobby" in the United States.

In effect, the diplomatic strategy drew Republicans into a procedure whose dynamic they could not effectively control. In the process, not only was Sinn Féin's tenuous link to socialism abandoned but long-cherished Republican ideals were dumped by the wayside. This was most graphically reflected in the grotesque spectre of Jonathan Powell editing the

that is wrong in this state.

After tea an outline of the party's history was brief and yet extremely interesting, and I, and others, wanted more of it.

The social evening was extremely enjoyable, and stories heard, serious topics discussed and yarns were relived, with the odd hangover the next morning all part and parcel.

Sunday morning, and "Building a Leninist party" was a most interesting talk. Socialism is a science to be learnt, and organisation is crucial, along with theory. These are core elements in our thinking. We are people in struggle and

speeches of Sinn Féin negotiators in Downing Street, and "Republicans" bending the knee to British royalty.

Sinn Féin had become co-opted by a state it was once committed to destroying. Moreover, it was prepared to administer an agreement that effectively reinforced sectarian categories, because identity politics was hard-wired into the Good Friday Agreement.

When Sinn Féin talks about "equality" now it relates to notions of inter-communal equivalence in a squalid sectarian scramble for limited resources, rather than a more equal redistribution of material outcomes in order to reduce obscene levels of disparity in wealth. In the north, Sinn Féin power-sharing has meant subordinating itself to a neo-liberal agenda. This has led to the party endorsing cuts in welfare, supporting PFI, and facilitating a reduction in corporation tax, at direct cost to the block grant.

In effect, concessions have been made to the most egregious aspects of the capitalist system. The Provos, always anxious to evade the epithet of "sticky," have been perfectly happy to emulate the "stoops."

These observations are made not to lament the turning away from paramilitary tactics but to highlight the fact that the leadership of the Republican movement have actually made momentous choices at critical moments during the course of the so-called "troubles"—and they have made significant strategic errors. Rather than

have no time for those Marxist academics sitting in the high towers of academia pontificating to all and sundry.

Our personal behaviour is important, and the new media were touched upon, and a particular remark caught this writer's attention: "You don't own your own image rights," and must know what democratic centralism is.

The health service was dealt with next, and comrades were given the raw facts of the continued privatisation in the Six Counties and the ruinous health system in the 26 Counties.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the talk on the environment: "Saving

engaging in an inclusive debate with those activists at the cutting edge of the armed struggle, the leadership opted to back itself into negotiations with the bitterest of political enemies.

Compromise with the most reactionary representatives of Loyalism, Unionism and the British Establishment was always likely to end badly; and we now have a situation where it's not even clear that Sinn Féin are republican, let alone socialist. Gerry Adams said recently that a united Ireland should not be something rushed into, while the party leader, Mary Lou McDonald, has confirmed that she would be willing to talk to anyone in post-election negotiations, because "that's what grown-ups do."

And here we can see the essence of the problem: principles cast adrift with the most vacuous of sound-bites.

In effect, in the hands of the Provisionals, Republicanism has become a multi-purpose ideology employed to lubricate the wheels of an electoral machine that is in the service of cynical, careerist politicians. Sinn Féin wanted working-class support without the more onerous task of rewarding them for their efforts, and they were punished at the polls.

There are lessons here, but there is little evidence that the leadership of Sinn Féin is capable of learning them. The most basic lesson is this: the idea of socialism without national sovereignty may be an illusion, but independence without socialism isn't worth crossing the street for. ★

the planet"—a riveting talk that caught the imagination of many of the comrades present, with a list of further reading given to follow up.

Youth and ideology was the next theme, with the role of the Connolly Youth Movement in awakening the youth from their slumber well outlined, with descriptions of their various campaigns and steadily increasing membership. The speaker gave us all hope as we left the summer school for the four corners of Ireland after a brilliant weekend along the River Blackwater.

My thanks to all who arranged and participated. ★





## The spoils of economic war

Juan Fernando Teran of *teleSUR*  
on how the United States  
and Saudi Arabia  
profit from sanctions  
on Venezuela and Iran

**T**HE UNITED STATES has been playing the role of the world's economic bully. So far it has imposed sanctions against Afghanistan, Belarus, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Crimea, Cuba, Cyprus, Eritrea, Haïti, Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Lebanon, Libya, Russia, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

But if unilateral harassment has proved ineffective in achieving conventional geopolitical objectives, why does the United States insist on bullying Venezuela and Iran?

A glance at the political economy of international oil markets—an industry used as a battlefield for furthering the aims of war—provides an insight into the seemingly irrational realm towards which Donald Trump has been leading US foreign policy.

### Energy-independence requires manipulating markets

As international markets are highly speculative, many people believe that price trends cannot be manipulated; but that is not true. When energy commodities and strategic raw materials are involved, the United States does not sit back as a patient price-taker but prefers to throw the dice as a price-maker.

Between 2006 and 2014, when China's economic boom was increasing the demand for international commodities, structural changes occurred that, ironically, favoured the United States a few years later.

Firstly, high oil prices allowed the fracking industry to become a financially viable option. This in turn helped the United States to gradually overcome the dependence it had experienced for thirty years and that made it the world's largest oil importer in 2016, with a voracious appetite of about 12 million barrels per day.

In December 2018, for the first time in seventy-five years, the United States became a net oil exporter, thanks to “thousands of wells producing from the Permian region of Texas and New Mexico to Bakken in North Dakota and Marcellus in Pennsylvania,” according to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*. In the words of Michael Lynch, president of Strategic Energy and Economic Research Inc., “We are becoming the dominant power in the world.”

Trump is reaping the fruit of energy-independence, a condition he did not contribute to at all.

This abundance of energy is fragile, however, because maintaining it depends on keeping oil prices as high as possible. To force this to happen, therefore, anything that threatens to diminish global oil supplies is actually good for the United

States, including the blockade of Venezuelan and Iranian exports.

And that's not all . . .

While the United States now has enough oil to be able to export some of its reserves, Trump's homeland can't satisfy the world's energy demands completely. This opens up business opportunities for Saudi Arabia and other allies, which can also benefit from economic sanctions against Venezuela and Iran.

Before April 2018, when the United States began applying a new round of sanctions, Iran was OPEC's second-largest producer, exporting almost 3 million barrels per day. Since then, however, its oil production has been reduced by more than 1 million barrels.

In Venezuela, US foreign policy has achieved a similar result: between February 2018 and January 2019 Venezuela's average oil output dropped from 1.5 million barrels per day to 1.1 million, not much more than half its production in 2006.

These combined results have triggered a trend towards the contraction of global oil supplies, which could be worsened if the Libyan civil war adds another cut of 1.2 million barrels per day in the near future.

Nevertheless, the oil market's invisible hand is not enough to ensure those high prices the United States desperately needs, as global supply essentially meets

# The US budget deficit is how much more the government spends than it receives in revenue annually.

global demand, moving about 99½ million barrels per day, according to the International Energy Agency.

This won't change on its own: global economic growth will not easily lead to a new boom in demand for oil. On the contrary, factors such as Brexit and the US trade war against China could reduce growth prospects all over the world.

In this context, where the demand for oil remains more or less fixed, putting Venezuela and Iran out of business changes the share of the pie each country gets. And, of course, only the lucky ones get to continue enjoying their slice of the oil markets. Among these is Saudi Arabia, a country that will be able to capture more clients and expand its oil output without violating its OPEC commitments.

Oil prices have already responded to America's politically motivated supply shortages. The average spot price for crude oil rose from \$56 per barrel in January to \$67 per barrel in May, an increase of 16 per cent. This would not have been possible without the sanctions that prevented Venezuela from selling more than half its production in February.

The international average oil price will most probably remain below \$100 per barrel, but today's unstable equilibrium prices are enough to keep American companies in the fossil-fuel business, at home and abroad.

One of the short-term costs of this manoeuvre could be price volatility. However, it seems that the Trump government has assimilated such an eventuality; global stability hasn't ever been one of America's foreign policy priorities.

Looking at it pragmatically, the negative consequences of harassing Venezuela and Iran are outweighed by a very lucrative reward: 2 million barrels of oil per day. As Reuters commented on 5 May, the United States now removes about 2 million barrels per day from the world's supply, through sanctions on the Iranian and Venezuelan oil industries. But it hopes that soaring American oil production—now at a record 12 million barrels per day—will keep global markets well supplied, and hold prices down.

The political manipulation of supply and demand is a risky rent-seeking game. And this is where Trump's

personality could play an important role. He is not a risk-averse player; and so far he seems unconcerned with the collateral damage arising from his economic warfare. One of these is that sanctions "will help oil producers because the prices will go up, and Russia will be one of the most significant oil producers," according to Robert Malley, former Middle East adviser to Barack Obama, as reported by the Novosti press agency.

We are no longer living in that "good old world" in which US geopolitics were for ensuring the flow of cheap natural resources from the closest friendly provider. Hence, ironically, a regional production crisis near US territory could be good for the United States in the medium term, as Giancarlo Elia Valori wrote in *Geostrategic*, adding that "the US is entirely in favour of an increase in the oil barrel price—and hence indirectly in favour of tension in Venezuela."

Trump opens war fronts everywhere, which wouldn't seem to make sense unless they were a distraction. But they're not.

The rise of China as a global power has been silently transforming the international monetary system, another element triggering the United States into endless economic bullying.

Since the abandonment of the gold standard in 1971, the US dollar is not linked to any assets, becoming a fiat currency. In such cases only a country's output could back the currency in the long run. But what happens when monetary expansion occurs faster than increases in productivity?

Bringing new meaning to the motto "In God we trust," coined so long ago, the dollar's value depends on its capacity to remain an international reserve currency—that is, a currency that other countries hold as part of their foreign-exchange reserves and use in their international transactions.

In a world where economic agents don't ask the Federal Reserve to convert their notes into gold, or any other physical asset, trust is the only thing keeping the United States upright. As a result, the dollar has remained a mighty currency, because most international transactions are traded in US dollars.

On 30 January, in fact, the US

national security adviser, John Bolton, revealed very little when he blatantly admitted that the attempted coup in Venezuela was really about grasping for oil resources. But in reality, aggression by the United States hides something much more than that.

If the dollar stops being the world's most traded currency, the United States will not be able to issue the notes it needs to finance an almost fifty-year government deficit, which rose from \$666 billion in 2017 to \$779 billion in 2018.

The US budget deficit is how much more the government spends than it receives in revenue annually. The deficit in the US budget for the fiscal year 2020 is expected to be \$1.1 trillion. This is the biggest deficit since 2012. Trump has ramped up the deficit to pay for record levels of military spending.

The dollar losing status as the world's preferred currency would give the United States problems in paying for imports in an economy where its lack of international competitiveness has produced a trade deficit since 1976, which widened to \$50 billion in March.

Last but not least, if the dollar stops being almighty the United States will have a very difficult time maintaining itself as a world-class economy, as its government debt exceeded \$22 trillion in February. This is more than 76 per cent of what the country is able to produce in one year. Nevertheless, this is most likely to get worse: the debt-to-GDP ratio will rise to 150 per cent by 2049, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Besides preventing Venezuela and Iran from exporting their natural resources, the United States is actively seeking to avoid the collapse of the dollar, an inevitability in the next few years, as the history of previous empires has shown. This is why the Trump government is prone to fighting against the use of barter, virtual currencies, or other alternative international payment methods.

Sanctions are not whimsical expressions of this president: they are tools used to retain hegemonic power in a multipolar world no longer willing to tolerate such an aspiration. At the core of US bullying is not ideological disagreement but economic decline. ★





## The working class becomes the subject of art

Jenny Farrell on the 200th anniversary of Gustave Courbet

A CONSTANT feature of any news programme in the capitalist world is “Business News” and reports from the stock markets. Those who toil to create the profits are always absent from the story.

This is particularly apparent to me, because I grew up in the German Democratic Republic, and at school even our literature books always included paintings with a working-class or socialist subject matter. Some of these left an indelible impression on me, so much so that I still think of them and occasionally look at them even all these decades later.

One of these paintings is Gustave Courbet’s paintings *The Stone-Breakers*.

Courbet painted *The Stone-Breakers* in his home town of Ornans, in eastern

France, in 1849. He was thirty years old. Marx and Engels had published the *Communist Manifesto* the previous year, which stated as its opening fanfare: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,” and “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.” This is the defining insight of the middle of the nineteenth century.

*The Stone-Breakers* depicts two roadside labourers, in almost life-size: 170 × 240 cm (67 × 94 in.). The labourers take up the greater part of the picture, emphasising the fact that they are the central figures and protagonists.

With the very recent proletarian

uprisings of 1848, Courbet’s focus on the common people was radical. This image of two men, one only starting out in a life of hard labour and the other towards its end, expresses unrelenting hardship. Despite their arduous toil, these men just barely survive. Their clothes are badly torn and patched.

The colours in which they are painted blend with their place of work; the palette is dominated by shades of grey, bleached blues, earthy whites and browns. Rough brush-strokes translate the coarseness of the men’s clothing and their surroundings into tangible reality. There is no attempt to “beautify” the image by giving it a polished appearance, as would have been the painterly norm in Courbet’s time. This is a radical departure in theme and form.



Gustave Courbet was one of the first painters to make the life of workers the subject of realistic art.



PREVIOUS PAGE *The Stone-Breakers* (1849, since destroyed)  
 ABOVE *The Winnowers* (1855)  
 (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes)  
 LEFT *Self portrait with pipe* (1848-1849)

The older man's red striped waistcoat, near the centre of the picture, stands out. It is a statement of dignity and suggests the colour of the working class. Apart from that, however, combined with his white shirt and blue socks, this worker subtly displays the colours of the Tricolour, the French flag as it emerged in the Revolution of 1789. These colours once represented liberty, equality, and fraternity; what have they come to mean sixty years later in this bleached and torn form? This is without doubt a deliberate irony on the part of Courbet, especially as the colours adorn the older man, aged about seventy, according to Courbet. Courbet's grandfather had been a *sans-culotte* (militant revolutionary) in 1789.

The two figures are etched sharply

against a dark background, themselves throwing shadows that nearly merge with that of the low hill. Only in the upper right corner of the picture is there a patch of blue sky. The maturity of the corn behind them indicates early summer, as does the heat of the blazing sun. A large pot and a single spoon directly beside their place of work tells us that their whole life revolves around their labour. It also suggests that they are related. They eat on the side of the road; there is no private space.

We cannot make out the face of either man. The older man's face is in profile, but only the lower part of it is visible under the straw hat, which casts a shadow over it. The younger man, lifting the broken stones, has his back turned. By not showing the faces clearly, Courbet focuses the viewer on the labour and its conditions, not appealing for sympathy but for insight, in almost Brechtian de-individualisation, preventing unreflective emotional involvement.

Courbet uses a similar technique in his great painting of women at work, *The Winnowers*. Here too, earthy reds, off-whites and blue dominate the palette. As in *The Stone-Breakers*, the central figure is adorned in red—here much more

obviously so. Again, faces are either turned away, as in the main figure, looking down, or obscured by shadow, preventing eye contact with the viewer and thereby individualisation.

Once more the workers are shown at work, in the work-place, surrounded by the product of their work. And once again we see the lunch vessel in the picture, here at the centre back, with a ladle, and another one beside the sacks. The pots, plate, bowls and sacks echo the shape of the sieve, held up by the central figure in an energetic movement that contrasts with the more weary impression of the woman on her left. This tool is at the centre of the picture.

As in *The Stone-Breakers*, the workers toil in close proximity, but there is little connection or communication between them. All focus is on the labour. The unity of the composition is achieved by earthy colours, underlining the characters' relationship with the soil, and by the many elliptical or round shapes uniting them.

In *The Stone-Breakers* the older man's powerful hands stand out. His very strength and repetitive action, his less fluid, almost mechanised appearance, suggests a machine, and labourers as machines. Despite his age, he radiates strength and purpose. He is a force to be reckoned with. There is a great sense of dignity.

The younger man seems to be struggling more under the weight of the stone. He is newer to the job, not as mechanised in his movements. His clothes are even more ragged, his dusty shoes in tatters. Yet both figures possess a powerful physical presence, which is produced by the sun shining on them, light flowing round their bodies.

These two men express the lifelong toil of the working class and its condition. Their anonymity allows us to generalise. There is no sentimentality, and no idealisation. The artist conveys his sympathy for the workers, their dignity, and his disgust for a system that thrives on such poverty and exploitation.

Gustave Courbet was one of the first painters to make the life of workers the subject of realistic art. *The Stone-Breakers*, the first of his great realistic works, was destroyed in the bombing of Dresden in 1945. ★

# MEMORY

## Kildare anti-fascist remembered

On Saturday 22 June, Christy Moore unveiled a plaque to the socialist republican Frank Conroy, a Kildare man killed in 1936 while fighting with the International Brigades in the Spanish war against fascism.

The plaque, presented to Kilcullen

Heritage Centre by the Friends of the International Brigades (Ireland), is a twin of a plaque presented to the town council of Lopera in April 2016.

More than a hundred people packed into the centre to hear the historian James Durney speak on the life of Frank Conroy, who was born on 25 February 1914 in Kilcullen, Co. Kildare.

Christy sang his song "Viva la Quinta Brigada" and was joined on stage by the

Kilcullen Choir to give an incredible performance of "Ride On" and "Nancy Spain."

On 16 December 2012 the Frank Conroy Committee held its first commemoration for this young Irish revolutionary who had conveniently been airbrushed from history by the establishment. Today the International Brigader Frank Conroy is as well known as the Kildare Fenian John Devoy. ★



## Connolly Books

**Established 1932. Ireland's oldest radical bookshop.**

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

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

- ★ Irish history
- ★ politics
- ★ Marxist classics
- ★ feminism
- ★ environmental issues
- ★ progressive literature
- ★ trade union affairs
- ★ philosophy
- ★ radical periodicals



## Join the fight for socialism

**Send me information on the Communist Party**

name

address

post code

e mail

phone

send to CPI 42 East Essex Street Dublin D02 XH96  
or CPI PO Box 85 Belfast BT1 1SR