

the socialist

PAPER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY

ISSUE 126

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2019

NO TO CARBON TAXES!

**Make the real
polluters pay!**



INSIDE



Housing crisis & abuse of power
p3



FEATURE: Winning the class war in the US
p7



Who's afraid of Greta Thunberg?
p9

Join the Socialist Party

Text 'Join' to
087 3141986



[f socialistpartyireland](https://www.facebook.com/socialistpartyireland)

WWW.SOCIALISTPARTY.IE

Wealth inequality – a growing chasm

By Manus Lenihan

The world is becoming an ever-more cold and harsh place for workers and poor people - seen in Ireland with the housing crisis. Meanwhile this state is a playground for the wealthy.

Tenement conditions

An asking price of €400, €500 or €600 a month for a shared room has now become normal, but you still haven't seen it all. One ad (From flatsharing FB page Roomigo on September 14th) demands €610 per month – not for one room, and not even for a shared room, but for a shared bed!

"Extra walls can double income for landlords!" gushes the Times (September 30th). Here we see the innovative genius of capitalism on display yet again. Across Irish towns, semi-d and terraced houses

are being chopped up into apartments. Showers are shoe-horned in a few feet from the beds, and tenants don't have control over their own heating. In the 1900s they just called them tenements. But the marketing departments have been earning their keep: a new scheme for charging workers through the nose to live in barracks is branded as "co-living."

Cities stripped bare

It's not just a housing crisis. The closing of the Bernard Shaw in Dublin shows the way cities are being sterilized and stripped bare. Those cranes that cover the skyline, those vacant lots that are at last being built on after being covered with weeds for fifteen years – they're not building social housing or services or places to socialize; it'll

be more hotels, along with rip-off accommodation for the wealthier students.

Growth of REITS

Irish banks lent €3 billion to construction in 2011; in 2018 it was just €638 million. The credit for all this feverish building is coming not from Irish banks but from Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) and international capital. These are the people who are demolishing and rebuilding our streets. Not that "our own" indigenous breed of billionaire is any better.

Construction bosses call the shots

Construction industry bosses have been exposed in a report called "Democratizing the Irish planning system" (Lennon & Waldron, 2019). In 2017 the government decided that developers could now bypass council approval. It was presented as a way of solving the housing crisis (It has utterly failed, in case you were wondering). But the report shows that it was designed by and for big builders. Documenting the massive amount of lobbying that went on, the report shows that these capitalists thought the planning system was "too democratic" and that "Joe Public" had too much power. Fine Gael listened with an attentive ear and implemented their ideas to the letter.

Sordid tax dodging

Ireland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has for a long time been useless as a way to measure the



Ryanair's Michael O'Leary is one of Ireland's 2,000 "ultra-wealthy"

economy. Now Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) joins it in the dustbin of history: 2/3 of Ireland's FDI is "phantom," according to researchers. For capitalism around the world, having vast volumes of phony FDI is now just part of doing business, and Ireland is happy to oblige. So while the politicians pat themselves on the backs over "growth" and "investment," most Irish "FDI" is just sordid tax-dodging.

The wealth creators?

Two thousand people in Ireland each have wealth exceeding €30 million, according to Wealth-X. This means that per capita, we have the fifth-highest number of these ultra-wealthy parasites in the world. But don't worry, they worked hard to get where they are today – much harder than nurses,

construction workers, farmers or paramedics. Buying up shares and waiting for the money to roll in is much harder than a week of 12-hour shift work assembling medical devices; networking with other rich people at fancy parties is much harder than being a single parent or a full-time carer; buying back your own shares of stock is exhausting work, and those who earn their living through this vital task must live in envy of bartenders, waiters or chefs.

Growing poverty

Meanwhile 760,000 of those nurses, construction workers, delivery drivers, coders, carers, soldiers and waiters are living in poverty – making up one-sixth of the population – and many of them are paying huge rents to some of those same 2000 ultra-wealthy people.



Average monthly rent in Dublin is over €2,000

Cork North Central By-Election Cllr. Fiona Ryan – socialist fighter challenges capitalist establishment

By Conor Payne

COUNCILLOR FIONA Ryan has been selected as the Solidarity candidate in the upcoming Cork North Central By-Election. Fiona is a member of the Socialist Party. As an activist and Councillor, Fiona has a record as a fighter for working class people:

She has led tenants fighting against evictions, including the successful struggle of Leaside Apartments residents which opened up 59 empty homes to people on the council waiting list.

Fiona was a leading figure in Cork in the battle for abortion rights.

She has actively supported local environmental campaigns, including cycling campaigns and in opposition to the disastrous OPW plans for the river Lee.

Punish Fianna Fáil & Fine Gael

This by-election is one of four which

will take place across the state. They are an opportunity for working class and young people to pass judgement on this right-wing Fine Gael government, which is facilitated by Fianna Fail's co-operation in the Dáil. Despite their talk of "recovery," many people feel no significant benefits – this has been primarily a recovery for the rich, for landlords, developers and big business.

There is certainly no "recovery" for those paying record high rents, or waiting years for social housing. There is no recovery in the health service, or other public services still reeling from austerity.

Action on climate change

On Climate Change, this government talks the talk but plans to build terminals for imported fracked gas in Shannon and the Port of Cork.

In Cork North Central, Solidarity and the Socialist Party will offer a genuine socialist alternative. While the government, the Greens and oth-

ers will push for "Green" austerity taxes on working people, we will call for real climate action, and for making the big business polluters pay.

This includes fighting for free public transport for all, massive public investment to create Green jobs, and democratic public ownership of the energy industry and other key sections of the economy to plan for a rapid transition to renewable energy.

On housing, we will campaign for real rent controls, banning evictions into homelessness and a massive programme to build public homes.

No-deal Brexit

The government and bosses are lining up to make workers pay the price for Brexit, while preserving the profits of big business. We will use the campaign to oppose any job losses, pay cuts, or austerity and call for trade union and workers' action to fight back. Socialist policies that break with the capitalist market,



such as nationalisation of industries planning job losses, are needed.

As the only candidate representing this clear alternative, a strong vote for Fiona will represent a clear rejection

of this neoliberal big business government and would be a boost for the fight for housing, workers' rights and climate action, and for the genuine socialist left.

#SexIsNotRent

Housing crisis & abuse of power



By Ruth Coppinger TD

EXPLOITATION HAS always been part and parcel of the private rented sector, including sexual exploitation. With the escalating housing crisis, the balance of power has dramatically shifted even more to landlords. But until recently 'sex for rent' had only been anecdotal and not publicly brought out in Ireland.

In September, Socialist Party members were approached by a young woman whose friends we had assisted in a previous eviction situation. She had been propositioned by her landlord, offering discounted or free rent for sex.

Sexual harassment

What was unusual about this sexual harassment by a landlord against a tenant was there were WhatsApp

messages to back it up. These messages graphically illustrate the power landlords can now use and abuse against a backdrop of record high rents and record low number of rental properties.

'Laura' wanted to highlight this to prevent other women or vulnerable tenants going through the same. We agreed a strategy to raise it in the Dáil and media.

In the Dáil, we made the point that no research exists in Ireland on the extent of sexual harassment by landlords. In England, research by Shelter found 250,000 women had experienced this. In the 25-34 age group, 13% of tenants said they had faced this in the last five years. There is no reason to think Ireland is different — or likely worse, given the acute nature of the housing and rent crisis.

Massive publicity followed putting a spotlight on unwanted sexual attention in the rental sector. And with it, more women disclosed to us.

Those in HAP most vulnerable

A particular pattern emerged in the HAP (Housing Assistant Payment) sector. Tenants — mainly women with young children — who face insecurity and homelessness are, of their nature, more prey to landlords and letting agents as HAP properties are more difficult to secure.

One woman, Kirsty, spoke about her experience with a letting agent who prioritised her for the property, then quickly began sending dinner invites, complimenting her and frequently dropping in. His demeanour

drastically altered when she challenged him on a maintenance issue and when her HAP payment was delayed. He issued a Notice to Quit.

Other HAP tenants told us of landlords commenting on their appearance, discouraging boyfriends and sending suggestive messages.

In all cases, female tenants tolerated it so as not to risk offending them and being denied the property.

Build social & affordable housing

Following the revelations, the Minister for Housing held a meeting with Mick Barry TD and myself. We called for research to be done and the department is to come back about this. We pointed to the dangers of HAP as the main form of social housing, rather than mass public home-building, and argued that HAP properties should be allocated by councils not private landlords. We also demanded real rent controls and the passage of Solidarity's Anti-Evictions Bill which would give tenants security and remove the easy threat of eviction landlords now have.

But of course the root of this is the failure of the state to provide social and affordable housing. This creates a perfect storm for predatory landlords. The housing crisis can be resolved if vast vacant public land banks are utilised to build thousands of social and affordable homes. Working-class people should not have to rely on profiteering landlords for accommodation. Only then can these power dynamics between landlord and tenant be ended.

Outrageous WhatsApp messages sent by landlord to tenant, which Ruth Coppinger TD read out in Dáil in September



The landlord offered the tenant to stay in his home for free 'if they could come to an arrangement'

End landlord profiteering – real rent controls now

By Jonathan Diebold

AS IRELAND enters yet another consecutive year of crisis in the housing sector, the government continues to fail to provide meaningful solutions to tackle rising rents and increased homelessness. Compounding the ongoing lack of public and social housing is the government's refusal to institute real rent controls that will see them reduced to levels that are affordable.

While the construction of public housing is a vital demand to place on the government, in order to ensure that the power of landlords and vulture funds is reduced, rent control is an important step towards ensuring people have some degree of security in their homes. However, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail, parties which themselves consist of and are supported by a large number of landlords, won't even take this small step.

Rents skyrocketing

Rents have skyrocketed, with Daft.ie stating in their latest rental



Real rent controls, including reductions to affordable levels, are urgently needed

report that national rents are now 35% higher than their pre-2008 peak, at nearly €1,400 - and much higher in cities. Overtures have been made in the direction of rent

control, with the institution of "Rent Pressure Zones" (RPZs), but these have largely been symbolic gestures for PR purposes.

RPZs mandate that in certain

areas of Ireland rents cannot increase by more than 4% annually. What this means in practice is that in Dublin, for example, a rent of €2,000 (which is now the average

rent in the city), can rise to nearly €2,500 in the space of 5 years. This rise in rents takes place against an economic landscape increasingly marked by precarious employment and the erosion of workers' rights.

A deepening crisis

There is a greater economic insecurity around Brexit and a looming recession in the early 2020s which will mean wages are certainly unlikely to rise in a way that can come close to offsetting this. Homelessness is sure to continue to rise with no investment in public homes.

Even with the 4% limit, loopholes exist to surpass it. For instance, a landlord can evict a tenant in order to renovate the property, and then increase the rent significantly.

A government that was serious about tackling the housing crisis and spiralling rents would need to introduce real rent controls, so that rents actually reflect peoples' wages - rents that only increase at the rate of inflation and are reduced to affordable levels. Real rent controls such as these would need also to close loopholes, especially around evictions.

Building a movement for socialist change

By Cillian Gillespie

ONCE AGAIN working-class people were put on rations in Budget 2020. There was the paltry increase of 30c in the minimum wage from its already paltry figure of €9.80 an hour, there was a freeze on pension increases, a hike in carbon taxes and a stubborn refusal on the part of the government to invest in free public transport, childcare, public housing and social services generally.

A rigged system

Recovery notwithstanding, this is the reality of capitalism in Ireland today – a rigged system for big business, bankers and the super-rich. While many have felt little tangible benefit from the upturn in the economy, we will certainly feel the pain when a downturn takes place. This could be triggered by a no deal Brexit or a slump in the world economy, given that Ireland is particularly vulnerable to the shocks of a global recession. This will result in job losses, wages and conditions put on the chopping block and the imposition of a new austerity regime, while big business is bailed out and Ireland remains a low tax regime for the 1%.



This vista, combined with the climate catastrophe facing our planet, will pose sharply the question of building a mass socialist alternative for working class and young people in the 2020s. The reality is that all the main parties, including Sinn Féin and the Green Party, accept the logic of a capitalist system that is creating a race to the bottom in workers rights, a housing crisis and rampant inequality.

Explosions from below

The recent resignation of Paul Murphy TD from the Socialist Party has resulted in a number of media commentators cynically suggesting that the building

of such an alternative is simply out of the question, given the array of different small left groups which they argue are incapable of uniting. The Socialist Party and Solidarity will of course work others on the left, as we have done with People Before Profit in the Dáil. However, this argument fails to recognise that it is the conditions of capitalism and the radicalising impact its multiple crises is having on young and working-class people that will lay the basis for the building of a powerful left-wing movement in this country.

The last five years has seen the explosion of the water charges movement, the historic campaign that won abor-

tion rights and the inspiring climate change strikes and protests. This illustrates how the oppressive, profit-driven and exploitative nature of this system has and will bring a new generation into political activity. Similar movements from below will come into existence in workplaces, communities, schools and colleges. A deepening radicalisation and social explosions are inevitable in the coming decade, posing the question of anti-capitalist change.

Socialists and struggle

The Socialist Party has always sought to work alongside those who have yet to draw socialist and anti-capitalist

conclusions about society, and have helped to win important victories in the fight against austerity and for landmark progressive change. We fought alongside working-class activists in building mass non-payment of water charges from 2014 to 2016. Working with ROSA activists and Women on Web our members played a critical role in ensuring 12-weeks on request was won as part of the Repeal victory. More recently we have actively worked with school students in building for the climate strikes on 20 September and the Socialist Party in the North fought shoulder to shoulder with workers in Harland and Wolff to successfully defend their jobs and skills from the threat of redundancy.

The method of political sectarianism, which means socialists standing back from the real struggles of ordinary people, is alien to the politics and practice of the Socialist Party – which our record demonstrates. We have not only seriously engaged with these movements but have consistently linked them with the need for socialist change and a break with the capitalist system. This is something we will continue to do, working alongside others on the socialist left, as part of the struggle to build a mass left and working class movement.

Oughterard protests & preventing racist division

By Mick Barry TD

THE ISSUE of the Direct Provision system became a national talking point in September when protests in Oughterard, County Galway, forced a climb down on plans to open a Centre in the town.

The Department of Justice and the owner of Oughterard's Connemara Gateway Hotel had planned to use the hotel as a centre for "less than 250" asylum seekers. More than 800 people in a town of 1,300 attended a public meeting to oppose a Direct Provision Centre into Oughterard.

Social crisis

An around-the-clock picket was placed on the hotel and regular attendances of 50-plus were reported from the picket line. On 1 October, the owner of the hotel withdrew the tender for the Centre. A previous attempt to site a Direct Provision Centre in Rooskey, Co. Roscommon, had been thwarted following local opposition and an arson attack on the building in question.

The social crisis in Oughterard was a key driving factor in the protest movement. There is currently only one GP service, the Garda station was shut down several years ago, the schools are overcrowded and the town has been neglected for key infrastructure projects. Right-wing politicians and extreme right-wing activists were able to intervene into the controversy and pit the interests of the majority of people in the town against the interests of asylum seekers.



Fueling prejudice

Local Rural Alliance TD, Noel Grealish, told the public meeting that African asylum seekers were coming to Ireland to sponge "off the system here". Grealish was defended by his Rural Alliance colleagues Mattie McGrath TD and Michael Collins TD. The Rural Alliance have always been a grouping of gombeen men. Now it seems it's a group that will tolerate racism within its ranks as well.

The irony is that the Rural Alliance often support the Government in Dáil votes, propping up the very Government that has let the people

down so badly on the social issues. Meetings in Oughterard were also addressed by extreme right-wing activists like Rowan Croft (Youtuber "Grand Torino"), local far-right National Party organiser Gerry Kinneavy and Gearoid Murphy (who once described his politics as being "probably somewhere between libertarianism and national socialism, with a touch of Christian ethos").

While it is important to point out that these activists downplayed or hid their far-right affiliations and were removed from local campaign Facebook groups when unmasked,

it's also true to say that this was probably the most significant far-right intervention into a community issue in this country in many years.

Inhumane Direct Provision system

Socialists are also opposed to the Direct Provision system – but for very different reasons.

Direct provision has forced more than 7,000 asylum seekers into overcrowded, inhumane centres which take a heavy toll on the mental health of adults and children alike.

Direct provision has created a bonanza for hotel owners and pri-

vately-run catering businesses. The State paid private firms operating the network of centres across the country €72 million last year. Significantly, asylum seekers have begun in recent years to organise to shut this system down.

Homes for all not racism

Socialists demand the dismantling of the entire direct provision system, an end to deportations, a defence of the right to asylum, the unrestricted right to work for all asylum seekers, and the right to housing for all – including those who seek sanctuary in this country. We say that the vast wealth in the hands of big business and the super-rich should be used to build public housing on public land for all those who need it. Migrants and non-migrants should not be in competition for the scarce resources that the capitalist system is willing to provide.

The present government is complicit in fueling racism through its own actions of ghettoising asylum seekers and deportations, and in creating a social crisis by starving communities of investment in public services. This is also a government which includes ministers such as Josepha Madigan, who sought to whip up anti-Traveller sentiment when standing in the 2014 local elections.

We cannot rely on them to end racism. Only a mass movement that unites all working people, Irish and migrant, in a fight for massive public investment in jobs, housing and decent services for all, and opposes of this oppressive, racist capitalist system, will be able to do that.

Growing exploitation at work Why young workers must organise

By Neil Moore struggles internationally.

A WHOLE generation of young workers are realising the reality of the so called post-recovery economy is not all it is cracked up to be. Rising rents and higher costs of living are at odds with low wages, the erosion of employment rights, and further casualisation of work.

A precarious existence

This can be seen by the huge growth of the service sector, with low paid, entry level jobs – compared to the decline of manufacturing, usually highly skilled and unionised, with good pay and conditions won through years of struggle. The shift to more precarious work and working conditions has a real and damaging impact of working people – as work is becoming more alienating, insecure and underpaid, we are seeing an unprecedented mental health crisis among young workers.

Yet, despite huge challenges young workers are beginning to demand more – a living wage, zero-tolerance for sexual harassment, respect and decency at work are by no means revolutionary demands, but have led to potentially explosive

Moving into action

We've seen the fight for a living wage in both the US & UK from fast food workers in giants such as McDonalds and Deliveroo, to mass 'wildcat' walkouts in Google around sexual harassment, english language teachers, construction workers, archaeologists, bartenders, restaurant workers, supermarket and pharmacy workers have all taken an approach of organising their colleagues and engaging in battles with their bosses to push back against the race to the bottom.

There is a want and a need for a new generation of workers to organise themselves and their co-workers and struggle. Not all of this struggle will develop within the structures of the labour movement, however we recognise the best vehicle for this change will be through the trade union movement – where the most successful struggles of working-class people have been won previously.

Role of trade unions

A new generation of workers in sectors that haven't been seriously organised in decades, such as hospitality, call centres and most of



Hospitality workers are among the most exploited in terms of wages and conditions

retail must be organised now. This means the trade union movement getting serious about putting resources into organising campaigns,

training and developing a new layer of shop stewards and activists. It means engaging in a serious struggle to defend jobs, to demand in-

vestment in public services and fight for better pay and conditions – reversing the impact of years of austerity and precariousness.

English Language Teachers strike for union recognition

By Harper Cleves

THE TEACHERS at the Delfin Language School have voted to take strike action in order to put pressure on management to recognise the union of their choice, Unite. This decision was made following repeated attempts by Unite the Union to discuss the concerns of the workers with the management at Delfin.

Teachers organised and participated in two half-day work stoppages on the 23 and 30 September in order to put pressure on Delfin, but to no avail. After this they came out on strike on Monday, 7 October and are due to step up their action in the following week with two days of strike action planned.

Getting organised

According to an english language teacher interviewed at the picket, this dispute can be traced back to a year ago, when the management team at Delfin attempted to strongarm workers into signing low hour contracts, guaranteeing only three hours of work a week. This inspired workers to self-organise and look into joining the English Language Teachers (ELT) branch of Unite. Within a year, Delfin achieved 100% union membership.

Delfin workers are organising in order to fight back against low pay, unpaid breaks, and a lack of holiday pay. The owners of Delfin close the workplace officially for two weeks at Christmas, forcing teachers to sign up for the dole, which many are not eligible for as they have not accrued enough PRSI points while teaching English abroad.



Ongoing strike at Delfin English Language School, Parnell Square, Dublin

Precarious employment

Such conditions are reflected across the sector. A government report conducted by an independent mediator found that in a sector with over 100 schools, the vast majority of teachers are dissatisfied with the security and conditions of their employment. Most teachers described their employment as 'precarious', because of the uncertainty of their teaching hours, low pay, and the number of school closures that have occurred with little to no warning for the staff, often including withheld wages. This is a highly prof-

itable industry that is worth €800 million per annum, a figure that will likely rise as more students will come to Ireland from Europe in the aftermath of Brexit.

The government report was prompted, in fact, by the sudden closure and subsequent occupation of the Grafton Language School in Portobello, which the ELT branch of Unite played a crucial role in. The ELT branch itself began in 2015 following the closure of 16 languages schools over the course of one year. One of the proposed new amendments to the Qualifications and

Quality Assurance (Education and Training) (Amendment) Bill 2018, which flowed from this report, and was pushed for by ELT branch members, would require all English Language Schools abide by Irish Employment Law.

Pressure needed

In a system driven by the blind pursuit of profit, workers cannot rely on the benevolence of their bosses, as the workers at Delfin are now demonstrating. It is only through co-ordinated action that workers are able to wrest even basic rights from the hands of the capitalist class. This year we have seen increased evidence of workers organising themselves. The paramedics organising in NASRA are engaged in a continuous battle to have the fighting union of their choice recognised by the HSE.

Currently, the Wrightbus workers in Ballymena, County Antrim are fighting to protect job losses after the company went bust following capitalist mismanagement. And just recently the workers at Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast, with the help of Unite the Union Organiser, and Socialist Party member Susan Fitzgerald, managed to save their jobs following a several month occupation of their workplace.

These workers were bolstered by demonstrations of solidarity by other workplaces, as well as the increasingly militant mood of workers on this island and internationally. The Delfin workers will need similar solidarity combined with their determined action.

School secretaries take on two-tier pay

By Kate Relihan

Last month, school secretaries commenced a work to rule over a reprehensible two-tier pay scheme stemming back almost four decades.

While secretaries employed by the Department of Education enjoy the status and benefits of public servants, those employed by the individual Board of Management of schools are on temporary contracts, are paid as low as €12 an hour, with no bonus nor pension entitlements, and are forced to sign-on during school holidays.

Solidarity is crucial

Without a doubt, school secretaries are public servants - the lifeblood and face of every school, but for forty years establishment governments have seen them as mere skivvies. If talks at the do not result in public sector status for secretaries, strike action will be necessary, and it is imperative that the main teachers' unions show their solidarity.

Such solidarity was seen nationwide during the work-to-rule as staff pictures of secretaries alongside teachers, SNAs and caretakers flooded social media.

By Daniel Waldron

“We need a dynamic capitalist economy that gives everybody a justified belief that they can share in the benefits. What we increasingly seem to have instead is an unstable rentier capitalism, weakened competition, feeble productivity growth, high inequality and, not coincidentally, an increasingly degraded democracy. Fixing this is a challenge for us all, but especially for those who run the world’s most important businesses. The way our economic and political systems work must change, or they will perish.”

This is how commentator Martin Wolff concluded his piece in the *Financial Times*, entitled “Why rigged capitalism is damaging liberal democracy”. Increasingly, capitalist commentators and ideologues are drawing the conclusion that the legitimacy, and even the existence, of their system is under serious threat, and that it must be “reset” if it is to survive.

Living standards undermined

The neoliberal economic model which has dominated for decades – a response to a crisis of profitability in the 1970s – has promoted a race to the bottom in wages and conditions, deregulation of the labour and financial markets, privatisation and attacks on public services and social security, and the dominance of unproductive finance capital. This sowed the seeds of the 2008 financial crisis and the Great Recession, following which workers were again made to pay the price through harsh austerity. None of the causes of that crisis have been resolved, and economists are warning of the overwhelming likelihood of another downturn.

The events of the last decade have increasingly hollowed out the authority of the “political centre”, the representatives of neoliberalism, resulting in profound political instability. This has been reflected in the crisis British capitalism faces around Brexit, and in the rise of right-wing populist figures like Trump, and Bolsonaro. But it has also led to developments on the left, with the rebirth of industrial struggle and growing openness to socialist ideas in many countries, the rise of reformist figures like Sanders and Corbyn, and the emergence of global movements against sexism, climate change and so on, with many active in these movements drawing anti-capitalist conclusions. This is what troubles capitalist strategists like Wolff.

Acting in the interests of all

Reflecting this concern for the future of their system, the US Business Roundtable has, for the first time in its history, issued a statement which has redefined the primary purpose of a corporation from serving its shareholders to serving “all of our stakeholders” – ie, workers, communities, etc. They envisage a capitalism with a human face, acting in the common interests of all.

Of course, the emptiness of these words becomes clear when you consider that one of the 181 CEOs who signed this statement is Jeff Bezos, Amazon owner and richest man in the world. Bezos has viciously resisted attempts by Amazon staff to organise against poverty pay and Dickensian



Front page of the *Financial Times*, reflects the anxiety of some in the capitalist establishment

working conditions. He is currently bankrolling efforts to unseat Seattle City Councillor Kshama Sawant – a member of Socialist Alternative, our

US co-thinkers - because she has campaigned for a tax on major corporations in the City to help fund social housing and homeless services.

Inequality and climate catastrophe

Capitalism is structurally incapable of functioning on any basis except that of maximising profit. Any capitalist who tries to defy this reality will not remain a capitalist very long. The inequality and dysfunctionality which commentators like Wolff bemoan are a natural by-product of the system working as it must. Similarly, while individual capitalists may be concerned about climate change, they cannot overcome their myopic and chaotic system’s inability to act in the urgent, coordinated way necessary to deal with the crisis. For example, Barack Obama accepted that man-made climate change was a reality, but he still promoted the fracking industry, because the interests of big business and US imperialism demanded it.

Capitalism is a parasitic system which has nothing to offer but poverty, inequality, war, bigotry and destruction of our environment. As James Connolly said, “The day has passed for patching up the capitalist system; it must go.” Because of its role in production, the working class is the force with the collective power to strike at the heart of capitalism. We need to build fighting, democratic trade unions and a political voice for the working-class, with a socialist programme aimed at taking society’s wealth and resources into democratic public ownership, so they can be used to meet the needs of people and planet, not create profit for a tiny elite. ■

The powerful r

By Laura Fitzgerald

THE RESURGENCE of a powerful US labour movement, with a militant-rank-and file its engine, shows no sign of abating in 2019. This is after a historic 2018, in which a total of 485,000 workers went on strike, more than in any year since 1986. 2018 figures contrasted dramatically with 2017, in which only 25,000 went out on strike, lower than any year on record other than 2009, the height of the economic crash.

Teachers’ revolt

The workers’ movement upsurge began in the “Red State” of West Virginia in February 2018. Sick of their poverty wages and systematic undermining of public education by Republicans and Democrats alike, this revolt of teachers that included wildcat unofficial strike action and which scored a victory, began precisely where union structures and officialdom was weak, allowing a rank-and-file takeover that was the root of its militancy and victories.

Erin Brightwell of this paper’s US sister organisation, Socialist Alternative, writes that: “After decades of decline in the power of unions, the teachers and school support workers of West Virginia boldly staged a statewide, ille-

Winning the class war in the US

By Justin Harrison

“If there is going to be class warfare in this country, it’s time that the working class of this country won that war.” – Bernie Sanders

As the fight for the Democratic nomination grinds on towards the winter and spring primary season, Bernie Sanders continues to work hard to differentiate himself from the pack, by putting forward a bold, clear, working class program to revitalise and mobilize the labour movement. He is calling on the unions to rally to his campaign and join him in the fight against the obscene accumulations of wealth and power of the billionaire class.

“The Organiser in Chief”

In a series of campaign events, speeches and social media posts this August and September he rolled out his Workplace Democracy Plan, “... establishing a national goal to double union membership...” and declaring that if elected, “I’m not only going to be Commander in Chief. I am going to be Organiser in Chief.”, committing to use the office of the president to actively support union organizing, and to mobilize mass support for his program.

Included in his plan are commitments to guarantee the right of public workers to organize and bargain collectively, give federal workers the right to strike, enact “card check” organizing, eliminate “right to work” laws, ban the permanent replacement of striking workers, and re-legalize sympathy strikes.

Opposing anti-union laws

Many of these proposed reforms look back to the militant fighting tactics that built the U.S. unions in the first place, tactics that the bosses decided were much too effective, and used their political power to make them illegal.

These proposals would eliminate most of the current legal and economic barriers to organising unions and conducting successful strikes, and dramatically shift the balance of power in the workplace and the broader economy in favor of the working class.

Point by point Sanders responds to the political demands of the union leadership, giving them everything that they have been saying they need to restore the economic and political power that unions have lost over the past 50 years. This shift of power would result in the dramatic improvement in wages, working conditions, health, and the overall quality of life for the vast majority of Americans.

Based on this, every union in the US should be endorsing and campaigning for Sanders right now, mobilizing and engaging their membership to fight alongside him to win the election and carry out his programme.

Serious Opposition

Big Business will not sit still and let Sanders win the election and carry out his plan. Even if he wins the nomination, corporate America would rather have four more years of Trump than a Sanders presidency. He is already facing the full opposition of the Democratic Party establishment, that



Bernie Sanders has become the leading figure in the developing movement of the US working class

is lining up behind Warren as a reliable “progressive” alternative to Sanders in case Biden should falter.

If Sanders wins the election and begins to carry out his planned reforms, he will face the most ferocious opposition from the rich and powerful, including economic and political sabotage by the Billionaire Oligarchs, the Democratic Party leadership and the corporate media.

Winning even the most basic of these reforms will require a mass mobilization of the unions, the youth, and working class communities, going beyond anything we have seen since the 1970s. It will mean being prepared to take political strike ac-

tion. It means building a new political force that contests with the corporate dominated parties alongside determined, disciplined mass actions to have a chance of winning.

Time For A New Party

We need to lay the groundwork now to build a new party to fight on Sanders programme in the likely event that he is undemocratically blocked from the nomination, just like 2016. Unfortunately Sanders has not drawn this conclusion and continues to argue for turning the Democrats into a “working class party.” The only way this happens is if the Democrats’ public representatives end all reliance on

corporate cash, commit themselves to fight for pro-working-class policies, and if they are accountable to democratic structures. The establishment will split before accepting any of this.

With an intentional approach to building sustainable local structures organized around his unifying working class program, and linking them with ongoing struggles against racism, sexism, climate change, oppression and class exploitation, Sanders’ campaign can initiate the work of building a new mass party uniting all working and oppressed people in the US. Such a party can play a critical role in further popularising anti-capitalist and socialist ideas. ■

Resurgence of US labour movement

gal strike, shutting down the entire public K-12 [Pre-School to Secondary Education. Editor.] education system for eight days and winning a wage increase for themselves and all public sector workers as well as defeating various threatened attacks. The educators’ rebellion that began in West Virginia then led to eruptions in a number of other states, both “red” and “blue,” including Oklahoma, Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Colorado, Washington State, Oregon, and California. It has also had an impact on how workers in other industries view going on strike.”

With 35,000 Chicago public schools teachers and staff set to strike from 17 October 2019, a new battle line for the teachers’ revolt will open up.

From McDonald’s to General Motors

The revitalising of the US trade union movement has spread to hospitality, from the #MeToo inspired McDonald’s strikes, to a strike of hotel workers at the Marriott hotel chain, involving nearly 8,000 workers; to retail, for example the Stop and Shop strike in New England earlier this year involving 31,000 shop workers; to tech, including the first moves towards Google workers unionising; and now to heavy industry, with 50,000 auto workers in the United Auto Workers



50,000 workers at General Motors are currently on strike

(UAW) on strike against General Motors (GM) in a seminal and strategic dispute that at the time of writing has involved an all-out stoppage for three weeks solid.

Steve Edwards of Socialist Alternative writes about the UAW strike’s significance:

“When the GM contract came up in 1982 the UAW leadership had already accepted the logic of concessions to preserve corporate viability, and therefore (so they believed) their members’ jobs. That contract saw the first acceptance of a lower pay scale for new hires.

“This strategy has never worked. The record shows that since that moment, GM has gone from 440,000 unionized employees in the U.S. to the present figure of just under 50,000. In 2018 GM reported \$10.8 billion in U.S. profits but announced the shutting down of five North American plants.”

Growing radicalisation

Decades of attacks on workers’ wages and conditions, the ravages of privatised healthcare, and a major drive to further privatised education are the unbearable conditions pushing US workers into action. The radicalisation present in US society in the decade since the Great Recession has been represented in bursts of social move-

ments, from the 1% vs the 99% of Occupy, to #BLM and anti-Trump women’s movement.

It was especially seen in the class demands evident in Bernie Sanders’ previous Democratic primary challenge, that called for a political revolution against the billionaire class. This campaign mobilised and inspired millions of workers and youth, including a huge popularising of socialist ideas, acting as a forerunner of labour’s upsurge, as it’s fuelled by a backbone of a new generation of politicised worker-activists.

A powerful working class

It’s worth noting that included in strike figures for 2018 and 2019 are battles that specifically target racism and sexism in a whole range of disputes, including action by furniture workers demonstrating against the barbaric treatment of refugees by the state.

The multi-racial and all-gendered working-class of the US has emerged as a powerful arbiter of solidarity and progress in the teeth of reaction under Trump, and its continued industrial and political organisation is vital for the working class and oppressed everywhere. Its force organised around the ideas of socialism can end the rule of capitalism in the “belly of the beast”. ■

Egyptian protesters break the wall of fear

By Colm McCarthy

ON 20 September, protest returned to the streets of Egypt. The emergence of rallies calling for an end to Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's brutal rule in Egypt in recent weeks mark an important development in challenging the fear factor that has subdued opposition to him since he came to power in 2013.

A corrupt regime

The spark for the protests was provided by a series of videos from former building contractor and actor Mohamed Ali, alleging that el-Sisi has squandered millions in public funds on palaces, villas and vanity projects. The videos posted from Barcelona, where he now lives, have chimed with the discontent felt by swathes of the Egyptian population. Despite eventually addressing the allegations, el-Sisi hasn't attempted to deny their substance.

This is against the backdrop of continuous austerity measures linked to a \$12 billion IMF loan in 2016. Subsidies for energy and food have been gutted, going beyond the previous attacks on them during the "reforms" of the 2000's. These "reforms" - which served to benefit both capital and the patronage networks around the then dictator Hosni Mubarak at the expense of the Egyptian working class - provoked widespread resentment, but this didn't find expression until



Major anti-el-Sisi demonstration in Cairo on 20 September

the revolts in North Africa spread to Egypt in the early weeks of 2011. Under el-Sisi, a similar process has seen him win praise from the masters of international capital, whilst discontent amongst the broad mass of the population brews.

Splits in the regime

There is some speculation that Mohamed Ali has the support of elements within the Egyptian military who wish to see the back of el-Sisi.

Discontent among some elements of the military is reflected in the fact that a former chief of staff of the armed forces was amongst those who had their candidacy blocked for last year's sham presidential election. Donald Trump has referred to el-Sisi as his "favourite dictator" and praised him for dealing with the "chaos" in the country, which remains the second largest non-NATO recipient of US military aid.

The failed, year-long Muslim

Brotherhood government of Morsi allowed military figures to pose as defenders of the population from Islamism whilst re-establishing their dictatorship. However, el-Sisi's incredible brutality means that the potential for explosive events can see control slip from the hands of the warring factions in the military elite.

The scale of the protests in Sudan and Algeria, that brought the downfall of the al-Bashir and Bouteflika dictatorships, shows how quickly

movements can threaten the position of seemingly unassailable rulers. If such developments were to happen in Egypt, it could have an inspiring effect across the region.

Growing confidence

So far, the protests are nowhere near the scale of those that occurred from 2011-13, which were themselves the product of years of organising. However, the confidence to go on these protests indicates an important step has been taken, since it shows that anger is again beginning to trump the fear factor inspired by the security apparatus of the Egyptian state.

Thousands have been arrested. Television networks, which are largely owned by Egypt's intelligence agencies, have resorted to threatening people off attending the demonstrations. However, by the brutal standards of the el-Sisi regime, which was responsible for the biggest massacres in modern Egyptian history in 2013, the response has been muted.

This regime can be brought to its knees by a movement of the masses, with Egypt's powerful working class at its helm. A key lesson of the revolution of 2011 is the necessity to link the struggle for democratic rights with the need to break from the capitalist system that the military dictatorship in the country is based on. This means fighting for a government of workers and the poor that takes the key wealth and resources into democratic public ownership.

Hong Kong: Mass protests defy clampdowns & repression

By Maurice O'Connor

POLICE VIOLENCE against protesters in Hong Kong has moved to a higher level recently, with live ammunition being used against protesters. A clip of a protester being shot in the chest has gone viral.

This is the response of the Hong Kong regime, and the Chinese "Communist" Party (CCP) that backs them, to months of huge protests in the city, centred around protecting and extending democratic rights. The protests have seen up to two million people on the streets at various points, out of a population of seven million.

Fear of CCP regime

A ban on face masks was recently introduced, to little effect, with the protests continuing unabated. The regime has even considered a partial shutdown of the internet, to cut across the organising of protests.

While protests have been focused on the Hong Kong regime, and its leader Carrie Lam, there have been leaks that suggest the limited power of this regime, with the CCP taking an ever firmer grip on the state response to the protests. The Chinese government fear, above all else, that the wave of protests in Hong Kong will spread to mainland China.

While the withdrawal of the extradition law was seen by protesters as



Four months on: mass protest movement continues in Hong Kong

"too little, too late", many supporters of the Chinese government feel that any concessions would encourage similar protests in mainland China.

Protests of this scale would have likely won huge concessions from governments in other parts of the world. The limited response of the

Hong Kong government is a result of being backed by the CCP, which does not want to concede any democratic rights fearing the precedent it will create.

With the Chinese government being the true power behind the Hong Kong regime, the question is posed of how the protests can take on the might of the CCP. The answer would seem to be: not alone. If the power of the Chinese government is to be truly threatened, it must be joined by a movement of the working class in mainland China.

Role of Chinese working class

The Hong Kong protests have included three partial general strikes, organised primarily through social media. These are illustrative of how the CCP regime can be taken on. The demands of the protest need to be extended to include full democracy for China and Hong Kong, including the right to form independent trade unions. The Chinese working class need to see Hong Kong's struggle as fully connected with their own.

The general strikes and workplace struggle highlight how society can be changed. A movement for democratic rights is completely bound up with the struggle against capitalist rule, which profits from the repression of the CCP regime. Real democracy can only come about if this system is overthrown and replaced by democratic socialism.

Solidarity with victimised socialist & trade union activist

By Thomas White

Hong Kong is facing a wave of corporate 'white terror' - dismissals, spying and intimidation - against workers and trade unionists that voice support for the mass protest movement that exploded there in June.

Nathan Leung Lai Pong, a member of Socialist Action (sister organisation of the Socialist Party in Hong Kong) and an outsourced worker at HSBC, was dismissed on 5th September after participating in the general strike against the government two days earlier and giving media interviews about the need for a trade union for bank workers.

On 2 October, the Socialist Party took part in an international day of protest against this anti-worker repression, alongside socialists and trade unionists from New York to Yemen.

Who's afraid of Greta Thunberg?

By Emma Quinn

EARTH STRIKE, Friday 20 September, saw the largest demonstrations against climate change yet. Millions-strong marches and protests took place, inspired by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, whose solo protests developed into the global "School Strike for Climate".

Young people left school and took to the streets, demanding urgent action on environmental destruction and, three days later, Greta called out the "betrayal" of world leaders at the UN Summit in New York.

"You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I am one of the lucky ones. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of mass extinction. And all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"

Disgusting attacks

Greta's raw reminder of the brutal reality of climate change and the connecting of that with the profit system was inspiring for most. Unsurprisingly, it had the opposite effect on the world's most powerful

men and their mouthpieces in the capitalist media, hitting a nerve and triggering a predictable wave of sexist, patronising attacks against this 16-year-old - from Trump to Putin, to Europe's richest man, Bernard Arnault, to Piers Morgan, Jeremy Clarkson and even Ryan Tubridy getting his oar in.

Arnault (who made his billions via luxury brands like Givenchy and Dior, items out of reach for the majority of ordinary people) ironically accuses Greta of "demoralising young people". There is clearly an overlap between right-wing nationalism, climate change denial and misogyny, and that was certainly present in much of the commentary.

All the basic boxes were checked. The comments were infantilising, derogatory of her mental health and she was accused of being "exploited by her parents and the international left". French academics grossly suggested the teenager is not "sexy enough". More mainstream sexism talked of her being too hysterical, shrill, fanatical, etc.

Growing radicalisation

So, why have powerful politicians, bosses and conservative men of a certain age engaged in the public bullying of a teenager? The short an-



Greta joins march in New York on 20 September

swer is; they have a vested interest in the status quo, and in capitalism, the fundamental driver of climate destruction and also, conveniently enough, of profit. And they are afraid. They are afraid of Greta and the millions of people who are saying

that the planet is more important than their profit, and who are coming closer to the conclusion that the status quo and their system needs to go.

The issue of climate change, because of its absolute and undeniable

connection to capitalism, is posing the real potential of radicalising millions of young and working-class people. Many are becoming more open to the need for a break with this rotten system and have an increasing desire for a world without inequality and oppression. Such a world can only be possible with a united and international struggle against capitalism and the building of a socialist alternative.

Strike action

Greta has not yet come to this conclusion, and perhaps never will, but she has inspired a generation to get organised and "strike", and has voiced her support for trade unions and workers taking solidarity action with school students. This an essential and vital next step that could unleash the massive power of the working class and really put fear into those at the top.

Trump et al might be afraid of Greta, but she is not afraid of him, evident in the glare she gave him and in her final comment to the UN: "We will not let you get away with this... The world is waking up. Change is coming whether you like it or not".

The onus is on us to ensure that this change is socialist change.

No importation of fracked gas!

By Gary McDonald

"I BELIEVE we have a chance here, a chance to replace a climate of fear and anxiety with a new climate of action and opportunity, that's in our hands, responding to the challenge of the century with creativity, imagination, courage and, above all, determination"

The sheer hypocrisy of this drivel that was uttered by Leo Varadkar at the recent UN climate summit in New York was indeed matched by the shameful actions that he and his Fine Gael government have so recently taken.

The Irish state has just given a company, owned 50-50 by Hess LNG (a subsidiary of the US multinational Hess Corporation) and Poten & Partners Inc, the green light to build a 500MW gas power plant, liquid gas storage containers and an import terminal on the Shannon Estuary in County Kerry.

Pollutive and dangerous

This construction would see Ireland strategically placed to receive Hess LNG supplies from its operations from all over the globe, attracting large volumes of sea-based traffic carrying the dangerous fracked liquid gas to and from Ireland. The construction would undoubtedly have devastating effects on the local ecosystem.

The fracked shale gas industry is known to be extremely pollutive and highly dangerous, so accidents are



bound to occur. To add insult to injury, it's also very likely that the project will receive government funding to support the multimillion-euro construction!

The US fracked shale gas industry is most at fault for the huge rise in global methane emissions over the past decade. Worryingly, fracked gas is mostly composed of methane, which is an even more potent greenhouse gas that traps in the atmosphere even greater amounts of heat than CO2.

Blow to climate

If the construction of this facility was allowed to proceed, it would deliver another blow to the Earth's environment and it would be another setback in the global fight against climate change. We must resist its construction and any further expansion of the fossil fuel industry with protest action.

This is yet another instance of a capitalist government demonstrating, once again, not only an inability to take meaningful action against cli-

mate change, but a willingness to foster it by continually supporting the interests of the industry, big business and vulture funds. Fine Gael attempt to present themselves as champions of the environment but, in reality, they are complicit in its destruction.

System change

That is why the meaningful change required to avert complete catastrophe must come from below in the form of system change.

Organised movements of the working class, joining and becoming active in trade unions, taking collective strike action in their workplace, all the while arming themselves with socialist ideas, could bring about the end of the fossil fuel industry and the system that drives it, capitalism.

Using these methods of political action, these industries need to be taken into public democratic hands worldwide so that we can begin the immediate transition away from the production of fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy.

School Students explain why they are striking against climate change:



"I strike because I can, I have the opportunity to stand up for myself and for others, I have the opportunity to make tiny changes towards a global goal. And to ignore this opportunity would be a betrayal of those who can't and an insult to those who are suffering."

– Marcus MacGabhain (16)

"The reason I strike for climate is because, at the end of the day, it's do or die, and I want to be on the right side of history."

– Roisin Garcia (16)

"Climate change, perpetuated by the unsatisfiable greed of big business and an unresponsive government, is destroying the very ground beneath our feet. Only by striking in unison and in force can we force their ever-searching hands away from the shrinking purse of Mother Earth and towards the reaction of a sustainable world."

– Jay Sacker (17)

Nationalise Wrightbus to save jobs

THE SOCIALIST Party sends solidarity to the 1,200 Wrightbus workers faced with redundancy since the firm went into administration on 25th September. Staff were informed that talks with potential buyers had fallen through and that almost all of them were to be made jobless with immediate effect due to cash flow issues.

Private security was used to ensure the workers left the site, with management clearly fearing the potential for an occupation like that at Harland & Wolff, where nine weeks of action by the workers stopped the yard simply going to the wall and created the space for another buyer to step in.

Another blow for Ballymena

If the jobs at Wrightbus are lost, it will be the latest in a series of major blows to manufacturing in the Ballymena area in recent years following the closures of JTI Gallaher, Michelin and other firms. These job losses first and foremost impact the workers and their families, but they have a broader impact across the local economy, through supply chains and decreased spending power.

Crucially, they deprive young people of the opportunity to learn a skilled trade, leading to a decent job. Poverty pay and precarious conditions in retail, hospitality and other service industries are what face most

young people here when they leave education.

Empty words

Rightly, there is anger at the fact the Wright family 'donated' £15 million from the firm to their Green Pastures Church in recent years. This shows both incompetence and a cynical disregard for the livelihoods of Wrightbus staff. Workers held a protest outside the church this Sunday and have called for the family to hand over the land on which the site stands in order to help secure a future for the plant.

Once again, the political establishment have shown they have nothing but empty words to offer workers facing redundancy. Local MP Ian Paisley Jnr seems to spend most of his time either taking dodgy holidays or wringing his hands about local job losses, but he has nothing meaningful to say.

Like all the main parties, the DUP embrace the logic of the capitalist market, with short-term profit as its be-all and end-all. Boris Johnson previously talked about Wrightbus and Harland & Wolff being part of a "big industrial agenda" for the North, yet his government also said that the future of the shipyard ultimately rested on "a commercial decision."

Fight for public ownership

What is needed is immediate nationalisation of Wrightbus to safeguard the jobs and skills for the future. That is not a fantasy demand. The



1,200 jobs are at risk at Wrightbus based in Ballymena

Scottish government, under pressure, recently stepped in to nationalise the Ferguson Marine shipyard on the Clyde. If it can happen there, why not in Ballymena? Nationalisation was correctly raised by the Harland & Wolff workers and their unions and has also been raised by

Unite with regard to Wrightbus.

The workers at both Wrightbus and Harland & Wolff have skills that can contribute to tackling the most pressing crisis facing humanity today – climate change. Harland & Wolff workers have expertise in producing at-sea wind turbines, while

Wrightbus workers can produce electric and hydrogen-fuelled vehicles for public transport. That these workers are instead threatened with being thrown on the scrapheap underlines the dysfunctional, short-sighted nature of the capitalist system.

Obituary: John Throne (1944-2019)

ADDRESSING A National Conference of the Socialist Party in Dublin on 21 September, National Executive member Kevin McLoughlin marked the recent passing of John Throne in Chicago and registered his important role in the founding and building OF the Militant Tendency, the forerunner of the Socialist Party, and the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI).

Along with comrades such as the late Peter Hadden, John Throne played a crucial role in assembling the forces that would form the Militant in Ireland in 1974. He also participated in the formation of the CWI, which was established in the same year.

John was a leading full time worker for Militant based in Dublin. He was originally from just outside Lifford, County Donegal and was propelled into political activity by the events in Derry in the late 1960s. After moving to Dublin in the early 1970s, John and the Militant inter-

vened into the Labour Party and played a vital role in organising the opposition to coalitionism and taking on the Labour right-wing under the respective leaderships of Brendan Corish, Frank Cluskey and Michael O'Leary.

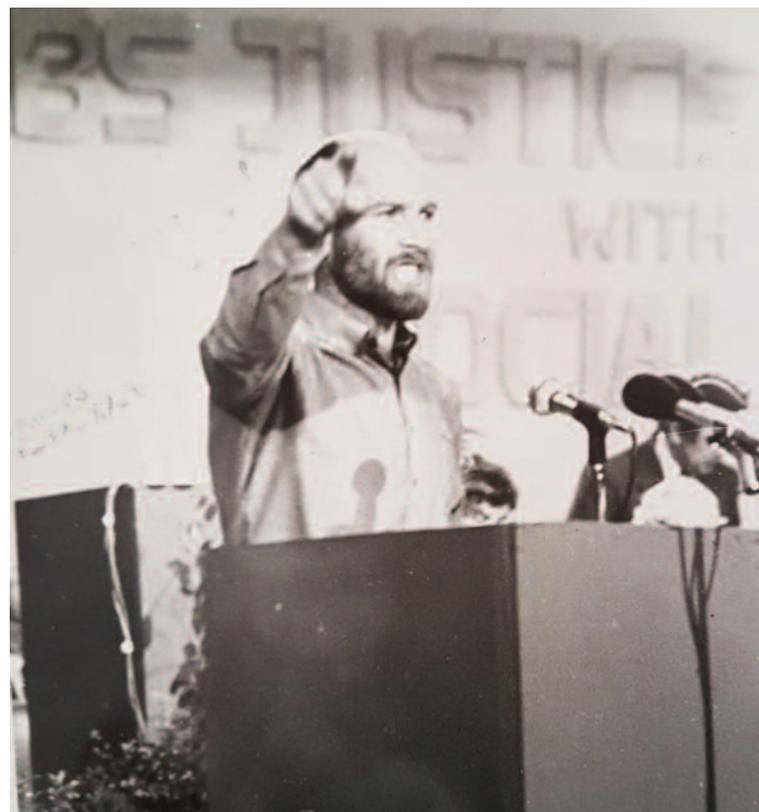
John was first elected onto the leading body of the Labour Party, the Administrative Council, at the National Conference in Wexford in 1978. Subsequently, in the early 1980s, this role was assumed by Joe Higgins and with agreement, John subsequently left Ireland to do vital work of building an International as an organiser with the CWI.

The Militant grew rapidly North and South from 1982 to 1986, numerically and in its influence. This was based on our principled position on the national question, encapsulated in our slogan "For Workers' Unity and Socialism," our work in the unions and in popularising socialism and Marxism through the Young Socialists in the North and Labour Youth in the South. This success was in part due to the good po-

litical foundation and the tradition of dedication and commitment that had been laid previously by many comrades, clearly with John Throne making a major contribution.

From the latter part of the 1980s John was based in the US. There he was a leading full time activist in Labor Militant, the CWI group in the US, in its early and formative years. The political approach that John adopted to building a socialist organisation evoked strong opposition from a majority of members and he was removed from his positions at a conference of Labor Militant in 1996.

Notwithstanding that since that time the Socialist Party in Ireland and John have disagreed on many issues, including John making imbalanced criticisms of the CWI generally and of the party in Ireland in particular, we believe it is important and appropriate to recognise publicly the significant role that John Throne played in the formation and building of the Militant Tendency, the forerunner of the Socialist Party and the CWI for over 25 years.



John Throne was a founding member of Militant, predecessor of the Socialist Party

Film review:

Joker – a reflection of modern times?

By James McCabe

JOKER IS an engaging film. It won the top award at the Venice Film Festival, but has also faced a wave of scorn from film critics; some of whom describe it as “irresponsible” and “toxic.”

Set in the fictional Gotham City in the early 1980s, commentators from all quarters have argued that the film’s backdrop of wealth inequality and political turmoil will strike a chord with today’s audiences.

The protagonist, Arthur Fleck, is a grown man who lives with his mother. He takes medication to treat his ailing mental health and lives a poor, precarious existence as a clown and budding stand-up comedian. Fleck’s comedy routines fail to make people laugh while at the same time his condition of involuntary, uncontrollable laughter makes him the subject of ridicule amongst his peers.

Along with a number of humiliating experiences, he loses access to mental health counselling and medication due to budget cuts. His situation evokes further pity as we learn that he was subject to severe childhood abuse while at the same time we’re repulsed as his fantasies about a next-door neighbour result in him stalking her on her way to work. His internalised frustration and rage then manifest in murderous violence when he shoots a trio of Wall Street bros who assault him on the subway.



Joker had the biggest October opening of all time at the box office

Turmoil in Gotham

The Wall Street trio turn out to have been employees of billionaire Thomas Wayne, who’s asked in a TV interview about the murders and whether they were motivated by anti-rich sentiment. Wayne then rails against poor people, and describes them as “clowns” who never made something of themselves. This comment sparks a backlash of demonstrations and riots by protesters wearing clown masks and carry-

ing placards with slogans such as “Resist” and “Eat the rich.” A masked protestor is shown on the evening news shouting, “f*ck the rich, f*ck Thomas Wayne, and f*ck the system.”

In previous Batman films, Thomas Wayne was portrayed as a noble philanthropist, yet in *Joker*, we discover that billionaire Wayne abused a female employee, reflecting the sexist, exploitative behaviour that sparked the #metoo movement.

Dangerous film?

Much of the hand-wringing by commentators about the film focuses on the supposed danger that Arthur Fleck’s violent actions could spark copycat mass shootings. The idea that films are the main cause of mass shootings is consistent with the mainstream media’s superficial response to these increasingly common events. Also, the notion that mental health and violence go hand-in-hand is a dangerous and insulting

myth that is used by the establishment to try to divorce mass shootings from their socio-economic context.

The stereotype of the mass shooter as a loner with mental health issues deflects from the wider context of the growth of far-right ideas, as well as the social alienation and stress affecting so much of the population due to the precarity of work and housing in capitalist society today. Not to mention the current backlash against the global women’s movement and the hyper-masculinity that’s celebrated in US culture as part of its pro-war propaganda.

Insular Hollywood

The picture that *Joker* paints of modern capitalism is a departure not only from the comic book genre but from the generally banal storylines and flat characters that an out-of-touch Hollywood has churned out over the past period.

The film indicates a growing awareness by sections of the upper middle-class milieu that dominate Hollywood of the impact of capitalist crisis on working-class and oppressed people today.

At the same time, the depiction of the protest movement in *Joker* as a horde of violent rioters bent on chaos could well indicate the anxiety that this layer feel about movements that could in any way destabilise or threaten the system upon which their own power and privilege rests.

Women’s football 2019: Equal pay, #Metoo & Megan Rapinoe

Keishia Taylor interviewed Suzanne Wrack, Women’s Football Writer for *The Guardian*, on her way to Lisbon – the first time *The Guardian* had sent someone to cover an international women’s friendly!

The Women’s World Cup was extremely significant this year, with the equal pay campaign and the wonderful Megan Rapinoe. What made this year so special?

What’s so fantastic about this world cup is that big disputes over equal pay and expenses coincided with women’s football growing and getting more investment. The US team shattered the idea that if you want equal pay then you have to generate the same amount of money as the men’s team, because they have been doing that since 2015! It’s much more ideological than that – it’s about profits for the top of FIFA and generations of holding women’s pay and condi-

tions down because it impacts the money they have available for themselves and the men’s team.

Rapinoe saying she’s “not going to the f*cking White House” put her in the spotlight and when it was announced that the prize money would be doubled, she said “double it again!” – she’s really embracing the role of constantly pushing things forward. And football commands a huge amount of respect! People often follow what their team or national team does extremely closely, so it wields real power to be a leader on challenging issues of sexism, racism, etc. and positively change things.

The feeling that enough is enough and unashamedly pushing things forward can be seen elsewhere in the global feminist movement as well. Do you think the players are inspired by other movements?

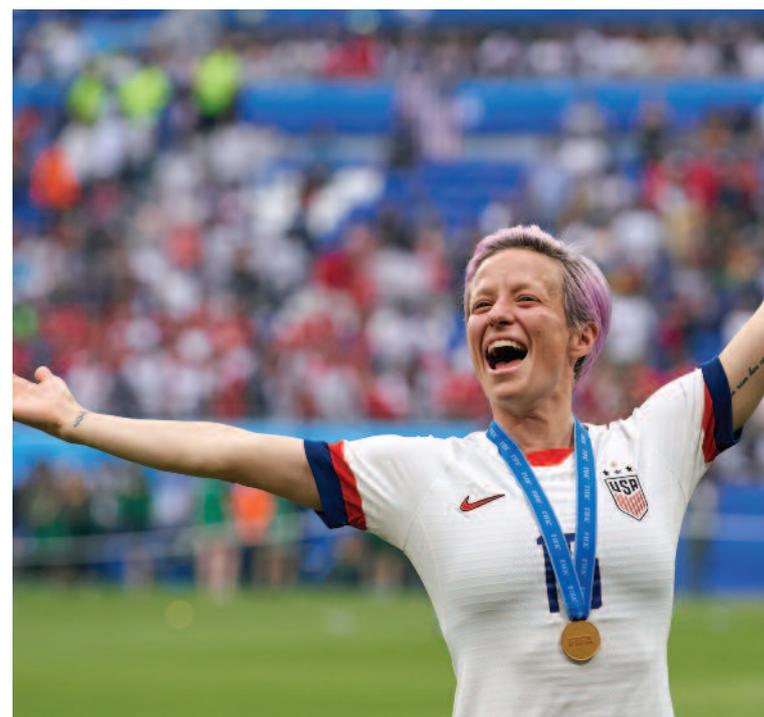
Nothing exists in isolation and everything has a context. I think the attitudes that are reflected in society are reflected in and through football. I’d say Rapinoe is definitely looking at other movements and drawing inspiration, taking a knee in support of Colin

Kaepernick and things like that. When you see things like #metoo, I think it’s innate solidarity. Just by playing football, female players are breaking with stereotypes and traditional gender roles in a way that isn’t necessarily a conscious political act, but they are playing an important role.

You broke the #metoo story in the Afghanistan FA – could you tell us about that?

I had interviewed some of the Afghanistan women’s team the year before, so when I heard rumblings about terrible contracts with no rights I got in touch with the players and from there I approached the team manager who connected me with some of the victims. It was great as a journalist to be able to publish a story that had a material effect on the players, particularly when the legal system wasn’t going to help them. The players were very keen to widen the discussion, to say that this is definitely happening elsewhere and to support others to come forward.

Football is a part of society, it’s not in a vacuum. #Metoo has been



Outspoken star player of the US women’s national soccer team, Megan Rapinoe

happening everywhere, so the idea there wouldn’t be one in sport is ridiculous! These cases always existed but now we’re more confident to speak out on these issues and tackle them. There’s a growing consciousness around

women’s rights and what is and isn’t acceptable.

Hear more from Suzanne at Bread & Roses Festival, 26 October, Project Arts Centre, Temple Bar, Dublin. Interview with Suzanne at 1.45pm!

thesocialist

PAPER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY

ISSUE 126

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2019

Government defers paltry minimum wage increase

DEMAND
€15 / HOUR
MIN WAGE
NOW!



JOIN THE SOCIALIST PARTY!

Text 'JOIN' to 087 3141986

www.socialistparty.ie