SOCIALIST alternative

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TRUMP DEFEATED

WHAT NEXT?

INSIDE

• Covid crisis exposes a rotten system – 10-point socialist programme
• Global uprisings against oppression – socialist feminism now
• Engels @ 200 – a revolutionary thinker for a world in turmoil

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Fifty million people have been infected with Covid-19 globally, with over one and a quarter million tragically losing their lives. In Ireland, we've had 65,000 cases with over 1,900 deaths in the South and 42,000 cases with over 750 deaths in the North. A second wave is now overwhelming health services across Europe.

Like climate change, the roots of this pandemic lie in the destruction of our planet in the interest of greed-driven production-for-profit, which clearly cannot sustainably coexist with nature.

The working class, the poor and the oppressed will continue to die because of government inaction, or more accurately, willful criminal neglect. An economic slump – triggered by the pandemic, but caused by deeper contradictions inherent in the capitalist system – will also make poverty, oppression and inequality much worse.

Working-class and young people are fighting for their lives. We need to get organised and mobilised now to break once and for all with this ruinous system that is destroying the world.

People being sacrificed for profit

Despicably, the super-rich have taken advantage of the crisis, with the world's billionaires increasing their wealth from $8 trillion to $10 trillion since March. In Ireland, the richest 300 have increased their fortunes to €93 billion. These parasites, who can retreat to their yachts, private islands and mansions for safety, or if needed can quickly access the best of healthcare, are using their substantial political influence to ensure business interests and profit predominate, even during this pandemic – illustrating again how backward and unjust society is.

This was shown too in the Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Green Party government initially rejecting the advice to go to Level 5, having recklessly reopened the economy in the summer because short-sighted businesses opposed continuing with the restrictions. They refused to organise the required systems of mass testing and tracing, or properly equip the health service. Evidently, people's health and lives cost too much. Little surprise either that establishment commentators increasingly legitimise variations of the callous 'herd immunity' strategy.

It is a deception to suggest any contradiction between maintaining the economy and living standards, and protecting public health. The wealth and resources exist to do both. The real contradiction is between the policies that businesses dictate and governments impose, and the actual needs of the majority of people.

This deception will increasingly be pushed to obscure the reality, and we can't accept this. The health and economic emergencies, and their ramifications, are not being dealt with. North and South the governments are not looking for actual solutions. Their policy is about convincing people "to live with" (and die with) Covid-19, because they have no alternative. But this will mean things can, and likely will, get much worse. We reject this approach: the virus and the economic crisis can be overcome.

Accentuating inequalities

Already the pandemic has compounded the injustices and inequalities of capitalism in society. The risk and infection rate is highest among working-class, migrant and Traveller communities, and asylum seekers in Direct Provision are particularly vulnerable.

Working-class women are disproportionately impacted too, with layoffs and cuts to hours and conditions in the retail and hospitality sectors, for example. The 'double shift' of working and managing family life has been exacerbated by extra tasks connected with cleaning, sanitisation and caring for children, and for elderly and vulnerable family members. There has also been an 18% increase in calls to Gardaí reporting intimate partner violence this year.

The continued unnecessary restrictions on abortion, and the heinous decision to seal the mother-and-baby homes records, testify to the sexist and misogynistic attitudes that the Irish state fosters, which are still prominent in the education, health, welfare and legal systems. The North's One Health Trust has had to close its early medical abortion service due to limited resources. The explosive combination of exploitation and oppression means working-class women will be at the forefront of the fightback we need. The inspiring struggle of Debenham's workers, and the mass movement in Poland now against a new attack on abortion rights, demonstrate this.

Governments incapable of responding

All the effects of Covid-19, including the inevitable inequality in access to a vaccine when one is developed, will cause much more turmoil and further death – big pharmaceutical companies are already salivating at the conservative estimates of a $10 billion annual market for the vaccine, and market logic dictates that the wealthy will jump to the front of the queue.

The powers-that-be are responsible for squandering the progress that was made during the first wave (which was achieved in the main by the discipline that ordinary people displayed in those months) exacerbating the extent and the impact of the resurgence of infections and deaths that led to the second lockdown. But how many more waves, infections and deaths will there be? The economic tsunami that will break again and again over people's lives in the next years will knock society back decades.

It's clear that if permanent chaos is to be averted we need revolution. Working-class people, across borders, with young people in the forefront, need to assert their rights, take control of the direction of society and break with catastrophic capitalism.

Act to secure our health & safety

The start of this change can be workers and students insisting on their right to be safe, and where this is not respected by bosses, managers or officials, they should walk out of work, school or college until the anti-virus conditions are satisfactory.

Workers in Moy Park poultry factory in Portadown, at Goodman meat plant in Lurgan and at the sorting office in Derry, did just that and walked out demanding proper protection from the virus. In Greece, students occupied over 700 schools to protest against unsafe conditions.

The silence of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) during the crisis has been deafening. Clearly we can't rely on it or wait for it to act. Instead, workers and students should take the initiative in responding to infections and trying to suppress the virus. If and when workers take action, or school or college students rebel against a dangerous situation they have been forced into, trade unions and student unions should support them unconditionally.

In reality, if there was a trade union leadership with any conviction there would already have been a general strike to insist that the wealth appropriated by corporations and the super-rich here be re-appropriated and used by the state to put in place a system of mass and immediate testing, and to construct the world-class health service we require.

This is crucial, as lockdowns alone – without mass testing and tracing, and all necessary anti-virus infrastructure – will not stop the infections or the needless deaths. Such a general strike doesn't have to be called from above, it can be built from below on the issues of combating the virus and economic crisis. What is clear is that we need a movement of workers, women and young people, organised from below, if a decent feature for people and the planet is to be secured.

Capitalist ideology is destroying lives

A staggering 320,000 workers are now jobless in the South and 67,000 in the North, where it is forecast that 100,000 will be claiming unemployment by the end of the year. Hardship, stress and anxiety are set to worsen. Twice in just over a decade capitalism in Ireland and internationally has thrown the world into a deep economic mess.

The needless anarchy of the capitalist market system is exposed. The skills of unemployed construction workers could be married with some of the billionaires' wealth, which should be seized, and turned into hundreds of thousands of new homes and essential physical and social infrastructure. This is beyond what the market system is capable of, however.

Instead of taking and using the wealth to deal with the multiple crises we face, the government is opting for deeper debts on the financial markets, and soon enough those debts will be paid back through a new programme of vicious austerity on working people.

All the while this Southern government will maintain Ireland as a tax haven for multinational corporations and hope that this creates economic spin-offs. In other words it has no developed economic strategy. This approach condemns Ireland to chronically underfunded public services, an increasingly low-wage economy and gross inequality.

A large part of this borrowing will be used to fund a programme of 'corporate welfare' – bailouts for busi-

nesses. They claim that this will incentivise the bosses to keep jobs. Not only will this not work in practice, but the logic is crazy. Basically, they want to use our money to assist bosses to maintain profits so that the bosses continue to employ us! Instead, let's really save money and get rid of the profiteering 'middle man', then use the wealth to create direct employment in publicly owned and democratically run industries and utilities to provide the goods and services we need.

We need a revolution from below

We can't afford to accept the reckless approach to the virus that's being adopted. Neither should we accept what is unfortunately inevitable on the basis of the economic status quo – that ordinary working-class people pay the price for the Covid crisis in the form of economic dislocation, social disintegration and extreme political instability.

We need a revolution that takes the ownership of the economy out of the hands of the billionaires, and instead democratically plans the use of society's wealth and resources to benefit all in society. If organised, working-class and young people have the numbers and the power to achieve such change. As well as all the other factors, the climate change clock is ticking. We don't have unlimited time: a break with capitalism and real democratic socialist change is now an urgent necessity. Below is the programme the Socialist Party will adopt to fight the pandemic and for socialist change – join with us today.■

10-POINT PROGRAMME ON COVID CRISIS

1. Mass testing key to defeating Covid – end reckless government inaction

Lockdowns are not enough. They, and the difficulties they create, are often necessitated by government refusal to organise proper mass testing. Mass testing, including if necessary the population being tested over a short period of time, alongside rapid tracing and treatment, is the most effective way of dealing with the virus and reduces the need for restrictions. To achieve this we need emergency requisition of all private labs, as well as investment in state labs and the development of necessary infrastructure in workplaces, schools, colleges, airports and all major public locations. This is a vital investment for future potential pandemics. PPE must also be generally and freely available, produced and supplied by the state.

2. Workers should strike if their health is not safeguarded – assert your right

Government or individual bosses cannot be trusted to safeguard health and safety – there is an economic conflict of interest. The criminal silence and inaction from ICTU on this is an abdication of responsibility. Workers have a right to work in a safe environment, and that means they must also have the right to withdraw their labour if they have serious concerns, without any victimisation or cuts to their income. For a general strike from below – a discussion should begin in workplaces and in the trade union movement about organising a one-day stoppage to demand real mass testing and tracing; the establishment of a properly funded and publicly owned, one-tier health service; and that big business and the super-rich pay the price for the economic crisis.

3. For health & safety in schools & colleges – transform the education system

Class sizes must be drastically reduced and buildings transformed and renovated to facilitate health and safety. There are grave concerns that currently education is not safe, but information on infections is being hidden. Teachers, SNAs, and college and school students have the right to work and study in a safe environment and should exert democratic control over health and safety. If they deem it necessary, schools and colleges must be shut down until all concerns are addressed. Support the planned industrial action by ASTI in the South and UCU in the North; other teachers' unions must follow their example – for united strike action by teachers and students.

School or college students should also strike if they have serious concerns over health and safety, and coordinate actions with other students – unity is strength. Use this opportunity to abolish the stressful and outdated testing systems – 11 plus transfer tests in the North and the Leaving Cert system in the South once and for all. It was cancelled for 2020; proper planning and resourcing can make the misery of the Leaving Cert system history. Invest in third-level education and expand places for all who want to go on to college or university.

4. Support women at the coalface

Emergency action to deal with the rise of gender violence: urgent massive investment in refuges, shelters and all services supporting those experiencing gender-based violence. There must be appropriate accommodation immediately available to everyone who leaves their home due to abuse. Funding must be allocated for training and education programmes that raise awareness of gender violence and challenge backward attitudes in schools, college, workplaces and throughout society.

The state must invest to develop a free, public childcare service for all, based in communities and workplaces. It is unacceptable, particularly in the context of this ongoing Covid crisis, for people in receipt of the

One-Parent Family Payment to be harassed by the state – furthermore, this payment must be increased to €350, in line with the PUP. In the North, child benefit and universal credit payments must be increased to match the reality of the cost of living. Likewise, all unnecessary restrictions placed on those requesting an abortion, including the superfluous second GP consultation, must be scrapped, and where necessary, hospitals and GP surgeries should be mandated to provide a service locally. Abortion is a medical procedure and should not be restricted by legislation, but rather should be governed by medical guidelines.

5. Housing and Covid-19

Slash and freeze rents to levels that are affordable. Keep the ban on evictions in place. Reinstate the moratorium on mortgage repayments, if requested and without interest being applied. The model of co-living will only spread the virus -- it must be opposed. For the immediate abolition of Direct Provision. For proper and culturally appropriate accommodation for Travellers as well as other supports for the Travelling community in the context of the Covid-19 crisis.

Overcrowded housing conditions and homelessness are fuelling the Covid-19 crisis. This overcrowding crisis is a condemnation of the wilful refusal to build social and affordable homes by successive governments. That now needs to end. We need a major programme to build public homes on public lands to rent or to buy for all those who need them.

6. Avert the poverty trap

Defend the living standards of workers and the unemployed in this crisis. For a universal and comprehensive sick pay system. All unemployed people must be given the €350 Covid payment at a minimum. Workers, backed by the trade union movement, should resist all attacks on their pay and conditions. For a €15/h minimum wage (or £12/h in the North) with no exemptions. For a standard four day/30 hour working week with no loss of pay.

7. For a free, universal public health service

We are currently paying the price for the gross underfunding of our health service. For immediate investment to recruit nurses, doctors and other staff, necessary beds and ICU capacity, equipment to tackle an upsurge in Covid cases, and to maintain non-Covid health services. For the provision of 24-hour and free counselling services to tackle the mental health crisis.

This unjust, two-tier health service must go – nationalise the private hospitals with no compensation. Integrate them into a fully resourced national public health service that is free at the point of use, with staff and representatives of the broader community at the heart of management. The health services and health workers in the North and in the South, including those involved with testing and tracing, should fully cooperate and have an integrated system to deal with the pandemic. Bring big pharma into public ownership – provide drugs and vaccines for need not profit. Nationalise all privately owned nursing homes.

8. Tax big business and the rich – no mass redundancies

End Ireland's status as a tax haven for multinational corporations. Introduce an emergency Covid Wealth Tax, abolish the tax loopholes for big business and the wealthy, and double corporation tax to fund public services and maintain incomes. State assistance and cheap credit from a public, non-profit banking system should be provided to small businesses on condition that there is a maintenance of jobs, wages and conditions, as well as mandatory recognition of trade unions. Job-shedding companies should be required to open their books for scrutiny by their workers. Companies that announce redundancies should be brought into democratic public ownership, with workers at the heart of management.

9. No future of mass unemployment for young people

A new generation must not be faced with a future of mass unemployment. We need real training programmes and apprenticeships for young people, with decent pay and conditions. No to another free labour scheme like Jobbridge. The state must invest the wealth of society to provide skills, education, and jobs.

Mobilise and utilise the capabilities of all workers that have been made unemployed by this crisis. No reliance on the private sector to solve this crisis. For an industrial policy based on state investment in socially useful infrastructural projects such as state-run schools, hospitals, care homes and creches, as well as a viable and environmentally sustainable manufacturing base. Invest in green jobs and renewable energy – for a zero carbon economy by 2030.

10. Covid and the case for socialist change

Seize the wealth and resources of big business and the super-rich and bring them into the democratic public ownership of the working class, where the resources are organised by and for the majority in society. On the basis of an economy that is democratically planned, we can ensure that these resources are invested to meet the challenges of this and other potential pandemics, as well as climate change – all while protecting and raising the living standards of the vast majority.

Malcolm X, the revolutionary civil rights leader, said "we are not out-numbered, we are out-organised". There are 3 million workers in Ireland and 800,000 members of the ICTU. Combining with a movement of young people, this is an extremely powerful force. Covid-19 has also magnified the oppression of women and people of colour in capitalist society. We need a multi-gendered, multi-racial, working-class socialist feminist movement to end the rule of capitalism.

Joining with a revolutionary struggle of the working-class and oppressed globally, we can build a democratic and sustainable socialist world. For such a movement to win, we need a party committed to socialist change and this is what the Socialist Party is striving to build.■

Statement by Socialist Alternative
(Sister organisation of the Socialist Party in the USA)

TRUMP'S OUT

SOCIALIST ANALYSIS & NEXT STEPS FOR STRUGGLE

The celebrations have begun. Trump has clearly lost, and he will be out of the White House early next year. A massive sigh of relief is being exhaled by tens of millions of people across the country and hundreds of millions across the world. Yet we should recognize that the pandemic, climate change, economic crisis, and institutional racism won't go away when Trump leaves office. Biden himself said that he doesn't want fundamental change, and he will "reach across the aisle" to right-wing Republicans. We'll still need determined mass movements to win gains for working people, to fight against the far right, and to challenge the disastrous rule of the billionaire class.

Of course, Trump continues to claim that the results are fraudulent and that the election is being stolen. We can't exclude that sections of his supporters will mobilize to oppose him leaving office. If Trump tries to stay, there should be mass mobilizations to drive him out.

But it's also pretty clear that the ruling class does not want further chaos. The media and even sections of the Republican establishment have been at pains to stress that capitalist democracy is "functioning." Even the courts, which Trump hoped would intervene to stop the counting or refuse to count sections of the mail-in ballots have so far refused to do so. Recounts in several states are also unlikely to change the outcome.

Why was it so close?

The pollsters and pundits were wrong again, and there was no Biden blowout or "blue wave" taking a majority in the Senate. The Democrats have also lost a number of seats in the House and there are also losses at the state level. That being said there were some progressive victories in the House with the election of Cori Bush and Jamaal Bowman who will now join "The Squad" alongside Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Rashida Tlaib, and others.

In the leadup to the election, voter suppression, a Republican specialty, was amped up in the context of the pandemic. On top of this, the electoral college is one of the most undemocratic institutions (along with the Supreme Court) in a U.S. political system designed to

mask the rule of the billionaire class. Voter suppression did have an effect but actually all of Trump's constant talk about fraud and the undermining of the Postal Service only made ordinary people more determined to come out and vote. This led to the truly remarkable turnout, the highest percentage of registered voters since 1908.

The liberal pundits assumed that this massive turnout would heavily favor the Democrats. But the outcome was far from decisive. In fact, Trump could have easily been defeated in a landslide, especially if Bernie Sanders had been the nominee. Trump has one of the lowest approval ratings of any incumbent Presidential candidate ever, and the Democrats waged a weak campaign against him with a horribly uninspiring corporate candidate.

In a FoxNews exit poll, 72% of voters said they're in favor of a government-run health-care program. In Florida, where Trump won, 61% of people voted for a ballot measure for a state-wide $15 an hour minimum wage. This shows that a clear appeal to working-class voters, which Bernie could have done effectively, would have likely defeated Trump in a landslide.

Trump has criminally mishandled the COVID-19 pandemic – leading to hundreds of thousands of U.S. deaths – overseen mass unemployment and a further slide into poverty for millions of Americans, and yet the Democrats did all they could to "snatch defeat from the jaws of victory."

They put up an embarrassing candidate who was kept out of the public eye, didn't have a "ground game" for their campaign in key swing states, refused to adopt wildly popular policies like Medicare for All and taxing the rich, and didn't conduct a mass voter registration campaign to win over millions of new voters who despise Trump. Yet the Democrats' biggest failings weren't just "mistakes" but instead due to their fundamental nature as a pro-corporate party controlled by billionaire backers.

Exit polling shows that voters who saw the pandemic as the key issue voted for Biden by an 82% margin while those who saw the economy as the key issue voted for Trump by an equally huge margin. What these numbers reflect is that the Democratic Party in this election had literally nothing to say to working people or even large sections of the middle class who are extremely afraid of the future or are already struggling with debt, loss of jobs, etc. For many, Trump's message of "open the economy" resonated. It is no exaggeration to say that without the pandemic and Trump's criminal mishandling of it – or if he had been a bit more competent – he would have easily defeated Biden.

Democrats' hostility to progressive politics

In the final days of the campaign, Biden made clear he would never ban fracking, would never cut police funding, and would accept yet another right-wing addition to the Supreme Court. He (again!) said that cops should shoot suspects "in the leg" as his solution to racist police murders, and he refused to support Medicare for All as the election took place at the height of the pandemic. It comes as no surprise that an Axios poll showed that over 58% of Democratic voters were motivated to cast their ballots "against Trump" rather than "for Biden."

All this left space for Trump to portray himself as an "outsider" despite being in the White House! Trump criticized Biden from the "left" for his racist 1994 Crime Bill, as well as his support for ongoing wars and pro-corporate trade deals. This was combined with a vicious cocktail of Trump's racism, sexism, authoritarianism, appeals to the far right, conspiracy theories, and "law and order" rhetoric which definitely resonates with a section of conservative white voters.

In his statement to the media on November 4, Trump went as far as to say that "Democrats are the party of the big donors, the big media, the big tech, it seems. And Republicans have become the party of the American worker, and that's what's happened." Of course for a billionaire who filled his cabinet with other super rich people to say this is absurd. In fact, voters who earn less than $100,000/year voted for Biden over

Rally in Washington DC to oppose Trump's attempt to deny the result

'Black & Brown Votes Matter' campaign activists celebrate the election result

Trump by a significant margin. But the fact that this resonates at all tells us everything we need to know about the Democratic establishment.

The Democratic Party leadership fought harder and more effectively against Bernie in the primary than they did against Trump in the general election. Yet the liberal pundits will seek to play a "blame game," claiming that this situation is due to people who didn't vote (especially people of color), independent voters, racist ideas in the white working class (which is a real factor that we get into below), or Democrats being associated with the "radical left." Instead, the Democratic Party leadership needs to look in the mirror to see who gave Trump the opening to try to steal this election. In addition, Sanders himself shouldn't have capitulated to Biden, and he shouldn't have self-censored his previous criticisms of the Democratic Party. This helped give room for Trump to appear as the anti-establishment candidate.

The blame game

Liberal pundits and some activists on the left are downplaying the uninspiring, pro-corporate nature of the Biden campaign and instead adopting a reductionist approach. They say that Trump's vote increasing from 2016 is due only to racism in the white working class. Of course, the U.S. is a deeply racist society, and the far right has grown and will continue to be a threat that socialists and the labor movement need to fight against.

However, this alone does not explain the gains Trump made in this election and it'd be a very serious error to write off his voters as simply a block of racist, white voters. In fact the one section of the population where his percentage support decreased was among non college educated white voters. This doesn't change the fact that two thirds of this demographic supported Trump but it shows that it's far from monolithic.

Trump's support grew among Black and Latino voters, long taken-for-granted Democratic voting blocs. In fact he won the highest vote among people of color of any Republican presidential candidate in 60 years! There are a number of factors at work here but an important element in why a section of Black and Latino working class voters chose Trump is again because of the economy and the complete failure of the Democrats to speak to the crisis facing working people right now.

From the point of view of capitalist organs like the New York Times, there's a benefit to reducing this election to race because it undercuts people's faith in the potential for a multiracial working class solidarity and distracts from the failings of the Democrats. While they don't say so openly, they are actively opposed to the emergence of a multiracial mass movement centered on the working class that would take on the rule of the billionaire class whom they defend. Corporate identity politics is a cover for the defense of capitalist rule.

Again there's no denying that Trump benefited in the

sections of American society with the most backward ideas about race by using "law and order" rhetoric.

The need for genuine working class unity in the face of racism is crucial. But the question of how we actually achieve this unity in such an extremely polarized society is complex. We believe it is possible on the basis of a fighting program that includes both demands that improve the lives of working people as a whole along with a clear stand for black liberation and immigrant rights.

The massive multiracial uprising this summer – and the wide support for the uprising in society – in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd precisely showed the potential for a united fight against racism and economic inequality. But the lack of leadership, organization and a clear strategy gave the ruling class the opportunity to confuse issues like the call to "defund the police." It also gave Trump and the far right an opening to push back exploiting people's fears of spreading chaos. The backlash against the uprising (especially in rural areas) is real but should not be exaggerated.

"Biden will be overseeing one of the deepest crises in the history of U.S. capitalism. He will aim to serve the interests of the billionaire class, just as he has throughout his entire political career. This will lead millions to search for an alternative to the Democratic Party leadership and mainstream politics in general."

What will a Biden presidency look like?

It is clear that a Biden/Harris administration will solve none of the key problems that face working people. It is predictable that they will hide behind the potential Republican control of the Senate as an excuse for why change can't be delivered. Even during the campaign when the Democrats were trying to win control of the Senate, Biden said that he'll "work with Republicans," the perennial excuse for agreeing to massive attacks on working people's interests. There's a better chance that you'll see rich Republicans in Biden's cabinet than Bernie Sanders.

From the start this will be a weak administration overseeing the deep crisis of the pandemic and economic devastation. The Federal Reserve and capitalist economists are almost unanimous that there needs to be a lot more fiscal stimulus to prevent an even bigger slump. But while the $600 top-up to unemployment benefits needs to be urgently restored, this is not at all the same as the lasting change we need like the Green New Deal and Medicare for All. Unfortunately the Democratic leadership are very clear that they are opposed to both of these programs which are overwhelmingly popular with ordinary people.

A final victory

We urgently need to build a mass movement to fight for an emergency stimulus plan for working people, a socialist Green New Deal, community control of the police, Medicare for All, and much more. We can't depend on corporate-controlled Democrats to fundamentally change the situation, and Biden has said over and over that he won't put forward the policies that we so desperately need.

Biden will be overseeing one of the deepest crises in the history of U.S. capitalism. He will aim to serve the interests of the billionaire class, just as he has throughout his entire political career. This will lead millions to search for an alternative to the Democratic Party leadership and mainstream politics in general.

In this context, the far right could grow even more under a Biden presidency. In order to effectively fight against right-wing racists, we need a program that can mobilize working people into action. We can't limit our demands to what is acceptable to the Democratic Party leadership and their billionaire backers. Instead, we need to fight for the needs of billions of people worldwide rather than the billionaires. This type of struggle would inevitably conflict with the capitalist system itself.

This election shows that the Democrats can't decisively defeat the far right. Socialist Alternative thinks we need a new party based on the working class. We'd advocate that this new party stands for seizing the wealth of the top corporations and putting them under democratic workers' control and management. Trump is the symptom. Capitalism is the disease. Socialism is the cure.■

Hundreds of Trump supporters — some armed — gathered in Pennsylvania to show their anger at Biden being declared winner

THE ECONOMIC & SOCIAL CRISIS OF AMERICAN CAPITALISM

Note: This is an excerpt from a longer article published by the Socialist Party just prior to the US Presidential election. To read the full article, go to: www.socialistparty.ie

By Harper Cleves

2020 has been a year characterised by an extreme crisis of capitalism, seen most clearly through the deadly COVID-19 pandemic and the global recession. In a year marked by upheaval, this US presidential election seems out of step; featuring a standoff between one of the least popular modern US presidents Donald Trump and yet another lacklustre Democratic Party candidate, Joe Biden. The eventual results of this election will inevitably have repercussions on consciousness and political activity globally, as we saw this summer with the black lives matter protests. As such, it is essential that we have a clear understanding of the different dynamics at play so we can prepare for the struggles that emerge in the future.

COVID-19 and the Greater Depression

Before analysing the details of the election itself, it is important to situate this presidential race in its context. Even before COVID-19, the global economy was teetering on the brink of disaster, reflecting the crisis-ridden nature of capitalism. The constant competitive thrust of the market led to years of neoliberal attacks on social protections, an overreliance on debt and increasing protectionist policies flowing from the US-China trade war. COVID-19 and the subsequent closing of economies worldwide tipped the scales and triggered a recession that was already impending.

The impact of this recession on the American economy and the American working class in particular has been substantial. Following the end of the second quarter of the year (May – June) the average rate of decline in GDP at that stage was 31.7% with predictions for the total decline of the year ranging from a 46% decline in real (inflation adjusted) GDP to a more conservative 36% decline.

With the third quarter nearly ending, and the economy continuing to open up, the rate of decline has dropped moderately to 31.4% indicating a certain amount of recovery, which is predicted to continue to a certain extent as more businesses open up and more people are able to return to work. Trump and his supporters often point to the 10.6 million jobs which have been created since the beginning of May as further evidence of recovery, and Trump's leadership and decision making skills over the course of a pandemic.

Of course, these statistics do not tell the whole story. Some economists are describing the current recovery in the US economy as K shaped; meaning the people in the higher income brackets (the capitalist class and upper middle class) are faring better financially than they did before the pandemic while the vast majority of Americans are treading water, if not already drowning. While official unemployment figures have dropped as the economy has opened up, these numbers do not account for the 20.5 million workers who want to work but cannot, the 7.5 million in part time work or the 1.4 million who file for unemployment benefits each week. An estimated 27% of American adults did not pay their rent or mortgages for the month of July. For Black Americans 31% of renters were unable to pay their rent last month compared to 28% for Latinos and 14% for white renters, demonstrating the racialised legacy of generational wealth in the US. Meanwhile US billionaires have increased their wealth by 29% over the pandemic, accumulating roughly $845 billion since the beginning of the lockdown.

These figures alone demonstrate the tremendous precarity of most working class people living in the United States as well as the disgusting wealth inequality that has been exacerbated by this crisis. And yet none of these figures take into account the huge scale of tragedy as a result of Trump's reckless approach to pandemic precautions. At the time of writing, 220,000 Americans have died as a result of COVID-19 and 7.75 million have contracted the disease. This number is projected to double to 410,000 before the year ends; a number which exceeds the amount of Americans killed during World War II.

Climate crisis

On top of the COVID-19 crisis and the recession the US is also being hit by the climate crisis which for many people calls into question the very existence of humanity. This year has seen some of the hottest heat waves, historic fires and one of the most active hurricane seasons on record. Millions have been evacuated and hundreds of thousands have lost their homes to raging wildfires and flooding. In the middle of a pandemic characterized by respiratory complications, millions in the Western United States have been forced in doors due to dangerous air quality.

This occurs on the back of a wave of global youth protests in 2018 and 2019 on the issue of climate and widespread popularity for system change and not climate change and it has not gone unnoticed for many young people that the wildly popular green new deal

championed by Bernie Sanders and AOC has not been adopted by either presidential candidate.

Workers at a rally outside McDonald's in Detroit on 20 July, the day when workers staged demonstrations around the country to protest economic inequality and systemic racism.

Black Lives Matter

This backdrop of extreme precarity for working class Americans, and especially for people of colour living in the United States set the stage for the explosive black lives matter protests that re emerged in June of this year. According to the Center for Disease Control Black people living in the United States are 2.6 times more likely than white Americans to contract COVID-19, are 4.7 times more likely to be hospitalized as a result of the disease and are 2.1 times more likely to die. In a study conducted early in the year, black teenagers were asked to answer specific questions about how often they experience different forms of overt and subtle racism on a fortnightly basis. Those surveyed experienced an average of five comments of a charged racial nature a day. All of these factors, including previously cited statistics on housing precarity and unemployment combined with a legacy of racist policing to create an explosive situation following the racist police murder of George Floyd.

The support for these protests, while it has decreased 67% to 55% since June remains significant. Over the course of June, support for the black lives matter movement increased by 26 points, as much as it had in the entire two years previous and slogans around defunding the police became popularised with an average of 31% of Americans showing some support for the idea. Much of this support was likely consolidated following the National Guard presence in various protesting cities and the use of unmarked government vans to round up protesters throughout the summer protests.

Workers' struggles

All of this unrest has also found it's expression in worker struggle, including important examples of struggle by unorganised and precarious workers. Since the beginning of March, a Labor News website called PayDay Report has identified over 1,100 wildcat actions and 260 official strikes between 1 March and 31 May, and these numbers are expected to be underreported. Grocery workers, and Amazon warehouse workers took actions against workplace safety in the context of dangerous pandemic conditions. Bus drivers in New York and Minneapolis refused to transport Black Lives Matter protesters on behalf of police.

The US Postal Service faces attack by the Trump Administration and the American Federation of Teachers threatened to strike over unsafe school reopenings. This follows recent militancy demonstrated by teachers in places ranging from Los Angeles to West Virginia. In the past couple of years women workers in places ranging from McDonald's to Google put the issue of sexual misconduct and assault at the center of workplace issues through walkouts.

Polarised consciousness

A tremendous amount of potential exists for socialists looking to organise in this period. In the context of a Bernie Sanders primary race, 70% of millennials said they would vote for a socialist for president. 22% of Millennials also said that the country would be better if private property was abolished. Furthermore, in a recent Pew Research poll 65% of Americans say the rich are rich because of 'advantages in life' rather than inherent skill, compared to 42% in 2018. Between pandemic inequality, climate change, and racist police brutality, more and more people are drawing systemic conclusions and looking for alternatives. More and more people are looking for ways to fight back. The potential for socialists to organise in this context is tremendous.

Of course, another aspect of American consciousness is the right wing sentiment that characterizes Trump's base, and which at this moment in time seems to coalesce around the rhetoric of conspiracy theories including anti-mask ideas and Q-anon. Generally, American consciousness during this period of time is moving to the left, with young people, women, and people of colour leading the way. However, at the same time the right wing core is being consolidated and moving further to the right, reflecting a process of polarisation taking. This is the context in which the elections in November are taking place.■

THE ROOTS & REALITIES OF RACISM IN IRISH SOCIETY

Mass protests of young and working-class people spread across the US over the summer demanding "Justice For George Floyd!". Led by black youth, the multi-racial movement spread across all states and forced authorities to charge the police officers involved in the racist murder. But these protests went further, putting the whole system on trial and demanding that #BlackLivesMatter. MYRIAM POIZAT & MANUS LENIHAN look at the movement that's developed in Ireland and the realities of racism being highlighted.

The protests drew solidarity from across the world. In Ireland, 5,000 marched in Dublin, and there were socially distanced – but angry and determined – protests in Cork, Galway, Limerick, Dingle, Monaghan, Derry and Belfast. A feature of these events was black youth taking to the streets like never before to express their outrage at the racist state murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others, but also the racism experienced by people of colour here.

Opposition to racism in Ireland

The issue of racism and racist oppression in capitalist Ireland has been kept quiet for a long time. The BLM movement has given confidence to young and working-class people of colour and oppressed groups to speak up on the untold and unchallenged racism in this country towards people of colour, refugees, migrants and Travellers. This horrendous state racism is imposed by a system which perpetuates Direct Provision, deportations and a general lack of investment in public services for all. This, in turn, creates an environment for racism to be stoked up in society in the form of harassment and abuse in the streets, schools and workplaces.

Last September, a report conducted by the Fundamental Right Agency found that 17% of those who are people of colour suffered racism in their workplace because of their background, a third of those suffered surveyed faced discrimination because of their skin colour and that black people are three times more likely to experience discrimination in access to public services.

"Progressive" establishment unmasked

In the South in recent years, with marriage equality passed and the 8th Amendment repealed, the Irish ruling class have milked the opportunity to present themselves as modern, liberal and progressive. Yet, when the protests around BLM emerged, the government tried to break them down by framing the protests as unsafe during the pandemic. However, young and working-class people of colour especially, who finally got a space to voice their real life experiences, were not ready to be silenced and were ready to defy the government.

To defend his popularity, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar tweeted a response to the killing of George Floyd that superficially made the right noises. But it was a hollow and meaningless gesture, particularly given his own record on racism. In 2008, Varadkar proposed that un-

employed migrants should be paid to leave the country.[1] This was a profound insult and attack, scapegoating people from migrant backgrounds for the economic crisis, just to grab headlines and boost his own career.

The vile racism of the far right is also a real danger. Recently, far right groups have used opposition to lockdowns and the wearing of masks to mobilise street protests, often accompanied by street violence. Some of these protests attracted thousands, reflecting the impact of conspiracy theories about the pandemic on a disaffected layer who are not part of the organised far right. This underlines that we now have a more emboldened and organised far right in Ireland. At the same time, it's important to note that their arguments about the pandemic are rejected by a clear majority and that the desire for real change in the recent general election did not benefit these forces. Instead it reflected, albeit in an inchoate manner, a desire for left-wing change on the part of working-class people, particularly working-class youth. Nonetheless, the far right threat must be taken seriously and we must be prepared to build opposition to these forces and to combat them with socialist and class ideas which expose their hollow anti-establishment rhetoric.

A racist state and establishment

The Irish state has a long history of racist oppression. Just this year, the segregation, profiling and identity theft of non-white children in mother and baby homes came to light. Rosemary Adasar, a person of colour and a survivor of this racist abuse, aptly pointed out how the state and the Catholic Church fostered racist stereotypes and prejudices:

> "If you think about it, where would Irish people get that level of racism? They got the racism from the Roman Catholic Church, and their missionaries and their penny for the bloody black babies and images of savagery and fear."[2]

The Catholic Church, alongside other Christian churches, both in Ireland and globally, helped promote the imperialist and racist idea of "the white man's burden" and of the supposed need to bring "Christian civilisation" to the "dark continents" of Africa and Asia. This was a historic justification for colonialism and imperialism. Hence the racist and paternalistic idea of supposedly helping the "black babies" referenced by Adasar. Even though Ireland was historically a country colonised by imperialism, the political representatives of the emerging Catholic capitalist and big farmer class were largely supporters of the British Empire, as long as they gained limited self-government within it. In doing so, they invariably embraced the racist ideology of white supremacy that was part and parcel of imperialism.

Travellers are an ethnic group, only recognised as such by the state in 2015, who have experienced racism at the hands of the southern Irish state. Travellers were institutionalised in mother and baby homes at a disproportionately high rate, were barred from academic subjects in schools and were the victims of racist abuse by those in authority. In the early 1960s, the Irish government – in a report written in consultation with big farmers, business interests and the Church – disgracefully talked of finding a "final solution" to the "itinerant problem". The report went on to inform the thinking of the state in the decades to come, the strategy of which was to isolate Travellers on the edges of towns and cities in substandard accommodation.[3]

Despite achieving 'ethnic status', the Traveller community is still discriminated against in myriad ways

All the main establishment parties have engaged in racist comments in recent history, albeit in a more subtle form, in order to garner votes in elections. A notable example of this was Josepha Madigan, currently Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion of all things, whose 2014 local election leaflet said that spending on Traveller accommodation was "a waste of valuable resources". Today, councils up and down the country leave Traveller accommodation funding unspent year after year.

Racist practices are routinely carried out by the state apparatus in the South, such as deporting those fleeing poverty and persecution. Last year, there was a 45% increase in deportations. In 2004, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael both supported the 27th amendment to the constitution, denying citizenship to children of migrants born in Ireland. Those in power still defend the brutal Direct Provision system. Thousands of people are forced to live locked out of society for years – in overcrowded facilities on less than €20 a week; with no driving allowed; restrictions on work and study; no cooking facilities and therefore no access to the food they used to eat; and without enough respect paid to cultural dietary restrictions, such as Muslims not eating pork. The cost of Direct Provision last year was likely over €120 million – money directly into the pockets of private contractors who cut corners with food and facilities.

5,000 people joined the march for #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd in Dublin in June

Racism in the education system

Three thousand people have signed a petition online calling for more books by people of colour to be added to the school curriculum, and more petitions in support of including Black History in our education system are popping up. There is a lack of real education and awareness around racism in schools. For example, there is little to nothing about Traveller culture or history. This is unsurprising, as the vast majority of schools are run on a conservative Catholic ethos, which has been strongly linked with the Irish state.

While there are countless inspiring stories of solidarity – staff and students taking initiatives against racism or standing together against deportations – there is a lot of racist abuse and discrimination behind closed doors. Examples which are bubbling to the surface online now include some teachers and management giving out to black students, using language like "ghetto," "slum," "gang," "monkeys", and racial profiling being used to stream classes.

This discrimination comes not just from individuals who have bad attitudes. It has come from school management; from Gardaí in the street; from bosses in the workplace.

Racism and capitalism

Why are the establishment so embedded in this injustice? The answer is that racism and capitalism go hand-in-hand. The recent BLM protests have correctly turned their attention to the legacy of slavery and colonialism, and the racism that was used to justify this. Both of these crimes were essential to the development of capitalism and its racist legacy remains deeply entrenched within the society it has built.

Under capitalism, a small number of people, most of them white and male, own and control the resources, investing only for profit. Amazon boss Jeff Bezos has a net worth of $180 billion, in stark contrast to the precarious and low-paid jobs disproportionately done by people of colour in the US – including Amazon's own predominantly black, Latinx and Asian labour force.[4]

The powerful and wealthy can get away with discriminating, and they have every incentive to do so. Fostering racist division and prejudices only helps maintain their class rule. Migrant women are often frontline workers in healthcare, hospitality and retail, on low pay and precarious conditions. The vulnerability of these workers equals more profits for the huge agencies that employ them. Many landlords refuse to rent to migrants or people of colour. When young people look for jobs, the most damaging discrimination can happen without a single word being spoken: "[Racism is] knowing we could get skipped over when employers are looking at CVs because of our last name."[5] Bosses and landlords can, out of sheer bigotry, refuse to deal with people of colour. Then those who have jobs or housing often feel lucky and keep their heads down, meaning rent, conditions or pay get even worse.

Fight racism with solidarity

There are countless examples of mass struggle by oppressed people and interracial solidarity pushing back and challenging racist discrimination, starting with what is happening now in Ireland, where racism is finally being spoken of, where powerful statements have been made around the need to challenge state racism and the reality of racism in our schools, streets and workplaces. It is the start of a conversation and people's attitudes being challenged, rallying alongside young and working-class people of colour across the country.

In the current protests in the US, bus drivers have refused to transport cops or arrested protestors. This is

an example of how socialists and trade unionists can build vital solidarity with oppressed people fighting racism. Three examples from the south of Ireland further illustrate this point.

Dunnes Stores workers in Dublin went on strike in 1984, refusing to handle South African goods as a protest against apartheid. These 11 workers were met with condescending sneers from the media, then brutal violence and vile racist abuse from the Gardaí. But they stood firm on the picket lines and won the dispute with the aid of socialists such as Nimrod Sejake, a political exile from South Africa and member of the Militant (forerunner of the Socialist Party)..

In 2005, a dramatic strike unfolded in Ireland. Turkish construction workers employed by a corporation called Gama were on criminal pay and conditions, sleeping in barracks on-site, working 80 to 90 hours a week, and being paid €2.30 an hour. Aided by the Socialist Party, the Gama workers went on strike and, against the odds, won. This was a victory for all workers in Ireland because an attempt to undermine pay was defeated. The active and latent support from Irish working-class people was crucial to winning this strike and putting pressure on the company and the state to concede to the workers' demands. This support was reciprocated in 2017, where the favour was returned in a moving gesture of solidarity: the former Gama strikers donated the remainder of their strike fund to the Jobstown Not Guilty campaign.

The Debenhams workers too, having been shafted by their employer and left to fight for their entitlements showed incredible solidarity with their colleagues in Bangladesh who were also shafted by the same company, including by fundraising €16,000.

Clearly, people of all class backgrounds, including workers, can fall prey to racist ideas. But workers as a social class have a vested interest in fighting racism. Regardless of background, we live in the same areas, we use the same public services, we share the same workplaces, schools, colleges and trade unions. A majority in society, those who work by hand or by brain, are exploited in this system by a small circle of big business interests. This system employs every kind of prejudice and bigotry to profit and to divide workers – racism, but also sexism, LGBTQI+ phobia, and many other forms of oppression. The lived experience of working-class people being exploited in the name of profit, and fighting back, forges solidarity and can overcome prejudice.

In the last five years in Ireland, we witnessed the victories for marriage equality and repeal of the 8th amendment. The winning of these gains did not come as a result of the generosity of the capitalist establishment. Ultimately, they were driven by grassroots movements of the working-class and young people for progressive change and to affirm the rights of LGBTQI+ people and women. These events are inspiring examples of how a movement of solidarity against oppression can be built, encompassing working-class people from all backgrounds.

"The victories for marriage equality and repeal of the 8th... driven by grassroots movements of the working-class and young people for progressive change and to affirm the rights of LGBTQI+ people and women... are inspiring examples of how a movement of solidarity against oppression can be built"

Radical socialist change

Black Panther leader Fred Hampton said:

> "We don't think you fight fire with fire best ; we think you fight fire with water best. We're going to fight racism not with racism, but we're going to fight with solidarity. We say we're not going to fight capitalism with black capitalism, but we're going to fight it with socialism [...] with all of us people getting together and having an international proletarian revolution."

Socialism means taking the major industries and resources out of the hands of a handful of rich people and putting them under public control, run by elected representatives of workers of all races, religions and nationalities. This would obviously not solve racism in the short term. But investing on the basis of need and democratic decisions, instead of private profit, would allow us to begin correcting the historic crimes against people of colour and undermine the social roots of racial prejudice.

The BLM protests have exposed the ugly face of capitalism, how it affects working-class people of colour far more brutally. With the murders of George Floyd and others, the outrage against racist state violence directed at people of colour, youth and workers has again exploded to the surface. The fight-back has risen to a new level, demanding an end not just to murderous oppression, but all injustices and inequalities.

These protests have shaken the US and the world. The sustained and global nature of the movement, the blows it has struck against the prestige of the armed forces of US capitalism, are truly remarkable. This shows that it is possible to build a mass movement of the youth, the oppressed and the working class to challenge capitalism, to pose a socialist alternative and to end all forms of inequality and oppression.■

Notes

1 www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/fg-pay-jobless-migrants-to-leave-71589.html ● **2** Maeve Sheehan, 23 Feb 2020, 'They got racism from the Catholic Church, the missionaries and their penny for the bloody black babies', www.independent.ie ● **3** Oisín Kelly, '#TravellerLivesMatter: The fight against racism & injustice', *Socialist Alternative*, Issue 3, Spring 2017 ● **4** www.aboutamazon.com/workplace/diversity-inclusion ● **5** 'Aine Kenny, 4 Jun 200, 'Growing up black in Ireland', www.irishexaminer.com

As we go to press the struggle by the Debenhams workers for the honouring of the redundancy agreement their union Mandate reached with the employer in 2016 has passed its seventh month, and has long since earned its place in the lore of this country's labour history, writes MICHAEL O'BRIEN.[1]

The court injunction granted to the liquidator KPMG against the effective pickets workers have mounted has since been defied, with a number or workers and activists prepared to risk summonses for contempt of court and jailing.

While the demands of the workers for four weeks pay per year's service remain unmet they have decisively forced onto the political agenda the treatment of workers in liquidation scenarios. While nothing is guaranteed the political terrain is now more favourable than previously for forcing within the lifetime of this government legislative changes that would improve the standing of workers in the hierarchy of creditors but also to give enhanced redundancy agreements full legal force so that they can be funded from liquidated assets in future similar cases.

The fact that a review on the treatment of workers in liquidation situations was even mentioned in a programme for government is itself a testament to the pressure that the Debenhams workers' struggle has placed on this government and on Fianna Fáil in particular.

Action from below

How has this notoriety been achieved? In the last decade Debenhams stands out – alongside the Luas strike of 2016 and the Greyhound Recycling lockout of 2014 – as one of a handful of disputes characterised by the union leadership not having total control over the conduct of the struggle. Instead these struggles were marked by a layer of shop stewards and activists who early in the course of the dispute formed a view independent of and at odds with their trade union officials of what methods were needed to wage the fight, but also of what constituted an acceptable settlement.

An additional important feature of these struggles was a close collaboration with the radical left, particularly the Socialist Party whose consistent advocacy of a fighting strategy to any workers we encounter facing attacks on jobs, pay and conditions particularly chimed.

This approach stood in contrast to the first instinct of Mandate's leading officials when news broke of the closure of Debenhams which was not to contest the company's claim that they did not have the resources even to meet the statutory minimum entitlements for the workers.

Getting organised

The frequent Zoom meetings in the early months of the campaign, shop stewards, workers and Socialist Party

representatives, particularly Mick Barry TD and former deputy Ruth Coppinger, which in turn became a hub for organising socially distanced protests in the depth of the first lockdown, outside both the Dáil and the stores, prevented the anger of the workers at their treatment at the hands of the company from dissipating.

Once the lockdown eased laying the basis for the liquidator to grab stock again the initiative came from the workers themselves to act on the ballot that was conducted in May – where 97% voted in favour of strike action – and to mount effective pickets nationally and subsequently occupations in three of the stores. Mandate by contrast, while conducting this ballot, did not articulate a strategy to the workers of how the ballot would be acted upon.

Throughout the struggle the approach of the union leadership has been marked by a paternalism towards these overwhelmingly women workers, whose shop stewards have been left having to drive this struggle from below and disgracefully were excluded from the direct engagements with the liquidator which culminated in a rotten paltry offer of €1 million to settle the dispute in September.

It would not have been possible for this strike to be sustained had the workers not been armed with clear lines of argument that challenged the "business case" of the company and liquidator.[2] Here the knowledge among the workers themselves on the finances of the company was fully harnessed and greatly contributed to the lines of argument, that were conveyed to the media and that sympathetic TDs could bring into the Dáil to challenge the government who themselves bore responsibility for permitting this "Clerys mark 2" to occur.

Union leaders fall short

Where lies the potential shortfall of pressure that could force a decent settlement that meets the workers' demands? Principally it lies in the refusal of the official trade union movement to escalate the struggle and turn the widespread sympathy of other workers into tangible action that would exert the necessary pressure on both the government and employers as a class.

Criticism of the trade union movement leadership coming from the left is not "union bashing", as some of those on the receiving end want to portray. For all the criticisms we make, our position remains that every worker should be in a union and that on average being in a union, even one with a conservative leadership, corresponds with better pay and conditions than being non-unionised. The question is what type of trade union leadership have we got, what type do we need and what has been revealed about the trade union officialdom by the Debenhams' struggle.

This is a particularly pressing question in light of the economic crisis that has been exacerbated by Covid-19 which has been seized upon by employers, including in unionised workplaces, for a frontal attack on jobs, pay and conditions.

Fighting unions are essential

Covid has seen bosses and the government think and act "outside the box". Employers including in current and former semi states like the Dublin Airport Authority and Aer Lingus see Covid from their point of view as a game changer, providing them with an opportunity to effectively tear up pre-existing contracts.

Likewise the government, under the pressure of events in the spring, felt compelled to introduce temporary measures including income supports, taking control (at a price) of private hospital space, rent freezes and eviction bans – all measures thought to be inconceivable weeks previous. In the context of such flux it would have been entirely legitimate and opportune for the trade union movement to raise demands around public ownership of major job shedding companies including Debenhams in the weeks following the announcement of job losses there but also in light of the projected wide scale job losses across retail and other sectors.

This particular demand was uniquely emphasised by the Socialist Party and obtained a degree of support among Debenhams workers early in the struggle but was subsequently ridiculed by senior Mandate official Brian Forbes (without specifically naming the party) in an online meeting hosted by the Communist Party of Ireland on 27th August. The CPI chairperson of the meeting, Jimmy Doran, backed up this criticism as well as Brian Forbes' deriding of Ruth Coppinger's (again without naming her) justified call at the protest march of Debenhams workers on 8th August for the conducting of a ballot of the wider Mandate membership for even a half day of action to support the Debenhams workers.

Our view remains that if such a movement-wide response was warranted for the Irish Ferries workers in 2005[3] (which effectively turned into a half day unofficial work stoppage) then it most certainly is for the Debenhams workers.

KPMG has refused to engage with workers since its last offer was rejected

Union leaders: conspicuous by absence

The reality is that, besides the correct demand for income supports, the official trade union movement leadership was conspicuously un-dynamic in its initial political response to Covid, especially compared to the various employers' organisations who were clear sighted about their members' interests. ICTU[4], UNITE[5] and SIPTU[6] have each produced economic policy documents all in the same ball park of re-distributionist policies to defend jobs and incomes which by themselves are supportable. However demands around direct state investment to create jobs, public ownership and using the Covid crisis as a lever to push the agenda of workers' control of the shop floor even from a health and safety perspective was missing.

The general approach of the government of direct financial supports to businesses, designed to leave economic relations between bosses and workers unchanged post-Covid, has not been challenged by the trade union movement whose leadership largely accepts capitalism as an unchanging and unchangeable reality.

"Right2Change" unions

Trade union officialdom in Ireland is not a completely undifferentiated mass. For example historically there have been wings pro and anti the succession of social partnership deals.

A certain fissure opened up in the course of the Fine Gael/Labour coalition years when in the heat of the household and property tax struggles a number of unions – UNITE, MANDATE and the CPSU (now part of FORSA) – gave some backing to those campaigns (short of backing the boycott tactic) when the rest of the trade union movement remained silent or even antagonistic so as not to place themselves at odds with the Labour Party.

Those unions supportive of the property tax struggle together alongside the CWU and TEEU (now CONNECT) took the helm of the Right2Water campaign and subsequently Right2Change[7] which promoted a concept of a Sinn Féin led "alternative government" in the run into the 2016 general election.

This has promoted the idea that there is a distinct "left" in trade union movement officialdom, in part expressed through campaign group called the Trade Union Left Forum (TULF) which has the participation of activists and officials from the above mentioned unions and the political driving force of which comes from the Communist Party of Ireland.

A principle preoccupation of the TULF is the Industrial Relations Act 1990, which is the main piece of legislation that circumscribes how industrial disputes are conducted and makes effective picketing in many instances, including in the Debenhams struggle, illegal. That said if there is a serious and determined campaign of industrial action and the employer does not have a ready means to employ strike-breaking labour or some other means of mitigating the economic and/or political impact of the withdrawal of labour, then successful outcomes are possible despite the restrictions of the Act.

Industrial Relations Act must be defied

However if the success of the strike rests, for example as in the case of Debenhams, on preventing the movement of stock out of stores, then the 1990 Act, which at most permits workers to briefly talk with potential strike-breakers to persuade them voluntarily not to cross the picket but no more than that, is a form of legal protection for the breaking of the strike. Therefore victory in these instances rests in large measure on the preparedness of workers to defy the Act via solid pickets that prevent strike-breaking.

The call by TULF for the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act is correct but they do not support the open call for defying the Act. A posting on its website on 14 October decrying the awarding of injunction against the militant picketing of the Debenhams stores reiterates the role of the Industrial Relations Act 1990 and then contains a link to an article about the Act from the CPI's newspaper from two years earlier. The article, by Jimmy Doran, give a comprehensive account of how the Act impedes struggles but the conclusion is revealing:

> "It's time for the trade union movement to fight back against the class war being waged against us. To do this we need to tip the balance of power from capital to labour. *The first step is to repeal the 1990 act, and the equivalent anti-union legislation in the North.*"[8] [Our emphasis][8]

This implicitly excludes defiance of the Act when it is necessary to win strikes.

It is a short leap from holding this position to welcoming the rotten €1 million offer by KPMG to the settle the dispute in September which a number of political forces – including the CPI linked Connolly Youth Movement and Sinn Féin – did on social media before it became clear that the shop stewards were not only opposed to the offer but also opposed to it being balloted on.

As we go to press Jimmy Doran has written a new article[9] on the Industrial Relations Act in light of the Debenhams experience, where he paints a picture that in advance of the Act being repealed, workers are "powerless" and "dependent on the judiciary", and explicitly argues against the Act being defied! In terms of how he sees repeal coming about, he argues for a three-stage strategy of motions being passed through more individual unions for repeal, followed then by repeal being pushed through the ICTU, after which we then have a lobbying campaign for the government to legislate, at which stage workers can then be called into action! Implicit in this procedural strategy is that workers, including presumably the Debenhams workers, should obey the Act until then, and suffer years more of defeats.

The real lessons from past struggles

The analogy given in Doran's latest article, of how the ICTU was won to a position of supporting the abolition of water charges, is false to the core. The vote at the ICTU biennial conference in July 2015 was welcome,

but came at a stage when a people power struggle in the form of mass demonstrations, meter protests and a boycott were well established, and frankly, despite the vote being passed the ICTU as a body still did not enter the fray of the water charges struggle in any case.

The Socialist Party is not indifferent to the danger posed to unions being landed with legal costs by breaching the 1990 Act. However it has been shown in practice that the application or non-application of the law happens in a political context, and where a struggle or cause has popular support, this support in itself can offer protection to working class people who engage in direct actions and civil disobedience.

Many of the rights we have today have their origins in such struggles, not only in the mists of time but in the last number of years, including the already mentioned waters charges. Likewise with the open illegal distribution of the abortion pill which was decisive in shifting the political terrain. In both these diverse examples the legislative change *followed* the struggle waged to turn the bad law into an effective dead letter.

Mandate's lack of strategy and leadership has been a source of much frustration for workers

In the industrial field too we have examples militant successful pickets organised by ad hoc rank and file groups which served to win disputes while protecting the union to which the workers belonged from being legally implicated. In the 1990s for example, individual members of the Building and Allied Trades Union (BATU) formed "Builders Against the Black Economy" to execute militant pickets that operated outside the Industrial Relations Act.

Similarly, during the successful GAMA construction struggle in 2005[10] involving hundreds of Turkish and Kurdish workers who were grotesquely exploited, despite being members of SIPTU they, alongside supportive activists, formed the Turkish Workers Action Group which conducted the pickets which flagrantly breached the 1990 Act with no adverse consequences.

The official trade union movement can maintain a legal separateness from these initiatives thus not expose themselves to costs. But conversely they should not try to sabotage them as was attempted in August when the Debenhams workers put down their union placards and alongside their supporters including Socialist Party members blocked an attempted removal of stock in the Cork branch despite vociferous efforts by the Mandate official to convince the workers to allow the stock to be removed.

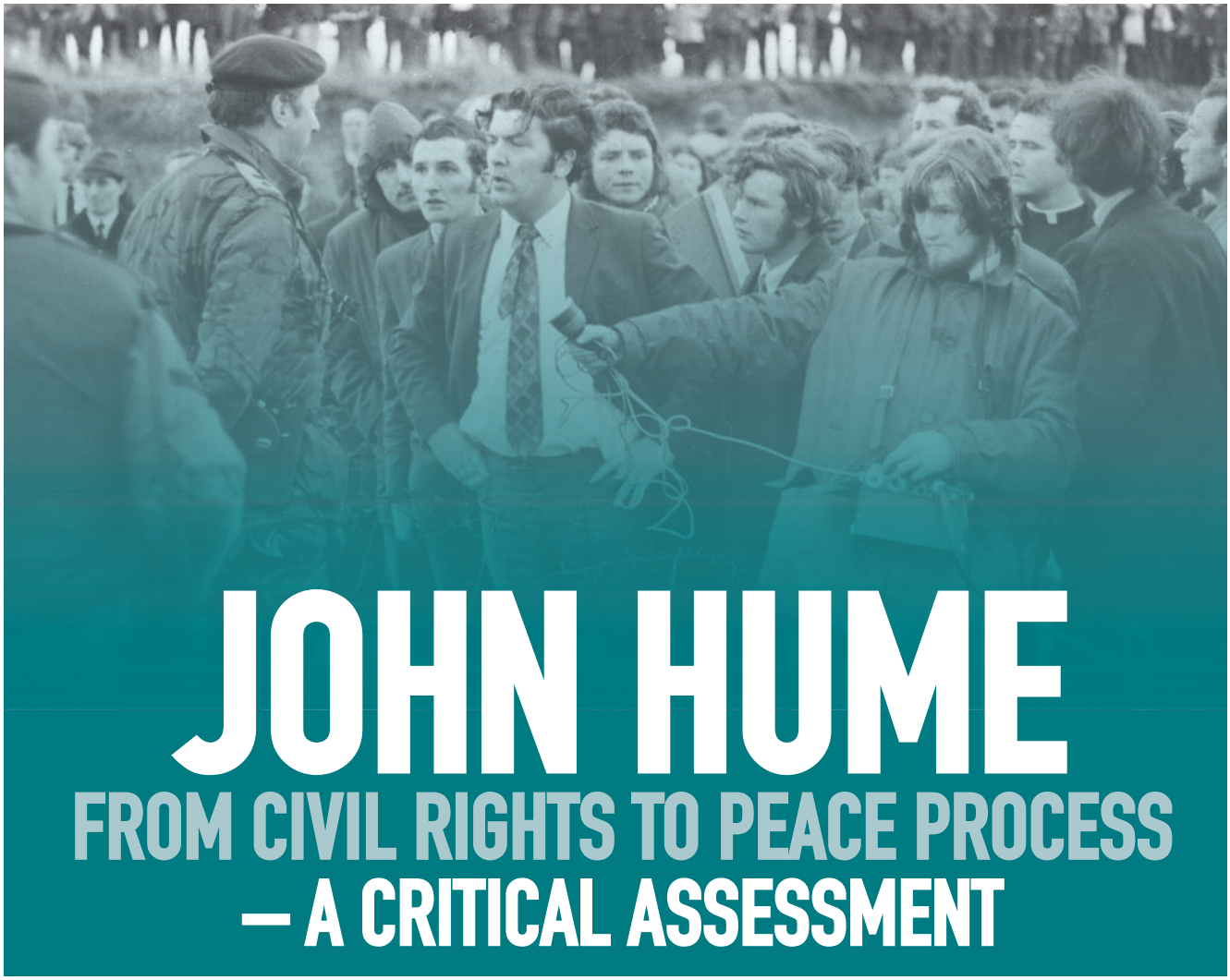
Lack of an industrial strategy

Despite the political differences between the different wings of the official trade union movement described earlier in the article, what has been revealed by the Debenhams dispute is that there is little differentiation when it comes to the absence an industrial and organising strategy for overcoming the restrictions of the 1990 Act. At best, this reflects a lack of confidence in the potential power of workers and working-class solidarity generally. It is a programme for inaction in the face of a bosses' assault and the context of the generalised crisis of capitalism.

Besides the possible legislative legacy that may arise from the Debenhams struggle of some improvements in the law governing liquidations, we need a legacy within the trade union movement itself of the hard lessons of Mandate's deficient approach being fully learned. The potential that has been demonstrated by hundreds of women workers in Debenhams was given an opportunity to bloom. But that potential is there latent amongst hundreds of thousands of workers in Ireland. It needs to find its expression in the trade union movement and not be stifled and regarded as a threat. ■

Notes

1 Ruth Coppinger, 2020, *How Sacked Debenhams Workers Fought Back*, www.socialistparty.ie. Pamphlet written early in August which gives the essential details of the dispute up to that point ● **2** For more on the finances of Debenhams see: Michael O'Brien, 14 Jul 2020, 'Stand with Debenhams workers in fight against multinational fraudsters!', www.socialistparty.ie ● **3** For a brief report at the time see: 'Thousands take part in Irish Ferries protests', 9 Dec 2005, ww.rte.ie ● **4** ICTU, *No Going Back*, www.ictu.ie ● **5** Unite the Union, Hope Not Austerity, unitetheunionireland.files.wordpress.com ● **6** SIPTU, Sept 2020, A Progressive Fiscal Framework, www.siptu.ie ● **7** For the Socialist Party's position on Right2Change see: Kevin McLoughlin, 24 Nov 2015, 'Potential for new Left movement', www.socialistparty.ie ● **8** Jimmy Doran, 8 Jul 2018, 'What is the Industrial Relations Act?', www.socialistvoice.ie ● **9** Jimmy Doran, 1 Nov 2020, 'The Industrial Relations Act must go', www.socialistvoice.ie ● **10** An excellent documentary on this strike entitled, *We Are Workers Not Slaves*, is available at: https://vimeo.com/3240952



JOHN HUME
FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO PEACE PROCESS – A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

On 3 August, John Hume, former leader of the nationalist SDLP, passed away at the age of 83. He was eulogised by establishment figures in the North – including Unionists – as well as in the South, Britain and internationally. His passing was also met with genuine expressions of respect from the mass of ordinary people in Northern Ireland, among Catholics but also in the Protestant community.

This reflects his association in popular consciousness with opposition to paramilitarism and sectarian violence; with the civil rights movement of the 1960s and '70s; and his role in the 'peace process' which led to the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. DANIEL WALDRON looks back at these historic turning points and critically assesses the roles of the forces at play, including that of John Hume and his co-thinkers.

The 1960s saw the relative tranquility of the first four decades of the Northern state undermined. The sectarian patterns of life began to break down, with a coming together of the two communities in housing developments and new industries. An upturn in industrial struggle brought together workers from across the sectarian divide and strengthened the trade unions, with the development of a powerful layer of shop-floor activists. Young people were being radicalised by international events, from the black civil rights movement in the US to the revolutionary upheaval of May 1968 in France. Growing support for socialist ideas found its expression partly in the growth of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP), which won over 25% of the vote in the 1962 Stormont election compared, for example, to the conservative Nationalist Party's 15%.

Civil rights movement emerges

It was in this context that the civil rights movement erupted in the last years of the decade. Its central focus was the disenfranchisement and discrimination faced by the Catholic community. Since the state's foundation, the Unionist Party had held hegemonic power at Stormont, but also used gerrymandering and class-based electoral discrimination to control councils even in predominantly Catholic areas. Discrimination against Catholics in jobs and housing was a stark reality, although poverty and dire living conditions were also the reality for the mass of Protestant workers. This inequality was not simply motivated by bigotry, but was a calculated measure by the Unionist establishment to frame the political status quo around sectarian rather than class division.

Democratic demands for the ending of this discrimination were central to the civil rights movement as it emerged. However, from the outset, there were divergent tendencies within the movement. On the left were those who saw united class struggle as the means to win fundamental change, and therefore recognised the need to reach out to the Protestant working class, linking the question of ending sectarian discrimination with economic and social demands to improve the lives of all workers. On the right were those who sought to limit the scope of the movement to minimal democratic demands, eschewing class and struggle and the prospect of fundamental change in the interests of all-class 'anti-Unionist' – i.e. Catholic – unity. The question of which tendency would come to dominate would shape the course of history – whether socialist change or sectarian reaction would win out.

Derry was to become an epicentre of the new movement, given the blatant disenfranchisement of the majority Catholic community, the atrocious housing conditions and the particularly high levels of unemployment in the city. A third of men in Derry were unemployed in 1968, with low-paid women shirt factory workers often the key bread-winners in a household. Here, the left wing of the movement was spearheaded by the Derry Labour Party and the Derry Housing Action Committee.

October 1968 – historic turning point

It was these forces which initiated what was to be an historic civil rights march on 5th October 1968 around slogans such as 'Class, not creed', 'Working class, unite and fight' and 'Orange and Green Tories, Out!' John Hume – then a teacher, who had risen to prominence in the campaign for a university in the city – refused to sign the police notification of the march or to have anything to do with it.

The march was banned and the crowd of around 400 which took part was subjected to brutal attacks from the Royal Ulster Constabulary, being baton charged repeatedly as they made their way into the city centre. Images of the police assault on peaceful protesters were broadcast into homes across the North and much further afield, and acted as a catalyst for profound upheaval. In the aftermath, broad layers of the Catholic population were brought into political activity for the first time. In the Protestant community, many were horrified by what they saw, with an important section of Protestant youth also beginning to move into active opposition to the Unionist administration.

In the tumult which followed the march, 'moderate' figures quickly stepped in to head off the potential for the left to seize the initiative. A Citizens' Action Committee (CAC) was formed, dominated by middle-class figures who had had nothing to do with the initial march. John Hume was elected secretary. Eamonn McCann – then a leading figure in Derry Labour Party – initially and correctly refused to join the new body, which he described as "middle-aged, middle-class and middle of the road."

Quelling radical action

The CAC's first action was to delay a planned follow-up march the next week and instead opt for a sit-down protest at the Guildhall two weeks later. Speaking from the platform, Hume made clear his vision for the civil rights movement: "The civil rights movement was not out to unite Ireland or the working classes. It was a movement without any political aims. Civil rights is not a political issue. It is a moral issue."

The role of the CAC was to try to put a lid on the spontaneous explosion of protest from below which emerged in the city after 5th October, diverting it into safe, apolitical channels when necessary. A follow-up demonstration called by the CAC on 16th November attracted 15,000 – reflecting the awakening which had taken place – but the organisers insisted it be silent and without political demands. Immediately following this rally, the CAC called for an end to spontaneous protests.

Indeed, it would take every opportunity to try to quell political action – for example, suspending protests for a month in response to Unionist Prime Minister Terence O'Neill's promise of some gradual, piecemeal reforms – and only returning to the streets when the pressure from below was such that to do otherwise would mean being bypassed. As civil rights marches again began to clash with state forces and Ian Paisley's loyalist reactionaries, John Hume would describe them as a "becoming a distraction" from the aims of the movement.

SDLP founded

Following his election to the Stormont parliament as a 'civil rights independent' in February 1969, Hume resigned his position in the CAC, a sign of his orientation towards winning limited legislative reforms rather than fundamental change from below. In 1970, Hume would help to found the Social Democratic & Labour Party – its name reflecting the support for socialist ideas at the time rather than the party's real character. From the outset, it styled itself as a 'party for the minority' – i.e., Catholics – and was dominated by 'moderate' middle-class nationalists. It was formed in large part from the rump of the old discredited Nationalist Party but also involved some figures previously associated with the labour movement – notably Paddy Devlin and Gerry Fitt, both of whom would leave at different points arguing the party wasn't socialist in character, Fitt after being replaced by Hume as leader.

At the same time as the Catholic population was moving into collision with the state, significant sections of Protestant workers were engaged in strikes and protests in opposition to the bosses but also against the Unionist administration, in defence of jobs, for decent pay and so on. If the workers' movement – particularly the trade unions and the NILP – had taken the lead independently, these two strands of opposition could have been tied together around a programme of socialist demands, challenging not just discrimination but the entire sectarian status quo and the capitalist system itself.

"Broad unity on a limited programme"

While significant sections of the ranks of the movement – as in Derry Labour Party – were striving in this direction, the leadership refused to take up the challenge. The conservative right were, at best, paralysed by the upheaval taking place, hiding themselves away; at worst, they lined up behind the Unionist administration in defence of "law and order".

Even some nominally on the left of the workers' movement failed at this crucial juncture. The Communist Party argued for the trade unions to fall in behind the idea of "broad unity on a limited programme", saying that "at this stage of the fight, the 'Green Tories' (ie, right-wing nationalists) are necessary allies." This meant sacrificing working-class unity for unity with the likes of Austin Currie who – when presenting himself for selection as a candidate in Fermanagh & South Tyrone – said, "I am not in favour of a mad socialist. The selected candidate must be sound on the border issue."

The mass of Protestant workers initially had a 'wait and see' attitude towards the civil rights movement. However, as its demands became narrowed and conservative nationalist figures came to dominate, it increasingly seemed that – rather than aiming for the abolition of poverty entirely – the aim of the movement was for an equality of poverty, that the demand for an end to sectarian discrimination meant taking jobs and homes from Protestant workers in order to give them to Catholics. The Unionist establishment was able to foster suspicion and eventually hostility towards the movement. Paisley and other hard-line figures – who had been isolated and out of step with the majority of Protestant workers – were able to gain more of an echo, whipping up fears that the real aim of 'civil rights' was to relegate Northern Protestants to the position of a minority community in the even more impoverished and Catholic Church-dominated Southern state.

Based on a minority of the population, the upheaval in the Catholic community was incapable of fundamentally challenging the state, but neither could state repression subdue the awakening which had taken place. Out of this stalemate arose, first, loyalist gangs who led pogroms against Catholic communities in Belfast in August 1969, and then the growth of the IRA – a few years earlier, seen as "something for the history books", according to Danny Morrison, who would go on to become a leading figure in the Provisional wing of the movement.

Spiral into sectarian conflict

Many trade union and labour movement activists would act heroically to try to stem the slide towards all-out sectarian conflict. Shop stewards in the Belfast shipyard – a workplace with a history of sectarian expulsions, as well as united class struggle – called a mass meeting of the workforce and a token strike to oppose the escalating violence, and then toured the homes of Catholic workers, guaranteeing their safety. While parts of Belfast burned in August 1969, others were patrolled by cross-community peace vigilantes, often with labour movement activists to the fore. However, rather than seizing on these examples to rouse the mass of workers into action against sectarianism and for their common interests, the conservative leaderships of the movement only retreated further in the face of events. The left in the movement – though strengthened in the previous period – was insufficiently organised and lacked the political clarity necessary to provide an alternative pole of attraction.

The spiral towards conflict continued. British troops were sent in. Initially welcomed by many as peacekeepers, they soon became the agents of brutal repression, particularly in the Catholic community. The Provisional IRA attracted more frustrated Catholic youth, but their campaign only served to drive Protestant workers into the arms of the state, as well as strengthening loyalist paramilitaries. The old Stormont parliament was abolished in 1972 and replaced with direct rule from London. Some elements of discrimination were abolished, but repression was not, and the sectarian character of the state forces remained fundamentally unaltered. By the mid-1970s, the majority of ordinary people were unhappy onlookers as the pattern of paramilitary and state violence which was to characterise the Troubles bedded down.

Republican movement – in from the cold

This form of the conflict was to come to an end in the 1990s for a number of reasons – among them, the growing realisation among the leadership of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin that their 'long war' could not

Hume and Trimble were considered the architects of the "peace process"

defeat the state, but also that the British ruling class actually wanted to extricate themselves and that the Protestant community was the real barrier to a capitalist united Ireland. As leader of the largest nationalist party, John Hume played a role in bringing the republican movement 'in from the cold' and opening up dialogue with the British and Irish governments about a negotiated end to the conflict.

However, a crucial factor was the growing war-weariness among the mass of working-class people, which again found expression through the trade union movement, with the development of united strikes, walkouts and demonstrations in response to atrocities carried out by both loyalist and republican paramilitaries. These served to isolate the paramilitaries and pressure them to end their campaigns.

Twenty-two years on from the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the hope of working-class people for a peaceful and more prosperous future has not been fulfilled. While the agreement has brought together Unionist and nationalist politicians in an uneasy agreement to disagree in the power-sharing Executive – punctuated by periodic crises, like the three-year abeyance of Stormont ended in January this year – it has institutionalised sectarian division and tended to create polarisation on the ground. For example, the 'moderate' SDLP and UUP were eclipsed by their more 'hardline' rivals – Sinn Féin and the DUP – more than a decade ago. Brexit – with the threat of hardened borders – as well as the demographic shift towards a Catholic majority and the question of a 'border poll' in the near future can all dramatically destabilise the situation. Dissident republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations remain small and marginalised, but they are beginning to reassert themselves.

Mural of civil right struggles show class demands to the fore

The peace process

Neither has the peace process brought the promised 'peace dividend'. From its inception, the Northern Ireland Executive – both under the dominance of the UUP and SDLP, and that of Sinn Féin and the DUP – has embraced a neoliberal economic model, cutting and privatising public services while trying to entice foreign direct investment with the promise of low wages and state subsidies. Stormont's subservience to the interests of big business has been underlined in the current rush to reopen the economy without adequate safeguards in place. Young people in particular face the prospect of mass unemployment or permanent entrapment in precarious jobs with poverty pay.

The continued political dominance of sectarian political forces and of the capitalist system – which breeds poverty, alienation and division – poses the prospect of a potential return to conflict in the future. As in the 1960s, the only force which can offer a way out is the working class, acting independently and united around its common interests. A new generation of youth is being radicalised by international events and drawn towards socialist ideas. Although weakened organisationally and politically, the trade union movement retains huge potential power, representing almost 250,000 workers from all backgrounds. A glimpse of the ability of class struggle to unite ordinary people was seen in the strikes of health workers last year for pay-parity with their colleagues in Britain, which drew mass support from across the divide, played a role in forcing the DUP and Sinn Féin to re-establish the Stormont Executive and won a partial victory for the NHS staff.

It is crucial that future opportunities for fundamental, socialist change are not missed. There is an urgent need to build an anti-sectarian political voice for the working class – one which unites the people on economic questions, but also consciously challenges the sectarian forces and strives to find solutions to the questions which divide our communities, based on solidarity and mutual respect. As part of this process, the building of a revolutionary Marxist force which draws upon the lessons of the past will be vital.■

Common History, Common Struggle

Lessons from the 1960s – When Workers' Unity & Socialism Challenged Unionism & Nationalism

By Peter Hadden

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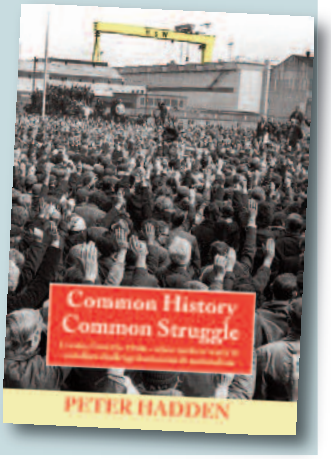


GLOBAL UPRISINGS AGAINST OPPRESSION

SOCIALIST FEMINISM NOW MORE THAN EVER

Whenever there is a crisis, be it war, climate catastrophe or a pandemic, it is women, people of colour, indigenous populations – the most oppressed and exploited sections of the working class and poor – who are worst affected. It is not surprising, then, that recent years have seen explosions of social movements against oppression. EMMA QUINN analyses this continuing global development.

"Capitalist society is and always has been a horror without end."[1] Now, when the system is in the midst of an unprecedented economic and social crisis where basics like healthcare, housing and decent standards of living are not available to millions in even the wealthiest capitalist countries, and where sexism, racism, LGBTQphobia and division are systematically perpetuated, it is not surprising that those who have experienced the worst brutalities of the system are leading mass struggles against oppression and inequality. In fact, mass protests against oppression have become a defining feature of this era.

Biggest protests in US History

"We have Black sons, Black brothers, Black friends, we don't want them to die. We are tired of this happening, this generation is not having it, we are tired of oppression," said Muna Abdi, a 31-year-old Black woman who joined a BLM protest in St Paul, Minnesota.[2]

Captured on camera, the cold-blooded murder of George Floyd served as a catalyst in igniting an uprising of people of colour against the violence and injustice being inflicted upon them on a daily basis by the police and the racist US state. The explosion of protests emerged in the context of a pandemic that has seen the highest level of unemployment since the Great Depression, in which black women are twice as likely as white men to have lost their jobs.[3] Not only more likely to be struggling to pay rent and buy basic necessities, Black people are dying from the Covid-19 disease itself at a disproportionately high rate.

The recent Black Lives Matter demonstrations most likely represent the biggest protest movement in the history of the United States with an estimated 15 to 26 million participating in protests in the weeks following the murder.[4] The protests have been more sustained and more widespread than ever before, taking place across all 50 states, including predominantly white rural communities and inspiring a wave of solidarity actions all around the world. The protests have been some of the

most ethnically diverse ever seen, with young women especially stepping forward as organisers.

It is not a coincidence that the five biggest protests in US history have taken place since the election of Trump, who himself personifies the deepening crisis of capitalism. The day after his inauguration in January 2017 saw the largest ever single day of protest. This Women's March was a response to the threat his presidency posed to abortion rights, women, people of colour, the LGBTQ community and the climate. An estimated 7 million people, mainly women, participated in the approximately 673 protests and marches that took place on every continent across the globe.[5]

#MeToo – Ni Una Menos – #IBelieveHer

In November 2019, feminists in Chile epitomised the burning anger of a new generation of activists when they performed the protest chant and dance, "A Rapist In Your Path". This was a twist on "A Friend In Your Path", a sexist pro-police anthem which urges little girls to sleep while their "lover cops" protect them. Their performance lacerated "the oppressive state" and its culture of victim-blaming, ingrained misogyny and police repression of women and working-class anti-austerity protesters. It pointed out that sexual violence doesn't happen in a political vacuum and very literally pointed thousands of fingers at courtrooms, government buildings and police stations while shouting "the rapist is you".

Poignantly, older women, including survivors of Pinochet's terror, performed the chant at the National Stadium in Santiago, which had been used as a prison camp for working-class and socialist activists after the CIA-backed military coup in 1973. The crowd was so big that it stopped traffic. The chant resonated all over the world, capturing the essence of the #MeToo and Ni Una Menos (Not One Less) movements. It demonstrated an important shift in consciousness as activists were using the slogan to take aim at the system itself. Women in the US pointed at Trump. Women in Brazil pointed at Bolsonaro. Women in India pointed at Modi and were met with water cannons when they performed it. It has become a global symbol of defiance against sexual violence and state repression.

Protest in June against police brutality in Kenya and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US

Millions of women in countries ranging from Argentina to South Africa, the Spanish state and Thailand have marched for abortion rights and against femicide, gender violence, pay inequality and poverty in recent years. Simultaneously, millions of school students and young people all over the world walked out to demand climate justice. A defining characteristic of these mass movements is that it is women and young people that are playing leading roles. Importantly, these movements are radical and uncompromising, anti-system, international, solidarity-based, multi-racial and LGBTQ inclusive.

Class struggle methods to fight oppression

A common feature is the use of the most powerful methods of struggle of the workers' movement, including strikes, walkouts and occupations. No better example was the remarkable "Feminist Strike" on International Women's Day 2019, which saw around million people shut down the Spanish state with demands against gender-based violence and victim blaming, pay inequality and austerity. The fact that this action was the inspiration for further mass actions globally, such as a feminist general strike in Switzerland, mobilisations against gender violence in Israel and Palestine to name just a couple, is also in the very best traditions of the working-class movement, namely international solidarity as vital — something that obsequious trade union bureaucrats could take some lessons from! Furthermore, there have also been strike and walkout actions by workers against sexual harassment, including by McDonalds and Google workers.

The movements have won important victories, such as abortion rights in Ireland and a victory for the movement against court-room misogyny in the "Wolfpack" rape case in the Spanish state. They have also had an immeasurably progressive impact on society by forcing the realities of sexism, racism and inequality onto the political agenda, challenging backward and dangerous attitudes and also by frightening capitalism's ruling class who fear mass struggle of the working class, the poor and the oppressed more than anything else.

Oppression in all its forms is a tool of the ruling class to cut across working-class solidarity and unity in struggle. Therefore, movements against oppression, most especially when they win the solidarity of a large mass of the working class, poor and oppressed, are powerful, not only in striking blows against oppression but in fact in shoring up the whole working-class fight against the capitalist system.

We saw this in the Repeal movement in Ireland that was driven by young women and the LGBTQ community, with socialist feminists playing a critical role and with mass support from working-class communities

being a key driver of the 'Yes' vote. Not only did the movement succeed in overturning a draconian abortion ban and delivering pro-choice legislation, which included access to abortion for free, it did this at a time when abortion rights are being attacked in many parts of the world. It also succeeded in putting the backward Irish state, political establishment and Catholic Church in the dock.

"Through the eyes of women"

Women are more likely to be "essential workers" on the frontline in the fight against Covid-19, working as nurses, healthcare assistants, teachers, cleaners, retail workers and hospitality workers. In the main these heavily feminised workforces continue to be the lowest paid, the most precarious and the most exploited. Inevitably, this is reflecting itself in struggle. In Ireland, over the last two years we have seen strike action by nurses, childcare workers and the inspiring (mostly-women) Debenhams workers who have taken on a ruthless multinational company, the political establishment and the courts to defend basic workers' rights.

In Britain, the Trade Union Congress reported in May 2020 that a significant membership increase had been "driven by an incredible rise in union membership amongst women".[6]

The Covid-19 pandemic has made the so-called "double shift" into a "triple shift" for women workers. Gender violence has seen a "horrifying global surge" of femicide and intimate partner abuse.[7] Intimate partner killings in Britain doubled in the first 21 days of lockdown.[8] Reports of domestic violence in the North of Ireland are at the highest since records began,[9] and in the south Women's Aid reported a 43% increase in calls between March and June.[10] Increasingly, evidence is also coming to light about how Covid is disproportionately affecting communities of colour.[11]

For all these reasons, the Covid crisis is further sharpening the propensity for working-class and young women and people of colour to be at the forefront of struggle. *The New York Times* recently reported that, "women were more likely than men to report having participated in protest over the past two years, and that mothers with children in the home were twice as likely as fathers to report participating in a protest".[12] Study of attitudes of young people in Britain by HopeNotHate found that "leftist activists" were three times more likely to be women and were more likely to report experiencing racism, violence and sexual harassment.[13]

Women workers lead the way

A Marxist analysis centres on the daily realities and material living conditions of working-class people as the drivers of their revolutionary potential. This has special resonance in the field of the workplace, where workers come together, experience exploitation in a common way, and conversely when they get organised feel the potential power of their collective struggle in opposition to the same. Rising oppression and exploitation is creating a combustible situation that socialists should be consciously preparing for. Many of the mass struggles against oppression of recent years have happened outside of the structures of the trade union movement. Decades of selling out by trade union bureaucrats has resulted in unions that in some cases are hostile environments for the most fighting layers of workers. A damning report on one of Britain's biggest trade unions, the GMB, found it to be "institutionally sexist" and that it was "not a comfortable place to be for many employees and members from Black and minority ethnic groups".[14]

As well as continued bursts of struggle emerging outside of established organisations continuing as a likely trend in the combustible world situation, women workers have an indispensable role in the transforming of trade unions into the radical and combative force necessary for the future battles. The Debenhams workers are a brilliant example of this in Ireland. In the US, which has seen a resurgence of organised labour in the recent few years, this was concretely seen in the teachers' uprisings, the 'Red for Ed' explosion of working-class militancy. Led overwhelmingly by women workers, this opened the door for workers ranging

The powerful "A Rapist In Your Path" protest originated in Chile but went global

New US Vice President, Kamala Harris, is no radical

from the service sector to heavy industry to engage in strike action and begin to reclaim their unions as instruments of struggle.

Of course the mass struggles against oppression have not developed without complication. They have hit historic highs and then ebbed. They haven't yet organised into political organisations nor have they, for the most part, been expressed in a more organised and long-lasting fashion within the organised labour movement. The desire for change has manifested so far in spurts of struggle and fightback, but has the potential to spread, deepen and take root in the working class exactly because capitalism can provide no answers, no fixes, no hope for women, people of colour or the working class itself. These movements are just the beginning of a new political period, not the end of one.

Socialist feminism V feminising the elite

While huge profits have been made during the pandemic, ordinary people's lives have been turned upside down. At the same time as there has never been more desire for gender equality and action against systemic racism. There has also been the inevitable confusion and backlash. Emboldened by the likes of Trump, there has been a worrying emergence of an anti-feminist, misogynist, transphobic online culture. From Men's Rights Activists, Incels (involuntary celibates), Pickup Artists and the now tens of thousands of members of MGTOW (Men Go Their Own Way) under the guise of caring about some of the real issues impacting working-class men, from poverty to mental health, they point the finger at "lying, cheating promiscuous women" and are acting as a gateway to recruitment to the far-right. Feminism is posed by these groups as a way of controlling and repressing men. In Britain, one in five young men have negative views about feminism.[15] The political establishment and the far right have a common interest in using "toxic masculinity" to perpetuate division and pit sections of the working class against each other — posing a real threat to the safety of women.

The nomination of Kamala Harris as running mate for Joe Biden's presidential campaign triggered an immediete gushing of support from bourgeois feminist organisations. Kamala Harris may be a woman of colour and may pose as a feminist, but like Hilary Clinton, her history is one of advancing establishment interests. "Top Cop" Harris has a political record of siding with Wall Street and the mass criminalisation and incarceration of working-class and poor black people. The approach of bourgeois feminism — feminising the elite — has nothing to offer working-class people of any gender.

The most effective way of cutting across the insidious far-right that is pushing anti-feminist, misogynist ideas amongst alienated young men, is through drawing the sharpest possible distinction between socialist feminism and the bourgeois, or corporate or establishment feminism against which we are in a fight. Socialist feminists are fighting to build the widest possible movement and uprising of the working class and all oppressed groups for socialist change. Working-class women have a crucial role to play in this struggle.

As pioneering socialist feminist, Clara Zetkin, remarked in a speech in 1921, those who don't recognise the same can only be seen as "conscious saboteurs of the revolution",[16] given the reality of the radicalisation of huge swathes of working-class and young women evident around the world today. This is most sharply expressed at this moment in Poland, in which an uprising led by young women against a misogynistic attempt to further ban abortion is inspiring opposition, radicalisation and struggle of the broader working class against the right wing.■

Notes

1 VI Lenin, 1916, Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution, marxists.org ● **2** "Tired of this': Tens of thousands protest George Floyd killing', 1 Jun 2020, www.aljazeera.com ● **3** Kimberly Adams, 30 Apr 2020, 'Black women twice as likely as white men to suffer economically from COVID-19', www.marketplace.org ● **4** By Larry Buchanan, 3 Ju 2020, 'Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History', ww.nytimes.com ● **5** Courtney Weave, 22 Jan 2017, 'Trump reacts to mass protests with conciliatory tweet', www.ft.com ● **6** Carl Roper, 27 May 2020, 'Union membership rises for third year running to 6.4 million', www.tuc.org.uk ● **7** Shalva Weil, 19 Apr 2020, 'For Women, Lockdown Can Be More Dangerous Than the Coronavirus', www.haaretz.com ● **8** Jamie Grierson, 15 Apr 2020, 'Domestic abuse killings 'more than double' amid Covid-19 lockdown', www.theguardian.com ● **9** Lisa Smyth, 30 Sept 20202, 'Significant increase in reports of domestic abuse amid Covid lockdown in Northern Ireland', www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk ● **10** Women's Aid, 20 Aug 2020, 'Rise in Reports of Domestic Violence in 2019 and During Covid-19, says Women's Aid', www.womensaid.ie ● **11** CDC, 24 Jul 2020, 'Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups', www.cdc.gov ● **12** Lisa Lerer and Jennifer Medina, 17 Aug 2020, 'The 'Rage Moms' Democrats Are Counting On', www.nytimes.com ● **13** hopenothate.org.uk ● **14** Rajeev Syal, 3 Sept 2020, 'GMB union institutionally sexist, inquiry finds', www.theguardian.com ● **15** hopenothate.org.uk ● **16** Clara Zetkin, 8 Jul 1921, 'Report on Communist Women's Movement', www.marxists.org

ENGELS @ 200

A REVOLUTIONARY THINKER FOR A WORLD IN TURMOIL

Friedrich Engels was born 200 years ago, yet as a thinker was profoundly radical and strikingly modern, writes KATIA HANCKE. While his lifelong collaboration with Karl Marx resulted in many co-authored works, as well as extensive correspondence between the two in which they developed their ideas jointly, Engels also wrote his own brilliant contributions to contemporary debates in the socialist and workers' movement, and was a leading activist in the first and second internationals.

Engels lived a full life in a period of history rife with explosive revolts and violent counter-revolution – where the actuality of revolution was widely comprehended and where a newly formed proletarian class was beginning to organise on an unprecedented, international scale. The socialist movement grew out of its infancy into a mass movement in which polemics and debates were necessary to clarify issues of theory, programme, strategy and tactics. Many of these debates endure even today. In this and in many other ways Engels' 19th century contributions to revolutionary Marxism continue to help us in our present day quest for a consistency of thought and clarity of programme and orientation.

This article will focus on three of Engels' works spread out over his political lifetime – from 1845 to 1884 – and give some insight into the development of his thinking as a dialectical materialist. The first book is *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, which for the first time puts the working class front and centre as the driving force for its own emancipation and the socialist transformation of society. The second is *Anti-Duhring*, a polemic from the late 1860s and 70s, on history and philosophy, which presented dialectical materialism as a coherent and systematic method to understand the world. The third is Engels' distinct contribution to understanding women's oppression, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, which to this day is fundamental to a socialist feminist analysis of how oppression is interwoven with the capitalist system.

Early industrial capitalism

"The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves". So begins the General Rules of the International Workingmen's Association – the foundation of the First International in 1864. For Marxists, the central role of the working class in any movement aiming to challenge capitalism as a system is fundamental. This key tenet of Marxism was first expressed by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1845.

Engels had moved from Germany to Manchester in 1842 to work in one of his father's factories. Once in Manchester, he breaks with his bourgeois upbringing and through his intimate connection with Mary Burns (a labourer in a local mill) gets introduced to the working-class districts of Salford and Manchester. This opens up a new world to him and has a lifelong impact on his ideas.

The book he writes in 1845 reflects this change. While the book is extensively researched and bases itself on previous government studies, it is clearly written by someone who has witnessed first hand what he describes in the book. The result is a vivid, indignant and angry exposé of the conditions working-class people had to live in at the time. It describes the factories – the long hours, back breaking work and poor working environments – leading to early death, lifelong illnesses and deformities. It sketches the squalor of the working-class neighbourhoods – the shoddy housing, the overcrowding, the lack of sanitation. It is interesting to note that, nearly 200 years on, the global proliferation of slums described by urban geographers like Mike Davis looks eerily similar to what Engels witnessed.

As well as exposing the economic and social problems facing the Manchester proletariat, Engels highlights the broader consequences of the rise of capitalism in the cities of England – the environmental destruction, the effects of child labour, the disintegration of family life, the psychological effects, the brutal alienation. As an example, this description of London street life in 1844 sounds remarkably familiar:

> "The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of this great city. The dissolution of mankind into monads, of each which one has a separate principle and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme."[1]

The book is a powerful "J'accuse" about the horrific exploitation a new and growing working class is subjected to in an era of capitalist growth. But the text is not just a journalistic report, it uses the facts on the ground to develop an analysis that transcends the specifics of 1840s England and is as relevant today as it was back in 1845. Two points in particular are worth focusing on here.

A new exploited class

The first is how Engels perceptively analyses the root causes of the conditions he describes. He clearly identifies capitalism as the culprit – a system that by nature has exploitation stitched into its fabric. He explores how the industrial revolution was based first and foremost on an explosive expansion of the capacity of productive forces. The introduction of new machines, of new technology and factory production are identified as the driving forces in a radical transformation of all aspects of society. While he highlights the dialectical interaction between these different elements, the expansion of productive forces – the economic developments – is key to understanding the rise of capitalism.

He counterposes this analysis to other theories, such as that of the English economist, Thomas Robert Malthus, with its emphasis on population growth as the cause for the growth of the industrial revolution across Europe. These ideas were not popular just at the time – some of them still get raked up today, for example by those who wrongly blame environmental destruction on the growth in world population, and advocate the correspondingly inhumane solution of population control.

Engels' unpicking of the reasons for the development of capitalism and highlighting the centrality of economic development in influencing social, political and cultural phenomena is a clear example of a historical materialist method. Engels himself expressed it like this: "It was in Manchester where I was hit in the face by the economic realities which in the historical narrative to date have played either no role or were dismissed. At least in the modern world, though, they are a decisive historical force and the basis for today's class contradictions..."[2]

Engels here also begins the development of a theory of wages, explaining that with the ascent of capitalism "employers have gained a monopoly of all means of existence" – the bosses own all the key levers of the economy. Workers have to sell their labour to the capitalist class to make a living. He traces the growth in population, which correlates with periods of expansion where more work is being created. But those same workers who are so crucial to make this possible at one point, are without any regard thrown on the scrapheap at another – to guarantee profits in times of crisis. And this "reserve army of labour" is then used to hold down the wages of those still in employment.

All of these ideas are developed much further by Marx and Engels in subsequent decades, culminating in the three volumes of Capital. But the seeds of a

Industrial Manchester was a filthy & brutal place to live for workers

Marxist analysis of capitalism are already there in *The Conditions of the Working Class*.

A powerful revolutionary force

The second, related point from the book that has a lasting relevance is the centrality of class struggle – of the working class in fighting for its own liberation. While socialist ideas were growing in popularity in England and the rest of Europe, these ideas were based on a moral outrage against the horrors of capitalism and a detailed blueprint of what an alternative, socialist society would look like, without considering how things can be changed – what material force, what class in society is capable of posing a fundamental challenge to capitalism. People like Robert Owen in Britain and Saint Simon in France tried to set up "socialist colonies", little bubbles of "paradise" that cut themselves off from the rest of the world while the capitalist system as a whole was left untouched.

The idealism of utopian socialism was a reflection of the fact that it was in the main a small group of intellectuals dreaming up these ideas without real reference to, or involvement with, the people they were so eager to liberate – the working class. Engels himself later summarises it as follows:

> "The Utopians' mode of thought has for a long time governed the socialist ideas of the 19th century. The solution of the social problems... the Utopians attempted to evolve out of the human brain. Society presented nothing but wrongs; to remove these was the task of reason. It was necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society from without by propaganda and, wherever possible, by the example of model experiments. These new social systems were foredoomed as Utopian; the more completely they were worked out in detail, the more they could not avoid drifting off to pure phantasies."[3]

While the specifics of some of these schemes may sound bizarre in today's world, variations of utopian socialist ideas have crept up in the workers' movement time and again. The fact that for exploitation and oppression to end, the system as a whole has to be changed is, after all, daunting. Without identifying the material force that can bring about that change, it can sound impossible, and people limit themselves to reformist or even personal "solutions" – using co-ops, insisting on safe spaces etc.

This is why Engels' insistence on the potential power of the working class, first outlined in 1845, is so important. It rails against the popular utopian notion that because the working class are so exploited, they are incapable of organising their own liberation and need to rely on intellectuals from without who will "save" them. Engels, in contrast, has experienced how the conditions workers in Manchester find themselves in has also led to the birth of the modern proletariat as a class. This growing class consciousness has been harnessed

by the growing Chartist movement in the early 1840s, leading to the 1842 general strike which was particularly strong in Manchester.

Engels drew lasting general conclusions from this: while people are the product of their environment, we are also able to interact with and influence our surroundings – we are an active part in our own history. This dialectical interaction is something that will be further developed in Engels' writings for the rest of his life.

Recognising that the self-emancipation of the exploited and oppressed is not only possible, it is imperative to change the system, transformed socialist thinking and practice. It shifted the debate from an academic "pie in the sky" quibble to a real discussion about the need for working-class people to get organised and unite – around all issues of exploitation and oppression. Three years later, Marx and Engels expressed it as the final rallying cry of the *Communist Manifesto*: "Workers of the world, unite!"

Propounding a materialist philosophy

In the following decades, the close co-operation between Marx and Engels leads to the development of a coherent worldview and philosophical method referred to as dialectical materialism. While this method can be found in virtually all of their writings on society and history, the most explicit treatment of it by Engels is in the polemical *Anti-Duhring* (1876-78). In this series of articles, later brought together as a book, Engels reluctantly but sharply takes apart the hodgepodge of ideas put forward by an influential university professor called Eugene Duhring and counterposes it to a dialectical materialist understanding of society and nature.

Duhring at the time had won considerable support within the German social democratic party (SPD), not least because of the level of persecution he suffered at the hands of the repressive Prussian state. The SPD at the time was a "broad socialist church" – a party that placed more emphasis on unity at all cost than on clarity

of purpose. The discussions around the programme adopted at the congress in Gotha in 1875, and the willingness to compromise on issues of programme and tactics, highlights this. Engels' *Anti-Duhring*, then, was focused on starting a discussion on the need for intellectual coherence and clarity of thought. Change occurs all the time, everywhere – nothing stays the same forever. Therefore, we need a philosophy that allows us to understand how change occurs – the processes that underlie it.

He introduces the different elements of dialectical thinking – the idea that processes can logically turn into their opposite (negation of the negation); that quantity changes into quality, inevitably leading to an interruption of any continuity; unity and conflict of opposites – the idea that contradictions are inevitable and a motor for change.

He then uses these concepts to explain how inevitable contradictions are building up within capitalism – how in trying to hold on to the old (private ownership) it is simultaneously creating the seeds for a new, socialised form of social system. Capitalism is its own gravedigger. The growth of capitalism is based on the socialisation of labour but the privatisation of the means of production in the hands of an (ever smaller) group of capitalists. Where in previous periods, workers would have produced goods in the home or in small workshops with their own means of production, the industrial revolution forces large groups of workers to work together in factories owned by capitalists. The privatisation of the means of production gives capitalists unfettered opportunities to exploit workers and underpay them for the work they do, leaving huge profits to be made for the capitalists. But this very socialisation of production also lays the basis for the birth of the proletariat as a class. Large groups of workers stuck together in collective working conditions logically leads to workers organising together and understanding their common interests as a class – developing class consciousness.

At the same time, the industrial revolution brings with it a huge, unprecedented expansion of production. For the first time in history there is the potential to eradicate hunger and poverty on a world scale. But because of the private ownership by the capitalist class this huge increase in production of wealth is instead turned into profits for the 1%, while inequality increases on a daily basis. These opposing class interests underlie all class struggle.

In short, while in the past both labour and the means of production were private, capitalism proves that socialisation vastly improves humanity's capacity to provide for all. However, as long as the means of production remain private, in the hands of a few super rich, this potential is stymied. For the wealth that is produced to be used for the common good, both labour and means of production need to be socialised.

So Engels uses capitalism as an example to explain that changes in economic relations are the motor force of history.

An approach to natural science

At the time of the controversy surrounding the publication of *Anti-Duhring*[4], Engels was already interested in how dialectical materialism applies in other fields. Its application to economy, history and society to this day has a lasting impact on our understanding of those sciences. But Engels' research regarding dialectics and nature is more controversial.

Chartists at a mass meeting on Kennington Common in South London in 1848

This is largely because in later years, under Stalinist regimes in the former USSR, scientists were expected to work within a framework that turned Engels' method of enquiry into a dogma. However, a careful examination of Engels' own writings on science – both in Anti-Duhring and in the collection of notes posthumously published as *Dialectics of Nature* – makes it clear that his thinking was much more inquisitive (in the form of open questions) than dogmatic. For example, in *Anti-Duhring* he explicitly states that a Marxist "does not build dialectical laws into nature but discovers them in it".[5]

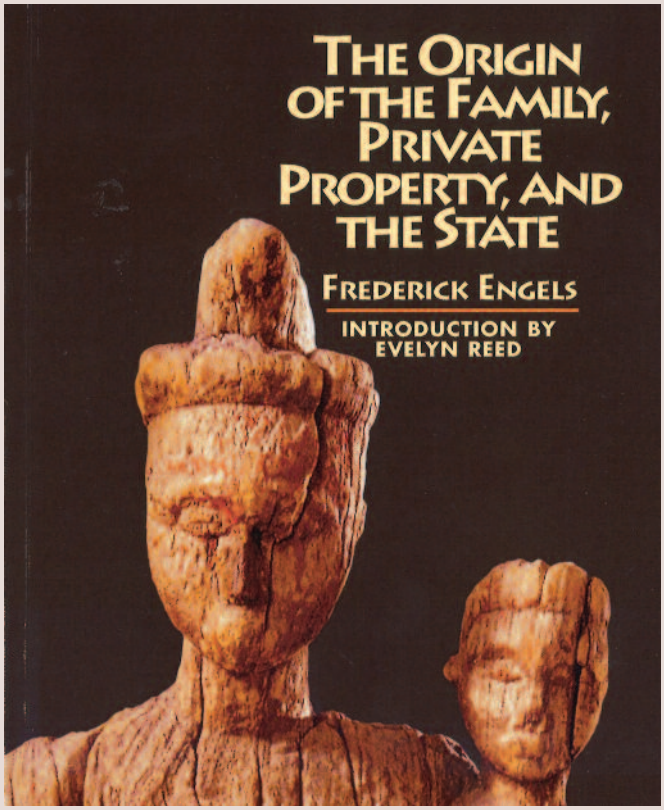
Many of the specifics in Engels' writings on science have become outdated as scientific research marches on. But it is interesting to note that many of the broader conclusions he draws from his research stand up to scrutiny to this day. A good example is one of his earliest essays in the collection, "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man". 100 years after it was written, the American paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould commented that Engels hit upon a radically different theory of the evolution of early humans because he didn't fall for the accepted wisdom that our brains are the driving force of human development. Instead he recognised that all scientific research relies on theoretical thinking – the questions you ask will influence the research. And the questions you ask are influenced by your thinking, your ideological bias.

In Gould's words: "A bias must be recognized before it is challenged. Cerebral primacy seemed so obvious and natural that it was accepted as given, rather than recognized as a deep-seated social prejudice related to the class position of the professional thinkers and their patrons. Engels writes: 'All merit for the swift advance of civilization was ascribed to the mind, the development and activity of the brain. Men became accustomed to explain their actions from their thoughts, instead of from their need.... And so there arose in the course of time that idealistic outlook on the world which, especially since the downfall of the ancient world, has dominated men's minds. It still rules them to such a degree that even the most materialistic natural scientists of the Darwinian school are still unable to form any clear idea of the origin of man, because under that ideological influence they do not recognize the part that is played therein by labour.' The importance of Engels's essay does not lie in the happy result that Australopithecus confirmed a specific theory posed by him – via Haeckel – but rather in his perceptive analysis of the political role of science and of the social biases that must affect all thought."[6]

This clarity that scientific research, like all human thought, is conditioned by the social realities in which it is created, stands us in good stead in this period where contradictory "scientific facts" are used to back up fake news and conspiracy theories.

The origins of women's oppression

Engels applies this same method of thinking to understand the origins of women's oppression in his book, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, first published in 1884. In this work he once again points out that it was changes in the method of production that led to changes in the relations of production, to social change. The book explains how the rise of class society, based on the rise of private property, led to the development of the state as an instrument representing the interests of the ruling class in the public sphere, and how simultaneously the family was used as an institution to safeguard private property and pass it on.



He relies on extensive research of a new and developing science, anthropology, especially the (at the time controversial) groundbreaking work of Lewis Henry Morgan in his book Ancient Society. But Engels' conclusions transcend the specifics of the anthropological research to make much more general points that to this day provide a unique insight into the origins of women's oppression.

He proves that patriarchy predates capitalism and can be traced as far back as the development of early agrarian societies. This transition from hunter gatherer to settlement sees for the first time the rise in importance of private property and therefore inheritance. The key means of production (domestic cattle) tended to be in the hands of men, which dramatically increased their status and position. Authority, power and property relations between men and women are determined in that context.

Engels traces the different forms and functions the institution of the family has taken and how it has hugely varied depending on historic context, geographic context and social class. The whole book challenges the notion that women's role in the family as the primary caregiver and the subordinate partner is written in stone. The institution of the family is described

as an ever changing cultural, historical product rather than a "natural" way of organising society.

He also highlights that historically the family has been used to push women into the home and away from participation in social production. This economic disadvantage also expresses itself socially and sexually (he sharply exposes the hypocrisy of monogamy as something that in practice is only imposed on women, a double standard that survives) – patriarchy is not just based on economic dependence, it has become intertwined into every aspect of life.

Capitalism's relentless thirst for a larger labour force has reversed this trend to exclude women from social production. Engels points out that women being integrated into the workforce is a positive – it gives women an independent means of income and it allows working women to break free from the isolation of the home and get organised as part of the proletarian movement. Engels making this point is important in the context of a socialist movement that at the time was divided on the issue of organising women. While the reformist wing of the movement argued for women to be sent back to the hearth, Engels provided revolutionary Marxists such as Clara Zetkin with a theoretical foundation to organise women workers and bring them into the socialist movement.

Engels is fully conscious of the double oppression women workers bear – both at work and in the home. He points out that eradicating this double oppression is a precondition for liberation: "The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time." But he is optimistic that this double burden cannot continue and will lead to the break up of the family as an institution. Considering in 2018 alone, women globally did $10 trillion of unpaid domestic labour according to Oxfam, it can be argued that Engels was premature in writing off capitalism's ability to continue women's oppression inside and outside the home.

Bronze statue of Marx and Engels in Berlin

Engels' contribution is influencing the discussion on women's liberation to this day. He has given us a framework for an historical analysis of the issue, proving that oppression is rooted in the economic system we live under. It links all struggles against oppression directly with the need to overthrow capitalism – only by changing the relations of production can we turn private oppression into collective social responsibility. Under capitalism care for the young, sick and elderly is offloaded as a burden to individual families – an ideological offensive has accompanied and made possible cutbacks in education, health care and social care as well as a devaluing and underpaying of the jobs in those sectors. Engels counterposes that with what is possible if we collectively own the wealth we create:

> "With the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, the single family ceases to be the economic unit of society. Private housekeeping is transformed into a social industry. The care and education of the children becomes a public affair; society looks after all children alike..."

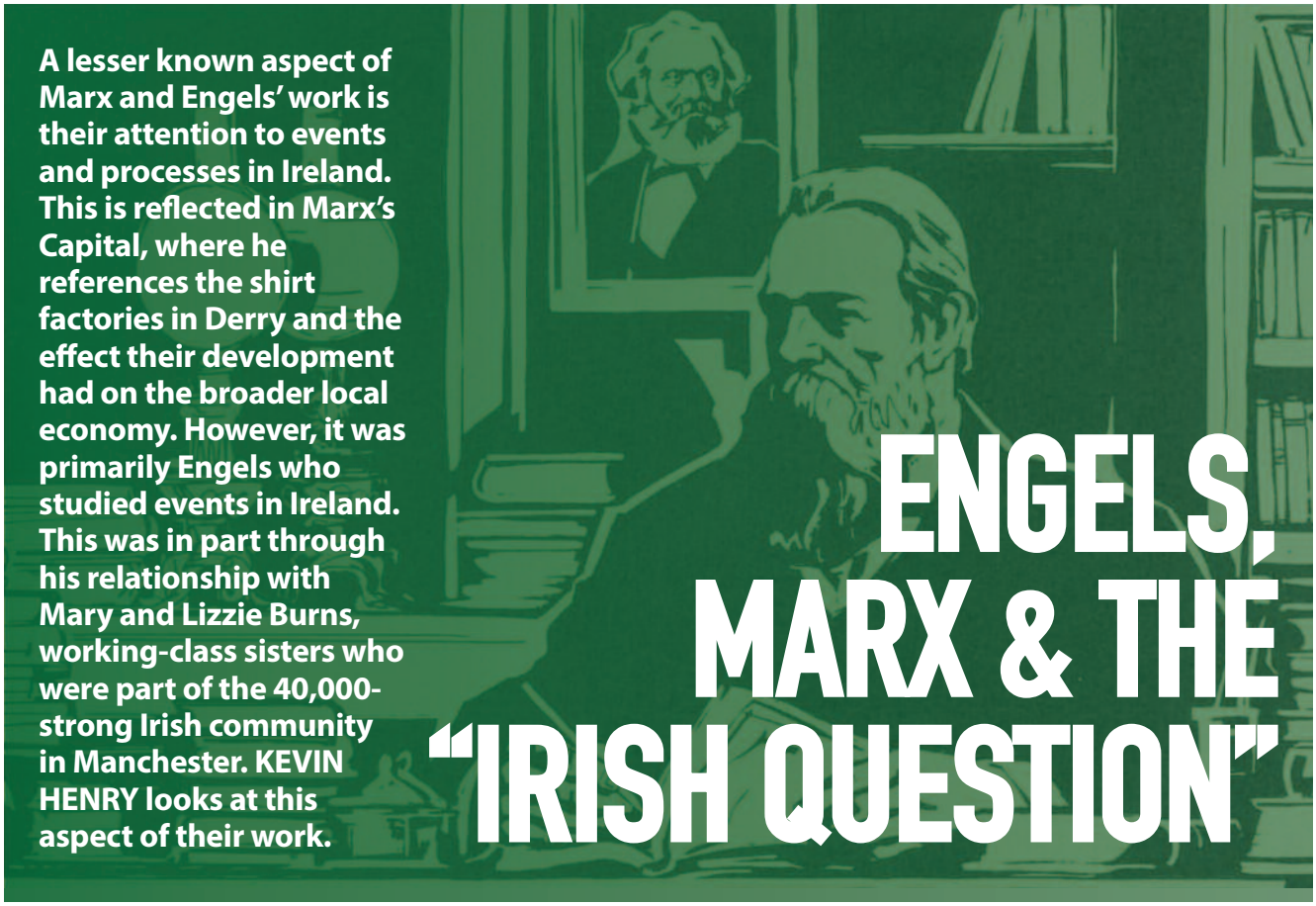
Lessons for today

21st century capitalism is in many aspects different from what Engels describes in the 19th century – 200 years ago, young capitalism was still a system in ascent, whereas we live in a system in deep crisis, economically, politically, socially, ecologically and in many other ways. This worldwide crisis coincides with a renewed interest in socialist ideas – a search for ways to build an alternative to a rotten system holding down an ever expanding global working class in conditions of exploitation and oppression.

Engels' writings transcend the specifics of the Victorian period in that they help us develop a method to understand what is going on in the world and act as a guide to action for all working-class people. They also offer us an inspiring view of the possibilities that open up once capitalism is replaced with a system based on public ownership and control of the key sectors of the economy, in which the wealth generated in society can be used for the good of all. Marx and Engels' reminder in the Communist Manifesto – that we have nothing to lose but our chains, but have a world to win – is today more relevant than ever.■

Notes

1 Opening paragraph of The Great Towns, chapter in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. L Proyect in "Engels on the English Working Class", http://www.columbia.edu/~lnp3/mydocs/modernism/engels_english.htm ● **2** John Green, 2009, *Engels: A Revolutionary Life*, Artery Publications, p80 ● **3** *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, as quoted in Dan Swain, 2020, None So Fit to Break the Chains, Haymarket ● **4** For a full explanation of this controversy, see "Politics, Polemic and Marxism: Engels' Anti-Duhring" by David Riazanov ● **5** Kaan Kangal, 2019 ,"Engels' Intentions in Dialectics of Nature", *Science & Society vol 83*, further develops this point of Engels' exploration of science ● **6** Posture Maketh the Man, in "Ever Since Darwin", Stephen Jay Gould, 1977



ENGELS, MARX & THE "IRISH QUESTION"

A lesser known aspect of Marx and Engels' work is their attention to events and processes in Ireland. This is reflected in Marx's Capital, where he references the shirt factories in Derry and the effect their development had on the broader local economy. However, it was primarily Engels who studied events in Ireland. This was in part through his relationship with Mary and Lizzie Burns, working-class sisters who were part of the 40,000-strong Irish community in Manchester. KEVIN HENRY looks at this aspect of their work.

At times in his early writings, Engels' descriptions of Manchester's 'Little Ireland' repeat many contemporary stereotypes of Irish people, but his writings also show great empathy with this most downtrodden section of workers in England. Engels didn't just comment on conditions, but also looked at the effect of immigration. He noted that the existence of a low-paid immigrant workforce was used by the Manchester mill owners to lower wages for English workers, and was absolutely essential for British industry to rapidly expand.

More importantly, his later work shows an attempt to grapple with the reality of life in "England's oldest colony." Engels visited Ireland on three occasions. He produced a series of notebooks on Ireland, and he and Marx regularly discussed the country in their correspondences. In fact, he intended to produce a history of Ireland, but unfortunately was unable to see this through due to other pressures.

His first observation on arriving in Ireland was on the overbearing repression, describing how "the 'iron hand' is visible in every nook and cranny." His second was on how devastating the famine and its aftermath had been: "fields are empty even of cattle; the countryside is a complete wilderness unwanted by anybody."[1] In Britain, Marx and Engels challenged the prevailing wisdom of bourgeois society that the famine was a natural disaster, and instead placed the blame firmly at the feet of British imperialism. At a time when respectable opinion contended that the famine and emigration had reduced pauperism in Ireland, Marx bluntly responded, "We must confess that 'the famine' is quite as radical a remedy against Pauperism as arsenic against rats."[2]

"Act according to a common plan"

Marx and Engels saw the national question in Ireland as inherently linked with social issues, particularly the unresolved question of land ownership. They were extremely critical of nationalist leaders in Ireland - particularly Daniell O'Connell, whom they called a "political juggler" – for not linking the land question with the struggle for independence and other democratic demands.

Similarly, they saw a dialectical relationship between the British working-class movement and the masses in Ireland. Engels hoped that "the mass of the Irish people will unite ever more closely with the English Chartists and will act with them according to a common plan." The Chartists were a revolutionary movement of millions of British workers who fought for a six-point 'People's Charter' which called for annual parliaments, universal suffrage, vote by secret ballot, abolition of the property qualification for members of parliament, payment of MPs, and the establishment of equal electoral districts. Engels viewed it as "the most advanced class struggle the world has seen". In the decade from 1838 to 1848, the mass movement that swept the country threatened to topple the British establishment.

Some of the Chartist leaders were from Irish backgrounds, and its most left-wing leaders drew broader conclusions about the British empire – with one, Ernest

Jones, famously responding to the boast that "the sun never set on the British Empire" with the retort that "the blood never dried." Engels argued that, "The Irish people must fight strenuously, and in close association with the English working classes and the Chartists" and that "only after these six points are won will the Repeal [of the Union] have any advantage for Ireland."

Marx, Engels and the Fenians

The defeat of the 1848 revolutionary struggles in Europe – including of the Young Ireland revolt and the Chartists – led to a belief that Ireland could become 'the lever' to challenge capitalism and English landlordism, which was playing a reactionary role across Europe. When the Fenians – a new Irish nationalist clandestine movement – emerged in the late 1850s, Marx and Engels sought to engage with them. They were unequivocal in supporting democratic rights, including opposing the repressive measures of the British state. When the killing of a policeman during the escape of two imprisoned Fenian leaders in Manchester resulted in brutal reprisals, including the execution of three Fenians, Marx and Engels were involved in the solidarity campaign against repression that involved labour movement activists across Britain. Marx initiated a public meeting on the issue in London, hosted by the International Workingmen's Association, and it is even speculated that Engels hid one of the escaped leaders. Engels compared the 'Manchester Martyrs' to John Brown – who had been executed in the US for heroically organising a revolt against slavery – because of the role it played in galvanising support for the Fenians, particularly among the Irish diaspora.

While opposing the repression against the Fenians movement and being generally sympathetic to their plight, Marx and Engels were not uncritical of the movement, particularly of its leaders. In private correspondence, Engels wrote to Marx saying: "The beastliness of the English must not make us forget that the leaders of this sect are mostly asses and partly exploiters and we cannot in any way make ourselves responsible for the stupidities which occur in every conspiracy."

FENIAN ATTACK ON THE POLICE VAN IN MANCHESTER. (See p. 455.)

The Fenian attack on a police van in Manchester, September 1867

These comments seem almost prophetic. A few weeks later, a bomb - detonated with the aim of freeing Fenian prisoners in Clerkenwell jail – misfired, killing a dozen residents of a working-class neighbourhood. Marx commented that, "the London masses, who have shown great sympathy for Ireland, will be made wild by it and driven into the arms of the government party. One cannot expect the London proletariat to allow themselves to be blown up in honour of the Fenian emissaries."

Notably this approach is world's apart from the approach of those today who claim to be Marxists and yet, during the Troubles, uncritically supported the IRA campaign, which at the times saw civilians in the North and in Britain consciously targeted.

After independence may come federation

Marx and Engels saw that there was a dialectical relationship between the developing working class in Britain and the Irish masses. They encouraged the labour movement to take up the question of repression and oppression. As Benjamin Lucraft – a English radical trade unionist and collaborator with Marx and Engels – put it, "It was our business to show the Irish that it was only a class of the English that wronged them and that the same class of Irish were as bad."

Marx saw it as democratic to support independence for Ireland, but even then he added that, "after separation there may come federation" with workers in Britain. This reflects the need to build unity of working-class people internationally. Today, the Socialist Party is unique on the left in continuing to work in that spirit, arguing for "socialist Ireland in an equal and voluntary socialist federation of Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland, which in turn would be part of a wider European socialist federation." Our opponents sometimes ridicule this idea as some form of new domination of Ireland by England. Nothing could be further from the truth. A socialist federation could only be achieved through democratic negotiation and agreement, with no element of compulsion, and done in a manner that is precisely 'on a free and voluntary basis'.

Marx and Engels' position on Ireland evolved over time, especially as they more comprehensively understood the reality of colonialism. Despite living prior to the development of the working-class movement in Ireland at the start of the 20th century, their approach was not driven by illusions in nationalism, but fundamentally by what was in the interests of the working class and oppressed masses, and what would act to assist rather than undermine unity and revolutionary movements. This approach remains indispensable today.■

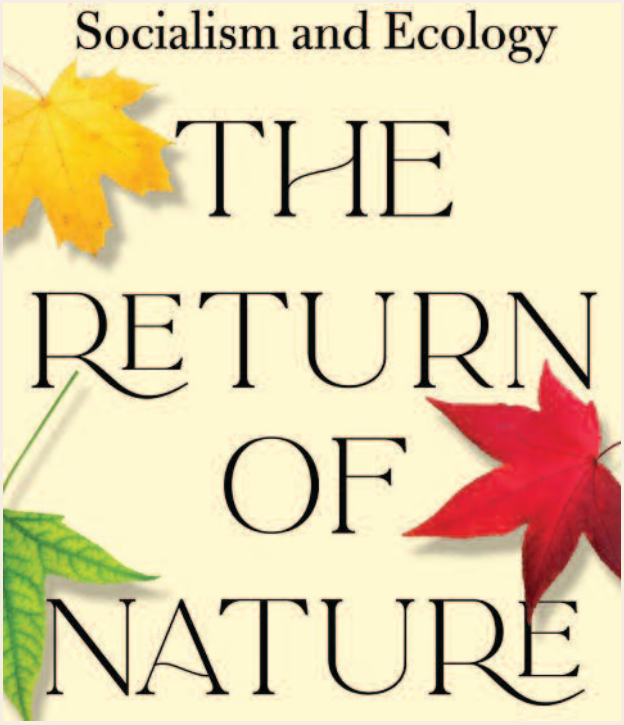
Notes

1 Kevin B. Anderson, 2016, *Marx at the Margins,* The University of Chicago Press ● **2** Ibid ● **3** MECW Volume 6, p. 448; ● **4** John Newsinger, 2013, *The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire,* Bookmarks ● **5** MECW Volume 6, p. 448; ● **6** Marx, Engels and the Fenians, www.marxists.org ● **7** Ibid ● **8** Kevin B. Anderson, 2016 ● **8** Marx/Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers

The Return of Nature

By John Bellamy Foster
Monthly Review Press, 2020

Reviewed by Keishia Taylor



John Bellamy Foster's ground-breaking *Marx's Ecology* in 2000 demonstrated that Marxism, from the beginning, dealt with ecological questions. Its long-awaited sequel, *The Return of Nature: Socialism and Ecology*, developed these ideas from the deaths of Marx and Darwin to the 1960s, tracing a continuous thread of dialectical thinking about the environment. It is a meticulous study of the co-evolution of socialism and ecology citing a huge wealth of sources, including the significant contributions of Engels, the "Left Darwinist", Ray Lankester, and the Romantic Marxist, William Morris.

Much of 19th century science celebrated the domination of humans over nature. Engels explained that the division between mankind and nature was not inevitable or permanent but was a direct consequence of the emergence of private property, as the robbery of the Earth was the foundation of the economic system. Instead, human society is a part of and arose from nature, while simultaneously acting upon nature; humanity creates and operates according to its own laws but is still subject to the natural laws of physics. There is no absolute opposition between nature and society; using a dialectical materialist approach accounted for the changing and contradictory nature of existence in the world.

In *Anti-Duhring*, Engels wrote that "Nature is the proof of dialectics, and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this proof with very rich materials increasing daily." Darwinian evolution was a ground-breaking example, but he also argued that the so-called constants of physics were often the points at which a quantitative change becomes qualitative change, such as the freezing and boiling points of water. Another example is the conversion of hydrocarbons into distinct compounds by lengthening or shortening the chain of carbon atoms.

For Marx and Engels, the materialist conception of nature and the materialist conception of history were reflexively connected, just as the alienation of nature and the alienation of labour were. William Morris expanded on the concept of alienation by arguing that capitalist production and division of labour caused a deep disconnection of the working class from their work, themselves, the natural world and their belonging to a broader ecological whole. As a Romantic socialist, he writes that art is the worker's pleasure, freedom and individuality in his daily necessary work, something that is crushed by capitalism.

Foster documents the brutal conditions imposed on the working class, beginning with Engels' 1845 *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. In industrial towns, the working class lived and worked in filth and squalor, with a lack of sanitation or healthcare, air and water pollution, poor nutrition and adulteration of food, at constant risk of crippling injury and ultimately premature death. Engels called the early death of working class people, linked to their environment and conditions, "social murder" at the hands of capitalists.

Morris writes of the inherent wastefulness of capitalism in terms of the purposeless goods produced for the wealthy, the socially unnecessary toil expended, the misery and wasted lives of workers, pointless bureaucracy and destruction of the environment. He was among many who critiqued the rapacious destruction of forests, depletion of soil nutrients, pillage of the seas, and pollution of the air and rivers with smoke and sewage wrought by industrial capitalism. Some warned against the scale of human interference with the complex ecological systems which was unbalancing the metabolism of nature with unknown consequences. These socialists rejected a Malthusian approach of blaming over-population and placed the blame squarely at the feet of the capitalist drive for expansion and profit, rather than humanity as a whole.

In the late 19th century, Lankester emphasised that humanity was walking on an ecological knife's edge, but we have long been travelling on a trajectory to total disaster. In a society dominated by pursuit of short-term profit, capitalist expansion, and with power concentrated in increasingly fewer hands, science, technology and production can have dangerous results. Capitalism is incapable of balancing the needs of profit with the genuine needs of society as a whole – it cannot be done.

The warming of the atmosphere; the destruction of the world's forests by agribusiness and fires; the massive

loss of habitats and biodiversity; extreme weather events; and the pollution of the water systems with microplastics; these realities have been furiously suppressed or dismissed by capitalist establishments for decades. Today world capitalism is vulnerable, being in the throes of manifold crises – the pandemic, economic depression, mass unemployment and destitution, inter-imperialist competition, climate catastrophe, and, our only hope, the potential of mass action by the working class.

The Return of Nature narrates a century of dialectical ecological scholarship, providing a tool for developing our understanding of the deep current of ecological thought in the emergence of socialist ideas. Unfortunately the book falls short of being any sort of guide to action. Nevertheless, in the final sentences, Foster outlines our urgent task; "what we must dethrone today is the idol of capital itself, the concentrated power of class-based avarice, which now imperils the ecology of the earth."■

Les Misérables

Directed by Ladj Ly
SRAB Films, Rectangle Productions, 2019

Reviewed by Róise McCann

Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables* (2019) borrows its name from Victor Hugo's historic novel written in 1862 but is most relevant in 2020. The film is set in the district of Montfermeil, where Ly grew up and where the events of Hugo's original were written to have taken place. "It hasn't changed much" characters remark when speaking about the social deprivation which is rife in the area. Ly commented that this is the first element of the film, the second being a depiction of the conditions of communities in banlieues, in particular the prevalence of police violence.

This year there have been eruptions of protest all over the world following a video showing the police killing of George Floyd, an unarmed black man in Minneapolis, USA. The Black Lives Matter movement is one against racism and police brutality, and Ly's work as a videographer offers crucial insight into these issues in France. Ly gained prominence in 2008 when he shot and released footage of riot police attacking a handcuffed man, leading to the suspension of the officer involved. The incident would inspire the creation of the 2019 film.

The film begins with the aftermath of France's victory at the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Crowds fill the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, adorned with tricolour flags waving and cheering in exultant celebration. Imagery employed during this opening sequence is reminiscent of that of musical adaptations of Hugo's *Les Misérables*, where masses of people line the streets during the June rebellion of 1832. Both instances parallel each other as they represent unity, French people joined together regardless of class or creed in rebellion and antithetical celebration. They also both come to a crashing end, with the novel revealing the brutal state repression which quashed the uprising in 1832, and the characters of *Les Misérables* (2019) returning to the realities of the banlieue (suburb).

Conflict of power is central to the plot of the film, which follows two police officers who oversee a newly transferred rookie from Cherbourg, and it is from his perspective of shock that we view the breaches of conduct which occur on the streets of Montfermeil every day. Chris, the more heavy-handed of the resident officers, casually harasses and brutalises young men and women. When met with resistance, he asserts "I am the law". The Mayor, their "very own Obama" clashes with police, his own monetary interests always at heart. In response to the precarious existence of young people that leads many to commit crimes, and the ambivalence of community actors like the Mayor, the Muslim Brotherhood religious group focuses on intervening on the cycle of violence. All forces become embroiled when a travelling circus conductor accuses a young man of stealing a lion cub. The police, in the pursuit of maintaining 'law and order', heighten the use of repressive force, searching for the perpetrator. In doing this, they start a skirmish between themselves and young men playing football, which ends in a shocking act of violence captured on a

drone camera by a teenager nearby. Much like the real events that inspired the film, the footage itself holds great power, as if released it would reveal the corruption and brutality of the police. Fearing repercussions Chris goes to extreme lengths to obtain and destroy the video, including collaborating with organised crime groups to which the police turn a blind eye in their daily duties, focusing their efforts on harassing local young people of colour.

The police receive a warning from Salah, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood who was previously involved in juvenile crime, incarcerated and attempting to raise himself and others like him above the cycle of crime and punishment that seems inescapable. In reaction to young men on the streets attacking the officers in guerrilla-style protests against their increased brutality, he tells police "you won't avoid their rage". Just as the dire conditions of poverty leading to young people's involvement in petty crime, and the police violence to which they are subjected, is seen as inevitable, their revolt is also inevitable. The film concludes with a crescendo of violence, with teenagers of Montfermeil trapping police in hallways of the apartments where they live and unleashing a lifetime of police repression and violence back upon them. The conflict of power at that moment has been won and is firmly clasped in the hands of a brutalised child.

Ladj Ly said that his *Les Misérables* was an expressly political film, "I wanted to make the point that a century later the same social misery still exists". The film portrays how violent police intervention does not protect working-class people, but heightens the precariousness of their conditions. Beyond this, it shows the failure of the capitalist system to support working-class people, who are failed on every level from healthcare to acceptable housing and secure jobs. Instead, when petty crimes are committed as a result of these conditions, the system offers harsh punitive action. Ly invokes Victor Hugo's maxim; "there are no bad plants or bad men. There are only bad cultivators."

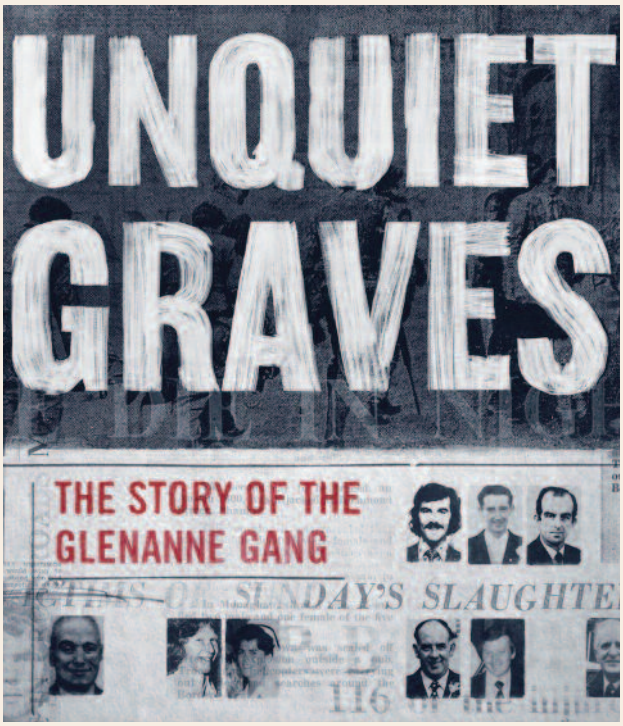
Today in the era of the Black Lives Matter movement, with extreme and seemingly ever-increasing instances of police brutality and absence of justice, *Les Misérables* is essential viewing.■

Unquiet Graves

Directed by Sean A. Murray

Journeyman Pictures, 2018

Reviewed by Sean Burns



Unquiet Graves opens with a harrowing reenactment of the murder of two young men, Colm McCartney and Sean Farmer, in 1975. Returning from a Gaelic football game in Dublin, the two were stopped at a 'British Army' checkpoint near the village of Newtownhamilton in County Armagh and shot dead. Throughout the documentary families of victims detail the horrific experiences suffered at the hands of loyalist paramilitaries and the British state.

The documentary gives a detailed look into the reality of state collusion, and the devastation wrought on working-class people's lives as a result. It focuses in particular on the role of the Glennane Gang in 1970's Tyrone / Armagh – a gang composed of RUC officers, British soldiers and UDR men alongside loyalist paramilitaries – who are believed to be responsible for 120 killings, including the infamous Dublin / Monaghan bombings and the Miami Showband massacre.

Part of what the documentary uncovers is the lie that British imperialism purely intervened as a benign peacekeeping force between two "warring tribes". This narrative is exposed thoroughly throughout the film by accounts of victims and the testimony of John Weir. Weir, a sergeant in the RUC's Special Patrol Group (SPG) counter-terrorist section and member of the UVF, details the active collaboration between security forces and loyalist paramilitaries.

The British ruling class was acting to defend its interests. The army was sent to Northern Ireland to protect property and the profits of the British capitalists, not to protect the interests of either Catholic or Protestant workers. Even in their own words this reality is shown. General Frank Kitson, who was a key figure in the British Army's intervention into the North, stated:

"Everything done by a government and its agents in combating insurgency must be legitimate. But this does not mean that the government must work within exactly the same set of laws during an emergency as existed beforehand. The law should be used as just another weapon in the government's arsenal, in which case it becomes little more than a propaganda cover for the disposal of unwanted members of the public."

The documentary details the horrific spiral of sectarian murders in the area. On 5 January 1976, six Catholics – three Reavey brothers and three members of the O'Dowd family – were murdered by the Glenanne gang in south Armagh. One day later, the Provisional IRA retaliated, using the cover name of the South Armagh Republican Action Force. They stopped a workers' bus on a country road near Kingsmill. They asked all 12 men on the bus their religion, ordered the only Catholic to walk away, and proceeded to execute the remaining men. This resulted in 10 deaths and one survivor. There are suspicions that state agents may have been involved and that this may have impeded the investigations at the time. In response, the Glennane Gang formulated a plan to massacre Catholic school children and their teachers in the Armagh village of Beleeks. This plan, alleges John Weir, was instigated by British Intelligence operatives. It would not come to fruition, as the Belfast UVF stepped in, deeming it as going 'too far', risking all out civil war.

What is unfortunately absent from the documentary, however, is the response from working-class people to this escalating crisis – a response which would be decisive in preventing any slide into such a civil war. After the Reavey / O'Dowd murders and the Kingsmill massacre, Newry Trades Council immediately called a strike which closed most of the factories and workplaces of the town and brought thousands onto the streets. The overwhelming mood for peace was harnessed instead by the Peace People in the summer and autumn of 1976. A series of rallies were held across the North. 20,000 turned out at Belfast's Ormeau Park, 30,000 on the Shankill, 25,000 in Derry and many thousands more in Antrim, Coleraine, Strabane, Craigavon, Dungannon, Newtownards, Ballynahinch and elsewhere. These were not insignificant & disconnected events. The working class exerted itself and this was key to pushing back the tide of sectarianism.

Many of those who participated in the film are campaigners for truth and justice. This documentary is part of the process of shining a light on the past and the role of the state in colluding with sectarian forces. It spends some time detailing the struggle to access documentation and files, including attempts for international bodies to investigate. Unfortunately the British State and all sectarian actors in the troubles have made clear that it is only their narrative that will be told.

Socialists support a genuine accounting of the past but have no illusions that the British State, nor any sectarian force, can deliver an honest account. We do however have confidence in working-class people to expose the truth and expose these forces to real scrutiny. This could mean some form of wide-ranging enquiry into the troubles, which would not be in the hands of the state or establishment parties but made up of respected trade unionists and those with a record of campaigning on these issues from the standpoint of ordinary people, including human rights groups.■

The Jakarta Method

By Vincent Bevins
Ingram Publisher Services US, 2019

Reviewed by Manus Lenihan

The beautiful Indonesian island of Bali attracts visitors from all over the world. But most holidaymakers have no idea that just over fifty years ago the Indonesian military and police killed 80,000 unarmed civilians on that island. Across Indonesia, in 1965-66, at least one million socialists, communists and trade unionists were murdered. *The Jakarta Method* by Vincent Bevins deals with this massacre and traces how its 'method' was very consciously exported to country after country, under the guidance of the United States government.

These crimes were rooted in a rabid anti-communist ideology, which saw every challenge to the powerful and wealthy as part of a 'global communist conspiracy.' But the revolutionary movements in every corner of the world in the 1960s and 70s were rooted not in conspiracies, but in the unbearable conditions created by capitalism.

Indonesia had thrown out Dutch imperialism after a revolutionary war. It was seen as a key leader of the 'Third World,' the former colonial countries where millions dreamt of a future of dignity and prosperity.

The hopes of many Indonesians were invested in the Parti Kommunist Indonesia (PKI), a mass workers' party with 3 million members. 20 million Indonesians – one-fifth of the population! – were members of broader groups openly affiliated to the PKI, including the women's organisation Gerwani. In the early 1960s, the party was unarmed and gaining in elections; it had neither the means nor the incentive to commit the bloody acts that it was later accused of.

The PKI leadership was wedded to the Stalinist stages theory, which held that socialism was not possible in under-developed countries. They believed that socialists should play second fiddle to the

'progressive bourgeoisie' until such time as a 'period of capitalist development' had taken place. In 1960s Indonesia, this meant giving critical support to President Sukarno, a charismatic leader who carried off a delicate balancing act between Islam, the military, nationalism and the PKI.

On the night of 30 September 1965, a group of pro-Sukarno army officers murdered six generals. This murky incident was seized upon by the right wing. A bloody and bizarre version of events was broadcast around the world: it was claimed that members of the PKI women's movement, Gerwani, had tortured and castrated the generals in a demonic ritual. Neither PKI nor Gerwani had any part in the affair. But to this day, the Indonesian ruling class insists that this pathological, misogynistic nightmare is the real version of events.

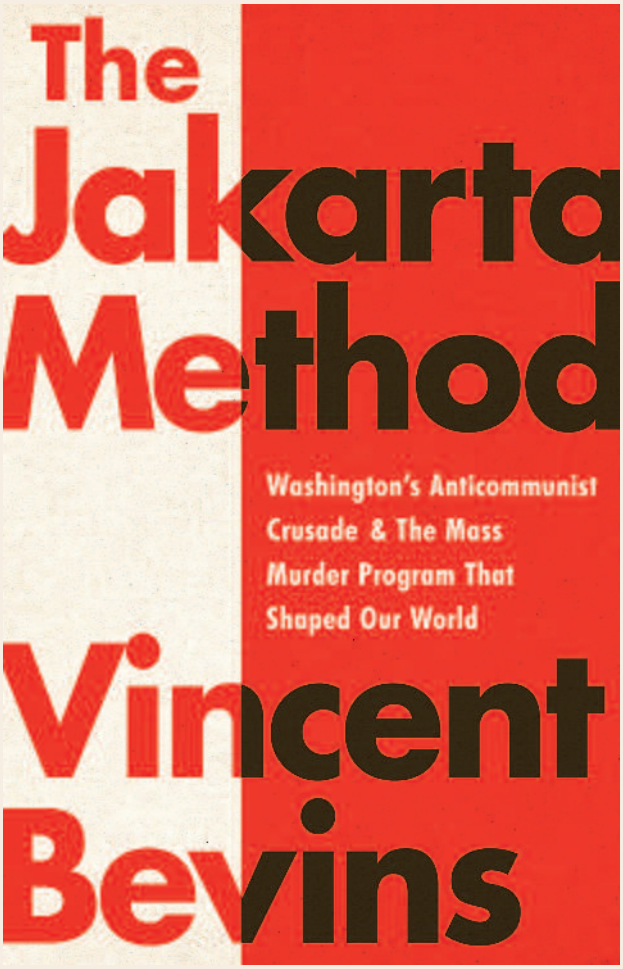
September 30 was used as a pretext for military, police and paramilitaries to destroy the PKI. Bodies clogged the rivers. The smell of death hung over parts of the countryside. 1-2 million unarmed civilians were killed in six months.

President Sukarno was sidelined by the military then overthrown. Workers and poor people, represented by the PKI, suffered a crushing, historic defeat at the hands of the ruling class and its military.

The fingerprints of the US government were all over events. They supplied lists of alleged communists for the Indonesian authorities to torture and kill. There followed a carve-up of the country between US business interests and a corrupt Indonesian ruling class. A million people were locked up in a vast network of concentration camps. From 1975-79, the Indonesian state again employed anti-communism to justify genocide in East Timor.

Bevins traces how, in 11 different countries, repressive operations named 'Jakarta' (after the Indonesian capital) were put into effect. The list of countries where the method was applied, as opposed to just the name, is much longer. It is important to keep in mind that we are not talking about fatalities of war or even accidental 'collateral damage.' The 'Jakarta Method' was (and is) the cold-blooded murder of unarmed civilians. A large part of the book traces the development of this method in South and Central America.

Nobody who reads *The Jakarta Method* should come away with illusions in reformism, i.e. a belief that the army, police, civil servants, media etc are neutral and



that a socialist government will be 'allowed' to take power by democratic means.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the 'Jakarta Method' was essential to the victory of capitalism in the Cold War – although Bevins backs away from this conclusion himself, emphasizing that the Soviet Union fell as a result of its own internal contradictions. But a wave of successful revolutions would have changed the course of world history, including within the Soviet Union itself. In any case, the author shows beyond dispute that US imperialism, far from being a champion of democracy in the Cold War, was aggressive and merciless. He points out that since the end of the Cold War, after a brief decline in US military spending in the 1990s, the tempo of imperial violence has risen to new heights.■

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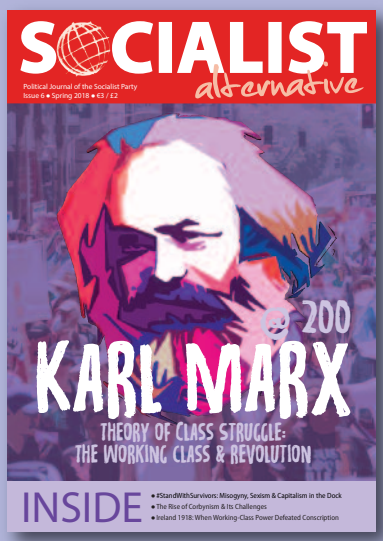

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