

Socialist Voice



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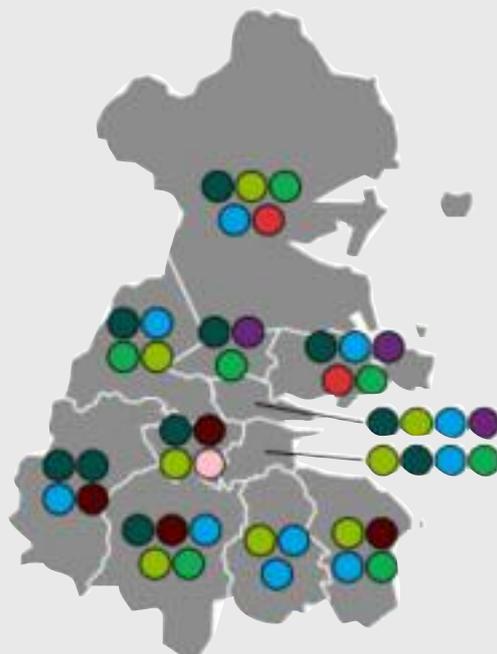
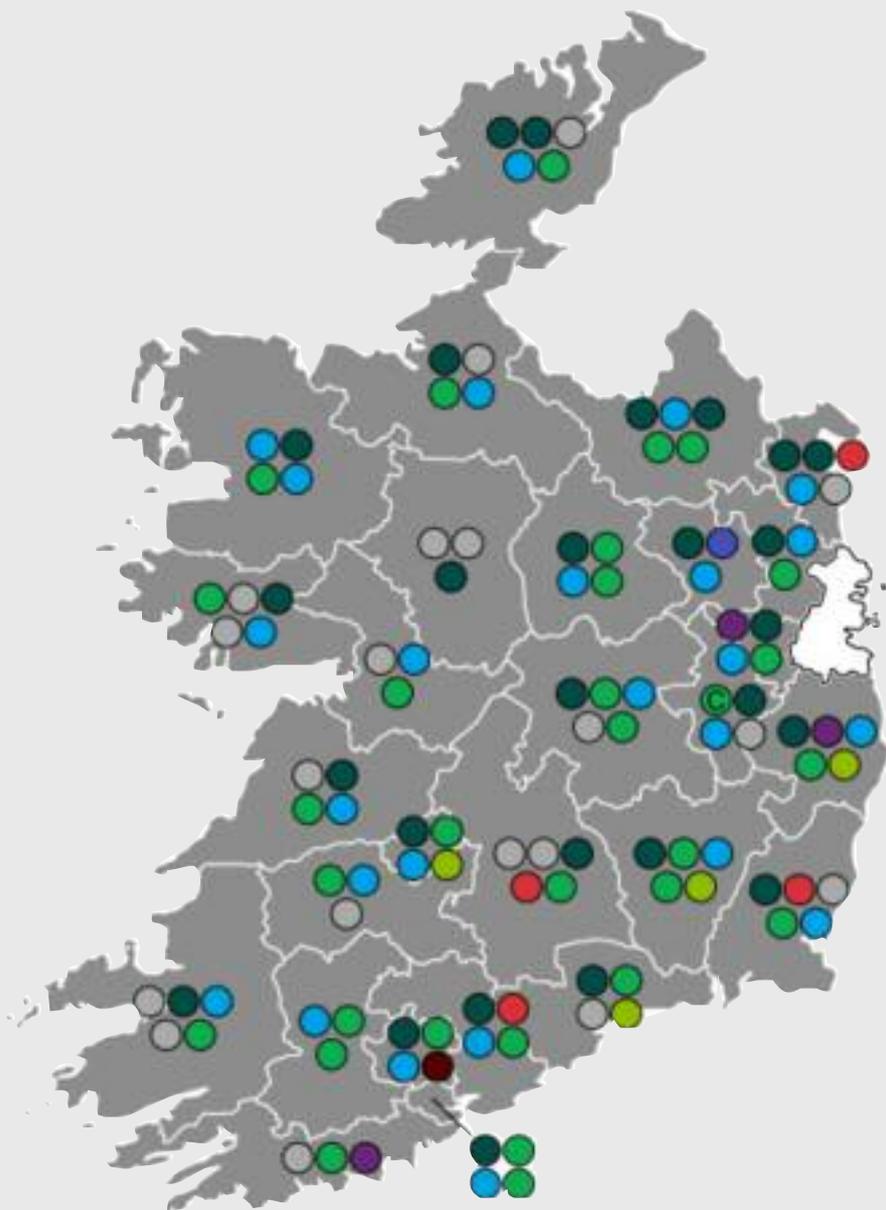
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A platform to build on

The general election brought to the surface some of the issues and concerns of working people within this state *writes Eugene McCartan P2*



“Liberty, sir, liberty, is the Briton’s boast; and by all my coal mines in Cornwall, I reverence its guardians.”—
Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766).



CLASS POLITICS

Consternation among the elite

TOMMY MCKEARNEY

THAT THE AGENTS of imperialism and the ruling elite everywhere weaponise information is nothing new. Two thousand years ago Augustus Caesar had supporters paint salacious and damaging stories about his enemies on the walls of Rome.

Technology has changed since then, but the underlying objective and methods remain the same. The process is carried out using a two-track approach: distort the truth shamelessly but convincingly, and where possible prevent the other saying anything at all.

Evidence of this is all around us, from the bilge broadcast by Fox News to the sophisticated narrative spun by RTE and the BBC, including their reporting of the American bombing of Al Jazeera's offices in Kabul and Baghdad, the imprisonment of Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, and, more locally, the imposition of the old section 31.

Pressure on those offering an alternative or anti-imperialist outlook is relentless. Google deleted the Youtube account of the British channel of Iran's Press TV in January following the

assassination of the Iranian general Qasem Suleimani. Meanwhile the US government is seeking ways to close down Telesur, the media network based in Venezuela and supported by Cuba.

Unless any reader might think that the egregious lie is confined to Trump and his spooks, reflect for a few moments on matters this side of the Atlantic. Last month the *Independent* (London) published an article by Keir Starmer under the breathtaking heading "Our radical socialist tradition must remain at the heart of Labour."¹ This ostensibly left-wing sentiment was written by the man who bears most responsibility for forcing the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn to prevaricate on its Brexit policy, thereby facilitating a massive Tory victory in the last election.

This former director of public prosecutions, head of the Crown Prosecution Service for England and Wales and pillar of the British establishment has the brass-necked effrontery to pose as a radical socialist while winning the approval of every right-wing commentator in Britain.

Not, indeed, that we are spared similar machinations in Ireland. Since

Sinn Féin's shock success in the recent general election in the Republic, though, they have reached new heights as pandemonium reigns throughout the establishment on both sides of the border.

For years unionism has taken comfort from a belief that the South's electorate had little or no interest in reunification. There is no longer the same certainty. However, an opinion poll conducted by the University of Liverpool and published conveniently in the days after the election provided a measure of reassurance for unionists. With only 29 per cent of Northern voters supporting reunification, according to the survey, Jon Tonge, professor of politics at the university, was able to say that "the data offers an antidote to excitable recent commentary concerning the imminence of Irish unity." The timing of the report's publication was perhaps merely a coincidence, but, understandably, many are sceptical.

Meanwhile south of the border every reactionary element in the 26-County state has taken part in the Stop Sinn Féin offensive. The hostile media were unsparing in their vitriol, one right-wing

Election



THE GENERAL ELECTION has brought to the surface some of the issues and concerns of working people within this state. The problems of housing, rent, health, pension age and the capacity of working people to make ends meet moved up the political agenda.

A decade or more of the most recent economic strategy of "austerity" has taken a heavy toll on working people, their families and their communities. Forced austerity has always been a basic feature of life under capitalism for workers; we have always had to stand in line for health services, always waiting on the housing list or taking out life-controlling mortgages to get shelter. The children of workers rarely went on to third-level education.

While we have made advances, through hard struggles on all those issues, the last decade has been

particularly harsh on working people. The national ruling-class forces, in alliance with the European Union, have been engaged in a systematic dismantling of the gains won over the course of the twentieth century by workers throughout Europe.

If we look at the turn-out of 63 per cent we see that just over 66 per cent voted for parties that could be described as establishment parties—Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party, and Social Democrats—while a little over 27 per cent voted for Sinn Féin and the ultra-left, who could easily coalesce on a left social-democratic programme. And if we add the Green Party, which won 7 per cent, that left-of-centre vote comes to about 34 per cent—a significant platform on which to build.

The election showed that a large number of workers want change in their



For years unionism has taken comfort from a belief that the South's electorate had little or no interest in reunification.

hack going so far as to claim that "24.5% of the electorate voted for the Irish equivalent of the Monster Raving Loony Party."² It's hardly necessary to make a comprehensive list of the mainstream media contributors to this brouhaha; but special mention has to be given to the intervention of the Garda commissioner, Drew Harris.

With exquisite political timing, the former RUC officer made a speech claiming that the Provisional IRA's Army Council is Sinn Féin's governing authority. If the commissioner is so worried about this he might share his concerns with his colleagues north of the border. The chief constable of the PSNI, Simon Byrne, was happy recently to employ the services of Sinn Féin's vice-president, Michelle O'Neill, and her colleague Gerry Kelly during a recruiting drive for the force.

In reality, Harris must know that, even if the Army Council still existed in its old military form, no group of seven persons could exercise control over thirty-seven popularly elected members of the Dáil. But fear of a secret army was never really the issue here. Raising the spectre of subversion is the political equivalent of the cardsharp distracting punters as he performs the three-card trick. While attention is focused on a non-existent terror threat, the issues that won Sinn

Féin a large slice of the vote are being played down

Make no mistake, it is the issues rather than Mary Lou McDonald's party that are causing such consternation among the wealthy ruling elite and their followers. If a programme attempting to address inequalities and deficiencies in society gains momentum among the public it would threaten the privileged cohort benefiting from neo-liberal austerity.

This group is growing increasingly nervous, and therefore aggressive, as the global economy is threatened with at best a slowdown, if not outright recession, exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 epidemic.

It's important, therefore, not to let the situation descend into a war of words centred on Sinn Féin. Doing so would merely allow right-wing apologists to shift the narrative away from the reality of biting hardship and inequality and towards nebulous arguments that will never be resolved—because those dissembling have a vested interest in altering the narrative.

In this respect the Right2Change unions have made a positive contribution with a statement issued last month.³ While not being dismissive or disrespectful of the part played by Sinn Féin in making progressive demands, spokespersons for the four

unions involved emphasised the need for action on the issues. Brendan Ogle of Unite identified these clearly as "housing, health, education, public services and long-overdue improvements in workers' rights," adding that if such a programme cannot be implemented at present "then it needs to be developed to ensure a brighter future."

He hits the nail on the head here by concentrating on the importance of the programme to be implemented and, if it's not possible to do so now, that we persist until we succeed. It is vital, therefore, that we are not diverted by those peddling misinformation on behalf of capital and the empire.

As always, there is a world to be won if we keep our eye on the real objective. ★

1 Keith Starmer, "Our radical socialist tradition must remain at the heart of Labour," *Independent* (London), 22 February 2020 (at <https://bit.ly/2Vgjtki>).

2 Ian O'Doherty, "Sinn Féin: A party of crackpots?" *Spiked*, 24 February 2020 (<https://www.spiked-online.com/>).

3 Right2Change, "Right2Change unions call for an historic left led Government for change," at <https://bit.ly/2Vf2RjL>.

real material conditions, that is, to the endless struggle to keep a roof over their heads, to get medical attention when they need it, to have sufficient wages to cover what they need to buy, to have security in old age—not a lot to ask for but something that those who control our lives are determined to prevent us having. Their priority is to make profits, out of every aspect of human need. To do this they need to keep costs down—that is, to pay workers less and make them work harder, and make their existence as precarious as possible, to make them vulnerable to those pressures.

Sinn Féin did not create the shift to the left among working people: it has become the temporary vehicle for the expression of those deep frustrations and unfulfilled aspirations.

The change in how people voted

shows their demand for a left government, with people-centred economic and social policies. The growing left vote is the product of a long period of low-level resistance by working people, including opposition to service charges and water charges, resistance to health cuts, and the repeal of outdated social legislation on such issues as divorce, abortion, sexuality, etc.

At first the ultra-left benefited from some of these struggles, but thanks to their infantile approach to politics and the abuse of democratic struggles they have gradually lost it.

Working people have clearly lent Sinn Féin their votes, both in an act of defiance to the establishment and also wanting something done about their living conditions, seeing a left social-democratic economic and social agenda as articulated by Sinn Féin as meeting

those needs.

Sinn Féin's programme, as they themselves proudly boast, is costed and well within the fiscal straitjacket of the European Union. Many of the economic hardships experienced by working people both here in this state and in the EU are experienced because of this fiscal straitjacket.

The challenge now is to build on this emerging class-consciousness and to sharpen the struggle on a range of vital questions. How do we build and strengthen workers' organisations?—building class resistance outside the electoral arena, building and developing people's understanding that this system cannot provide what they need, or a decent, healthy life.

The election result is only the echo of the battle, not the battle itself. ★

CONNOLLY YOUTH MOVEMENT

Connolly Youth celebrates 50 years

Youth ★ Sovereignty ★ Democracy



“The Irish people have never been prepared to accept passively either domination from abroad or repression at home. Masters North and South are faced with a risen people. A new generation has grown up. An extrovert, aggressive generation, a questioning generation, thrusting at the bonds of the existing order.”

Manifesto of the first all-Ireland congress of the Connolly Youth Movement, 1970.

FERGAL TOWMEY

IN 2015 DELEGATES from two Irish cities made their way to East Essex Street in Dublin to conduct the Connolly Youth Movement’s annual congress. In 2018, delegates from three cities convened on Cork for the same purpose. In 2020, delegates, for the first time from branches established in six different cities, will congregate in Belfast for a weekend of camaraderie, discussion, and the formulation of policies and tactics of youth resistance to capitalism.

The political journey of the Connolly Youth Movement over the last decade

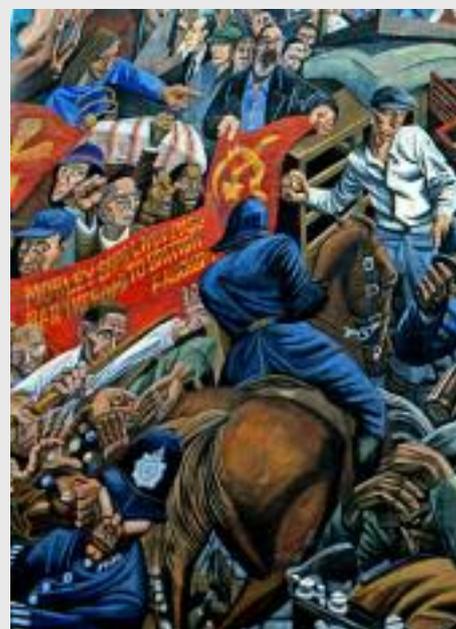
has been astonishing, and all indications suggest that the best is still ahead, as rising levels of class-consciousness in Ireland are converging into a historically unprecedented threat to the political establishment.

There will be many different subjects for the congress participants to reflect on as we begin a new decade of struggle; but many of the problems and challenges facing the organisation are the kind of difficulties that are good to have: how to utilise the upsurge in membership and activity and translate it into effective action, how to build good cadreship, and how to place class struggle at the heart of a generation’s rejection of traditional politics.

As these questions are teased out through debates and workshops, a new link is being forged in an Irish communist movement fast approaching its centenary. The congress will feature a commemorative talk on the life of Madge Davison, the CYM’s first all-Ireland general secretary, and a guided tour of Belfast.

The movement’s goal has shifted from establishing its profile to

How can we defeat fascism?



GRAHAM HARRINGTON

THE COMMUNIST International defined fascism as “the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.”

Fascism arose from capitalism’s need to solve the crises it itself created, at a time when the Soviet Union and the communist movement presented a real threat to the capitalist system’s existence. It was a replacement of state power by the moneyed interests that took to eliminating the communists and then the other working-class movements through the use of open terrorism, without the need for bourgeois legality.

Fascism was not just a European phenomenon: it has a presence wherever capitalism exists. In Latin America, “Operation Condor” was a US-sponsored scheme in the 1970s that propped up fascist dictatorships in the region, with the assassination of leftists in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and other countries, making it safe for American

investment. More recently, fascist groups were used in Ukraine, Syria and Libya to carry out the work of imperialist interests.

If fascism has a clear class basis, it follows that anti-fascism must also.

If fascism is intent on representing the ruling class and imperialism and using racism etc., it follows that anti-fascism must align itself with the working class, with progressive sections of other classes in certain contexts and anti-imperialism, and stand by all those oppressed groups under threat.

With this in mind, we must ask certain questions. Is Donald Trump a fascist? Are Nigel Farage and Peter Casey fascists? Is the ethno-state of Israel fascist? Is the local man down the pub annoyed at immigration a fascist?

These questions can only be answered if they are approached in the correct way, not with a knee-jerk response.

Anti-fascism must be as constructive of an alternative as it is anything else. It should not become a convenient excuse

The political journey of the Connolly Youth Movement over the last decade has been astonishing, and all indications suggest that the best is still ahead

becoming one of the main political institutions of the Irish working class. These goals are ambitious, but the central role of the CYM in society is to serve to school activists in practice, to prepare cadres for the responsibilities of serving and organising their communities. This feeling of responsibility differentiates the CYM from other youth organisations, which work on the basis of being an adjunct to electoral politics or debating societies; the CYM's point, and the point of all communists, is to change the world. It emanates from a lived experience that is shared between young people all over the country, that the time for waiting for incremental improvements is over and that change needs to be substantial and immediate.

As socialist politics face the constant risk of being watered down or re-adjusted to fit the demands of the hegemonic totality of capitalism, more than ever a red youth is desperately needed to point out the shortcomings of the politics that social democracy, liberalism and conservatism are offering young people in this period,

for liberal play-acting in make-belief culture wars which the left seems intent on making worse. Some sections of the left almost seem, out of their ultra-leftist defeatism, to see working-class people as essentially prone to racism and chauvinistic attitudes, putting their belief instead in the liberal middle-class strata.

Where it is applied, fascism takes society backwards. In the areas of Europe that were occupied by the Nazis, slavery and feudalism made a return, for the first time in centuries. In Ireland, it is not unnoticed that the far right have usually been tied to British imperialism in one way or another, from the Blueshirts to their successors today.

Phil Piratin, a British communist MP in the 1940s, describes in his book *Our Flag Stays Red* some of the tactics used against fascists by communists in the 1930s. Communists would infiltrate themselves into British Union of Fascists circles and try to carry out propaganda work to sow disillusionment among their ranks. In some cases, when noted British fascists were facing eviction and,

where everything is being reimagined: what it means to be Irish, what it means to be republican, what it means to be a socialist.

A rupture with the established orthodoxy of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil has opened, and it is up to the cadres of the CYM to shape the future that will succeed it, to ensure that we have the theoretical tools for building a nation we can be proud of.

This constant reworking of these boundaries is occurring in concert with re-emerging prisms of social criticism of capitalism as young people are seeing the failure of capitalism in Ireland to facilitate language revival and environmental protection. The result is a country in suspended animation, and thousands of young people's lives suspended along with it.

The red lines that were set by neo-liberal parties in the new consensus after 1991 have resulted in a disastrous crisis that touches upon every aspect of the lives of young people in Ireland. The laissez-faire approach of wealth as the primary policy-maker has produced a society where every social good is scrutinised,

predictably, their movement gave them no support, communists would make a point of standing with them. Piratin describes how these former fascists would then rip up their British Union of Fascists membership card in disgust.

Could we imagine taking similar actions today, essentially calling the bluff of the far right that it represents working people's interests? During the water charges movement we were engaging with all sorts of working-class activists. The CPI pressed the position that the struggle was about privatisation, giving the people's anger a class grounding. This took the campaign from being, in its earlier stages, about tax to one centred on ownership and class power, in the process isolating the small number of confusers who wished to manipulate public anger for their own narrow interests.

The same can be said for the anger today at the housing crisis. Working people are justifiably angered by the state's support for landlords and developers over that of the people,

weighed and dissected for its profitability and worth, from mental health to accommodation, to language, to education, to democracy and trade union rights. Everything that is intrinsic to the potential of young workers and students is derided as useless, useless if it does not serve capital.

The will is now there to cross these red lines and to live in a country that is moving in a direction that gives voice to the voiceless and effect to all the deferred and misdirected hopes of the people of this country.

The next ten years will be crucial in shaping this direction, and as congress participants formulate a renewed programme this year the words from the documentary *Rocky Road to Dublin* (1968) will be foremost in their mind: "What do you do with your revolution once you've got it?" Coming together to share in building the coherence of that vision for a new Ireland is the energising and encouraging outcome of the CYM's national discussions. Going forward, our determination will continue to be tinged with hope for the future as we enter what we demand will be the *red decade*. ★

though this often expresses itself against immigrants and refugees. This is a deliberate policy. How else can we explain Leo Varadkar and others tweeting images of themselves welcoming Syrian refugees, as if they cared about their well-being? If they really cared about refugees they would stop the use of Shannon Airport by those who are creating the refugees in the first place.

The response of the left has been to try to fight a defensive battle, tackling the myths of immigrants and refugees getting houses and cars along with everything else. While of course this type of work is needed, to an extent, it does not on its own challenge fascism, or the ability of the far right to further sow division. There is a pressing need for the left to organise workers and, in the process, seeing what we can learn as much as what we can teach.

On the housing issue, for example, the winning of universal public housing for all workers will render the whole issue of racism moot, far more than any shouting of "racist" can do. ★

The Earth System and the capitalist system are incompatible

EOGHAN O'NEILL

IN NATURE, many complex processes must occur to guarantee the sustainability of life. The earth itself is a system of interaction between the physical, chemical and biological processes that take place within it.

Within the Earth System, which consists of the land, seas, atmosphere, and poles, we find many natural cycles occurring, such as the carbon cycle, water cycle, nitrogen, phosphorus and sulphur cycles, and many others.

All these cycles and processes have allowed life on earth to flourish for billions of years; and human life has been part of that story for roughly 150,000–200,000 years. It is only in the last 10,000 years or so, since a stable-climate epoch known as the Holocene, when average fluctuations in temperature remained within 1 degree, allowed for settled agricultural

is interlinked with the rise and development of the capitalist system.

Over the past couple of decades there has been what Ian Angus, author of *Facing the Anthropocene* (and guest speaker for this year's Connolly Memorial Lecture in May), refers to as a revolution in science—that is, the development of Earth System science, where the sum of all the parts within the system, which individually have been studied over the centuries, have been combined to a point where we now have a fuller understanding of the interactivity, interconnectedness and interdependence of the natural cycles and processes on the planet.

What Earth System scientists also conclude is that life and human development have an effect on the natural cycles—water, carbon, etc.—and that our own social and economic systems are “embedded” in the system. What they have also concluded is that,

more.” This global change has adverse effects on the Earth System, threatening the sustainability of civilisation as we know it.

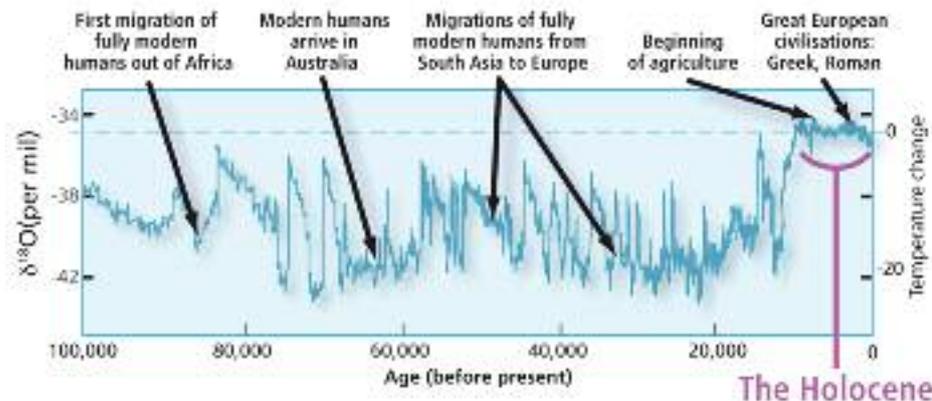
This has led those in the field of Earth System science, headed by the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, to make the formal recommendation in 2000 that we have left the Holocene epoch and have entered a new epoch—the Anthropocene: the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on the Earth System. They state that “the magnitude, spatial scale, and pace of human-induced change are unprecedented in human history and perhaps in the history of the Earth. The Earth system is now operating in a ‘no-analogue state’.” We cannot compare it with previous times, because it is unlike anything that has gone before.

There has been debate about when the Anthropocene epoch began (the birth of agricultural societies or the Industrial Revolution, for example). However, a consensus has been found, thanks to the research conducted by Earth System scientists, that the period from 1950 onwards really encapsulates the beginning of the Anthropocene epoch.

The reason for this is the accelerated pace at which production and consumption, the “socio-economic trends,” have developed, with their impact on the natural cycles and processes within the Earth System. This period from 1950 to the present is known as the Great Acceleration, as illustrated in the two diagrams here.

It would be wrong to reach the conclusion that what has transpired is to be blamed on the entire human race, that it is in our nature, as a species, to act in a destructive way towards all life on the planet. It would also be false to conclude that the acceleration that has taken place is due to population growth, that there are too many people living on the planet.

To counter the second conclusion first: the consumption of energy, food, water and other basic needs and the demand for a range of goods and services is vastly higher in the more



communities to develop, thrive and multiply to the level of human development we have today.

Humans have always had an impact on their surroundings; but that is true of all life, as life is part of, not detached from, the Earth System. However, it was only since the Industrial Revolution, beginning about 1750, that we began to witness the impact of human activity affecting the global system rather than just being localised. The rise of industry

“in many cases, the human systems are now the main drivers of change in the Earth system.”

So human activity is not just having an impact on climate change but is in fact creating a global change in “atmospheric circulation, ocean circulation, the carbon cycle, the nitrogen cycle, the water cycle and other cycles, sea-ice changes, sea-level changes, food webs, biological diversity, pollution, health, fish stocks, and

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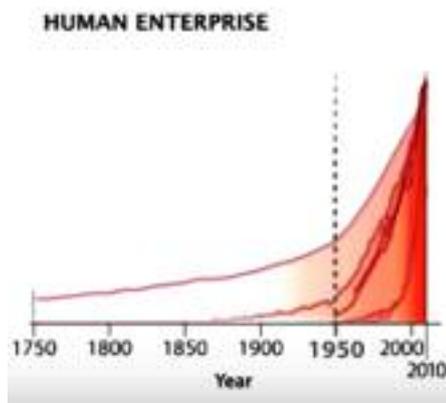


affluent regions of the developed countries of the global north than of those living in the underdeveloped countries of the global south. So to blame climate change and global change on everyone equally, or even to blame it on the countries with high population growth, generally those in the global south, is to totally obscure the reality of uneven development and consumption. Clearly it is the advanced capitalist countries that have put their foot on the pedal.

Global change is not just a numbers game. There are enough resources to meet the basic needs of the 7 billion people living on this

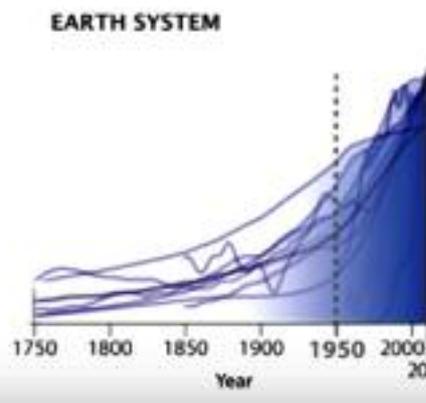
human nature but to the system in which human nature and human development has proceeded. The system that has existed for the past three centuries, more or less, is the capitalist system. It is the system itself, the owners of capital, its beneficiaries and those who uphold capitalism that we need to target, to lay the blame on.

In nature we find many complex cycles. The foundation and the longevity of cycles is due to the replenishing and recycling that takes place within these processes. Within the human body similar processes and cycles take place to allow humans to



planet; what is totally skewed is how resources and wealth are employed and distributed, how those who own and control them get to make the decisions on how they are utilised and distributed.

This is not due to a theory of



have the lifespan that we have. Without the recycling process, life would be stunted. The respiratory system, for example, is a biological system consisting of specific organs and structures used for gas exchange in animals and plants, to facilitate the

inhalation of oxygen and the exhalation of carbon dioxide.

For life to flourish there must exist an exchange of equivalents, a balance of use and waste, where each use creates waste and where waste in one system creates use in another. Everything in our planet is formed by the balance of individual systems, incorporated in the Earth System, which has created the conditions for a stable earth, allowing humankind to expand their horizons.

Each system is cyclical in nature. If it were not so, the evolutionary processes that have taken place over the lifespan of the earth would not have been able to develop as they have.

Capitalism and the capitalist system run counter to the natural cycles of the planet. Its nature is in the form of a spiral. What this means in essence is that the capitalist system, within which the majority of the inhabitants of the earth exist, exhibits a use and a waste function without completing the cycle. The system makes use of resources without an equivalent use and replenishing of its waste product; therefore it produces a non-equivalence of exchange, an imbalance.

Capitalism functions in the form of $M < M^1$, where capital investment (M) must be less than what it gets in return for that investment (M^1). The difference between M and M^1 is profit.

Profit, in commodity production (C), is the extraction of surplus value from labour power, paying labour less than the value of what labour produces. In finance monopoly capitalism ($M-M^1$), commodity production doesn't need to take place. It is based on speculation of assets. However, without a commodity production base ($M-C-M^1$), without the super-exploitation of workers in the global south, finance, investments and speculative economies would not be able to function and dominate as they do.

So, in the instances where $M = M^1$ (nil profits or break-even) and $M > M^1$ (a loss), capitalists and the capitalist system will find themselves in a state of crisis.

Continued overleaf

Earth system

Capitalism's main function is to produce profit for the owners of capital. In this sense, capitalism and capitalists see themselves as removed from the Earth System, because their function is to continually accumulate profit. Where this is not possible, capitalism enters a state of crisis, which extends into a crisis for working people, with job losses, austerity measures, and all the rest.

For capitalism to be in the $M < M^1$ state it must continually seek to exploit both human and natural resources in its quest to accumulate profit. Therefore it is necessary to externalise environmental costs and to employ even more exploitative labour practices. We have witnessed this phenomenon, especially over the last forty years, with outsourcing and foreign direct investment moving to the global south, where labour and environmental laws, protections and practices are less stringent, or non-existent. They use their strength, their influence, their military, their demands on these countries. The development of capitalism, of finance and welfare economies since the 1950s, directly relates to the Great Acceleration.

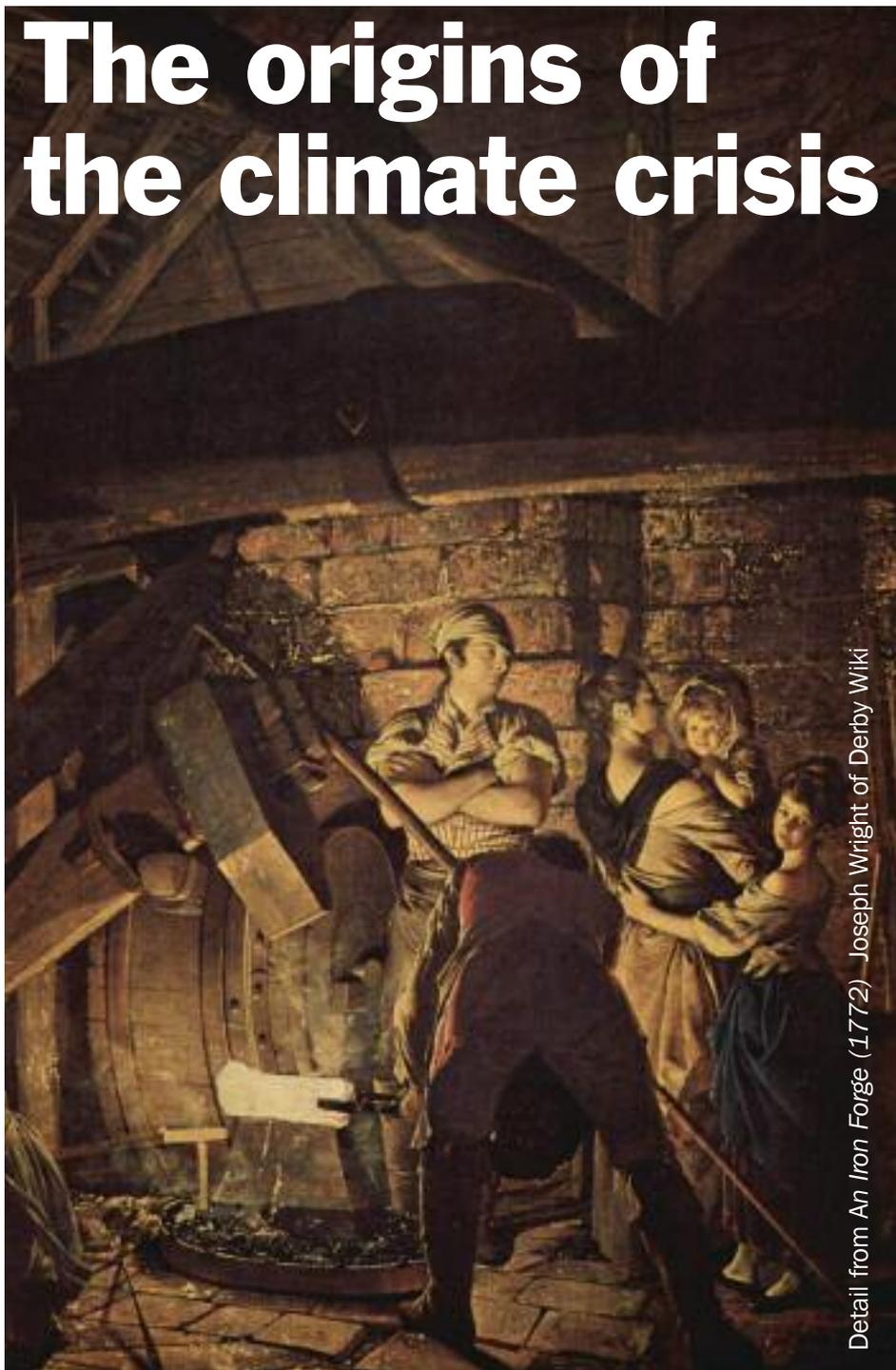
Capitalism is not a system based on cycling and recycling, a balanced system, and can never be formed to function that way, because its nature is to spiral, to accumulate more than it began with, to use up more and more resources so as to generate greater growth, greater profits.

Because of its nature, and based on the large amount of evidence available on climate and global change, capitalism has spiralled out of control. Quite simply, the Earth System and the capitalist system are incompatible. One must go. ★

Resources and diagrams

International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme, at <https://tinyurl.com/mteep42>.
Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016)

The origins of the climate crisis



Detail from *An Iron Forge* (1772) Joseph Wright of Derby Wiki

Out of the green fields of southern England, in the same century in which Shakespeare penned his pastoral comedies and the Tudors initiated a new phase of Ireland's conquest, a novel form of economics arose. A terrible force, only nascent, long since held at bay by previous societies, brought a new motive and logic to land-ownership and production that would shortly transform England and, within a couple of centuries, the entire planet.

The total domination of finance capital, followed by its expansion across the earth's surface, has brought about unbridled environmental destruction.

JOE FLEMING

The essential distinction was the domination of market economics. Before this economic revolution the price of land had been governed by custom, rents being fixed often for centuries without alteration. Landlords began to judge their property's value not by customary tenure but by the potential economic output of the land: how much profit could be made from it. Maximum exploitation became an economic necessity; the propertied who did not adhere to this soon found themselves propertyless.

The mother and father of wealth—nature and human labour—came to be viewed solely as a means of producing economic value, with concern for their well-being and longevity featuring rarely in account books.

All other forms of property and relations with the land that did not follow market logic—common land, customary rights, peasant holdings—were eliminated before the all-encompassing, ever-expanding profit motive. The peasantry (and small-scale farmers) were violently removed from their land in order to produce profitable crops or animals—look only to India, Senegal, Sudan or Colombia to see this process in real time.

This now dominant class, having seized the means of production (lands, resources, machinery, labour, etc.) from the majority, invested not to produce a particular need or want but to accumulate greater value for their capital. It was the onset of these capitalist social relations that fundamentally broke, what Marx called the metabolic rift between humanity and nature: the give-and-take connection that humanity was reared on.

The destruction of this link has only deepened with continued capitalist expansion. Inevitably, our relationship with the earth has become entirely parasitic and destructive.

If this system had remained an English or even a European phenomenon there would be no fear of environmental breakdown; but this is antithetical to capitalism's fundamental nature. The need to expand has brought its destructive logic to the whole planet.

Imperialism is capitalism's international manifestation. England's centuries-long conquest of Ireland transformed and intensified concurrently with the development of English capitalism. Within a century, traditional Irish society had been virtually wiped out.

This process has taken place on every continent on the globe, violently rendering the majority of the world's peoples economically tied to and dependent on the imperial core.

Following the onset of modern monopoly capitalism in the late nineteenth century, with increased domination by finance capital, imperialism intensified. As one indication of this seismic transformation, from owning 10 per cent of Africa in 1876, Europe suddenly owned 90 per cent of the continent by 1900. An entire continent was violently rendered a dependency of Europe, the profits of imperialists now the society's motive force, replacing the primarily peasant-based economies of before.

The degradation and ruin done to the continent and its people by imperialism, alongside most of Asia and Latin America, was, and is, disastrous—for both people and the planet. The global masses have been dispossessed of their connection to and ownership of the soil and forced into obedience to international capital and profiteering in order to survive.

The current crisis moment, this fatal juncture in the history of humanity, was evidently many centuries in the making, yet the specificity of the current historical epoch—capitalism's current stage of development—cannot be ignored. The total domination of finance capital has stretched capitalism's contradictions to their limits, leading to an even more frenzied quest for avenues of capital investment and maximum returns.

This took place concurrently with the fall of socialism in much of Asia and Europe, devastating the planet's delicate environment. Vast swathes of the earth that were centrally planned were thrust into the anarchy of the global capitalist economy, economies run in the interests of people giving way to neo-colonial economies run in the interests of the financial elite. Natural resources were brutally exploited to feed capital accumulation—such as the

vast forests of Russia, conserved and even expanded under the Soviet Union. This drastic decline in workers' power saw global capital brutally reassert its power, stripping hard-won environmental protections.

The total domination of finance capital, followed by its expansion across the earth's surface, has brought about unbridled environmental destruction. Even the capitalist class now openly accepts that human extinction is inevitable, given the present course. But even in the face of this immediate threat of extermination by means of an overheated earth, the violent forces of capital and its ideology, liberalism, keep much of the working class from seizing power for itself and ending our death spiral.

Anything except capital accumulation is blamed: overpopulation, the consumption of meat, industrialisation by former colonised countries—the problem is either individualised or put on the masses of the global south. The extraordinarily few corporations producing the vast majority of carbon emissions are ignored.

Unless humanity does away with the arbitrary domination of capital, and its endless need to expand and wreak destruction, our survival beyond the next generation or two is doubtful. ★

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Why communists support trans rights

FAYE SARSFIELD

Why does supporting trans liberation attack rather than defend gender roles and stereotypes? As Marxists we must provide a materialist understanding of trans people to understand how to fight against our patriarchal society.

Trans liberation as class struggle

First, we should examine what the conditions of trans people are today. In 2013 the Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI) published a report claiming that 81 per cent of trans people have thought about or attempted suicide before transitioning. In addition to this, we see that health services for trans people are completely inadequate. Trans people often wait for months to even get in front of an endocrinologist.

This situation seems to be arguably as bad or worse in the north, with an average waiting time of 166 weeks in Belfast. As a result of these dire circumstances, many trans people opt for self-medicating by buying hormones on line without any medical supervision or even regulation from questionable web sites. Given that the price of drugs on line is so high, a significant number of working-class trans people simply go without, and are unable to transition because of the sheer cost.

Thus there are a significant number of the trans population who are not visible as trans people. This had led to the myth that trans people are middle and upper-class college kids who spent too much time on Tumblr and then decided that they are non-binary. In actuality, trans people, just like all people, exist as marginalised members of the working class, as well as people like Caitlyn Jenner, who will vote, act and do whatever it takes to defend their own class position. We must conclude that transgender liberation is a class issue, just as much as combating imperialism and patriarchy are.

Don't trans rights neglect biological sex as a materialist reality?

We must understand that there is no such thing as a woman's brain, a man's body, nor any essential characteristics of gender. Misogyny has developed historically as a means to divide labour and subjugate women and those perceived to be women to the will of patriarchy. Gender is an extremely nebulous term, and it is difficult to come up with any specific definitions as to what it relies upon.

If it is simply about giving birth or having a penis, then is an infertile man or an intersex woman not a man

or a woman? Or is this about the perception of one's masculinity or femininity? I think it is also unreasonable to claim that a woman is simply an adult human female, because this leaves out trans women who were assigned male at birth but experience misogyny just as much as cis women do.

In fact transmisogyny affects cis people just as much as trans people. A cis woman in Florida was not seen as female enough and was sent to an all-male prison for ten hours. I would argue that the most useful definition of gender is one that gives priority to the safety of women, trans and cis. Given that trans women experience violence at the hands of patriarchy, surely this is enough reason for them to be able to use women's spaces.

Women-only spaces are specifically for women because they need to have a space to protect themselves from men in our patriarchal society.

The withering away of gender

I am both a Marxist and a trans woman. My life experience has led me to consider the following metaphor: If we must use the dictatorship of the proletariat to overcome the class antagonism, in order to build a stateless society, surely the same could apply to gender?

There is a specific reason people identify as trans and not as non-binary. Our gender society still has specific social markers and habits that cause one set of expressions to be gendered as feminine and others as masculine. However, I believe as a Marxist and feminist that the end goal of our politics ought to be the creation of a stateless, classless and perhaps genderless society.

Yet, just as we critique the anarchists for misunderstanding how class relations operate and the need for a workers' state, I feel that there are often socialists who expect trans people to reject gender roles but not allow us to identify and enjoy the dignity of the gender we identify as.

Therefore I want to propose the withering away of gender, along with the withering away of the state. I only mean as a philosophical metaphor, rather than a new theory of gender that we must follow. Having said that, just as with class antagonism, once we have overcome gender by allowing all people to take control of their bodies and identities at the expense of our patriarchal capitalist society, the need for a distinction between genders will become purely academic.

While I am a gender abolitionist, I see this withering away of gender being fulfilled by the reconfigurations of the economic conditions that prevent trans people from self-actualising

Economic conditions prevent us from transitioning or cause people to scapegoat us and allow us to be the victims of discrimination, ostracisation, and violence. ★



A transfusion of 1 litre of fresh and youthful blood in an Ambrosia centre will set you back \$8,000; 2 litres gets you a discounted rate of \$12,000.

Vampire capitalism

LAURA DUGGAN

IT'S HARD NOT to believe the end is nigh when the buying and selling of blood turns out to be one of America's booming industries.

The life-saving act of blood donation in Ireland operates on a voluntary basis, besides the odd celebratory pin, and people are expected to give out of the goodness of their heart. Of course with capitalists being hell-bent on lifting the plot from every dystopian film and making them into everyday reality one shouldn't be surprised that blood is now a growing, privatised and lucrative business in some parts of the world.

A particularly egregious example of this bloodsucking trend is the return of Peter Thiel's anti-aging company Ambrosia (a.k.a. Ivy Plasma). Thiel is another Silicon Valley billionaire, Trump supporter, and bankrupter of Gawker, and has hopes of being the first immortal. His company, according to its own web site, "offer[s] infusions of young blood from donors ages 16 to 25 . . . [leading to] improvements in biomarkers related to Alzheimer's disease, cancer, inflammation, and stem cells after a single treatment with young blood . . . You must be at least 30 years old to receive this treatment."

A transfusion of 1 litre of fresh and youthful blood in an Ambrosia centre will set you back \$8,000; 2 litres gets you a discounted rate of \$12,000. You can get further reductions if you merely want the blood and are willing to organise your own transfusion.

Moving away from a billionaire's pipe dream, a few enormous bloodthirsty American companies, such as Grifols and CSL, supply 70 per cent of the world's plasma, mainly because most other countries have banned the practice, on ethical and medical grounds.

In contrast to the money made on this plasma, the prices for plasma donation set by the blood-collection companies can appear chaotic or arbitrary at first. For example, the first five times a person sells their blood they may receive \$75; for each sale after that they stand to earn between \$20 and \$50.

The companies are fully aware that people who continue to sell blood past the premium prices are desperate. Desperate means easier to exploit; and these donors can be pressured into selling for \$30 this time in order to get closer to the \$50 sale next time. Many of these blood-collection centres are enormous, with multiple rows of dozens of machines working away. It's all very reminiscent of a battery farm.

These same desperate donors are allowed to donate twice per week (104 times per year), provided they aren't anaemic or dehydrated. To put this in perspective, Ireland allows blood donation once every 90 days, platelet donation once every 28 days, for the safety of the donors. This twice-a-week blood donation, however, is another source of income that many American working poor have become

reliant on; and of course the hidden costs can be high.

Losing two donations' worth of plasma a week has serious health consequences. About 70 per cent of regular American donors experience health complications. Donors have a lower protein count in their blood, putting them at greater risk of infections and of liver and kidney disorders. Many regulars suffer from near-permanent fatigue and are borderline anaemic—disorders and illnesses that these same donors can't afford to treat or avoid by ceasing donations, donations that are then used to treat and ensure the health and well-being of those who can afford medical treatment.

A warning issued by the US Food and Drug Administration in February 2019 forced Ambrosia to temporarily shut its doors, only to reopen in November the same year. Needless to say, the treatments are based on pseudo-science and have been dogged by controversy, including one patient dying as a possible result of the anti-aging transfusion.

This shouldn't be the scandal, though: the logical end point of Thiel's dystopian world vision would be an economy in which the wealthy subsist on the blood of the poor—literally vampire capitalism ★

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Sandra Trotter
CLARA ZETKIN
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RECLAIMING
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The crisis of late imperialism

NICOLA LAWLOR

UNDERSTANDING IMPERIALISM is vital to our understanding of the world today, enabling us to chart a path forward to tackle the environmental crisis and to move humanity towards a system of equality and common ownership—socialism.

Unfortunately, many on the left either reject the existence of imperialism in favour of a mechanical understanding of a capitalism of a different era or reduce imperialism to the military invasions and occupations of certain states or areas. Both views are incorrect.

While capitalism is the system, the process by which capital reproduces itself (M–C–M and M–M¹), imperialism, is the entirety of power structures

globally—political, economic, social, cultural, military—that underpin accumulation on a worldwide scale and that have divided the world into a centre and a periphery, north and south.

Our understanding of imperialism as a historical stage of capitalism, the concrete manifestation of capitalism at this point in history, goes back to the work of a number of theorists at the beginning of the twentieth century, when this stage of capitalism was bursting forth, including Hobson, Lenin, Luxemburg, Hilferding, and Bukharin, to name a few.

Marxist theorists, in the tradition of those early critiques of imperialism, are now discussing and defining the present period as “late imperialism,” where global monopolies govern a world

system that is crisis-ridden as a result of the very processes of concentration and centralisation that led to these monopolies.

Samir Amin points to a triad of imperialist centres—North America, Europe, and Japan—as being the core. The features of late imperialism are stagnation, globalised production, labour arbitrage, financialisation, permanent global unemployment, permanent military expenditure and war, and privatisation.

These features give rise to a number of crises or rifts, which are irreconcilable:

- (1) economic
- (2) the state and democracy
- (3) ideological
- (4) environmental.

The degree of concentration of

Signs of the next economic crisis

EON MACDERMOTT

OVER THE PAST two months we’ve been reminded constantly about the supposed health of our economy. Unfortunately, things are not as healthy as cherry-picked statistics might suggest—as anybody looking for a hospital bed or a home can clearly see.

We’re highly vulnerable as a small, open economy to the vagaries of international capital, particularly to problems in the United States. As the 2008 crisis has shown us, issues in the core soon spread to the periphery, and the bursting of bubbles in the United States soon becomes a global issue that affects us all. For this reason it’s worth assessing a number of current weaknesses in the US economy.

Pensions, corporate debt, and equity bubbles

Each downturn has its origins in the “solutions” to the last; and the one that looms before us is no different. Quantitative easing (QE), which involved central banks creating trillions of dollars through the purchase of private bonds and financial assets, was supposed to encourage lending and investment. In one respect it worked. Corporate debt has bloomed to unforeseen levels, though productive investment has failed to increase in tandem, a phenomenon we also see closer to home in the EU.

It was assumed that a blockage in the circuit of capital, M–C ... P ... C¹–M rested with M, indicating that the problem lay in a shortage of money capital. But the problem lies rather in the movement from C to P, indicating a

crisis of confidence in the capitalist class about throwing their capital into the process of production.

With declining rates of profit and deep uncertainty, there is little incentive for the capitalist class to risk what capital they have now if they are not certain to recoup it later. We see indications of this as the velocity of money (M2) has collapsed, indicating that money is being hoarded rather than used productively.

Who bought the corporate debt, and what did corporations do with it if not employ it in the process of production? The purchasers have largely been central banks through QE and pension funds, the latter desperate to buy revenue-generating assets, even if their quality is highly dubious. Money raised through the issuing of corporate debt has largely been used to buy back shares, inflating

The concentration of wealth has caused the decay of democracy in western states and corrupted democracy in the periphery.

economic power has ultimately caused stagnation in the system, resulting in constant bubbles, bursts, and crises of overproduction. The concentration of wealth has caused the decay of democracy in western states and corrupted democracy in the periphery. Democracy is no longer the chosen path of rule for capital as states become increasingly authoritarian, leaving only a democratic façade.

Capital is increasingly turning to nationalist and neo-fascist organisations to govern politically for it, as ideologically it has little to offer, other than reactionary demagoguery, in the context of high levels of inequality, poverty, and permanent unemployment globally.

The final, but most important, element of the crisis of late imperialism is the environmental rift between capitalism and nature. Given the necessity by global monopolies to exploit nature for profit, there is no question but that imperialism will not be able to continue and prevent environmental catastrophe. It is one or the other; and incorporating radical ecology in anti-imperialist strategy is vital for the fight for socialism.

Ultimately, these points of crisis are what call into question the system's

ability to reproduce itself for that process of $M-C-M^1$ and $M-M^1$ to operate uninterrupted and to manage disconnect within structures. But what is lacking is the agency for turning these crises into a revolutionary movement; what is lacking is a conscious anti-imperialist internationalist global movement, led primarily by the working class but including peasants, agricultural labour, intellectuals, students, and oppressed peoples.

Before Amin died he made a call for this.

Constructing a transnational alliance of workers and oppressed peoples of the entire world has to be the main objective of the struggle to counteract the spread of contemporary imperialist capitalism . . . Nothing decisive will affect the attachment of the peoples of the triad to their imperialist option, especially in Europe . . . The most probable outcome will be a remake of the twentieth century: advances made exclusively in some of the peripheries of the system. But these advances will remain fragile, as have those of the past, and for the same reason—the permanent warfare waged against them by the imperialist power centers, the success of which is greatly due to their own limits and

deviations . . . This construction cannot be a remake of the Internationals of the past—the Second, the Third, or the Fourth. It has to be founded on other and new principles: an alliance of all working peoples of the world and not only those qualified as representatives of the proletariat (recognizing also that this definition is itself matter of debate), including all wage earners of the services, peasants, farmers, and the peoples oppressed by modern capitalism. The construction must also be based on the recognition and respect of diversity, whether of parties, trade unions, or other popular organizations in struggles, guaranteeing their real independence.

Amin saw progress as stemming primarily from the peripheral countries and peoples in struggle against imperialism—and the role of progressives in the core countries to be an anti-imperialist support for these struggle and the weakening of core imperialism.

He called for a new International. Right up to his death Amin developed an advanced Marxist analysis, and also challenged us to conceive of how we win socialism, how we make revolution. This call is worth serious consideration. ★

the value of stocks, to the delight of those who earn their living from ownership rather than labour.

So, once again, the stock market soars while normal people suffer.

Usually there is a significant correlation between the increase in share price and an increase in the value of a corporation. As a corporation becomes more profitable the share value increases, as stock-owners expect higher returns. The link between value and growth in stock price has never been weaker, with share prices climbing to exalted heights as underlying valuations fail to match—the driving factors being share buybacks, recent tax cuts, and bubbles in momentum stocks by pension funds forced to seek high returns because of low interest rates. None of these are sustainable.

This lays the foundation for a crisis in the pension system and the stock market of catastrophic proportions, a crisis that may be significantly worse than the last.

Workers are, for all intents and purposes, lending their pensions to the capitalist class, who use the money to inflate the value of their assets—and have no intention of paying those loans back when the scheme inevitably collapses.

Far from stability, we're teetering on the edge of a very dangerous precipice.

How will it affect ordinary people?

Predicting the exact time and date of an economic crisis is a waste of time. That doesn't mean that we can't observe the weaknesses in the capitalist system that are most likely to bring us to the next crisis. Like a ship with numerous breaches and hasty repairs to its hull, we are able to identify the most likely points of failure even if we don't know the exact moment when a breach will be opened. When the hull starts groaning and small leaks spring, we should take note.

As the last crisis has shown us, the interests of the capitalist class are

protected while ordinary people are forced to carry the burden of saving a system that works against their interests.

The establishment will offer the same ineffective "solutions" to the next crisis as it did for the last: more austerity, as ordinary people are swindled out of their pensions and forced to endure cuts to vital public services—none of which will solve the underlying problem of a diminishing rate of profit inherent in the capitalist mode of production.

Yet there is an alternative. Rather than leaving the process of production to the whims of a class hell-bent on accumulating capital, regardless of the social and environmental impact, we can and must organise our system of production around human needs.

The only way to prevent this destructive cycle continuing is to break it, with demands for a democratic, rational economy that plans for, and meets, the needs of the majority. ★

A grieving woman resolves to liberate Ireland

JENNY FARRELL

THE MOST famous, fabled and fêted Irish *filí* (poets) are male. The reasons lie clearly in patriarchal class society. All the more reason for us to seek out the female representatives of a skill that in the old Irish days was associated with prophesying or “seeing”, in fact the Irish word *file* derives from just this meaning.

The oldest piece of writing that has come down to us, albeit through the lens of Early Christian monks, celebrates powerful women, including just such a prophetess-poet, Fedelm. This profession was largely oral, initially in a pre-literate society, and survived for a long time in storytelling and so on. Some types of poetic expression were the reserve predominantly of women. Most notably among these, perhaps, is a *caoineadh* or lament. Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill’s “Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire,” (Lament for Art Ó Laoghaire), spoken in 1773, is one of the greatest laments in Irish literature.

In this lament Eibhlín Dhubh describes the circumstances surrounding the murder of her husband, Art, in Carraig an Ime, Co. Cork, at the behest of a planter, Abraham Morris.

At the same time the lament speaks on behalf of the oppressed Catholic population of Ireland, suffering under colonial rule. Specifically, this is about the rebellion against the Penal Laws, which prohibited, among other things, education for Catholic children, and restricting the right to property—for example owning a horse worth more than five pounds.

Morris outlawed Art Ó Laoghaire for refusing to sell him for five pounds a horse that Art had brought back from his service in the Austro-Hungarian army. He decreed that Ó Laoghaire could consequently be shot on sight.

Art and Eibhlín came from important Irish families. The earls had fled from Ireland to the European continent, consolidating the complete collapse of

the old order. Part of the surviving Catholic nobility, Art was educated on the Continent, and served as a hussar.

The Lament is divided into five parts. The first part was probably spoken by Eibhlín over the body of her husband in Carraig an Ime, beginning with a short account of how the lovers met, eloped, and married.

My steadfast love!
When I saw you one day
by the market-house gable
my eye gave a look
my heart shone out
I fled with you far
from friends and home

Eibhlín repeatedly addresses Art as friend and partner, as an equal. Here she describes the awe and fear that Art instilled in the English by his imposing figure and defying the Penal Laws. He carried a valuable sword, wore splendid clothes, and rode his white-faced steed.

My steadfast friend!
it comes to my mind
that fine Spring day
how well your hat looked
with the drawn gold band,
the sword silver-hilted
your fine brave hand

. . .

You were set to ride
your slim white-faced steed
and Saxons saluted
down to the ground,
not from good will
but by dint of fear
—though you died at their hands,
my soul’s beloved . . .

She also evokes their happy home life and Art’s love for his sons.

Then she speaks of the moment when Art’s death became clear to her, when his horse returned riderless to their homestead. Eibhlín’s determination and courage increases, and she leaps into the saddle and gallops to the scene, where she finds Art’s lifeless body:

to find you there dead
by a low furze-bush
with no Pope or bishop
or clergy or priest
to read a psalm over you

but a spent old woman
who spread her cloak corner
where your blood streamed from you,
and I didn’t stop to clean it
but drank it from my palms.

No-one is present, other than this old Mother Ireland. Her identity is evident in that she uses a traditional cloak. It is also significant that no Catholic clergy were present. Eibhlín is left alone with this woman.

It is a desolate picture of the state of the country and its forgotten loyalties. Remarkably, in all this lament there is no hope for life after death; one might even say that the absent clergy at the scene have disqualified it from a role in the liberation of the country. Eibhlín can only rely on herself alone—supported by old Mother Ireland.

In the second part, a dispute between Art’s sister and Eibhlín takes place, in which her sister-in-law accuses Eibhlín of having been in bed when she came to the farm from Cork. This may well be a commentary on the discord between the two noble families and, in a wider context, on the disintegration of the vanishing Gaelic order.

As the body is prepared for burial, Eibhlín utters her curse on Morris.

Ruin and bad cess to you,
ugly traitor Morris,
who took the man of my house
and father of my young ones
—a pair walking the house
and the third in my womb,
and I doubt that I’ll bear it.

Then, images from nature suggest that Art was the true ruler of the country, even if the population has forgotten this.

Take the narrow road eastward
where the bushes bend before you
and the stream will narrow for you
and men and women will bow
if they have their proper manners
—as I doubt they have at present

. . .

Into every part of this lament is written Eibhlín’s resistance against foreign rule and the oppression of her people. This connects her very closely with Art.



Some types of poetic expression were the reserve predominantly of women. Most notably among these, perhaps, is a *caoineadh* or lament.

Returning to the murder, Eibhlín explains her resolve to avenge it. She will use every avenue to obtain justice: She will sell her belongings:

but I'll spend it on the law;
that I'll go across the ocean
to argue with the King,
and if he won't pay attention
that I'll come back again
to the black-blooded savage
that took my treasure.

If the legal paths fail, Eibhlín is ready to avenge Art herself, the man who represented Ireland's Gaelic order. Increasingly, Eibhlín develops

into the independent woman who will determine her life and, by implication, stand up for her people.

In the last, fifth part Eibhlín's grain and livestock are thriving despite her great grief. She has taken up Art's legacy. She will run the farm, raise the children, and avenge Art. Contrary to the expectations in seventeenth and eighteenth-century *aisling* poetry, in which a female figure awaits a male saviour, Eibhlín takes this fate into her own hands, following in the tradition of the strong Gaelic women, and will free Ireland from foreign rule.★

A huge loss



Henry Dent (1956–2019)

Comrades have been saddened by the death of Henry Dent, a former secretary of Dublin District CPI.

For many years Henry was a frequent and characteristic participant on Dublin marches and demonstrations for every progressive cause. He also staffed Connolly Books in a voluntary capacity from time to time.

Henry, along with his comrade Rosanna Flynn, was the mainstay of Residents Against Racism. In that capacity he worked tirelessly and quietly to assist individuals in claiming their right to refugee status or to avoid deportation. He accompanied people to court, assisted with form-filling, and organised reliable legal assistance.

Following Henry's death Residents Against Racism held an evening of tribute in the Teachers' Club in Dublin, which was attended by a number of immigrants who would not be living legally in Ireland were it not for his work. Other individuals were grateful to him for his quiet advice in dealing with personal, family or social difficulties that they experienced arising from their sexuality.

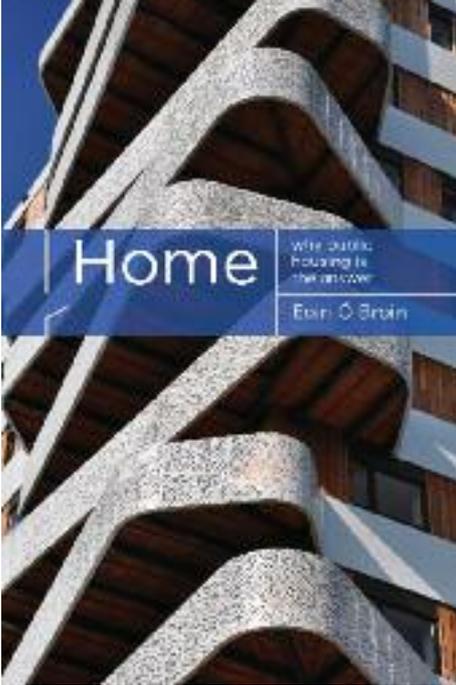
Compassion was at the heart of everything Henry did. He loved people and animals, life and nature. He was a vegan from a time when most of us did not know what that meant, and would not even take necessary medicine if he suspected the producers had experimented on animals.

Fágann a bhás líon mór daoine faoi bhrón.

M. Mac A.

Building homes, even if they are publicly owned, in an effort to manipulate the logic of supply and demand can only provide a short-term fix, not a long-term solution.

Universal public housing is the only way



GRAHAM HARRINGTON

Eoin Ó Broin, *Home: Why Public Housing Is the Answer* (Dublin: Merrion Press, 2020).

MUCH LIKE its author, Sinn Féin's spokesperson on housing, *Home* is a very nice and pleasant book. However, given the context of an ever-increasing homelessness crisis, it falls short of providing a truly transformative solution to the housing and homelessness crises.

While it is well written and researched, its weakness is its conclusions, as they do not seem to come from a thorough understanding of the capitalist system and the realities of housing policy in a capitalist state.

The treatment of housing policy historically does not provide for much disagreement. Ó Broin contends that the new Free State embarked on more or less the same type of housing policy as had existed under British rule favouring home ownership rather than any state-led investment in public housing. It is explained, correctly, that it was the inflexibility on this policy, and not some genetic trait of the Irish people to favour home ownership, that explains the lack of public housing in comparison with

other countries. We might add that this was an inevitable consequence of the counter-revolution of 1922–23.

The author admits that he lacks the ability to include an analysis of the housing situation in the north of Ireland, and as a result the book deals only with the twenty-six counties, and unfortunately it shows. The preference in the book for “public housing” with the involvement of so-called approved housing bodies (AHBs), which include the likes of NGOs and charities, doesn't take into account the realities of how that policy has been used by the British government in the north of Ireland, where the AHBs have been different only in form, but not in content, from any landlord, requiring a profit to run and needing capital to make investments, not to mention not having any accountability to the tenants themselves.

Ó Broin favours a system that can only be described as eclectic, trying to bring together all the best parts of everything in a neat policy. Class struggle is rarely, if ever, that simple, unfortunately. The proposal to build upwards of 100,000 homes might go down well as an election slogan, but as a demand that creates a housing policy that would eradicate the scourge of homelessness for ever it falls short, for the simple reason that it is simply a tweaking of the “fiscal space” afforded to any capitalist government. It is still playing within the confines set by neo-liberalism.

The book does not take into account the massive vacant housing stock, well above 200,000 vacant properties, which could be used to house not only the homeless but all those on the housing waiting-lists. Of course in a capitalist system this would not be allowed happen without being a result of intense political struggle.

Building homes, even if they are publicly owned, in an effort to manipulate the logic of supply and demand can only provide a short-term fix, not a long-term solution. People do not need homes in five years' time or however long it takes to build: they need them now.

A long-term solution can only be the

complete removing of the private sector, the landlords and developers, from housing provision. While Ó Broin favours training courses for landlords, and efforts by the state to put manners on the worst of them, this simply will not work in reality. The 20 per cent of landlords that are large transnational corporations, such as I-RES REIT, the largest landlord in the state, are the monopoly capitalists in the housing industry. They are the ones who make the policy. The fact that most apartments being built now are being sold to large groups such as the American investment group Heitman, which then leases them for rent, only shows that this is a system that is working very well.

Ó Broin's belief in the cost-rental model is another cause for concern, given the reality of the St Michael's Estate project, where rents were practically the same, as the CPI said at the time. This type of “alternative” only works to let the state and employers off the hook when it comes to such issues as low pay, with workers and their families still bearing the burden of capitalism's problems.

In a system of universal public housing, financed by progressive rents linked to income, housing would be a service provided by society, not by the private sector. As much as this would conflict with the EU, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Overall, *Home* is a decent read, but those looking for more shouldn't put away their copies of *Socialist Voice* just yet. ★

SV

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