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Within a week of Parliament's return, the Johnson government suffered an unprecedented six consecutive parliamentary defeats. Multiple legal challenges have been filed against attempts to push through a no-deal Brexit, including a Supreme Court ruling that the proroguing of Parliament was unlawful. Seán Burns looks at how the spiralling crisis that British capitalism finds itself embroiled in deepens by the day.

On August 28th the editorial board of the Financial Times (FT), the chief mouthpiece of British capitalism, called on MPs to push Johnson into an election through a vote of no confidence. For the FT to issue such a bold demand is an indicator of the scale of the crisis that is confronting the British establishment at this stage – their main political vehicle, the Conservative Party, can no longer coherently represent their interests, shifting instead in a right-wing populist direction.

The FT even counselled MPs not to balk at the idea of a caretaker government under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, suggesting it was the lesser evil to crashing out of the EU, as is possible under Johnson's

premiership. Such a possibility is anathema to the dominant wing of British capitalism, whose economic interests are bound up with the neo-liberal European project.

Economic instability

Britain is no longer the workshop of the world. Its total manufacturing capacity is now less than 10% of GDP and it continues to decline. Most major manufacturers operating in Britain are now foreign-owned, as we have seen with the proposed closures at Honda, which is Japanese-owned, and at British Steel, which is owned by US venture capitalist firm Greybull. When Thatcher created the "Big Bang in the City" in the late 1980s, she turned away from manufacturing as the mainstay of the economy and instead promoted banking, speculation, insurance, the service industry, retail and, as a consequence, a massive growth in consumer debt. Consumer spending now accounts for 80% of GDP.

Decades of austerity have not been successful in restoring growth in the economy. The neo-liberal policies of the past period have resulted in continued stagnation and the threat of another "Great Recession." It is in this context that the Brexit crisis is acting as an accelerant in a volatile situation. The potential for British suppliers to face trade tariffs and have their access to European markets restricted is a nightmare scenario for the ruling class.

The British economy has already entered into recession last quarter and looks likely to continue in that direction. The full impact that Brexit may have is unclear at the moment. The lack of clarity about the basis upon which Britain will exit the EU makes it difficult to predict accurately, although economists have predicted a GDP loss of up to £60 billion. This could be devastating. A shock of that scale could act as a trigger for a Europe-wide recession, given how interconnected the markets are.

The pound has fallen and is expected to continue to fall as Johnson heads down this path. Both the EU and the British capitalist class favour a deal but are stuck in a quagmire - unable so far to get parliamentary support for a “Brexit in name only” which would see Britain remain in the Customs Union and single market. Meanwhile, the EU is not just contending with “Brexit Britain” but looking over their shoulder at the rise of right-populist governments and forces elsewhere in Europe. To grant significant concessions to Britain could give confidence to other forces that would accelerate the breakup of the European project.

That is not to say that a deal is completely ruled out at this point. An attempt at “creative ambiguity” when it comes to language surrounding contentious areas of the withdrawal agreement is well within the realm of possibility. An attempt to pull the situation back from the brink is still possible.

Workers cannot pay the price

The ground is already being laid for workers to pay the price for any loss of profit as a result of Brexit. Any attempts by the employers to launch a fresh onslaught against workers - whether in the form of shifting production, cutting wages or sacking workers - must be resisted.



Since the Brexit referendum, politics in Britain has been mired in crisis

Workers in Britain and Northern Ireland do not have to accept the divinity of the capitalist market in dictating what jobs are where. We need to defend all jobs with sustained and coordinated trade union action; any company threatening to pull out, facing collapse, or jeopardising jobs must be nationalised under democratic workers' control and management, paying compensation to shareholders only where there is a proven need. All price hikes must be opposed. Wages must be index-linked with the cost of living. There must be democratic working-class control over the supply and distribution of goods, alongside public investment in manufacturing and green jobs on the basis of a socialist plan of production, where society's resources are seized from the hands of big business and the City of London.

Northern Ireland

In the Brexit referendum, Northern Ireland voted by 56% to remain. 85% of Catholics voted remain while 60% of Protestants voted to leave the EU. But there was also a class dimension to the vote. The majority (80%) of middle-class people voted remain, as opposed to half of manual workers. The Catholic vote points to a perception that the EU is linked with “peace money”, acting as a check on the British government, ensuring rights as well as a frictionless border.

Much has been made of the potential threat that Brexit can pose to the Northern Ireland “peace process” – in reality, it is merely exacerbating what is already inherent in the situation. The underlying sources of conflict have not and cannot be addressed by capitalism. The fact that any proposed Brexit deal to date poses the risk of escalating tension and conflict points to capitalism's inability to deal with the national question in Ireland.

The backstop

The issue of the “Irish Backstop” contained in Theresa May's Withdrawal Agreement is the major sticking-point in the negotiations around Brexit. Aimed at preventing a hard border in Ireland, this would see the UK effectively remain within the Customs Union indefinitely if no alternative trade arrangements could be found. Northern Ireland would remain closely tied to EU regulations, which could lead to increased non-customs checks on goods moving between the North and Britain. This has been staunchly opposed by hard Tory Brexiteers, including Johnson, and by the Unionist parties here.

There has been speculation in the press around the DUP accepting an alternative backstop arrangement, including around a “special economic zone” being established as a mechanism to overcome Unionist opposition to the hardening of an East/West border. The idea of an “all-Ireland food zone” would mean, in practice, a single market for agricultural goods on the island of Ireland as a whole, leaving Northern Ireland detached from Britain. It also includes the principle of a “Stormont lock” in the case of regulations imposed

from Brussels, which would give Northern Ireland an effective veto over any new trading arrangements, i.e. allowing the North to unilaterally withdraw from the agreement.

This poses a number of questions. First of all, there is the question of whether the EU can accept a region being able to withdraw from trading arrangements so easily, which is a threat to the integrity of the single market and the European project. The question also remains to be answered whether this will be seen as simply a backstop in disguise. If, over a period in time, there are significant divergences in standards East/West, this can feed into a growing sense of the undermining of the Union in the eyes of many Protestant workers. Likewise, if Unionists attempt to withdraw, will this act as a provocation to nationalists as the closer links with the South would be threatened?

No hardening of borders

The increased likelihood of a “no-deal” Brexit puts the question of a hard North-South border more firmly on the table. For most people in Northern Ireland, particularly Catholics, this would be unacceptable. A hard border would be seen as embodying the denial of their national aspirations and entrenching partition further, as well as creating real disruption to people’s lives. Conversely, a hardening East-West border would add to the sense among many Protestants that they are gradually being inched towards a united Ireland. Either arrangement can inflame sectarian tensions.

It is easy to see the potential for events to spiral out of control. If border infrastructure, no matter how scaled-back, were to be targeted by “dissident” republicans, for example, and loyalists were to respond, an escalation in violence could take on a dangerous dynamic.

The trade union movement – representing the interests of workers from all backgrounds – must act independently to oppose any hardening of borders, to defend jobs and wages and, crucially, to stand against sectarianism in the context of Brexit. The motion passed by ICTU calling on workers not to work on a hard border will be significant if it is implemented. This cannot be just another grandiose gesture from the leadership of the union movement, proclaimed at a conference but with no serious attempt at implementing it. It must be backed up by a clear strategy and plan that is based upon the power of the working class acting independently, not on strengthening the hand of “anti-Brexit” parties in Northern Ireland. Every issue when refracted through the lens of the North can take a sectarian tinge if not based firmly upon the interests of the working class as a whole.

Class unity, not “national” unity

The call has been raised for a so-called “national unity” caretaker government to block a no-deal Brexit, involving Labour, the Liberal Democrats, Tory rebels and the smaller pro-Remain parties. Corbyn backed this proposal but Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson and other potential “allies” in this endeavour opposed the idea that Corbyn would lead such a government. That she could stomach five years of coalition with the Tories but not five weeks of Corbyn as Prime Minister illustrates clearly the class interests which she and her party represent.

Corbyn’s failure in the first instance to fight for a general election – choosing instead to build a coalition of parties to table a no-confidence motion against Johnson and potentially install a “caretaker government” – is dangerous. Even if he were nominally leader, Corbyn would be a prisoner within such a government, with the pro-capitalist Blairites who currently dominate his own parliamentary party among the jailers. He would not be able to articulate a position which represents the interests of the working class, but would be beholden to the dominant neo-liberal, pro-EU forces.

Breath of life for Liberal Democrats?

The attempts of the ruling-class to create a new “centre party” that can act as a safe pair of hands for capitalism to carry through Brexit in the face of divisions in the Tories and Labour have been futile. Change UK (aka the Independent Group) flopped at the first hurdle. Composed of Blairites and “progressive” Tories, they attempted to showcase themselves as moderate and reliable. The social basis of these kinds of political organisation has been undermined. This is



Socialists oppose any hardening of the border, north-south or east-west



fundamentally because of the devastation wrought by austerity and neoliberalism in the last decade.

Now, the Liberal Democrats dominate the front pages of the papers. The Tory defections and instability in both Labour and the Tories have given them a boost. It is a clear attempt by the ruling class to weaponise fears around Brexit as a stick with which to beat Corbyn and attempt to tow back Johnson. If a Labour or Tory minority government emerges from the next general election, the role the Liberal Democrats are being prepared for is to sanitise both “extremes” as potential kingmakers in Parliament.

Second referendum

The best-case scenario for both the EU and British capitalism is to hold another referendum in which the public would vote the “right” way this time and choose to remain. The Liberal Democrats and the Blairites, most notably Tom Watson, are attempting to direct pressure at Corbyn to adopt this approach. The real fears that exist in society surrounding Brexit and the potential insecurity has meant that this idea has reached further into society. In reality, it is a futile exercise. It is not possible to simply press a “reset” button and undo the last number of years.

The rejection at the Labour Party conference of a hard remain position is a defeat for the Blairites who seek to use confusion around Brexit to remove Corbyn. The leadership’s resolution which passed is for a Labour government to negotiate a deal and then put it to a confirmatory referendum with the option to vote for Remain.

Attempts to overturn the referendum result will be met with resistance, including from many workers.

This would confirm for them, clear as day, that the political elite have no respect for their democratic decisions. Most significantly, it would create a space for far-right organisations to grow.

In elections throughout Europe, the likes of Tommy Robinson and other hard-right figures postured as working-class defenders against the political elites, such as those in Westminster. There is a reason for this. There is a deep-seated resentment and anger at establishment politicians who, for over a decade, inflicted devastating cuts on working-class communities. If Corbyn capitulates on the question of a second referendum, in the eyes of many workers will be lining himself up with those who attacked them.

Fighting for a general election is a more democratic way to proceed. A simple binary referendum does not allow for nuanced choices between programmes, politics or approach. A general election allows all of this to be brought out.

General election now!

A general election now looks extremely likely. Johnson no longer commands a majority in Parliament. “Benn’s Law”, which passed before the proroguing of Parliament, obligates the Prime Minister to seek an extension of the Brexit deadline if no deal is approved by MPs by 19th October. Johnson has insisted the UK “will be ready” to leave the EU by the current deadline, without an agreement “if we have to,” and he’d rather be “dead in a ditch than seek another delay.”

The Supreme Court ruling that found the proroguing of Parliament to be illegal was a blow to the Johnson Government. The attempt by Johnson to place himself above Parliament has been met with

outrage from the British ruling class who, through this process, see the integrity of their political institutions being undermined.

As things stand, there is no guarantee that Corbyn would win an election. Due to his concessions to the Blairites, Labour has lacked coherence on Brexit and lost support to both the LibDems and the Brexit Party. Johnson will seek to fight this election on the grounds of “Parliament versus the people”, aiming to galvanize the distrust of workers in establishment politicians and cut across the Brexit Party by articulating a hard position.

Now Corbyn must put forward a clear programme which can speak to working-class voters, whether Leave or Remain. He must articulate a vision of a socialist exit from the EU which would free a future government under his leadership from the EU’s restrictions on nationalisation, public spending and state intervention into the economy – which would act as a barrier to his policies – while guaranteeing workers’ rights, migrants’ rights, environmental safeguards and so on. Combined with demands for free education, a £10 minimum wage, massive investment in social housing and renewable energy, democratic public ownership of key sectors of the economy and other pro-working class measures, this could see him secure a majority in Parliament. The election of a Corbyn-led government on this programme must be linked with mass mobilisation of the working class, through mass protests and strikes. The six-million-strong Trades Union Congress must give a lead and unite all those impacted by austerity, as well as young people radicalised around climate change, and prepare the basis for such a government to come to power.

Crucially, however, in order to be able to actually implement these policies, Corbyn will have to finish the civil war within Labour and decisively drive out the Blairites. Representing the neo-liberal capitalist establishment, they have and will seek to sabotage him at every turn. Corbyn and his supporters have sought conciliation with the right for too long, and it has increased the confidence of the right. There should be an immediate move to introduce mandatory reselection ahead of a snap election, giving the membership the right to remove sitting Blairite MPs and replace them with working-class representatives who will back Corbyn’s policies and a socialist programme for government.



Corbyn’s hesitancy in relation to Brexit & the battle with the Blairites has weakened his position

“Corbyn must put forward a clear programme which can speak to working-class voters, whether Leave or Remain. He must articulate a vision of a socialist exit from the EU which would free a future government under his leadership from the EU’s restrictions... while guaranteeing workers’ rights, migrants’ rights, environmental safeguards & so on”

Only working class can point way forward

The Brexit crisis reflects a clash between forces which represent varying capitalist interests – whether the hard-right Brexiteers, the neo-liberal Remainers, the EU establishment or the Fine Gael government in the South. None stand for the interests of working-class people in Britain, Ireland or Europe. Under their control, any outcome will be arranged in the interests of big business, not ordinary people. It is urgent that the working class puts its stamp on events by mobilising independently and across borders in defence of our common interests, in opposition to the bosses and their political representatives. This can point the way towards the building of a socialist Europe run in the interests of the millions, not the billionaires. ■

Capitalism is burning the planet

Despite the warnings of scientists worldwide, the political establishments around the world have resisted taking the necessary actions to end the extraction and the burning of fossil fuels, which is the largest piece of the pie to tackle. While Leo Varadkar's government is planning to increase the Carbon Tax in the 2020 budget, ensuring that poor and working-class people are forced to pay the price for the damage caused by big profiteer businesses, 33 banks (four of which have headquarters in Ireland⁴) have invested \$1.9 trillion in fossil fuel companies internationally since the signing of the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016.⁵

Notably, Britain, France, Canada and Ireland have all recently declared climate emergencies. Yet, instead of taking concrete measures to actually address the issue, such as massive investment in renewable energy or free public transport, these four countries give \$27.5 billion annually to the fossil fuel industry in the form of tax breaks, financial incentives or support for companies exporting abroad.⁶ It is not a lack of resources that is preventing a quick transition to renewable energy and zero-carbon economies, but the fact that those resources are being directed where profits can be made by banks and corporations.

And that's in the more "liberal" capitalist states. However, the political crisis of the capitalist system has allowed far-right, bigoted rulers like Trump in the US and Bolsonaro in Brazil to gain presidential power and use their elitist and xenophobic agenda to deny the existence of climate change at all in order to block – alongside corporate lobbyists – any form of progress that could deal with this environmental crisis. For example:

- Big oil companies like Exxon have known about climate change and the impact of fossil fuels for the past 40 years, yet "the largest five stock market listed oil and gas companies spend nearly \$200m (£153m) a year lobbying to delay, control or block policies to tackle climate change."⁷ This shows where the priorities of the profiteers have been lying.

- Since the election of Bolsonaro, fires have been rapidly increasing in the Amazon, with an 84% increase in August from the same period in 2018.⁸ Not only is the destruction of the rainforest having an irreversible impact on the air and stabilisation of temperature, but the burning

of the trees contributes to increasing the level of carbon emissions. Yet, those fires were not accidental. Since before his election, Bolsonaro has been talking about opening the rainforest to illegal invasion – destroying centuries of natural history, natural wealth, unrecorded biodiversity, but also human lives (especially indigenous lives) in the name of short-term profit.

The Green New Deal

Political establishments have thus been unwilling to take radical (or any real) action against climate change. Yet, in the past year, the youth movement led by Greta Thunberg has emerged across the globe, gathering 1.4 million young people for the first international strike on 15 March and up to 7 million for the second between 20 and 27 September. This movement has demonstrated that the issue of climate change is a defining radicalising issue in the 21st century.

It was in the midst of this rising pro-climate-action mood that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), the popular left-wing congresswoman from New York City and a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), came forward last February with a Green New Deal (GND) resolution. This 14-page resolution first offers a strong and correct stance against the inequalities in capitalist society, demonstrating the impacts that climate change could have on the majority of people, and more specifically on the poorest and most oppressed groups in society affected by low income, homelessness, unemployment, racism, sexism, ageism, and disabilities.

The GND presents the need to fight against socio-economic inequalities and climate change through the creation of "millions of good, high wage jobs in the



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has been a champion of the 'Green New Deal' in the US



School student activist, Greta Thunberg, has inspired many to follow her example in striking against climate change

US, to provide unprecedented levels of prosperity and economic security for all people in the US and counteract systemic injustices.” To do so, the resolution pushes for those new jobs to be highly unionised, to offer family-sustaining wages and other social services like medical leave.

The GND also rightly calls “(to meet) 100 percent of the power demand in the United States through clean, renewable, and zero-emission energy sources (i) by dramatically expanding and upgrading renewable power sources; and (ii) by deploying new capacity.” It correctly points in the direction of using the existing wealth and resources of society to massively invest in infrastructure and renewable energy. Specifically, it advocates a very moderate 70% tax on all income above \$10 million. This is a step forward in popularising the idea of tackling wealth inequality and redirecting money where it is needed, as opposed to where it is profitable.

AOC’s progressive reforms were recently backed up and added to by self-described socialist presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in his \$16.3 trillion GND plan, which calls for the creation of 20 million green jobs and the nationalisation of electricity companies. As well as challenging wealth inequality, Sanders’ plan aims at popularising a limited form of public ownership and real public investment for the needs of people and the planet.

Billionaires’ resistance

However, in reality, even a moderate tax on the wealth and profits of big business and the super-rich, as proposed by Sanders and AOC, would be ferociously resisted by the capitalist class. This was illustrated well

in 2018 with the vigorous campaign waged by Amazon in Seattle to oppose a minimal tax on its profits to fund social housing, which was proposed by Seattle City Councilmember Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative (co-thinkers of the Socialist Party in the US). Here in Ireland, the notorious “Apple Tax” case showed how both Apple and the Irish government would work together to protect Ireland’s status as a tax haven and to make sure Apple doesn’t pay the €14 billion it owes in unpaid taxes.

In August 2019, almost 200 big business owners, including multi-billionaire Jeff Bezos of Amazon, came forward with the need to change “the official definition of “the purpose of a corporation” from making the most money possible for shareholders to “improving our society” by also looking out for employees, caring for the environment and dealing ethically.”¹⁰ They are seeking to give the impression that they will genuinely act to prevent climate change and defend the needs of ordinary people.

However, Amazon, for example, still has not paid any federal tax, has not ended secrecy over its role in carbon emissions, and its warehouse workers continue to work in highly precarious and inhumane conditions, having to skip bathroom breaks to keep their jobs. Undoubtedly, this recent announcement reflects the pressure they feel from below and is an anticipation of further growing resentment of the nefarious role these CEOs and their companies play in society. Radical change in favour of the majority of people and the planet is anathema to these social parasites. In fact, it is a threat to everything they represent.

Economic crises & stagnation

The rise in popularity for left and socialist ideas across the world is challenging the idea that neo-liberalism and capitalism is the only way of organising society, and can be seen in the increasing support for left-wing figures like Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK. Corbyn's recent promotion of a Green Industrial Revolution (a GND for the UK) demonstrates the possibility for such reforms to become more popular in the coming period, especially in the context of an emerging international climate movement. But it is important to remember that these reforms are being proposed in a period of economic stagnation and crisis for capitalism internationally. On the basis of the political status quo, this means the implementation of further neo-liberal policies and austerity measures, not the drastic increase in public investment that's necessary to tackle climate change.

AOC's GND echoes President Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s, which was aimed at resolving the Great Depression through an increase in state intervention and social expenditure in the US economy. Fundamentally, it is a policy for reforming capitalism. However, it is often forgotten that not only were reforms gained by mass movements of workers organised throughout the country, but that the New Deal did not solve the economic crisis. This was only done through the creation of a war economy after the US entered the Second World War, when the fundamental interests of US capitalism were threatened by German and Japanese imperialism and it was compelled to mobilise all its resources in order to defeat them.

Unlike the Second World War, and despite the gravity of the climate catastrophe facing our planet, we have seen no willingness on the part of the capitalist class to invest its resources into ending this crisis. Their system is geared solely to maximize short-term profits, and the overarching interests of our planet are at best a fleeting afterthought.

Break with capitalism needed

The implementation of such a GND would not resolve the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system. Even eradicating the use of fossil fuels, while absolutely being a hugely significant achievement, would still leave us with the problems of waste (in the form of overproduction and duplication), for example, and inequality generally that the system perpetuates. While we produce enough food to feed 10 billion people every year, more than 820 million still suffer from hunger every day.¹¹

Likewise, a turn to 100% renewable energy would not end wasteful and exploitative industries, like fast fashion, which is the third-largest user of water globally "in a world in which around two billion people are already living in water-stressed areas"¹² and which exploits workers, often children and women, working under very precarious and dangerous conditions for extremely low wages. In 2018, "NGOs have reported

on Bangladeshi sewing machine operators working for 90-100 hours a week yet not having enough to live on for the month."¹³ As Karl Marx stated as early as 1867:

"All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility... Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the technique and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker."¹⁴

The main issue facing the planet, therefore, is that of the private ownership of wealth and resources by the capitalist class. In 2018, an Oxfam report showed that 1% of the world population owned 82% of global wealth. As proposed by AOC, wealth inequalities could be challenged through the taxation of corporations and the super-rich. Yet this would not challenge the system as a whole. The 2015 Panama Papers scandal which revealed fraud, tax evasion, and the evasion of international sanctions, is a clear example of the loopholes existing in the taxation system. The nature of weak capitalist economies like Ireland, craving foreign investment, allows the creation of tax havens where private companies can find refuge from corporate tax.

The movement for a GND therefore needs to challenge capitalism as a whole and fight for a socialist alternative. Bernie Sanders' call for the nationalisation of electricity companies in the US and AOC's proposal of ensuring that workers and communities participate democratically in the implementation of the GND at local level are very important steps forwards. However, it is only through expropriation or nationalisation of



the key sectors of the economy that workers could democratically plan an economy based on the people's and the planet's needs and end the private race for profit.

The role of struggle

The climate movements emerging around the world, as well as those against inequalities and oppressions, show a rapid radicalisation of the youth and the working class.

Last year, in the midst of the #NiUnaMenos movement in Latin America, the #MeToo movement in the US and the Repeal movement in Ireland, six million

women and men took to

the streets of Spain on International Women's Day to protest against sexism and misogyny. If organised around a clear programme, through trade unions and committees representative of all workers and oppressed people, the united working class could uproot the capitalist establishments and achieve a real alternative in the interests of the majority.

As additional examples, the Yellow Vests movement in France emerged last November against the rise in carbon tax and successfully put pressure on the French neo-liberal government to increase the minimum wage and drop the last fuel tax, showing the need for an environmental programme that will not make workers pay the price for capitalism's greed but one that they will get behind. In Belfast, Harland and Wolff workers have been occupying the shipyard to fight for the 130 skilled jobs which the company recently put at risk. Not only have they been calling for the nationalisation of the industry, but they have also raised the idea of a transition to wind turbine production, showing the potential that a socialist economy could offer if workers were to democratically decide what is best for them and the planet.

As such, a GND like the one proposed by AOC could only come into place with the pressure of an organised mass movement of workers and oppressed people, demanding radical change for people and the planet. Sanders' recent tweet declaring, "If there is going to be class warfare in this country, it's about time the working class won that war", is a positive step towards popularising the need for working-class struggle. The recent women's marches, teachers' strikes, school student walkouts, McDonald's and Google strikes against inequalities and oppression also show the growing potential for united struggle in US society. Sanders should call for trade unions and



School students in South Africa join the global climate strike on 20 September

workers to organise a real mass movement to challenge the profit-driven system, support a socialist GND and fight against all forms of inequality and oppression.

If led by the working class, youth and oppressed people, the struggle against climate change could be built around the solidarity of all races, genders and nationalities, linking economic and social issues to capitalism, a system that perpetuates all forms of exploitation, inequality and oppression through its ruthless and insatiable drive for profit. If organised around a clear socialist programme, resources could be expropriated and democratically utilised to plan an economy based on the needs of the people and the planet, not profit. ■

Notes

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The last year-and-a-half has seen a steady escalation of a trade war between the world's two major capitalist powers, the United States and China. This dispute takes place against the background of the world economy undergoing a period of what has been described as "slowbalisation" and a reversal of the process of globalisation, writes CILLIAN GILLESPIE.

In May of this year, Donald Trump imposed a 25% tariff rate on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports to the US. This brings to \$250 billion the tariffs placed on such imports by the Trump regime since the dispute began in January 2018. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime responded in kind by imposing tariffs on \$60 billion worth of goods and services from the US. This represents a dramatic shift in world relations.

The period preceding the "Great Recession" of 2008 was characterised by growing and mutual dependence between China and the US. The US acted as the

"buyer of last resort", with cheap credit being provided to American consumers based on significant borrowing from Chinese savings, while China acted as the "workshop of the world" and underwent a boom in exports that helped fuel its economic growth.

Threat of new recession

This trade dispute is more than a temporary spat. We are witnessing the emergence of a new "Cold War" between these two states, albeit one fundamentally different from the Cold War that existed in the period following the Second World War up until the collapse of the Soviet Union. That was a clash between two rival economic and social systems, represented in the main by US capitalism and the Soviet Union. The latter consisted of an economic system based on a state-owned planned economy where capitalism had been abolished, but which was ruled by a privileged, dictatorial bureaucracy.

The conflict between the US and China is rooted in the rise of the latter as a growing capitalist power, and the relative decline of US capitalism. This conflict is economic and geo-political in nature, with the Chinese regime seeking to exercise its power and influence globally. Unlike Japan, which was previously the main competitor of the US, but one that was militarily subservient to it, China is not just an economic

colossus, but also a formidable military power.

A sharp focus of this clash is the question of competition in the high-tech industries. The representatives of US capitalism, both Republicans and Democrats, are increasingly worried about competition from Chinese companies such as Huawei. Companies like Apple, Alphabet and Amazon constitute the most profitable section of the US economy, and they will jealously guard their global hegemony.

They are also concerned by Chinese capitalism's development of technology such as 5G, the new mobile internet technology, which the Trump Presidency claims is a national security risk. The city of Shenzhen, in South-East China, is predicted to become the next Silicon Valley, furthering the challenge to the US' long-term dominance of this sector.

Since 2015, the dictatorship of Xi Jinping has pursued a policy entitled "Made in China 2025" with the aim of becoming a "manufacturing superpower", with Chinese capitalism, closely connected to the CCP regime, dominating aerospace technology, including aircraft engines and airborne equipment; and also dominating biopharmaceuticals and high-performance medical equipment. Chinese capitalism is transitioning from a labour-intensive economy to a capital-intensive economy, and wants to develop and export more technologically-developed, high-value goods. This is seen as fundamentally a threat to the profits and power of US capitalism.

This conflict is taking place in advance of a likely downturn in the world economy and, in fact, is a key contributing factor to such a development. The ballooning indebtedness of the major capitalist countries, with interest rates being slashed by the world's central banks to near historic lows at near-zero rates, means that the system's proverbial toolkit and ability to take measures to counter another recession has diminished significantly. Also, in 2008, the representatives of the capitalist class in the G20 largely co-ordinated their response to the crisis through stimulus measures and quantitative easing. Given the context in which the next downturn will take place, such cooperation is unlikely to be repeated.

Imperialist tensions and globalisation

The trade war is symptomatic of a malaise within capitalism globally, which has seen a growing tendency towards protectionism in the form of new tariffs and regulations over the last decade, and a growing rivalry between the major capitalist powers. The last ten years have produced the weakest economic recovery since

"There are real limitations on the ability of capitalist companies to repatriate these supply chains, given the amount of investment they have poured into them, often spanning multiple states... In a sense, this illustrates that the degree to which globalisation itself can be reversed is highly constrained"

the Second World War, evidenced by a decline in world trade and economic co-operation. This process of increasing capitalist rivalry and tension poses the question as to what degree we are witnessing a reversal of the process of globalisation that accelerated enormously in the period of the 1990s and the first decade of this century.

Globalisation can be understood as the process produced when the world economy sees the rate of global trade significantly outstrip the rate of economic growth. The period preceding 2008 did see such growth in trade, as well as significant liberalisation of international capital flows and the greater integration and interdependence of the world economy through the growth of 'global supply' or 'global value' chains, meaning production of goods such as mobile phones and cars is spread over a whole number of countries and

continents — connecting rubber plantations in Malaysia with tire manufacturers in China, for example. Another noteworthy example of the emergence of such chains is the growth of the Taiwanese company Foxconn. It oversees one of the largest workforces globally, mainly concentrated in China where its workers live under brutal conditions, and acts as a supplier to major tech companies such as Apple.

De-globalisation

Since the "Great Recession" of 2008 there has been a significant reversal of the factors that spurred on globalisation in the period prior to this. Capital controls have been imposed in countries as diverse as China, Cyprus, Iceland and Brazil in order to prevent the destabilisation of their currencies. There has been a significant decrease in the amount of capital that has moved between countries in the form of stock or bond purchases or lending and foreign direct investment. In 2007, the figure stood at \$11.9 trillion, but by 2015 it had fallen to \$3.3 trillion.¹ In 2018, investment by China in Europe and the US fell by 73% and the value of investment by multinationals globally fell by 20%.²

Having expanded on an annual basis by 4% in the preceding two decades, global supply chains stagnated from 2011 onwards. There are real limitations on the ability of capitalist companies to repatriate these supply chains, given the amount of investment they have poured into them, often spanning multiple states, something that has been highlighted by the Trump administration since it came to power in January 2017. In a sense, this illustrates that the degree to which globalisation itself can be reversed is highly constrained.

The period following the Great Recession has also seen a marked decline in the growth of world trade. Between 2011 and 2015, the global value of merchandise exports contracted by 10% and, in 2019, growth in global trade is expected to decline to 2.6%, generally mirroring the sluggish growth in the world economy itself. In the three decades prior to 2012, growth for world trade would have stood at 6%.

This is what capitalist commentators refer to as “slowbalisation”, as the decline in trade reflects the decline in demand for goods and primary commodities such as oil and gas. Trade has also been affected by a rise in tariffs and regulations. A World Bank report issued in November 2017 (before the opening salvos of the current US-China conflict) found that 7,000 such measures had been introduced in the last decade, half of which were aimed at China.⁴

Neo-liberal “political centre” undermined

Hand in hand with the globalisation of the world economy from the 1970s onwards was the implementation of neo-liberal policies on the part of the capitalist class and its representatives. As the post-war boom period gave way to economic crises and declining profit rates, the capitalist class — with Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in the US leading the charge — sought to increase the exploitation of the working class. This encouraged an intense race to the bottom in workers’ rights and conditions, stagnating wages, an assault on trade union rights, privatisation of public services and enormous cuts in social expenditure.

It saw an increasing shift away from investment in the productive manufacturing base of the economy and a massive rise in finance capital, with the emergence of speculative bubbles in shares, property etc. This in turn saw the destruction of the industrial base in advanced capitalist countries, such as those in Europe and North America. The major corporations increasingly outsourced production to the East and “Global South”, where they could maximise profits as a result of lower wages and woeful conditions.

Combined with the impact of the crisis of 2008, the implementation of these policies over decades has led to deterioration of support for the representatives of capitalism that articulated and advocated the virtues of globalisation and neo-liberalism. This so-called “political centre” was made up of both the traditional parties of the capitalist establishment and the former social-democratic parties in Europe, who embraced the logic of neo-liberal capitalism in the aftermath of the collapse of Stalinism. The Brexit referendum and the ensuing political crisis for the ruling class in Britain is a stark reflection of this trend.

It can also be seen with the emergence of right-wing populist forces, most notably Donald Trump, that have cynically railed against globalisation and its impact on working-class people. The other side of this process in the US has been the support for the Presidential candidacy of Bernie Sanders from 2015 onwards, the



Foxconn: One of the largest and most exploited workforces in the world

growing revival of the trade union movement and the increasing support for “socialism”, particularly amongst young people. This poses a political problem for the capitalist establishment, in the sense that there has clearly been a drastic undermining of the social basis and support for globalisation and neoliberalism, and a growing realisation that it has not delivered for working-class people.

On the contrary, in the advanced capitalist world, it has delivered an undermining of living standards. In the neo-colonial world, it has meant the destruction of the indigeneous manufacturing base that had been built up in the post-war period, as trade barriers became “liberalised” and open to competition from companies from the major imperialist states.

Capitalism: a global economic system

Since its birth, capitalism has been an international economic system based upon the emergence of world trade and an international division of labour. The modern process of globalisation and integration of the world economy was undoubtedly fueled by the development of new technologies such as those in communication, which facilitated a greater development of trade and an increased ability of capital to move across borders. However, it ultimately reflected a trend inherent in capitalism: the desire of capitalists to find new markets and new arenas to invest their excess profits in. This internationalised nature of capitalism was something analysed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the Communist Manifesto in 1848:

“The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country... All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are destroyed by new industries whose introduction

becomes a life and death question for all civilised countries, by industries that work up raw materials drawn from the remotest zones, industries whose products are consumed in every quarter of the globe... The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarous, nations into civilisation.”

However, Marx and Engels also understood that capitalism was a system based on the nation-state, in which different national states exist ultimately to defend the interests of their own indigeneous capitalist class, through measures such as tariffs against foreign capital, currency manipulation to make their exports more competitive and, in more extreme cases, wars. Capitalism is a system based on the creation of a world market and, at the same time, based on competition between rival nation-states; this is a fundamental contradiction at its heart. The degree to which the world economy has become integrated over the last number of decades means that, with the emerging global trade war today, this contradiction has never been greater.

1870-1914- First phase of globalisation

Although historical analogies are always conditional, it is useful to look back at a previous period of “globalisation” which gave way to a period of protectionism and sharp conflict between various capitalist powers. The period from 1870 to 1914 is regarded as the first real example of globalisation of the world economy. This saw rapid growth in world trade, an increase in migration and in the free movement of capital. The world economy became increasingly dominated by the major imperialist powers engaging in colonisation of large chunks of Africa and Asia in order to exploit their natural resources and markets.

This era of imperialism, or what Lenin called “monopoly capitalism”, gave the lie to the idea that capitalism could ever be based on “free trade”, in contradistinction to protectionism. The economic development of the economies of the colonial world remained stunted as a result of imperialist exploitation, unable to develop an indigeneous manufacturing base. The imperialists sought to plunder the resources of the colonial world and ensure that they did not emerge as competitors. In 1830, these countries accounted for 50% of world manufacturing. By 1913, however, this figure had fallen to 7.5%.⁵

The increasing integration of the world economy on the eve of the First World War was graphically illustrated by the economist John Maynard Keynes, who wrote:

“The inhabitant of London could order by telephone, sipping his morning tea in bed, the various products of the whole earth... he could at the same moment and by the same means adventure his wealth in the

natural resources and new enterprises of any quarter of the world.”⁶

Yet this period was also to witness heightened competition between the major imperialist powers themselves, as - much like today, with the US and its rivalry with China -the status of British capitalism became increasingly undermined by its rivals, namely Germany and, to a lesser extent, the US. This resulted in growing militarisation and ultimately gave way to the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914. This was something that many of the leaders of the Second or Socialist International were unfortunately blind to, seeing this period of capitalist development as one of stability as the system internationally became more interdependent and would not therefore bring about further wars or revolutionary upheaval. Karl Kautsky, the most prominent and authoritative of its theoreticians, argued in September 1914 that notwithstanding the outbreak of the war:

“...the capitalist economy is seriously threatened precisely by the contradictions between its States. Every far-sighted capitalist today must call on his fellows: capitalists of all countries, unite!”⁷

His argument reasoned that the era of imperialism reflected simply a policy of the capitalist class rather than a unique period of its development, and would give way to a period of “ultra-imperialism”, where tensions between the imperialist states would be mitigated by an understanding that their system was in peril:

“The longer the War lasts, the more it exhausts all the participants and makes them recoil from an early repetition of armed conflict, the nearer we come to this last solution, however unlikely it may seem at the moment.”⁸



The first phase of globalisation culminated in the First World War



Globalisation has undermined the conditions of workers in advanced capitalist and neo-colonial countries

post-war period, were not separate from the existence of capitalist nation states. They remained under the hegemony of US imperialism, which was by far the most dominant capitalist power after 1945. This economic and military hegemony is now being challenged by a rising China. While companies like Apple and Google are multinational in character, their homebase is the US. This is also true of the emerging Chinese companies that are now competing on the world market.

Capitalism and the nation state

Not only did this barbaric slaughter drag on for another four years, until revolution from below forced its conclusion; it set in train a period of stagnation and protectionism from 1914 until 1945. The capitalist class increasingly adopted a “beggar thy neighbour” policy of protectionism, with the implementation of new tariffs and the devaluation of currencies to make their exports more competitive. This was particularly the case in the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash in 1929, which led to the Great Depression. Ultimately, the unresolved tensions between the major imperialist powers culminated in the outbreak of a new world war in September 1939.

During the heyday of globalisation in the 1990s, capitalist commentators argued that their system had entered a new paradigm and had, in fact, overcome the limitations of the nation state. This argument was put forward in the context of their system being ideologically strengthened following the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and the rightward shift of the former parties of the working class.

The argument was even echoed by some of the left, including those with considerable ideological influence within the emerging anti-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s, such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. In their book *Empire*, they argued:

“that sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule. This new global form of sovereignty is what we call Empire.”⁹

In reality, the ‘supranational’ institutions of global capitalism such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which developed in the

Capitalism today is based on crises and stagnation. This is giving way to greater instability, clashes and inter-imperialist rivalry. The US-China rivalry is unlikely to take the form of all-out military conflict in the medium term, given that this could lead to nuclear annihilation and more broadly is something capitalism will seek to avoid. However, this system will prove itself incapable of resolving any of the fundamental problems confronting humanity, not least the destruction of our ecosystem. This requires cooperation between states and democratic planning for the needs of people and our planet, not the competition and the ruthless drive for profit that the system is built on.

Capitalism as a world system has created a force that shows a way out of the crises facing our future — the international working class, which today is larger and potentially more powerful than ever, and is linked by a common interest in fighting for a democratic socialist world, based on the common ownership of its wealth and resources. On this basis, we can tear down the borders that capitalism has built up and construct a society based on real equality and the fulfilment of our needs. ■

Notes

- 1 “Globalisation In Retreat: Whatever Happened To Free Trade”, *Wall Street Journal* (29 March 2017) ●
- 2 “Is the world economy still slow-balsing”, *The Economist* (online edition, 17 April 2019) ●
- 3 “Global trade growth loses momentum as trade tensions persist”, www.wto.org (2 April 2019) ●
- 4 “Globalisation In Retreat: Whatever Happened To Free Trade”, *Wall Street Journal* (29 March 2017) ●
- 5 Martin Upchurch, “Is Globalisation Finished”, <http://isj.org.uk/is-globalisation-finished/> ●
- 6 Quoted in, Larry Elliott, ‘Globalisation once made the world go around. Is it about to grind to a halt?’, *The Guardian* (21 January 2017) ●
- 7 Karl Kautsky, “Ultra Imperialism”, (September 1914), www.marxists.org ●
- 8 *Ibid* ●
- 9 Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press (2001), Introduction, p viii



HARLAND & WOLFF OCCUPATION

HISTORIC STRUGGLE SAVES JOBS

For nine weeks, workers at Harland and Wolff in Belfast occupied the shipyard after the company went into administration, placing skilled jobs at risk. The workers at the shipyard – members of Unite and GMB trade unions – demanded that the government nationalise the yard to safeguard its future. Workers, young people and trade unionists have shown solidarity with this important struggle in order to defend this iconic landmark and create jobs for generations to come.

The struggle of these workers' is the reason the shipyard was saved, with a new buyer taking over the plant at the time of publishing.

Socialist Alternative spoke about this important workers' struggle to one of the central leaders of the occupation, Unite's Regional Coordinator and Socialist Party member SUSAN FITZGERALD.

The workers' occupation at Harland & Wolff shipyard is truly historic. Can you explain how the dispute erupted?

Weeks before the dispute erupted, there was a buyer that was the exclusive focus of the administrators. This buyer had promised to take on the assets and the workforce of Harland and Wolff but then, at the eleventh hour, reduced their bid significantly and, most importantly, refused to take on the workforce. At this point, management had their head in their hands

and it was left to the unions to pull together a plan which, aside from going to the workforce, initially focused on discussing with government, politicians and the administrator regarding what could be done to save the shipyard.

While these talks were going on, we had regular canteen meetings with all the workers and, as well as updating them on what was happening, we argued that it was clear that they would need to take action to put their stamp on events. We referenced and drew out the lessons of the workers' occupations at the Ford/Visteon plant in Belfast ten years ago and at Waterford Crystal. We also talked about other occupations, including ones led by socialists like Jimmy Reid, who organised the "work-in" in the 1970s against attempts to lay off ship workers on the Clyde.

Importantly, we talked about what was necessary to save the yard – re-nationalisation. The workers were well aware that the shipyard had been previously nationalised from 1977 to 1989. The case for nationalisation wasn't made in some "ideological" way but flowed from the reality that there was no easy private-sector fix. Yet we had this resource that could be used to invest in green energy, an area of work that the yard had been engaged in for the previous 10-15 years.

While talks were ongoing, behind the scenes, plans were being drawn up to occupy the yard should this be required. A workplace "Cobra Committee" was established, aping the British Government's emergency committee. By 29th July, it was clear that there were no last-minute rescue plans and it was

necessary for the workers to declare that they were taking over the shipyard. At the same time, you had similar event at Ferguson Marine in Glasgow, where the Scottish government announced it would nationalise the shipyard. This strengthened the case for nationalisation – if they could do it Scotland, why couldn't they do it here?

So the main banner that hung from the famous Samson crane was “Save Our Shipyard: Renationalise Now!”

There is massive support for the stand taken by the shipyard workers. Can you talk about the solidarity that has been shown?

Since that banner went up and the occupation began, solidarity has appeared in spades from every type of worker you can think of. The Bombardier workers, which are based next door to the shipyard, were among the first to turn out. As soon as the occupation began, they got a banner made saying “Bombardier workers stand in solidarity with Harland & Wolff workers.” In a scene reminiscent of the past, when they marched together for better pay, Bombardier workers made their way up the airport road and were greeted with loud cheers and clapping. It was genuinely emotional.

Many agency workers who, in the recent past, worked in the shipyard showed up and stood at the occupation daily to offer their support, seeing the struggle for what it is: a fight for decent jobs. When the Ferguson Marine shipyard was nationalised, the workers there said Harland and Wolff was next and

produced a banner in solidarity, sending a senior union convenor over to Belfast to bring greetings.

Even before the occupation had begun, when civil servants were on strike, they got pictures taken holding placards in solidarity with the shipyard. We have people from across Northern Ireland showing up: footballers, musicians, comedians, writers, pipe bands - you name it. When the Irish Congress of Trade Unions organised a rally, each union left behind their flag as a message that this is a fight for the whole movement and to show unity.

Solidarity has also come in from across the island of Ireland, with workers in the South coming to visit the occupation. Unite construction and energy workers visited, bringing thousands of euros with them for the hardship fund. The Unite construction branch t-shirts are seen everywhere at the yard. Waterford Crystal workers travelled up to speak and to share their occupation experience, and again came with a fantastic donation.

As much as the workers got solidarity, they were prepared to give it back. On the week of Belfast Pride, the workers put up two pride flags which are still flying to this day, hoisted at the gate. During various Pride demonstrations, “Save our Shipyard” flags and t-shirts were carried along in support of the shipyard workers. Many people also took the placards of the Socialist Party, which said “Pride Means Solidarity: support the shipyard workers.” On the day of the climate strike, workers postered the occupation with signs supporting the strike, wore ‘Climate Strike’ t-shirts and helped carry union banners on the march.

Similarly, when Boris Johnson came to Stormont, the shipyard workers were the first people out



After nine weeks of determined action by the workers, all the jobs were saved and the shipyard remains open into the future

protesting. Obviously, they were joined by others on the day protesting for different causes, including Irish language activists. At a certain point, the shipyard workers discussed with the Irish language group and asked them how to say “Save our shipyard” in Irish. We then proceeded to chant this together. This was done as a gesture by the shipyard workers, led by Unite representative Joe Passmore, to reach out and show respect to all communities in Northern Ireland and is illustrative of the potential that exists when workers struggle together to actually deal with the issues deemed to be contentious on the basis of mutual respect and solidarity.

On that point, the media and others have injected the history of sectarianism into the dispute. How have you responded to this?

Workers were very angry when the BBC showed old footage of a Catholic worker from 40 years ago being interviewed about sectarian intimidation in the workplace; not because anyone should engage in a whitewash of the past, but because it was a lazy and crude depiction of the shipyard, particularly as it exists today. It was particularly seen as crude in the context of a united struggle to defend jobs.

It was also a one-sided presentation of what happened in the shipyards. I challenged the BBC business editor to cover the story of the senior shop steward Sandy Scott who, fifty years ago last month, when the Troubles began, organised a mass meeting of the workforce because Catholic workers had not come to work for fear of sectarian attack. At the meeting, shipyard workers unanimously passed a motion organising a token strike against sectarianism and the shop stewards then visited the homes of Catholic shipyard workers, successfully appealing to them to return. At the same time, Ian Paisley was only able to mobilise 180 out of a workforce of 8,000 to support his rallies. There was much discussion at the yard as to why we never hear these stories. So far, it doesn't look like the BBC have taken up our suggestion, but we made contact with Sandy Scott to tell him about the occupation and to praise his role.

As you have already said, the workers have demanded nationalisation of the shipyard. As a socialist, what do you mean by nationalisation?

The demand that the government should nationalise the shipyard makes perfect “common sense”, particularly in the context of the need to deal with the environmental crisis and to create green jobs.

No one has a better understanding of what is needed to run the shipyard, or expertise in terms of what is needed, than the workers. No one has more invested in a real sense in the shipyard than the workers

themselves and no one has demonstrated a greater willingness to fight for the shipyard than the workers themselves. So, in my view, it makes perfect sense that not only should the shipyard be taken into public ownership but that it would be handed over to the real experts to run - the workers. In other words, that there should be workers' control and management of the shipyard. This would mean the workers could take decisions not simply on the basis of the profit motive but on the basis of what is socially useful and in the interests of our environment – like green energy.

The new buyer represents an important victory in that it saves the shipyards and skilled jobs. It was only possible because of the struggle waged which ensured that workers were temporarily laid off as opposed to being made redundant and ensured that issue of the shipyard was kept on the agenda. Nonetheless, nationalisation would have been and is the best way to secure the shipyard for the long-term and to ensure the workers' skills were put to the best use for society as a whole. It speaks volumes about politics of political establishment that this was never seriously considered.

I was far from the only socialist at the yard and one of the things you see really graphically is the ability of workers to rapidly learn far-reaching lessons from the struggle that they are involved in. At the same time, you have a workforce with lots of different political and religious views, including with strong convictions. Yet workers have shown an ability to discuss these issues in a respectful manner, albeit with the usual and signature slagging.

One view that is becoming clearer, though, is that neither Unionist nor nationalist politicians represent the interests of working-class people. I think it's understood that, when you are in a battle like this, the only people you can really rely on is other workers and your own organisations. As a socialist, I think there is a bigger need than ever for the trade union to put their own agenda on the table and look at how they can challenge the main parties in a manner that can unite working-class people.

At the moment we are seeing important movements of young people developing, including school strikes against climate change. How is this workers' struggle relevant to those movements?

Nobody understands as well as Harland and Wolff workers the role that the shipyard can play in terms of creating green energy. For the last 10 to 15 years, these workers have been involved in making prototypes and building the physical infrastructure that is necessary for at-sea wind turbines. As a union, we have been constantly arguing for years for Harland and Wolff to become a specialist in green energy. Before the recent crisis, the reps and I took it upon ourselves to research and identify possible work in this sector. We used the Socialist Party position in the Dáil to get questions

asked about upcoming projects that could bring work. We pushed via Unite's presence in Westminster. But, in hindsight, it's clear the management had no real interest and had given up.

Environmentalists will know Infastra, the company that has taken over the shipyard for its role in exploratory drilling for oil at Woodburn Forest near Carrickfergus and the current role at Islandmagee. Socialist Party members and many trade union activists have been involved in the campaigns. There's no doubt that many workers would want their skills used to help deal with the environmental catastrophe and the union will keep campaigning for green jobs along with a just transition. The central problem however is you do not control what you do not own. Left in private hands the shipyard will be used for whatever is most profitable whether that is renewable energy or fossil fuels. The only way to ensure the shipyard is used in an environmentally sustainable way is on the basis of public ownership and workers democratically been able to decide how their skills can be used in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The workers, of course, also know that many of the young people visiting them are young socialist and environmental activists. All the workers see the struggle they are involved in as not just being about defending their jobs, but in holding the line in terms of a struggle for a decent future for young people. Saving the shipyard would mean the opportunity to pass on the skills that exist in the shipyard to a younger generation by bringing on apprentices something that is key if we are to use the shipyard for green jobs.

Finally, are we beginning to see an upturn in workers' struggles in Northern Ireland? We have had strike action of civil servants, as well as other workers - from postal workers to nurses - balloting for action. We have also seen the destruction of jobs at Wrightbus. What lessons do you think there are for workers generally from this dispute?

Before this dispute, the shipyard and the idea of shipbuilding in Belfast was written of as a relic of the past. It was the workers themselves who had confidence that there was a future for the industry and could see how their skills could be put to use.

The occupation shows the capacity of workers to organise and rise to the challenge. Every day of the occupation I witnessed ingenuity and huge ability in dealing with problems, big or small. These workers



have developed into class warriors to meet the needs of the struggle – organising finance, managing rotas, developing structures and, most importantly, a plan to win. They have shown they can articulately argue their case, both in the media and meetings, while taking care of each other over these long weeks. It's endlessly impressive to me to see the sharpness of thought in meetings and in private, matched with a razor-like ability to see behind business bullshit.

The other lesson we touched on earlier is that when a group of workers take a stand, they will be met with solidarity from thousands of workers from all backgrounds. We were particularly taken aback by the solidarity from trade unionists and workers in South Africa who found out about the dispute via the Socialist Party's sister organisation, the Workers and Socialist Party. The idea that these hard-pressed workers were inspired and took action in solidarity with workers in Belfast was simply incredible and a point of conversation repeatedly.

Wrightbus is a graphic illustration of complete disregard capitalist have for workers and their willingness to throw workers who have given years of their life on the scrapheap. What we see in the shipyard workers struggle is the only people that can be relied upon to defend jobs is the workers themselves and struggle is key to defending jobs. As we talk, the workers at the yard are hiring buses to join wrightbus workers in Ballymena in a rally to save jobs.

As the militant trade union leader Bob Crow used to say, "If you fight you might win, if you don't, you've already lost." There are no guarantees of victory but the struggle of these workers has been central to ensuring they weren't simply laid off, but instead we have a discussion about how the jobs can be saved.

The last thing I would say is the struggle of these workers shows that a socialist alternative to the failures of capitalism is possible and the key agent to deliver that is the working class. ■



How can socialists win?

Review of *The Socialist Manifesto* by Bhaskar Sunkara

In this year's State of the Union address, Donald Trump stated that "America will never be a socialist country." More recently, he declared that he will be running in 2020 to fight a "socialist takeover." Why, all of a sudden, do we have this anti-socialist rhetoric? Because socialist ideas are making a comeback. KEVIN HENRY reviews a new book that seeks to popularise the ideas of socialism.

A recent Gallup poll found that 58% of Americans aged 18 to 34 think socialism is good for the country. This is reflected in the popularity of *Jacobin* magazine and particularly its website, with more than a million-

and-a-half views a month. The publication by *Jacobin* editor Bhaskar Sunkara of *The Socialist Manifesto* is, therefore, very timely, providing much food for thought on how the ideas of socialism can win in the "era of extreme inequality."

The opening chapter of the *Manifesto* gives the reader an outline of how, over a twenty-year period, a New Jersey factory worker could see their lot improve when a "left-populist movement" wins the Presidency and a majority in Congress to introduce social-democratic reforms, backed by "rank and file resistance in the labour movement." Ten years later, a "socialist coalition has a mandate to change society" and sees businesses nationalised, with capitalists "simply resigned" to these measures. In many ways, this thought-process, more than any other part of the book, summarises the outlook of the author and of all those who organise to transition from capitalism to "democratic socialism" through reforms over a

protracted period. Essentially he's articulating the classic position of reformism, that the capitalist system can be reformed out of existence.

Despite the title, most of the book is focused on providing a history of the socialist movement and only really, in the final part of the book, do we get a "road map based on the long, complex, variously inspiring and dismal history of left politics" in the form of 15 programmatic points. If this book helps to introduce a new generation to the history of the socialist movement, including its much forgotten history in the USA, then it will serve a useful purpose. A more detailed review could explore the inaccuracies in this survey of the socialist movement, but this review will focus on some of the points of difference with the revolutionary approach, which are useful for socialists to debate today.



Scene from Russia in 1917 which Sunkara describes as a "genuine popular revolution"

Bolshevism or Stalinism

Sunkara does at times present ideas which are old wine in new bottles but, to his credit, he doesn't simply repeat the more outlandish distortions that are so often levelled at revolutionary socialists. For example, he rejects the idea that the 1917 Russian Revolution was some sort of coup, describing it as a "genuine popular revolution led by industrial workers, allied with elements of the peasantry."¹ For Marxists, this was a seminal event in history, where working-class people, in an active and organised mass uprising, took power into their own hands via workers' councils (soviets).

After the February Revolution which abolished Tsarist despotism, there were 300 soviets in Russia which, in reality, controlled virtually every aspect of society. By October, this number grew to 1,200. Delegations elected by workers in factories or districts would come together to discuss how to defend and take the revolution forward. This was at a time when most workers in the so-called "democratic countries" were still denied the right to vote at all. In Russia, workers had engaged in an incredible level of self-organisation and began to pose the question of taking state power for themselves, in the interests of the overwhelming majority. Within this, the Bolsheviks, who led the call for "all power to the soviets", grew from a small minority in February to a majority in the soviets by October. The government that came to power on the basis of the October Revolution, carried through the abolition of capitalist property relations, along with enacting social reforms that, a century later, remain radical compared with much of the world today.

Sunkara does, albeit with his own twist, echo the tired old trope that actions taken later, in civil war conditions, allowed authoritarianism to develop and

that the Bolsheviks had not sufficiently planned for what to do after the revolution. However, it is superficial and wrong to suggest that the rise of Stalinism was a product of measures the young workers' government was forced to take in wartime conditions. It was a result of a more complex mixture of famine; backward economic and cultural conditions; the perishing of a broad layer of the advanced workers in the civil war; and primarily isolation — due to the defeat of other revolutions abroad.

Sunkara tells us that "the international revolution didn't come." This is a one-sided and ultimately distorted presentation. The devastating effects of the war and the inspiring example of the Russian Revolution led to a revolutionary wave across Europe and the world, most importantly in Germany, where the working class heroically fought for power, including forming soviets in various forms. The "international revolution" did come, it just didn't succeed. What was missing was not the willingness or capacity of the working class to fight for power, but leadership, like that provided by the Bolsheviks in Russia — capable of forging a road to power.

What Sunkara underestimates is that revolutionary movements — from in Spain in 1936 to France in 1968 or Sudan in 2019 — will happen whether socialists are there or not. The lesson from history that the issue is whether there will be a revolutionary leadership, in the form of a revolutionary party, there capable of carrying through the fight for power.

Reformism's history

Sunkara's position ultimately points in a very different direction. For him, "a few hundred miles to the west of Moscow, democratic socialism came close to becoming a reality"² — by which he means social democracy in

Sweden. In the chapter, "The God That Failed", named after a famous anti-communist book from the 1940s, we get a potted history of social-democratic governments coming to power in the inter-war period, with a particular focus on Sweden.

The social-democratic governments in Sweden delivered important reforms, particularly in the 1960s and 70s when the then-prime minister, Olof Palme, was pressured by a strong workers' movement and radicalisation among young people which threatened to break the relative social peace. An illustration of how things changed for workers in this period can be seen in the position of women. In 1966, 66% of women stayed at home. By 1974, the year abortion rights were won, 80% of women were part of the workforce – the highest level in the world. A central reason for this was the role played by a strong labour movement, which acted to pressure the government and resulted in childcare being part of the public sector, with the number of nursery places rising from 72,000 in 1975 to 330,000 ten years later.

The Social Democratic Party programme talked about placing "decision-right over production in the hands of the entire people" and the 'Meidner Plan' was developed by the trade unions, requiring all companies above a certain size to issue new stock shares to workers so that, within 20 years, the workers would control 52% of the companies they worked in. Crucially, however, capitalist rule was never seriously challenged.

Up until 1976, only 5% of Swedish industry was in public hands and, even after decades of social-democratic governments, "fifteen families" owned the majority of Swedish industry. As Sunkara points out, "No matter how creatively implemented, it was still dependant on private sector profits and the calculation by business that maintaining the peace with a powerful labour movement was worth the cost."³ On the basis of post-war growth, capitalism had the space to accept such reforms. This was reflected in the idea that, "What was good for Volvo also seemed good for Sweden". They also genuinely feared not just a powerful workers' movement, but the fact that only a few hundred miles away existed an alternative social system based on state ownership and planning of the economy – albeit in Stalinist form.

End of the post-war boom

The fact that "social democracy was always predicated on economic expansion" meant that, when the post-war boom came to an end, capitalism had less room to grant new reforms or maintain old ones, and neo-liberal counter-reforms were necessary from the point of view of the capitalists in

order to restore their profits. This was compounded by important industrial defeats, and later with the ideological pro-capitalist offensive that followed the collapse of Stalinism.

The lack of space for such reform was seen in the election of President Mitterand in France. He was elected on a radical Keynesian programme, known as the "110 propositions for France." They included public works programmes and a 1982 nationalisation bill which put five industrial groups, forty banks, two steel companies and the armaments industry into public ownership in order to maintain employment. The response of international and domestic capitalism was a \$5 billion flight of capital, forcing the government into a u-turn which included implementing austerity policies.

For Marxists the lesson here is clear, as Sunkara points out: leaving capitalism unchallenged and key sectors of the economy in private hands ultimately leads to the destruction of those reforms won. The same is true today in relation to Venezuela which, strikingly, the book does not deal with. For a period, the Venezuelan government was able to improve the position of workers and the poor on the basis of using the country's oil wealth. However, by leaving the rest of the economy in private hands, the Venezuelan government has allowed the local capitalist elite and US imperialism to sabotage the economy.

Sunkara draws much more pessimistic conclusions about what he very broadly sees as attempts at socialism in the 'third world'. He repeats the old stagist idea that countries have to go through a capitalist stage of development before they can begin to transition to socialism, believing that the "best we can hope for in the developing world" is "encouraging capitalist growth, while mitigating its worst effects and



Recent experience in Venezuela is rich in lessons for socialists, but is largely ignored by Sunkara

redistributing it spoils – as the Workers’ Party in Brazil and other Latin American pink tide governments have recently done.”⁴ Again, we are given an assessment of how this has worked out, but the election of the ultra-reactionary Bolsonaro government in Brazil, assisted by mass disillusionment in the Workers’ Party, shows the obvious limitations of this approach. Like the Communist Parties of the past, Sunkara’s embracement of this stages theory is rooted in a lack of confidence in the working class.

Unanswered questions

What is also striking is the failure to discuss and analyse the recent experience of the left in this era of “extreme inequality,” particularly the experience in Greece. Sunkara poses the question: “How do we make sure that any left government can actually stick around long enough to win some victories (and not just retreat like Greece’s Syriza did)?” However, this question isn’t answered, except to say that mass pressure is necessary so that “leaders ensure confrontation over accommodation with the elite.”

Similarly, Sunkara recognises that the capitalists will “do everything to stop us” and points to them engaging in capital strikes – withholding of investment and siphoning off cash. But there are no answers as to how, for example, a left government could respond to flights of capital. A starting point would be to look at what those on the left argued was necessary in Greece to avoid the capitulation of Syriza. For example, this is the programme that was developed in some detail by Xekinima (sister organisation of the Socialist Party in Greece):

“Impose capital controls; refuse to pay the debt; nationalise the banks; move speedily towards a national currency (drachma); use the liquidity provided by that currency to finance major public works, to stop the continuous contraction of the economy and put it back on the path of growth; cancel the debts of small businesses crushed by the crisis and provide loans under favourable conditions so they can get back into activity and provide a quick spur to the economy.

“Nationalise the commanding heights of the economy; plan the economy, including a state monopoly of foreign trade, so that it acquires sustained growth and does not serve the profits of a handful of ship-owners, industrialists and bankers, but is in the service of the 99%.

Create special planning committees in every sector of industry and mining, and put particular attention on agriculture and tourism which are key to the economy and have huge potential. Establish democracy in the functioning of the economy, through workers’ control and management in every field and level.

Appeal to the workers of the rest of Europe for support and solidarity, calling on them to launch a common struggle against the EU of the bosses and the multinationals. For a voluntary, democratic, socialist union of the peoples of Europe.”⁵

The parliamentary road

In short, what was needed in Greece was “an anti-capitalist, anti-EU offensive on a socialist programme.” Such a “rupture” requires the mass mobilisation of the working class. For Marxists, the working class is central; it is not simply a voting bloc or a force to put pressure on a left government as an auxiliary tactic. The central task is for the working class to take ownership of the economy into their own hands, creating their own radical democratic institutions, and run society in their interests. For Sunkara, the central task is as follows:

“Democratic socialists must secure decisive majorities in legislatures while winning hegemony in the unions. Then our organizations must be willing to flex our social power in the form of mass mobilizations and political strikes to counter the structural power of capital and ensure that our leaders choose confrontation over accommodation with elites. This is the sole way we’ll not only make our reforms durable but break with capitalism entirely and bring about a world that values people over profit.”⁶

As historian Paul le Blanc noted in his review of *The Socialist Manifesto*, despite the positive reference to the German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, the author reflects more the reformist ideas Luxemburg struggled against. In comparing the approach of the Bolsheviks to German social democrats, she commented:

“German Social-Democrats have sought to apply to revolutions the home-made wisdom of the parliamentary nursery: in order to carry anything, you must first have a majority. The same, they say, applies to a revolution: first let’s become a ‘majority.’ The true dialectic of revolutions, however, stands this wisdom of parliamentary moles on its head: not through a majority, but through revolutionary tactics to a majority – that’s the way the road runs.”⁷

In the chapter “Future We Lost”, much is said about the history of the socialist movement in Germany, but the lessons are not fully brought out. We are told that leaders like Karl Kautsky, at the time considered the “pope of Marxism,” had no choice but to accept the German ruling class’s war mobilisation. However, this ignores the reality that workers in the early days of the First World War were prepared to take action against imperialist slaughter, reflected in numerous mass anti-war demonstrations, but were betrayed by the mass workers’ parties.

Karl Kautsky was one of the leaders Luxemburg clashed with. Sunkara's sympathy with this thinker is clear when he argues that Kautsky "believed workers would win power through free elections, [then] extend political and civil liberties and radically reform, not smash, the existing state." This notion that it is possible simply to reform the capitalist state, with its entrenched bureaucracies and armed forces, is also reflected in one of the fifteen points where the focus is to "democratise our political institutions." Socialists, of course, fight for and support every reform, including democratic reforms, under capitalism. However, it is a very different thing to believe that these (capitalist) "institutions", in themselves, represent the route to power for the working class.



The capitalist state is not neutral and this is a decisive issue for socialists

Marxists and the state

It is noticeable that while the parliamentary road to socialism is alluded to, the concrete experience of the Allende government in Chile, the most famous example of this approach, only gets a tiny mention. The 1970 election of left-wing president, Salvador Allende, was part of a revolutionary process that saw the US-owned copper mines nationalised, along with important sectors of the banks and other industries. Plans were announced for the nationalisation of nearly 100 companies. By 1973, over 40% of the economy was in public ownership. Yet the state itself, including the army, was left untouched. On 11 September 1973, a military coup backed by the CIA was launched that crushed the Allende government, bringing to power a brutal military dictatorship that murdered 30,000 people.

History is littered with examples that illustrate that the capitalist state is not neutral but, in the words of Friedrich Engels, in the final analysis, could be reduced to "armed bodies of men acting in defence of property". Sunkara does touch on the Marxist view of the state, even giving the example of how the Trump presidency has come into conflict with sections of the capitalist state, nervous about how his right-populist policies are a challenge to NATO. But the full implication of what this means from the point of view of the strategy of socialists is not brought out.

How do we win?

For Sunkara, the working class are key in order to put pressure on a left-wing government or win concessions from a capitalist government as "capitalists depend on their labor for profits, and when organised, workers can withhold that labor to win reforms." He correctly observes that, while the working class has changed, it has changed "not as much as you think", given the widespread propaganda, in that working-class people still hold that power.

He correctly argues that "socialists must embed themselves in working-class struggles" and observes the very important role played by a "militant minority", including socialists, in the inspiring West Virginia teachers' strikes and that for socialists, "it is not enough to work with unions for progressive change. We must wage democratic battles within them." He is also correct to argue that "a loose network of leftists and rank-and-file workers isn't enough. We need a political party" and that such a party should base itself on the "disruptive capacity of labor."⁸

Where Marxists differ with Sunkara is that, for us, it is not simply a question of the working class having massive power that can win reforms or have a "disruptive capacity" but, as the title of his chapter on Marx and Engels puts it, the working class is the "gravedigger" of capitalism. The socialist transformation of society requires the working class to use its power, that of making society function, to consciously take over the running of society in the interests of the majority. And, crucially, the party that we need is one that puts this revolutionary strategy at the centre of its political programme.

This book has been compared in many reviews to the *Communist Manifesto*, written 171 years ago, but apart from superficial comparisons, with the titles and the young ages of the authors, the comparison doesn't go very far. However, the ideas in the book are worth discussing and debating out as we strive to build a socialist movement actually capable of transforming society. ■

Notes

- 1 Bhaskar Sunkara, 2019, *The Socialist Manifesto*, Verso, p. 93 ● 2 Ibid, p. 104 ● 3 Ibid, p. 122 ● 4 Ibid, p. 156 ● 5 Andros Payiatos, 'The Rise and Fall of Syriza', *Socialism Today*, Issue 210 ● 6 Sunkara, 2019, p. 222 ● 7 Paul LeBlanc, 2019, 'Not a manifesto but part of a discussion', www.links.org.au ● 8 Sunkara, 2019, pp. 215-237



Is there a punk revival?

By Shane Finnan

When you hear the word ‘punk’ some of the first images that may come to mind are mohawks, squats in London, fast and loud guitar chords, the Clash and so on. Punk is often associated with a certain anti-establishment sound and lifestyle in the late 70s and early 80s in England; of counter-cultural youth raging against the Thatcherite political project and an all that went along with it: alienation, racism and deindustrialisation.

Yet in more recent times there’s been a rise of bands speaking about the ethos of punk. Dublin group Fontaines DC, for example, see themselves continuing in this spirit – not necessarily strictly because of their sound, but tied-in with their feeling of playing and making music on their own terms – in an attempt to try to make sense of a confusing and alienating world. Similarly, Girl Band, one of the most electric bands to emerge this side of the Atlantic in decades, have an affinity with post-punk.

In essence, these bands are playing music with an ambition to make sense of the world, and for the sake of artistic expression, rather than bending to the pressures of Culture Industries which churn out the usual and the same-old, same-old all in the pursuit of profit.

Moments of collective joy

In the particular moment in history we find ourselves, there are a lot of people who are very scared. There’s a lot of collective anxiety, isolation, fear, anger, alienation. There’s a lot wrong in the world. In their performances, Bristol 5-piece, IDLES, play with this in mind. Although they state they’re not a punk band,

they are certainly a continuation of that subversive, questioning energy – railing against narrow-mindedness which surrounded them when they were growing up.

For them, Soul and Blues would have fallen into this category long, long ago before punk was ever established. During their shows there’s a shared respect from the crowd to IDLES for having the gall to challenge oppressive authority, toxic culture and rich boys – and from IDLES to the crowd for appreciating their cathartic offerings which has helped them overcome the roughest of spats.

Cultural expressions of capitalism’s crisis

The cultural importance of these bands is that they are constructively challenging widespread alienation and misguided anger which is stoked up and created in capitalist society with their platform as artists. For example, IDLES have proudly declared at their live performances that they “love each and every last immigrant”, they have proclaimed they are feminist and unequivocally opposed to sexual violence and toxic masculinity, and opposed to brutal austerity which hits working-class people hardest.

IDLES certainly reflect the positive impact that the global women’s movement have had on a layer of young men, illustrated in lyrics such as: “Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them” – borrowed from Margaret Atwood, author of the *Handmaids Tale*. The rise of the global feminist movement has found an artistic expression in series such as the TV adaption of the *Handmaids Tale*, which obviously has had an

impact on the consciousness on the most politicised sections of young people.

In a world defined by a sense of uncertainty and wariness at the present and future, with economic instability and inequality widespread, these punk bands are a beacon of artistic light. Counterpose these bands to snake-oil salesmen such as Jordan Peterson, who unfortunately can be a reference point for many young, alienated men, who blame “Cultural Marxism” and Feminism for the woes of young men. Neither of these movements crashed the economy in 2008!

The notion that Marxism or Feminism actively oppresses men is utterly reactionary – in reality what drives male alienation and despair is the capitalist machine which breaks people’s spirits as it subjugates the majority to the rule of profit. The capitalist system also attempts to reproduce rigid gender roles and expectations – which inevitably has a corrosive impact on the psychology of young men.

Punk as a mirror

Punk bands often identify the root-causes of much misery in the world, and can shine a light on those responsible for it. Punk, although often not always consciously political, has the potential to act as a stepping stone to develop a more radical, anti-capitalist consciousness for young people.

Now, punk isn’t a panacea, but a punk revival can certainly have an important buffering effect against some of the reactionary ideas whipped up from the likes of Peterson to the extreme Far-Right, and at the very least mirrors positive dimensions and effects of various social and political struggles. Take, for example, the fact that Carlos from Fontaines DC has been regularly photographed with a Repeal jumper.

Politics influences music. In various interviews, the Fontaines D.C have spoken candidly about a Dublin which is becoming more unrecognizable and gentrified as hotels are erected across the Liberties and the City Centre. Musicians musing on a changing world often reflect where consciousness is at with youth and the alienated in society. It’s an interesting point that the Fontaines chose to call their debut album *Dogrel*, which is Irish working-class slang for poetry. That reflects a growing interest in historical working-class culture and identity which has been



Fontaines D.C. (above) and Girl Band (below) are key parts of a vibrant and growing punk scene in Dublin



eroded by neo-liberal capitalism and its drive to gentrify Dublin.

Ultimately socialist politics is what’s needed to cut across the division that’s whipped up and stoked by capitalism and the far-right. But a punk revival could be an early, organic cultural response to the alienation which is experienced by so many – not just in terms of the bands themselves, but in terms of the audiences they attract.

It’s objectively a good thing to see punk gigs full to the brim with rounds of applause given to bands such as IDLES who speak out against toxic masculinity, racism and division generally. It’s certainly positive to see IDLES and the new-wave of punk bands taking off as role-models for alienated youth, as it confirms that many young people are grappling with the world that they are living in and trying to make sense of it. ■

100 Years Since the Founding of...



The Communist International

One hundred years ago, on 2 March 1919, 53 delegates from Left and communist parties gathered at a congress in Moscow, at the heart of revolutionary Russia, with the goal of forming a new International. Within six months, the Communist International, or Comintern, had an estimated one million members. **PER-AKE WESTERLUND** reviews this historical event and assesses its continuing relevance.

The Comintern showed the strength of the working class in a revolutionary time, underlining the need for revolutionary mass parties to end the war, and the exploitation born of capitalism.

Right-wing politicians and capitalist commentators use the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into a dictatorship under Stalin, and the degenerative effect this had on the Comintern itself, to discredit the very idea of an international revolutionary organisation,

and the socialist programme on which it's based. But the fact is that it was the defeats of revolutions in other countries that laid the foundation for Stalinism. Rather than contributing to the Stalinist degeneration, the founding of the Comintern was the best hope for combating it, and potentially changing the course of history. Tragically, it failed.

The political and organisational weaknesses of the newly formed Communist Parties, and of the Comintern as a whole, opened the way to counter-revolution and isolated the Soviet Union. Stalin then launched the slogan of "socialism in one country" and established his and the bureaucracy's power in the Soviet Union with increasingly bloody purges. The fact that Stalin, in 1943, officially dissolved the Comintern underlines the contradiction between Stalinism and the policies and goals of the original Comintern.

The collapse of the Second International

The labour movement has always been international. This is in contrast to the bourgeois classes whose base is the nation-state, within which they exercise power and from which they conduct wars to conquer others, if at all possible. The working class, on the other hand, has common interests across national borders,

summarised by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto's final appeal, "Workers have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all countries, unite!" It was then, and is even more so today, time for the majority – the working class – to establish its own system: socialism.

The First International was founded in 1864 and contained several different tendencies, from Marxists to anarchists to trade union leaders. The Second International was formed in 1889 and consisted of rapidly-growing social-democratic workers' parties that essentially defended Marx's revolutionary ideas. In this international, the Russian Social Democrats, whose left wing was the Bolsheviks led by Lenin, were included.

The Second International collapsed when World War I broke out. Despite recurring undertakings from all sections of the International to actively oppose the war if and when it broke out, almost all party leaders chose to support the war effort of their own respective countries. The German Social Democrats organised mass demonstrations against the war as late as the week before the outbreak, but still its parliamentarians voted for war credits. In country after country, the social-democratic parties agreed to "class peace" with bourgeois governments and monarchies for the duration of the war.

The capitulation of the social-democratic parties shocked both Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, who was a leader of the left within the German Social Democrats.

Zimmerwald

Lenin's conclusion was that the collapsed Second International must be replaced by a new, Third International. The first step was to gather opponents of the war in the social-democratic parties to a conference in Zimmerwald in Switzerland on 5-8 September 1915. 37 representatives from 11 countries participated, most coming from the left of the Social Democratic parties. The agreed statement proposed by Leon Trotsky condemned the war and its threat to all humanity.

The Zimmerwald Manifesto pointed out the complicity of the parties that supported the war, and called for class struggle against the war and for socialist revolution. Lenin considered its analysis and practical suggestions inadequate, but supported it nonetheless, while organising a meeting of the 'Zimmerwald Left' immediately afterwards. A secretariat was established in Stockholm, where a final Zimmerwald conference was held in September 1917.

Zimmerwald consisted mostly of relatively small groups, left-wing minorities and those in opposition to the war. But these relations of power were completely changed by the Russian Revolution. In February 1917 the almighty Tsar was overthrown, and in October, the workers' democratic councils – the Soviets – took power under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party. In the first resolution of the October Revolution, immediate peace was called for. World War I had by this time taken the lives of nearly ten million combatants and seven million civilians.

An internationalist revolution

Both the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik Party were strongly internationalist. The whole perspective after the workers took power in Russia was that the Russian Revolution was the beginning of a series of international revolutions. The experience from Russia was also that the alternative to a complete takeover of power by the working class was the most brutal reaction, as evidenced by the dictatorship that General Kornilov tried to establish in August 1917.

Among workers and oppressed people throughout the world, the Russian Revolution sparked the hope of liberation from war, inequality, and all oppression. Hundreds of thousands of activists in the labour movement internationally began to consider themselves 'Bolsheviks'.

Internationalism was also a result of the war. In Russia there were two million prisoners of war, many of whom returned to their homelands as supporters of the revolution. Newspapers and bulletins were published in a variety of languages. When the counter-revolution took up arms against the Soviet government and foreign armies invaded Russia, 50,000 volunteers from outside Russia joined the Red Army.

When the revolution broke out and the Kaiser was overthrown in Germany in November 1918, the question of a new International became even more urgent. The Bolsheviks had changed their party name from Social Democrats to Communists to separate themselves from the pro-war parties of the Second International. New Communist parties followed in other countries: Austria on 3 November, Hungary on 24 November, Poland on 15 December and Argentina on 19 January. Most important of the new parties was the German Communist Party (KPD), which was formed on the eve of 1919, with Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in the leadership.

After the November Revolution, when Rosa Luxemburg was released from prison (she had been imprisoned for her resistance to the war) she concluded that the Russian Revolution had shown the way and a party had to be formed. In December a representative of the German Communists, Eduard Fuchs, came to Moscow for discussions. In a security-coded message, Rosa Luxemburg greeted Lenin: "May God grant that the coming year will fulfill all our wishes. All the best! Uncle will report on our life and doings, meantime I press your hand."

But just over two weeks after the formation of the KPD, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were murdered by the right-wing paramilitary 'Freikorps', at the behest of the social-democratic Minister of Defence, Gustav Noske.

The first Congress

Without knowledge of the murders, on 24 January the Russian party and eight new Communist parties sent out an invitation to a founding conference for a new International. The text, written by Trotsky, expounded how the alternative was posed between the bloody

dictatorships of the generals or the dictatorship of the workers to “build a new world on the ruins of the countries destroyed by the war.” The invitation underlined how the “social chauvinists” – those social-democratic parties that supported the war – used arms against the working class, both in Russia and Germany.

Thirty-nine groups and parties were invited. From Norway, Italy and Serbia there were mass parties, from Sweden, Bulgaria and the Netherlands major left-wing splits from the social democrats.

The congress was conducted during the ongoing civil war in Russia, with revolution and counter-revolution on the agenda in much of Europe. Several delegates could not make it to Moscow. Ture Nerman described in his book about the Comintern:

“The opening took place on 2 March at 6pm in the courthouse in the Kremlin. The long hall was decorated with red tablecloths with inscriptions: “Long live the Third International!” On the walls were pictures of revolutionary leaders in different countries and on a wall the victims of the proletarian freedom struggle: Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg and others. It was Lenin who opened the historic gathering, and his stenographically recorded speech gives the eloquent mood of the day in the core of the new world movement:

“On behalf of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party I declare the First Congress of the Communist International open. First I would ask all present to rise in tribute to the finest representatives of the Third International: Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. (All rise.) Comrades, our gathering has great historic significance. It testifies to the collapse of all the illusions cherished by bourgeois democrats.”¹

Preparatory or founding congress?

At the Congress there were 34 representatives with 56 votes. For example Hugo Eberlein, who was the only participant from the KPD, had 5 votes. Otto Grimlund from the Swedish SSV had three votes, as did the representative from the Norwegian Labour Party and the three participants from the Finnish Communist Party. In addition, 19 delegates attended with an advisory vote.

Eberlein brought with him a directive from the KPD that the conference should be seen as preparatory and that thus he should not vote to form a new international there and then. Lenin and the Bolsheviks explained that in that case they would be prepared to postpone the decision. But during the conference,



Lenin (second from right) sits at the top table at a session of the First Congress in 1919

more and more people argued for the step to be taken.

Otto Grimlund from the Swedish SSV was one of them and received an answer from Eberlein:

“Real communist parties exist only in a few countries. In most, they have been created in the last few weeks, in several countries where there are communists today, there is still no organisation. I am surprised when the representative of Sweden calls for the founding of the Third International and must admit that in Sweden there is no purely communist organisation but only a large communist group within the Swedish Social Democratic Party.”²

Grimlund in turn “recalled that his party energetically defended the Zimmerwald and the Russian Bolshevik revolution.”³

When the Congress took the decision to form the Third International (Comintern), Eberlein explained that he still doubted whether it was right, but that he would now try to get his comrades in Germany to join as soon as possible.

Appeal for workers' councils

The Congress saw the formation of the International as a crucial step to a federal socialist world republic, a society in total contrast to the slaughter of the world war and imperialism. Counter-revolutionary terror was condemned in a special resolution: “The Tsarist government shot and hanged workers, organised pogroms of Jews, destroyed anything living; the Austrian monarchy drowned the indignation of the Ukrainian and Czech peasants and workers in blood, the British bourgeoisie butchered the best representatives of the Irish people...”⁴

In light of the experience of the Russian revolution, the importance of worker’s democracy based on democratic councils was emphasised:

“On the basis of these theses and the reports made by the delegates from the different countries, the Congress of the Communist International declares that the chief task of the Communist Parties in all countries, where Soviet government has not yet been established, is as follows:

- 1) to explain to the broad mass of the workers the historic significance and the political and historical necessity of the new, proletarian democracy which must replace bourgeois democracy and the parliamentary system;
- 2) to extend the organization of Soviets among the workers in all branches of industry, among the soldiers in the Army and the sailors in the Navy and also among farm laborers and poor peasants;
- 3) to build a stable Communist majority inside the Soviets.”⁵

1919 – Year of revolutions

That year, 1919, the bourgeoisie’s power, and capitalism itself, hung by a very fragile thread. Just a few weeks after the Congress, the Hungarian workers took power, and shortly afterwards the workers in Bavaria established a Soviet republic. The latter lasted from April 7 to May 3, while the Hungarian fell on August 1. Both were drowned in blood by counter-revolutionary violence.

1919 was also a year of general strikes, with a truly global workers’ struggle and radicalisation. Massive general strikes were organized, among others, in Scotland, Peru and the newly formed Yugoslavia. Whole cities were shaken or taken over by the labour struggle, such as Seattle, Winnipeg, Limerick, Barcelona, Glasgow, Belfast, Zurich and many more.

The Communist parties and the entire Comintern grew rapidly and in the autumn of 1919 had half a million members outside the former Tsarist-Russian empire. The following year, the German Independent Social Democratic Party (a left split from the Social Democrats) split and the KPD gained 300,000 new members. The majority of the French Socialist Party joined the Comintern (150,000 of 200,000 members). Large communist parties emerged in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

The Comintern also differed from the Second International in its emphasis on the colonial revolution. At the Second Congress in 1920, 30 delegates from Asia, including from nations and peoples who were oppressed during the Tsar’s rule, participated.

The optimistic perspective of 1919, and the real, living prospect of further revolutions with workers taking power across Europe and the world, was extinguished by the victories of the counter-revolution - aided by devastating betrayals by reformist labour and trade union leaders. Revolutions and strikes showed the

strength of the working class, and forced many concessions, but they did not lead to workers taking power.

The need for revolutionary parties

The explanation had already been given at the Comintern founding conference 100 years ago. In the manifesto that was prepared by Trotsky and adopted unanimously, the crucial importance of the revolutionary party is emphasized:

“If the First International presaged the future course of development and indicated its paths; if the Second International gathered and organized millions of workers; then the Third International is the International of open mass action, the International of revolutionary realization, the International of the deed.

“Bourgeois world order has been sufficiently lashed by Socialist criticism. The task of the International Communist Party consists in overthrowing this order and erecting in its place the edifice of the socialist order. We summon the working men and women of all countries to unite under the Communist banner which is already the banner of the first great victories.”⁶

The new Communist parties lacked the Bolshevik Party’s long experience. Thousands of active workers had been schooled by the Party’s politics and struggle. The leadership, under Lenin and Trotsky, understood that the revolution could not stop halfway. The Party’s method of “patiently explaining” what was needed in 1917, in parallel with concrete slogans of “Peace, Bread, Land” and “All Power to the Soviets,” was matched by the workers’ own experiences and led to mass influx into the party.

In other countries, Communist parties were missing or they were built up after the revolutions. In 1919 there was the opportunity to take power in several countries. In Germany, the revolution was lost in the autumn of 1923, which eventually opened the way for the worst reaction in history – Nazism.

With the isolation of the Soviet Union and the hardening grip of Stalinism, the Comintern lost much of its appeal, despite the fact that the Communist parties stubbornly and mistakenly argued that they were following in the tracks of Lenin and the Russian Revolution. The real Marxists were the internationalists who, with Leon Trotsky, fought against Stalinism. ■

Notes

- 1 Ture Nerman, 1949, *Kommunisterna: fran Komintern till Kominform*
- 2 Ibid
- 3 Ibid
- 4 ‘On the White Terror’, Theses Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International, www.marxists.org
- 5 Lenin, V.I., *Collected Works*, Vol. 28, p. 475
- 6 Leon Trotsky, 1919, *Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World*, www.marxists.org

When They See US

Directed by Ava DuVernay

Netflix, 2018

Reviewed by Lucy Marron

In the spring of 1989, a scandal gripped New York: the case of the “Central Park Five.” After the brutal rape of a female jogger in Central Park, five black and Latino teenagers from working-class Harlem were arrested and forced into false confessions by police, who promised this would guarantee their freedom. This was, of course, far from the truth. In the end, the five boys served sentences between five and fourteen years for a crime they didn’t commit.

“When They See Us” is a four-part drama series, released by Netflix, which revisits this case and aims to shine a light on the racial bias of the city’s police force, the unjust “justice” system, and the prejudice of New York’s capitalist establishment. The title itself, “when they see us”, sets a theme that will run throughout. “They” is the police force, the media, the justice system - these are set against “us”, the five teenagers who will be convicted for a crime where no evidence was provided; based on discrimination and racism.

Despite the fact that this happened over 30 years ago, the themes don’t feel so distant. The racial discrimination of the police, the animalistic language used when talking about the teenagers, the fear of both the children and their parents in dealing with the justice system is upsetting but also calls to mind that these aren’t things of the past. The names Trayvon Martin, Cyntoia Brown and Kelly Williams-Bolar circled my mind as I watched each of the teenagers experience the unforgiving racism of the police. That remains part of the reason why the series is so gripping, and so necessary: the themes within it are not those of the past, they persist widely in the US today.

A third of the initial episode is dedicated to the interrogation. Watching the relentless questioning and ruthless methods used by the police elicits a hopelessness very early on, and the fate of the boys seems inevitable. A particularly poignant part of the episode is when we watch as a police officer uses one of the teenagers’ fathers’ own stint in prison in order to convince him to “talk sense” into his son. Bobby McCray tries to convince his son to comply, saying, “when the police want what they want, they will do anything.” Watching the detectives quibble as the coerced confessions don’t add up, you feel yourself willing them to see sense, to see that they’re wrong; they don’t.

The second episode starts with a focus on the media’s role. At the time, Donald Trump took out \$85,000-dollar newspaper ads entitled ‘Bring back the death penalty!’ with the intent to rally people against the accused. The episode centres around the trial. From the outset, it’s stacked against the boys - they can’t pay



for lawyers, the prosecution separates the trials so they can choose when to introduce evidence, and the judge, nine times out of ten, sides with the state. Watching the prosecution pick apart the words of the witnesses to obscure their meaning serves as a reminder of the inaccessibility of the legal system for working-class and oppressed people. All are found guilty.

The third part focuses on “the four” - Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Raymond Santana and Yusef Salaam, who spent their sentences in juvenile detention. It becomes clear that a huge racial imbalance exists within the centres. Still today, black male youths make up the highest demographic within juvenile detention, a huge 43%. This is despite the fact that black youth make up less than 11% of under-18s in the US. We also see how the divide is not just racial, but is a class divide. The parents worry about money for their kids to buy from the commissary, travel expenses, and the phone calls that cost up to \$20 for 15 minutes. Unfortunately for the four, their sentence doesn’t stop when they’re released. They struggle to get jobs and have difficulty adjusting to life outside of prison, without any support given. One of the four, Raymond Santana, is rearrested, caught drug-dealing after he lost his job. Reoffending statistics in the US are high; within five years of release, three-quarters of released prisoners are rearrested.

It bears reminding that the US has the highest prison population worldwide. Private companies don’t just make money from prisons through goods and services, but also exploit prisoners by forcing them to slave away to make profits for big companies. The prison industry in the USA has a net worth of \$1.3 billion dollars and reportedly has made profits of up to \$5 billion. It begs the question of whether the problem of mass incarceration is really one the government wants to solve when it is so profitable.

As the series begins to close, the focus is on Korey Wise, the eldest, who at 16 goes to adult prison. Inside, he faces the same racism, beatings, and isolation. He is transferred nearly 400 miles away from his hometown of Harlem, making it almost impossible for his mother to travel to him when she already struggles to see him. To avoid the beatings Korey requests to be put in solitary confinement, which only compounds his isolation. Wise spent 14 years in prison, before the five were exonerated in 2002.

The series exercises feelings of anger, hatred and

disbelief as you sit stunned by a police department relentless in their goal to put five youths, most of whom have never met before, behind bars. The justice system is riddled with systematic lies and contrivances that are megaphoned to the public through a complicit media that selects the salacious details for the purpose of 'justice' - putting innocent youth in prison.

While the men were awarded a \$42 million settlement, no amount of money will bring back the time they lost, the trauma they experienced and how their lives were shaped by this injustice. ■

Bauhaus 100: The Print Portfolios

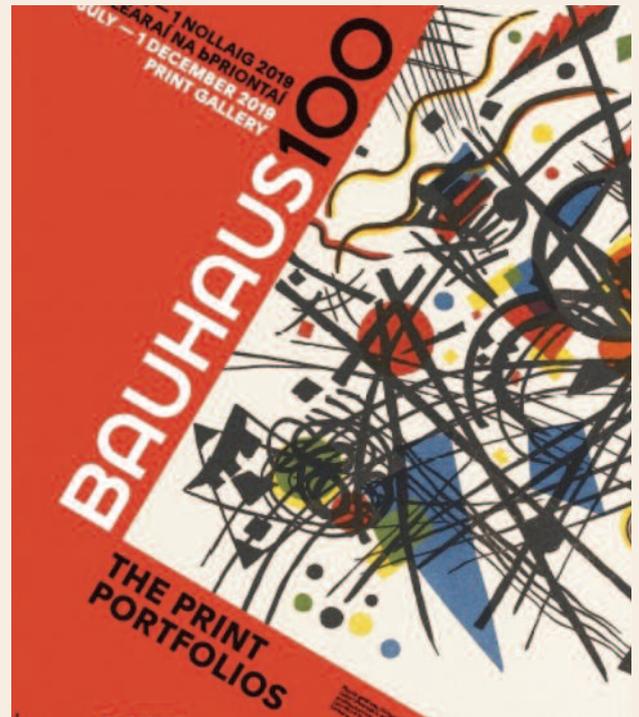
National Gallery of Ireland, 2019

Reviewed by Aislinn O'Keefe

In April 1919, less than six months after the ending of World War I and just a few months after the crushing of the November Revolution by the German Social Democratic Party leadership, Walter Gropius set up the Bauhaus (School of Building) in the historic town of Weimar. Having served as an officer in the German army, he had experienced first-hand the devastating impact of war and, in particular, the way in which technology was wielded by imperialist powers to destructive ends. The ideology of this new art school was clearly shaped by these events and embraced the spirit of the November Revolution.

Under the previous imperialist rule, the arts were suppressed. Stuff and conservative bourgeois academies churned out what Gropius considered to be an art divorced from life. Inspired by the radical experimentation in the arts after the Russian Revolution, he championed a new art and wrote the Bauhaus Manifesto (the cover illustrated with Feininger's woodcut 'Cathedral of Socialism'), along with many other writings espousing his beliefs.

Among his stated aims was to remove all class pretensions between the artist and the artisan; he viewed distinctions between the two as divisive. Instead, at the Bauhaus, art, craft, and later industry were to be fused. The culmination of this unity of the arts and industry would be embodied in the ultimate collective work of art: the building. More radical still, he propounded the theory that technology should be a means of freeing workers from burdensome, mechanical labour and that failure to do so would result in the continuation of a disordered society whereby the individual remained enslaved. Gropius's school, then, would be a model for a more humane and unified society.



Gropius lamented the isolation of the artist from the community arising from the academies resulting in, in his view, the loss of folk art and the creation of an 'art-proletariat' unequipped to cultivate their own economic and creative independence. His vision for the Bauhaus was to develop a programme which would foster "actively creative human beings." To achieve this, he designed this programme, firstly, to develop the individual's own style and, secondly, for the students to go on to learn various skills at their choice of workshop. Unfortunately, this choice did not extend to the female students, who were encouraged to take weaving workshops only. Ironically, these workshops proved to be the largest source of revenue for the school.

Stylistically, the Bauhaus can be summed up simply: form follows function. This meant a form of design and art that did not contain extraneous decoration, and an architecture whereby construction materials (such as piping or steel beams) would not be hidden for purely aesthetic reasons as they were an integral part of the design.

The Bauhaus was also socially progressive: students were encouraged to live freely, celebrate life and experiment. Students could be seen walking around Weimar with androgynous styles of dress and outlandish costumes, and they practiced an open and free sexuality. A significant number of students were also Bolshevik, many were Jews and the combination of all of these factors meant unwanted attention from right-wing forces and the rising Nazi movement. Eventually, state funding was pulled, resulting in a re-location to Dessau and later to Berlin, where the school was eventually closed due to Nazi pressure in 1933.

With continuing Nazi persecution throughout Germany, many students and teachers, including Gropius himself, fled Germany and spread Bauhaus to Europe, the U.S. and Israel. Unfortunately, only the formal aspects of Bauhaus were transmitted; for example, the architectural style was appropriated in the US where it became the style of austere corporate capitalism, a far cry from Gropius's intended purpose.

The Bauhaus flourished for a short time and represents optimism and hopefulness ripe with the possibility of a just and humane society. Unfortunately, this society was not realised and far-right ideology plunged Germany and much of the world into another

war. One hundred years later, the world is faced with another rise in the far-right, posing a significant threat to the rights of workers, women, people of colour, the LGBTQ community and the vulnerable in society. This signifies a capitalist system in crisis and a backlash to gains achieved over the last number of decades. In recent years, however, there has also been a rise in movements against oppression and injustice globally. It is within these movements that Marxist ideas can, and do, find fertile ground in the struggle against capitalism. Socialism provides the only viable alternative to the current untenable structure of society and the optimism and vision of the Bauhaus can be an inspiration in this undertaking.

Bauhaus 100: The Print Portfolios exhibition at the National Gallery of Ireland presents 52 prints from artists such as Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger and Natalia Goncharova. These prints were part of an initiative by Gropius to fund the Bauhaus and he invited many well-known artists of the time to donate artworks to financially support the school. Unfortunately, the initiative was not very successful in raising these much-needed funds. However, they stand as testament to the radical vision that Bauhaus embodies. The exhibition runs until 1 December 2019. ■

From Lucifer to Lazarus – A Life on the Left

By Mick O'Reilly

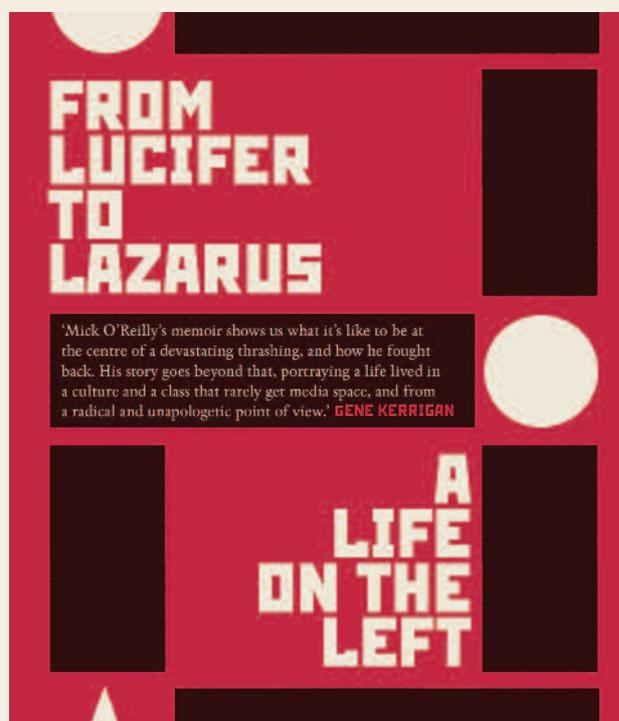
Published by Lilliput, 2019

Reviewed by Michael O'Brien

This autobiography by the former Irish Regional Secretary of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union (ATGWU, since renamed Unite) is, among other things, an important window into a period of the Irish workers' movement going back to the 1960s and 1970s.

Born in the Liberties in 1946 and reared in Ballyfermot, Mick O'Reilly didn't finish primary school but factory life in Ireland and Britain schooled him in politics and trade union militancy. Most of his early working life was in car assembly plants which were epicentres of militancy in this period. His time in Fiat in Dublin in the early 1970s is when we get a glimpse of the confident shop steward movement that was capable of fighting for pay rises, but also taking action in support of victimised colleagues, as well as political strike action, e.g. in response to Bloody Sunday in 1972.

The other dimension of Mick's early life was his politics. He was a member of the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) which, though small, developed a base



among shop stewards and the trade union officialdom. However, a faultline for Mick and others developed with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 to crush the "Prague Spring." This was opposed by him and the CPI as a whole but, over subsequent years, its key leader, Mícheál Ó Riordáin, turned the party back into a more uncritical mouthpiece for the Stalinist bureaucracy.

O'Reilly's own analysis of those developments points in a 'Eurocommunist' direction, which was the reformist political adaptation later in the '70s of a number of western European Communist parties. Mick himself later joined the Labour Party, was active in Labour Left and sat on its Administrative Council in the 1980s as a representative of the ATGWU, alongside Socialist Party member Joe Higgins when Militant (the Socialist Party's predecessor) worked inside Labour.

Militant comrades were progressively expelled from the Labour Party from 1989 onwards. The Labour Left effectively collapsed by the late '80s as a meaningful internal opposition and, by the time of the special coalition conference convened after the 1992 'Spring tide' general election which saw Labour achieving a then record 33 seats, Mick O'Reilly - along with other then-Labour Lefts like Michael D Higgins, Tommy Broughan and Emmett Stagg - supported coalition with Fianna Fáil, something he acknowledges as a mistake in this book.

This mistake was, in a sense, a byproduct of Mick's old Communist Party politics. The CPI at the time also supported the coming together of Fianna Fáil and Labour as they viewed Fianna Fáil as a 'progressive' wing of the capitalist establishment. It is the Irish version of the Stalinist stages theory that supported further capitalist industrial development in Ireland as necessary before socialism could come on the agenda.

For readers of this journal, the parts dealing with social partnership will resonate most. Starting with the "Programme for National Recovery" in 1987, the free collective bargaining that prevailed previously and necessitated more rank-and-file and shop steward activity were replaced with tri-annual agreements negotiated at the top between the government, ICTU and IBEC. Describing the impact on the rank and file, O'Reilly says: "Neglect your negotiating skills and you lose them. Muscles atrophy from lack of use. When you do this for a whole generation of trade unionists, you end up with a movement with a head and no body. And that's what happened to the trade union movement; we've lost a culture and lore of how things are done."

He, likewise, pinpoints the Industrial Relations Act 1990, which was introduced by Bertie Ahern as an obstacle to organising in hostile employments and an impediment to effective strike action.

Mick O'Reilly and the ATGWU stood out for their consistent opposition to partnership deals and were supportive of the various ad hoc campaigns by rank-and-file trade unionists and lefts to organise rejection. There was at least one deal, 'Partnership 2000', when the majority of organised workers in the state voted 'No' but such was the distorting effect of the electoral college system used by ICTU to decide on the matter that the deal was passed. That could have been the cue for the ATGWU and other unions whose members rejected the deal to break with ICTU and form an alliance to fight for real pay rises and revive shop floor activity.

Despite not taking this route, O'Reilly was undeniably a thorn in the side of union officialdom on both sides of the Irish Sea. His efforts to bring the breakaway train drivers' union ILDA, which split from SIPTU, into the ATGWU excited the rage of the SIPTU and ICTU leaders.

This and other factors led to the then London-based General Secretary of the TGWU (the union is organised on an all-Britain and Ireland basis) Bill Morris (now a Lord!) to move against O'Reilly. In 2001, he and other officials worked behind the scenes to have Mick and Eugene McGlone suspended and dismissed from the union on charges that were demonstrated to be false after a three-year internal and external campaign waged by Mick, Eugene and supporters across the movement.

Eventually, a shift left in the union leadership, with Tony Woodley's replacement of Morris, paved the way for Mick's return. Though retired, he remains active on the Dublin Council of Trade Unions to this day.

There is much the Socialist Party would disagree with Mick O'Reilly on, not least his take on the national question and how to characterise the former Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that there are many features of Mick that makes him stand apart from his craven contemporaries in the movement and, for that alone, this book is required reading. ■

The Age of Surveillance Capitalism

By Shoshana Zuboff

Published by Profile Books, 2019

Reviewed by Paddy Meehan

There has been a constant stream of revelations regarding privacy in recent years: from Cambridge Analytica's campaign during Trump's presidential run,

resulting in a record \$5 billion fine for Facebook, and the undisclosed use of facial recognition cameras in cities across England, through to Apple and Google admitting to listening to private audio recorded without the users' consent through Siri/Echo devices. Coupled with the huge accumulation of wealth in companies such as Apple, Facebook and Alphabet (Google), which has seen Apple overtake ExxonMobil as the US company which has accumulated the most wealth in the last 100 years, this means that *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* is dealing with a very important development which Marxism and the labour movement must get to grips with.

Zuboff's latest book is a contribution to this topic, coming from the author of a number of books on

information tech's impact in workplaces. Her book gives a detailed explanation of the rise of the main 'surveillance capitalists,' as she sees it, in Google and later Facebook: "Google is to surveillance capitalism what the Ford Motor Company and General Motors were to mass-production-based managerial capitalism" (p.63)

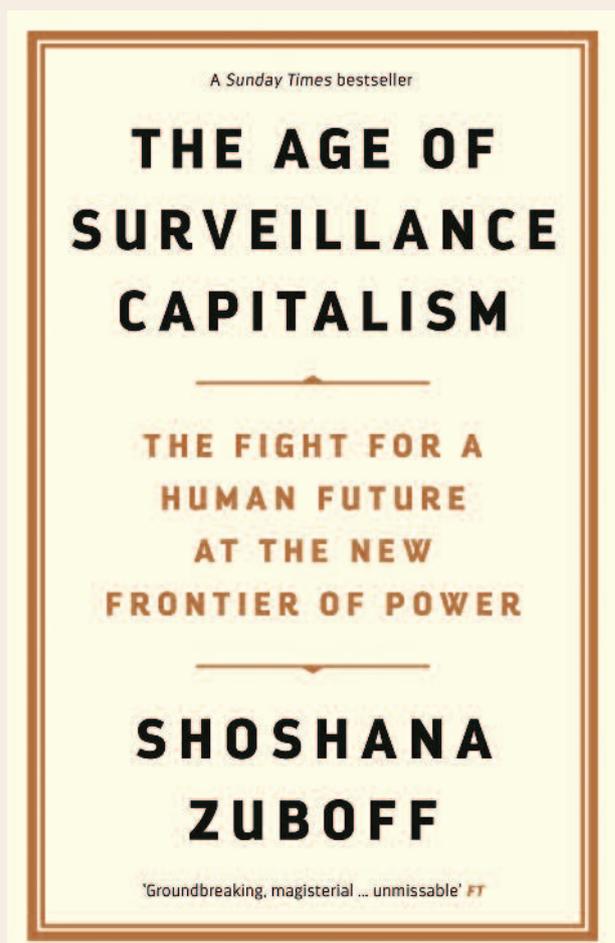
The book very effectively deals with how both companies had stumbled upon access to and then control of huge amounts of data – Google in the development of a tailored search engine algorithm, giving it access to search histories, and Facebook in access to personal and social network information. They embarked upon a campaign of rapid expansion of access to substantially more data through supplying applications and services for convenience, functionality and ease of use for 'free.' The user's only cost was the necessity to relinquish control over immense amounts of data.

This data could be anything from your location, screen time, other activities on the device, personal messages and even audio recordings of what's going on around you. Initially understood as "data exhaust," the author pinpoints the commodification and interpretation of this data (data surplus) to be a key turning point from information tech companies (ie Apple and Microsoft selling hardware and software to make a profit) to surveillance capitalism (the extraction of profit from selling the insight gained from mass data extraction initially in advertising but eventually to the futures markets).

Zuboff, in part two of her book, gives a very informative explanation of the consolidation of these companies' hold over their newfound and ever-expanding pool of data through privacy agreements which are deliberately complex and long. It is estimated it would take 76 working days each year to read all the privacy policies the average web user encounters. These companies have also consolidated their hold through extensive lobbying; info-tech companies' lobbying costs are now higher than those of fossil fuel companies. There is also an unprecedented propaganda campaign about their right to control such extensive wealth and invasive information - think the Bezos, Musk and Zuckerberg cults of personality.

The book gives the reasons for the development of 'surveillance capitalism': the massive explosion of information on people online from the nineties and the beginning of the 21st century, coupled with the age of surveillance states in the West willing to utilise this technology, particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the so-called 'War on Terror.' Her conclusion is that we've entered a new phase of capitalism, one based on this type of profit derived from data extraction, prediction and behaviour modification.

The context Zuboff raises, although definitely part of the explanation, is incomplete and makes her conclusion problematic. A feature that is ignored is the nature of capitalism in this period – reaching the end-phases of the neo-liberal marketisation of all commodities. This led to a huge financialisation of the market.



The shift to financial capitalism being more prevalent in the advanced capitalist economies and the access to an increasingly globalised world economy was the context in which info-capitalism stumbled upon a new method of prediction and behaviour modification. This has a direct application to finance capital (what stock trader would turn down modelling based on a gargantuan data pool that claims to predict and even modify the outcome of the market?) as well as these companies themselves being huge investment opportunities. Therefore, her conclusion that this is a new and destructive form of capitalism ignores the reality that it is an off-shoot of finance capital.

Zuboff's solutions – the "right to the future tense," "sanctuary" and regulation and breaking-up and clipping the wings of the monopolies - fall very far short of the type of conclusions and actions we need. It does give an interesting although incomplete explanation of what this section of capitalism is and how it has developed and consolidated its position. Unfortunately, the conclusion is for a return to "reasonable" capitalism. Instead, we need to discuss public ownership of the infrastructure (data centres, networks, etc), publishing algorithms to end the secrecy, the establishment of real rights of individuals over the data they produce and the need for a real, democratic oversight of the internet. ■