

# the socialist

PAPER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY

ISSUE 140

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

IPCC Report: Another Warning

# IT'S CAPITALISM OR THE EARTH

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## Socialist action on climate change

**AS PART of International Socialist Alternative (ISA), an organisation of revolutionary socialists in over 30 countries, the Socialist Party is mobilising our members and supporters to Glasgow for the UN Climate Change Conference this November. If you are interested in joining us, sign up here:**

<https://tinyurl.com/COP26ISA>

We face the biggest threat to humanity in history. Yet no government anywhere has acted adequately. If ever revolutionary change was called for it is now.

### 1. No time to lose — resource the solutions

For unprecedented, massive public investment in services, housing, in-

frastructure, reforestation and renewable energy to stop emissions and to protect us against climate related disasters. We need more, better & free public transport and a zero carbon economy!

### 2. 'Make the real polluters pay

The capitalist market cannot solve the climate problem. Tax the super-rich and corporations to invest in green technology, energy and jobs. Take the destructive fossil fuel companies out of private, profit-seeking hands immediately.

### 3. Protect land & resources from corporate exploitation

Stop pipeline projects, deforestation and imperialist exploitation of natural resources. Protect the needs and rights of Indigenous and all working-class communities. Ensure guaranteed jobs for all workers.

### 4. Strike together against the system — build a fighting climate movement

Organise grassroots climate committees of students and workers — activate your community, school, workplace and union from bottom to top. Build a coordinated mass movement of protests and strikes, which could paralyse the whole economy to force the changes we need.

### 5. Democratic planning, not market chaos

A system based on private ownership, profit and competition can only further destroy, not save the planet. We can only control what we own, so public ownership of the world's resources and industries is vital. To rapidly cut emissions while guaranteeing a decent life and future for all, the economy must be publicly owned and democratically planned by the working-class majority, as part of an international socialist system.



We need to build climate strikes bigger than ever

### 6. Capitalism offers only a future of disasters

The capitalist system is based on the exploitation of people and nature, damaging both relentlessly. It breeds poverty, displacement and wars, racism and sexism, and countless other social ills. Climate catastrophe will only make these worse. Every struggle against injustice is part of the struggle against capitalism.

### 7. International workers' solidarity instead of nationalist rivalry

Build the movement across all bor-

ders — there are no national solutions. Cancel all foreign debts and scrap patents on green technology, as well as medical and pharmaceutical technology. Knowledge, skills and resources must be shared based on international workers' solidarity and cooperation.

### 8. Change the world — fight for socialism

To save our planet we need to end capitalism. That's no small ask but there's no other way and time is running out. We can do it — we have the social power — if we organise. Revolutionary change requires revolutionary ideas and organisation, that's what ISA is striving to build — join us today!



Public transport is already free in Luxembourg

## Gulf stream slowdown another warning: end capitalist climate chaos!

By Haritha Olaganathan

**THE GULF stream is one of many currents in the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), an essential system credited for the hospitable climate of the Northern Hemisphere, particularly countries like Ireland. Climate scientists now have serious concerns about AMOC weakening and possibly eventually stalling altogether.**

AMOC's current pace — its slowest in 1,600 years — urgently puts into question the necessary steps to solving the climate crisis. Further unlining the urgency, it is witnessed alongside a summer of bludgeoning natural disasters across the globe.

Data from the last 100,000 years shows that AMOC can fall back to a more unstable and slower state within a matter of decades. Today's slowing isn't because of natural changes in flow but a direct response to our planet's warming.

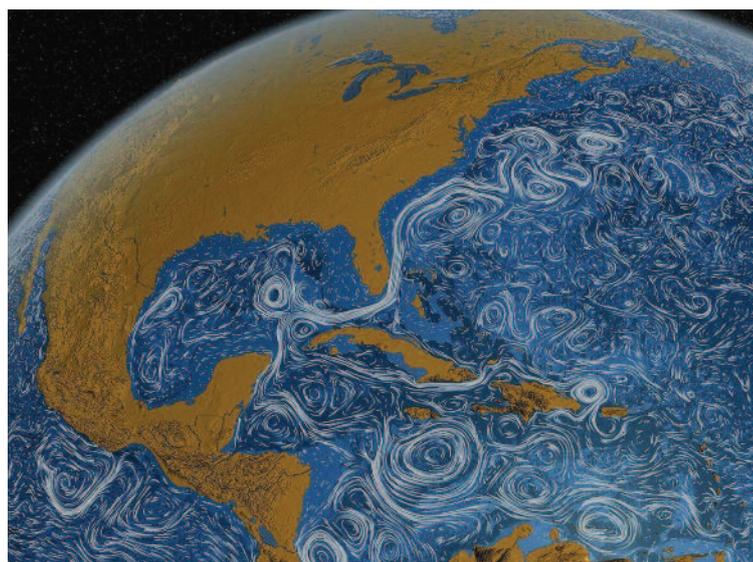
#### Tippling points

This could be an overwhelming predicament — AMOC has a heightened status in our environment as a massive heat and carbon sink. The recent IPCC report found that 56% of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted into the atmosphere

since 1960 has been absorbed by forests, soil and oceans. These carbon sinks are already becoming saturated and losing efficacy, but a collapse of a key circulation system could be a disastrous tipping point for our climate.

In all of the five greenhouse gas scenarios projected by the IPCC, a temperature increase of at least 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels is reached by 2030, and any increase beyond this bodes “progressively serious, centuries-long and, in some cases, irreversible consequences.” This is not because of magic numbers that cause an immediate environmental shutdown, but because small quantitative changes in temperature build-up to trigger a large-scale qualitative change to the environment through tipping points.

The stalling of AMOC would lead to increased droughts in South Asia and West Africa; stormy weather in Europe; pushing up sea levels along the US East Coast; endangering the Amazon rainforests and Antarctic ice sheets. This in turn causes sea levels to rise and melts Arctic permafrost, where the unfreezing soil releases potent methane gas, contributing to further heating unfurling the very worst effects of the climate crisis that makes our planet increasingly hostile to human life.



Dire indications show Gulf Stream slowing down

This must be avoided at all costs.

#### It's not humans, it's capitalism

The IPCC report contains a colossal amount of data to substantiate the idea of the central role of “humanity” in spurring on the climate crisis. Yet degradation of the earth isn't written into human nature. Rather it's in the nature of capitalism, which puts the drive for profits for big business before every other con-

sideration. Thus the environment is seen as an infinite pit of resources to drain because that is what is most profitable today.

Far from being tethered to these destructive methods, working-class people's needs and desires are in contradiction to capitalist profits — in fact, as workers, we are exploited in the pursuit of profits in the same way as the planet.

Even when capitalist governments

nominally accept the reality of the climate crisis, they invariably promise too little, too late. The last time the atmosphere was as warm as it is today sea levels were up to ten metres higher, which would submerge many of our major coastal cities, home to 200 million people.

#### Let's mobilise to save the planet

The climate crisis is brutally unfolding before our very eyes. This summer saw devastating heatwaves in North America, wildfires ravage countries throughout Europe, famine in Madagascar and flooding bringing villages and towns across Belgium, Germany and China to rubble.

Socialists, like scientists, are not fortune tellers — we cannot predict the exact timing of tipping points such as the stalling of the Gulf stream. However, we know that there is little stopping them from taking place under the current system — only a break with the profit motive in a world where production and investment is democratically planned for the lives and safety of the majority can we end the evils of over-production and pollution.

The climate crisis adds urgency to the task of building a force capable of bringing this rotten system to its knees.

## North: National Insurance hike

# Tories rob workers to pay private health fat cats

By Daniel Waldron

**THE TORIES' planned National Insurance rise is another attack on low and middle-income workers – many already struggling to make ends meet – from a government which shamelessly represents the super-rich. Using the Covid crisis as a pretext, they claim this tax rise is aimed at supporting the health service. In reality, it is part of their sinister agenda to undermine our NHS and allow it to be parcelled off to their big business friends.**

Undoubtedly, we need increased funding for our health and social care services. They have been left creaking at the seams by decades of cuts, underfunding and privatisation by politicians at both Westminster and Stormont. Even before Covid, one in six people in Northern Ireland were on a waiting list.



Johnson continues with anti-worker and anti-NHS policies

However, additional funding should not come at the expense of ordinary workers, including NHS staff who have just been offered a miserly 3% 'pay-rise' as 'thanks' for their frontline role during the pandemic –

a pay-cut when rising living costs, such as huge energy price hikes, are considered. The move would leave young workers also shouldering student loan debt having more taken out of their pay packet than those earn-

ing over £150,000!

Instead, the wealth should be taken from the billionaires who have made a killing over the course of the last 18 months, while working-class people have been fighting just to keep their heads above water. In the first three months of lockdown alone, the UK's billionaires increased their personal wealth by £27 billion! Funds could also be directed away from destructive military projects, such as the £205 billion earmarked to replace the Trident nuclear weapons system.

### Tory privatisation plans

Health Secretary Sajid Javid laughably claims he is part of a "compassionate Conservative government" which "cares deeply about the NHS". Yet their Health and Care Bill – currently passing through Parliament – will give private healthcare vultures a seat at the table when NHS funds are being allocated, and allow them to cherry-pick services to run for profit.

Rather than being invested directly into public health services, much of the money raised through the National Insurance hike will go into the coffers of private health companies, contracted to take on NHS patients. From 2023, the increase is to be separated out into a separate levy, potentially laying the basis for a shift towards a US-style, private insurance system – something which the DUP's Sammy Wilson seems to endorse!

The working class cannot afford to take this attack lying down. The trade union movement must develop a plan of action – including major protests and industrial action – to block this tax hike on workers, and demand that wealth be taken out of the hands of the billionaires in order to fund a high-quality, comprehensive and fully public NHS for all. Socialist Party activists in the trade unions will be raising the call for a real fightback on this issue in the coming days.

## South: Maternity care during Covid – state misogyny continues

By Emma Quinn

**AN OUTPOURING of anger and frustration has erupted again in light of the release of the third series of "The Rotunda" on RTE. Filming of the docuseries coincided with strict restrictions on maternity services. The reality of maternity care in 2021 was pain and anguish for the thousands of people who had to attend antenatal appointments, and experience labouring and caring for newborns alone.**

### Partners sit in cars, govt sit on hands

A combination of long-term underfunding of maternity services and backward misogynistic attitudes to every aspect of women's health and sexuality by the Irish state has contributed to the dangerous crisis situation pregnant people and their families now find themselves in.

- Since June at least one in ten Covid patients in ICU were pregnant.

- According to the Rotunda, only 40% of pregnant patients are vaccinated (compared to 91% of the general population).

- Strict restrictions on partner access throughout the pandemic has resulted in thousands of people experiencing pregnancy related traumas alone and has deprived pregnant people of essential support and even advocacy during and after birth.

### Government priorities

Throughout the pandemic the government has remained laser-focused on the reopening of business and related issues, with maternity care a clear afterthought. Even now that 22 October has become a deadline for the lifting of remaining restrictions in



society, there is no commitment to lifting restrictions in hospitals.

Government abandonment of the public maternity system is not a recent development. Everyone knows the Irish state has a horrendous record in regards to pregnant women. Yet minimal effort has been made to engage with understandable concerns around maternal healthcare in a global pandemic, or crucially, vaccination during pregnancy.

### Urgent action

Now urgent action must be taken to fund an information campaign that explains the vital benefits of vaccination and to provide rapid testing for patients and their partners.

The pandemic has deepened every inequality women experience, maternity care included, with class and race also being key determinants to quality of care. Around the world a pregnant person or newborn dies every 11 seconds – this is a totally unnecessary human tragedy and an indictment of the patriarchal capitalist system.

## South: Demand schools are made safe – reject mass infection of the young

By Ruth Coppinger,  
secondary school teacher & parent

**WITH SCHOOLS reopening, many parents and young people will no doubt be delighted. We all want an end to the pandemic and the physical and mental toll it's taking on young people. Keeping schools open as long as health and safety permits is a social necessity, both for students themselves and for working parents.**

Why then has the government done so little to make schools safe?

This will be the first time schools reopen with Delta as the dominant variant and with most restrictions being lifted at the same time. The Delta variant is more transmissible and has more serious health consequences for the young. Given that no real mitigation measures are in place in schools, a political decision seems to have been made to allow mass infection of children with Covid-19.

### A very uncertain time

After 18 months, we know masks, vaccines and ventilation can work against Covid – yet school students don't have these. You wouldn't think we had the highest number of Covid cases in the EU – during the summer when schools were off. Now, around 3,000 primary and 1,000 secondary schools will reopen. In some urban areas where case numbers are high, schools have 1,000 pupils or more.

The new message from the political establishment is away from a public health emphasis to 'personal responsibility'. Children and young teenagers can't exercise much personal responsibility inside school, or insist windows are opened or air



monitors put in place. They rely on adults.

### Still a real, dangerous threat

Ministers have been effectively gaslighting and making out there will always be people who are 'nervous'.

What is the real situation in schools? Yes, teachers and SNAs will mostly have had the opportunity to be vaccinated, which is a hugely positive change on last year. But students have not!

Delta is twice as transmissible as the original virus. Vaccines may only reduce transmission by 50 to 60%. The government has given the wrong impression that the virus isn't that dangerous for young people. They've misused figures.

Long Covid is serious for young people. It's a multiorgan syndrome with diverse symptoms. An estimated 4,400 under-18s currently have it in Ireland. It can take months, even a year, from the quality of life of a young person.

### Risking children's health

We have to reject the mass infection of young people as a government strategy. The government Covid plan for schools is the same as last year, with the one addition of air monitors – portable, not for every room. The recommended levels for air quality

are also nearly twice that of the UK.

The Independent Scientific Advisory Group outlined a scenario for what could happen in a sample school in autumn / winter using NPHET figures: Taking average class size as 24, with only one class for every level of primary school (most schools have much more), would be 192 children. At current infection rates of 0.3%, there's a 40% chance a group of 192 will have one person spreading.

Without proper mitigation measures (no masks, vaccine, air filters, testing etc): the majority of susceptible children could be infected within 2-3 months; two from this school could be hospitalized; and 13 to 29 could suffer Long Covid.

### WHAT'S NEEDED:

- **high quality masks. This should include primary children over 5 (medical exemptions);**
- **ventilation and HEPA filtration. A filter & CO2 monitor for every class;**
- **create more space by drastically reducing class sizes. Invest the necessary resources to hire more teachers & SNAs.**
- **full transparency re cases & isolation of anyone at risk;**
- **Regular testing in schools, colleges & universities;**
- **provide vaccines for children under 12s, when one is approved**

# The Zappone Affair & the hapless political establishment

By Mick Barry TD

**THE “KATHERINE Zappone affair” clearly showed that cronyism is alive and very well in the upper echelons of Ireland’s political establishment.**

It’s clear to anyone with an ounce of wit that the Foreign Affairs Minister must have agreed to create a job for Zappone as a special envoy at the United Nations back in late February or early March.

Zappone is not a member of Fine Gael but worked closely with it as a minister in the previous Government. She gave evidence against the Jobstown defendants in the water charges trial back in 2017 and showed her value to the capitalist establishment in many other ways besides.

Unfortunately for Coveney he had to go to his senior department officials to get the new job officially created. In the meantime, Zappone sent him a series of texts thanking him profusely and trying to get the new job nailed down.

## Merriongate

Controversy blew up in July when the creation of the envoy position and the official appointment of Zappone came before cabinet.

Not only had Micheal Martin not been briefed in advance of the meet-



The Zappone affair is the fiasco the seemingly never ends

ing but it then emerged that Zappone had held a social event in the Merriem Hotel the week before which had been attended by Leo Varadkar (and, interestingly, Labour’s newest TD Ivana Bacik). Zappone had texted Varadkar about the job in the runup to the social event.

The social event, in turn, appeared to many to breach Covid guidelines. The Attorney General rushed to offer “clarification” of the guidelines, providing useful cover for Varadkar.

In an attempt to defuse the crisis Zappone stepped back from the envoy role. The Government breathed a sigh of relief and, thankful that everything had erupted while the Dáil was in recess, headed off for their summer holidays.

## At sixes and sevens

Varadkar’s office however then failed to provide his text correspondence with Zappone when asked to do so under a Freedom of Informa-

tion request.

Coveney deleted messages from Zappone from his phone, claiming at first he did it to free up space and then because his phone had been hacked last year (something the Taoiseach had never been informed about).

An unnamed Fine Gael TD told a newspaper that watching the events unfold was like watching a clown running across a minefield.

Coveney then went before an

Oireachtas committee and claimed that there was a misunderstanding back in March and that a job had not been offered at that point. No one really believes that, but Coveney will probably survive in his post unless Zappone comes forward to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. To say this is very unlikely is probably a major understatement.

## Cronyism crisis

However, the fiasco will not help tensions within the Government. It’s clear to one and all that Fine Gael Ministers played Fianna Fáil in general and Micheal Martin in particular for fools.

More importantly, the whole thing played out in front of the eyes of the general population who got to see the cronyism, the lobbying and the deception in glorious technicolour.

The Government was already unpopular among working-class people before this crisis broke. Among a broader layer of the population these events will serve to tarnish them further.

With class discontent now due to re-emerge in a more active form as Covid recedes, this Government is likely to find itself more or less on the back foot now right up to the next General Election.

## “Housing for All” plan: Repackaging a failed model

By James McCabe

**FOR SO long we’ve been told that if we work hard enough, we can attain a comfortable standard of living or at the very least be able to afford the security of a roof over our head. Yet so many people are now in a situation where they can’t guarantee where they will be living from one month to the next. And many are drawing the correct conclusion that their housing insecurity is not their own fault, it’s systemic.**

In fact, data released by Eurostat back in July reported that the cost of housing in Ireland is actually 77.7% higher than the EU average. The media, business and political establishment here have no problem acknowledging that a housing crisis exists, but the policies they have championed and implemented thus far have only exacerbated the problems.

## Housing for All plan

So, what’s to be said for the much-vaunted “Housing for All” plan that the government launched in September? They claimed, to much fanfare from the mainstream media, that they aim to get 33,000 houses built per year between now and 2030, in-

cluding an increase in the percentage of social housing built annually. Considering that less than 500 social housing units were built in 2014 and 2015, it sounds like an improvement. But the new “Housing for All” plan is unfortunately a repackaging of the establishment’s standard approach to the issue:

a) The scale is completely insufficient. There are 450,000 young adults in the state who are living with their parents because they can’t afford to rent. There are also roughly 365,500 households in the private rental sector. In Kerry, rents are 16.5% higher now than they were this time last year. They rose by 5.6% nationally over the same period.

It should also be borne in mind that demographic trends show that there will be an additional one million people living in the south of Ireland by 2040. The supposed “Housing for All” plan didn’t even factor that into their calculations.

b) The plan contains no rent freeze or rent reductions, no increase in security of tenure for tenants, and no change in the ability of landlords to evict tenants. There should be an immediate ban on evictions and real rent controls should be introduced that make renting actually affordable for working people. Rents should be slashed and frozen at that level.



A new protest movement on housing must be built

c) Who will build the much needed social housing? The plan aspires to increase the amount of social housing. However, Rory Hearne, author of *Housing Shock: The Irish Housing Crisis and How to Solve it* argues that the plan gives no detail on how social

houses will be built: “Will the social housing be bought from the private market as is currently the case?”

## Tunnel vision

Even if you ignore the fact that a large cohort of Fine Gael and Fianna

Fáil TDs are landlords themselves. Or the fact that the Minister for Housing, Darragh O’Brien personally invested €30,000 into a real estate fund in 2008; the reality is that the government can’t fathom any other strategy than facilitating property investors and construction tycoons. The failed strategy of hoping that capitalists would resolve our housing problems has led to nothing but a locked-out generation, mica scandals, overcrowded housing and homelessness.

## Homes for people not for profit

There is clearly a deep sentiment in society that this situation is untenable. 3,000 people from Donegal marched in Dublin during the summer to highlight their crumbling homes - as a result of corner-cutting profiteering by developers. That protest gave a glimpse of what could be done by a grassroots movement of workers, tenants and young people. But such a movement would need a programme of breaking with the logic of the capitalist market, where housing provision is based on private gain. Together we can build a mass movement to demand the building of hundreds of thousands of good quality and retrofitted social and affordable homes as soon as possible. We can’t wait any longer!

# Fight for genuinely integrated education

By Emma Ward

**THIS MONTH** sees the 40th anniversary of Lagan College, Northern Ireland's first integrated school. Opening their doors in September 1981 they welcomed just 28 students, under police presence and armed guards, to a small Scout hall.

Since then, their numbers have flourished to over 1,400 pupils and they are regularly oversubscribed. However, despite the success of the college and similarly integrated schools, 90% of students in Northern Ireland still attend schools that predominantly or exclusively cater only to one side of the community.

This is not reflective of views of people in Northern Ireland, 71% of whom are in favour of integrated education. Likewise, when communities have had votes on turning local schools integrated they have voted overwhelmingly to do so.

## Sectarian politicians

The blame for this lies squarely with sectarian politicians who may claim to support integrated education but have acted to block progress and every turn. The recent second reading of the Integrated Education Bill, brought forward by Alliance MLA Kellie Armstrong, exemplified politicians' astounding inability to listen to the people they serve. Education minister, DUP's Michelle McIlveen, labelled the bill "unwelcome and unhelpful", whilst Sinn

Féin's John O'Dowd claimed integrated education will pay "homage to the crown but to no-one else."

The Socialist Party supports the proposals in Armstrong's bill that new schools must be integrated; however, we also think that this will only be effective on the basis of a program of public investment to build new schools where needed, and for a program to integrate currently segregated schools.

## End religious control

A Department of Education review carried out in 2017 found that during O'Dowd's time as education minister, Stormont had "failed to lead planning, development and growth of integrated education." Later that same year, under DUP's Peter Weir's management, the continued wilful negligence of the issue led to almost £50 million of funding under the 'Fresh Start' agreement to be handed back to the Tory government.

It is not just our schools that are segregated, the teaching colleges that train our future teachers are also divided along the lines of religion. This goes against 79% of people surveyed in the poll who believed that schools should have a religious and cultural mix when it comes to teachers and governors.

The powerful influence of churches, both Catholic and Protestant, on the governing of schools must be ended, not just to deal with issues of integrating education but also to address other crucial issues like the lack of fact-based, LGBTQ-



Lagan College's popularity is indicative of the 71% of the population that favours integrated education

inclusive and consent-based education. Politicians are doing our young people a serious disservice by educating them in a religious and societal hall of mirrors, surrounded only by reflections of one side of a community.

## Mass campaign pressure

Parents and guardians are now making their voices heard through enrol-

ment numbers with most integrated schools oversubscribed in 2020 / 2021. Oversubscription directly resulted in up to 21% of children who had applied to an integrated school having to be turned away. We must stand united to amplify their voices and emphasise the appetite and need for change.

Politicians have failed for a generation to live up a commitment to in-

tegrate education. Instead they have acted to institutionalise sectarianism rather than overcome it. We also need a radically different education system which is fully publicly funded. That requires a movement led by the parents, students, education workers and people coming together across the sectarian divide in order to transform our education system.

## NHS workers speak out against low pay & unsafe staffing levels

By Sean Burns

**THE NHS staff shortage is endangering the lives of patients and health workers themselves. This was plainly displayed on 6 September when it was reported that 613 people had spent more than 12 hours on hospital trolleys waiting to be seen. This extreme pressure has driven many out of the profession with 182 nurse resignations in the last six months in the Belfast Trust and more than 3,000 unfilled nursing jobs in Northern Ireland.**

A charge nurse in Northern Ireland reflected their experience of short staffing in a Royal College of Nurse(RCN) report:

**"...My heart breaks when I see how tired and stressed the nurses are. It is difficult trying to keep morale high and lead the team at this time. I am supposed to have 11 registered nurses on duty daily and I am lucky if I have five; the weekends are covered mostly by bank staff."**

Nurses in Northern Ireland are less likely to be paid enhanced rates for working unsocial hours, are more likely to work additional hours and are least likely to be paid for these



additional hours than their counterparts in Britain. All of this was exacerbated by the pandemic and the additional pressures placed on healthcare. One Nurse told *The Socialist*:

**"We are exhausted and fearful for the future and we believe we are being treated with total disrespect. Pushed from pillar to post on the whim of managers."**

This is a product of years of underfunding, privatisation, pay freezes and disregard for health workers, by both the Stormont Executive and Westminster have undermined our public health system. The bill for agency staff soared to £254 million last year. Underfunding and inadequate staffing is a clear attempt to prepare the ground for the privatisation of public health.

The 3% pay offer for nurses is a complete slap in the face from the Tories. That Stormont is effectively following suit is rubbing salt in the wounds. Pat Lawlor, a Socialist Party member and RCN member in Belfast responded to the offer:

**"We have put ourselves at risk, some colleagues literally giving their lives fighting Covid, it's an absolute disgrace that health workers are being driven to food banks and poverty. A real 15% pay rise is essential to restore the ten years of wage cuts. It sends a message of respect, and greatly assists recruitment that will begin to stabilise our failing health service."**

Anger, frustration and burnout are widely and deeply felt throughout

the entire health service where staff have been pushed to breaking point, and asked to go beyond. While facing a complete lack of respect from higher management and government politicians. One Nurse described what they saw as the hypocrisy of higher ups:

**"It has been daily that they (management) ask more and more from our nursing staff. There has been a total focus on claiming glory, looking good in the eyes of the public, forgetting the daily patients and caseloads that we cared for"**

The RCN has warned that thousands are contemplating leaving the NHS. Frontline staff report very high levels of exhaustion and despair, some even suffering from PTSD. It is critical that the mood of anger is channelled into an immediate and effective campaign for the full 15%, backed up with industrial action. When the UK government suggested the NHS pay rise would be 1% in March, the RCN swiftly set up a £35m industrial action strike fund, this was a clear statement of intent. It was militant industrial action that secured pay parity in Northern Ireland 2 years ago - such tactics are popular amongst workers everywhere and will win.

**A MIXTURE of shock, horror and incredulity. These words best describe the reaction of most of the world's population to the heinous mass terror attacks of 11 September 2001 on the Twin Towers in New York City.**

**A LONG WITH the attack on the Pentagon in Washington DC, these were assaults on symbols of the power of US capitalism and imperialism, yet its victims were predominantly civilians and working-class people. The death toll on the day was 2,996, with 2,753 casualties in New York.**

In the days following this atrocity, the forerunner of *The Socialist*, *The Voice* wrote:

"In opposing this atrocity and sympathising with the thousands of ordinary people who became innocent victims we stand apart from George Bush and other spokespersons for the ruling elites across the world whose statements of condemnation are pure hypocrisy."

#### Ruling class hypocrisy

The hypocrisy of then-President Bush and other representatives of the US ruling class flowed from their own state's history of mass terror inflicted on the world's poor and oppressed, which easily dwarfed the attacks of 9/11. The history of the US ruling class is blood stained – the genocide of Native Americans in the 19th century, the dropping of nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and its murderous and bloody war against the Vietnamese people in the 1960s and early 70s are only three of many examples that testify to this. Indeed, US foreign policy in the Middle East and Afghanistan, had helped fuel the rise of the extreme, right-wing groups such as those led by bin Laden and their ultra-reactionary interpretation of Islam.

Another crime of US imperialism evokes a sense of grotesque irony at the events of 9/11: on 11 September 1973 a CIA-backed coup in Chile, against the leftist government of Salvador Allende, brought to power the murderous dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. In the proceeding weeks and months, thousands of Chilean workers and young people, socialists, and trade unionists were rounded up to be tortured and/or executed.

#### The war on terror

The events of 9/11 were immediately and cynically exploited by US imperialism to launch its Orwellian "War on Terror". The Bush administration sought to capitalise on the shock

and anger that came with Al-Qaeda's terror attacks to establish its fantasy of unfettered US power.

The self-styled "neo-conservatives" in this administration, namely Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, had been members of the "Project for New American Century", a Dr. Strangelove-like think tank founded in 1997. Its aim was to maximise US hegemony and ensure that it remained unchallenged in the post-Stalinist era. Among other things they were also clearly conscious of the rise of China as an economic and military force and determined to mitigate it.

Key to their plans were those of "regime change", deposing those regimes globally that were not compliant with the diktats of US imperialism. Top of their list was Iraq, ruled by Saddam Hussein (a dictator that the administration of Ronald Reagan had armed in the 1980s), whose regime possessed two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves. Having quickly deposed the Taliban in Afghanistan in late 2001 (although, as subsequent events would prove, it was far from defeated), they quickly set their sights on invading Iraq, doing so in March 2003.

The total costs of wars waged by the US since 2001, notably in Afghanistan and Iraq, have come to \$6.4 trillion. The scale of human suffering that imperialism has visited upon their populace is immeasurable. An estimated 801,000 have died as a direct result of these conflicts, but the cost to human life is likely to be much greater than this. For example, the reputable medical journal, *The Lancet*, estimated the number who died because of the war in Iraq to be 1.2 million, based on a sharp rise in the death rate in the aftermath of 2003.

Added to all of this, an estimated 21 million have been displaced from wars waged by western imperialism since 2001, creating an almost unprecedented refugee crisis.

Unlike the victims of 9/11 and their families, the heartbreak and suffering brought by these wars is seldom acknowledged by mainstream capitalist media in the US and Europe. Implicit in their warped and racist logic is that people are not victims of terror if it's car-



## Unbearable cost of war in Afghanistan – the bl

By Jonathan Diebold

**THE WAR in Afghanistan has exacted a horrific toll on the people of Afghanistan and is sure to go down in the annals of history as among the most wasteful and criminal ventures of the last century. After two decades of war and occupation, with trillions spent, hundreds of thousands dead, and many more wounded, maimed, displaced and traumatised, the farcical imperialist adventure is at an end, having achieved nothing. It's worth tallying some of the costs to illustrate this point.**

#### Human cost

The costs have been first and foremost human. Precise estimates in a conflict like this are hard to come by, but approximate figures include around 50,000 civilians killed, a further 120,000 Afghan fighters killed from both sides, over 3,500 coalition forces killed and over 20,000 wounded, and a further nearly 4,000 contractors killed and 15,000 wounded. Numbers of Afghans



Millions of young people & children in Afghanistan have known only a life of war





# FOR 20 YEARS TORTURE

## bloody legacy of imperialism

wounded are hard to come by but are likely in the hundreds of thousands. Many of these wounds include permanent injuries and loss of limbs.

On top of this, an estimated 330,000 have been displaced as refugees in 2021 alone, a trend that could worsen under Taliban rule. Those that survive have experienced a lifetime of war, leaving an entire population, almost half of whom are under 15, traumatised. Repression and atrocities under the Taliban will continue, particularly towards women, LGBTQ+ people and ethnic minorities, with executions already reported.

### Who profits?

The cost is also an economic one. \$2.2 trillion has been spent by the US. This money, which could have gone towards education, healthcare, tackling coronavirus or climate change, instead primarily went to the Department of Defence (over \$1 trillion) and banks (over \$500 billion). Much of this money was lost to corruption. Meanwhile, the GDP of Afghanistan remains under \$500 per

capita, and illiteracy, poor healthcare, and extreme poverty predominates, particularly in rural regions. Less than 5% of the population is vaccinated against Covid-19. Trillions more will be spent in the future on treatment for veterans who have been injured and traumatised, as well as on debt repayment and interest.

There is also an environmental cost – the US military is the largest single contributor to climate change, and Afghanistan was their biggest operation of the century. The people of Afghanistan in turn are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with droughts and food insecurity commonplace, including the one this year which left a third of Afghans – 12 million people – facing food-insecurity.

None of this waste was necessary. This was a failed project to preserve American imperialism's crumbling prestige, which tragically impacted the lives of millions, and proves the need to end the wasteful, violent and disastrous system of capitalism, and replace it with a socialist world.

ried out by powerful and heavily armed imperialist states.

### Repression and torture

It was not just military invasions that were unleashed by the “war on terror”, blatant use of torture became effectively legalised, euphemistically referred to as “enhanced interrogation”. This was notoriously the case in Guantanamo Bay, where prisoners or “detainees” (a label used due to the carefully constructed legal limbo they were in) captured in Afghanistan were subject to horrific torture techniques such as waterboarding, sexual assault and sleep deprivation.

This was combined with significant attacks on civil liberties and democratic rights, notably the Patriot Act, rushed through the houses of Congress with little opposition. One of the many draconian provisions in this legislation was the ability of the state to find out what library books one had taken out.

The last 20 years have also seen a marked rise in Islamophobia and demonisation of Muslims in the US, Europe, India, Israel and China. This was implicit in the war-mongering rhetoric surrounding the “war on terror” and the racial profiling that accompanied the introduction of the above repressive legislation.

### Humiliation of imperialism

The 20th anniversary of 9/11 could not have come at a worse time for the US ruling class and their allies. Last month, the last of the United States' occupying forces were forced to carry out a final and inglorious withdrawal from Afghanistan, and two decades after they were toppled the Taliban are back running the country. Along with the disaster of Iraq, this illustrates that the limitations and constraints on the power of US imperialism are all too real. The plans of the neoconservatives circa 2001-2003 are a distant memory. This humiliation comes at a time of heightening tension with China, with which it is locked in a new cold war.

Over 100 years ago, during the slaughter of the First World War, James Connolly wrote: “War is a relic of barbarism only possible because we are governed by a ruling class with barbaric ideas.”

The wars since 2001, and the torture, racism, and suffering that have accompanied them, reinforce the profound truth in these words. Let's not forget that the arms industry has reaped trillions in profits in the context of this slaughter, or that in the context of the Afghanistan war alone, that banks have amassed \$500 billion from the interest payments on loans used to fund it.

Working-class and oppressed people across the globe, regardless of their religion, nationality, gender, race or sexuality, have a common interest in overthrowing this capitalist system. We must fight for a socialist world, where all resources and wealth are publicly owned and democratically used in the interests of all. By “beating swords into ploughshares” and using science and technology in a rationally planned way we can redirect the expenditure of weapons and wars to abolish poverty, and tackle climate change.

Such a world, built on peace and solidarity, would truly be worthy of the name of ‘human’ and it is one we must fight for today.

## Afghan women pay the price for Taliban victory



By Martina Stafford

**WE CANNOT overstate the depth of horror that faces Afghan women right now, in the post imperialist chaos left behind by the US and allied forces. If there were any illusions left in the US and its allies as a progressive force for change, surely they have been shattered. Almost 20 years later, with an estimated 2 trillion dollars spent and more than a quarter of a million dead, one of the harshest regimes of systemic misogyny is back in power, arguably more emboldened than ever.**

### Colonialism & Taliban oppression

Despite a ban on demonstrations and the threat of severe retaliation with the Taliban using whips, sticks and live ammunition to beat up and break up the protests, Afghan women have taken to the streets day after day in groups large and small to protest against Taliban rule. “We want equal rights, we want women in government”, women chanted in Kabul. Afghan women are facing terrifying consequences for fighting back against a regime that views their independence with utter contempt and yet they shout ‘Azadi’ or freedom on streets that are lined with violent, armed Taliban fighters.

The invasion of Afghanistan, or “Operation Freedom”, failed miserably at attaining any of its supposed goals of democracy and human rights, proving that Afghan women cannot depend on the US or any of the world's rival imperialist powers for their liberation. In fact, upon closer inspection of the crimes committed throughout the occupation, there is little difference in the tactics used by the US-supported government forces and those of the Taliban.

According to Amnesty International, children were recruited by the US-backed government militias, facing multiple abuses, including sexual abuse. US-backed, pro-government militias have been accused of multiple crimes, including murdering civilians, committing fraud, theft, rape, kidnapping, drug trafficking and extortion.

### US imperialism and Taliban

US foreign policy has been critical in nurturing the development of the Taliban in the first place, having emerged in the 1990s as an extension of the CIA-sponsored Mujahideen who fought the “Communist” regime in Afghanistan. The Taliban and the US used each other to further their independent aims but were soon at odds with the US wanting nothing more than a puppet regime to promote US interests, and the Taliban wanting to control and dominate on

their own terms.

The ideology underpinning Taliban rule is based on a form of Sharia law, which essentially manifests as pure gender apartheid, in which women face brutal repression and restrictions in participating in public life. A 21-year-old woman in Mazar-e Sharif was recently killed because she was outside without male company.

Afghan women are facing one of the most extreme manifestations of systemic misogyny, but sexist ideas are used all over the world to legitimise and justify restrictive and rigid family relations; with the family being the basic unit of oppression in class society.

### Global oppression of women

The system of capitalism is based on the domination and exploitation of workers, women and the planet in order to bleed as much wealth as possible to further the profits of the capitalists. This includes the trillions of dollars worth of free labour that women do every year which is taken happily as a free gift to capitalism, reaping the rewards of a labour force overwhelmingly cooked for and cared for by women. It's not hard to see how the subjugation, dehumanisation and emasculation of women can further the interests of the capitalist class and the manager of their affairs, the capitalist state.

Whether it is China, Russia or the US, we must have no illusions that any of these powers or their allies seek anything more than to carve up the world according to their own class interests which are fundamentally opposed to the interests of the majority of the people on the planet regardless of national borders.

As socialists, we see the fight of Afghan women as a fight that is connected to struggles all over the world against oppression and exploitation, albeit a particularly dangerous one. As well as international solidarity, Afghan women need to be connected to mass movements of workers and the youth in the region to gain the strength necessary to take on the Taliban.

### Global solidarity needed

Neighbouring Iran has had major anti-government protests and strikes over the past four years due to water shortages and poor working conditions. Last year, India witnessed one of the biggest organised strikes in human history with over 250 million workers and farmers, supported by women and the youth, participating in a nationwide strike. The greatest possible strength can be gained through the connection of workers' struggle with socialist feminism and international solidarity.

# Texas abortion ban: Right to choose under assault

By Harper Cleves

**O**N WEDNESDAY, 1 September, women and people capable of becoming pregnant woke up to a new and terrifying landscape as the most restrictive abortion legislation in the country was effectively rubber stamped by the US Supreme Court in the dead of night. The Texas “heartbeat bill” prevents pregnant people from seeking an abortion after six weeks, even in the case of incest and rape. This bill also allows individuals to take legal actions against anyone assisting a pregnant person accessing an abortion, including medical providers, anyone providing financial support, and even hired uber drivers and taxis!

For women, LGBT+ people, and indeed all survivors of sexual assault globally, this misogynistic, and mistrustful treatment of those seeking abortions will amount to a revictimisation, and will confirm for many that for conservatives and elites, their humanity and well-being is less important than their ability to produce children.

## Failure of the Democrats

Across the United States, where Republicans hold power in state legislatures, similar bills are being proposed, even with a Democratic Party controlled presidency and congress. The fact that a court with lifetime appointments, whose composition reflects not the needs of the people whose lives it's decisions will dictate, but instead the political



A major nationwide day of protest against the abortion ban has been called in the US for 2 October

leanings and agendas of the presidents' that happen to appoint them, means that even gains won through hard fought struggle from below are always in danger of being overturned.

Similarly, the approach of Democratic Party politicians, even those with pro choice platforms, offer no solutions to seriously halting the im-

plementation of these bills. Victories for women and pregnant people will not be won behind closed doors, attempting to make deals with bigots and big bosses, they will be won on the streets.

The Democratic Party does not mobilise its voters to protests, because such a movement would expose the infinite barriers posed to

oppressed and exploited people that they are complicit in upholding. The fact that progressive elements in the Democratic Party such as Bernie Sanders and the Squad have also failed to take a movement building approach on these issues exposes the concessions they have made to the Democratic Party establishment and the limits of their political perspec-

tive. The working class, women, and the LGBT+ community do not need a party of “woke capitalists,” that say the right things, but take no formative action. They need a party run by and for working class people.

## If we fight, we can win

The good news is that mass movements have challenged backwards ideas before and won significant gains for women, the working class, and all oppressed and exploited people. The landmark Supreme Court case of *Roe v Wade* was implemented under the pressure of a mass feminist movement with clear demands that forced the establishment to make concessions. Similarly in Ireland in 2018, and in Argentina in 2020, movements on the streets, led predominantly by young working class women and non binary folk paved the way for significant victories in winning access to free, safe, and legal abortions.

In the United States, as well as globally, the COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the gaping inequalities under capitalism. In this context, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which women and pregnant people across the United States will stand on the sidelines and watch this legislation wreak havoc on those affected in Texas. An organised, working class, mass movement, with clear demands has more power than almost any force in society. The bill in Texas could mark the beginning of a significant role back in bodily autonomy across the United States, but it also could mark the beginning of a socialist feminist revolt against a misogynistic capitalist system.

## Famine in Madagascar: Caused by climate change & capitalism

By Lucy Marron

**M**ADAGASCAR IS on the brink of the first famine in modern history to be driven by climate change according to experts. Over one million people on the island nation are currently experiencing severe food insecurity, with at least 30,000 in southern Madagascar facing starvation. Many have resorted to eating locusts and wild leaves in order to survive, having already sold most of their possessions in an attempt to obtain food.

## Severe drought

Global warming has created a hotter and more arid dry season and a wetter rainy season in Madagascar. This gradual change in rainfall patterns that has taken place over the last four decades has accelerated, causing a drought in the country which has now lasted four years. The dry conditions alongside high levels of soil erosion, deforestation and increasingly frequent sandstorms have destroyed harvests and made areas that were once full of abundant crops, a barren wasteland.

75% of the region's population are agricultural labourers, and many

more are subsistence farmers: these people have not only lost their livelihoods but their only source of food as a result of the climate crisis. Rising sea levels causing increased flooding during the country's rainy season leaves large amounts of standing water, which contaminates water supplies and increases the spread of disease.

## Devastating inequality

While 100 companies produce 70% of annual carbon emissions, Madagascar has contributed only 0.01% of emissions between 1933 and 2019. Despite this reality, the working class and poor of the country are currently facing the worst effects of a climate crisis they did not cause.

This is likely to become a shared reality across Africa: centuries of resource extraction, exploitation and imperialism has left many parts of the region with basic or limited infrastructure, making the area more vulnerable to the effects of a climate crisis driven by capitalism's ceaseless pursuit of profit. Christina Kolo, a Malagasy climate activist said ‘capitalism is destroying my country’ and criticized the top-down solutions offered by international aid organisations.



A drought in Madagascar has now lasted four years

The working class and poor of Madagascar cannot rely upon the chaos of a capitalist market which increases food prices during a famine. The sell-off of natural resources and the destruction of the island's forests

at the hands of the Malagasy ruling class must be resisted. Immediate action must be taken to prevent the death of more people, but a global solution is also necessary.

The impact of the climate crisis

can only be curtailed when its root cause: the capitalist system, is replaced by a globally planned, green socialist economy, that is publicly owned and democratically controlled by the international working class.

# Sharon Graham wins Unite General Secretary election!

## Now build workplace power to win for workers

Statement from Socialist Party & Socialist Alternative England Wales & Scotland members of Unite the Union

**SHARON GRAHAM** has won the election to become the general secretary of Unite the Union. International Socialist Alternative members send our congratulations to Sharon Graham, for whose candidacy we mobilised support. This victory, which saw the Blairite-backed Gerard Coyne relegated to third place behind Steve Turner, is testament to the determination and resilience of Unite members – many of whom have been on the frontlines working in difficult and potentially dangerous conditions throughout the Covid pandemic.

As the new general secretary, Sharon now faces a number of major challenges. First and foremost, there is the need to build a fighting industrial response on the issues of workplace safety, pay restraint, working conditions, and the growing threats

of casualisation and automation. These issues are among those most pertinent to both Unite members and the wider working class, much of which is currently in urgent need of organisation.

Most immediately, building the fightback means using the ‘workplace power’ model to direct all necessary resources to win the consultative ballots on pay in the public sector. In the private sector, it means making clear to employers, such as Rolls Royce, that Unite is in dispute with, that the full power of the union will now be mobilised with solidarity protests and a strategy of widening industrial action, based on connecting the steward and convenor layer of the union to link up disputes and potential disputes. At a strategic level, Unite should be pushing for a programme of coordinated and escalating strike action against the Tory government, as well as further attempts at fire-and-rehire.

For Sharon to succeed in the aims she outlined in her election campaign, it will be crucial to build upon and broaden out the networks of



Sharon Graham was the candidate backed by the broad left in Unite

support that were developed in the run up to this vote. There is an urgent need for a genuinely demo-

cratic, grassroots and socialist broad left. The existence of such an organisation, which can bring together the

union’s best fighters on the ground, is vital for any leading figure in order for them to withstand the huge pressures that they can face from both from the capitalist class and within the union, as well as to empower the activist base of Unite.

Also essential is that Sharon helps to marry a militant industrial approach with a political strategy that can win for workers. Keir Starmer is currently on an anti-left rampage in Labour, with auto-expulsion letters fired off to leading figures in the trade union movement daily. Politically, the party is being returned to the dark days of Blairism. Unite, along with other trade unions, should oppose anti-democratic attacks on the left, whilst facing up to the pressing task of playing an active part in developing a viable political alternative – discussing how a new party of struggle for working people can be built. We wish Sharon all the best in her new role. Our members inside Unite will do all that we can to assist in developing the fighting strategy of the union, both industrially and politically.

## South: School caretakers & secretaries take strike action

By Kate Relihan, teacher & INTO member (personal capacity)

**SCHOOL CARETAKERS** are to take industrial action for the first time in the history of the state alongside secretaries on Wednesday, 15 September in a one-day nationwide strike. Their union Fórsa rightly accuses the Department of Education of failing to deliver on standardising pay and conditions and basically closing down discussions at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) – a dispute ongoing since 2018. This is some kick in the teeth to vital school staff (try running a school without a secretary or caretaker!) that have gone above and beyond during this pandemic, risking their own health.

A national rally is planned in Dublin and there will be pickets at the headquarters of the Department of Finance and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Most caretakers earn a meagre €13,800 a year, and 90% of secretaries as low as €12,500 a year – in stark contrast to the 10% of secretaries who are rightly paid by the Department of Education directly, who earn up to €44,000 per annum.

The gross indignity of four decades of pay discrimination, irregular and short term contracts, having to sign on during summer / Christmas holidays, no sick pay nor pension, sees most caretakers and secretaries dependent on the Ancillary Services Grant which is at the



School secretaries and caretakers must be supported by the teacher unions

grace of the Board of Management – and an already massively underfunded pot.

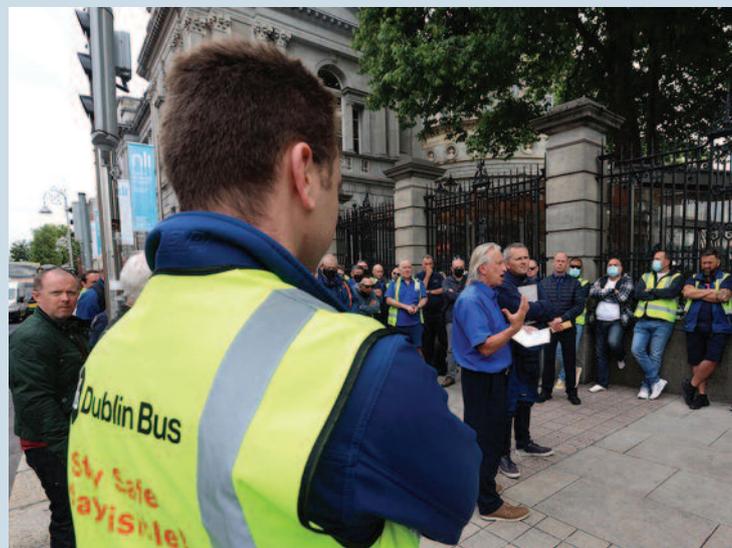
### Solidarity needed

The three teaching unions, ASTI / TUI / INTO, have all issued public statements of ‘resolute support’ in solidarity with Fórsa members. However this falls well short of the solidarity necessary. Unfortunately, with just a few members per school, secretaries and caretakers have little power when it comes to leverage with the government. The only way pressure can really be brought to bear is

through united strike action that brings together all education staff.

By standing shoulder to shoulder and striking with our colleagues who have had no let-up in regard to poverty wages, conditions and discrimination, this issue could finally be put to bed. Withdrawing our labour, asserting our united power and thus reinstating dignity to our profession is exactly the course of action that must be demanded of our union leaders. Workers can win big with correct tactics and strategy – just as we saw with our education colleagues in the US in 2018.

## Support workers keeping public transport safe



**Solidarity TD and Socialist Party member Mick Barry** voiced his support for the decision by transport unions to urge their members not to comply with the new arrangements to increase public transport capacity beyond 75%.

The decision was made by the Cabinet without seeking public health advice from NPHET and then implemented without any consultation with transport unions.

Deputy Barry said: "Frontline transport workers have played an outstanding role in the course of the pandemic. They have suffered illness and even death in order to keep transport services in place. The Government should not have issued the instruction to reinstate 100% capacity without seeking public health advice and without consultation with transport workers and their representatives. I support the decision of the transport unions to urge their members to keep capacity at 75% until late October."

The transport unions have also indicated that they will support any worker who refuses to work in crowded carriages across the rail network.

Deputy Barry said that the controversy over capacity in public transport highlights a key issue for the reopening of Irish society – the consent of workers on issues relating to health and safety.

He said that the public transport controversy – involving, as it has done, dik-tat by bosses – shows how things should not be done.

He said that health and safety policy must enjoy the support of workers and that a form of workers’ control needs to operate whereby workers have the decisive say where agreement cannot be reached.

## Film review: *Wildfire* directed by Cathy Brady



By Kevin Henry

**WILDFIRE TELLS** the story of two sisters, Lauren and Kelly, who grew up in a fictional Irish border town.

The film starts with Kelly finally returning home after going missing, and focuses on the bond between the sisters as they struggle with mental

health problems resulting largely from their mother's premature death.

The sisters seek to discover the truth of whether the death of their mother was really a car accident, or suicide. They are also, like their mother before them, struggling to deal with the death of their father who was killed by a bomb during the Troubles.

The performances by the main actresses, Nora-Jane Noone and Nika McGuigan (who tragically died before the film was released), really makes the film. Indeed the writer and director, Cathy Brady, has said that, unusually, she started with the idea of bringing these two actresses together and the story grew from there.

### Troubles legacy looms

Throughout the film the stigmatisation of mental health is a key feature, as is the ever present nature of the sectarian division and the legacy of the Troubles. This is done very effectively with images depicting the end of the Troubles, including the release of paramilitary prisoners, and footage of the discussions happening today around the possibility of a hard border.

It is also done by giving prominence in the background to sectarian markers: flags, graffiti and murals that many of us would be very used to in our daily lives. This gives the vivid sense of not being able to escape 'the town', as the sisters describe it. But the legacy of sectarian division is really brought out in a scene in which the sisters confront the paramilitary men responsible for the bomb that killed their father.

An interesting feature of the film is in the depiction of Lauren's workplace – an Amazon-esque warehouse – where, while dealing with her personal problems of being concerned for her sister's and her own mental health, she is struggling to keep up with demands of meeting targets at work. This reminded me

of how false the promise of a 'peace dividend' for working-class people has been, 25 years into the 'peace process'.

### Social trauma

The film is partly based on a true and unusual story of a case of shared psychosis, involving two sisters in Britain, but the director wanted to bring out the issue of intergenerational trauma, which affects a sizeable section of the population in the North. Research conducted by Ulster University on behalf of the Commission for Victims and Survivors, found that almost 30% of the Northern Ireland population suffers mental health problems, and nearly half of those are directly related to the Troubles – including "high levels of, often untreated, post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of decades of violence".

At times *Wildfire* is hard to watch given it is dealing with a major mental health crisis. However, it is a welcome break from countless films which reduce issues related to the Troubles to simply one group looking for revenge over another. *Wildfire* does a decent job of dealing with serious issues that warrant much more discussion in society.

## 100 years since the Bruree Soviet, Limerick



The iconic photograph of the Bruree Soviet, 1921

By Dominic Haugh

**100 YEARS ago, on 26 August 1921, workers at the Cleeves' plant in Bruree, Co. Limerick, occupied the Flour Mill and Bakery. The occupation became known as the Bruree Soviet and the occupation continued until the 3 September.**

The background to the occupation was a dispute that arose over the dismissal of a worker the previous November (it appears that up to three other workers were dismissed subsequently). In February 1921, the union demanded the re-instatement of the sacked workers and the payment of wages while they were laid off. Management refused and the dispute festered until the plant was occupied on 26 August 1921.

ITGWU industrial organisers and Marxists, Sean Dowling and Jack McGrath, were instrumental in organising the occupation. Local ITGWU

representative, Patrick Doherty, was appointed manager. The now customary red flag and tricolour were hoisted over the plant and a banner proclaiming 'Bruree Workers Soviet Mills: We Make Bread Not Profits' was hung over the entrance.

The workers awarded themselves a wage increase of 7s 6d and reduced prices. It is reported that the business proceeded with clockwork precision and a continuous stream of customers called to the bakery 'all of whom seemed to appreciate the change'. Union officials claimed to have doubled the output of the bakery and that extra workers could be employed.

Both the leadership of Sinn Féin and the ITGWU were concerned at developments and feared that the occupation could lead to the spread of similar actions. Their fears were well-founded – only days after the ending of the Bruree Soviet dock workers in Cork occupied the docks and estab-

lished the 'Cork Harbour Soviet'.

On 2 September, a Sinn Féin delegation led by Constance Markiewicz met with the ITGWU leadership in Liberty Hall in Dublin. During the course of the meeting Markiewicz threatened to use the IRA to remove the workers from the plant. In response the ITGWU leadership warned that if such an action occurred the local activists in Limerick could organise a general strike in the area in response. Markiewicz subsequently withdrew the threat and an agreement was reached granting all of the workers' demands in return for the workplace being returned to the control of Cleeves'.

The Bruree Soviet was not just a simple workplace occupation. The Soviet controlled the village of Bruree and its hinterland. When a reporter from the *Limerick Leader* visited Bruree during the Soviet he commented that the Soviet the was in control of the village 'both industrially and otherwise'.

## Obituary: Tony O'Mahony (1958-2021)



**IT WAS with deep shock and sadness that we received the sudden news that our good friend and comrade Tony O'Mahony had passed away unexpectedly on 11 June of this year.**

A socialist his entire life, Tony grew increasingly frustrated at the conditions facing working-class people in Ireland, which eventually provoked him into getting active in the We Won't Pay Campaign against the water charges. He went on to join the AAA, now Solidarity, and later joined the Socialist Party as well. With a voracious appetite for politics, he became a student of working-class history.

Tony committed everything to the cause and was a tireless working-class fighter to the end. He was to the fore in every major struggle from the water charges to Repeal. He would be present on every activity, whether that would be stalls with his dog Bestie by his side, postering, door knocking, or meetings.

Tony was also devoted to his family and very proud of their achievements. His pride and joy was his dog Bestie, named after George Best, who attended many actions and protests along with Tony.

Tony was always up for the craic or a social and he never failed to charm anyone he would meet with his warmth and kindness. An avid sports fan, it is fitting that Limerick retained the Liam McCarthy Cup for the first time this year. Tony would have been proudly flying the green and white Limerick flag. Taken too soon. Rest in power, Tony.

# South: Green TD embroiled in sexist WhatsApp group scandal must go!

By Steph Lacey

**IT WAS revealed in August that misogynistic, sexist, and threatening WhatsApp messages have been exchanged between a small number of men and women interested in planning and heritage issues in Limerick city, one of whom was Limerick Green Party TD Brian Leddin.**

These horrific messages were primarily aimed at an unnamed well-known female professional and Limerick city councillor Elisa O'Donovan. The attacks included members of the group superimposing the word 'c\*\*\*' onto a photo of the unnamed woman and putting it as the main photo of their group chat, with one member stating that the photo is their "new dartboard." In a series of vicious and threatening messages they also said that they would throw a grenade at the woman and that she should be "incinerated". Targeting Cllr O'Donovan, they said:

"She must be ended."

"As in sleeping with the fishes type thing?"

"Yes"

"Haha fair enough. I know the perfect back garden."

They called her a "c\*\*\*" and made jokes about her appearance. Brian Leddin said she was fame hungry and "unhinged". They also made disgusting sexual comments about how they "nearly would if I was that drunk and she didn't talk."

## 'Apology' not good enough

When his disgusting behaviour was uncovered, Brian Leddin TD issued an apology that Elisa O'Donovan deemed "weak" and unconvincing. Eamon Ryan when asked for comment on the issue stated that:

"He has issued an apology which is correct. There's no space – no matter whether it's private, online, or a WhatsApp message system – there's no space for any commentary that is demeaning of the other person. *So I think he has rightly apologised.*" (Our emphasis) The Green Party has also issued a statement essentially confirming that no action will be taken against Leddin.

## Victim blaming

Subsequent to his apology, Brian Leddin TD has been quoted in the Limerick Leader saying that, "I made one comment which can be considered derogatory. It was about somebody I had a personal relationship with. My thinking wasn't divorced from the fact that I had a personal relationship with that person which ended quite badly."

This is victim-blaming! Trying to contextualise his comments and behaviour on the basis that he had a "personal relationship" with Cllr O'Donovan that "ended quite badly" is a thinly-veiled attempt to imply that she may have acted in a way that justified his comments. It proves his apology is hollow. The Green Party now has to reexamine the situation with Brian Leddin TD – how can they justify not sanctioning him now?



ROSA - Socialist Feminist Movement held protests outside Green Party offices, including HQ in Dublin

## Brian Leddin position untenable

This kind of systemic sexism is one of the reasons why members of ROSA in Limerick held a peaceful and small protest in March to highlight all forms of sexism, misogyny and gender violence. A member of ROSA has been fined €500 for attending that protest. A woman standing socially distanced on the street and holding a sign to try bring awareness to gender violence will be penalised more by the state than a public representative involved in a group chat talking about killing women.

There is a serious epidemic of sexism and gender-based violence, the UN has even referred to it as the "shadow pandemic", and the kind of talk that was going on in that group

chat perpetuates it. The other members of the group chat haven't been publicly named yet. They should be named and shamed, and the Green Party must insist that Brian Leddin step down from his position as a TD immediately.

## Systemic sexism

Violent misogynistic language or ideas don't originate in someone's head from nowhere. Sexism is deeply woven into the fabric of class society. Despite many advances for women in recent years and the general repulsion with all forms of oppression, systemic sexism remains because capitalism relies on division and the unpaid care work of women, and profits from their second-class status.

So, it's hardly surprising, and perhaps even telling, that supposed 'liberal', or 'progressive', but still pro-capitalist politicians would employ such abusive and violent language to denigrate women they don't agree with.

Ultimately attitudes such as these will only be overcome through struggle by a united movement of the working-class majority and all oppressed people. Solidarity in struggle smashed the 8th Amendment and the ban on gay marriage in the south of Ireland. The lesson is that we cannot rely on politicians who refuse to challenge the oppression and prejudices which are endemic under capitalism. We need our own political movements and organisations, and a socialist alternative.

# North: Pride goes rural — fight for LGBTQ+ liberation!

By Rory Howard

**ON 25 September, Omagh Pride will make its debut. Alongside Mid-Ulster Pride, we are now beginning to see Pride events outside of the main cities. This is a reflection of an important positive shift in social attitudes over recent years, including in small towns, where LGBTQ+phobia was often at its worst.**

Videos of support have come from those who moved away from Omagh in the '90s and early 2000s in order to be free to come out. These events give LGBTQ+ folks in towns and rural communities a boost of confidence to be visible in an area often forgotten in the larger conversation of LGBTQ+ liberation.

Through struggle, the past few years have seen important victories for LGBTQ+ rights, including the long fought battle for marriage equality and adoption rights — finally allowing LGBTQ+ folks the right to start a family. The lifting of the ban on gay men donating blood — a lingering remnant from the AIDS crisis and the resulting homophobic fearmongering — removed an important example of systemic homophobia in the North.



## The struggles continue

However, the effect of decades of LGBTQ+phobia are present in the disproportionate mental health issues and homelessness in the com-

munity. Trans and non-binary folks still face systemic abuse in the hurdles they have to jump in order to get recognition of their identities or gender-affirmation treatment. Al-

though LGBTQ+phobic legislation has been removed, it doesn't mean the stigma has been erased, as a growth in hate crimes shows.

So, Pride should not just be a celebration but part of the struggle to fight for real liberation. We should also remember the radical history of Pride, from its origins after the the Stonewall riots in 1969, to the decades of struggle since that have challenged bigoted attitudes. Unfortunately, like all parasites, capitalism adapted in order to ensure profit, morphing into 'rainbow capitalism'. Corporations that once funnelled money to anti-LGBTQ+ politicians now adorn the Pride flag in the month of June — except in regions where this would clash with the homophobic rulers and undermine their ability to make profit.

Now, many of the same politicians who once defended or were silent on policies oppressing us are being heralded as saviours of the community for standing up to nasty right-wingers, in a desperate display of pantomime politics. Still, some continue to demonise the LGBTQ+ community by hypocritically claiming we undermine the moral fabric of society. These politicians are a danger to our rights and their homophobic bile

endangers real lives, and therefore still must be challenged.

## Solidarity key to liberation

LGBTQ+ liberation can only be achieved through solidarity with other oppressed groups and the wider working class. Mark Ashton, a local hero of the gay community who campaigned in support of the miners during strike of 1984-85, epitomised this approach. The support from LGBTQ+ activists led the miners' union to campaign for repeal of Thatcher's homophobic Section 28. He knew the shared enemy his community and the strikers faced. Though the face has changed, that enemy remains the same: the capitalist system which breeds exploitation and oppression.

In a world where LGBTQ+ people are already arrested and executed in many countries, simply for being who we are, the need for global solidarity is a matter of life or death. We need a Pride movement that doesn't shy away from building solidarity and fighting for liberation for all, and we need Pride protests not just in every major city, but in as many towns as possible. The development of new Prides shows that is very possible today.

# the socialist

PAPER OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY

ISSUE 140

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

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