

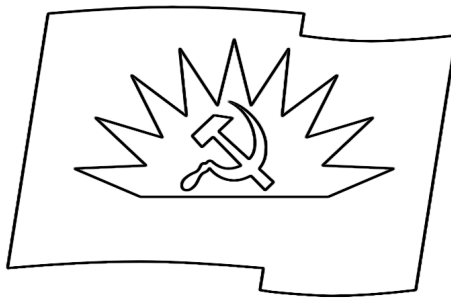
NEW EDITION



**AN INTRODUCTION TO
THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND**

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SECOND EDITION



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This booklet is intended to give a brief introduction for those interested in knowing more about the Communist Party of Ireland. We wish to introduce people to the ideas, policies and values of the CPI, to help those who are beginning to explore alternative politics for the first time to gain a fuller understanding of what we stand for, and to give those who are considering joining our party a brief overview of our policies and our strategy.

What is the Communist Party of Ireland?

The Communist Party of Ireland is an all-Ireland party made up of working people whose policy is based on the theory of Marxism and whose objective is to be in the forefront of the struggle to abolish capitalism and build socialism. It actively works for the unity of all our people, regardless of national origins, religious affiliations, sex, or colour; it campaigns against all forms of discrimination and sectarianism, no matter what their source or how they manifest themselves.

The CPI is a party of and for working people. It is on the side of workers on the many issues and problems that face our people. It is rooted in Ireland's revolutionary history and its struggle for independence, and it has been an integral part of the labour movement and people's struggles since its foundation.

The first Irish communist party, founded in 1921, took part in the War in Defence of the Republic, 1922–23; the founding members included Roddy Connolly (son of James Connolly), Seán McLoughlin (surviving commandant of the 1916 Rising), and the writer Liam O'Flaherty.

The party played a leading role in the united actions of Protestant and Catholic workers in the North in the 1930s, was the organiser of the contingent of Irish volunteers who went to Spain to fight against fascism, was the force behind the unemployed movement in the 1950s, made a significant contribution to the reunification of the trade union movement in 1959, was the driving force behind the establishment of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and a leading component of Dublin Housing Action Committee in the 1960s, campaigned for world peace during the worst period of the "Cold War," led the Irish Voice on Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s, played an active role in the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement, and opposed Ireland's membership of what was to become the European Union.

The CPI was the first organisation to call for repudiating the unjust

debt that has been placed on the backs of the people in order to pay off the corporate debt to foreign banks.

What is socialism?

A socialist society is one in which publicly owned and controlled enterprises become the dominant form of ownership in the economy under a government made up of the organised working class. This need not exclude some forms of private ownership continuing to exist for some time.

Economic planning is necessary in a socialist society to prevent the booms and slumps that are a persistent feature of capitalism. Centralised planning enables the best use to be made of the country's resources and the technical skill of its workers and to protect the needs of the people as a whole. Socialism makes all economic, political, social and cultural areas of life subject to full democratic accountability, with the active participation of the people.

A socialist government will insist on the peaceful, negotiated settlement of international disputes and will consistently support international disarmament. Aggression and interference in the internal affairs of other countries will be replaced by a policy of friendship, non-interference, and mutual respect.

What is the difference between communists and socialists?

Communists believe that socialism can be achieved only if the working class wins state power and uses that power to abolish capitalism. The CPI struggles to win working people to that understanding.

Among those who call themselves socialists there is a great divergence of opinion on what they stand for, ranging from ultra-left parties to social democrats. Originally there was no difference between communists and socialists. However, from the late nineteenth century, and especially from the beginning of the First World War, the working-class movement has been divided into two main currents, with one current, which retain their revolutionary position, identifying themselves as communists and the other current generally describing themselves as socialists or social democrats.

Within that current there is no agreement either on what socialism is or on how it can be achieved; in the main, however, those elements have argued for collaboration with the capitalist class in order to achieve

reforms that somehow would lead to socialism, without a revolutionary struggle, which often led them to argue for a better, fairer capitalism—not its overthrow. In Ireland, social democracy found its political expression in the Labour Party, and through its influence in the trade union movement it succeeded in narrowing and containing the aspirations of working people. At the international level, what remains of social democracy propagates the illusion of humanitarian imperialism, leading it to be an active supporter of wars of aggression.

Most social-democratic parties, including the Irish Labour Party, have long since abandoned any commitment to socialism, while among other socialists there is confusion about what they stand for, how change can be brought about, or the nature of that change. Following the economic crisis of 2008 social democracy in Europe was publicly critical of “austerity,” a series of massive attacks on the people’s wealth and living standards, with cuts in social welfare and large-scale privatisation of the people’s property and of public services. Quickly, however, they made their peace with capitalism.

Communism is a very advanced form of human society that Marxists believe will evolve from fully developed socialism, after all traces of capitalism and capitalist relations have been eliminated. In a communist society there will be no antagonistic classes and therefore no state apparatus (such as armies, police, and prisons), and all wealth-producing property will be owned in common. Under socialism the guiding principle will be “To each according to their work”; under communism it will be “To each according to their needs.”

Exactly what such a future society will be like we can only guess at. There is no blueprint, and we are not concerned with speculating about it: our task instead is to defeat capitalism and pave the way for socialism.

Communists do not struggle to bring about communism: they struggle to bring about socialism, which will eventually develop into communism.

What is Marxism? Why should a political party be guided by it?

Beginning in the 1840s, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels developed a philosophy, a theory of history, a critique of political economy and a political programme based on a rational and scientific study of society and history. They showed that the history of all human societies has been a history of class struggle, that the way in which wealth is produced

and controlled decides the nature and characteristics of a society, and in particular that the working class—the only class in history that does not exploit any other class—must set about the task of abolishing capitalism in order to end exploitation and oppression. For this reason the working class needs its own revolutionary political party.

Marxist theory has been enriched and extended by the theoretical work and the practice of other revolutionaries, notably V. I. Lenin and including our own James Connolly. Of particular importance to us, Connolly led the way in developing a Marxist policy for a colonial and neo-colonial country, demonstrating that in such a country the struggle for national independence and the struggle for socialism are two aspects of a single process.

Does the CPI advocate revolution?

Revolution is the transfer of political power from a ruling class to a more progressive class. Socialist revolution is the winning of state power by the working class.

Revolution is not the same as a revolt or an insurrection, nor does it necessarily involve the use of physical force—though the experience of history shows that any significant advance by the working class or other progressive forces is likely to be met by violent opposition and repression, which the revolutionary movement must defeat. The CPI, therefore, is a revolutionary party.

Can there not be a mix of socialism and capitalism?

The essential feature of socialism is that the state is controlled and run by working people. A socialist state owns and controls the major industrial enterprises, natural resources, public utilities (water, gas, electricity, transport, and communications), the health service, and all other basic services that the people depend on, and runs them in the interests of working people.

In the early period of socialist transformation there may be a role for some some forms of productive private property, though this also would have to conform to the requirements of centralised economic planning. The history of the building of socialism in various countries shows that at certain crucial periods the state required some degree of capitalist economic participation in order to develop some aspects of the economy, or joint enterprises with foreign companies to gain access to certain technologies and expertise.

In the era of state monopoly capitalism in which we now live, however, it is debatable whether any such intermediate stage would be desirable or even possible, as whole ranges of industry and services have already been monopolised and centralised by giant transnational corporations, all of which will have to be nationalised as an essential step in the building of socialism.

These decisions and other investment priorities will be decided by the organs of democratic power after the people's victory, with maximum democratic participation.

Hasn't communism been attempted before and failed?

Communism has not, in fact, been attempted anywhere—nor could it be, as communism is an economic and social system of the distant future that will evolve out of socialism.

The process of building socialism was begun in several countries in the twentieth century, notably in central and eastern Europe, where German fascism was defeated by the Red Army. Under extremely difficult conditions, huge obstacles were overcome and great advances were made. Despite this, a combination of poorly understood problems, political mistakes and external aggression and subversion led to a counter-revolution in most of those countries, whereby the socialist system was overthrown and capitalism was aggressively reintroduced.

Much of the anti-communist propaganda now poured out by the establishment and its media is based on the false idea that an attempt was made to construct a communist society, that is, one without a state apparatus and without differences in income. No society at the present time can be judged against such false criteria. This propaganda is accompanied by horror stories about injustice and oppression that for the most part are complete falsification.

The idea of building socialism under the leadership of the working class has not been invalidated but in fact has been strengthened by recent history and current events. Those who organised celebrations for the abolition of the Soviet Union and the other socialist states are now presiding over the greatest assault ever on the rights and conditions of working people in a world now characterised by permanent war.

Anti-communist falsification is an essential component of this strategy, as it is necessary to convince people that no alternative to imperialism is possible.

What is the CPI's view of the Soviet Union?

The CPI consistently supported the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries as the builders of a new society that promised to free humanity from exploitation and oppression. It never expected this task to be easy, or without setbacks. We continue to recognise the historic achievements of those countries as far more significant than their faults and weaknesses.

The building of socialism in the Soviet Union was begun in very difficult and dangerous conditions, and its development was shaped by both internal and external factors. It emerged from the devastation, both material and human, of the First World War in what was then one of the most backward countries in Europe. Its birth was immediately met with invasion by fourteen foreign countries to prevent its development—in the words of Winston Churchill, “to strangle the Bolshevik baby in its cradle.”

Having survived this ordeal, the Soviet Union had to set about building socialism under siege, in a hostile world. The “democratic” states’ hatred of communism was so great that they were prepared to use even fascism to combat it, at the same time tolerating the Nazi assault on the Spanish Republic.

In the end they were forced to enter into an alliance with the Soviet Union in order to defeat German and Japanese fascism and to ensure their own survival; and the same Winston Churchill had to admit that it was the Soviet Union that “tore the guts out of the German army.”

All this was while it strove to build a new society, to educate millions deprived of education, to give shelter to the millions who had no home, to raise the cultural level and make culture available to the people and reflect the real living experience of the people. It created hundreds of thousands of jobs and built new cities and towns, factories, hospitals, and schools. It struggled to bring about equality between men and women and between the many nationalities within its borders.

At the same time the Soviet Union, later joined by the other socialist countries of eastern Europe, was giving material as well as moral support to workers around the world and to the peoples fighting for their liberation from colonial exploitation. It provided crucial assistance to the forces of national liberation in Asia and Africa and supported and protected other countries that had embarked on the road to socialism, including Cuba.

The economic and social advances made by working people under socialism created more favourable conditions and strengthened the hand of workers struggling to improve their living and working conditions under capitalism.

The class forces that socialism challenges, while physically trying to isolate and destroy the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, also created an ideological anti-communist industry. Its purpose is to win the battle of ideas, and its method is the poisoning of public opinion with lies and innuendo.

This ideological industry is financed in the main by the United States and serviced by the academic establishment and various “think tanks,” often finding common cause with “left-wing” anti-communism. They wish to narrow any discussion of the history of socialism to the intense economic and political struggles that took place in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s, without reference to international context, reducing those events to the role and machinations of individuals. Their purpose is to obliterate the experience and the liberating role that socialism played in the twentieth century and continues to play in those countries that are building a new life for their people.

The history and experience of socialism in the twentieth century is contested. We are well aware that, in the construction of socialism, serious mistakes and also abuses took place, and we have no desire to understate the gravity of those events. Methods of work persisted that had a negative effect on democratic practice, which in the long run led to alienation and cynicism among workers—weaknesses that the enemies of socialism were able to use to undermine the system.

We strive to face this historical experience honestly, and we try to understand the rich lessons to be learnt from the first attempts to build socialism. The anti-communist strategy, on the other hand, is designed to blacken socialism and to frighten people from exploring alternatives to capitalism—a moribund and decaying system.

The West’s policy of “anything but communism” has led it to support any and every anti-communist regime, including the most brutal tyrannies and fascist dictatorships as well as mediaeval Islamist terrorists. Even with the defeat of the socialist countries the anti-communism industry continues to subvert the vision of a rational and just society. While this industry, aided by the ultra-left, never changes its menu of crude anti-communism, socialist Cuba, with mass democratic participa-

tion, constantly renews and invigorates the practice of living socialism and inspires millions of people.

There are rich lessons to be drawn from the experience of building socialism, both from its many successes and from its failures, experience that the CPI tries to bring to bear in its day-to-day struggles.

What is imperialism?

During the nineteenth century, colonialism—the conquest and direct control of other countries and the plunder of their resources—developed into a system in which direct military control was no longer necessary and could be replaced by indirect economic control, whereby the huge American and European corporations gain ownership of the wealth of other countries under the guise of what they call investment—backed up, when necessary, by military force. In this way imperialism became the preferred and dominant form of relationship with poorer countries, and colonies became neo-colonies, allowed to have formal political independence but held in the stranglehold of imperialism.

Capitalism has developed from a competitive local system into an all-embracing global system, divided among monopoly companies and among dominant countries. Companies grew and either bought out and merged with competitors or forced them to close down, leading to a few companies dominating markets. Monopoly—seemingly the opposite of competition—is in fact a result of competition.

To continue expanding, companies merged so as to better exploit foreign regions; and to support this process they required bank capital. Lenin described the outcome of this process as finance capital. This expansion required the active support of states in suppressing revolts as well as in conquering new territories. Imperialism divided the world among the dominant powers; and any attempted redivision would result in war, as happened, for example, in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War.

The additional profits yielded from the super-exploitation of colonies provided the means for buying off workers in the home countries, which resulted in the split in the international socialist movement and the rise of the reformist tendency known as social democracy.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the process of merger and monopolisation continued at an extraordinary rate, so that today more than 80 per cent of all transnational corporations are controlled by 730 entities, three-quarters of which are banks and financial institutions.

In Ireland the economic crisis is made worse by the country's marginal position within an imperialist bloc, the European Union, as well as by the servility of its political class. This means that resistance to the crisis must be anti-imperialist, involving the defence of what remains of the country's national independence and sovereignty and opposition to the control over Ireland (and other countries) by the unelected EU Commission, working on behalf of transnational corporations—in short, it requires the reconquest of Ireland.

What is the CPI's attitude to the economic crisis?

The present economic crisis was caused by inherent features of capitalism at its present stage, which is also its final stage: it was not caused by a handful of unscrupulous bankers, or by greed, as we were often told.

Crises are constant and recurring features of capitalism. In recent years the state has intervened to hold back crisis by adopting laws and policies that defend the ruling class, implementing an all-out assault on the social and labour rights won by working people over the previous century, which they call "austerity."

The CPI is completely opposed to paying the socialised corporate debt imposed on the Irish people, a debt that is not theirs. This corporate debt is used as a means of undermining and rolling back workers' wages and conditions and justifying savage cuts in public services and social welfare.

What is the CPI's policy regarding the European Union?

The European Union (originally the Common Market, later the European Economic Community) was established primarily as a bulwark against socialism and the Soviet Union and to prevent the emergence of a strong left and workers' movement in western Europe after the Second World War.

From the beginning its purpose has been to concentrate power at the centre, in the form of the unelected EU Commission. There has been a step-by-step tightening of control from the centre, removing more and more of the political, economic and social decision-making from member-states, most strategically away from accountability at the national level and away from national class struggles.

This has resulted, as intended, in domination by the major economic powers, principally Germany, together with the creation of structures

that facilitate corporate lobbyists. The whole process has been for subordinating the interests of working people to those of the giant monopolies and transnational corporations.

The European Union has used and is using the economic crisis to consolidate and strengthen its control over the individual states, particularly the peripheral states (such as Ireland), turning that relationship into a new form of neo-colonialism within the structures of the EU itself.

The CPI opposed Ireland's membership of this bloc from the beginning, as it understood what the consequences would be for the economic and social interests of the people. It also opposed it because of the threat it posed to Irish democracy, sovereignty, and neutrality.

Experience has borne out these grave concerns. The EU is now in the process of building its own military forces, to protect and to extend its global interests, which will most certainly mean the final end of Ireland's military neutrality.

The Irish political establishment have been willing and active collaborators in the whittling away of national democracy and sovereignty. For the elite it is more important to maintain their economic and political relationship with the European Union than to protect the interests of the Irish people. This is clearly shown by their enthusiasm in imposing the huge corporate debt on the people.

For these reasons the CPI continues to oppose membership of the European Union. To advance to socialism it is necessary to break the stifling anti-people grip the EU has on the Irish state and the Irish people. To begin to solve the country's grave economic and social crisis we need a different direction and different policies, which are now restricted or outlawed under the EU treaties.

The CPI believes that the Irish people must have the decisive say in all decisions that affect their economic and social interests, free from external dictates and bullying. The party campaigns to defend political independence and national sovereignty against the marginalising and dependence being imposed by the European Union, standing instead for equality between countries and peoples, for working-class patriotic internationalism.

What is the CPI's view on the reunification of Ireland?

Ireland was partitioned in 1922 in the interests of British imperialism. But the subjection of Ireland to imperialism involves much more than

partition. Our people are subject to domination by the European Union and the United States (through its dependence on transnational corporations) as well as by continued British interference, especially in the north of Ireland.

The two state entities established in Ireland to meet the interests of British imperialism, and the two wings of the Irish capitalist class, nationalist and unionist, have served their class interests well, while ignoring the interests and needs of working people. As a political settlement partition has failed, and has left a legacy of bitter division as well as a culture of dependence and economic subservience, resulting in unemployment, poverty, and mass emigration from the whole country. Working people, not the business classes, have paid the price for partition.

The CPI welcomed the Belfast Agreement as a positive step towards ending political violence and creating conditions for the potential development of political struggle and the mobilising of the people. The party also recognises the limitations of the agreement while continuing to argue both against any continuation of the failed elitist military strategy and for a strategy to transcend the limitations of the agreement and to struggle for a new national democracy that ends British interference and establishes a new democracy, centred on the people. This puts the struggle against partition at the centre of the liberation of the people, particularly the liberation of the working class.

Campaigning merely for the unity of territory is something Irish communists have opposed and argued against. The CPI believes we need to put the economic and social needs of the people at the centre of any struggle to end imperialist domination and control: in the words of James Connolly, "Ireland without her people is nothing to me."

Resisting and ultimately defeating imperialism, which is an essential precondition for the building of socialism, requires a strategy that resists all imperialist controls, including those of the European Union and the United States as well as Britain, even if the latter is a much-diminished influence.

The reunification of Ireland will come about as a consequence of uniting the majority of the people, north and south, in a common anti-imperialist struggle.

What is the CPI's view on trade unions?

Trade unions are the most basic organisations created by workers to

defend themselves from the arbitrary actions of employers. Experience has shown that workers can be mobilised to defend their interests and are willing to stand up when they are given a sense of direction, with clear demands, objectives, and leadership.

The CPI recognises the importance of workers being members of, and being active within, trade unions. It encourages workers to join a trade union and to be active within it. The many weaknesses that generate frustration are no reason for not becoming involved. Workers can realise their own interests and full potential only when they combine with other workers in united action.

“Social partnership,” adopted by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in 1987, sapped the strength of the movement, weakened union structures industrially and politically, reduced participation by workers in their unions, and resulted in the trade union movement in some cases becoming indistinguishable from employers and the state. Social partnership, Croke Park Agreements and Haddington Road Agreements were the strategy of a weak and politically servile social-democratic trade union leadership.

The CPI stands for the full independence of trade unions from the control and anti-union laws of the state. In particular, it campaigns for the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act (1990), which prohibits a range of traditional union activities. The communist approach to trade unions is to build the class understanding and political understanding of workers, to show that they have fundamentally different interests from those of their employers and the state, to increase democratic participation at all levels, and to build and strengthen links and co-operation between trade unions and the many community organisations in the struggle for a shared future.

What is the CPI’s view on women’s equality?

The demand for full equality between men and women has been an essential part of communist and socialist thinking from the beginning. Indeed the movement for women’s rights has its roots in the labour movement, in the struggles of women workers. It was the communist Clara Zetkin who first proposed the celebration of International Working Women’s Day, and communist women played a leading role in establishing the celebration of this day in Ireland.

The CPI has consistently participated in the movement for women’s rights—for equality in the work-place, in society, and in the home, and

for a woman's right to the control of her own body, including the right to choose abortion. This movement has achieved some advances, such as equal pay in many trades and professions; yet women remain severely disadvantaged at work, especially in low-paid work, where equal pay has not penetrated.

An important part of the struggle is opposition to the culture of machismo and misogyny, which is not only a legacy of the past but is increasingly propagated by the commercial mass media, reflecting the crisis of capitalism.

To these issues the CPI brings a socialist and working-class outlook, in contrast to those bourgeois feminists who talk of a "glass ceiling" and who would be satisfied with equality in the boardroom, the professions, and the Dáil, leaving low-paid women workers as they are.

Capitalism can never provide true equality between men and women, because by its very nature it is based on exploitation; it does not care whether exploiters are men or women, so long as profit is accumulated. The full emancipation of women, as of men, cannot be achieved without advancing towards socialism.

Are communists opposed to religion?

No. The CPI regards religion as a private matter for each individual. It takes no interest in people's religious opinions or affiliation, including those of its own members.

Communists work with progressive Christians and other religious believers who have made important contributions to the struggle of peoples against colonialism and imperialism. It is conscious of the commitment by people of religious faith to the struggle for peace and social justice.

On the other hand, it does not accept that the churches should be involved in running the state. Clerical authorities, of all religions, have allied themselves with the oppressors and exploiters of peoples, advocating submission and obedience by the people to their rulers. Church leaders of all faiths have a tradition of opposing progressive change in society, while there is an equally long tradition of revolt and rebellion against oppression expressed in religious terms. In present-day conditions these believers are potential allies, and potential supporters of our party.

What is the CPI's view on the environmental crisis?

The continuing destruction of the global environment is an inextricable part of modern monopoly capitalism. It is capitalism that is creating the environmental crisis, with its need for constant growth and its use of limited natural resources. If capital is to grow it must alienate and exploit both workers (in the form of their labour power) and the environment (in the form of the resources required and the environmental degradation caused by its methods of production).

The World Wildlife Fund has reported that air temperature in the Arctic has increased by an average of 5°C over the last hundred years, melting the polar ice caps at an incredible rate, to a point where there will be almost no summer ice left in the Arctic by 2020. This has severe implications for the world, not only in the loss of polar bear and seal habitats, and the consequent effects on local people, but in dramatic changes to the entire northern hemisphere. The lack of a permanent ice shield will result in the loss of other sea species and a general acceleration of global warming.

Climate change is only one critical issue facing humanity, though it is now understood to be the most urgent. Linked with climate change is the manner in which production is changing the land. Changes in land cover are the principal cause of the extinction of species, with 13 per cent of birds, 25 per cent of mammals and 41 per cent of amphibians now threatened with extinction.

Maintaining biodiversity is crucial for humanity, as natural ecosystems provide many life-sustaining resources, such as the pollination of food crops, the formation of soil, nutrient cycling, water supply, the treatment of residues, medical resources, and food itself. The destruction of rainforests, especially in Brazil, is of particular concern, as deforestation is releasing huge amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, again speeding up climate changes.

The list of environmental concerns is growing and now includes not only climate change but acidification of the seas, the destruction of species, shortages of fresh water, chemical pollution of the air, water, and soil, and now extreme weather events.

A crucial factor in the degradation of the environment is modern warfare, including the use of depleted uranium in weapons. Arms production is the most anti-environmental of all industries; and wars are hundreds of times worse.

Changing personal habits is not enough. The emphasis on this shifts the burden and responsibility onto individuals, families, and communities, allowing the role and nature of capitalism off the hook. It is this system, the life styles it promotes and the savage exploitation of our finite natural resources in the endless drive for super-profits that are the central problem.

We can understand the nature of the catastrophe we face only if we link the nature and ownership of capitalist production with its obsession with commodities and the life styles it promotes. The crisis in the global environment can be faced only if we challenge capitalism itself.

The future and very survival of our planet and the lives of thousands of millions of our fellow-humans is now bound up in the struggle for socialism. We cannot save our planet and save capitalism.

What is the difference between the CPI and other left parties? Could the left parties not get together and agree on common policies?

Political parties are organisations of people who share an analysis of their society and agree on a common strategy and programme. No other party in Ireland has the same analysis of Irish society as the CPI, or the same approach to confronting imperialism.

The CPI is always ready to co-operate with other parties, organisations, and individuals, and does so on a variety of issues on the basis of mutual respect and agreed goals, but there is not enough common understanding to make a joint political programme possible.

How is the CPI organised?

Where there are enough members in a district the CPI organises them in a party branch; where there are individual members the party maintains as much contact as possible, so that every member can contribute, regardless of whether they live in a village or in a city. Members pay a small membership subscription, in proportion to their income.

Branches elect their own chairperson and secretary and any other officers they require. Meetings include discussions of current developments and of the party's strategy and activities, in which all members may participate and express their views. Members are expected to be activists, and to carry out decisions once they have been collectively discussed and decided by the party. Collective action empowers the individual and draws on and maximises the experiences of the members,

so that everyone can play their part and everyone can make a worthwhile contribution.

A party congress, made up of representatives of all the members, is held every three years. The congress elects the National Executive Committee, which is the national leadership of the party.

Is the CPI part of an international communist organisation?

No. There is no international organisation of communist parties (though there was at one time). But all communist parties are part of a worldwide movement with a common goal and consider themselves bound to offer solidarity and support to fraternal parties and progressive movements in other countries on the basis of independence and equality.

There are communist parties in at least 120 countries. International meetings are held regularly at which representatives of parties from all over the world discuss theory and strategy, but no common programme is adopted, nor would that be possible, as conditions in the various countries are not the same. Joint statements are agreed at each international meeting, and the CPI actively engages in the development of these and other inter-party statements where relevant.

As an internationalist party the CPI sees the struggle for socialism in Ireland as part of a global struggle. Any victory for workers and for socialism anywhere in the world is a victory for workers in Ireland.

What are the CPI's activities?

The CPI is a party of working people for working people. It is a party of activists, who work in trade unions, community organisations, solidarity campaigns, cultural projects and other democratic movements as well as campaigns conducted by the party itself, and it was the guiding force behind the setting up of a number of significant campaigning organisations. It organises public meetings, maintains a bookshop in Dublin (Connolly Books, 43 East Essex Street), and publishes pamphlets and periodicals.

Is the CPI a registered political party?

Yes. Registration, however, does not confer any rights other than the privilege of having a party's name on the ballot paper in an election, while at the same time it imposes certain obligations, such as having to submit information about its financial affairs.

Does the CPI contest elections?

Yes. However, it does not limit its goals to winning elections, nor does it believe that this is the way in which the working class will win power in a capitalist country. On the other hand, elections can provide a useful opportunity to get the party's message to more people, to gain support, to mobilise its members and supporters, and to expose the weakness of the view that electoral success by itself can be used to bring about radical change.

Elections and parliaments have an important place in the whole process of advancing the interests of the people, but only if this is linked to struggle by the people outside the parliamentary system. Marxists believe that the working class can achieve political power through a combination of means, including electoral means, when it has achieved mass support and when the ruling class is no longer able to maintain its control. Precisely how and when this will happen will depend on the conditions in a particular country at the time.

Where can I get further information?

For further information about the CPI you can read the documents adopted by the 25th National Congress, published under the title *Break the Connection with Imperialism!* (2017), as well as publications on economic policy, political strategy, and the history of the party. You can also read the monthly *Socialist Voice*, which contains articles about political, economic, trade union, international and cultural affairs. A weekly newsletter, *Unity*, is also published in Belfast. If you are in Dublin you can visit the party's bookshop, where its publications and a wide range of books on various aspects of socialism and people's struggles is available.

The CPI also has a web site, with news and details of coming events (www.comunistpartyofireland.ie), and has an active presence on Facebook and Twitter.

How can I join the CPI?

Ask for an application form from the head office of the party (43 East Essex Street, Dublin). When the completed application form is received you will be invited to meet two party representatives, who will discuss your application and also answer any questions you may have. You will then be invited to attend your first branch meeting and begin to join in the work of the party.