
UNITY

Printed & Published by the Communist Party of Ireland

For Peace, Independence and Socialism

12.9.20 Vol. 32 No 32 (Print Day Wednesday) Online

People before property

By Lynda Walker

IN 2004 a fire destroyed the North Street Arcade in Belfast; it has been left semi-derelict ever since. During this time there has been a development of the arts and cultural centres, the use of the Irish of Congress of Trade Unions for meetings and the John Hewitt pub owned by the Belfast Centre for the Unemployed, the Black Box and The Met in St Ann's Square. Writers' Square and Buoy Square has been the gathering place for International Women's Day, May Day and other rallies for years. The Cathedral Quarter (CQ) has developed an ethos of its own.

However the area has deteriorated, with derelict buildings predominant.

North Street and Donegall Street do need renovation but the development should be in partnership with the citizens of Belfast.

In 2014 the BBC reported: "an ambitious £360 million proposal including new shops, apartments, hotels, cafes and bars in a rundown 11 acre area of Belfast."

Since 2014 the ambitious project reappeared on a number of occasions, and it was on the Belfast City Council Planning Committee agenda again on Wednesday 2nd Sept, they approved the plans by eight votes to five.

The Development Management Officer Report, available on the council's web-site, describes the proposals for development, this time the cost is £500 million.

Tribeca is the name that is being

foisted on us by the developer Castlebrooke, at least there was public consultation when naming the CQ.

Save CQ Campaign identifies some of the objections that are noted in Appendix 1 of the above report.

These include the construction of a 10 story building adjacent to the Assembly Rooms, and the conversion of the Assembly Rooms in Waring Street into a boutique hotel, rather than a cultural centre.

This building is of historic significance, formerly The Exchange; it was built in 1769 as a single-storey then added to. In 1798 the Rooms were used as courtrooms for the trial of rebel leader Henry Joy McCracken of United Irishmen, who was subsequently hanged in the High Street.

Also opposed is the privatisation of Writers' Square, and the reduction "of Writers' Square by 53%, no provision for green space."

Clarification is sought regarding the existing monuments and plaques paying tribute to renowned artists/literates and the statue dedicated to the memory of Belfast International Brigaders who fought in the anti-fascist war in Spain.

These will be removed to facilitate the development; "however a condition is recommended that at Reserved Matters stage (when it goes back to the Council Planning Committee) the landscaping details for Writers' Square shall include requirements to retain the

existing references to literature heritage, albeit potentially in a new form," making it imperative that the International Brigade Commemoration Committee contact the council about the memorial.

One of the most controversial areas is, "The proposal of no social housing or family housing on site. Just 14 children could be accommodated in the 367 housing units being proposed. Vulnerable people from Choice Housing would be moved away from the site, to Academy Street."

The need for family housing is vital but the Communist Party of Ireland stress the need for public housing not social housing.

In 2018 *Unity* carried an article that opposed the first 'build to rent' accommodation scheme approved at the Belfast City Council.

This was a £15 million social housing scheme, with a 16 story building comprising of 90 one and two bedroomed flats in the CQ-Academy Street, "hailed as a wonderful development that will appeal to "urban professionals, small families, corporate renters, visiting professionals and downsizers."

The completion date is unsure, they are being built by Lacuna Developments who are responsible for much of the student accommodation in Belfast. .

This multi-million pound project in CQ will take several years to complete, but there is a lack of partnership with key bodies, a lack of community consultation and a lack of genuine and accurately reported feedback. See page 2.

Editorial

Unity is published each week
by the Communist Party of
Ireland.
PO Box 85, Belfast BT1 1SR.

Loyalties

WHEN the post war Labour government in Britain introduced the National Health Service health minister Aneurin Bevan was asked how he had managed to convince some in the medical profession who were in opposition to a NHS. His response was that he had to fill their mouths with gold.

In the modern day NHS private practice seems to be the equivalent of “filling their mouths with gold.” Documents leaked to the media reveals that people suffering from severe arthritic illnesses are among those waiting 218 weeks for NHS assessments but appointments in the “independent” sector will take less than a fortnight.

Suspected motor neurone disease and multiple sclerosis cases face delays for neurology consultations of four years in the Belfast trust but if a patient can afford the fees this is reduced to three months.

One GP spoke of how “uncomfortable” he was with what he described as the north’s “two tier health system”, warning how it further disadvantages those from poorer backgrounds post Covid. He added that it cost £230 for an appointment with some NHS consultants privately before you’ve even had a blood test or a scan, that’s a 15 to 20 minute appointment, a brief history and examination. No wonder then that after seeing the waiting time figures he was “really disheartened.”

In one of the reports the Irish News stated that five years ago a “high-profile GP” questioned how consultants doing private work at a time of rocketing waiting lists “could sleep in their beds at night.” At the same time criticism was also made as to whether the Department of Health was making the “best use of its consultant staff. Added to this were more calls for greater scrutiny. It was reported that those representing these medics claimed that even if more NHS doctors chose to opt out of the private sector and work extra hours, it would not solve the waiting list crisis as the system had neither the capacity nor funding to meet targets.

The ethos on which the NHS was founded is obviously being eroded. Those opposed to the privatisation of the NHS will need to look beyond the major contracts given to private companies and to question some of those within it as to where their loyalties lie.



People before property: action and voting

AS noted the plans for the Cathedral Quarter have to come back to the Council Planning Committee, so now is the time to up the ante.

Write to your councillor, join Save CQ, Campaign on Facebook.

Trade unions and other organisations could still make a contribution lobbying and asking to meet with the Council.

Belfast citizens reject Tribeca !

**How the parties voted on
Wednesday 2nd September 2020.**

***Motion to Refuse planning
permission for Tribeca Belfast*:**

Hussey - DUP - against

McKeown - SDLP - for

Brooks - DUP - against

Carson - Sinn Fein - against

Collins - PBP - for

Garrett - Sinn Fein - against

Groogan - Green - for

Hanvey - Alliance - for

Hutchinson - against

Maskey - Sinn Fein - against

McCullough - DUP - against

Murphy - Sinn Fein - against

O’Hara - Green - for

5 For, 8 Against



Selling Unity in Buoy Square, a gathering place on May Day

Solidarity with the Debenhams workers

UNITE, along with other unions has expressed its full support with Debenhams workers who have spent the past 150+ days picketing the company and found themselves with no alternative but to occupy company premises in Dublin and Cork.

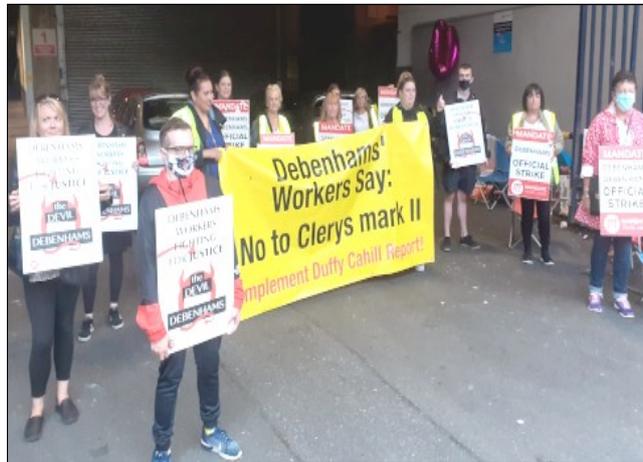
The union condemned the arrest of occupying workers in Dublin as an “outrageous response to a peaceful occupation.”

Unite Regional Secretary Jackie Pollock sent a message of solidarity to the workers, saying: “Unite fully supports Debenhams workers taking action to defend their rights.

“The workers have been left high and dry not only by the company’s actions but also by the failure of successive governments to implement the 2016 Duffy-Cahill proposals and legislate for such situations, allowing Debenhams to tear up a collectively negotiated redundancy agreement and transfer assets over the UK.”

These workers are not the first group of workers to find themselves in this situation, and they won’t be the last until the Government acts, said the union.

Unite pointed out Debenhams workers have been left



with no choice but to take action to defend their most basic rights.

“Their decision to occupy company premises in Dublin and Cork was born out of frustration, and Unite is appalled that workers were arrested in an outrageous response to a peaceful occupation.

“Unite stands in full solidarity with the workers,” Jackie Pollock concluded.

TULF: the arrests bring the crisis in workers’ rights to a new level

In a statement expressing solidarity with the Debenhams workers the Trade Union Left Forum said the arrest without a court injunction of the Debenhams workers for the occupation of stores brings the crisis in workers’ rights to a new level.

This marks a massive change of direction by the state, said TULF, where workers are now arrested for defending their rights even before an employer goes to court.

“This demonstrates which side the government is on. This is the state attacking its own citizens. The trade union movement must challenge this,” said TULF.

Support strikes are banned under the 1990 industrial relations act, it is unlikely any Union will be willing or able to officially call for short term supportive action even for a couple of hours or a solidarity march as it would put the organisation at risk of sequestration of all their unions assets .

Under the act two weeks notice would be required, supportive action is banned under the act, so the 1990 Industrial Relations Act has the unions and the workers caught in a double whammy.

To divert attention and to appear to support the workers the Taoiseach has called for a review of company law, the Duffy Cahill report must be brought in, but this would be useless without a review of labour law specifically the 1990 Industrial Relations Act.

TULF called for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to step up to the mark and call for this review and for all trade unionists to support these workers.

“Mandate Trade Union , Connect Trade Union , Unite Hospitality ROI and the civil service section of Fórsa trade union who all have a policy to abolish the 1990 Industrial Relations Act must now publicly call for it to be abolished,” said the campaigning group.

“These four unions must meet and agree and agree a formal strategy, to build a cross union campaign to have the 1990 Industrial Relations Act. act abolished.”

MEDIA REVIEW

Whose interests ?

WHEN it comes to the situation in Hong Kong all we have seen on our TV screens are the so-called pro-democracy demonstrators being man-handled by the police.

The fact that this element have been trashing the place, and in one instance setting fire to an elderly man who had the audacity to challenge them has not been commented on.

The mobs who rampaged through Kiev and eventually set up a fascist state received equally sympathetic coverage in our media.

The *Morning Star* did publish an interview with Alice Mak who is described by the interviewer, Kenny Coyle, as the most prominent contemporary leader of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (FTU). Yes they do have trade unions in Hong Kong.

Mak is also a member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council. She describes the FTU as proudly "patriotic" which has always supported Hong Kong's reunification with China.

It was formed in 1948 and comprises of 200 affiliated unions with about 400,000 members.

One of its constituents is the Hong Kong Seamen's Union which has a longer history, participating in the Hong Kong-Guangdong strikes of 1925-26 which were part of a wider upsurge of the Chinese anti-imperialist revolution of the 1920s.

When the FTU was formed trade union work as we understand it was virtually impossible so the biggest challenge, according to Mak, was to help the underprivileged.

As many people were illiterate and had no opportunity to receive educa-

tion the FTU set up its own education network and also set up clinics.

However in 1967 a series of major labour disputes erupted across Hong Kong.

What started off as disputes over wage cuts and lay-offs exploded into a popular rising of resentment against British colonial rule which resulted in scores of people being killed.

However the colonial government did concede some positive reforms in the 1960s and 1970s.

During the 1980s the economic reforms in China led to many Hong Kong manufacturers relocating to the mainland.

Mak stated that many of their unions had been in the manufacturing sector so a number of workers lost their jobs.

"We had to face many new challenges, she added.

The FTU welcomed Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty seeing its role as a positive force in reunification.

However it does recognise Hong Kong's pro-capitalist majority as a reality and therefore has focused on a long-term strategy.

This stand though made the FTU's members, offices and centres a particular target of anti-communist rioters last year.

Mak's district council office was vandalised on three occasions and in one attack rioters destroyed computers and office equipment.

They also destroyed her constituents' application forms for the gov-



ernment's Caring and Sharing scheme which provides low-income households with a £400 payment.

Not surprisingly there is a counter organisation to the FTU in the form of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKCTU).

This outfit was founded in the early 1990s by a coalition of labour groups linked to the Protestant churches and surprise, surprise, has enjoyed a generous subsidy from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), a well known CIA front.

In 2014 documents leaked to the Hong Kong media forced the HKCTU to admit that it had received more than £500,000 from the American Centre for International Labour Solidarity, a core part of the NED, over the last seven years.

Other leaked files showed that HKCTU leader Lee Cheuk-ya's political front, the Hong Kong Labour Party, received funding from the city's media mogul Jimmy Lai who is described as Hong Kong's Rupert Murdoch.

It is claimed that Lai had stashed cash into Lee's personal bank account. When the story broke the cash was quickly transferred to the party account.

Early last year Lee joined a delegation to Washington to support US legislation directed against China and Hong Kong drafted by right-wing Republican Marco Rubio.

This has since been repackaged, with bipartisan support, as the Hong Kong Autonomy Act.

Not surprisingly Alice Mak dismisses the possibility of finding common ground with the HKCTU stating unequivocally that the confederation is working against the interests of Hong Kong and its people.

The question may be asked as to whose interests are they working for ?

W. Ows

Taking a Look at Life.....by Raymond O'Connell

Rosa Parks

GIVEN the continuing habitual inequality, violence and shootings of Black people by US police forces and the BLM campaign it is instructive to look back at the life and times of the woman dubbed the 'mother of the Civil Rights Movement', credited and vilified as the person who 'started it all' – Rosa Parks.

When Rosa Parks died on 25.10.2005 aged 92 a process of canonisation began.

She was the first woman and second African American to lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda.

Her action in 1955 had already been increasingly misrepresented over the decades – “she was tired, so she sat down”.

Indeed for many people that is the only thing they know of Rosa Parks' life.

She was indeed tired, tired of repression and the myriad ways in which she was treated as an inferior being because of her race.

Rosa Parks though had been an



activist with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for a decade and during the bus boycott she travelled the country raising funds and support.

Back home her mother and husband took the abusive calls and death threats.

For a decade after the 'success' of the boycott Rosa Parks and her family continued to be subject to threats but also economic hardship.

As the movement grew a college education seemed a prerequisite for a salaried position and Rosa Parks was solid working

class.

Eventually the family moved to Detroit where Rosa Parks quickly discovered and confronted the hypocrisy of the northern liberal establishment that depicted racial inequality as a southern problem.

She spent the next decade campaigning, not only on internal issues but was an early opponent of Vietnam.

She was also active in the anti-apartheid movement and on US policy in Central and South America.

She was not afraid to work with radicals and was 'red baited'. Her hero was not MLK but Malcolm X.

This radical Rosa Parks was nowhere to be seen at her funeral.

For Bush it was a distraction from his failure to respond to Katrina.

For others it provided the opportunity for a revisionist narrative.

Rosa Parks all those years ago highlighted a gross wrong.

The wrong had been righted. It was a story of national redemption.

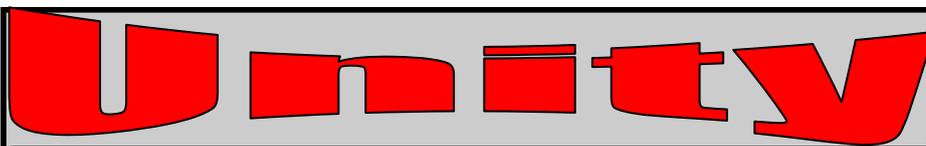
Rosa Parks' reticence, good manners and somewhat gentle manner facilitated this while her steely resolve was ignored.

The US was now a post-racial society.

Subsequent problems had to be laid at the door of those black individuals who broke the law, not the federal government.

Rosa Parks would have seen through it all and just as her action in 1955 was not an isolated incident but the culmination of a decade of action enabling a movement to evolve, the more recent years of inequality, injustice and institutional racism have built to the present BLM movement.

The parallels are in fact striking.



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