

SOCIALIST



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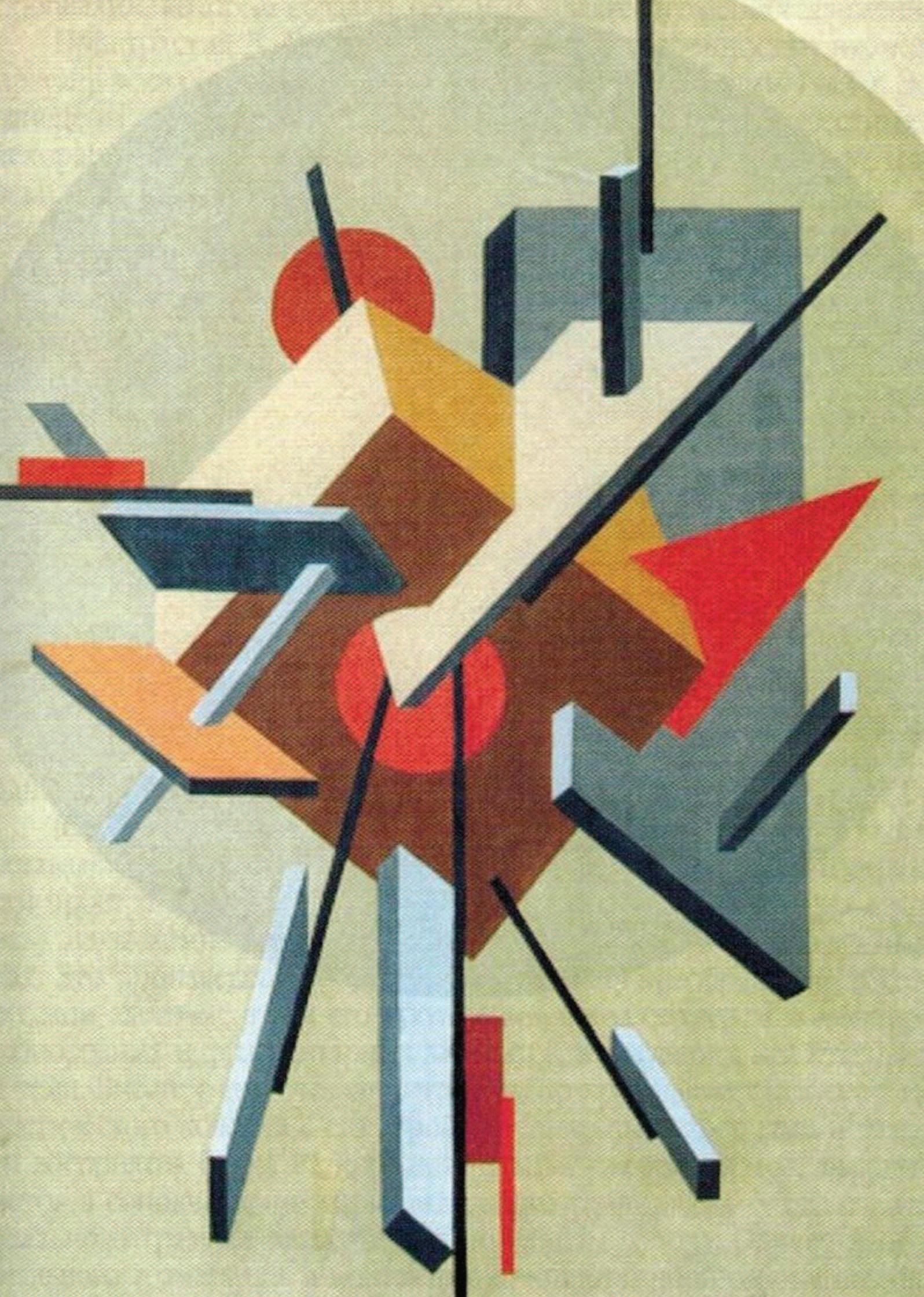
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A SOCIALIST CLIMATE ACTION PLAN FOR A WORLD ON FIRE



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- The national question & the imperative of workers' unity
- Palestinian liberation: Lessons from the First Intifada



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How capitalism is punishing the poor & prolonging the pandemic

One year on from the announcement that vaccines against Covid-19 had been approved, most of the world's population has yet to receive a single dose. Moreover the inequality of the rollout is glaring, and points to systemic problems obstructing an effective vaccination campaign.

"The central African nation of Burundi has yet to administer a single Covid-19 vaccine. In Kinshasa, a megacity of 12 million in the Democratic Republic of Congo, healthcare workers have given out fewer than 40,000 Covid-19 shots. In Uganda, people line up for hours outside hospitals only to be turned away amid dwindling vaccine supplies." — Wall Street Journal, 25 Sept 2021¹

The announcements last November that vaccines had been developed to protect against the coronavirus gave real hope that the devastation and disruption would end soon. Such optimism was not unreasonable. Vaccines are literal life-savers, and where they have been rolled out in significant numbers have proven their effectiveness at preventing serious illness and deaths, including in the south of Ireland which has an excellent rate of vaccination.

But the fact that the rate of new cases and deaths globally is basically as high now as it was then shows a fundamental problem, not with the vaccines but with the rollout — and particularly the inability to provide the poorest regions with the doses they need.

Global poor suffer

The rapid development of the vaccines is a testament to the potential of modern science and what it can achieve when it's adequately resourced. Unfortunately this

scientific potential is generally hindered by the economic and political order that dominates the world, namely capitalism. For instance, the patents held by big pharmaceutical corporations are a blatant block on the production of generic vaccines, which could conceivably allow every country to manufacture their own.

Instead, for billions of people the hope offered by the vaccines was a chimera, as the above quote from The Wall Street Journal aptly demonstrates. It's worth noting that the example of Burundi, where no vaccines have yet been administered, is a country with a population of 11 million, more than twice the size of the southern Irish state.

The African continent has now been hit by a third wave of the pandemic, yet shamefully, less than 2% of its 1.3 billion population has received even a first dose. Of the 4.8 billion vaccines that have been distributed across the globe, an estimated 75% has been received by just ten (wealthy) countries.² Latest projections suggest that the majority of those living in low-income countries, such as those in Africa, will have to wait until 2023 to be vaccinated.

Latin America is another region of the world where Covid has struck with devastating ferocity. There has been in excess of one million deaths so far in Mexico and Brazil, yet vaccination rates remain dangerously low in both countries, standing at 32% and 38% respectively. In the continent's poorest countries the figures are even worse, notably at 11% in Guatemala and just over 4% in Nicaragua.³

Deadly inequality

Without a proper vaccination programme, coupled with other necessary public health measures, there will be no end to this disease. Inevitably the poorest will

continue to suffer most. In April and May we witnessed the horror that engulfed India during a savage second wave, during which a lack of oxygen in hospitals left countless Covid patients to perish by choking to death on streets.

Many countries in the neo-colonial world lack the basic healthcare and infrastructure necessary to treat patients of the virus. Overcrowded slums, where many in the Global South are forced to reside, make superspreading unavoidable.

Added to the mounting death toll and sickness directly stemming from the virus, has been the economic fallout. The cost to the global economy of a slow rollout of the vaccine has been estimated at \$2.3 trillion.⁴ Governments in the neo-colonial world, unlike those in more developed capitalist countries, do not have the resources to cushion the living standards of their (largely unvaccinated) people from such economic losses.

Vaccine apartheid

Yet to describe the pandemic at this point as a “pandemic of the unvaccinated” is only partially true. It is a plain scientific fact that the longer Covid-19 is allowed to spread, the more it can mutate and unleash new variants, which may even overcome the protection offered by the vaccines that have been developed. For example, despite constituting just 0.64% of the world’s population, Peru and Colombia (where fewer than one third of their populations are vaccinated), have produced two variants of Covid-19, the Lambda and the Mu.⁵ Though not as deadly as Delta, this is still an ominous warning of the dangers posed by the criminal and self-defeating policies which amount to vaccine apartheid.

Several intertwined factors have ensured that capitalist governments have wilfully ignored these dangers and allowed such a global apartheid to emerge. A racist contempt to the world’s poor living in the Global South is one. In the inhuman world view of the billionaire class these lives are dispensable. Theirs is a system, after all, that denies one-third of the world’s population access to clean water, resulting in almost 485,000 preventable deaths each year.⁶

Another is the decades of exploitation of the Global South by the world’s imperialist powers which has stunted its development and denied it the capacity to develop an indigenous industrial economy, including a pharmaceutical sector. Big pharma is mainly concentrated in the major capitalist centres, with the ten largest pharmaceutical companies based in the United States and Europe.⁷

Then there is the nature of the profit system itself. Like all sectors of the capitalist economy, these privately-owned pharmaceutical companies and their super-rich owners, CEOs and shareholders only understand the short-term logic of the profit margin;

human need doesn’t enter the equation. Again, one guarantor of such profiteering is the use of patents to stamp out competition, and many wealthy states, notably those in the EU, are determined that the patents for the Covid vaccines remain in place.

This system can’t deliver

The world is in a race against this virus. We’re also in a race to prepare for and if possible prevent the next potential outbreak, which could even come before we have a real handle on Covid. If universal global vaccination is to become a reality and brought into speedy effect, then the private ownership of big pharma must end. As too must the weaponising of the issue by imperialist powers, notably in the new Cold War rivalry between the US and China.

The capitalist system, however, is an irrational one based on competition and greed. It has proven itself incapable of resolving this crisis. In fact, its destruction of the environment — a significant contributor to the outbreak — will only lay the basis for further pandemics to emerge.

We need a struggle by the working class, locally, nationally and internationally, to seize the resources and technology of the Pfizers of this world and bring them into democratic public ownership. A global plan, under democratic workers’ control, could ensure that production of vaccines is ramped up and distributed equitably. Booster shots should be part of such a plan. The inequality of capitalist anarchy

pits booster shots needed by those already vaccinated against those yet to be, but we reject this entirely. The necessary vaccines for the whole world population can and should be produced, nothing less is acceptable.

A socialist alternative means a democratic and rational plan based on working-class solidarity. This is an objective necessity, not an abstract ideal. The pandemic has laid bare the injustices of this system, and combined with climate catastrophe speaks to its deeply destructive nature. Now is the time to join the fight for this alternative. ■

“In the inhuman world view of the billionaire class these lives are dispensable. Theirs is a system, after all, that denies one-third of the world’s population access to clean water, resulting in almost 485,000 preventable deaths each year.”

Notes

- 1 N. Bariyo and G. Steinhauser, 25 Sept 2021, ‘Covid-19 Vaccine Gap Between Rich and Poor Nations Keeps Widening’, *The Wall Street Journal*, www.wsj.com
- 2 Editorial, 25 Aug 2021, ‘The Guardian view on global vaccine inequality: unwise as well as unethical’, *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com
- 3 Jorge Galindo, 20 Sept 2021, ‘Unequal Covid-19 vaccination drive hinders control of pandemic in Latin America’, www.english.elpais.com
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- 5 Jorge Galindo, 20 Sept 2021, www.english.elpais.com
- 6 WHO, 18 June 2019, ‘1 in 3 people globally do not have access to safe drinking water’, www.who.int
- 7 Pharmaceutical Technology, 1 Oct 2020, ‘Top ten pharma companies in 2020’, www.pharmaceutical-technology.com



Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have signed a new defence and security pact — AUKUS — which has infuriated France and is clearly directed against China, writes by Per Olsson of Rättvisepartiet Socialisterna, our sister organisation in Sweden.

The new defence pact “AUKUS” agreed between the USA, Australia and the United Kingdom can, in the words of the British journal *The Economist* on 17 September, be described as an “agreement that prioritised geopolitics — namely, balancing against China’s rise —over non-proliferation sensitivities”.

According to the author, the pact has only one previous comparison:

“America’s civil nuclear deal with India in 2005, which came only eight years after India, a Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty holdout, had tested nuclear weapons”.

The pact, which was announced on 15 September, is aimed at China and constitutes a risky escalation of an increasingly heated Cold War between the imperialist powers.

Major sea change

It’s a huge sea change since 2014 when China’s ruler, Xi Jinping, was met with standing ovations as he spoke in the Australian Parliament. Chinese capitalism was then seen as not only the lifeline of Australia but of other Western states. But the interests of power, political and military ties have proved to be stronger than the economic relations. Since last year, a trade war between China and Australia has been raging, despite the fact that China has been Australia’s largest market since 2007.

Power politics, nationalism and militarism are now in the driver’s seat and the focus is on who and which imperialist powers will establish Indo-Pacific hegemony and become the dominant power of the 21st century. What has been geopolitically dubbed the Indo-Pacific region covers virtually the entire sea area from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Ocean and India — 44 percent of the earth’s surface and 65 percent of its population. According to the Swedish Institute of International Affairs:

“It also accounts for 62 percent of world GDP and 46 percent of all trade in goods.”

Above all, AUKUS means a further militarisation of this power struggle. With the help of American and

British technology, Australia will build at least eight new nuclear-powered submarines that will be armed with Tomahawk missiles. It has only happened once before in history that the United States has shared its technology for nuclear-powered submarines and that was when Britain gained access to the technology 63 years ago. This alone testifies to the importance that US imperialism gives to this alliance, and it could be followed by similar pacts now that the Biden administration is setting itself on a war footing to meet the challenge from China.



Global politics is increasingly polarised as tensions rise between the US and China

“Strategic deterrence”

Only six countries have nuclear-powered submarines in their fleets, and when Australia becomes the seventh, it will:

“give Australia strategic deterrence and attack capabilities for the first time. The logical area for deployment of those submarines would be the deep waters of the western Pacific [near] Taiwan”

The words of a hawkish Admiral Lee Hsi-ming, former chief of staff of Taiwan’s Armed Forces, in the *Financial Times*, 16 September.

AUKUS was negotiated in secret and has caused a crisis in Western imperialism, especially in relations between the three signatories of the pact and France.

French Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, described the pact “as a stab in the back” and claimed that “we have been humiliated”. Last week, France called home its ambassadors to both the United States and Australia, also a unique measure.

French imperialism not only lost a giant order worth \$66 billion (€56 billion) when Australia decided to renege on their contract to buy 12 diesel-powered submarines from France and instead build nuclear-powered submarines using American and British technology. What particularly upsets French imperialism is that France has not been recognised as a great power and important ally.

Controlling Indo-Pacific region

For more than ten years now, French imperialism, which has long been present in the region through its so-called overseas territories, has itself been turning towards the Indo-Pacific region.

According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies:

“Economic ties between France and the Indo-Pacific have grown significantly over the past years. More than one-third of French exports to non-EU countries go to the region. French direct investments amounted to 320 billion euros in 2018, a 75 percent increase since 2008. More than 7,000 French subsidiary companies are present in the region, with revenues increasing by 40 percent between 2010 and 2016. This connection with the Indo-Pacific is complemented by a significant military presence. For the French Ministry of Defense, the Indo-Pacific is divided into several areas of responsibility where 8,000 soldiers and dozens of ships are pre-positioned in several bases”.

In May 2018, President Emmanuel Macron described France as an “Indo-Pacific power” for the first time. It is also France that has pushed for the EU to formulate a “strategic engagement with the region”.

For a socialist world

The new Cold War casts its shadow over the world and even if the Chinese dictatorship is severely hard-pressed, it will respond to AUKUS. It cannot be ruled out that the fight will also be taken to the COP26 summit. The Cold War has no winners. The two rival big imperialist powers, the United States and China, will consider themselves only able to afford temporary retreats, and therefore the battle for world domination will continue to make the world insecure and a more dangerous place.

The threat that it represents shows the urgent need to unite the oppressed of the world in the struggle against imperialism and capitalism and for a socialist world of peace and freedom. ■



A SOCIALIST CLIMATE ACTION PLAN FOR A WORLD ON FIRE

Introduction

We face the biggest threat to humanity in history. It is beyond all doubt, as reaffirmed by the latest IPCC report, that we are in the throes of a devastating existential climate and ecological crisis, caused by human activity — or more accurately, human activity as it functions under the capitalist market system.

It is warmer now than it has been for 100,000 years. Since 2000 we've experienced 19 of the hottest years since records began 141 years ago.¹ At the same time, climate-related extreme weather disasters have jumped by 83% globally in the last 20 years, killing 1.23 million people. Major floods have doubled and severe storms have increased by 40%.²

Everywhere we can see the signs of an accelerating crisis. This summer floods devastated much of central Europe. Wildfires raged from Greece and Turkey to western US and Canada where an unbearable heat wave killed hundreds. These were dwarfed by the infernos sweeping Siberia, which were larger than all the world's other blazes combined.

In Madagascar hundreds of thousands are facing famine conditions following the worst droughts in decades. As the UN World Food Programme states: "This is not because of war or conflict, this is because of climate change."

Pandemics, like the coronavirus pandemic which at the time of writing has claimed the lives of over 4.7 million people, are also a product of climate and ecological breakdown, forcing pathogens to evolve and

break out into human populations as governments and corporations encroach into undisturbed habitats.

These disasters are harbingers of a far more catastrophic future we can expect if we fail to stem the warming of the planet. This is indeed a terrifying prospect, all the more so because experience of the inaction of 'world leaders' in the face of this threat would suggest that it's more likely than not to come to pass.

Despair would be an understandable reaction, but the wrong one. It's not too late to act to prevent climate catastrophe, and it can be done. If human activity is causing this crisis, then human activity can likewise stop it: by changing — in sweeping, far-reaching ways, to be sure. But there's no time to lose.

Here, we offer a programme of action for the climate crisis in Ireland, which must be linked to similar but tailored programmes in every country. As we explain, the fundamental cause of the crisis is the capitalist system, and so this is an anti-capitalist programme for socialist transformation. Nothing less will do. If ever revolutionary change was called for it is now.

Disastrous inaction, devastating action

No matter how many summits they hold or statements they issue, the rulers of our world are utterly failing to act to avert this disaster. More than half of the CO₂ emissions since 1750 have been produced since 1990; the year of the first IPCC report.³ The fossil fuel companies responsible for more than half of those

emissions have spent billions on propagating misinformation and bogus science to cover up their damaging actions.⁴

The world's governments have known and have allowed it to happen. Their failure is due to their acceptance of the capitalist system, with its recurring crises and prioritisation of short-term profit. It's an inherently anarchic and destructive system, and can't be any other way.

The abject failure of market-based solutions is evident in the fact that while every energy company now issues propaganda boasting of its green credentials (while lobbying against climate action), only 2% of the world's energy currently comes from wind and solar power.⁵ Private investment in renewables has actually gone into decline since 2016.⁶ Meanwhile, fossil fuel supply has continued to expand, including with the boom in fracked gas. Since the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015, the world's 60 largest banks have invested \$3.8 trillion in fossil fuel companies.⁷

This is not merely "inaction" but the active wrecking of our planet. They will not stop. They will continue to extract and burn fossil fuels as long as it is profitable, or until a movement can be built which can stop them.

The system is the problem

The capitalist system we live under is in direct conflict with the future of our world. In this system, the key economic sectors and sources of wealth are owned and controlled by a wealthy minority, and profit-making is the overriding factor which drives economic activity. Competition with rival capitalists creates a dynamic in which all other considerations are necessarily relegated to the need for short-term profit, to re-invest and expand, lest they go bust or be swallowed up.

The control of the capitalist class over the economy naturally means huge power over governments, state institutions and the media, all of which reflect their influence and interests.

In such a system, nature is treated as an inexhaustible source of wealth which can be freely exploited. The costs and consequences of depleting natural resources, polluting ecosystems, and disrupting the processes integral to maintaining the biosphere will never be included in this profit-making formula.

The reality is that all wealth comes from the raw resources of the earth and the work done with them by workers. According to a recent UN-sponsored report, none of the world's main industries would actually be profitable if they had to pay the costs of their environmental damage.⁸ Living sustainably is fundamentally contradictory to capitalism's constant need to expand and to maximize profits.

Green capitalism bankrupt

Anyone looking for confirmation of the bankruptcy of "green" capitalism should look no further than the role of the Green Party in government in the South. During its first stint in government with Fianna Fáil in 2007, it rubber stamped the bank bailout and every austerity

measure, and failed to gain any significant environmental measures. It betrayed the community-led protests in Rossport, Co. Mayo, against Shell's Corrib gas pipeline which it had supported in opposition. Eamon Ryan, as minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, initiated a particularly woeful scheme that incentivised the purchase of diesel engine cars.

The Greens' participation in the current Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael coalition has likewise not meant the introduction of radical measures; no free public transport, no mass investment in energy-efficient housing, no plans for a green transition in agriculture, which is the biggest contributor to Ireland's carbon emissions. Its exalted Climate Action Bill amounts to a thoroughly inadequate target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, a target which this and future governments will only be legally bound to "pursue". Instead, working-class people are being made to pay with increased carbon taxes while the key polluting sectors of big business are protected.

Under this government we are seeing a boom in data centres, owned by multinationals like Facebook, Google and Amazon. Many of these centres use as much water as large Irish towns. By 2030, it is projected they will have added 1.5 million tonnes to the state's carbon emissions and consume 30% of its electricity use. This figure could increase to 70% if all the proposed data centres were to be facilitated.⁹

Agriculture, mainly big agribusiness, contributes around 33% of Ireland's carbon emissions and the Green Party accepted last minute amendments to its already weak Climate Action Bill which protected this industry. Pro-capitalist 'environmentalism' cannot take on the interests of the multinationals which dominate the southern economy, or of Irish capitalists like billionaire Larry Goodman and the other 'beef barons'.



Younger generations are mobilising en masse on climate change

The picture in the North is no different. Alongside many climate change deniers in the DUP we have gross hypocrisy from the rest of the main parties. All the parties (with the exception of the DUP which has proposed an alternative bill that is even 'less ambitious') have supported a Climate Bill that commits to carbon neutrality by 2045.

While they are happy to have their pictures taken campaigning for this bill, they support toxic industries operating in the North. While community protests have stopped attempts at fracking, there is still no official ban, and the threat from unwanted oil and gas companies remains. The Northern Ireland Executive has even commissioned a £75,000 consultants' report on the pros and cons of petroleum exploration. Likewise, tens of thousands of people have objected to gold mining in the Sperrin mountains, yet all Stormont has committed to is a 'public inquiry' on the issue.

Who's to blame?

We must be clear — climate change is not a 'crime of humanity', it is a crime against humanity, as well as against the earth. We reject the argument that "we are all to blame". The vast majority of the world's population is responsible for very little in terms of carbon emissions. A recent UN report showed that globally the top 1% of earners are responsible for a yearly per capita average of 74 tons of CO₂ per year. Meanwhile for the bottom 50% of earners the figure is 0.7 tons.¹⁰ The poorest half of the world are responsible for just 7% of cumulative emissions since 1990, while the richest 10% are responsible for 52%, and the richest 1% for 15%.¹¹

In fact, as the US folk singer and labour organiser Utah Phillips put it: "The earth is not dying, it is being killed, and those who are killing it have names and addresses." The culprits responsible for the harm being done to our planet are the super-wealthy people that make up the capitalist class and their hangers on.

For example, the CEOs and boards of the major corporations and banks make decisions every day that profoundly shape our world. They are unaccountable, and operate by one ultimate guiding principle: to maximise profit. This combination of unlimited power and insatiable greed is the source of the environmental crisis, and countless others besides.

We reject, too, the argument that living standards are too high and working-class people must pay for the crisis in the

form of regressive measures like carbon taxes, water charges, etc. Many, even in wealthier countries, are not "over consuming", rather they do not even have secure access to adequate housing, healthcare or other basics. Any neo-liberal "environmental" policies which add to the pressure people are under will only drive a wedge between the climate movement and working-class people.

Instead, we stand for a mass, united movement of working-class and young people to take on the corporations and politicians who are destroying our world.

Public ownership and democratic planning

Of course there are endless examples of waste and unsustainable consumption. But these are not primarily the result of individual choices but of the system we live under. Supermarkets and agribusiness dump good food while millions around the world go hungry. 'Planned Obsolescence' means that products are deliberately built not to last.

Huge resources are wasted on unnecessary packaging, on advertising, on duplication by competing companies. Such is the irrationality of capitalist economy that there are 68 varieties of Irish apples, which can be grown and stored here throughout most of the year, and yet 95% of the €100 million worth of apples consumed here each year are imported, from countries such as New Zealand, Chile and South Africa.¹² This is no accident.

How can we have rational production and consumption when the whole economy is geared primarily to make profit for a tiny elite? We need to organise things on a completely different basis; an economy geared to fulfilling human needs and to



Fossil fuel power plants must shut down, and their workforces provided with new jobs in the renewable energy sector or other green jobs

making the urgent transition to a sustainable relationship with our environment.

We can only do this if the economy is owned and controlled not by the banks, the energy companies and the other capitalist profiteers but planned democratically by working people, in Ireland and around the world. Rather than the competition, chaos and self-interest of the capitalist market, a democratically planned economy will facilitate purposeful, targeted and coordinated action to address this crisis. This could involve a global plan to completely transform energy, transport, infrastructure, industry and agriculture on the basis of renewable energy and of sustainability.

Such a programme will not mean a threat to workers or to jobs, but would instead mean massive investment in green and low-carbon jobs. We need a new green industrial sector under democratic public ownership producing the renewable energy infrastructure we need. We need to build and staff new transport networks and to retrofit every home and building. We also need to invest in quality housing, in health, in education and in many other basic needs.

Such a programme could guarantee the future of every worker in the high-carbon industries which will need to be reduced or ended. It is capitalism and its market anarchy which condemns workers and young people to mass unemployment while there is essential work that's not being done because it is not sufficiently profitable for the bosses. Socialism would harness all of the human and technological resources at our disposal, and gear them towards solving society's problems.

The fight of our lives

But this kind of policy will not be given from on high. In recent years, an international protest movement of millions of young people has been a real point of pressure on governments. This has been hugely positive and points to the only way forward for the climate movement; independent action from below. But so far it hasn't been enough to force the fundamental changes needed.

In fact no significant measures have been taken despite the increasingly dire warnings from scientists, only very limited "voluntary" and "nationally decided" climate commitments. At the same time carbon emissions continue to reach record highs.

Whatever shifts may now take place in the ruling class' approach as the crisis develops, the constraints of this rotten system mean that they will never implement the measures needed. The rivalries between capitalist nation-states mean that the different powers will seek to maintain their own "competitive advantage" by



We must prepare for extreme weather events such as floods, which hit central Europe in July 2021

minimising the action they take. Fossil fuel interests, the agricultural industry, other major polluters and their loyal politicians will work tenaciously to block a transition to a sustainable future.

Planning on an unprecedented scale, production for human need and international cooperation — these are the key approaches we need if we are to rescue ourselves from the looming climate catastrophe.

Our rulers and their system will not deliver the ecological transition we need and so the fight for climate action is now an urgent fight to take power from their hands and transform society. The climate movement needs a revolutionary socialist programme and real democratic organisation — in every workplace, community, school and college. It will be led by young people, but to win it needs to be a global movement of the working class, which is the force which makes everything in society function and has the strength to really challenge capitalist power.

'Socialism or barbarism' wrote Rosa Luxemburg in 1916. This choice is now starker than ever. We face a terrifying future unless we can organise to replace capitalism with a democratic socialist system, where the key sectors of the economy are planned to meet the needs of all people and the environment.

In this society, economic decisions would necessarily factor in environmental and social impact. On the basis of a truly democratically-run economy, we could make rapid decisions about how to use the resources of society and put the full weight of the global working class behind stopping runaway climate change in its tracks.

Winning this society will require the biggest ever united struggle of the global working class against capitalism. While the size of this task is mammoth, it is absolutely realisable and the future of humanity depends on it. Below are some key aspects of the Socialist Party's programme to fight the climate crisis and capitalism — join us today.

A 10-point climate action plan:

1) Urgent action to stop the pollution

We need immediate, radical action. Both the Irish and UK governments have endorsed the call to be net-zero by 2050. This is too late, as by this point there will already be enough carbon in the atmosphere to catastrophically alter the Earth system. Not only this, but these pledges come with no actual plans of how this can be achieved.

We need an immediate end to all deforestation, chemical pollution and a ban on toxic mining for precious metals. We also need decisive action to reduce industrial greenhouse gas emissions which continue to rise in Ireland. This includes halting all oil and gas extraction and exploration in the fields off the Irish coast — all licenses for which should be deemed null and void.

End all state subsidies and investments in fossil fuel projects. We need to ban the import of fracked gas and plans for liquified natural gas terminals should be scrapped. Through substantial public programmes of forest and bog restoration, biodiversity can be protected and carbon sequestered.

2) No to "eco-capitalism" & "eco-austerity"

While big business now cynically promotes a green image, it is fundamentally driving this crisis, not solving it. If we are to win a real transition to a sustainable system it means challenging the big corporations harming the planet, as well as the banks and hedge funds that invest in them and the governments that allow them to continue destroying the earth.

We oppose "eco-austerity" measures like water charges and regressive carbon taxes. These are attempts to pass the blame and the cost of the crisis onto working-class people, and will not curb emissions or waste. Eco-austerity is no solution to a crisis that begins with capitalist production itself.

Tax the super-rich, end corporate welfare and nationalise the banks. Use the wealth to fund large-scale emergency investments in green energy and technology, and a mass green jobs programme.

3) Green energy now

70% of electricity in the South is still powered by fossil fuels; this is scandalous. We need a rapid and expansive transition to green energy, primarily wind and solar power. Nuclear power and biomass energy are damaging in numerous ways and are not part of the solution.

Establish a publicly-owned green energy company, run by elected representatives of workers in that sector,

other sectors, and communities, to manufacture, install and operate wind turbines, including on major off-shore and on-shore wind-farms. Similarly, to manufacture wave and tidal turbines, and solar panels to be installed on most houses and buildings.

Importantly, these projects should be carried out in consultation with communities and without further clearing of and encroaching into areas which are vital wildlife habitats and sources of irreplaceable biodiversity.

Rebuild electric grids so that they rely entirely on renewable energy, with smart grid technology to integrate vast energy sources, and linked to international projects of supergrid networks.

Environmentally damaging industries should be nationalised under workers' control and redesigned and retooled to contribute to the climate emergency, or other social issues. We also need a moratorium on the building of data centres, which are an untenable drain on our energy supplies.

4) Transform agriculture

Agriculture is the biggest factor in CO2 emissions in Ireland, responsible for around one third.

We need to transform our food systems away from big agribusiness' intensive agricultural and land-use practices, which pose threats both to environmental and public health. Workers for agribusiness companies are routinely forced to work in unsafe conditions — this was highlighted when multiple meatplants saw Covid-19 outbreaks.

The large corporations that harm our environment and our food-systems should be brought under democratic public ownership. The workers involved in these industries and the public more generally should be in control of the food that we depend on, not the corporations that just seek to maximise their profits no matter the harm to animals and the planet.

Small and medium farmers should be supported to move to sustainable practices and technologies, providing for training in regenerative farming practices and income support.

Part of any ecological transition in farming must be ending the dominance of meat and dairy, which is such a big contributor to carbon emissions. On the basis of democratic planning, this can be done in a way which protects the livelihoods of small and medium farmers and agricultural workers.

5) Free, reliable & expanded public transport

Public transport in Ireland is currently underfunded

and unreliable. We need massive investment in free, reliable and expanded public transport to transform our cities, towns and communities.

As well as abolishing fares, we need a vast improvement in quality and quantity: an integrated public transport system based on trains, trams, buses and bicycles. No-one in a city or town should live or work more than a five-minute walk from public transport links, with frequent services.

School buses should cover all public schools and be completely free of charge. Not only will this reduce emissions, but it will massively improve people's lives through increased connectivity and public space, reducing traffic and stress for commuters.

With such a public transport system, personal car use will dramatically decrease, but infrastructure for electric vehicles, powered by renewables, should be put in place to allow for a total phase out of petrol and diesel engines.

6) A real just transition: public works & green jobs

A Socialist Climate Action Plan would implement a massive green jobs and public works programme that builds new green industries, carries out the transition to 100% renewable energy and a sustainable economy.

Introduce a living wage and a four-day working week with no loss in pay — to share out work, improve productivity and mental health, and reduce commuter carbon. A shorter working week will also crucially give workers more time to participate in other activities, including climate activism.

A state-owned construction company must be set up to build hundreds of thousands of public homes, and the schools, hospitals, creches, community centres and amenities needed to go with them; all built to the highest standards of energy efficiency. On top of this, where necessary, all existing homes and public and commercial buildings should be retrofitted to meet the same standards.

All public services should be brought back into full public ownership, such as waste collection and recycling, water provision etc. Major investment is needed in building, repairing and upgrading water treatment plants, wastewater treatment plants, water and sewer networks.

Significantly expand national parks, and commence an extensive reforestation and afforestation programme, with proper full-time jobs in planting and maintaining forests as well as sustainable forestry.

We also need to plan the adaptation of our societies to the unfolding impacts of climate change, including protection against extreme weather events, flood defences in particular, and ecological clean-up measures.

Not one worker should lose out. The only real 'just transition' is one where workers are at the centre of decision making: where they control their workplaces, communities and the economy as a whole.

7) Build a fighting climate movement

The school and college strikes have shown that the younger generations will lead the way in this struggle. Build on and extend the strike movement to workplaces where they can really impact the 'business as usual' operation of the capitalist economy.

Working people not only suffer the worst effects of climate change, but also have enormous power when they organise and act together. Workers make society run – everywhere from schools to transport to factories – and by striking can bring this system to a halt.

Organise a mass campaign network of grassroots climate committees in schools, colleges, workplaces and local communities. Trade unions and students unions should also be part of such a network. Bureaucratic union leaderships have a history of blocking struggle, so the movement should base itself on appealing to and organising rank and file workers and union members.

All effective campaigning tactics should be utilised, from petitions, protests, boycotts, to walkouts, occupations and of course strikes of varying durations and intensity. A crucial objective should be to build the campaign by winning over as many people as possible. The movement for climate action should support and link with all struggles by working-class people against inequality and oppression of every kind.

The targets should be the capitalist governments and the major polluters and wealth hoarders. The movement for climate action has no real allies in the capitalist ruling class, only opponents.

Only by basing itself on the methods of social and workers' struggle can it effectively fight for the real changes needed. Reforms can be wrenched even from right-wing governments, but the climate movement needs to build its own political alternative; to bring about socialist governments that will implement the necessary anti-capitalist policies.

8) Democratic planning not market chaos

The challenges we face are of world-historic proportions. Nothing comparable to what's needed, in scale or timeframe, has ever been undertaken let alone accomplished. The type of root and branch transformation — of production, distribution, consumption, energy, travel — required to achieve a truly sustainable world would be nothing short of revolutionary.

It is inconceivable that the capitalist market could bring about this change. The essential interventions by states in response to the coronavirus pandemic demonstrated in practice that even ardent free market ideologues must ditch their principles in response to such an emergency, and the climate crisis is a global emergency of a considerably greater magnitude. However even these state interventions were extremely limited and only temporary, precisely due to capitalist ideology, which is prepared to allow millions

to suffer and die from the virus rather than impede profit making, by big pharma for example.

The technology, knowledge and ingenuity exists to transition to a carbon-free economy, but only if these — and all resources — are utilised in a planned and democratic way, with equality and justice as cornerstones.

We can't control what we don't own, so we need to take the key sectors of the economy into public ownership, under democratic workers' control and management. Under our collective control we can use science and technology in the interest of society and nature, to ensure fast and effective emissions reduction without compromising people's living standards.

Rational planning can eradicate the waste of capitalist production: end unnecessary duplication and planned obsolescence, make products that last and repair, and reuse natural resources. We can slash expenditure on arms and the mis-information of advertising.

9) Internationalism not imperialist rivalry

Build the movement across all borders — there are no national solutions to this global crisis. The climate crisis is being weaponised by imperialism and the US and China in their great power rivalry. We say no to the new Cold War!

As a result of immense global inequality, poorer countries currently bear the brunt of the climate crisis. To take first steps against this enormous injustice, all foreign debts must be cancelled and patents on crucial technology and knowledge scrapped. Patents and "business secrecy" have been used during the Covid-19 pandemic to protect private profits, causing the deaths of millions, and "vaccine nationalism" has prevented an effective global pandemic response.

Green technology as well as medical and pharmaceutical knowledge and technology must be shared freely between workers in all countries on the basis of international solidarity and cooperation among the working class and poor.

The only plan which can save our planet is one which ends national and inter-imperialist rivalries and co-operates on a global scale. Capitalism and imperialism can never deliver this. It can only be won through coordinated action of the international working class and poor for global revolutionary change, against the capitalist class and the nation states that defend their interests.

10) Fight for socialist change

For many people today it's 'easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism'. Understanding the seriousness of the environmental crisis, and that the reality is likely worse than even the scientists have accounted for, likely reinforces this problem.

The capitalist class has done all it can to foster the notion that 'there is no alternative' to capitalism. But it's

no longer just socialists, more and more scientists now argue that anyone who wants to avert climate disaster and build a just and sustainable future, has no alternative but to fight to end the rule of this system and rebuild society on a new basis. For example, the recently leaked draft report of the IPCC Group III states: "the character of economic development produced by the nature of capitalist society is viewed by many political economic critics as ultimately unsustainable."¹³

It's very practical: If 100 companies are responsible for 70% of emissions, their actions in the coming years will determine all of our futures. This is untenable, and why we simply have no alternative but to take these companies out of private hands. Likewise big agribusiness, big retail and big pharma, and all of the major companies that dominate the economy.

Socialism means an economy and society organised around a rational plan to meet human needs sustainably, with real democracy, equality and solidarity at the core.

This is what's needed, practically speaking, to save the planet. The wealthy elites will always be ardent opponents of this change, and unfortunately, they will never give up their power and privileges voluntarily.

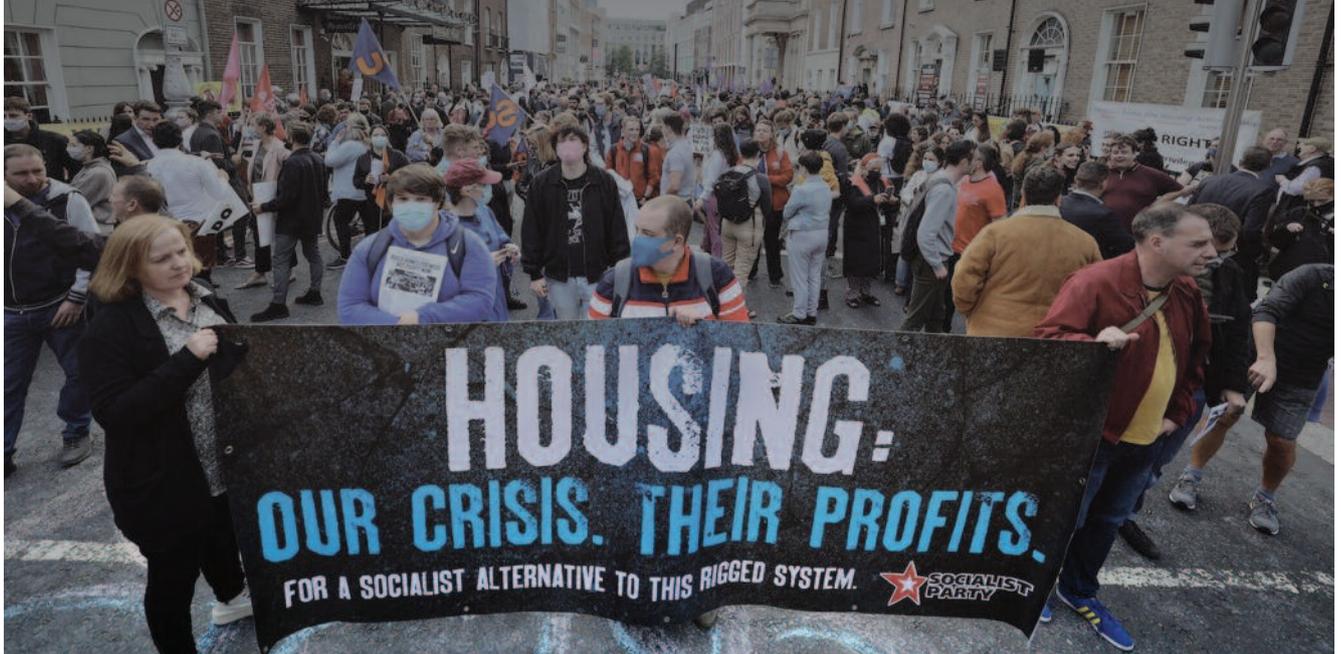
But they can't stop us — the working-class and oppressed majority. We won't let them burn the earth for their profits. If workers stop working, the world stops working. Mobilising this power is key to bringing about the change we need. To do this we must get organised and act with urgency. ■

The crisis is global and so must our struggle be. The Socialist Party is organised as part of International Socialist Alternative; an organisation of workers and youth actively fighting for socialist change in over 30 countries. If you agree, join us: www.international-socialist.net

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IRISH CAPITALISM & THE UNENDING HOUSING CRISIS



The coalition government in the south insist that its number one priority is housing, yet its solutions are more of the same landlord- and developer-led policies. Leah Whelan examines this problem and its systemic nature, which is intertwined with capitalism itself.

The housing crisis is not unique to Ireland; it is a global issue impacting working-class and poor people. It is currently estimated that 1.6 billion people are living without adequate shelter, and that one in seven people live in slums – with this due to rise to one in four by 2030.¹

As people struggle to find secure and affordable accommodation in some of the major capitalist cities, financial landlords – more commonly known as vulture funds – continue to monopolise the housing market for profit. The global real estate market increased its size in 2020, growing faster than the previous year, with a massive \$10.5 trillion invested between 2020-2021.² While working-class people faced financial struggles through loss of jobs, hours and pay due to the Covid crisis, financial landlords took advantage of the crisis and made a killing.

Ireland saw house price inflation jump to 8.6% in 2021 – the fastest level of growth seen in the market in almost three years. In 2020, €1.3 billion was invested into “income producing real estate”.³ At the same time, ordinary people struggling to pay mortgage and rent debts were still being served eviction notices,⁴ despite the government’s temporary ban on evictions.

While capitalism continues to view housing as a commodity rather than a human need, the global trend of workers losing out will only worsen. With more cities becoming unaffordable, people will be forced into untenable housing situations, contributing to job precarity, mental and physical health problems and poverty.

A permanent crisis

The housing and homelessness crisis in Ireland has been headline news for over five years now and still it worsens as governments rely overwhelmingly on the private market to deliver housing. The current housing problem emerged from the Celtic Tiger, during which the average house price rose from €67,000 in 1991 to €331,000 by 2007, fuelled by speculation by banks and developers. The bubble burst with the 2008 financial crash. Developers, many saddled with ‘ghost estates’, stopped building. The state likewise withdrew from any form of house building for up to eight years.

The recession created cheap assets and a space for those with capital to step in. Government parties gave the green light to financial landlords – with finance minister Michael Noonan infamously uttering, “vulture funds carry out a really good service” (add ref dáil record). These vulture funds, which viewed the economic prospects in Ireland as more favourable than southern Europe, have bought up land and thousands of housing units in Ireland.⁵

This is indicative of significant changes around the political economy of housing over the last decades, with more people now having to use the private rental sector (PRS), whether of their own accord or through

government-funded housing schemes (such as HAP, which is the epitome of governments' reliance on the private housing market. The PRS generally is regarded as the leading cause of homelessness in Ireland according to Focus Ireland.

Prior to this overreliance on the private market, indeed since the founding of the state and through the 1970s, the state played a direct role in providing large numbers of affordable homes through low-cost mortgage lending, and the construction of social housing.⁶ Council housing initiatives, such as the communities of Crumlin, Drimnagh and Ballyfermot in Dublin provided new generations with alternatives to tenements.⁷ Council house building reached nearly 9,000 per year, in the 1980s it was over 5,000 per year.⁸ During this time, the PRS decreased from 25% to 10% of all homes (Buckley, 2019).

International examples also show successful public housing roll-outs, notably in places like “Red” Vienna in the 1920s, where a powerful workers' movement brought about a mass programme of house building by the state.

Privatising housing provision

However, social housing was deliberately undermined through the promotion of the idea of ‘homeownership’, and a ‘home-owning democracy’ in the 1980s.⁹ Capitalist figures created a sense of individualism around homeownership, promoted alongside the ideals of the family. Leading this charge Margaret Thatcher famously announced: “there is no such thing as a society. There are individual men, and women, and their families”.

Capitalist governments all over Europe adopted similar policies of encouraging home ownership. To do this, the state began to sell off state assets – transferring social housing from local authorities (LA) to former tenants and private landlords, reducing the influence of LAs, and inevitably increasing the power of those with capital.

In 2008, the decrease of social housing was clear with only 600 units built, and by 2015 only 75 social housing units were built.¹⁰ Incentives were given to council tenants to buy their homes. Of course we don't criticise working-class people for availing of this, however we do criticise the governments which failed



The are currently over 2,000 children accessing emergency accommodation

to replace the social homes that were now privatised. This housing model began the trajectory of increased privatisation and chronic unaffordability.

Enter the vulture funds

Financialisation of the housing system is evident from the significant changes to the housing market over time. After the financial crash, mortgages were transferred into commodities which were then sold on the international market. Vulture funds were able to purchase large bundles of mortgages at a discounted rate of 70% from Irish financial institutions.¹¹ Through this process, vulture landlords have increased their holding of the total Irish mortgage stock.¹² The result is that working-class and young people are less able to access housing in Ireland.

Financial landlords play a bigger role than just buying up and renting out large swathes of housing units. They also keep many of them empty, which helps to keep rent prices artificially high. Currently, hundreds of luxury apartments in Dublin lie vacant. The Business Post published a report from the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) that shows nearly four-fifths of the 246 apartments in phase three of Clancy Quay are empty.¹³ The article also disclosed that nearly half of the 190 apartments in Capital Dock are vacant. Both units are owned by American real estate agency Kennedy Wilson which has over 2,000 rental units in Ireland.¹⁴

As a result of rents being kept artificially high, and homes purposefully empty, bidding wars have begun on properties that do go on the market. Such bidding wars have further locked out even those financially stable enough to gain mortgage approval. For example, a house in Dublin recently went on sale with an asking price of €685,000, but quickly attracted bids of over €1.2 million – nearly €500,000 over the asking price.¹⁵

House prices are estimated to rise by 12% by the end of year.

Also in the post-Crash period, banks ditched the initiative to provide loans and instead introduced a period of credit crunch that made it more difficult to access a mortgage. In short, the private market continues to dominate, create competition among buyers, poverty among renters and fuels the ever-increasing housing crisis.

Useless government schemes

Governments have introduced many schemes over the years to try and curb the increasing threat of mass homelessness. However, the schemes are routinely inadequate. The ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ scheme implemented in 2016 by the Fine Gael government failed to grasp the severity of the housing crisis. The scheme inflated statistics by including homes that were not exclusively new builds in their figures. The failure of the scheme was evident in the record number of 10,000 homeless people in 2019, which was 65% higher than when the scheme was first introduced.¹⁶

While the ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ scheme was criticised for not correctly analysing the housing crisis, the new ‘Housing For All’ programme introduced in September 2021 is even further off the mark. The government is peddling the typical narrative that this plan will finally solve the crisis. However, the plan is nothing more than a capitulation to developers and lobbyists.

Researcher Rory Hearne highlights that the plans are a maintenance of the status quo and a continuation of generation rent.¹⁷ The cost-rental scheme will only be offered to 5% of current rents. His report also shows that only 2% of the current 450,000 young adults living at home will be housed under the scheme; however, the scheme has also failed to account for the future growth of the population. The plan’s deficiency is also seen in its reliance on meaningless figures for private sector developments.¹⁸

Multifaceted problem

Decades of landlord and developer-led policies mean that young and working-class people will continue to suffer. In Ireland, almost one third of 18-39 year-olds are renting privately. The lack of building and access to social housing impacts single parents and their children disproportionately, particularly single mothers.¹⁹ Financial and tenure insecurities also have a severe effect on the emotional and social well-being of tenants.

This is evident from the 60% rise in 2020 of deaths in homeless hubs, B&Bs, and direct provision centres, and on the streets.²⁰

A major issue emerging in Ireland at the moment is the student accommodation crisis. Students are forced to drop out of college due to the lack of accommodation. In addition, some students are traveling anywhere from three to five hours per day to attend classes; others are staying in hotels and B&Bs to complete their education.²¹ The president of the Union of Students in Ireland called on the government to declare the student accommodation crisis as an emergency, and to provide long-term and sustainable solutions for students.²² Students have organised protests and a sleep-out outside the Dáil to highlight the growing issue facing students all around the country.

Increasingly, the housing crisis is merging with the climate crisis. In different parts of the world — especially coastal towns and cities — climate change will be a factor in forcing people to move, or even emigrate, compounding the refugee crisis. Extreme weather events will be another factor to contend with. In September 2021, New York was hit with severe flash flooding that left many people homeless. Forty five people died, most of whom lived in basements advertised by landlords as alternative forms of “affordable” accommodation for poor and immigrant families, often cramped and windowless.²³

This further highlights not only that the housing and climate crises are highly interlinked, it shows that both are class issues. Workers and their families bear the brunt. Wealthier areas are protected with better infrastructure, and those with capital can take extra precautions in protecting themselves.



The government’s latest housing initiative is another sop to private landlords and developers

What we need

Housing is a basic necessity and human right, and just like health, education, transport and other vital public services, it should not be commodified so that a cabal of developers, bankers, vulture funds and landlords can profit from people's wants. It is illustrative of the deeply parasitic nature of capitalism today that this right is denied, and this denial means we live in a world where slums still proliferate throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the wealthiest countries, too, many are condemned to homelessness or no security of tenure.

The housing crisis is a clear refutation of the free market ideology that insists that the "hidden hand" of the market will deliver for the majority in society. Clearly, the supply of affordable housing does not match the demand that's there for it.

The wealth and resources exist to provide everyone on our planet with a quality, eco-friendly home as part of a fully-resourced community. This is a minimum we should expect in the 21st century. As long as this wealth is in the hands of a super-rich minority, however, this potential will not come to pass. A socialist programme for housing begins with the understanding that the rules of their capitalist system must be ripped up if the needs of the majority are to be met.

Rents must be slashed and frozen to levels that are affordable, and economic evictions banned. The assets of the various vulture and cuckoo funds must be seized, and their practice of speculating on housing outlawed. Similarly, the free land and vacant properties of developers and landlords must be taken over and used productively. For instance, the Catholic Church has land assets estimated at €3.7 billion from 18 congregations.

Commencing a major programme to construct public homes to rent or buy is necessary, but generally, social housing must be made universally available to all working-class people, regardless of income. The major construction companies, such as Cement Roadstone Holdings (CRH), must be brought into democratic public ownership so homes can be built at cost price. This could be matched with building the necessary infrastructure, e.g. schools and childcare facilities, to provide a decent quality of life, including massively expanding the public transport system.

Recently, a referendum in Berlin against the backdrop of rising rents, saw a majority vote to expropriate the assets of corporate landlords. This example has been rejected by parties such as Sinn Féin, but it points to a crucial way forward for here. It also showed the potential to build a movement to take on the profiteers and win real, tangible victories.



Thousands from Donegal march on the Dáil: victims of the mica scandal, a classic example of profiteering coming at the expense of quality, safety and working-class people

A movement for housing justice must also be linked to the need for broader anti-capitalist and socialist change. This means taking the key levers of the economy into public ownership, under the democratic control of the working class, and organising society to provide everyone with the home they need, while safeguarding our environment. ■

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REVIEW OF 32 COUNTIES -
THE FAILURE OF PARTITION & THE CASE FOR A UNITED IRELAND
BY KIERAN ALLEN

The National Question in Ireland & The Imperative of Workers' Unity



As part of the discussions around the Irish national question and the border, Ann Orr reviews the recent book by Kieran Allen, *People Before Profit* national secretary.

Analysing history and examining the current situation are prerequisites to building a movement capable of resolving the national question in Ireland. This review will outline how in my view Kieran Allen's book does not demonstrate an approach that shows how workers and young people in the North can overcome divisions and build a better future for all. While we agree with many points in this book, given the constraints of this article it is necessary to focus on aspects where our analysis diverges most. This includes the nature of the national question in Ireland today and the potential for it to be resolved without a battle to fundamentally challenge capitalism, both North and South; the role of the working-class, including Protestant workers and young people in that battle; and the necessity and real potential for united workers' struggle.

There is a renewed focus on the national question for numerous reasons; recent demographic changes are the most significant. The Protestant population no longer makes up a majority in Northern Ireland, a trend likely to be confirmed by the 2021 census results. Brexit has added further complexity by sharpening tensions around the Northern Ireland Protocol and destabilising the United Kingdom. Kieran Allen correctly identifies these points as being crucial. He also accurately highlights that partition – the decision

to create two separate states in Ireland – was a conscious act by the British ruling class carried out in defence of its interests.

The responsibility of British imperialism

Faced with a developing unity in struggle of Protestant and Catholic working-class people in a radicalised mass movement in Ireland for revolutionary change, linking with workers in struggle across Britain, the representatives of British imperialism applied their tried and tested method of divide-and-rule. They feared that the emerging movement could threaten not only British rule here but also capitalism itself in Ireland and Britain and could strengthen movements for independence and social change in other parts of the British Empire. Partition was a blow to the working class across Ireland by diverting, dividing and weakening the movement. It derailed the real prospect that existed for economic and social liberation through socialist change. This is the real and shared history of a century ago.

The national question in Ireland is a product of this history and relates to the existence of the border, partition and the presence of the British state. Its legacy is also the existence of Protestant and Catholic communities with antagonistic national aspirations, mutual suspicions resulting from years of conflict, particularly during the Troubles, and two sectarian political establishments that stoke the divisions. British imperialism is responsible for these divisions and capitalism today ensures their maintenance because



Brexit: one of many factors contributing to a reviewed focus on the national question today

the primary beneficiary of a divided working class is the ruling class. The current situation can only be transformed by overcoming sectarian divisions among ordinary people. It is essential to maintain focus on what is in the interest of the working class as a whole and what will forge the type of unity that is needed to overcome divisions, exploitation and oppression.

Can a border poll provide a solution?

This book outlines an argument that a united Ireland can be achieved in the short term through a border poll. While Allen states that, "Irish unity needs to emerge in opposition to the political elites through a social movement that challenges the structures built up during partition" (p.161), he does not explain how such a movement can be built in a way that would actually involve workers and young people from both sides of the sectarian divide. We think this is essential to any lasting solution, but only possible in struggle not for an abstract 'Irish unity', but real economic and social change which can only come from the working class taking power and reorganising society. While Allen tackles various incorrect but dominant views about Irish reunification and exposes some of these as wanting to create a "united tax haven" (p.155) his own vision for an alternative is lacking, and he profoundly underestimates the opposition that exists among many to reunification and the reasons for this.

Understandably the overwhelming majority of Catholic workers and young people in Northern Ireland want to see the end of the Northern state. We agree; we favour the dismantling of both capitalist states on this island, but any serious discussion must address how this can be accomplished. A border poll as it is being spoken of would not achieve this, instead creating the basis for escalating the national conflict here. It would offer the limited choice between maintaining Northern Ireland as part of a capitalist UK, where inequality and

oppression are rife, or unifying two failed states in a capitalist united Ireland, where inequality and oppression would also be rife.

As explained above, actually resolving the national question requires overcoming the divisions among working-class people. Coercion either through violence or the ballot box, even if shrouded in the terminology of self-determination, is not the basis on which these divisions can be overcome. Instead of being a tool to bring about a genuine and lasting united Ireland, a border poll would act to drive workers further apart, making working-class unity – and the real change that only working-class unity can achieve – more difficult.

In 1973, Catholics rightly boycotted a border poll organised by the British government. They would not accept a situation where a demographic majority in the Northern state would result in them remaining in a state that they were totally alienated from, given its history of discrimination and repression. Likewise, Protestants should not be forced into a southern capitalist state that they have no affinity with given its historically sectarian nature. A real solution to the national question means upholding the rights of both communities and fighting to overcome sectarian division.

The Socialist Party consistently argues for and actively contributes to the building of class unity in the North, as the best way to fight and defeat the crisis conditions of capitalism. We do exactly the same with workers in the South and favour the linking up of this struggle across the border. Working-class unity against the worsening conditions of capitalism and collective struggle for socialist change is the only basis to overcome the divisions that exist. This is expressed in our call for a socialist Ireland and a voluntary and equal socialist federation of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England as part of a socialist Europe.

Exacerbating the sectarian divide

Kieran Allen argues that all referendums, including on abortion rights, are divisive, thus diminishing how a border poll would massively increase sectarian tensions. It is an astonishing argument. Far from being a rational debate about the relative pros and cons of one or other capitalist state, a border poll would be about how people perceive and describe their very identity. It would be the ultimate sectarian headcount, mobilising both communities to outvote the other – inevitably exacerbating the divisions.

Allen here ignores the points he himself makes about the reality of sectarian division in housing and education. Neighbours who have the same class interest would vote in opposite ways; areas which are geographically close but divided by "peace walls" and other sectarian markers, would divide into pockets smaller than postcodes. The divisiveness of a border poll is about the entire process which would further cement working-class people and communities into one or other camp, opening up the prospect of conflict and even violence on a level not seen in many years.

This stands in the strongest possible contrast to the impact of the Repeal or marriage equality referendums, which overwhelmingly brought the working class together.

Even if a border poll resulted in a majority vote for a capitalist united Ireland, it is unclear how this would be implemented in the context of active resistance. Allen's approach shows a blasé attitude to the likelihood of sectarian violence, describing the potential for resistance around or after a border poll as simply "kick[ing] up a stink [...] including the threat of violence" (p.124). Recent marches in towns and cities in Northern Ireland over the NI Protocol led to rioting, most notably at Lanark Way – a "peace line" between the Protestant Shankill and Catholic Springfield Road areas. Less than ten years ago significant protests and rioting erupted in response to the decision to remove the Union flag from Belfast City Hall.

Mass movements of a sectarian character have erupted when Protestants felt under threat in previous decades. Allen dismisses the potential for such events now. Those who believe that Protestant opposition to being forced into a united Ireland would be small and temporary are making a dangerous misjudgement. The examples of active resistance given above were in response to changes far less fundamental than a border poll – a process which would be an attempt to push Protestant workers into a united Ireland without their consent. The response to a vote in favour of a united Ireland would be much stronger and more widespread, and would create the conditions that could lead to civil war if a working-class alternative to sectarian division is not created.

It is essential to consider what would happen. Would those who expect only minor disruption call on the PSNI to respond to protests with repression? Would they favour the southern Gardaí being involved? Would they ultimately welcome the use of armed state forces to back up a border poll vote? In 1969, the Socialist Party's forerunner, Militant, was almost isolated on the left in opposing the deployment of British troops to Northern Ireland, which was a turning point in the development of the Troubles. We continue to stand against all forms of state repression.

If there were no intervention by forces of either capitalist state, would a reaction instead come from opposing paramilitary forces? These are unfortunately realistic scenarios that point to the danger of rapid and severe escalation of tensions and violence that could spiral out of control. The expectation that a border poll would actually end partition is flawed and risks setting in train

processes that could result in violent repartition of the island.

Nationalism is no answer

Kieran Allen correctly points out that there could also be reaction from nationalists to a prolonged refusal by the British government to call a border poll, which we have also pointed to previously. This point strengthens the argument that there is no satisfactory way forward in relation to the national question on the basis of the capitalist solutions championed by sectarian forces, including paramilitary forces on both sides that could be strengthened in the coming period. Instead of drawing the conclusion that a different way forward is required – one of independent struggle by the working class and young people against the conflict and misery that these forces and capitalism represent, and which could forge real unity – Allen puts himself on the side of the representatives of nationalism such as Sinn Féin. He excuses this by describing a border poll to bring about a united Ireland simply as progressive (e.g. p.124). 'Progressing towards what?' is the question. If the aim were towards working-class unity – the only way to socialist change and the resolution of the national question – it would be counterproductive.

Despite repeated references to Connolly's tradition, Allen ignores a central tenet of Connolly's approach throughout his life: "Only the working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland." The working class has demonstrated this power before. Shop stewards organised to protect workers against paramilitary threats throughout the Troubles, organised public demonstrations against 'tit-for-tat killings'. People also joined trade union protests calling for "No going back" following the breaking of



Image from a riot at Lanark Way in April 2021

ceasefires by paramilitaries in 1994. These are examples that Allen acknowledges as key to bringing about an end to violence in the 1990s. While the union movement here is numerically smaller and has fewer rank-and-file activists compared to previous decades, it still has a central role to play in challenging sectarianism.

Real fears of the Protestant working class

A theme of the book is a description of Protestant working-class people as being duped by "orangeism" to support their ruling class for little material gain. It is correct to point to the reactionary and harmful role played by institutions like the Orange Order, which was a more active factor in the lives of working-class Protestants in the past but continues to be a backward and sectarian force today. It is of course also important and correct to point out the sectarian, socially and economically right wing attitudes of the unionist political establishment.

It is a telling omission that Kieran Allen does not point to nationalist forces also playing a sectarian role. He significantly understates the sectarian character of the IRA's armed campaign, which included atrocities such as the Teebane and Shankill bombings. The aftermath of this campaign continues to have an impact adding to the mistrust and fear of many Protestants towards a united Ireland, particularly one in which Sinn Féin would be a significant political force. Allen ignores the reality that nationalist parties, like their unionist counterparts, are part of the "management" of the sectarianism he speaks of. While not equivalents, unionism and nationalism do share important features: both are based in one community, rely on sectarian division for their support (which they will whip up when it suits) and ultimately seek to represent the "interests" of that community in competition with the other.

It would be wrong to equate the fears and aspirations of Protestant workers and young people with the Orange Order or with sectarian leaders. Exposing the conflicting interests of the Unionist establishment and Protestant workers and young people is essential, and this cannot be achieved by trying to convince them that what they perceive as their culture and heritage is inherently reactionary. While also making this point at the beginning of his chapter "Protestant Workers", Allen then argues that there is a crisis over what Loyalism is loyal to: "To a Protestant religious tradition or a more secular culture which defines itself against the 'other side'? To a mythical Britain or a mythical 'Ulster'?" (p.100). Without discussing the interesting points posed about culture or the

mythical status or otherwise of nations in general, it has to be stressed that the identification of Protestant workers and young people in the North with an identity that is connected to being part of the UK cannot be wished away. It cannot be dismissed or diminished as Allen does when he attempts to brush off the divisive aspect of a border poll by stating that, "All movements for progressive change divide people because they *upset those who want to maintain the status quo* and embolden those who want change" (p.124, our emphasis). These comments are of no benefit to the essential task of uniting ordinary people on both sides of the sectarian divide. They take no account of the genuine and legitimate fears and anxieties of the Protestant working class towards a capitalist united Ireland.

Ensuring that Protestants will not be coerced and that their rights and sense of identity will be protected is key to creating unified struggle, and the only force capable of giving that guarantee is the working-class movement. Uniting workers and young people across the sectarian divide cannot be achieved by patronising or undermining Protestant workers and young people. This is doubly necessary given the current sense amongst many Protestants that they have been disregarded and sold out by those who supposedly represent them – a factor that combines with the repeatedly deployed tactic of Unionist leaders to create a siege mentality among Protestants to prevent social and class issues from dominating. Economic hardship and the lack of a sense of a future are all features in Protestant working-class areas, and these were some of the underlying reasons for the violence that erupted in the North early this summer and the protests that have continued on a smaller scale since.

A working-class and socialist alternative

Kieran Allen states that "working-class struggle comes up against the obstacle of Orangeism" (p.93), but this does not sufficiently appreciate the significance of



Struggles like that for abortion rights have mobilised Protestant and Catholic young people in recent years against the conservative political establishment in both communities

occasions when workers challenged the Unionist establishment – showing a different way is possible. After outlining how nationalists controlled several town councils following local elections in 1920, Allen comments that the Labour Party becoming the main opposition to the Unionist Party in Belfast was "more significant *in some ways*" (p.5, our emphasis). This was of crucial significance. It demonstrated that when appealing to workers the basis of their class interests and how their material conditions can be transformed for the better, the support for Unionist parties could be undercut. This fundamentally remains the case today.

It is precisely to show that the workers' movement can and must stand independently of unionism as well as nationalism that the Socialist Party continuously argues for the need for a new political party in Northern Ireland – a party for working-class people from both communities, bringing together Catholic and Protestant workers and young people.

Kieran Allen states his preference is a "radical united Ireland" (p.168) described in the concluding paragraphs of his book. Although referring to this as Connolly's "socialist vision" (p.169), it falls far short of this. Completely absent from his description of an alternative, which includes such positives as a national health service, the scrapping of university fees and the creation of green jobs, is the necessity of transforming society by taking ownership and control of the economy out of the hands of the billionaire class (instead he calls only for public investment). Only in this way can the wealth and resources in society be planned democratically and used to raise the living standards of all working people in a just and equitable way. This is not a secondary point, because as long as the key sectors of the economy, and consequently the political institutions, are owned and controlled by the capitalist class there can be no hope of real equality or democracy.

Missing also is any reference to the need to link with workers and young people internationally in struggle against the destructive anarchy of capitalism that causes so much harm to people and the planet. Such an international movement is also ultimately essential to any attempt to achieve real change on this island.

The essential role of workers' unity

Kieran Allen finishes by saying a radical united Ireland would be able to "take seriously the socialist vision of James Connolly" (p.169). He seems to imply that only following the achievement of a united Ireland on a capitalist basis could a socialist future be considered. But socialist change can't wait; it is an urgent necessity from the point of view of workers and young people, as nothing less can deal with the problems in society from

housing and healthcare, to the economic crisis and climate change, let alone the national question. We don't agree that united working-class struggle against capitalism and for socialist change should or can be put off, nor the struggle to achieve the unity of the working class which is a prerequisite to such change.

Implicit in Allen's view is that capitalism can find a solution to sectarianism and the national question; the underlying argument being that a united capitalist Ireland would be a progressive development and therefore should be supported by socialists in the same way as any positive reform should be championed by the left. This again betrays a fundamental lack of understanding of the essential role of working-class unity and how it must be built. A border poll will divide, not unite, and Ireland can't be united if the working class is not united.

We are not neutral in this debate. We are on the side of the working class in its totality.

This must mean rejecting false choices offered by the capitalist establishment and ruling classes in Britain, the South and internationally. The only real solution is one that comes from below: a united working-class movement to challenge the sectarian status quo as well as the exploitation and oppression of the capitalist system. Recent glimpses of this potential were demonstrated by struggles of workers in Harland & Wolff but also in the huge strike of health and social care staff in 2019, as well as the active movements for LGBTQ+ rights and abortion rights. Peter Hadden illustrated the strength that the workers' movement once had: "Between 1918 and 1921 the class movement which had developed was the major preoccupation of all

sections of society. It transformed the national movement. It convulsed the labour movement, North and South. It determined the attitude of the bosses in Britain. It struck dread into the hearts of the reactionary Unionists and right-wing nationalists alike." (*Divide and Rule*). Partition was the desperate move adopted to weaken this movement by fostering the poison of sectarianism. But the power to change this continues to lie with the working class.

Solidarity in action

Throughout the book, Kieran Allen references a "32-county perspective" (p.163) and even emerging "32-county consciousness" (p.122). To support this he references recent crucial and positive developments including the protests in the North following the marriage equality referendum and Repeal; the protests that took place North and South following the Belfast

"[Kieran Allen] seems to imply that only following the achievement of a united Ireland on a capitalist basis could a socialist future be considered. But socialist change can't wait; it is an urgent necessity from the point of view of workers and young people, as nothing less can deal with the problems in society from housing and healthcare, to the economic crisis and climate change, let alone the national question."

Rugby Rape Trial; and solidarity received by Harland & Wolff shipyard workers when they occupied their yard in 2019. Allen is correct to point to the positives of working-class solidarity that can indeed be demonstrated by all of these examples, but the conclusion is flawed. Firstly, it is selective – solidarity for Harland & Wolff and Debenhams workers came not just from across the border but also from across the Irish Sea. By the same logic it could crudely be suggested this indicated a 'British-isles consciousness'. Similarly, the well-attended solidarity protests in Belfast and the South following the murder of Sarah Everard in London could be cited as another example. Both issues of gender violence and movements against the climate crisis are referenced by Allen to support his premise when in fact young people and working-class people politicised on these issues are not interested in limited Northern, Southern or all-Ireland perspectives but rather understand these issues as being global phenomena that require an international response. Many are drawing far-reaching conclusions about the need to challenge this system. Trying to fit these movements into the prism of the national question only imposes artificial limitations.

Allen quotes Socialist Party member and union organiser Susan Fitzgerald out of context to support his argument that solidarity from the South was key in achieving victory for Harland & Wolff workers. Again, the most crucial point is missed: working-class solidarity and united action is the tool by which national divisions and conflicting national aspirations can be overcome. That is why the emphasis was correctly added to these acts of solidarity but equally important, and ignored by Allen, is that Susan points to the solidarity shown by workers in different workplaces across the North, the Ferguson yard in Scotland, workers across Britain, actions from other unions and indeed solidarity from across the world. They all showed commonality and expressed the collective interest of working-class people. Rather than being about showing the superiority or inferiority of one or other national identity or aspiration, it gives a glimpse of how the working class can overcome divisions.

This certainly requires the development of a consciousness, but more precisely the development of working-class consciousness: the working class becoming aware of its own power and potential to transform society. That the development of such working-class consciousness is possible is indicated by the positive examples we mentioned above and which Kieran Allen references but views through a narrow framework.



The Harland & Wolff occupation in 2019 saw countless examples of workers solidarity

We're confident that on the basis of common struggle in the coming years against the inequality, oppression and crisis conditions of capitalism, the working class, and particularly younger generations, can build mass movements founded on solidarity and mutual respect – which will make any such movements stronger. These will be the basis for breaking down the sectarian status quo, allowing issues of conflicting aspirations to be dealt with by consent – through discussion not coercion – and also creating the basis for one unitary socialist state in Ireland.

Capitalism must go

Given the reality of sectarian divisions today and the likelihood of their intensification, the active building of support for socialist ideas and for ways in which working-class and young people can come together is not an adjunct task. Capitalism breeds division, and a united Ireland ruled by a capitalist class would continue to exploit the sectarian divisions that exist among the working class on this island, which will likely have deepened in the context of a border poll. Hence, arguing for a socialist alternative is not an abstract nicety; it is a necessity that flows from the analysis outlined here.

Furthermore, united struggle for such an alternative, forging mutual respect and understanding in the process, is the only possible way to dismantle sectarian divisions among working-class people and to find a solution to the national question. It underlines why the struggle for socialism is not something that can be left to some point in the future or postponed while other issues are dealt with, but must be consciously built now and in full awareness of the urgency of erasing capitalism – which is reinforced by international challenges, particularly the climate crisis, but also the national question here. ■

Class Struggle & Women's Liberation

Why we need Marxist Feminism

Originally published in Swedish in 2019, this is an article written by Elin Gaufin, International Socialist Alternative (ISA) activist based in Stockholm. Elin is responding to an article written in *Bang*, Swedish feminist magazine, in which Marxism and Karl Marx himself was dismissed as economistic and irrelevant to questions of oppression. We re-publish this article with thanks, as it makes the case succinctly as to why genuine Marxism is not economistic, looks nothing like the crude and lazy stereotypes proffered, and how in fact socialist feminist struggle is urgently needed.

In recent years, the global women's movement has reintroduced the strike as a form of struggle on a mass scale, starting in Poland in 2016. International Women's Day on 8 March in 2017 and 2018 saw internationally coordinated strikes in many countries. In 2019, up to seven million people went on strike in Spain on 8 March, which, like the feminist strike in Switzerland on 14 June, must be among the largest ever

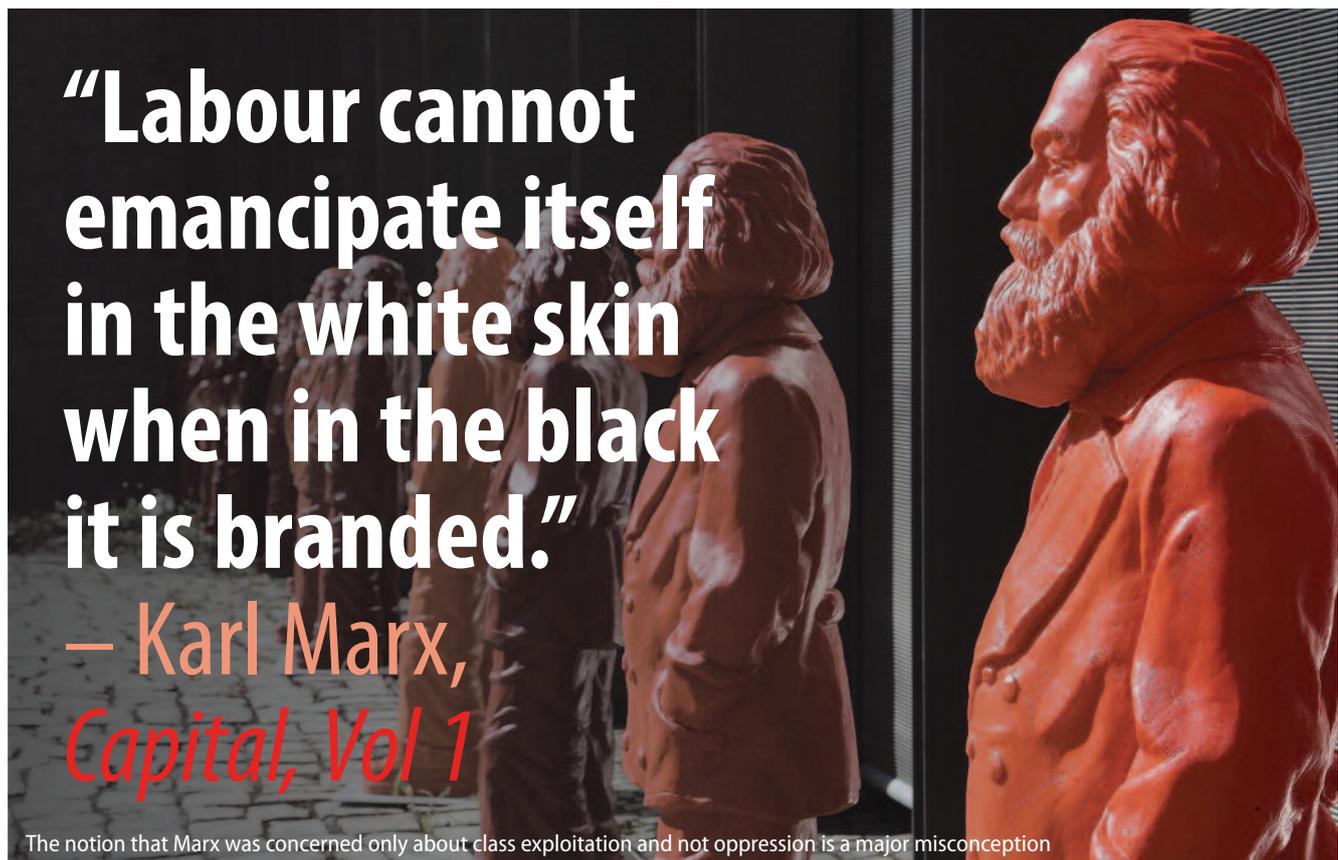
strikes in Europe. Similarly, feminist strikes and mass demonstrations have swept across Latin America as well as India and South Africa and were a main feature of the revolts in North Africa. The protest movement in Hong Kong also challenged sexism.

The reemergence of the strike

It was in the labour movement that the strike as a form of struggle was born, and for socialists it has always been a central strategy. The youth climate movement striking is a very important step away from individualism (the era of postmodernism and liberal identity politics) and towards collective action. Shutting down their workplaces or schools by sitting down or filling the streets clearly signals that the machinery must be stopped for change to be possible.

When workers strike, class struggle becomes more conscious. Karl Marx wrote that:

“Economic conditions had first transformed the mass of the people of the country into workers. The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle [...] this mass becomes united and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests.”¹



“Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin when in the black it is branded.”

**— Karl Marx,
*Capital, Vol 1***

The notion that Marx was concerned only about class exploitation and not oppression is a major misconception

The fact that the feminist magazine *Bang* had the labour movement as a theme reflects the same development within the women's movement.² There is, among other things, an article by Anna Remmets that discusses the important issue that has been discussed in many parts of the world, including up to 8 March — how should the strikes happen? One aspect is that women dominate in jobs where it is extremely difficult and sometimes illegal to strike, namely the health and social care professions. Insecure and temporary employment make it even more difficult, not to mention work without contracts or in the informal sector. In addition, there is discussion about unpaid work, so-called reproductive work or “household work”: should we go on strike from that? Remmets emphasises the International Women's Strike network as a trailblazer that wants to extend the concept of strike to include women outside the established labour market, without agreements or completely without income, which I will come back to.

The origins of women's oppression

There is also an article on the concept of class. Here, Ulrika Holgersson puts forward the tenuous myth that Karl Marx's “narrow” economic class theory “has contributed to the fact that for a number of groups, such as women and black people, their living conditions and rights have never been recognised as legitimate in the class struggle”. As a Marxist, there is a lot to reply to in that.

The strangest thing about the article is that it

highlights Gayle Rubin's contribution in the 1970s as pioneering. “American anthropologist, Gayle Rubin, opposed interpretations of capitalism as the origin of women's oppression. According to Rubin, women's oppression had a much longer history.” But this was widely known long before Rubin. Holgersson herself begins her article by mentioning Friedrich Engels' analysis of the origins of women's oppression in connection with private property and the emergence of class society about 10,000 years ago. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, as the book that Engels completed in 1884 is called, is still — despite important updates — fundamental to understanding where women's oppression originally came from.

Marxism is an ideology but also a tool for action that is constantly evolving with the living battles and setbacks against which it is tested. Getting hung up on just one person, Karl Marx, is not Marxist. I will try to show how Marxism developed, but I will start with Marx since he is referred to specifically.

Ulrika Holgersson believes that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Marx was completely uninterested in women as a special group with specific social rights and that this became Engel's lot instead. That is not true. Karl Marx did not start out as a feminist, but he was also influenced by the incipient women's movement (see, for example, Hal Draper's, ‘Marx and Engels on Women's Liberation’). And as Engels writes in the preface to the *Origin of the Family*, it was Karl Marx who started the work on the book but was unable to complete it before his death. It is clear

from reading the book that it was written to contribute to the struggle for women's liberation.

Holgersson believes that Gayle Rubin saw what Engels had overlooked — the role of reproduction in development. “It is not only the production of goods but also the reproduction of people, not only the need to be measured, but also to be sexually satisfied, which conditions human existence”. That is exactly the point of the *Origin of the Family*. Again, already in the foreword, Engels reiterates what has been central for Marxism both before and after — to focus on production *and* reproduction.

“According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life. This, again, is of a twofold character. On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of articles of food and clothing, dwellings, and of the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social organisation under which the people of a particular historical epoch and a particular country live is determined by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour on the one hand and of the family on the other.”³

This is in line with what Nancy Fraser, Tithi Bhattacharya and Cinzia Arruzza, who have greatly influenced the International Women's Strike, write in the manifesto, *Feminism for the 99%*:

“The critical point for us, and the key to understanding the present, is that class struggle includes struggles over social reproduction: for universal health care and free education, for environmental justice and access to clean energy, and for housing and public transportation.”⁴

Social reproduction

A theme for Holgersson is that Marxism believes that it is production that drives society and history forward, and that Marxist feminism therefore overstates that the solution for women is to enter production, i.e. get paid work and their own income. The same line of thinking is found in Nancy Fraser et al.: “By the same token, and *pace* traditional understandings of socialism, an exclusive focus on wage labor's exploitation cannot emancipate women”.⁵

In reality, socialism has not just focused on wage labour, but the idea that wage labour has not contributed to liberation at all is a one-sided assertion in the other direction. In the case of Europe and the United States at least, it is clear that the three major waves of

widespread women's struggles, together with labour struggles and other movements that led to economic, legal and cultural progress were all preceded by periods when many more women received paid employment — the end of the 1800s, the 1960s and the last 20 years.

That definitely doesn't mean a final emancipation, but having one's own income makes women less dependent on the family and freer to demand more equality. At the same time, there is a wider significance. With paid employment you get a workplace — an arena for organisation and you often become part of a team. Together with your workmates, it is easier to see the common conditions — it was no coincidence that the #metoo movement against sexual harassment was often based around workplace-based appeals to jointly demand change.

But Marxism or traditional socialism have neither seen women's right to wage labour as the ultimate goal, nor claimed that reproductive work is therefore worth less. On the contrary! When the labour and women's movement in the 1970s fought with great success for the establishment of preschools, it was because children's care is important. Children need trained staff, pedagogy, good facilities, etc. The same was the case when the expansion of other welfare reforms was won through struggle. However, none of these issues will be resolved as long as capitalism and class society exist. Children's groups and classes will continue to be far too large, cuts and privatisations constant, parents' working days far too long, many women's jobs just too unsafe and poorly paid, etc.

Capitalism ensures inequality

A basic idea of Marxism and the socialist movement is that this class society, capitalism, in itself and every day cultivates exploitation and hierarchies such as the exploitation of workers, racism and the gender-power order. The conclusion is that there must be a



Workers in many industries put the MeToo slogan into powerful action

fundamental social transformation in which capitalism is abolished. In a socialist society, its major assets would be commonly owned and managed. It has never before been so clear that today's private ownership of banks, oil assets, large industries, etc., leads all of humanity towards ruin. If society instead owns these assets, we can commonly decide what should be produced, how much and in what way. Here we come to the core of the argument. The whole purpose of a socialist social transformation is that resources must be transferred from today's destructive production to production in the name of welfare, i.e. to reproduction.

A massive expansion of welfare is the first thing that would be implemented. Even in a so-called welfare state like Sweden, there is a need for hundreds of thousands more employees in school, healthcare and social care to reduce stress levels and increase quality, and even more so in many other countries. One of the most important reforms that a socialist society must carry out is a greatly shortened working day, for more time for children, the elderly, cooking, leisure, community involvement etc. Already in the 1990s, the Women's power inquiry (government investigation) found that shorter working days for both partners in the family is among the surest ways to increase gender equality in household work.

The revolutionary tradition

There is reason to look towards those Marxists who have managed to go from words to action. Those who not only carried out revolutions but also started building another kind of society. It is no coincidence that International Women's Day, 8 March, which is still the day that brings together millions of feminists around the world in struggle, has its origins in the revolutionary socialist movement.

The Communist International noted that the Russian Revolution of 1917 had begun on International Women's Day and that this date would henceforth no longer vary from year to year but be fixed to 8 March. It was not only gender equality reforms such as the abortion law, the right to divorce, sex crime legislation and LGBTQ rights that saw the light of day in Bolshevik Russia for the first time. Welfare reforms such as daycare centres, canteens, laundry rooms and parental leave were also implemented. And significantly, the Communists understood that there was a need to continue fighting against the old structures. That the revolution must be permanent.

Inessa Armand and Alexandra Kollontai were the first two leaders of the women's committee in revolutionary Russia, Zhenotdel, which was set up for this purpose (the model was then spread to the entire international). Kollontai showed, among her many contributions

to Marxism, how household work that was previously considered private, in the sphere of the home, had now become tasks for the whole of society (which then found an echo again in the 1970s with the slogan, "The personal is political"). Armand's attitude was that:

"As long as the old forms of family, home life and child rearing are not abolished, it will be impossible to abolish exploitation and enslavement, it will be impossible to build socialism."⁶

Of course there was resistance, for example, among male party members. But it was not that the party as a whole didn't understand the importance of women's struggle. Lenin, for example, said that "the working class cannot achieve freedom, unless it achieves complete freedom for women".⁷ Leon Trotsky wrote in 1923 about the challenges they faced:

"To institute the political equality of men and women in the Soviet state was one problem and the simplest. A much more difficult one was the next — that of instituting the industrial equality of men and women workers in the factories, the mills, and the trade unions, and of doing it in such a way that men should not put women at a disadvantage. But achieving the actual equality of man and woman within the family is an infinitely more arduous problem. Domestic habits must be revolutionised before that can happen. And yet it is quite obvious that unless there is actual equality of husband and wife in the family, in a normal sense as well as in the conditions of life, we cannot speak seriously of their equality in social work or even in politics. As long as a woman is chained to her housework, the care of the family, the cooking and sewing, all her chances of participation in social and political life are cut down in the extreme."⁸



Women in the early Soviet Union fought to make gender equality a reality

The way forward was both major material improvements for working class people all as well as raising the cultural level and education in society.

Marxism and feminism

Then one must ask: what happened? For the Soviet Union did not develop along these lines but rather along opposite lines. The failed revolutions in other countries, the war of imperialism against Russia and poverty all caused Stalin's bureaucratic dictatorship to take over more and more. The counter-revolution worked on all levels and one of them, which Trotsky writes about in *Revolution Betrayed*, was the re-establishment of the traditional patriarchal family. For example, abortion and same-sex relations were criminalised again in the 1930s.

When the great wave of women's struggles broke out around the world in the late 1960s, it erupted against all aspects of gender oppression. It came to develop a radical feminist emphasis that was partly in polemic with a male-chauvinist left that was linked to Stalinism or its variant, Maoism. There, a male "proletarian culture" was cultivated as its view of the working class. The worker, they argued, was a white, heterosexual man. Radical feminism, in turn, argued (also incorrectly) that women's oppression was the original oppression and that the women's struggle is above the class struggle.

Over the past 30 years, the socialist programme has evolved as socialists have used it in concrete struggle. There have been ground-breaking campaigns and struggles — against domestic violence, against sexual harassment, against femicide, against wage discrimination, LGBTQI+ struggle, for abortion rights and much more.

To sum up, Marxism is both useful and necessary in the women's struggle. The working class is the force that can revolutionise society, which is the start of the abolition of the gender-power system. Women constitute an ever larger and above all an increasingly militant part of the working class, both in the formal sector, in the informal sector and in the welfare professions. In order for the working class to be able to unite and manage to raise a resistance against capitalism, the issue of fighting against both sexism and racism must be high on the agenda.

Liberation through socialist revolution

So back to Anna Remmets question about what kind of strikes are needed. The youth climate movement has gone from practicing individual veganism to striking. Furthermore, from school strikes to demanding of the unions that they also join in, and for "All out strikes". If



5 million joined the Feminist Strike in the Spanish state in 2018

all the unions went on strike, emissions would decrease immediately, at least on that strike day. Not just that. The social change that is necessary demands that power is challenged. The same is true with the feminist struggle. It is essential to stop production in order to challenge the power of companies and banks, as well as the states and the politics that back them up.

In all revolutions, a lively discussion about personal freedoms, about how gender roles must also be questioned, begins. The most recent example of this was during the spring's long occupation of the square in Khartoum, Sudan. The women's groups rose and demanded of the male participants that they educate themselves in questioning and opposing sexism, and the women's groups also refused to unilaterally be responsible for the cleaning tasks first assigned to them by the Revolutionary Coordination.

This is just a glimpse of what will happen when the whole society is changed from the ground up. For the revolution to proceed there is a need, by mass struggle and revolutionary leadership, to challenge the economic system and the capitalist state. When the working class and the majority of the population have the power, including over the economy, the material base exists for real liberation of all sexes. ■

Notes

- 1 Karl Marx, 1847, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, www.marxists.org
- 2 Bang, 2019, issue #2
- 3 Engels, 1884, *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Preface, www.marxists.org
- 4 N. Fraser et al., 2019, *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, Verso, p. 24
- 5 Ibid, p. 81
- 6 Karen M. Offen, 2000, *European Feminism 1700–1950: A Political History*, Stanford University Press, p. 267. (Also read more in Emma Quinn's article "Women's and LGBTQ Liberation in Revolutionary Russia")
- 7 VI Lenin, 1920, 'To the Working Women', www.marxists.org
- 8 Leon Trotsky, 1923, 'From the Old Family to the New', www.marxists.org



LESSONS FROM THE FIRST INTIFADA:

When mass struggle shook the Israeli regime

In May 2021, as Gaza was under another murderous assault by the Israel state, a major wave of solidarity protests with the Palestinian people swept the globe. This was combined with protests and a general strike of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and within Israel's borders. This naturally brought the question of 'how the Israeli state can be defeated?' to the fore of people's minds. Peter McGregor looks back at the lessons from the First Intifada.

The bombardment of Gaza lasted 11 days. Over 250 people were killed and over 1,000 injured. This happened in the context of the ratcheting up of assaults on Palestinians by the Israeli state in East Jerusalem and Sheik Jarrah. One harrowing tweet brought home the devastation and terror that Palestinians were facing: "Tonight, I put the kids to sleep in our bedroom. So that when we die, we die together and no one would live to mourn the loss of one another."¹

Looking back at the First Intifada that erupted in December 1987 can assist in answering the aforementioned question, particularly in light of the emergence of a new mood of defiance. This was best exemplified by the protests and general strike of Palestinians in response to the barbarity of the Israeli war machine. The Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, reported on the impact of the strike:

"The Israel Builders Association said Palestinian workers had observed the strike, with only 150 of the

65,000 Palestinian construction workers coming to work in Israel. This paralyzed building sites, causing losses estimated at 130 million shekels (nearly \$40 million). But even before the strike, since the beginning of the operation in Gaza, only 6,000 to 8,000 Palestinians were coming to work every day. According to Yehuda Katav, vice president of the builder's association, construction has slowed to a snail's pace. 'We cannot build without them'.²

This, coupled with the various other protests that took place in Sheik Jarrah and all across the occupied territories, and the international outpouring of solidarity all provide hope for a movement against the occupation.

40 years of dispossession & occupation

The Arabic word 'intifāḥah' literally means 'shaking off', and given its association with key struggles of the Palestinian people is generally understood to mean uprising. The First Intifada was exactly that, an uprising in an attempt at shaking off years of colonialism, occupation and brutal repression. It began when an Israeli settler crashed his truck into cars in the Gaza Strip, killing four Palestinian workers on 8 December 1987. This event was the spark, but a piling up of unbearable conditions created the tinder that produced a powerful flame.

The Intifada took place 40 years after the 'Naqba' in 1947, which saw the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland with some 750,000 forced to flee their homes, and just over 20 years after the occupation of the remaining Palestinian land in 1967, beginning a steady process of further ethnic cleansing of

Palestinians through the building of settlements. Having experienced over four decades of war, dispossession and daily injustices, a new generation began to say 'enough is enough'.

From 1967 through 1987, approximately 200,000 Palestinians passed through Israeli jails. At the time, Gaza's population was 500,000 and over 400,000 were refugees. Thirty-six percent of land in Gaza was controlled by 2,500 Israeli settlers, and 50% of land in the West Bank was either in the hands of 65,000 settlers or used by the military.³

What was the intifada

The First Intifada began as mass demonstrations in Gaza, which spread to the occupied West Bank. The demonstrations utilised the methods of mass struggle – protests, strikes, even riots. A coordinating committee was set up (the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising) alongside local popular committees that organised the struggle from the ground up.

The Intifada was based on an active revolutionary movement of young people, workers and women. It ended with the signing of the Oslo Accord in September 1993, which constituted a historic betrayal of the struggle for Palestinian national liberation by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) leadership. However, the intifada showed that working-class people can shake to the core an oppressive state, even one as vicious as Israel, which killed over 300 people in the first year of the intifada alone.⁴

Many of those involved in the grassroots committees were members of trade unions and left-wing organisations, and they used their positions in relation to the Israeli economy to make the revolt as effective as possible. The most powerful tool any workers have is strike action, as it stops production which in turn hurts capitalists' profits. Palestinian workers availed of that fact on 22 December 1987 with a general strike of Palestinians in Israel. *The New York Times* said, "Hundreds of thousands of Arabs inside Israel joined others in the occupied territories today in a general strike protesting Israel's handling of a wave of protests."

It continued: "great numbers of Arab laborers who wait on tables, pick vegetables, haul garbage, lay brick and perform most of Israel's menial work stayed home. More than 100,000 workers from the occupied territories go into Israel each day, in addition to the Arabs living there, filling a vital role in the Israeli economy."⁵ This, coupled with a boycott of Israeli goods by Palestinians in January 1988, is estimated to have cost the Israeli economy £28 million,⁶ equivalent to around £68 million today.

Committees of struggle

Notwithstanding the spontaneity at the beginning of the First Intifada, organisation of the movement was crystalised quickly. By January 1988, grassroots committees had been set up which went about organising food storage and distribution, healthcare,



The assault on Gaza in May sparked a powerful Palestinian general strike

special needs of their villages, etc. In a recent interview one veteran of the uprising said, "had the Coronavirus outbreak happened in the First Intifada, it could have been creatively contained. The spirit of social solidarity would make each person believe they have a duty".⁷

These committees took matters into their own hands and placed no hopes in the leadership of the PLO, which at the time of the First Intifada was in exile. Researchers have pointed out that the years leading up to the Intifada saw a massive increase in protests in Palestine, while "faith in a solution driven by external actors, like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), based in Tunis, and the Arab countries, had declined."⁸

In genuinely shaking the Israeli regime, the Intifada highlighted two vital things: first, that working-class and oppressed people, when organised and mobilised en masse can be a powerful force, and second, that mass struggle proved more effective than the counterproductive methods of the PLO in the past or Hamas today — with their use of individual terror attacks.

The role of women

The active role of Palestinian women in struggle laid some of the foundations for the organisations and programmes that were used during the First Intifada, for example the first women's committee was created by working-class women in 1978 in Ramallah in the West Bank.⁹ Such women's committees were an important part of the revolt, as outlined by Maura K. James in her paper 'Women and the Intifadas: the Evolution of Palestinian Women's Organizations', in which she states:

"While women all over Palestine participated in what Penny Johnson and Eileen Kuttub call "mother activism"... when older women sheltered youth and

defied soldiers' the formal societies kept the intifada in motion from the top. The women's unions 'participated in distributing the secret communiqués of the Unified Leadership, delivered PLO funds for social relief, visited prisoners and their families, and performed other activities...'”¹⁰

In the fantastic documentary *Naila and the Uprising* directed by Julia Bacha, the role that women played is again brilliantly displayed. Women distributed bulletins in bags of bread, set up schools for Palestinian children, sourced products from Palestine in order to make the boycott of Israeli goods, alongside the general strike, as effective as possible, and much more besides.

The documentary also details the effect that the revolt had in Israeli society, with an Israeli journalist explaining how a section of Israelis saw the need to support the uprising, including for example a protest by Israeli women who wore all black to “mourn ‘justice’, which has been violated by the occupation.” There was also a march of several thousand Palestinian and Israeli women who went from West Jerusalem to East Jerusalem, crossing the divide, at which Naila Ayesh said, “Double your efforts to lift the injustices from my people, so my son and your son, and all children can live side by side.”

Following these kinds of protests, along with the Palestinian uprising itself, pressure on the Israeli ruling class began to mount. Within Israel many ordinary working people realised that Palestinian resistance meant that the occupation or annexation of the West Bank and Gaza was unviable and untenable. Support began to grow for a separate independent Palestinian state rather than incorporating the occupied territories into a “greater Israel”

Role of the youth

Young people were central to the revolt. They were the first to throw stones, be involved in committees and were active in their schools and universities. Student activity and the spreading of radical ideas flourished from the 1970s as more Palestinians began to attend university. As Jack McGinn writes: “From the universities spread radical ideas of popular democracy; unions were set up to organise within the student body and the wider community in tandem with other sectors of Palestinian society.”¹¹

However, it was not just through student bodies that young people were active in the resistance, it was also in political parties and in community work. According to Rula Salameh, a student at Birzeit University: “when the intifada began, there wasn't a single student who



Women made up the backbone of the uprising

hadn't joined a political party on campus. All students spent their time and energy helping their community and working towards the collective mission of liberating Palestine from Israeli occupation.”¹²

At the time of the Intifada Palestinian society was very youthful. In 1987 in the West Bank 47.2% of people were under the age of 15 and 20.7% were between 15 and 24 years of age. In East Jerusalem in 1988, 41.7% were under 15 and 20.6% were between 15 and 24, and in Gaza in 1987, 48.8% were under 15 and 19.9% were between 15 and 24.¹³

Such a youthful population is not always precondition for an uprising, however it certainly plays a role in accelerating it, particularly when a young generation is faced with no real future. Young people are often the most open to radical ideas and willing to take determined, dangerous action. This is due to many factors: a sense of fighting for their futures, a freshness to activity untainted by experiences of leadership sell-outs, their conditions of exploitation in the workforce, their experience of injustice in education and in social lives, and many other things.

The Palestinian population today still has a youthful character. In 2019, 38.7% of the population were under 15 and 20.3% were between 15 and 24. It is safe to assume that the same potential for youth to be at the forefront of any coming struggle is there. The mood after 30 years of totally bogus talk of the part of the Israeli ruling class and imperialism of the creation of two states, implying an end to the occupation, coupled with the lived reality of repression, political betrayal and in the context of a movement against oppression within Palestine and internationally is still a strong one.

Right to self defence

With the First Intifada, the crucial effect and importance of mass struggle became clear. In response to such mass struggle, regardless of how peaceful and

disciplined it is, Palestinians have faced and will face military backlash from the Israeli state and therefore have a right to armed self defence. However, this should not be in contradiction to the mass movement, but rather an auxiliary to that movement wherever Palestinians are being fired upon.

Arms and ammunition should be democratically controlled by grassroots committees of struggle, which would allocate, distribute and decide how the arms are used. These methods of armed defence, which are used in conjunction with the most effective methods of working-class struggle, are juxtaposed to the futile and counter-productive methods employed by the PLO leadership in the past and today by Hamas. Such methods became prominent in the Second Intifada, which developed in response to the sellout of the Oslo Agreement. Instead of the mass action seen in the First Intifada, individuals and organisations in desperation resorted to acts of individual terrorism and even suicide bombings targeting Israeli military and civilians.

Such methods are incapable of defeating the Israeli state, which today has a military budget of over \$17 billion.¹⁴ In part this is because it drives Israeli workers into the hands of the Israeli ruling class and ultimately strengthens, not weakens, the hand of the latter. Secondly, because it points away from the mass struggle and the tactics that are necessary.

Lessons for Today

The Oslo Accords which were signed in 1993 and 1995 were a sell out of the movement by the PLO leadership who, behind the backs of the active movement on the ground, entered into talks with the Israeli government, facilitated by the government in Norway. The agreements established the corrupt Palestinian Authority, which instead of an ending of the occupation simply made Fatah (the dominant faction of the PLO led by Yasser Arafat) responsible for managing the occupation. Their forces were trained and armed by the CIA, and have worked hand in glove with the Israeli Defence Force in maintaining the occupation, blockade and oppression of the Palestinians.

In light of the experience of the heroic First Intifada, the question must be asked: why didn't this mass struggle defeat the Israeli state? The primary reason is that, ultimately, while an Intifada based in the occupied territories can have a major impact, it cannot defeat the Israeli state on its own. This is why the Palestinian liberation struggle should reach out to other sections of the working class in the Middle East, as part of a region-wide struggle to overthrow the various dictators and corrupt regimes, along with imperialism, along with the capitalist order on which they are based.

However, crucially, in order to defeat the Israeli ruling class, any such movement must seek to exploit the cracks in class-divided Israeli society, in which millions of Israeli-Jewish workers do not have the same interests as their corrupt rulers. In Israel since the start of the pandemic 268,000 households have fallen into poverty and the cost of living is the eighth highest in

the world.^{15,16} Racism against Ethiopian Jews is real. It's also important to note that within Israel's officially recognised border there is a sizeable Palestinian workforce in key sectors such as health, transport and construction.

If a Third Intifada is to succeed, a revolutionary force within the occupied territories that can lead and counter the influence of the rotten forces of Hamas and Fatah is needed. If such a force is based on a strong socialist and internationalist programme it could make an appeal to working-class Israelis, and inspire a struggle to end the occupation and overthrow Israeli capitalism, and defeat and expel imperialism.

A democratic, socialist solution based on the empowerment of the working class and oppressed would ensure that the national rights of both Palestinians and Israelis are upheld and that the rights of minorities are guaranteed. It would mean the creation of an independent, socialist Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem and a socialist Israel based on free and open borders. This could be linked to a struggle for fundamental socialist transformation of the Middle East, where the impoverishment and exploitation of its working population could be ended for good.

The First Intifada remains a testament to the enormous sacrifice and heroism of the Palestinian people who have time and again shown a willingness to defy oppression, strike back against colonial settlements and continue to fight for self-determination against a mega military force. But it is also a vital example of mass struggle from below, which is unquestionably the way forward for the movement for Palestinian liberation. ■

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The Care Crisis

By Emma Dowling

Verso Books, 2020

Reviewed by Caitriona Ní Chatháin

In her book *The Care Crisis: What Caused It and How Can We End It*, Emma Dowling explores the multifaceted world of care, and its degradation under decades of neoliberalism, and capitalism today. With a special focus on the situation in Britain, Dowling examines not only what we mean by 'care' and 'care work' but also, who carries out this work, who receives adequate care and who doesn't.

By naming our current situation a "crisis" she brings to light the many issues related to care and the disproportionate impact it has on working-class communities. While much of the prescient research for the book was done prior to the Covid pandemic, this January 2021 publication is able to convincingly make the case that the new conditions make the subject-matter even more urgent.

There is a global deficit of care, with a growing number of the world's population unable to access the care they need. In 2015 there were an estimated 2.1 billion people worldwide in need of care, mostly children and the elderly. By 2030 the total is expected to reach 2.3 billion.

The author addresses issues related to paid care work, unpaid care work and state-provision. All three are interconnected and play an important role in meeting (and in many cases not meeting) the care needs of individuals and communities. This interconnection can be seen in the role of women and the disproportionate burden of care work placed upon them, both paid and unpaid.

Dowling locates the role of women and the nuclear family in supporting the capitalist economy. Workers function better in the workplace in making profits for the capitalists as a result of unpaid care at home. One international study showed that women do 3.3 times more unpaid care work than men. Studies show that worldwide mothers (but not fathers) suffer from income loss as a result of having children, and a lack of affordable childcare is the main reason why mothers no longer engage in paid employment or work part time.

Dowling attributes much of the current care crisis to the wave of austerity following the 2008 recession. *The Care Crisis* illustrates the human cost of the same. This can be seen in the reformed funding model of Local Authorities (responsible for community and social care services) with some services losing over half of their funding. The result is that those who rely heavily on such services are being squeezed further into precarity. One stark example of this is the fact that nearly half of those living in poverty in the UK live in households with a disabled person.

The Care Crisis*

Emma Dowling

*What Caused It and How Can We End It?

What is equally startling is the policy of commercial expansion of private services within the welfare state through state contracts (such as fostering services) or through other means of commercialisation of aspects of the sector. The greater reliance of Local Authorities on private sources of funding has proven to be devastating on the quality and scope of services provided.

For example, Dowling describes how charity services, in attempting to plug the gaps in welfare provision, are in fact being normalised by the very welfare state that has turned its back on so many people. For example, thousands of referrals are made to food banks by state agencies each year, with these agencies providing tokens to confirm the recipient's eligibility! The amount of food banks in the UK has now grown to over 2,000. These are run entirely by volunteers, who, if they were to receive the minimum wage would cost £30 million.

Particularly illuminating are the short vignettes: a junior doctor on strike, a couple who feel conflicted over minding their elderly mother, a social worker lamenting the funding cuts and their detrimental effects on the outcomes of the people she works with.

The author also examines the notion of "self-care", highlighting its ascent in the wake of the crash. Much of the discourse around self-care is shrouded in consumer culture and self-optimisation. Trends such as clean eating, clean beauty and other market remedies are a quick fix that detract from the wider question of why people are feeling burnt out, stressed and unhealthy. The structural nature of individual problems is hidden. According to capitalism, if you're not coping, it's your fault.

Dowling highlights a need for "a transformation of the structural need for care", that society should be organised around care, as opposed to the neoliberal focus on the individual. Truly valuing care, it's argued,

means providing time for unpaid care, as well as massively investing in quality community care. Pay and conditions of care-workers, some of the lowest paid sections of the workforce, need to be dramatically improved. While Dowling also hints at more radical

solutions, the triumph of this book is the excellent overview of care work under capitalism. In short, real care is fundamentally at odds with a system that cares about profit first and above all else — Emma Dowling has forensically delineated this truth in *The Care Crisis*. ■

Arise: Power, Strategy & Union Resurgence

By Jane Holgate
Pluto Press, 2021

Reviewed by Michael O'Brien

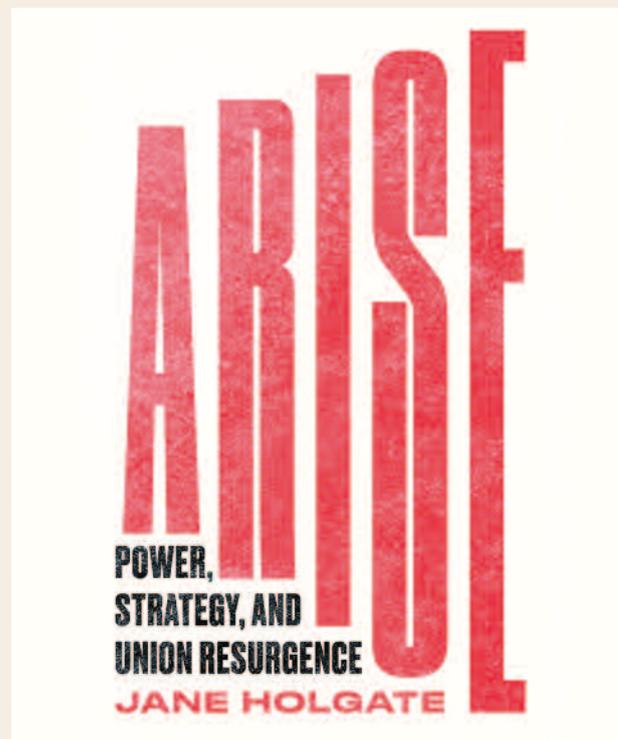
While being a historical and contemporary study of rising and falling fortunes of the British trade union movement, there is much in this book of interest to activists in Ireland who have witnessed a similar overall picture of decline in union density and all too frequent workplace defeats over the last four decades.

In trying to offer a perspective for those sections of the 21st century workforce often viewed as 'hard to organise', such as gig workers, part-time workers and also non-precarious workers in new sectors tech and services, a reference back to the late 19th century is an absolute requirement. The obstacles to organising workers then were as immense as today, if not more so.

Irish readers will be familiar with the particular role of Connolly and Larkin in bringing what was termed at the time as 'new unionism' to Ireland. This was the organising of the masses of unskilled and semi-skilled workers which represented a break from the tradition of craft unionism. Holgate goes into some detail about the seminal 'match girls strike' and dock strikes in London, where these methods were pioneered. In both instances you had thousands of migrant workers with zero legal protections, the emergence of organic leaders from the ranks and militantly executed strike campaigns that left a lasting legacy of organisation.

The main purpose of the book is a review of the 'turn to organising' undertaken by the British trade union movement some 20 years ago. The defeats suffered in the 1980s saw most of the trade union leadership in Britain adopt a defensive posture, termed 'new realism', which concluded that militant struggle was not possible in the economic context of higher unemployment and a raft of anti-trade union laws introduced by the Thatcher government. The defeat of the miners and print workers in the mid-eighties bolstered the hold of this retreat.

The strategy of the leadership was to wholly embrace a 'servicing' model of trade unionism, effectively treating their existing members as passive consumers with a focus on individual grievances. This was combined with



'in-fill' recruiting of non-members in already unionised workplaces, and in the few instances where employers were receptive, a form of social partnership. All of this was coupled with a hope for the eventual return of a Labour Party government.

None of the above, including the return of Labour to power under Blair, arrested the decline of trade union membership. The existential threat posed to the movement if they did not augment their shrinking base in disappearing older industries by breaking into new non-unionised workplaces became impossible to ignore, hence the 'turn to organising' and the creation of organising academies and departments.

One reform Blair did introduce was a system for mandatory trade union recognition if a majority of employees in a firm voted for a union, something still denied in Ireland. The reform did provide a clear path for a spurt of successful recognition campaigns but ran its course after several years.

The most valuable part of the book is picking apart why the two decades-long turn to organising has been a mixed bag, to say the least, and while it has slowed the decline of the movement and permitted some unions to grow again, it has no way near restored the movement to its previous heights. The fundamental deficiency is that most of the efforts have not amounted to true organising but rather recruitment of

members which is not the same thing.

The case studies of USDAW (retail) and the RMT (rail) is salutary. Both achieved significant membership growth on the back of recruitment campaigns with their own distinct features. USDAW operated a form of social partnership with the big four retailers. While their activists have been permitted to recruit thousands of their colleagues every year, the increased density has not been translated into a struggle to improve pay levels, which are not markedly better than for USDAW members in other firms where there is no recognition.

RMT by contrast did not buy into the model of having separate and distinct organising units, but rather grew its membership on the back of a succession of successful militantly fought pay campaigns under the Bob Crow leadership. The success of the RMT on recruitment and improved pay and conditions and saving jobs stands out from all the other examples in the book, including ostensibly left-led unions like PCS.

Holgate concludes with appeals to the trade union leaders to adopt a better approach with correct calls for political education of the membership and an embracing of the campaigning spirit of the school student climate movement, BLM and #metoo, so that the union movement speaks to the next generation and harnesses their evident fighting potential.

While making this appeal she does not fully face up the struggle that has to be waged by rank and file activists to set them on a different course. The reality is that the sorry state the movement got into in large measure arose when trade union officialdom engaged in a power grab from the shop steward layer that populated the workplaces in the 1960s and 1970s.

The revival of the trade union movement in the 21st century will not happen on the basis of the controlled top down recruitment campaigns that do not build the power that enables workers to fight for real improvements in pay and working conditions. ■

Betraying Big Brother

By Leta Hong Fincher

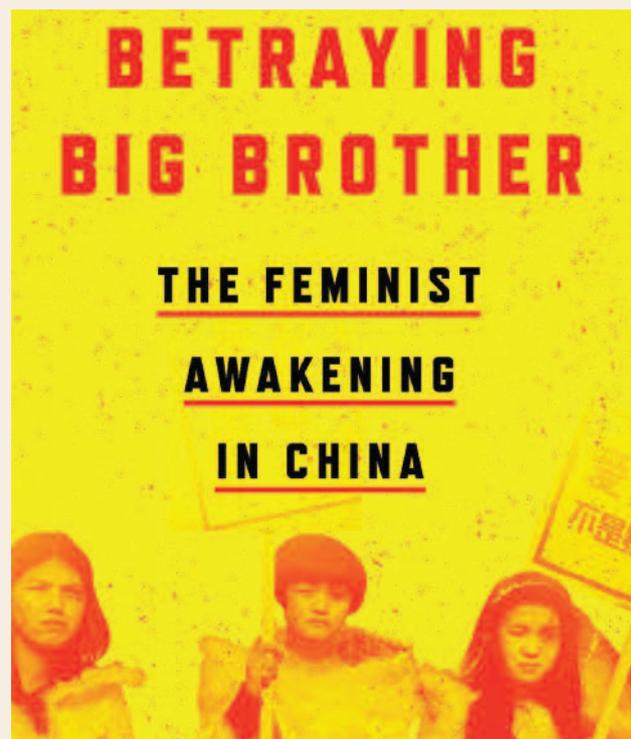
Verso Books, 2018

Reviewed by Róise McCann

On the eve of International Women's Day 2015, Chinese Communist Party-controlled state forces arrested Li Maizi, Wu Rongrong, Zheng Churan, Wei Tingting and Wang Man; the "Feminist Five". The five women were organising a protest against rampant sexual harassment in China and planned to hand out stickers on public transport. Leta Hong Fincher's *Betraying Big Brother* details the experiences of the Feminist Five, each of whom were subjected to intense interrogations and psychological torture during their detention.

Charged with "picking quarrels and provoking trouble", the women potentially faced sentences of five years in prison. CCP attempts to crush a burgeoning feminist movement with the arrests backfired, igniting protests around the world. The following #FreeTheFive campaign exposed the hypocrisy of Xi Jinping, who was gearing up to co-host a United Nations' event on women's rights in New York. Facing pressure, the Feminist Five were released after 37 days.

As Hong Fincher puts it, patriarchal authoritarianism is critical for the political dominance of the Communist Party in China. State propaganda highlights that the word "family," jia, is also part of the compound word for "nation," guojia. As such, Xi Jinping paints a picture of the "little families" of China which make up the "big family," the nation. Along with this propaganda comes a raft of eugenicist and sexist policies and initiatives



which seek to encourage "high-quality women"; middle-class university graduates, to marry and reproduce children for the contribution to a "harmonious society". Simultaneously, financial barriers and government-pushed overpopulation myths in effect discourage working-class, single and Uygur women from deciding to have children. Combined with policies which further exclude women from certain industries and occupations, Hong Fincher shines light on the growing generation of young women who are vehemently rejecting these gender roles and protesting

their imposed status as wives and breeders for the state.

In first-hand interviews with the Feminist Five, Leta Hong Fincher illustrates the massive ripple effect the campaign had on the feminist movement in China. Being visible as a feminist organiser in China is fraught with the threat of censorship or further state suppression. Feminists are often accused of deriving their ideas from “Western hostile forces” and interfering with CCP rule. Apps and websites like Google, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are banned in China, whilst microblogging apps Weibo and WeChat are heavily moderated to remove any content that is deemed “sensitive and illegal”. It was under this same logic that a 2018 #MeToo petition signed by thousands of students was removed by censors soon after it went up on social media. Demanding action against sexual harassment, the petition was part of the wider #MeToo movement in China which sought to hold powerful actors in state institutions and private companies accountable for a culture of normalised sexual abuse and harassment.

Despite intense suppression, the #MeToo movement swelled beyond university students online and into workplaces. Inspired by the news of other women standing against sexual harassment and oppression, a woman working in a Foxconn factory published an essay online which read, “I am a Woman Worker at Foxconn and I Demand a System that Opposes Sexual Harassment.” The anonymous woman was a victim of prolonged harassment by male co-workers and demanded that her employer set up effective channels of recourse for victims of workplace sexual harassment.

Hong Fincher also points to women in majority-female factories in China rising up against exploitation by their employers. In Huajian International factories, which make shoes for Ivanka Trump’s clothing line, three

trade union activists were detained and released on bail for speaking out against reported low pay, extreme hours and physical and verbal abuse from management. In factories owned by Simone Accessories, striking women workers were able to win concessions on issues of social insurance and housing benefits from management after nine days of collective bargaining.

Zheng Churan of the Feminist Five is quoted in the book as saying, “the forces of authoritarianism and crony capitalism are linking up around the world and getting stronger, so we feminists need to come together too”. The CCP’s imposition of state repression on feminists and labour organisers demonstrates the power in linking such movements. Existing at the core of these actions is the potential for explosions, permeating the sexist and exploitative base of China’s ruling class.

Zhang Leilei, an activist closely associated with the Feminist Five, wrote the following in a personal essay (which was promptly deleted from WeChat by government censors): “No matter how much they try to shrink our space, nothing can stop feminists from sprouting up everywhere.”

Leta Hong Fincher’s *Betraying Big Brother* illustrates explicitly how the global capitalist system of profit relies on the oppression of workers and women. *Betraying Big Brother* is a particularly potent read in the light of fierce state repression, demonstrating the power of activists in China who are putting these institutions of state capitalism in their crosshairs. The Feminist Five represent a nucleus of struggle. What is needed, Hong Fincher makes clear, is the unity of feminist activism in China with movements against all forms of oppression nurtured by capitalism, for the nucleus to erupt and shake the institutions of capitalist exploitation to their core. ■

Beautiful World, Where Are You

By Sally Rooney
Faber & Faber, 2021

Reviewed by Harper Cleves

Sally Rooney’s third novel, *Beautiful World, Where Are You*, was one of the most anticipated and hyped-up book releases in recent memory. For about two months in advance all of Dublin seemed to be waiting with bated breath for the 7 September release date advertised in every bookshop window. Many of the same millennials who waited in long queues outside of local bookstores for the final installation of the Harry Potter series in 2007 were among those who received

complimentary Sally Rooney buttons and bookmarks with their opening day purchase in 2021; except now they are all radical lefties and trans-inclusive feminists.

Whereas *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People* were deep examinations of young college radicals and their messy relationships, *Beautiful World* is centered on a friendship between two women in their late twenties / early thirties navigating a different stage of adulthood and relationships in a world that seems to be rapidly deteriorating around them. Alice, who is broadly thought to be a stand-in for Rooney’s own consciousness, is a successful writer, who after suffering a mental breakdown, is wrestling with the purpose and ethics of her work. Eileen, who was considered the more gifted of the two friends in college, still lives in Dublin, has been recently broken up with by her boyfriend, and makes a pittance at her job editing articles at a literary magazine.

There are certainly elements to criticise in this novel. Rooney is dubbed a Marxist in almost every article about her work. She certainly understands that exploitation of

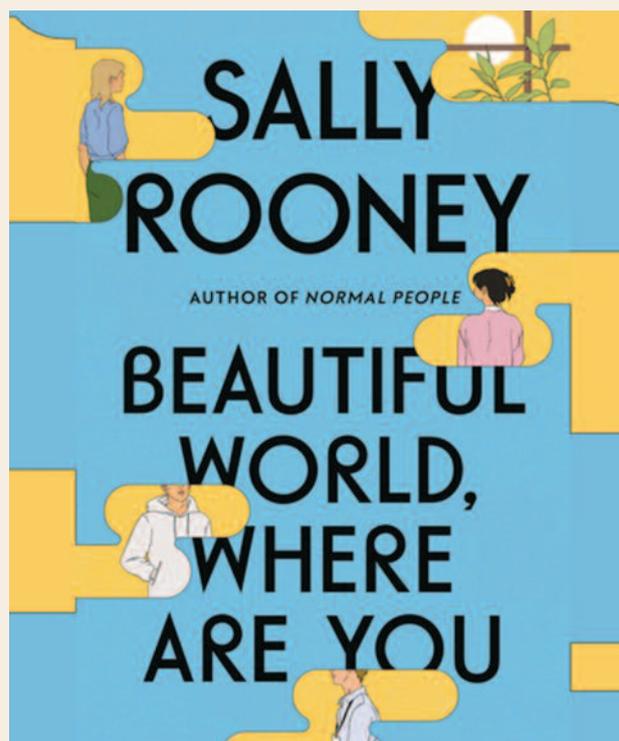
both people and the planet is at the heart of capitalism; and that it is a defunct system that has outlived its use — a sentiment that is undoubtedly refreshing to a generation of readers who are being priced out of the estates they grew up in, and are accustomed to news feeds filled with systemic misogyny and racism, major weather events, and regions ravaged by war. And yet Rooney’s perspective on being able to fundamentally challenge a society built on inequality and violence seems cynical at best. This is reflected in comments her characters make about climate change: (wondering if the best they can do is be personally sustainable in the face of climate disaster) or her flirtation with religion in the character of Simon, a preternaturally “perfect” central character in his early thirties who manages to be a regular mass attendee while also working for a radical left-wing political party — a fairly unbelievable idea given that the atrocities committed by the Catholic Church are at the heart of radical and progressive sentiment amongst young Irish people.

Having said this, the tenderness and sensitivity that Rooney demonstrates towards her characters serves to undercut her own cynicism about humanity. The emotional core of the novel is a series of emails exchanged between two college friends, now living on opposite coasts of Ireland and grappling with how to find meaning and joy in a fundamentally unequal and unfair world. In between the emails, Rooney narrates the minutiae of Eileen and Alice’s lives — love, work, friends’ birthday parties — in an extremely sparse and removed voice. One reviewer at *The Dartmouth* described the third-person limited narration as “voyeuristic” and “cold.” Meanwhile a *New York Times* review described it as “lovely”, but also as if “Rooney writes scenes as though she had to type them out on T-89” (for any potential zoomers reading this article, this was an early form of arduous texting we had to suffer through before the smartphone).

For me, the removed narration worked — and in fact suited the central theme quite well: the search for beauty and meaning in life, even in the face of capitalist destruction.

In their email exchanges, Eileen and Alice grapple with both the minute and meta issues that plague them; a bad date, and the collapse of civilization; a passive aggressive quip about a delayed response; and what the purpose of art is in a world desperate for fundamental change. It is in these personal, intelligent, and often overwrought and frustratingly uncommunicative exchanges that the emotional thrum of the novel lives; and Rooney floats above the exchanges without intimating an answer or a judgement. In describing the feeling of an empty room, or the touch of a wrist; in observing that Alice “seemed to be anxious”, Rooney puts herself in the position of so many of her readers; not knowing if she has an answer for the big and small questions, but sincerely hoping that we all find one.

As a millennial that did queue for the latest Harry Potter novel in 2007, so much has unfolded in the interim 14 years to fundamentally alter my outlook on



life. It is impossible to be young and socially conscious and to not see your personal strife connected with larger systemic questions and the broader suffering of the global working class, even when the subjugation of others often far outweighs my own. Sally Rooney’s characters’ seemingly trivial problems of work, friendship and dating are juxtaposed to the backdrop of global exploitation. But rather than dismissing Eileen’s anxiety, or Felix’s alienation in his warehouse job as “first world problems”, Rooney manages to pose the question: what if we all deserve better? What if the trivialities of our day to day are the source of human connection? Of solidarity? Of the seeds of a movement that can bring about a new and better world?

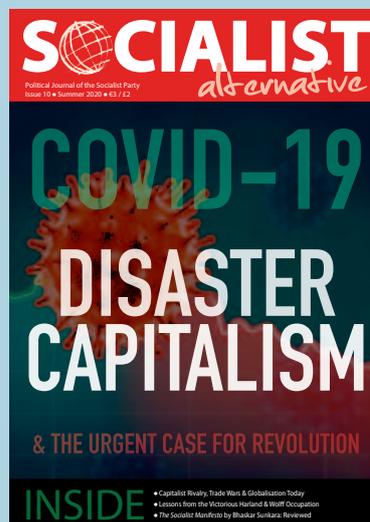
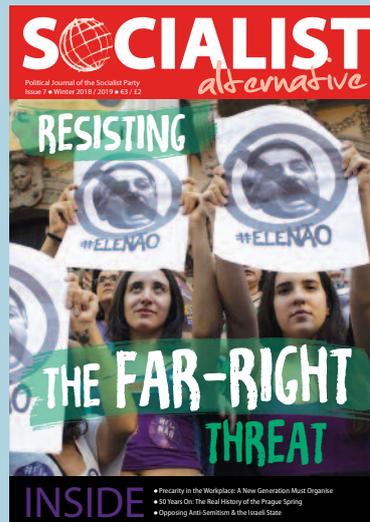
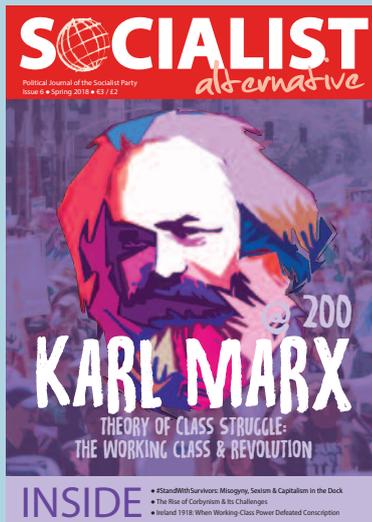
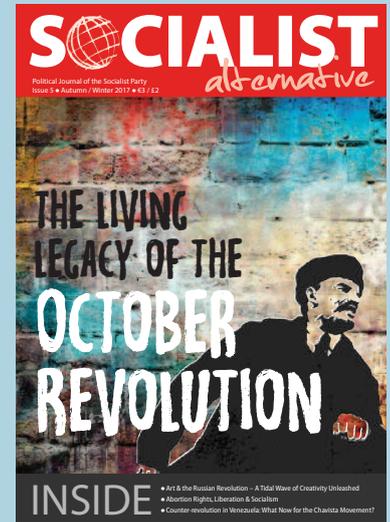
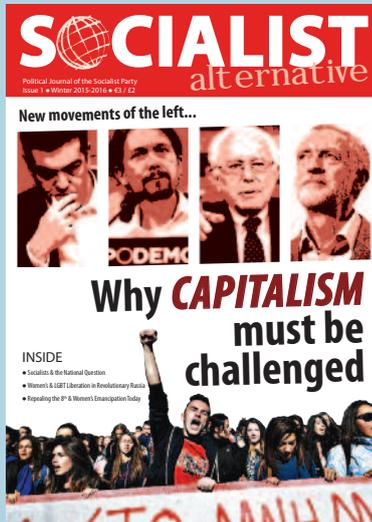
The last chapter ends with an emotional gesture towards the future, even as the novel ends at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic that still looms large with no clear end in sight. Eileen decides to have a child; a decision many young people her age have to make one way or another, but one which has been given extra weight in the context of the many catastrophes we witness daily. In explaining her decision to Alice she says, whether or not she decided to have a child, she still sees herself on the side of the millions of children that will be born into the world irregardless of her personal decision. “We have to try either way to build a world they can live in.”

This sentiment will be one that resonates with many. There are no guarantees moving forward; but there is a genuine and growing sense that we deserve better, and that the possibility of a better future is worth fighting for. It is this sentiment that is not only at the heart of Marxism, but at the core of what it means to be human; and Rooney’s ability to illustrate this is her greatest strength. ■

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