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The Socialist spotlight

By Leon Fitzpatrick

Massive wealth at one pole, misery at another

Last year 5.2 million individuals became millionaires and for the first time in history millionaires make up more than 1% of the world's population, according to the new Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report. The wealth gap has widened to its highest level since 2016 as house prices and stocks soar, the rich get richer while vulnerable groups such as young people, women, migrants and workers in retail and hospitality have seen their fortunes plummet. Another example, of which they are many, of how the system is stitched up against us.

Corporate landlords prepare for evictions

While renters in some of the wealthiest countries are handing over half to two-thirds of their salaries to landlords, private equity firms such as Blackstone are bulk buying properties. Blackstone reported \$1.75bn in net income in the first quarter of 2021 compared to a net loss of \$1.07bn in the same period in 2020. The firm now boasts \$649 billion in assets. With eviction moratoriums expiring this summer, Blackstone will undoubtedly take advantage of the millions of people due to be evicted by hoovering up their properties once they're out on the streets.

Vaccine apartheid – capitalism's contempt for the poor

As life returns to some semblance of normalcy in many wealthy countries, the effects of vaccine hoarding continue to take their toll on the Global South as Covid infection rates and deaths surge in the poorest regions. In early June, the US had administered vaccinations to nearly half of its population, in Canada over a third and in the EU approximately a third. Due to the shameful self-interest of the ruling classes in those same countries, the vaccination rates in countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, Vietnam and Zambia it ranged from 0.1% to 0.9% of the population.

Covid & mental health

New research published in the journal *World Psychiatry* points towards a grave link between mental health disorders, increased infection and death rates from Covid. A person recently diagnosed with a mental health disorder is seven times more likely to contract Covid and the death rate for a Covid infected person with a mental health disorder is 8.5%, nearly double a person without a mental health disorder. The hospitalisation rate for a Covid infected person with a mental health disorder is 27.4% compared to 18.6% for someone without a men-



Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg is currently worth \$127 billion

tal health disorder. Austerity during the neoliberal period has decimated much of the world's public health infrastructure and as always society's most vulnerable will suffer the most.

The merchants of death

According to the UN, 100 million people faced crisis or worse levels of food insecurity as a result of conflict, an increase from 77 million in 2019. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross commented that global fragility is deepening due to armed conflict, the pandemic, economic downturn, rising inequality and climate change. The global weapons manufacturing market is due to increase from US\$118bn in 2021 to reach

US\$140bn by 2027. Capitalism never allows a crisis to go to waste.

Mark Zuckerberg – Monopoly Man

An attempt to break up Facebook's social media monopoly failed as a federal court in Washington, D.C. dismissed the case on Monday. The cases' dismissal sent Facebook's stock market value surging past \$1 trillion dollars. Mark Zuckerberg is currently worth US\$127bn and has amassed enormous political power through Facebook as a social media network as well as acquiring Whatsapp and Instagram, giving Facebook an absurd ability to curate what can and cannot be seen online.



Blackstone: Vulture fund profiting from housing crisis

South: National Maternity Hospital must be 100% public, secular and progressive

By Laura Fitzgerald

THE RESOUNDING two-thirds majority vote in the 2018 repeal referendum vote was undeniably a vote for both abortion rights, and more generally for a progressive, secular Ireland. Building on the Marriage Equality vote that affirmed LGBTQ rights, it represented a watershed rejection of the cruel church-state nexus of repression of the past.

A total insult

The very idea that in the 2020s, most especially after the grassroots abortion rights mass movement achieved such a victory, that there is even a possibility that a newly built National Maternity Hospital would be anything other than 100% public, secular and progressive is outrageous. This, and the cruel botch-job done on the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation, in fact presided over by a Green Party minister, emphasise the continued backwardness and cowardice of the political establishment in this state.

The gall of the St Vincent's Hospital Group and the Religious Sisters of Charity in insisting that they maintain ownership of the site would make the blood boil. Meanwhile, unconvincing assurances from the Government that the Church teachings would have no influence on clinical decisions have sounded pathetic.

Build a mass movement to win

Timely truth-telling interventions from Dr. Peter Boylan to repeatedly insist that vital procedures for women and trans people of course will not be carried out while the Church can stick their oar in means that the pressure is really building on the Government. A major and mass demonstration should now be called and organised for – supported by all feminist, LGBTQ, migrant and traveller rights organisations, and the Trade Union movement, with networks build up during repeal reactivated to help deliver mass attendance – to demand a 100% publicly owned, secular and democratic new NMH.

Talk of a compulsory purchase order of the potential NMH land in Elm Park that means compensation



Protest in to demand NMH is made public Dublin on 26 June

to the church based on market value is problematic. Such compensation may easily run in the hundreds of millions of euros for this 29 acres of land. In 2017, RTE sold just under nine acres of its land, located literally across the road from the proposed NMH site, for €107.1 million to a major developer.

Why should significant public

funds be handed over to a religious order sitting on such prime located land? How can this possibly be justified? This land should be seized by the state with no compensation for an institution that has caused so much pain and suffering to women, the LGBTQ community and working class people generally, would be more appropriate.

We say:

- Public, secular and progressive NMH — it must be 100% publicly owned.

- NMH should be democratically run — no establishment figures, church representatives nor political appointees on the board — it should be made up of trade union representatives of the medical and ancillary staff; of users of the service, including migrant and Traveller women, and trans people.

- For the full separation of church and state. All church-owned land on which public services reside, along with all private hospitals, should be brought into public ownership, with no compensation. For a secular, public, one-tier national public health service.

- Build a united working-class movement that fights against this cowardly political establishment and against the rule of their oppressive capitalist system. Fight for a democratic, secular, and socialist society, built on solidarity and compassion, where its wealth is democratically and publicly owned and used for the benefit of all.

Interview: Hospitality workers need to organise

The hospitality sector has experienced an unprecedented level of attacks on workers' conditions and pay, with the employers utilizing the Covid pandemic and lockdowns as a convenient cover for dodgy employment practices. Despite this, workers in the sector have been attempting to organise together to fight for dignity and respect at work. *The Socialist* spoke to Neil Moore, organiser for Unite Hospitality in the North and a Socialist Party member.

What is the current state of hospitality post-lockdown?

"Employers in the hospitality sector

are reporting a widespread shortage of workers to take on essential responsibilities. This is the chickens coming home to roost for the employers. Even prior to Covid - zero-hour contracts, precarious conditions and low wages were the norm throughout the industry. This was compounded when bosses laid off thousands of workers in response to lockdowns. Even those who retained their workers through furloughing were unhappy at receiving a bare 80% of the disgracefully low minimum wage that they should get work elsewhere. Of course many did and discovered that working elsewhere, in many cases in call centres, in retail or even Amazon - was much preferable to their treatment in the hospitality sector."

What are the issues hospitality workers face post-reopening?

"In Unite we surveyed hospitality workers on their experiences. The results were shocking. 46% of respondents were considering leaving the industry - with factors pushing workers out of the hospitality/service sector including stress (74%), excessive hours (61%), unsociable hours (58%),



low pay (55%), bullying (44%) and lack of career progression opportunities (37%). A staggering 95% of hos-

pitality workers reported experiencing sexual harassment or abuse at their workplace."

What can workers do to change their working conditions for the better?

"Unions should not sit back at this time - we must develop an understanding among workers of the real collective power they have when they get organised. In 2020, workers in Queen's Students' Union demonstrated this power by coming together, organising in response to their employer not furloughing. They won a significant victory, winning wage support but also trade union recognition. Given the labour shortage in the sector we have two choices: accept more work for less pay alongside the same terrible working conditions, or fight for a living wage, a decent work / life balance and respect at work. Right now even the bosses are saying workers (particularly highly skilled workers such as chefs) can "name their price", proving it is workers who hold the real power in the workplace. In order to realise this power and secure better pay and working conditions, workers should join a union, organise with their colleagues and be prepared to challenge the status quo of the bare minimum that the employers arrogantly push us into accepting."

South: Low pay & high rent The squeeze on young workers

By Ewan Fitzgerald

WITH SOCIETY slowly reopening, and with the threat of the Delta variant very present, young workers who have not yet been vaccinated face the most risks to their health as they are forced to return to the workplace. They also still face low wages and high rents, long shifts, and short breaks, and cuts to the PUP for those not able to return to work.

Minimum wage and cost of living

As of January 2021, the minimum wage in Ireland stands at €10.20 per hour for those aged 20+, €9.18 for those aged 19, €8.16 for those aged 18, and €7.14 for those under 18. These arbitrary rates are themselves examples of discrimination against young people - being paid less for the same work. They should be abolished and all workers paid the same, regardless of age. An 18 or 19-year-old still pay the same prices as everyone else!

The average rent per month is somewhere around €1,256 (in Dublin this rate can double or more). This figure excludes heating and electricity, food, and any other bills. The average earning of someone aged 18-20 working full time (39 hours) is currently €358.02 per week, or €1551.42



per month. So after rent, they would be left with only €295.42 for any other necessities.

This government of bosses and landlords expects people to work just to exist, but not actually live. Young workers deserve better.

PUP and return to work

Over the course of the pandemic, many people have been relying on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP). While the PUP has undoubtedly helped many people for more than a year now, the state has made it clear that it will not last. Young people are going to have to return to work or try to survive on the

measly Jobseeker's Allowance, which is also worse for those under 25 - at €112.70 per week!

The PUP of €350 should be the standard rate for all 'Jobseekers', because anything less than means poverty - which has been inadvertently admitted by the government. If some people, mostly young, also realise that they're better off being paid by the PUP rather than their own wages, it's because they're being paid poverty wages!

An alternative solution

A response to this that would make life even a small bit easier would be the introduction of a €15 an hour minimum wage, with no exemptions. Guaranteed hours and shifts so workers can know for sure what they'll earn, and be able to manage their finances accordingly, is also necessary.

Even prior to the pandemic young people were at the bottom of the pit when it comes to employment and wages - often being used as cheap and disposable labour. This issue is so impactful that it has meant that the millennial and Gen Z generations are the first generations to be worse off than the preceding ones, and it's only going one way. We need to stand against capitalism and its exploitation, not just for us but for generations to come.

Challenge sexism in hospitality



By Amy Ferguson

SEXISM, A pillar upon which the capitalist system is reliant, permeates many aspects of society. Subsequently, women workers are not free of misogynistic standards and abuse when they clock into work.

In hospitality this is reflected in a number of ways. Firstly, the industry is notorious for its gendered uniforms; shirts that cling to our hips and reveal our chests. Secondly, a Unite the Union survey found that 90% of workers have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace.

Poor working conditions exacerbate these issues. Poverty wages mean staff are financially reliant upon tips to help us cover our bills, or even taxis so we can get home safe after late shifts. This means we are pressured into accepting unwanted flirting and touching, and having to 'look our best'.

Covid has further added fuel to the fire. On top of financial loss and understaffing many women workers are reporting an increase in harassment, frequently being told "take down your mask so I know how to tip you" or "take off your mask so I can see that smile".

Fortunately, throughout the past year we have also seen hospitality workers across the globe fight back collectively against sexual harassment, like the recent Paris McDonald's strike. Organising and taking collective action with your coworkers is vital to breaking with sexist norms, but it also requires taking a political approach, connecting with the demands and aspirations of young people to be free from capitalism's exploitation and oppression for good.

North: 'Peace process' running out of road – what way forward?

By Daniel Waldron

MORE THAN two decades after the Good Friday Agreement, the promise of a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Northern Ireland has not been fulfilled. Instead, the 'peace process' has entered a new phase of instability which could see it unravel under its own contradictions, with disastrous consequences. But workers and young people can chart a different way forward.

NI protocol creates turmoil

Anger in the Protestant community over the Northern Ireland protocol – which has placed a regulatory border down the Irish Sea – has led to the most serious rioting on our streets for more than a decade, including clashes at sectarian interfaces. Many working-class Protestants feel that their community is being ignored, patronised and pushed towards a united Ireland where they fear they will lose their identity and become a beleaguered minority.

This process has seen first Arlene Foster and now Edwin Poots unceremoniously deposed as DUP leader in quick succession, partly as a result of their perceived inaction on this issue. Their party has lost support to other Unionist forces who are posing as more reliable opponents of the Protocol. New DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson will be under pressure to take a tougher stance in deeds, not just words. Political Unionism is in flux, but it



will be deeply wrong to confuse this with a significant fall in support for the Union within the Protestant community.

Stormont's uncertain future

This poses the real possibility of the collapse of the power-sharing institutions in the near future. Sinn Féin, too, had threatened to pull Stormont down over the issue of Irish language legislation. The 'peace

process', as it has been constituted, is running out of road. It will not be as easily resurrected as it has in the past. At the root of this instability is the looming question of a border poll, which – in the context of a deeply divided society – will be little more than a sectarian headcount, pointing not towards a democratic solution but to sharp polarisation, perhaps with explosive repercussions.

Struggle can break down divisions

At the same time, there is real potential for struggles of workers and young people which can challenge sectarian division and the Unionist and nationalist parties who base themselves upon it. We see this potential when workers stand together on picket lines, in opposition to the bosses and politicians, and win – whether NHS staff fighting for pay parity and safe staffing, or Hovis bakers securing wage-rises. We see

it when working-class communities campaign together to stop cuts to vital services. We see it when young people from across the divide take inspiration from international movements and take to the streets in opposition to racism, gender violence and climate change.

While we are often divided in terms of our national identity and aspirations, workers and young people are overwhelmingly united in opposition to any return to the violence of the past. When Belfast bus workers walked out in protest against an attack on one of their colleagues during the recent rioting, they received near universal support. There is an important tradition of workers using their collective power to push back against sectarian forces who threaten the lives and safety of working-class people. This is a tradition which needs to be maintained and rebuilt.

Build a real peace process

We need to build a new peace process, based on bringing together working-class communities in the struggle for a better future, not sectarian politicians united only in their defence of capitalism. Such a process could find genuinely democratic solutions to the questions which currently divide our communities – including the question of borders – in a spirit of solidarity, mutual respect and compromise. This would require a break with capitalism – which breeds poverty, alienation and division – and a struggle for a socialist change.

South: The unending housing crisis – break with the capitalist market

By Fiona Ryan

THE HOUSING crisis is the most urgent issue facing young people today. Two generations face a housing market where homeownership is a fantasy and the ability to rent extortionately priced housing is beyond many people's grasp. This is fuelled by a feckless political establishment beholden to landlords, speculators and venture funds.

"Build to Rent" developments by investment funds, coupled with the government's refusal to intervene to stem landlord profits have helped create widespread unaffordability. In general, cities are becoming more expensive and gentrified internationally.

Cost of living crisis

Ireland now ranks second highest in the EU for cost of goods and services. The Global Liveability Index 2021 which tracks the living standards of 140 countries saw Ireland drop 22 places in just six months of this year alone. With renters on average paying 40% of their wages on

rent, it's clear this is no country for young people.

Tenants may face rent increases of up to 8% when the temporary ban on rent freezes expires. While the government has stated this was an unintended loophole, indications are that protections provided within fast-tracked legislation will be limited.

The housing crisis is the culmination of decades of neoliberal policies of housing spearheaded by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Greens and Labour and of a system that makes a home a profit-making commodity rather than a right.

Mica scandal & market failure

The government's insistence on almost total reliance on the private market to provide housing has consistently failed. We were reminded of this when thousands protested on 15 June this year seeking redress over the Mica scandal. As a result of companies cutting costs years ago, homes are literally crumbling.

A movement is necessary to demand an end to evictions and real rent controls with powers to significantly reduce and freeze rents to lev-



els that are affordable. Only a massive public housing programme can answer the crisis by providing quality affordable homes for all, to rent or to buy. This means rejecting the capitalist framework that views

housing as a commodity and not a right.

The housing crisis, alongside stagnant wages and precarious work, continues to fuel the widening discontent of young people. Ireland's

capitalist establishment faces a generation of young people unable to meet their most basic aspirations in an increasingly unaffordable society.

Many of them will conclude we need to break with the system that has bred so much inequality.

The case for socialism

Only a socialist transformation of society can wrench power away from the 1% who continue to consolidate enormous amounts of wealth. According to Oxfam, the 10 wealthiest men increased their wealth by \$540 billion during the pandemic. The same report estimated up to 500 million more people were in poverty in 2020.

The housing crisis is an inevitable symptom of a system designed to be unequal. The Socialist Party argues to end that system and take the wealth and power out of the hands of the landlords, builders, and developers whose greed is undermining our right to a roof over our head. Join and help us create a world where wealth and resources are in public ownership and democratically organised to meet the needs of people and the planet.

Why I joined the Socialist Party

"I started getting active in an anti-capitalist organisation following the brutal murder of George Nkencho at the hands of the Gardai close to where I live. I began to be aware of the need to actively organise against oppression to create long lasting change, going further than just going to protests whenever the next wave of unrest ripples through society. Through having discussions with Socialist Party members in YARI, I began to better understand how much the perpetration of oppression is due to the profit system we live under, and that to truly tackle this we need to dismantle capitalism and fight for a system based on need. And to achieve this a sustained and organised approach was needed. I was already aware of the party's work through my family but this realisation encouraged me to take the step to join myself."

— **Aoife Coppinger, 17, Dublin**

"I'd never been close to a party. My upbringing, albeit Protestant, was isolated from Green-Orange politics. As a teenager, my political interest grew amidst global developments and social issues... I was leaning leftwards, but there were no outlets to be truly productive. Most parties either aren't left-wing, or put the national question above all. This is where the Socialist Party came in, which took up the national question on the basis arguing for the unity of Protestant and Catholic workers. I joined following a meeting on the Capitol Riots, as it showed they took international issues seriously and had strong connections with socialists across the world. Discussions among members greatly developed my political understanding and validated my prior concerns and instincts through theory and fascinating insight into working-class history and oppressed communities, who constantly overcame bitter divides and challenged the limits of this system."

— **Luke Holmes, 21, Co. Derry**

I started contact with the Socialist Party after I attended the Rosa protest in honour of Sarah Everard back in March. I had attended several protests and had wanted to become more involved with the feminist struggle in Ireland for some time. Although I had been following the organisation for years it was at this March that it really hit home that the capitalist system was not ever going to work for me, and that socialism was something I needed to learn more about. Sarah could have been anyone of my friends, family or even me, and seeing how Rosa members were fined for exercising their right to protest by the very same institution that had harmed this woman showed me how dangerous institutions like the police can be and who they are really designed to protect. The pandemic has shown me that an equal and fair society can never exist within capitalism, and that is why I decided to join the Socialist Party.

— **Rebecca Nic Chomara, 25, Cork**

With our planet on fire...

THE BURNING NEED FOR SOCIALIST CHANGE

& how we can bring it about



The crisis is capitalism: Global revolt in the "Age of Disorder"

By Laura Fitzgerald

AT THE TIME of writing, North America is enduring a record-breaking heatwave, with many forced to seek sanctuary from this oppressive and potentially fatal heat in air-conditioned buildings. Temperatures are soaring to record highs of 45°C. Yet another ominous warning of the threat that climate change poses to humanity.

Capitalism today is overseeing multiple crises internationally: economic, political, social and ecological. The "Age of Disorder" is an apt term to describe the present period, one recently coined by a strategist for "Deutsche Bank", German capitalism's largest banking institution.

Growing resistance

Nominal economic growth, where it does exist, belies the fact that this means precious little to the lives of the majority. We never see the fruit of our collective labour, the coffers of the super-rich simply balloon further. Each annual report from organisations like Oxfam testifies to this expanding gap between the obscenely wealthy and everyone else. In contrast, young people today face a future of low-paid, precarious work and unaffordable housing.

These injustices are unacceptable, and importantly, are not being accepted, hence the rising waves of resistance across the globe.

Here we can only name check some countries that have witnessed rebellions, revolts, and revolutionary up-



BLM protest movement reaches Brussels, Belgium

heaval in the last two years:

Chile, Columbia, Peru, Ecuador, Sudan, Algeria, Nigeria, Myanmar, and Hong Kong have all seen such upheavals. The interlinked factors of opposition to deteriorating living standards, corruption and oppression is the common denominator that is fuelling these events — factors that have been massively exacerbated by the pandemic.

In Myanmar and Columbia especially, strike movements of workers

have been the beating heart of these movements, with young people and women to the fore.

The shift in political outlook is striking in places like the United States, the world's largest economic and military power. A plethora of opinion polls in recent years have shown growing support for the broad ideas of socialism, particularly among young people.

Most recently, an Axios / Momentive poll found that only 49% of those

aged 18-34 viewed capitalism positively. Prior to the pandemic in 2019, this figure stood at 59%.

Oppression and injustice

Last June, in the aftermath of the horrific murder of George Floyd, the biggest and most multi-racial protest movement in US history came into being. An estimated 26 million took to the streets. Similar Black Lives Matter protests exploded globally, with many statues of odious slave owners and colonialists being toppled — a reflection of the growing awareness and opposition to racism and oppression both in history and today.

Global opposition to oppression has also been reflected in the myriad of protests against gender-based violence, for abortion rights and for trans rights. Women and LGBTQ people are calling time on the daily discrimination and prejudices that they are forced to endure.

The recent mass protests in solidarity with Palestine in the face of Israel state terror were also global and reflected a powerful mood of international solidarity among working people.

Organising for socialist change

Capitalism offers only a future of instability, inequality and injustice. Struggle against these intolerable conditions by the working masses of our planet is an inevitability, as is revolution. These movements must be based on the multi-racial, multi-gendered working-class movement, and fight to win socialist change. ■

If the world today seems chaotic and the future looks bleak, try to remember one thing: it's not you, it's capitalism.

THE ACCELERATING DECAY of this system is increasing the rate of all kinds of disasters, as well as their intensity. This reality means more hardship for billions of people daily, and devastation for millions. Naturally, it's also deeply affecting the political outlooks and aspirations of those people. From everyday conversations about precarious work, underfunded healthcare, extreme weather events, or the misogynistic treatment of Britney Spears, it's not a leap to arrive at the conclusion that the injustice, turmoil and dangers we face are systemic, and that the system is capitalism.

This is certainly the conclusion that socialists want to assist more and more people to draw. We would also add that it needs to be eradicated urgently for the sake of everyone and everything we know and love, and crucially, that it can be. But understanding the systemic nature of our problems is the beginning of a revolutionary outlook, because it means understanding that reforms, compromises and 'lesser evils' simply won't do.

With that in mind, below are (just) five of the most pressing reasons that capitalism has to go.

1. Inequality: unfathomable wealth alongside unbearable poverty

Capitalism today is epitomised by the obscene wealth being hoarded by a tiny fraction of the population, while most of the world lives in abject poverty. There are so many statistics that demonstrate this point, such as the fact that the ten richest billionaires increased their wealth by half a trillion dollars in 2020 alone, while an extra 150 million people were estimated to have been pushed into extreme poverty – having to survive on less than \$1.90 a day.

It's worth briefly illustrating what's involved when we speak of trillions of dollars, particularly as we are approaching the horrifying milestone of the world's first trillionaire. If we use the measure of seconds in time we see that:

- 1 million seconds amounts to 11 and 1/2 days.
- 1 billion seconds amounts to 31 and 3/4 years.
- 1 trillion seconds amounts to 31,710 years.

There are around 2,750 billionaires in the world, and between them they have over \$13 trillion, more than the combined GDPs of Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Canada – five of the top ten economies in the world. Of course with such wealth comes im-

mense political influence.

The objection to these ultra wealthy people is not a moral one, or not just a moral one – how could it be considered anything other than immoral to have so much when so many have so little?

The problem is that they have so much *because* so many have so little, the two are not unrelated – in fact they are *directly* related. Oxfam has reported that in 2020 at the same time as the wealth of billionaires increased by 3.9 trillion, the wealth of workers globally declined by 3.7 trillion.

Now it doesn't always work out like that, with such an exact contrast, but this is basically how capitalism works. As Marx said in the *Capital*: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole."

It would take a worker on the medium wage of an Amazon employee 2,586 years to earn what Jeff Bezos earned in 2020. Bezos doesn't work 2,586 times harder than an average Amazon worker, but his wealth is based on exploitation, i.e. profits made from the unpaid work of hundreds of thousands of workers. This arrangement, which is the basic foundation of capitalism, is the source of the inequality we see in the world.

One of the most shameful things about this inequality today is not just that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer, it's that compared with any other period in history, there's less justification for *anyone* being poor: because the wealth, resources and productive capacity exist to ensure that everyone could be more than provided for, if only the wealth, resources and productive capacity were commonly owned and democratically planned.

2. Pandemics: produced & exacerbated by the profit system

It's quite possible that pandemics wouldn't have made the cut on a list of the five main reasons capitalism has to go if the list were being compiled before 2020. Even though the threat of a pandemic such as the one that's currently causing so much havoc in the world has been in the offing and warned about for decades. The fact that you couldn't possibly have a list without it now is an indication of how rapidly things can change and how volatile the system is – something that's worth registering, for good and bad.

We won't waste time outlining the debilitating effects of Covid on the globe – everyone knows. What everyone doesn't know, because it's rarely if ever addressed in all of the discussion on the issue by politicians, scientists or medical professionals, is that this is not a 'natural disaster'. Rather, it is specifically a capitalist disaster – in three main ways:



The pandemic has been a traumatic time for frontline health workers who showed huge courage and resilience

a) failure to prepare: The current pandemic was not unforeseen or unexpected – it was warned about in numerous scientific reports, which were effectively ignored. So from capitalist governments there were no increases in investment for more R&D, ventilators or PPE – which were all in short supply at the outbreak – never mind hospitals or healthcare systems in general.

As for the private pharmaceutical industry, in 2018 just \$36 million was spent on researching coronaviruses, while over \$30 billion was spent on "marketing" in the US alone.

b) the origins of the virus outbreak: The outbreak of this virus, like all previous epidemics in the last number of decades such as SARS, MERS or Ebola, was a result of the encroachment of human activity – in the form of big businesses (primarily agribusiness) and capitalist governments – into wild habitats which disrupts ecosystems. Certain pathogens that have been kept in check over thousands or millions of years are then shaken loose, and find new hosts in humans or animals that humans come into contact with.

c) inability to contain or cope: The inability to contain relates to the global nature of the world today in terms of the production, trade and travel generally, which means a virus can spread

very quickly. This would be a problem no matter what, but the division of the world into competing nations, including hostile powers, means that the ability to cooperate and coordinate an effective containment strategy is hampered. The dominance of business interests over public health and welfare is also a major block on the type of rapid response needed in terms of effective temporary shutdowns.

The inability to cope relates to the underfunding of health services over decades, which has massively contributed to the death rate of this virus. Big pharma's patents on vaccines, which were produced with massive public funding, is also now a major block on the production of generic vaccines – which is the only way the global population can be vaccinated in a timely fashion, preventing further illness, death and the development of new dangerous variants.

All of this means that as long as capitalism remains so does the threat of new pandemics, and their effects will be all the more devastating.

3. War: violence, dislocation & destruction in the interests of the ruling classes

As noted above, while just \$36 million was spent on researching coronaviruses globally in 2018, by comparison, a colossal \$1.8 trillion went on military expenditure just same year. In 2019 (just before the pandemic) it was up to \$1.9 trillion, and in 2020 (during the pandemic) it was up again to \$2 trillion – the highest rate since the end of the Cold War.

Where these trillions actu-



By Eddie McCabe

TO GO.

4. Oppression: discriminating gender, race, sexuality, religion, nationality...

The revolutionary civil rights leader Malcolm X put it best when he said “you can’t have capitalism without racism”. Fifty seven years since the Civil Rights Act was passed in the US, ending segregation and outlawing discrimination based on race etc., black adults make up 33% of the adult prison population, while only 12% of the overall adult population. One out of every 1,000 black men will be killed by police.

The plain fact is that legal equality, while extremely important, didn't resolve the problem of racism in the US because racism is stitched into the fabric of US capitalism. Its origins can be traced to the brutal system of chattel slavery and the ideologies and institutions that were built up to maintain that system, but remained in varying guises even after slavery was abolished.

For the ruling class in the US, represented by the Republicans and Democrats, racism has been essential to the maintenance of their political power by keeping the working class divided. And this phenomenon is not restricted to the US. This is the primary benefit the ruling classes of all countries gain from all forms of oppression.

To Malcolm X's quote above we could add: neither can you have capitalism without sexism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, sectarianism etc. Whether Uighur Muslims in China, Kurds in Turkey, Travellers in Ireland, or migrants virtually everywhere, minorities in capitalist society face discrimination to varying degrees, and if the establishment feels it necessary can be used as



scapegoats for problems in society.

Whatever about the individual attitudes of capitalists or capitalist parties themselves, the system they represent relies on division, discrimination and oppression, and fosters these through the state, the media, or through cultivating social norms and ideas that present those that don't adhere to them as 'others' or 'outsiders'.

The particular oppression of women predates capitalism but remains intrinsic to the workings and the profitability of the system. For example, unpaid labour that women do around the world is estimated to be worth €10 trillion dollars every year. This aids the reproduction of capitalism's workforce & therefore its profits.

From BLM, to #MeToo, to indigenous peoples rising up, the struggles of the oppressed are strongest when they take an uncompromising stance against the capitalist system.

5. Environmental crises: the existential threat

In many ways the most compelling argument against capitalism and for a socialist alternative today is the environmental crisis, and climate change in particular.

If we go by the UN's 2018 report we have just nine years to radically change the way our society functions or global average temperatures will hit 1.5°C above preindustrial levels, and then we're in real trouble — the type of trouble that will make the Covid pandemic seem like a breeze.

As global warming accelerates we can expect sea level rises of up to two metres, and a proliferation of superstorms, floods, droughts, wildfires and deadly heat waves. Increasingly large



parts of the earth will become uninhabitable, hundreds of millions of people will be displaced and many more species will go extinct. All of which will add to the vicious cycle of ecological breakdown that will spiral inexorably towards human extinction. The prospects really couldn't be worse.

Thankfully the debate on whether climate change is a natural or human-caused phenomena has been settled. But another debate remains to be won, because the reality is that the problem is not just human activity itself, which has coexisted with the natural world for 200,000 years, reshaping it for sure but not irreversibly damaging it. The problem, rather, is capitalism.

The mass destruction of the environment and the production of unsustainable levels of CO2 emissions dates back to the mid-19th century, with the development of industrial capitalism. Although half of all CO2 emissions have been produced since 1990. And the major contributor to global warming is not all people in general, but the 100

major corporations that have produced 71% of all CO2 emissions since 1988. Similarly, the richest 10% of the world's population is responsible for 50% of the world's CO2 emissions, and the poorest 50% are responsible for just 10% of emissions.

Notwithstanding the obvious threat that climate change poses to the capitalist class itself — even if the working class and poor will bear the brunt — it is utterly incapable of acting to avert catastrophe. Despite the race against time to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, even as agreed in the hopeless Paris climate accord in 2015, the world's 60 largest banks have pumped \$3.8 trillion into the fossil fuel industry since then.

This is why billionaires like Bill Gates have no workable solutions to the climate crisis: they're part of the problem. Even if they have good intentions as individuals, their system — the capitalist market system — has as its beating heart the rapacious drive for short-term profit. And it is this system that is the real existential threat we have to overcome. ■

The socialist alternative

AN ALTERNATIVE TO this system is not just desired by billions of people today, but is desperately needed. Socialists and socialist ideas exist not because of great idealist aspirations, but out of necessity. The alternative to capitalism, practically speaking, is socialism.

For example, if we have a planet of over 7 billion people and 1% have more wealth than the other 99% combined, we clearly need to turn this situation around. So that the wealth that we all collectively produce as workers, in the case of the majority, is used for the benefit of us all. That means taking the billions from the billionaire class, and taking over the major corporations, such as the Fortune Global 500, that generated \$33.3 trillion in revenues and \$2.1 trillion in profits in 2020.

If the anarchy of the capitalist market and the private ownership of the economy is causing the most pressing problems in the world then it needs to be ended, and there is no alternative but to take it out of private hands and into public ownership. That means taking over big agribusiness so we can prevent future pandemics. It means taking over big pharma so we can keep the world safe and healthy. It means taking over big arms manufacturers so we use their technology for human need not death and destruction. It means taking over big fossil fuel companies so we can transition to a zero carbon world.

Through public ownership, and with democratic workers' control and management as part of an overall plan for the economy, these industries could be transformed and utilised (or done away with in the case of arms and fossil fuels) to serve the interests of society and the environment, with local, regional and global cooperation. Such a socialist, planned economy is the only basis upon which a truly democratic and free society could be built.

In a sustainable and equitable way,

everyone's living standards could be profoundly improved. By dramatically reducing the working week, through sharing out the work, we could facilitate the participation of more people in the running of society, allowing for progress politically, economically and culturally. Likewise in science and technology, which could — in a real way, with human advancement not profit as the motive — be geared towards solving problems like climate change or curing diseases, or making discoveries that we haven't even dreamed of yet.

Socialism is the alternative to capitalism that we need. More and more people around the world are drawing these conclusions, especially young people, and it is these people, as part of an organised movement — political, economic, social — that can bring about this revolutionary transformation of society in the 21st century. ■



War in Yemen has cost the lives of 100,000 in the last six years, and four million have been forced to flee their homes



How the working class can change the world

By Manus Lenihan

IN LAS VEGAS, a dishwasher earns \$35,000 a year, a waiter \$60,000. They can avail of free courses, assistance of up to €20,000 in buying a house, and a range of other benefits.

Why is this the case, when in most places kitchen staff earn poverty wages? Is it because of the unusual kindness of Las Vegas casino owners? Because of the wisdom of politicians or bureaucrats?

No — it's because of Culinary Workers' Union local 226. In other words, because of the workers themselves. Hospitality workers in Las Vegas got where they are today thanks to a bitter 75-day strike in the 1980s, and decades of aggressive, militant action and consistent organising since then. In this union local — representing everyone from housekeepers to chefs and 173 different nationalities — we see a remarkably diverse range of people coming together, based on them all recognising their common interests and their united strength.

Progressive force

The example of Las Vegas helps to show why socialists place the working class front and centre of our politics. When we talk about the working class, it's not just romantic rhetoric or sympathy for the 'underdog.' The working class — which includes not just industrial, retail, transport, health, hospitality, logistics, IT and agricultural workers etc., but their dependents: the unemployed and retired, those on



Garment workers in Myanmar advocate for mass civil disobedience in face of military coup

disability, young people — really are the key force that can move society forward, that can challenge and defeat this brutal capitalist system of exploitation.

In the workplace, a zero-sum game plays out: workers can only get higher pay by cutting into the bosses' profits, and vice versa. While a small business owner, for example, will sometimes have interests in common with big business and sometimes with the working class, there is an ingrained tension between workers and bosses

— one that cannot be smoothed out. It can only be resolved by workers and representatives of the broader working class taking democratic control over large enterprises, over workplaces and investment decisions, i.e. ending the private ownership and control of a tiny minority of profiteers. After all if workers create the wealth in society, why shouldn't we own it and use it however we collectively decide?

But the class struggle is broader than the workplace. Most working-class people face additional oppression in

the form of sexism, racism, homophobia, etc, and every socialist worthy of the name must be ready to fight against all these forms of oppression and abuse.

Or take the housing crisis in the south of Ireland. Landlords and investment funds have made a mint by pricing 10,000 people into homelessness. We can't fix this unless we directly challenge those who profit from it, i.e. wage a political struggle against those at the top of the real estate and finance sectors.

Power from below

The working class makes up the decisive majority in Ireland and globally. As the slogan goes, we are not outnumbered, we are out-organised. But it's not just a question of numbers — what really gives us potential power is the fact that we control production, distribution and exchange. In the Debenhams struggle, the workers realised that their potential leverage lay in controlling the stock and preventing it from being moved. They held the line for over 400 days in spite of colossal obstacles.

We can see this on a larger scale in Myanmar. Even after months of state violence, the military coup leaders are not in control of the country. This is thanks to workers, most of them women, organising and taking strike action.

It's no wonder a study by the Washington Post and Norwegian researchers in 2019 found "that protest movements dominated by industrial workers outperform all other protest campaigns in bringing about democracy." Socialists have always recognised this — both the potential power and the inherently progressive character of the workers' movement.

If organised and conscious of its role no force in society is more powerful than the working class. In the words of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley: "Rise, like lions after slumber / In unvanquishable number! / Shake your chains to earth, like dew / Which in sleep had fallen on you: / Ye are many — they are few!" ■

Nothing to lose but our chains – Join International Socialist Alternative

THE WORLD IS on fire, and it's fuelled by the capitalist economy's destruction of our ecosystem, which also helped to unleash the coronavirus pandemic. Indeed it threatens further pandemics, amidst a torrent of other climate-related disasters.

A burning question for the next decade, then, is how we can end the rule of capitalism? That's not at all an easy one to answer, but one absolute necessity is the need to organise now, around a programme for anti-capitalist and socialist change, and to do so internationally.

What is ISA?

The Socialist Party is the Irish section of International Socialist Alternative (ISA). ISA is organised in over 30 countries, on every continent.

We are organising in the "belly of the beast", the United States, where our representative on Seattle City Council, Kshama Sawant, is facing a vicious attempt to unseat her by a campaign of big businesses and the right-wing political establishment.

Kshama and Socialist Alternative (our sister organisation in the US) led the battle that saw Seattle become the first city to enact a \$15 an hour minimum wage. They've also fought for social housing and the 'Amazon Tax' on



City Councilmember Kshama Sawant leading the struggle against big business in Seattle

big businesses, making powerful enemies, including Jeff Bezos, the richest man in the world, who funded the opposition in Kshama's last election, which she won.

In Brazil, ISA members are fighting against the rule of the racist, far-right regime of Jair Bolsonaro, and in China and Hong Kong against the brutal Chinese dictatorship.

In Israel/Palestine, our sister organisation, Socialist Struggle Movement, actively opposes the Israeli regime's criminal blockade and relentless assaults on Gaza, and fights to end the racist oppression of Palestinians.

Socialism is international Socialism is about building an international movement for an alternative where the wealth that the working class creates, and has created over generations, is taken back — out of the hands of the exploiters and oppressors: the capitalist class. Public ownership and democratic control of the economy would allow for rational



planning to meet all people's needs and safeguard the planet, which is not possible any other way.

Working-class and young people must organise globally to make this happen. We have everything to lose if we don't, but a world to win if we do.

Join International Socialist Alternative and the Socialist Party today. ■

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Covid & economic chaos churn

The rising wave of revolt in Latin America

By Jonathan Diebold

ATIDAL wave of protests and mass movements has been crashing over Latin America. Its origins date back years, but it really took off around 2019. From Mexico to Brazil, Chile to Haiti, working class people are spearheading movements against corruption, oppression, for the rights of women, indigenous people, LGBTQ+ people, and oppressed people, and for economic change.

The pandemic had temporarily cut across these movements. With considerable help from the anti-poor and pro-big business policies of right-wing governments, Latin America is now the hotspot of the entire pandemic. But economic hardship imposed by the pandemic, compounded with already high rates of poverty, has led to a resurgence in struggle. “The government is more dangerous than the virus” has become part of a popular slogan, originating in Brazil and adopted in Colombia.

While the pandemic initially cut across movements, fear has given way to outrage. With a huge social movement of women winning the right to choose in Argentina, protests in Guatemala setting fire to the congress building in opposition to austerity, and a movement of trade unions, indigenous people, and rural



Young people in Santiago, Chile, lead mass protest against government

workers overthrowing the US-backed coup in Bolivia, virtually every country in Latin America has seen tumultuous upsets and the emergence of mass struggle.

Protest at the ballot box

This has been reflected in electoral successes, most recently in Peru, where president-elect Pedro Castillo won based on the sharp anti-establishment mood and a grassroots mass movement. A similar anti-establish-

ment and anti-neoliberal mood struck Chile and was reflected in the recent elections, after austerity measure atop austerity measure sparked a campaign of fare evasion by school students in 2019, which in turn breathed life into a huge protest wave.

There are far fewer illusions in establishment parties and union leaders, and far less acceptance for compromise, than during previous waves of unrest in Latin America. This is a lesson Castillo will learn if

he softens his program further. It was a lesson learned in Ecuador, when the supposedly leftwing president Lenin Moreno introduced neoliberal reforms. Massive protests forced him to reverse these policies, but he lost his core support, with workers and indigenous groups calling for a null vote in the elections.

A similar lesson should have been learned by Lula, in Brazil, where mass struggle against the Bolsonaro regime has reemerged in the last few

weeks. The former president advocated for “class conciliation” and was ousted by the very same forces he advocated for conciliation with. Now with the trumped up charges against him waived, he is back advocating for the very same policies. He leads the polls, but trails behind the masses of the Brazilian working class.

Revolts in the streets

The recent struggles in Colombia further demonstrate this. Ministers fell as thousands of barricades were erected; reactionary reforms were reversed and policing reforms announced. Despite union leaders trying to demobilise the most militant elements, young people continue to lead the protests, and thousands of delegates attended a national popular assembly to maintain them.

While many of these movements lack coherency and a concrete anti-capitalism, the scale and militancy shows the re-emerging class consciousness of the Latin American working class. During the storm of protests in Chile, an oft repeated slogan was “neoliberalism was born in Chile, and it will die in Chile.” Latin America was the testing ground for what would become the neoliberal consensus among the global capitalist class. It is here that some of its worst effects have been felt, and where some of the sharpest opposition will continue to emerge.

Colombia: Mass movement against the corrupt Duque regime

By Thomas Carmichael

AGENERAL strike in Colombia in late April in response to proposed tax “reform” by the right-wing government of Ivan Duque has quickly developed into a broad uprising of workers, young and indigenous peoples. It reflects the massive discontent against the long-standing inequalities and injustices of Colombian society and its capitalist rulers.

These include issues such as the slow implementation by the government of a peace deal with the FARC signed in 2016 (if anything state repression has grown since then with the murder of trade union activists and leaders of social movements), the demand for better wages and equal access to healthcare and education. The tax reform bill was defeated quickly but the protests continue and have been met by aggressive state repression with more than 50 people killed, most of them by the police.

Movement explodes

This movement is a re-emergence of the protest movement that swept Colombia in late 2019 which was then curtailed by the pandemic. Since then Colombia has been par-



Protestors clash with riot police in Bogota, Colombia

ticularly hit hard by Covid-19 with approximately 106,000 deaths at the time of writing. The failure of the Duque government to deal with the pandemic has only further fuelled the deep-seated anger that is now bursting out once again. The pandemic has exacerbated the already staggering inequality in the country with more than three million pushed below the poverty line since March 2020.

The initial defeat of the so-called tax reform bill in May was significant and the movement that has exploded

in Colombia is of enormous significance. The Colombian state and its capitalist class have long been a faithful ally of US imperialism, which views it as an important client regime in the region. The pandemic has unleashed enormous hardship on the people of Latin America and these protests show that the ruling class will face enormous resistance to their policies and system.

The only hope for our future lies in workers and oppressed peoples coming together to fight and build a socialist alternative.

Peru: Left-wing teacher wins presidential election

THE ELECTION of rural teacher Pedro Castillo against the ultra-right neo-liberal candidate, Keiko Fujimori in Peruvian election is a blow to the establishment in Peru and capitalist class throughout the Latin America.

Castillo's election is a product of the weariness with traditional politicians and the status quo and a result of the dynamics opened by the massive mobilizations in Peru in 2020. His proposals are for radical change – convening a constituent assembly to replace the 1993 neoliberal constitution, the nationalisation of key industries, agrarian reform and allocating a large part of the GDP to health and education as well as the distribution of wealth. His campaign slogan was “no more poor people in a rich country”.

No conciliation with capitalism

The mobilization did not end with the calling of an election, but continued in the massive campaign rallies for Castillo during it. On election day, not only did people go massively to vote, but also once the voting was closed and faced with the possibility of electoral fraud to impose Keiko, there was a spontaneous march towards the vote counting office. This mobilization continued in the following days until Castillo's triumph seemed guaranteed.

Unfortunately, the first signals are that Castillo will seek conciliation with the capitalist order. He has spoken of

“maintaining dialogue with the various sectors of businessmen” and indicating that his government will respect private property. These very interests will need to be challenged if meaningful change for the Peruvian masses is to be achieved.

Revolutionary change needed

Along with these important political limitations, it is necessary to point out and criticize the very problematic positions that Castillo has defended in relation to fundamental issues such as the right to bodily autonomy for women and pregnant people and LGBTQ+ marriage. Only by understanding the need to defend and bring together the legitimate demands of all the oppressed, around an anti-capitalist programme to transform society, will it be possible to build a new socialist society.

The situation in Peru presents enormous challenges and opportunities to build a real revolutionary socialist organisation which promotes popular mobilization and the unity of the working class. It must give a vision of a Peru and Latin America free from the rule of capitalist exploiters, landlords and imperialism.

A socialist federation of the peoples of Latin America would bring its vast wealth and resources into democratic public ownership and plan the economy to meet the needs of its people and safeguard its ecosystem.

George Nkencho should be alive – more proof

By Peter McGregor

ON 26 May 2021 a man shot and injured two Gardaí during an hours-long standoff at a house in Whitechapel, in Blanchardstown. The man barricaded himself in the house and refused to cooperate with the Gardaí before shooting at them. He fired at least seven shots at the Gardaí over the course of the incident, with Gardaí returning fire.

The area was cordoned off and nearby houses were evacuated in a large-scale operation in which Gardaí requested a media blackout until about an hour after the incident had ended. The incident began at around 7pm and ended when the man surrendered and was taken peaceably around 9.30pm after an extended exchange with a negotiator.

Despite firing shots at Gardaí, whose injuries were fortunately not life threatening, this man was taken into custody unharmed. This was a good outcome given the circumstances, and how it should have ended. The contrast with how the Gardaí handled another incident five months earlier, that took place five minutes down the road in Manorfields in Blanchardstown, is incredibly stark however.

Stark contrast

George Nkencho was a 27 year old black man who was in the midst of a severe mental health crisis on 30 December 2020. During this unfortu-



Protest at the inquest for George Nkencho at the RDS in June

nate episode an innocent shop worker in Hartstown Eurospar was assaulted, and the Gardaí were called. George left the shop and began to walk back to his house in Manorfields, possibly carrying some sort of knife. He was followed by 15 Gardaí including members of the Armed Support Unit (ASU).

When he arrived at his front door, 20 minutes after his first interaction

with the Gardaí and with his back turned to them, he was shot twice in the back, twice more as he turned around and seemingly lunged at those nearest to him. After a gap of four seconds he was shot for a fifth time.

This situation was outrageously and tragically mishandled by the Gardaí and the ASU. This was clear anyway, but the events of 26 May

showed that the Gardaí are capable of dealing with a situation far more dangerous than the one involving George without resorting to force, let alone lethal force.

The racism factor

A question that has to be asked – because an obvious difference between the two incidents is that one man was white and one was black – is

what role did racism play in the treatment of George?

It is a denial of reality to say racism wasn't a factor on some level, and an underestimation of racism within the Irish state and society. One survey carried out within the Gardaí showed that 30% of all front-line Gardaí interviewed had a negative view of the black community, and 100% had a negative view of Travellers. Either conscious or unconscious, racism must be a factor taken into account when looking at George's killing, as should class bias and a host of other issues.

Public inquiry needed

An independent investigation and public inquiry into George Nkencho's killing must be launched. GSOC have already badly mishandled their investigation and have no credibility to produce a thorough account. Any inquiry must involve George's family and people from the local community, and must be open and transparent for all to see how it is being operated.

The battle for justice for George Nkencho is a critical one. The Nkencho family have been through an incredibly tough period since the death of George. They deserve to find out the truth of what happened to their son and brother. The fight for justice is important also as it can serve to ensure something like this never happens again, and can play a role in fighting against racism in Ireland – from the state and the Gardaí to daily racist abuse.

Defend the right to protest Drop the fines against ROSA activists!

IN THE first known charge of its kind under the Public Health Act Covid regulations, members of ROSA have been fined up to €500 and face prosecution over safe, outdoor protests highlighting gender violence during the pandemic. This follows activists in Belfast receiving fines of £200 for organising similar protests.

ROSA called small but vital socially-distanced protests in several cities north and south calling for emergency action against the "shadow pandemic" – the explosion of gender violence during the Covid crisis – following the murder of Sarah Everard (and the police repression at her vigil in London). They highlighted the stark increases in the incidence of gender-based violence worldwide and that women and trans people are expected to restrict their movements and lives in order to stay safe!

Stop criminalising safe protests!

Since the ROSA protests, at least three women on this island have been victims of femicide. During the pandemic, gender violence soared worldwide and in the South calls to Gardaí increased by 25% in one quarter and to Women's Aid by 43%. Similarly, in the North calls relating to gender violence have been at the highest level since records

began. It was already extremely difficult for women to leave abusive relationships due to lack of supports and a housing crisis, but they had no escape in lockdown.

Out of all the gatherings that caused public outrage during Covid, the state in the South is choosing to use the Public Health Act to prosecute ROSA for highlighting a public health and safety issue for women. No prosecutions were taken by police against far-right Covid-deniers who did not take any health precautions. Instead, the state is prosecuting women and young people who took part in stationary, safe, socially-distant standouts on the essential issue of the huge spike in gender-based violence.

Prosecute perpetrators instead!

More than 3,000 domestic violence 999 calls were 'cancelled' by the Gardaí, further exposing that gender-based violence is a low priority in this society. The state was rolling out expensive ad campaigns urging people to come forward about intimate partner abuse, yet the Gardaí weren't even responding to emergency calls! When women and men in these situations took the difficult and dangerous decision to call for emergency help, it wasn't there.

Meanwhile, Gardaí turned out in

huge numbers to carry women workers off Debenhams picket lines. Yet they have chosen to prosecute a ROSA activist in relation to a protest against femicide and gender violence.

Fight the fines

ROSA will mount a full challenge to these prosecutions and are seeking support, including financially, from the public. There has to be a fundamental right to protest. As long as it's done safely we must continue to protest important issues. Victories in recent years have shown us progress is only won when it is forced onto the political agenda from below. We say:

- **Drop the charges against ROSA activists who have been fined for safe, socially distanced protests highlighting the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence**

- **Defend the right to protest! The right to safe protest, even in extreme circumstances, has to be protected.**

- **Fund refuges & domestic violence services! Immediate trebling of the funding to refuges, domestic violence services, rape crisis services and mental health supports for survivors of gender violence.**



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Review: Bo Burnham: Inside directed by Bo Burnham

By Chris Stewart

IN LATE May, comedian and musician Bo Burnham released his new special *Inside* on Netflix. Created entirely during the coronavirus lockdown, Burnham wrote, directed, performed and edited the special himself from his home.

Sat alone at his keyboard, similar to the videos which rocketed him to early YouTube fame back in 2006, Burnham gives us an hour and a half of loosely strung together songs, sketches and monologues – commenting on everything from "White Woman's Instagram" pages to YouTube reaction videos.

Recurring themes include the alienation of internet culture, with direct reference to the parasitical role of social media corporations and the absurd hypocrisy of massive corporations attempting to be seen as "woke" brands.

His genre-hopping songwriting takes him from synth-pop bangers



about 'Jeffrey Bezos', to the circus-like polka of "Welcome to the Internet" in which Burnham presents himself as a villain enticing the viewer into the overstimulating world of social media: "here's a tip for straining pasta; here's a nine-year-old who died".

As with his 2013 special *what.* and his 2016 follow-up *Make Happy*, Burnham blends his brand of irreverent musical comedy with genuinely touching and thought-provoking moments. *Inside* provides a sort of time line of Bo's quarantine as he adapts to isolation over a period of a year.

While the first act deals primarily with Burnham getting used to this new reality, with songs like "Face-Time with my Mom (Tonight)" and "Sexting", we are also shown that Burnham has drawn far-reaching political conclusions, as many people will have during 2020.

Mimicking a children's education TV show in the song "How the World Works", Burnham's sock-puppet pal

"Socko" launches into a biting critique of capital. As the special goes on the tone markedly shifts. Songs like "Shit" and "All Time Low" discuss Burnham's struggles with mental health before and during lockdown.

Later, the folk song "That Funny Feeling" describes Burnham's feelings of disassociation and depression. Couched between a list of references that include cynical corporate marketing campaigns, bland celebrity culture, the looming threat of climate change and the media-invoked culture wars that dominate the internet. The song is a contemplation on the feelings of alienation under capitalist society that many will relate to, which is both humorous and deeply profound.

Inside will certainly go down as one of the great pieces of quarantine art. Through its witty lyricism, impressive musical production and incisive social commentary, the special says a lot about the strange year of profound capitalist crisis that we have all collectively experienced.

Free Britney Spears & fight for the freedom of all women

By Keishia Taylor

BITNEY SPEARS has cruelly been denied her request to end her legal conservatorship after courageously giving explosive testimony about her years of abuse and coercion under this nightmarish regime.

At the hands of her father and other vultures, Britney has been drugged, threatened, forced to work, deprived of money and freedom and, despite wanting another baby, she has been obstructed from removing her IUD. Britney has literally been treated as an object with no personhood, simply a commodity to profit from, while the courts upheld the abusive and absurd conservatorship for the last 13 years.

Dehumanising and sexist scrutiny

But she has been hypersexualised by her record company and the media since she was a teenager, as well as facing intrusive and degrading interrogation by the media about her virginity. In even the most private moments she has been hounded by paparazzi and faced dehumanising and callous scrutiny by the press so they can sell more papers.

Many aspects of what she suffered will be familiar to every woman to some extent – objectification, emotional manipulation and abuse, victim-blaming, gaslighting, threats, and denial of reproductive rights. Many of these abuses are institutionalised in a system that depends on the control and objectification of women's bodies, labour and lives – for profit and control.

Objectification of women

Whole industries are based on the objectification of women, by promot-



Despite harrowing testimony Britney Spears remains bound by legal conservatorship

ing narrow beauty standards that women must conform to, by requiring that women work for free in the home. The unpaid caring and domestic labour of women saves the global economy \$10 trillion per year, and is enforced using rigid gender norms to keep women doing domestic work and aspiring to unattainable beauty norms. The cosmetic and beauty industry is worth \$50 billion per year in the US alone, while the dieting industry makes \$71 billion per year.

The sickening truth is that while Britney has legally been treated as a possession since 2008, women are trapped in coercive, objectifying and abusive situations all over the world,

every day. We can't end this torment without destroying the basis for women's oppression and the capitalist state and system that promotes and perpetuates sexism.

The only way to combat this is through mass organisation to fight back against sexism in all its forms – we must never go back to the shocking misogyny of the 1990-2000s! Instead, we must move forward and battle to replace the capitalist system, which thrives and profits from oppression, with a democratic socialist society based on equality, liberation, and cooperation, run in the interests of women, the oppressed, the whole working class, and humanity.

Hungary: LGBTQ+ rights attacked by Victor Orbán regime, again



By Emma Ward

ON WEDNESDAY 23 June, a protester with a rainbow flag courageously staged a pitch invasion during the opening ceremonies of the Germany vs Hungary game. This was in direct response to the Hungarian Parliament passing the "Paedophilia Act" on the 15 June. Despite the attendance of thousands at widespread protests, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's ultra-conservative party, Fidesz, led an overwhelming majority vote of 157 to 1 in favour of the new bill.

Stigmatising LGBTQ+ people

Under the legislation all sex education programmes in schools must be authorised by the state and any portrayal of same-sex relationships or LGBTQ+ topics will be prohibited to people under the age of 18. These laws will further stigmatise and isolate younger members of the LGBTQ+ community as all representation and education concerning their rights are steadily stripped away. A 2017 survey by Hungarian NGO Háttér Társaság found that over half of LGBTQ+ students felt unsafe at school and over two thirds had been victims of verbal abuse.

Under the new law, shows such as 'Modern Family' and films such as 'Billy Elliot', will be given age restrictions similar to those reserved for media containing graphic horror and violence. This lack of open discourse and positive representation in the media will have an extremely detrimental effect on the mental health of young people within the community.

Solidarity needed

The pandemic has only served to exacerbate Orbán's policies; in May of last year the government effectively removed the recognition of trans and intersex individuals who are now forced to declare their "sex at birth" on all legal documents. In December 2020, same-sex couples were banned from adopting children. Despite the rhetorical protest from EU leaders there is serious concern that other EU countries will also adapt such policies.

These laws underline that while we have through struggle won important victories for LGBTQ equality, given the opportunity the right will seek to roll back on them. It is vital we stand in solidarity with our LGBTQ siblings in Hungary and across the world, not just during pride but all year round.

thesocialist

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HEATWAVE HELL IN NORTH AMERICA:



CAPITALISM IS SCORCHING OUR FUTURE

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