

Socialist Voice

Communist Party of Ireland
Páirtí Cumannach na hÉireann
Partisan Patriotic Internationalist
Number 184 June 2020 €1.50
www.commmunistparty.ie

Page 2 **Dollars and the virus**
Page 4 **Labour and law**
Page 6 **Revolution**
Page 6 **Organising the 'New Irish'**
Page 8 **Child care crisis**
Page 10 **Korea and Venezuela**
Page 12 **Music and value**
Page 14 **Charles Dickens and class**
Page 16 **Nation and language**

The health of the nation

Public health in the global north is being hollowed out, having been underfunded and privatised bit by bit for many years.

Twenty years ago in Italy there were almost 6 doctors to every 1,000 people; today there are 4.1.

Similar statistics can be found all over Europe as the neoliberal agenda of privatisation reaches a frenzy.

Cuba stands alone by continuing to increase the ratio of doctors to population, which now stands at 8.2 doctors for every 1,000 citizens—twice the figure for Italy, despite more than sixty years of imperialist interference and an economic blockade.

Jimmy Doran reports *Page 2*



SV

Socialist Voice

43 East Essex Street Dublin
D02 XH96 (01) 6708707

ISSN 0791-5217



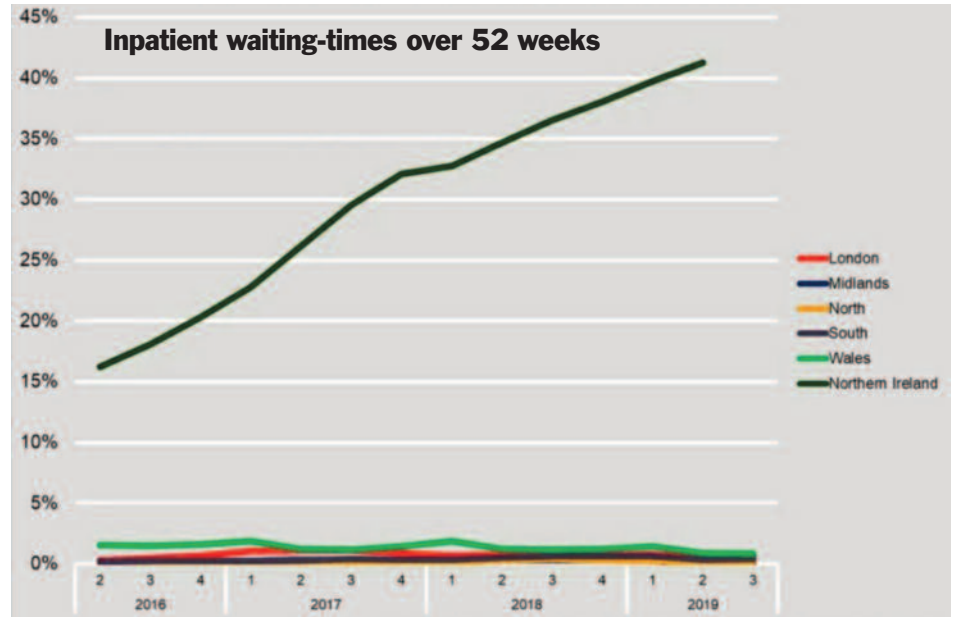
9 770791 521008

HERE IN Ireland we have two health services: the NHS in the North and HSE in the South. The NHS in the North is the worst-performing region of this once-excellent health service. And the HSE is in crisis.

The health service in the North, compared with that available to people in England, is as dysfunctional as a cable car with no cable. At the end of 2019, 41 per cent of inpatient waiting-times exceeded 52 weeks. There are no regions in England or Wales where the equivalent figure even exceeded 1 per cent. By comparison, only 0.06 per cent of inpatients in the midlands of England waited more than 52 weeks for admission to hospital; the probability of waiting over a year for hospital admission in the North is **650 times higher**.

Of the 3,108 patients admitted for ENT surgery in the Western trust area of the North in the second quarter of 2019, 59 per cent had been waiting for over a year. By comparison, 41 per cent of patients in West Lancashire waited less than six weeks.

Spending on the health service in the North is quite similar to that in other regions of the NHS, but with a much worse outcome. There are a number of



contributing factors: for example, one in eight health service positions in the North is vacant; so the more expensive option of agency staff is used to bridge the gap. And many sections of the service have been privatised, which also costs more.

The damning factor, however, is pointed out in a report by the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance, which states that 20 per cent of health outcomes are related to clinical care and

10 per cent to physical environment but that 40 per cent is related to socio-economic factors—that is, education, employment, social support, and community safety.

The North is the poor relation: a British colony where wages are lower, public services are lower, housing quality is lower, poverty is higher, inequality is higher, and suicide rates are higher.

The trade union movement in the

On supernovas and milkshakes

DÓNAL Ó COISDEALBHA

THE ECONOMIST John Smith of the University of Sheffield caused a lot of debate with his recent article “Why coronavirus could spark a capitalist supernova,” in which he offered a powerful rejection of mainstream and Keynesian analysis of the bond market.

For years now, “core” capitalist economies have been suffering from a chronic lack of growth in private investment. Investors prefer to buy government bonds than to invest in new production, which suppresses their interest rates. Keynesians think that, while at first glance unfortunate, this nevertheless indicates a golden opportunity for states to borrow and invest for little or no repayment cost—doing what the private sector will not do and creating a new economic boom.

Smith rejects this emphatically. He

says that low and falling interest rates on government debt point to a “supernova” in the making—not an opportunity but a portent of catastrophe.

His analysis focuses on what happens after the investors buy the bonds. Rather than holding them to term (to be repaid the principal plus the interest), they make a fortune by selling the bonds in the secondary market.

Because it is assumed that economic growth rates (and inflation) will continue to decline in future years and decades, it is also assumed that bond yields will continue to fall. Were a bond to be bought with a 2 per cent interest rate this year, it will be worth a lot more next year to sell that bond in the secondary market, because it is anticipated that bond yields with a 2 per cent interest rate will not be available to buy in the primary market in the future.

Market indicators show that investors expect the United States to join some EU countries and Japan in issuing negatively yielding bonds later this year, resulting from anticipated outright price deflation. The logic still holds: even with a negative interest rate you can still make the capital gains if it is anticipated that the rate will go even more negative in the future.

But, Smith points out, if for any reason the interest rate on government bonds begins to rise meaningfully for a sustained period, the enormous capital gains that investors make on projected falling interest rates will turn into huge capital losses, resulting in fire sales that would collapse the price of the bonds and send their interest rates soaring.

This would be a real catastrophe, because of the much higher borrowing costs that would result throughout an economic system that is increasingly

If this pandemic shows us anything it is that it knows no borders, be they physical ones, as with the partition of our country by Britain, or economic ones

North is unionist in outlook, reflecting the fact that historically more jobs were distributed to the unionist population in the Orange carve-up, so more union members were unionists. Sadly, because of this built-in prejudice they find it impossible to break off the attachment, the nostalgic loyalty to empire and a yearning for the glory days of its once-great National Health Service.

The research by NIPSA shows that hospital waiting-lists in the North are the longest in Europe. You are 48 times more likely to wait for more than a year than a person living in Wales. 64,000 people have been waiting over a year for their first outpatient appointment: that's 25 per cent of all those on the waiting-list. In England, by contrast, about 1,500 people are waiting over a year, a mere 2 per cent of the number in the North, for a population 30 times larger. NIPSA also reveals that A&E patients in the North have the longest waiting-times of any region of the NHS.

Sadly, the trade union movement seems to be blinded by misplaced loyalty and nostalgia for the glory days, and are failing to draw the necessary conclusions of their own research. Citizens in the North have been cast aside by the British

regime and set adrift. The border has now retreated back to the Irish Sea as the reunification of Ireland is hurtling down the tracks. The fundamentalist zealots have been thrown under the bus by their London masters in a farewell package of marriage equality and abortion rights.

British rule is imperialist rule, whether the government is made up of Tories, Liberals, or Labour. Despite years of bluster by the likes of Jeremy Corbyn, there was no sign of Britain leaving NATO under Oh-Oh-Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party, or scaling back the armed forces or nuclear weapons, or pulling out of the North, as any socialist worth their salt would have to do.

NIPSA also remind us in their document that after only five years from the original founding of the NHS the British Labour Party attempted to impose charges for its services. What for, pray tell? To increase the pension? A temporary national emergency? In fact it was to flex their imperialist muscles by doubling military expenditure, at a time when they were actually spending more than the United States.

That's the true nature of the British Labour Party: for king, country, and empire.

Unlike our trade union brothers and sisters in the North, in the South we are not afraid to state that the health service has failed the people and is not fit for purpose. There are excessive waiting-lists, and a poor doctor-to-citizen ratio (3.1 per 1,000—slightly better than Britain's 2.8).

These are two failed entities. They cannot be reformed: they need to be dismantled and built into an *all-Ireland health service*—a new beginning for a new Ireland.

The reunification of Ireland is inevitable; on demographics alone it will happen sooner rather than later. We must learn from history and not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Only a socialist republic can remove the unnatural division created by the British state, which has kept our people at each other's throats for generations. A good starting-point and the foundation stone of any socialist country would be a fully funded all-Ireland health service, free at the point of entry, from the cradle to the grave: from child care to nursing-home and everything in between.

"If you do not condemn colonialism, if you do not side with the colonial people, what sort of a revolution are you waging?"—Ho Chi Minh ★

kept functioning by the availability of cheap credit. Exchange value is created in the production of commodities and realised in sales, but the availability of cheap credit can keep an economy going for some time in the temporary absence of sufficient revenue.

Lending weight to Smith's argument are the events of the 9th of March, when, alongside stocks and gold, US government bonds were indeed sold in a fire sale for the first time, causing their associated interest rates to shoot up. The financial system was only saved when the US Federal Reserve extended credit to anyone who urgently needed cash, and the fire sale halted.

During that period, when investors scrambled to sell their bonds, stocks, and gold, they only wanted to buy one thing: US dollars. The increasing importance of the US dollar has been discussed in various recent economic theories, with names like the "dollar milkshake theory" and the "dollar wrecking-ball theory"—all making the point that the dollar is no longer simply

the world reserve currency but is actually a "dollar standard," which performs an equivalent role to the "gold standards" of earlier decades—directing and regulating the world's capital flows.

Since then the exchange rates of the currencies of Turkey, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, India and others have come under pressure because of a lack of availability of dollars to cover dollar-denominated debts and funding requirements—most of which are held by the private sector.

In my view, the fundamental reason that the developments in the bond market represent a "supernova" is to be found in the difference between a liquidity crisis and a solvency crisis. In the former you have a cash-flow issue, which the central bank can help by issuing credit (as the US Federal Reserve did in March, ending the fire sale in bonds), but in the latter it is not a matter of a cash-flow problem: you simply no longer have any means of servicing debt repayments, because your revenue is insufficient to continue

operating and you already have debts that you cannot hope to service.

The unfolding depression has caused a collapse in both primary commodity prices and incomes from the sale of manufactured commodities, badly hitting the earnings of companies in scores of countries that depend on dollars for purchases of capital equipment and debt repayments.

The extension of further US dollars in credit cannot help the weaker layers of borrowers who are now facing insolvency, rather than illiquidity. In the absence of a general recovery of capitalist profitability it follows that one after another these weaker corporates will cease to exist, further strengthening the dollar, causing a cascade of balance of payments crises and thus deepening the global slump.

If this comes to pass, the events of the 9th of March will be repeated many more times until the injection of fresh credit into the global financial system will finally be ineffective in stopping the rush for the exits. ★

Who shapes legislation on workers' voice?



NICOLA LAWLOR

OVER THE LAST two decades legislation has been introduced that provides workers with some collective voice or mechanisms for pursuing collective goals. None of these have been collective bargaining or legislation providing for union recognition.

Ireland stands out among most countries in still not having union recognition and collective bargaining in legislation. While these ambitions are certainly not a panacea for the weakened and declining trade union movement, they would certainly assist organised labour in both defending and enhancing the conditions of workers and in organising the unorganised. In that sense they would represent a tipping of the balance of power between labour and capital. And capital knows that.

A number of academics and researchers have looked at two pieces of legislation in particular, intended to provide some form of collective workers' voice, and the lobbying efforts of American transnationals and their representatives in Ireland. This research shows the anti-worker influence that the American Chamber of Commerce in Ireland, and others, have had on workers having a voice in their work-place.

In 2014 Tony Dundon and colleagues published a paper in the journal *Work, Employment and Society* entitled "Employer occupation of regulatory space of the Employee Information and Consultation (I&C) Directive in liberal market economies." Not a catchy title; but some information garnered from freedom of information requests was extremely interesting.

The paper looked at the transposition of the EU Information and Consultation directive in Ireland, the influence of the state and employers, and, unfortunately, the relative absence of union effort, interest or influence in this legislation.

Now, we might say that these forums can be part of a union-avoidance strategy and that as trade unionists we want nothing to do with them. But if this legislation is being introduced, and we know that employers are lobbying to weaken it, should we not have tried to influence the process to strengthen it? With much-weakened private-sector unionisation, is there merit or value in trying to make use of I&C forums as part of unionisation efforts?

Who said that?

DECLAN MCKENNA

"Karl Marx has been buried so many times that his resuscitation threatens to become an everyday occurrence."

Ernesto Estevez Rams, *Granma International*

"This isn't Afghanistan. This isn't Vietnam. This isn't a quagmire. My job is to make it a quagmire for the Russians."

James Jeffrey, US "special representative for Syria engagement"

"Bourgeois ideology is far older in origin than socialist ideology, it is more fully developed, and has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination."

V. I. Lenin (born 150 years ago), *What Is to Be Done?*

I believe the most terrible pandemic facing humankind is the use of force, the threat of the use of force, of wars promoted by the great powers, and in particular by the USA."

Daniel Ortega, president of Nicaragua

The covid-19 pandemic will result in a "savage recession" around the world "that will eventually present significant merger and acquisition opportunities . . ."

Albert Manifold, CEO of the building materials giant CRH. No bail-outs there, just buyouts and hostile takeovers.

" . . . We have ended up with political systems that offer a choice between one party that supports a brutal, unrestrained version of neoliberalism and another party that supports a marginally less brutal, slightly mitigated version of neoliberalism."

Jonathan Cook, *Counterpunch*

But, as we know, the state is not neutral: it is on the side of employers. With or without legislation, workers need to organise

The EU directive required member-states to introduce supportive dialogue mechanisms in the work-place in three areas: (1) information pertaining to the company, (2) information and consultation on anything that might lead to jobs being threatened, and (3) information and consultation with a view to reaching agreement on any changes to work organisation or contractual arrangements.

This is the espoused spirit and intent of the directive. In Ireland, however, this got transformed into a weakened “with a view to reaching agreement” for consultation, with a clause for existing forums (some of which never existed), only for employments greater than fifty, and, most importantly, in harmony with direct individual employee engagement models and away from the collective spirit and intent of the dialogue.

Also, importantly, employees have to actively trigger and win support from colleagues for an I&C.

The published research reveals the efforts made by both employers (and their collective bodies) and the state in reinforcing a voluntarist (voluntary opt-out for employers) approach to unions and marginalising the sharing of decision-making powers with workers. The overriding concern in Ireland, by both the state and employers, was to avoid mandatory collective-voice systems of any kind that might, according to them, threaten inward investment into the country.

The freedom of information request showed the active lobbying by IBEC, the American Chamber of Commerce in Ireland, the Irish Management Institute and Intel, in particular, to water down and limit the purpose of the legislation. IBEC was concerned that this would lead to union recognition by the back door, and the Department of Foreign Affairs was opposed to it at the EU level, for fear of business and investment concerns and, specifically, that this would cut across the direct-engagement human-resource management models of transnationals.

Intel had meetings with the relevant ministers and department officials. Indeed Intel submitted a document entitled “Elements of the draft directive which must be changed”—and much was changed! Department officials would update the minister on concessions they were winning that reduced the information-sharing necessity for Ireland.

The writers of the paper mentioned above went so far as to describe this as “ideological collusion between the state and big business”—as Marx described it, managing the affairs of the ruling class.

We cannot overlook the irony of employers committing huge resources to organising themselves collectively and co-ordinating their activity to prevent workers having that same collective voice or organisation.

This collective effort was once again on display in successful efforts to weaken the attempted “right to bargain” legislation of the Industrial Relations Act (2015). Again, Tony Dundon and colleagues published a paper in 2020 in the *Industrial Relations Journal* and, through a freedom of information request, found out that the relevant department in the preparation of this legislation met the ICTU once, IBEC once, and the American Chamber of Commerce four times!

In addition, the American Chamber of Commerce met the minister directly, while there is no evidence that the minister met the ICTU.

The American Chamber of Commerce said they felt “seriously threatened” by any moves towards union recognition or collective bargaining. Consequently, the legislation workers got was not union recognition, collective bargaining, right to access, union facilities, health and safety inspections or anything meaningful that might “threaten” American capital in Ireland: we got a very limited—and, in many cases of workers seeking to organise and bargain, useless—piece of legislation.

A new Fair Work Act is necessary, one that provides for union access, recognition, collective bargaining, and speedy, effective strike action. It is not a panacea. It would, by itself, do little to organise the unorganised; but it could provide a mechanism for rebalancing power in the work-place slightly more towards workers, which could qualitatively change the balance of power in society.

But, as we know, the state is not neutral: it is on the side of employers. With or without legislation, workers need to organise. ★

“We have an educated, informed, responsible, compassionate and disciplined people . . . In addition to these strengths, we have the training of more than sixty years of a long journey of resistance in the tough wars of all kinds that they have imposed on us . . . Be strong, Cuba. We will live, and we will overcome!”

Miguel Díaz-Canel, president of Cuba

“The big crisis of our times is [that] our minds are being managed to give power to illusion.”

Vandana Shiva, environmental activist, on the sham “renewable energy” sector

“The only thing worse than knowing that the planet is on the edge of extinction is discovering that we’ve put our hope for survival in illusions.” *Planet of the Humans* (2019), environmental documentary written and directed by **Jeff Gibbs**

“I note that while Mr Coveney has expressed support for solidarity in a general sense in the face of the global coronavirus pandemic he has not gone further and demanded an end to the sanctions, as Antonio Guterres and Pope Francis have urged.”

Letter from the **CPI** to the minister for foreign affairs, Simon Coveney

“There will be in the next generation or so a method of making people love their servitude and producing dictatorship without tears, so to speak. Producing a kind of painless concentration camp for entire societies so that people will in fact have their liberties taken away from them, but will rather enjoy it, because they will be distracted from any desire to rebel by propaganda, or brainwashing, or brainwashing enhanced by pharmacological methods. And this seems to be the final revolution.”

Aldous Huxley, from a speech for the Tavistock Group, California Medical School, 1961

Organising the “new Irish”

The interview that Unite conducted with former Keeling’s workers was the first time many media punters and commentators got any form of insight into how agricultural and meat processing actually make a profit in Ireland.
Alex Homits reports



THE STORY that propelled this discussion was that of Keeling’s flying in 189 Bulgarian workers after stating that only eighty-nine local workers applied for the positions.

This story is not unfamiliar to me, and I will recount another experience in relation to this model and link it to Keeling’s to demonstrate that this is not altogether a new phenomenon.

Since a bloc of eastern European countries entered the European Union, a huge flow of labourers has entered

western markets. Many of those coming across have various qualifications. I once worked as a night worker in the Clayton Hotel in Cork alongside a Polish national who had a master’s degree in architecture. She was on the minimum wage as a cleaner. This is not new or different.

Much of the work that eastern European workers accepted was low-paid, physically difficult, and precarious. I remember in 2005 or 2006 that eastern European workers, including my

grandmother, would come over in thousands to work on agricultural farms or flower farms, and most of them received less than the minimum wage. They didn’t speak English, they were not organised, and they were not treated with respect—an employer’s dream.

Another example is in west Cork, where there is no shortage of large processing plants or industries, including meat, cheese, yoghurt, and so on. Almost all these plants are filled with Romanian and Moldovan workers. They

A troika of hope: Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua

DECLAN MCKENNA

In a recent interview on Youtube the Nicaraguan ambassador to the United States, Francisco Campbell, had this to say:

“Sanctions are designed to destroy,

to destabilise, to demoralise, and to deny peoples in smaller countries especially the right to self-determination. You have people who want to give you all kinds of sophisticated interpretations about sanctions and the purpose of sanctions, but the bottom line is sanctions are designed to destroy, to kill, to inflict pain and suffering. Sanctions are immoral and are a form of aggression that are contrary to international law, contrary to the Charter of the United Nations, and contrary to the principle of peaceful co-existence that should exist between countries.”

In relation to sanctioning countries

during the covid-19 pandemic, he said that the “sectors that continue to try to undermine and deny countries the right of sovereignty and the right of self-determination should really set aside these destructive policies and allow each country to deal with this pandemic in such a way that it helps to build rather than destroy.”

Draft resolution of the UN Security Council on Venezuela

The Russian Federation presented a draft resolution to the UN Security Council regarding the situation in Venezuela:

“The Members of the Security Council discussed the latest

Much of the work that eastern European workers accepted was low-paid, physically difficult, and precarious.

are brought in in one of these main ways:

- Specific recruitment agencies, paid a handsome premium by the employer and which collect another handsome premium for workers, arrange contracts, employment and so on for workers that they find in eastern Europe. Wages are legal and deductions are legal; the method by which they make their rotten money is by skimming off everything the workers earn and creating lots of different surcharges.

- Workers are approached by managers on the factory floor to hire people they know—relatives or friends from their homeland—and given small benefits in the work-place. More often than not those bringing in people from abroad or organising employment for them charge them for this service. The charge ranges from €50 to €500, depending on who is doing it and where.

Keeling's are structured on the first model. They have a recruitment agency that specifically heads out to Bulgaria and recruits there. The recruitment agencies have surcharges, which guarantee them their income, and they receive another payment from Keeling's themselves. The workers are then brought over; they have accommodation organised for them by a local letting agency, which no doubt charges market prices. Their wages rarely go beyond the minimum wage, which is a common phenomenon in non-unionised industries

and work-places in Ireland.

Why do they adopt this model? If we examine the net worth of the Keeling family we see that in the last twenty years it has fluctuated between €100 million and €180 million; but we don't know for certain, because their accounts are managed by a company registered in the Isle of Man. As a result, it does not submit annual accounts.

A convenient enough set-up. Not only does Keeling's evade posting what it is making but it is highly dependent on low-paid and overworked migrant workers to continue to bolster its fortunes.

This follows a common pattern of the major food-processing plants around the country. This is linked to membership of the European Union and the absence of any trade union organisation among migrant workers in this sector.

On the role of the European Union, the issue is clear. Eastern European workers form an ever-dispensable reserve army of labour that western enterprises can call upon, dismiss, injure, kill and ultimately get rid of at a knock-down rate. This avoids covering what Marx called the cost of social reproduction—the cost associated with the maintenance, growth and nurturing of the working class.

My trade union experience demonstrates to me that migrant workers have not been seriously engaged with. There are sporadic attempts here and there, but by and large eastern European workers have

filled factories, processing plants and other large-scale industries without much input from trade unions—be they already present or not. The reasons that most eastern European workers have been abandoned are the same as why most of the working class is not in a union: laziness, depoliticisation, and so on, trends that have occurred in almost every country in the world.

The matter of Keeling's and of the many plants around the country is not one of lambasting or castigating the trade union movement but of creating and forcing a concerted effort to organise among the "new Irish" and create unbreakable bonds of solidarity with them. They are now part of the proletariat of Ireland, and form a significant and essential link in the chain of production.

Whether in Swords or in west Cork, Monaghan or Mayo, thousands of eastern European workers are being taken advantage of, to line the pockets of merchant families like Keeling. They are wealthy from the labour of these workers and will continue to accumulate vast riches until confronted. They have a system; we now understand this system.

The new proletariat, composed of the new Irish who work these factories, must be approached, organised and supported for better wages and conditions.

The interview that Unite conducted with a former Keeling's employee is a stepping-stone; now we must go further. ★

developments in and around the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

"The Members of the Security Council rejected the use or threat of use of force, as stipulated in the UN Charter, reaffirmed relevant resolutions on the condemnation of terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations and on the use of mercenaries.

"The Members of the Security Council called for the current situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, without interference, through peaceful and political means, in line with Chapter VI of the UN Charter, within the framework of its National Constitution and in full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Venezuela."

The United States vetoed this resolution. That's how dangerous these times are.

Cuban medical solidarity

Addressing the 73rd World Health Assembly, the Cuban minister of health, Dr José Angel Portal Miranda, declared that "without ever neglecting the responsibility to protect our people, we have not abandoned the Cuban Revolution's vocation for solidarity. More than 2,300 collaborators, organised in 26 medical brigades from the Henry Reeve Contingent, contribute today in the battle against this disease in 24 countries—in addition to the more

than 28,000 Cuban health professionals in 59 countries.

"Neither the genocidal blockade imposed on Cuba by the United States government, which has been cruelly intensified, nor attempts by that country's administration to discredit and hinder Cuba's international medical co-operation, have been able to prevent this gesture of solidarity. No single country can face this pandemic alone: a global response is required, based on unity, solidarity and renewed multilateral co-operation.

"Cuba reiterates, to the WHO and its member-states, our willingness to co-operate and share our modest experiences." ★



The crisis in child care

The covid-19 crisis and consequent quarantine continue to expose and heighten the contradictions inherent in capitalism. Nowhere are these more acute than in the case of child care in the 26-County state.

To analyse the situation and explain the failings of this system we must first set out clearly how it works.

Raymond Ó Dubhghaill
on the problems and the solution

Child care in Ireland: the private-subsidy model

Child care in Ireland is organised under a private model, where subsidies are paid by the state directly to the owners of creches in respect of each child they have attending their service. The level of subsidy per child is determined by the level of income of their parents or guardians, with amounts ranging from €3.50 per week¹ to over €150 per week.² In almost all cases, parents are required by the creche operators to top up the state subsidy with weekly fees in order to secure their child's place. In 2019 the average weekly fee charged was a huge €184 per child per week for full-time care.³ Only in Switzerland and Britain is child care more expensive than in Ireland.⁴

Despite the fact that child care is an essential service, availed of by approximately 200,000 children and their families each year,⁵ the Irish state holds no stake in the system and allows it to be run for profit, like any other business, while providing heavy subsidies to business owners from public funds. The state budget for child care in 2020, primarily comprising such subsidies, was €628 million.⁶



Under capitalism, women are expected both to undertake domestic labour in their own home, unpaid, and to work at a job in the outside world.

How business owners exploit the system and their workers

There is an inherent contradiction between quality of child care and profit.

By way of illustration, Hyde and Seek, the chain of creches that was subject to an RTE exposé in the summer of 2019, cleared €2¾ million in profits (after salaries) since 2014 while receiving €1¼ million in subsidies from the state during that period.⁷

In the meantime they were documented as diluting the milk they fed the children in their care and reducing portions of chicken breast to below nutritional standards, among other injurious practices⁸—all this while even if the state gave no subsidies whatever to their creches they would still have turned over €1½ million in profit.

Though their profession requires them to pursue expensive and time-consuming qualifications,⁹ child-care workers can expect to earn €10.38 per hour on average,¹⁰ little over the adult minimum wage, which now sits at €10.10 per hour. So while state subsidies might increase from one year to the next, like parental fees, these are paid directly to creche owners and function only to increase their profits, not the wages they pay to their staff.

The result is poor pay and conditions, high staff turnover, skyrocketing costs, and an ever-decreasing quality of care for children and their families, in order to facilitate the maximising of profits for business owners.¹¹

Child care and covid-19

In early May the Government's highly publicised plan to provide child care for essential workers during the covid-19 crisis was scrapped, with little fanfare, after only six child-care providers signed up to the proposed programme.¹² The demand for this essential service has not gone away, but the state and the private businesses it is partnered with have been shown to be fundamentally incapable of providing it.

Meanwhile, many child-care workers are unemployed, having been laid off en masse by their employers

as soon as the crisis began. Some are working in the “black market” of child care that has since been created—working as childminders for families where both parents have to work—with all the associated health and security risks of breaking quarantine restrictions.

Women, work, and domestic care

Under capitalism, women are expected both to undertake domestic labour in their own home, unpaid, and to work at a job in the outside world. In addition to this they can expect to earn substantially less for doing the same job as men.¹³ Typically, jobs that are done in the main by women—nursing, care work, teaching, etc.—will be undervalued and subject to high levels of exploitation.

Given the abysmal pay and conditions in the sector, it should come as no surprise that 98 per cent of child-care workers in the state are women.¹⁴

The Government's stated objective in subsidising child care is to increase participation in the labour market, particularly among women. However, the costs of child care are so unaffordable for working families that many are forced to stay at home, resulting in an increased burden on women, and the proliferation of unpaid domestic labour.¹⁵

What is the solution?

It's clear that child care is an essential public service. Therefore, it should be provided as a universal right, free of charge, by a state-owned and state-operated child-care system, where the challenging and invaluable labour of its workers is recognised by fair pay and conditions and security of contract.

In this regard, efforts to unionise the child-care sector, led primarily by SIPTU, should be applauded and encouraged.

However, we must recognise that the dire situation outlined above is not a result of the failings of the child-care system but of it working exactly as it is designed to: to enrich business owners at the expense of the public purse and the welfare of children and their families.

The contradictions illustrated above are inherent in the capitalist system, expressed in the private model of child care. Only through socialist revolution can the well-being of children and workers be truly realised, in a child-care system that is accessible to all and operated for the benefit of the people, not of the capitalist class. ★

Notes

- 1 Citizens' Information, “Universal childcare subsidy” (<https://tinyurl.com/y7bcywcl>).
- 2 Citizens' Information, “National Childcare Scheme (NCS)” (<https://tinyurl.com/y9o4zqno>).
- 3 Thejournal.ie, “The most expensive childcare is in Dublin, the cheapest is in Carlow” (<https://tinyurl.com/yxphqtlf>).
- 4 “Ireland has third highest childcare costs, study shows,” *Irish Examiner*, 8 July 2019 (<https://tinyurl.com/yat7t5lr>).
- 5 Parliamentary Budget Office, “Childcare in Ireland: An Analysis of Market Dynamics, Public Programmes and Accessibility,” 2019 (<https://tinyurl.com/y75ru95d>).
- 6 Parliamentary Budget Office, “Childcare in Ireland: An Analysis of Market Dynamics, Public Programmes and Accessibility,” 2019 (<https://tinyurl.com/y75ru95d>).
- 7 Eilish O'Regan, “RTE investigates creche Hyde and Seek clears €2.75m in profits as it gets €1.25m from the state,” *Irish Independent*, 25 July 2019, (<https://tinyurl.com/yc5szr33>).
- 8 Conor Gallagher, “Creche practices ‘a recipe for disaster,’ says childcare expert,” *Irish Times*, 24 July 2019 (<https://tinyurl.com/y2ltc3d9>).
- 9 Early Childhood, Ireland (<https://tinyurl.com/ya535qsj>).
- 11 “‘Dodging regulations and ratios happens everywhere’: The realities of working in childcare,” *Thejournal.ie*, 27 July 2019 (<https://tinyurl.com/y43t5dob>).
- 12 Samantha Libreri, “Frontline workers' childcare scheme is cancelled,” *RTE*, 14 May 2020 (<https://preview.tinyurl.com/ycedklnp>).
- 13 Eoin Burke-Kennedy, “Study finds gender pay gap in Ireland is widening,” *Irish Times*, 8 March 2020 (<https://tinyurl.com/ybax9ulf>).
- 14 Department of Children and Youth Affairs, “Early Years Sector Profile Report, 2017/2018” (<https://tinyurl.com/y7s69ylo>).
- 15 Joyce, Fegan, “Special Report, Day 1: Childcare costs stop many from going to work,” *Irish Examiner*, 19 August 2019 (<https://tinyurl.com/y7fpxcfm>).

Understanding People's Korea



GRAHAM HARRINGTON

ANYBODY WHO thinks they're an expert on North Korea is either a liar or a fool. Every so often the media go into a frenzy in reporting the latest news story about the country, playing up its eccentricities. Time and again North Korean officials who were supposedly executed will turn up alive and well, or some story about North

Korea landing on Venus will turn out to have originated on a satirical web site, rather than something that came from the country's official news media.

The sometimes comical barrage of propaganda against the country comes not just from anti-communism but also from straightforward racism: these people are warped by their totalitarian regime, and it's the duty of the civilised countries to sort them out. No wonder

the North Korean state remains so distrustful of westerners when so many, even many on the left, make no effort to understand the country.

Notwithstanding the worship of the Kim family, or the idealistic Juche ideology, which have absolutely nothing in common with Marxism, it must be emphasised that all countries come to socialism in their own way, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has managed some impressive achievements over the years. It was the second country in Asia to industrialise, after Japan, and did so while rebuilding from the Korean War.

Japan colonised Korea in 1910, its occupation lasting until 1945. During that time Koreans suffered greatly. Thousands of "comfort women" were forced into sex slavery, the murder of people and theft of their meagre resources was common. The liberation struggle that began in 1930 was led by Kim Il Sung, who co-operated with the Chinese communists in the fight against the Japanese. After Korea was liberated, many Koreans stayed to fight with the Chinese communists.

Another (final?) defeat for Juan Guaidó



SEÁN EDWARDS

IN VENEZUELA the month of May began with a bang. A group of mercenaries—North American, Colombian, and Venezuelan, armed and trained in Colombia with the participation of drug-dealing paramilitaries, the Drugs Enforcement Administration of the United States, and the benign surveillance of the Colombian government—mounted an invasion of Venezuela. The Drugs Enforcement Administration, officially charged with combating the drugs traffic, has no problem forming an alliance with major drug-traffickers.

The armed group left the coast of Colombia in speedboats and landed on the coast of Venezuela at La Guaira, near the airport and only an hour's drive from Caracas. Their mission was reported as being to seize the airport and kidnap President Maduro.

How they were expecting to accomplish this without major reinforcements is not clear; perhaps they

During the Korean War itself the principal city of the North, Pyongyang, was devastated, Agent Orange was used to destroy agriculture, dams were bombed to flood villages, and nuclear bombs were primed and ready to be used

After the liberation, local People's Committees were set up by the people to run the country when the Japanese left. Much as in Germany, imperialism partitioned the country and imposed its own regime, full of former collaborators. In the years after 1945 there were more than a few local insurgencies and uprisings against the southern state, seen as a puppet of the United States. The response by the United States and South Korea was massacres of communists and others, which continued for decades after.

During the Korean War itself the principal city of the North, Pyongyang, was devastated, Agent Orange was used to destroy agriculture, dams were bombed to flood villages, and nuclear bombs were primed and ready to be used. No wonder it remains a garrison-state to this day, while the United States stations nearly 30,000 troops on its doorstep.

Yet despite this the North was able to industrialise, with help from China and the Soviet Union. It managed to remain ahead of South Korea economically until the 1980s.

This level of development allowed the North to have an advanced socialist economy, with its public

distribution system being well regarded for providing for people's needs.

However, economic decline and the counter-revolutions in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe left the North devastated, given its energy-intensive agricultural system. In response to famine, it began a limited opening of the economy to the private sector and later the *songun* or "military first" policy under Kim Jong Il.

Under its new, younger leader the North has relaxed the control of the ageing military figures, and has used its nuclear programme to allow it to reduce the amount of military spending. The result has been a massive boost to the economy, despite crippling sanctions, in recent years.

There have been study trips to Viet Nam and China to study their economic reforms. North Korea has a massive potential reserve of rare-earth minerals and other resources in high demand, but lacks the ability to harness them. "Special zones," such as Kaesong, Sinuiju, and Rason, are used to allow South Korean companies to use North Korean labour, subject to external stability.

While the North remains a poor country, and contains many things

that Marxists will take issue with, it still has many things we can learn from. Its universal health system was noted by a WHO official as something any developing country would envy. It has universal education, almost free housing, full literacy, full employment, clean streets, and practically no crime, addiction, prostitution, or gambling. Women make up half or a majority of parliamentary deputies, professionals, and workers. Of significance also is that North Koreans pay no tax: state revenue comes from publicly owned companies. The cycle of boom and bust is not present.

It has managed all this under very difficult conditions: a partitioned country, few global allies, the threat of war coming any day. While it remains a very tense, controlled society, there is no compromise on its independence. It has also managed to preserve—through an intense and crude patriotism—the same revolutionary enthusiasm it had when it first became a state, something other socialist states struggled with over time.

Whether or not the North deserves our admiration, it certainly warrants our respect. ★

were attempting to prepare the ground for a greater force. This would mean they were part of a much larger plan.

Anyway, thanks to good intelligence, the Venezuelan armed forces were able to meet them on their arrival, killing eight of the invaders and taking most of the rest prisoner. Another group was taken into custody nearby by fishermen, members of the militia. Since then some stragglers have been rounded up, making a total of about forty.

It was impossible for this adventure not to be reported, even by the corporate media. Of course such a disastrous failure could not be acknowledged by its instigators: Pompeo rather cryptically claimed that the United States was not "directly" involved; perhaps its involvement was indirect.

Juan Guaidó chose the lie direct, denying anything to do with it, though his signature was on a contract signed with the mercenary company Silvercorp, headed by Jordan Goudreau, an ex-officer of the US Army Special Forces. Silvercorp

was to take charge of security in Venezuela, under Guaidó's government, for a fee of \$200 million. It was also promised a down payment of \$1½ million, which apparently was not paid. It has been reported that Goudreau is suing him.

The spectacular defeat of the invasion demonstrates the vigilance and efficiency of Venezuela's defenders, from the army to the militia members, like the fishermen of the coastal village of Chuao. It also illustrates the desperation of the extreme fascistic right wing around Guaidó, and of its backers, especially the USA, its allies, and its client states.

As elsewhere on the continent, the chief accomplices and agents of the United States are major drug-traffickers, who are close allies of the governments in a number of countries, Colombia and Honduras for example. Trump, accusing the Venezuelan government of promoting the drug trade, is directly allied with the greatest drug-traffickers on the continent.

The drugs business in the United States itself bears most heavily on the poor, and serves to divide and weaken the working class. The "war on drugs" is more of a "war of drugs"; those who proclaim it perpetrate it.

The series of defeats suffered by Juan Guaidó and his backers, and the resounding victories of the Chavistas in the face of economic war, attempted coups d'état, and terrorist attacks, has by no means altered the determination of the US regime and its allies to overturn the government of Nicolás Maduro and destroy the social progress achieved by the Chavista movement.

Now Trump has brought the US Navy into the Caribbean to blockade Cuba and Venezuela, and is explicitly threatening an invasion. This continuing aggression threatens not only Venezuela, of course, but the peace of the whole world.

A great mobilisation of all who value peace and progress is needed to bring this aggression to an end. Venezuela is now in the front line for humanity.

Music, value, and all that jazz



EOGHAN O'NEILL

I HAVE BEEN a musician for more than twenty years, playing in various original bands, cover bands, and wedding bands. As the whole industry for working musicians becomes ever more uncertain because of covid-19, I have often found myself pondering the question of the value of being a musician.

Many artists in various fields have come, at some point or other in their artistic career, to a stage where they question the value of their art and therefore the value of continuing to produce the art form. This is both a philosophical question and an economic one.

The value of doing something has a very specific meaning to the world we live in and the system that we work and function under. Whether you are conscious of it or not, or whether you like it or not, music, art, theatre and all other creative artistic fields—just like the rest of the forces of production, which create the goods and services to satisfy our needs, wants and desires in society—are part of the capitalist mode of production, the production of the world of commodities, owned by a ruling class

The creative arts, therefore, just like every other industry, are ruled by the laws of motion of capitalism and the centrality of profit as the driving force of the system.

A study group on volume 1 of Marx's *Capital*, specifically chapters 1–6,¹ that I have been engaged in over the past couple of months has brought to the fore the value system that Marx was investigating, and I have attempted to frame this article by applying the theory in the context of music, to which I have devoted a lot of time over the last two decades.

The word “value,” for most people, is often conflated with the word “price.” What the value of a song is and the price someone is willing to pay for it are two related but different things.

Value, in the Marxist sense, is the measure of socially necessary labour time employed in creating a particular good or service. In music, and in the creative arts generally, creating something—a song or a piece of music, a picture or a sculpture—means putting the mind and body to work, which is not a straightforward process for the creator. The creative process can vary wildly, and the productivity level in creativity can also be sporadic; songs can sometimes be written in a matter of minutes or in a matter of months. A collection of songs for an album can take years to write or might only take a few weeks.

At the writing stage, a song is a private or personal creation, and within a capitalist framework it has no social value, as it has not been transformed into a commodity that can be exchanged. So, for those of you who write songs for yourself, I'm afraid to say

that they have no value (for capitalism, of course!). For it to have value it must be transformed into a commodity: a song must undergo a process of production—arranging, composing, recording and mastering for commercial release.

This may all be done by the original artist in their bedroom or it may enter a division of labour, as the arrangers-composers, musicians, engineers and producers in the big recording studios all impart their particular level of skill and labour time to creating the finished song for commercial release.

It is at this point that the song, or a host of songs in album form, is transformed into a commodity, now a social product, having the potential to be exchanged in a market. Whether or not that potential is realised is dependent on many factors, such as musical taste, trends, genre, market size, financial backing, promotion, marketing, etc. The song in a release format, just like any other commodity, is of no use to the owner other than to be exchanged or sold. The record company, or you as an independent artist, have no use for a pile of boxes of records, cassettes or CDs (for those who remember those formats). Nowadays songs are uploaded to streaming services, where the number of streams is limitless; but just having them available to stream is of no use if they are not streamed—if some process of exchange doesn't take place.

The creative arts, therefore, just like every other industry, are ruled by the laws of motion of capitalism and the centrality of profit as the driving force of the system.

The price for a song, as we have seen, is related to the value of the song. However, they are not the same thing, as value is a measure of the magnitude of the *socially necessary labour time* employed in production. Money acts as a medium of exchange, which is a universal representation of that labour time; price, on the other hand, is the level or quantity of money that is attributed to the commodity that is paid in the exchange once it gets to the market.

The price paid (money going to the owner) is only realised after production has taken place, when the particular owner of the commodity comes to the market with other producers of the same commodity and where prices tend to an average but can fluctuate around the average price, depending on supply and demand and changes to production processes, which over time can vary the average price (usually downwards, as technology advances).

The time taken to create a song, or the time it took for a musician to reach a level where they can compose a song, doesn't really matter if it can easily be transformed into a commodity that can compete with the production level of other producers in the market. A jazz artist, having spent decades on reaching the highest level of music theory and composition, will not command a higher value or price for their single or album than that of a new teenage artist, who plays three chords with a catchy hook, because of their level of skill and the time taken to reach that level. They won't necessarily be competing for the same audience and market size, but it is the process of the commodification of music that equalises the socially necessary labour time employed in the music commodity.

If an artist is struggling to make large sales for their recorded work they will probably struggle to make sales on tickets from live gigs, and it becomes a perpetual cycle and struggle for artists who want to devote their time and effort to creating music but find it almost impossible to generate enough money, a living wage, from the industry.

We need to leave out the subjective factors of what constitutes "good" or "quality" music and concentrate on the subjective factors that will facilitate creative artists in maintaining a career in the industry. There are the costs—

cost of living, costs of producing songs (recording, mastering, artwork, promotion, etc.), and costs of gigging and touring—versus the potential sources of income: sales, streams, gigs, merchandise, sync (music used in films or television games) and other royalties, and state grants and supports.

For many independent artists the costs are much higher than the income, because so much of it is weighted on the individual and the group's ability to invest their own time and money while at the same time being able to afford the high cost of living. As a result, many go into full-time work in other industries or professions, others try to stay within it and join wedding or cover bands, or go into live or recording engineering or a host of other industry jobs to try to subsidise the costs of being a creative artist.

The trade-off in this substitution in wages is time, which over time becomes an obstacle to the creative process and often results in artists and bands eventually breaking up; people become busy with other things, and ultimately that potential to create is socially lost. (A recent trend is for Irish musicians to emigrate to a place—Berlin is one such—where the cost of living is much more affordable, to allow them to continue creating music for longer.)

As we saw, the creative process can vary wildly from artist to artist and even from song to song. It is this, the process of creation, that is actually incompatible with the capitalist system, because creativity is the polar opposite of standardised production. If you can't standardise something into a process of production it becomes impossible to guarantee a rate of profit that will attract investment. It is this that capitalism cannot abide, and so the capitalist industries have a clear incentive to transform creativity into standardised productivity.

Once creativity becomes standardised it changes from being a creative process into a production process. This is what the major owners of music—the record labels—really care about: producing readily available commodities for quick exchange, to guarantee a profit on their investment. This is why the large monopoly labels

that dominate the charts, radio and stream sites, as well as live venues and promotional companies, have tried to standardise creativity, because that is the only way to ensure a consistent level of profit for their investment.

They have tried to create a science of hit-making, with standardised song structures and times, standardised arrangements, standardised production, standardised soundscapes, standardised themes, standardised lyrics, standardised performances, standardised artists. They have a host of ghost writers churning out songs; they will have a selection of professional session musicians and producers ready to record the music. The final piece is to get the marketable front, often a "sex symbol"—the "X Factor" or "American Idol" style of pop group or singer.

This standardisation facilitates the process of music production to maintain continuous reproduction, without having to be reliant on creative artists to get their "moment of inspiration." The music industry, like many others, has been overtaken and monopolised by a mere three major companies, which own 80 per cent of the market: Sony, Universal, and Warner. Along with the labels, streaming sites have been dominated by a mere two—Spotify and Apple Music. And the Big Three labels are partial owners of Spotify, which then has an obvious interest in ensuring that their artists are promoted on the site.²

The following details, based on an excellent article by Mark Graham, "Does the Irish music industry exist?" show the level of monopoly control over every aspect of the music industry here in Ireland.³

Live music venues and events are dominated by one or two major entertainment and promotion companies. Live Nation is the world's largest entertainment company, which also owns Ticketmaster. In Ireland it owns 3 Arena and the Bord Gáis Theatre. The largest indigenous record label is Rubyworks (Hozier), owned by Caroline Downey and Denis Desmond, who have shares in Live Nation.

They also own a majority share (50 per cent) of MCD, Ireland's largest concert promoters.

Continued overleaf

Putting ordinary people at the heart of the story



▲ Pip meets Magwitch in *Great Expectations*

Jenny Farrell on the 150th anniversary of the death of Charles Dickens

CHARLES DICKENS was born in 1812 into the impoverished petty bourgeoisie. His father was imprisoned for debt, and financial circumstances forced the young Charles to leave school at the age of twelve and to work a ten-hour day in a blacking (shoe polish) factory.

The adult Dickens's first jobs were as a parliamentary reporter for radical magazines, and so he moved in radical circles. He was also instrumental in organising a strike by the reporters of the *True Sun* and successfully acted as their spokesperson. As his love of writing developed, he began to earn his living by selling his books and writing.

Dickens was born into the rapidly accelerating period of the Industrial Revolution, which powered the transition of British capitalism into its imperialist phase. His writing coincided with the fortunes of the Chartist movement and on to the upheaval of 1848–49 and then the triumph of European reaction in 1850, the collapse of the English socialist

Music, value and all that jazz

They sold the other half in 2018 to Live Nation, which also happens to own Festival Republic, “who run some of the biggest festivals in Britain and Electric Picnic here in Ireland.” Downey and Desmond are also directors of Gaiety Investments, owners of the Gaiety Theatre, the Olympia Theatre, and the Academy.)

This level of ownership, control and management has monopolised Ireland's music industry, from the record label to radio and the live venue promoters, and everything in between. This means that

if you are an independent music creator outside their circuit it becomes nearly impossible to maintain a stable income over time without having that financial backing and investment to help promote the music that is being created.

For many, the choice of continuing to work full time in the creative arts comes down to the bread-and-butter question of “Can I make a living from what I am creating?” In essence, you are examining the likelihood of the commodification of your art, and not the validity of what you create, which can skew an artist to conform to standardised music.

When we question the value of art it

is thought of in money terms—because capitalism demands it. But is art only worth something if it can be turned into a commodity, to be exchanged at a certain price, and worth nothing if it can't? Or is there a value to society in the creative arts, a social usefulness as a way of deepening and widening our cultural expressions and heritage, to be enjoyed by the present and future generations? Will this have positive effects for local communities and youth, who will always look for some outlet for expressing themselves?

I would argue for the latter. However, to ensure a vibrant and diverse range of art forms and artists, the creators and

Dickens always regarded himself as one of the common people, sympathising with them and exposing injustice against them.

movement under Robert Owen, and then its revival under the First International in 1864.

Dickens always regarded himself as one of the common people, sympathising with them and exposing injustice against them. This made him lastingly popular with the ordinary folk. His stance that the poor should be treated as human beings was in itself a revolutionary demand.

Taking this stance led Dickens to develop a new type of novel. His books take the focus away from characters in the wealthy classes and towards the lives of ordinary, mostly urban children, men and women, who grapple with everyday challenges. With his strong sense of individuality he made these people extraordinarily vivid. He shows his readers the darker side of society in the first great industrialised metropolis in the world. His most interesting and valuable characters are usually people from the lower social classes.

In 1842 Dickens travelled to the United States as a committed supporter of American independence, seeking to find the democracy of his dreams. Not only was he disappointed in this but the existence of slavery and its enthusiastic defence by many of those he met outraged him. After his return he wrote *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), which strongly criticised American society and its values, especially slavery and violence, as well as its extreme individualism.

In his novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*, published shortly afterwards, he also

described the conflict he experienced between expectations and reality in the United States.

Until his visit to America, Dickens's viewpoint was directed exclusively towards southern England, while the main impulse for Chartism came from the industrial Midlands and the North. Not surprisingly, Dickens's radicalism in his earlier novels was more moderate and at first represented incidental ills; but as his writing developed, the entire social system that he depicts increasingly proves to be deeply rotten and unreformable.

Great Expectations

By way of example, let us turn briefly to one of Dickens's later novels, *Great Expectations* (1860–61), in which the expectations of the title are those of a boy from the working class and are attached to the hope for a wealthy patroness's good will. The novel describes Pip's development, and the shock of disillusionment.

In this book there is no hope that conditions could be put right by the benevolence of the ruling class. Instead it is the outcast Magwitch, cheated, exploited, and brutalised by the law, who shows gratitude and generosity to Pip. Just as the bourgeoisie owes its wealth to the exploitation of the working classes, so Pip owes his wealth to Magwitch—and Pip is just as ungrateful as the bourgeoisie.

Dickens's depiction of the characters of two lawyers, Jaggers and his employee Wemmick, is also noteworthy. They are ruthless in their working lives but lead a completely

different, compassionate private life, showing that success in business is achieved only at the expense of one's own humanity. Jaggers always washes his hands following a particularly dirty job. Pip also changes during the time of his "expectations," at the expense of his humanity, painfully expressed in his shameful treatment of Joe Gargery and Biddy.

The novel shows the folly of indulging in illusion. Dickens's original ending underlined Pip's complete break with his aspirations for social advancement and his insight into the heartlessness of "better" society. However, under pressure he changed the ending in favour of a happier outcome. George Bernard Shaw commented that Dickens's original conclusion was the true happy ending. The logic of the novel contradicts the changed ending. Its most admirable characters are the blacksmith Joe Gargery and the teacher Biddy, Gargery's second wife. Pip himself, as the main character, begins and ends as a working person.

Dickens has had a great and continuing influence on subsequent writers. For example, in Robert Tressell's *Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* not only does Tressell expand on Dickens's focus by depicting a panorama of working-class people but he is also clearly steeped in the Dickensian tradition in his use of names or motifs that contain the power of social generalisation. In this sense, Dickens's increasingly fierce and pointed satires help prepare the ground for working-class literature. ★

the capital infrastructures have to be invested in and built, including indigenous record labels helping to finance and support artists and bands; small, medium and large venues, stocked with the necessary equipment, accessible and free, or at very low cost; the artists; the recording studios, again accessible at affordable rates; and the promotional end of radio play, focused on our own artists, rather than heavily importing music from the three major labels, as is done at present.

Capitalism and capitalists have no interest in sinking money into these long-term social projects, as the profit returns are not available. They will only further

monopolise and control creative outlets in order to guarantee profitability, to the detriment of our culture and society.

In isolation we cannot build a community, an environment within our local towns and villages, that encourages, nourishes and promotes artistic expression in all its forms: it needs the active and conscious engagement of the actual creators to both develop them independently and put pressure on public representatives for transformative demands on the industry, while also gaining the support of the local community, which ultimately will be fundamental in shifting the development of the creative arts.

There are many other ways and ideas worth considering, but until those in the music industry themselves (and other creative industries) begin to question the system under which they create, and begin to have serious conversations about their industry, the status quo will prevail, and creative minds will be stunted. ★

Notes

- 1 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (<https://tinyurl.com/p25t9v5>).
- 2 Will Meyer, "Taking the music industry monopoly seriously" (<https://tinyurl.com/y75ogkyn>).
- 3 Mark Graham, "Does the Irish music industry exist?"

Spake English and be dacent!



MÍCHEÁL MAC AONGHUSA

Tomás Mac Síomóin, *The Gael Becomes Irish: An Unfinished Odyssey* (Nuascéalta, 2020)

IT IS DIFFICULT to imagine a deeper enslavement of a subject people than to deprive them of their language. Such a condition has a deep psychological effect, which causes the abnormal to seem normal. There is a pretence that it doesn't matter, or it happened so long ago as to be immaterial, or even that it didn't occur at all.

In the Irish situation it is believed that the language shift happened many centuries ago and had something to do with some deficiency in Irish as a vernacular. How many are aware that at the beginning of the nineteenth century Irish was the daily language of the majority of the nation and for a substantial number was their only language?

We are left with a peculiar concept of what it means to be Irish: we are great craic, we drink like mad, we are convinced we are the most friendly people in the world and the most loved, and haven't we great leipreachán hats, especially on St Patrick's Day?

This isn't just pub talk but runs deep in what passes for serious commentary. We manage to match such a weak nationality with a strong nationalism. There are even Irish people who regard

the loss of the language as something to be celebrated. This deep psychological capitulation to a colonised oblivious mentality belies an incapability to imagine a culture-changing liberation.

The disastrous effects of cultural, intellectual, economic and political colonisation and the dominant ideology of present-day Ireland is at the core of a book by Tomás Mac Síomóin, *The Gael Becomes Irish: An Unfinished Odyssey*. Dr Mac Síomóin, though resident in Catalonia for twenty years, is arguably the most creative writer in Irish today. He is not a literary seclusionist or an isolated theorist but has been a lifelong political activist (including some years on the National Executive Committee of the CPI) and is an astute observer of minds and mores.

He delineates the genocidal brutality of the colonial occupiers throughout early modern history. From the middle of the eighteenth century the occupation had an enthusiastic coterie of collaborators in the emerging Catholic middle class. The development of capitalism and increasing cultural assimilation went hand in hand with the rise and enrichment of this class. By the early twentieth century Redmond led the Irish bourgeoisie to push for a place in the imperialist sun. A deep Redmondism informs the policies of the Irish state today and is not confined to the crassness of the likes of the Tan Flanagan.

After the disaster of Culloden the Catholic church changed its allegiance from the Jacobites to the monarchical patrons of the Penal Laws. Henceforth it played a huge part in undermining the use of Irish. Maynooth College (founded in 1791), a collaborative enterprise of the imperial government and the Catholic hierarchy, strengthened the dominance of both parties and had a calamitous linguistic effect. The most influential Irish politician of the next generation, Daniel O'Connell, was an enthusiastic angliciser who openly welcomed the demolition of Irish as the majority vernacular.

From 1922 onwards the dominant counter-revolutionary circles were happy to adopt the symbolic use of Irish but did nothing concrete to promote the language or even facilitate its use in the Gaeltacht. As Mac Síomóin points out,

Irish society suffers from an inherited inferiority in relation to the language, which expels it to the margins of life, to being a pastime, a folkloric detail, and a nice bit of bunting for special occasions.

The author draws on the work of the Portuguese scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who holds that forced cultural assimilation confronts all those societies and collectives whose knowledge, bases and forms of living are denied and disqualified: women, black people, LGBT communities, and other marginalised and colonised groups, and treats them with what he calls "epistemic injustice." Speakers of minority languages come within the scope of de Sousa's frame of reference.

Tomás Mac Síomóin goes on to broaden the language issue to other questions that are not being addressed by the commentariat or society in general. As a scientist he fears "the inexorable drift of environmental data towards human extinction." He is concerned that mainstream media are coming to be "subverted to the task of law and order maintenance . . . Methods of repression," he continues, "associated traditionally with totalitarian states, are almost certainly to be introduced in the interests of 'security'."

Mac Síomóin worries that the "new evolving normality could very well usher in a not very attractive dystopian technological world: a fractured society," distinguished by a high rate of unemployment, "galloping robotisation" and increased social inequality "and sustained by basic income, readily available 'recreational' opioid drugs, together with cheap or free mass entertainment."

The book reproduces an interview with the Kenyan Marxist writer and activist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, first published in *An Phoblacht* (no. 3, 2019). Ngũgĩ says: ". . . systems of conquest, colonisation and domination go for the linguistic jugular. So national liberation must, of necessity involve at the very least a recovery of a people's linguistic base."

That puts the issue raised by Dr Mac Síomóin in a nutshell. The cultural struggle is not an optional appendix to the liberationist agenda, and it is not a specifically Irish question. ★