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Our water: Demand a constitutional referendum

Eugene McCartan

THE PEOPLE, through organised struggle under the banner of Right2Water—by blocking meters, pickets, mass mobilisations, and non-payment—have secured an important victory with the suspension of water charges. We need to consolidate this victory with a constitutional amendment enshrining the people's ownership and control over this vital resource.

The continuing debacle about bin charges clearly exposed what the future would bring if they privatise water—which is the central reason for water charges in the first place.

The strategy of both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael is to break the

people's resistance to these charges by pulling a stroke with their "independent commission" on water. They wish to defuse the people's resistance and bring it into the safe arena of parliamentary debates and procedures, into structures that they control.

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael represent and protect the interests of big business. They carry out the instructions of the European Union. We have Karmenu Vella, the EU commissioner for the environment, attempting to sow confusion and division by issuing contradictory statements regarding whether or not the Irish Government has a derogation over water charges.

continued overleaf



"Hillary the Hawk, as US senator and Secretary of State, never saw a weapons system she did not support, nor a US war practice she did not endorse."

Ralph Nader

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Our water

Working people should not be fooled or deflected by these manoeuvrings of both the Irish establishment and the European Union regarding water charges. Their strategy was and remains to make the people pay, to commodify water, creating a market in water, thereby readying it for privatisation.

Experience throughout the world is that water has become a very valuable source of profit for global water corporations. They are making huge profits from people's need to have water in order to live.

It is important that we secure a constitutional amendment on the people's ownership of water before the EU completes its negotiations with the United States regarding TTIP. The Government has not secured the right to water, nor expressed any interest in stopping privatisation in the future. If TTIP is agreed it will prevent any future people's ownership.

What does privatisation mean?

- Placing all decisions about water in the hands of corporate interests, including the power to decide how and for what purposes water resources are used, now and in the future.
- Making the people's interests secondary to the profits of corporations.
- Turning water into a commodity—an economic asset for profit-hungry corporations.
- Making water part of the growing monopoly control over supplies of natural resources, including food, water, and energy; our resources would come under attack through TTIP and other trade deals between the EU and the major western states.
- Water being financialised and becoming a commodity, to be bought and sold like all other global stock.
- Profits becoming the priority over the common good.
- Constant price increases and a deterioration in the water infrastructure.

Water charges and privatisation would not stop at the existing

municipal water system but would lead to community water schemes also being brought under the control of corporate interests.

Why we need to oppose privatisation

People's or public ownership is the best way to manage and protect this valuable natural, life-essential resource. It guarantees fairly distributed, sustainably managed and democratically controlled water for all.

When the private sector engages in the provision of water, greater disparities in access and cost follow.

At least eighty-six cities and towns around the world have remunicipalised water services during the last fifteen years, proving the inefficiency and problems related to privatisation.

Water requires huge and continuing investments in infrastructure. An estimated three-quarters of the cost of running a water utility is for infrastructure alone.

Constant investment is required to foster safe, affordable and dependable water supplies.

Clean and affordable water is the basis of life. Skyrocketing water prices, unsafe supply, failing infrastructure—these problems fall disproportionately on the most vulnerable among us.

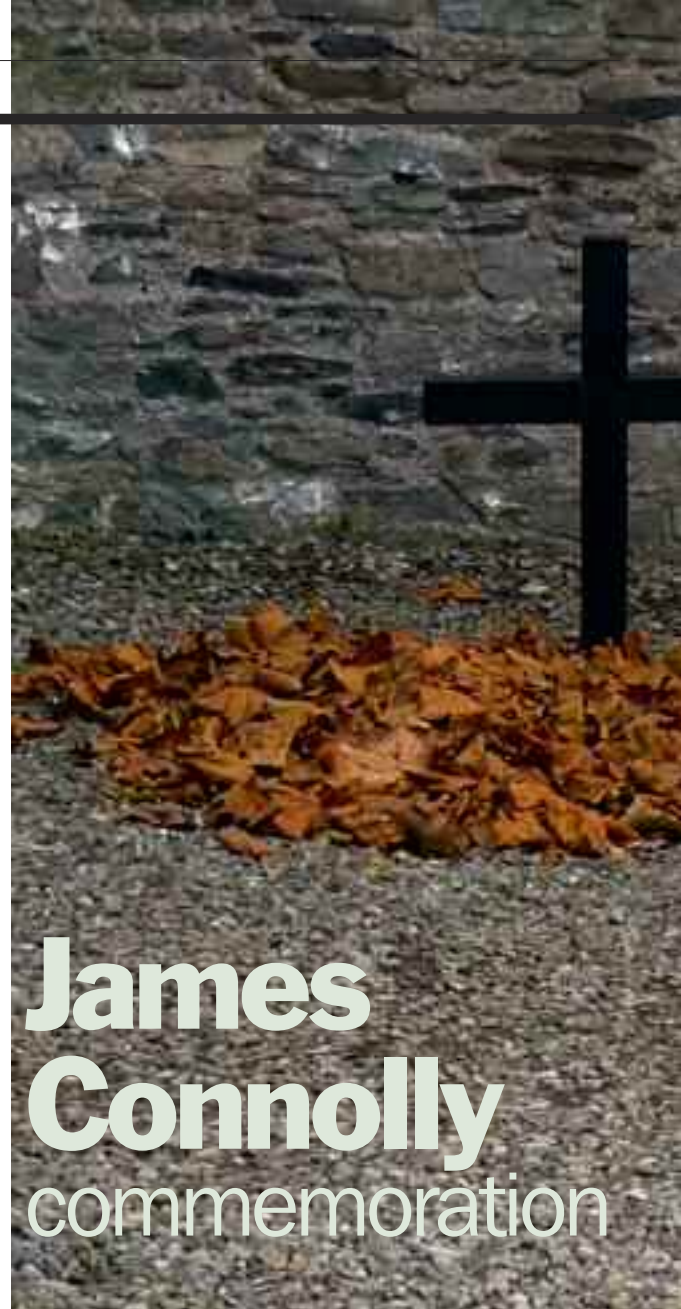
Support the demand to put the people's ownership in the Constitution. Get your own local community campaign going to demand a constitutional amendment.

Get your trade union, youth and women's groups to support this democratic demand.

Build on the victory in the current water struggle for the next stage in the battle to secure the people's interests, not corporate greed.

Sign our on-line petition at www.communistpartyofireland.ie.

We need to get back on the streets and build a renewed campaign against these charges. In particular now we need to raise the crucial demand for a constitutional amendment. Remember that a significant number of TDs in the present Dáil campaigned for the abolition of water charges.



James Connolly commemoration

▲ On the 12th of May 1916 James Connolly was executed in the stonebreakers' yard in Kilmainham Jail, Dublin.

IN HIS WRITING, Connolly sets out clearly his vision of a socialist republic—no narrow nationalist but a visionary socialist who understood the coercive nature of imperialism, not only in Ireland but globally.

Connolly condemned the rape of nations, the enslavement of peoples, and the plunder of their natural resources.

He knew that a socialist revolution was only possible by the defeat of imperialist power, hence he fully supported the struggle for Irish freedom in the same context as the struggle for the freedom of labour.

The struggle was a socialist struggle against a global system of exploitation; Ireland was but one battle in a war, but if Ireland could be successful in creating a socialist republic he knew it would be a beacon for other nations to rise against the system.

Speech by
John Douglas
general secretary,
Mandate,
Arbour Hill,
Dublin,
15 May 2016

Unfortunately, his execution robbed us of one of our greatest socialist thinkers. Although his ideas were to live on in many, some of whom would go on to fight fascism in Spain, his execution robbed us of the revolution; instead what followed was a territorial rebellion.

The socialist republic for which Connolly died was never to be. It was strangled soon after birth by a narrow nationalism and conservatism propagated by Capital and Rome. As Connolly predicted, hoisting the Green Flag over Dublin Castle itself was insufficient to achieve economic and social freedom.

One hundred years on, the vision of Connolly is as far away today as it was then: our island is still unfree; and I am not referring to narrow territorial freedom but rather the freedom to organise our economy and our society. The Ireland of today is dictated to by foreign capital, the voice of global capital is louder and stronger than ever before, the

imperialism of international finance capital dictates every facet of our economy and society. It renders our democratically elected governments powerless on the organisation of our society.

Our governments are often unwilling but more times unable to make independent decisions in the best interests of their own citizens, as was and is still demonstrated in the recent economic crash which hit Europe.

The people of Ireland were sacrificed at the altar of global capital. The financial system was rescued while the people were left to drown. Our constitution was ignored and our democracy violated.

I listen now with dismay as our newly elected Government here in the Republic sends forth economic evangelists to the UK to sway the people to vote to stay in Europe, a Europe which in our crisis played such a detrimental and corrosive role against the Irish people; a Europe which has long given up any pretence of a social agenda, a Europe which decided that all financial institutions were too big to fail, regardless of the human cost, a Europe that has no soul, hollowed out by decades of neo-liberal policies.

Whatever about the nature of the debate in the UK, and truthfully there are many aspects of the debate on both sides that are distasteful and many of the protagonists we as socialists hold in utter contempt and despise, but at least they are having a critical debate about the UK's relationship with Europe, something our own Government and the mainstream media have refused to do, fearing letting the genie out of the bottle, I believe.

Connolly would have analysed Europe and its actions in our recent past in Ireland and in Greece, Spain etc. and concluded that Europe is a capitalist construction intent on protecting capital at the expense of labour. He would have concluded that Europe is anti-working class and as such perpetuates poverty and inequality.

- Last night in Dublin alone 1,500 children slept in hostels and hotels for want of a home.
- Countless families on a daily basis fear eviction from their homes, in many cases their home loans sold to vulture funds.
- The Republic of Ireland is one of the most unequal countries in Europe; we are second only to the US in terms of the proportion of low-paid jobs in our

economy.

- Where CEOs of large corporations believe it's acceptable to slash low-paid workers' wages while paying themselves millions in salary and bonuses.
- Where the owner of Clery's store in Dublin—vulture developers—create and sell a company for £1 to a London liquidation firm and dump four hundred workers onto the streets, where the taxpayer picks up the bill for redundancy and wages due while they retain the valuable property.
- The rich and infamous and large corporations can steal a nation's social wage, which is so much needed to build schools and hospitals by paying no tax via a web of international tax havens, while water protesters are jailed for protesting in their communities against our natural resources being plundered and privatised.

Shame on you all, and all those who act as cheerleaders for this disgusting behaviour!

But all is not lost. The vision of Connolly lives on. It was expressed during the water movement and the Right2Change movement in the Republic of Ireland, combining, as Connolly would have, communities, labour unions and progressive political parties to mobilise and fight back, to defend our natural resources, to give expression and a voice to those who have been shut out and marginalised.

It was about much more than water: it was about citizens finding their voice, their power, and standing up against economic bullies, vulture funds, and big business. It empowered local communities, it was organic, it was and is a real social movement, and it shook the Irish political class to its very foundations.

It was about universal health care, education, housing, equality, justice, and fairness. It was about Connolly's vision for Ireland—a vision long lost in the minds of many. For the first time in decades people had a vision that a different economic, social and political construct was and is possible.

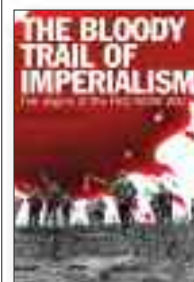
We owe it to Connolly that his vision is not once again strangled by powerful self-interests groups.

There is real hope for change. We must nurture and develop that hope into an organisation and a force. The last election was a beginning; let us march on.

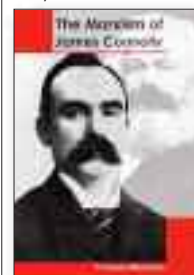
"Our demands most moderate are: we only want the earth."



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British referendum a victory for democracy

Tommy McKearney.....

THE UNITED KINGDOM has voted to leave the EU. Its electorate has done so in spite of exhortations to remain from, among others, David Cameron and Peter Mandelson, a majority of FTSE 100 chief executives, Goldman Sachs, the managing director of the IMF, Christine Lagarde, and Enda Kenny.

It's difficult, therefore, to overestimate the significance of this outcome. It has happened in spite of enormous scaremongering by the Remain campaign and its shameless exploitation of the murder of Jo Cox MP.

Undoubtedly, strident attempts will now be made to attribute this result, in its entirety, to the impact of migration exploited by xenophobic British reactionaries within and outside the Conservative Party.

It would, of course, be wrong to dismiss the part played by racism. Britain is a former imperial power, and contempt for other peoples was an endemic feature of its past and has not been eradicated. Nevertheless, this tendentious argument deliberately ignores the fact that there have been waves of migration into Britain for decades, all accommodated thanks to

an expanding economy.

Worse than being a deliberate misrepresentation is the fact that concentrating entirely on resistance to migration denies what the *Financial Times* described as the "rage from Leave voters alienated by London and globalisation."

No matter who legislated for the referendum or for what reason, voting was open to all, and the working-class movement had an opportunity to participate in a crucially important debate and decision-making event. Herein lay, perhaps, the most ominous aspect of the entire campaign. Apart from a small, coherent minority centred mainly on people in the RMT Union and the daily *Morning Star*, the left in Britain (in its widest definition) either failed to recognise or, worse, chose to ignore the despair felt by so many working people in the UK.

In part because of the depoliticisation of large swathes of organised labour as a result of the pernicious right-wing influence of New Labour's Blairite cohort, there was a general absence of any critical narrative, not to mention socialist analysis, in relation to the European Union. This weakness led to

the mistaken assertion, when the referendum was first announced, that being anti-EU was tantamount to being anti-migrant and xenophobic. Stepping back from positive engagement meant that the debate was dominated at first by feuding reactionaries.

Fearing a split in his Blairite-dominated parliamentary party, the leader of the Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn, felt forced to support the Remain campaign, though offering a different rationale from that of William Hague or Theresa May. With little by way of evidence, he argued that the European Union protected workers' rights and offered access to a lucrative market for British manufacturing.

Depressingly, Corbyn's lead was gladly followed by both the TUC in Britain and the ICTU in Northern Ireland. In fact the referendum debate in the North of Ireland paralleled that in Britain. The DUP supported quitting the EU for reasons similar to those of right-wing conservatives, while Sinn Féin argued a Remain case along lines employed by New Labour.

The Northern Ireland committee of the ICTU strongly supported the Remain campaign but, interestingly, did

A serious setback for Britain's bourgeoisie

Nick Wright.....

A DOUBLE COUP is unfolding in Britain. The vote to leave the EU has confounded the ruling circles, the monopoly media, the right-wing Labour clique, big business, the banks, the City of London, the military industrial power nexus, the foreign policy establishment and the NATO, intelligence and security praetorian guard. The US lock on Europe, exercised through Britain's membership of the EU, is threatened.

This is not an existential crisis for British capitalism but it is a serious setback for the most powerful section of the bourgeoisie with a crisis in both Conservative and Labour parties.

Cameron and Osborne, the two principal representatives of the *haut bourgeoisie* in government, are finished. But Boris Johnson, the former mayor of London, who opportunistically placed himself at the head of the Brexit campaign – although his personal position was for a renegotiation of Britain's relationship with the EU – has been defenestrated by his ostensible ally justice secretary Michael Gove who, in turn, is now eclipsed by the Home Secretary Teresa May.

Britain's ruling class is struggling to reorientate itself around a multi-faceted strategy to subvert the 23 June decision. Delaying the negotiations, a media-inspired street manifestation of Remain forces; attempts to freeze the status quo until October; manoeuvres to create a demand for a second referendum and a torrent of 'constitutional' advice that the pro-EU majority of MPs should subvert the referendum result have created a feverish political climate.

Jeremy Corbyn, the embattled leader of the Labour Party, who muted his long standing criticisms of the EU in the interests of preserving an appearance of party unity, has unequivocally demanded that the referendum result be respected and the Article 50 treaty provisions for Britain to leave the EU be implemented.

He is right that the Tories, whoever leads them, cannot be trusted to negotiate Britain's exit from the European Union.

Corbyn and the left wing, anti-war and trade union forces that brought him to the leadership of the Labour

Party face a coup by the parliamentary party majority and the Blairite apparatchiks in the party structures.

A labour government elected on policies that strike at the heart of the bi-partisan neo-liberal project would be an unreliable reserve for capitalist continuity. Blair himself put it clearly. He would rather see Labour defeated than victorious with Corbyn's policies.

However, although still dangerous, the carefully calibrated coup has stalled. Instead of resigning in the face of a staged series of front bench resignations Corbyn immediately sacked the coup frontman, Hilary Benn.

Shadow business secretary Angela Eagle was lined up to trigger a leadership election. But faced with a storm of opposition – with 60,000 people joining Labour in the ensuing week, in their overwhelming majority pleaded to back Corbyn – a rash of street demonstrations in support of Corbyn, the swift appointment of new shadow cabinet members and a firm stand by the leaders of the main trade unions in defence of the party's democracy the coup plotters have lost

acknowledge its deep-seated flaws at public meetings attended by this writer.

In the face of powerful opposition it seemed almost inevitable that the Leave campaign—including the well-reasoned left “Lexit” case—would succumb. That this did not happen is worth consideration.

Over the past forty years many British working-class communities have endured deprivation, with industries closing, low wages, zero-hour contracts, the welfare state undermined, and public services being privatised. As a consequence, a large number of these societies have been damaged, and many less-well-off people feel alienated from the political establishment, whether it is in the EU or London.

The EU is clearly not directly responsible for every socially destructive effect suffered by the British working class; but its overarching neo-liberal ethos has certainly facilitated the devastation.

Equally pertinent is the fact that the right-of-centre social democrats of New Labour have not only failed to offer working people a viable remedy but have colluded with the free-marketeers in inflicting their punishing programme. Kevin McKenna, writing in the *Herald* (Glasgow), accurately reflected the feelings of working people in the north

the initiative.

Their problem is that they lack political credibility. Eagle herself voted for the Iraq war and failed to oppose the welfare reforms at the centre of the Tories’ austerity programme.

On austerity and on the EU issue the parliamentary party have lost touch with Labour’s working-class constituency with millions lost to abstention, the nationalist and Green parties and UKIP.

The Labour right’s chosen strategy in the referendum – replicating the disastrous cross-party alliance in the Scottish referendum – isolated Labour further from working class voters. A clear left alternative under the rubric Lexit was advanced by sections of the left, including the Communist Party and unions representing train drivers, rail, shipping and transport workers, bakers and food workers but the TUC and the leaders of the biggest unions called for a vote to remain in the EU.

Corbyn and his allies in the party promoted, with limited success and minimal media coverage, an EU reform package that lashed together reformist and ultra left illusions about the potential to transform EU structures. As a consequence the referendum campaign was a toxic discourse around

of England towards the party when he said that “during three successive Labour governments they had been made to feel like an embarrassment to the metropolitan Islington elite who thirsted for power and money . . .”¹

While not underestimating the significance of a vote to leave the EU, it should not be taken in isolation from its wider European context. Disenchantment is not confined to Britain. A recent article in the *Financial Times* revealed the fact that the EU is becoming increasingly unpopular among people in its member-states.² Quoting from an extensive survey of opinion, Timothy Garton Ash mentioned that in eight of the ten member-states surveyed, a majority disapproved of how the EU manages the economy, and only 51 per cent are in favour of retaining the union.³

Admittedly these statistics are garnered by a research company, employing opinion poll surveys, and so must be viewed cautiously. Nevertheless some facts are indisputable. One is that the European Union, with its treaties enshrining neo-liberal economic policies, has exacerbated austerity in many of the member-states, and offers no obvious way to correct this deficiency. Furthermore, the legal structures and

reactionary themes. Even in this unpromising environment most people voted to leave based on sovereignty grounds with the conflicting issues around immigration in second place.

The attempts by the Labour Remainers to shift responsibility for the failure of their strategy onto Corbyn are backed by a powerful media campaign that has had some success in mobilising sections of the middle class and urban and cosmopolitan strata.

Changing the balance of forces and consolidating the new Labour leadership is critical between now and the next general election. A resurgence of industrial and popular action against austerity, privatisation, nuclear rearmament and war would help the prospects of victory. This, in turn, would make possible an exit from the EU based around progressive policies.

The situation is complex with sections of progressive opinion disorientated. Apart from confusion in the labour movement, the mobilisation of youth is skewed towards student and *petit bourgeois* strata with the great majority of working class young people uninvolved and not voting. An attempt to promote a second Scottish referendum would inevitably pose EU

constitution of the union not only make reforming its institutions practically impossible but also, as the Greek people (as well as the Irish and others) have learnt, makes futile resistance from within.

As a consequence, working-class people throughout the EU have an objective need to dismantle the EU as an entity; equally important in the light of its rapidly diminishing popularity, there is now a realistic possibility of doing so. However, this will require a carefully crafted and enlightened strategy, because otherwise fascism will exploit the misery created and perpetuated by the neo-liberals.

Essential to the success of such a strategy is challenging comprehensively and dismissing the illusion peddled by centrist social democrats that the EU can be reformed. The British referendum result shows that demolishing this myth is now a realistic option.

Running in tandem with this, however, is the need to promote a clear and unambiguous socialist alternative that speaks to the needs of the majority throughout the continent. Undoubtedly this will pose challenges; but when has building socialism been easy? And when has that been a reason for not trying?

membership based on neoliberal economics, austerity and privatisation against a progressive federalism.

The tide of xenophobia and racism stimulated by both sides of the referendum campaign demands a response based on safeguarding the rights of migrant workers, legal protection and trade union action to maintain pay levels, tax and welfare benefits and protections for refugees.

Central to this is the defence of workers’ rights and opposition to the European Court of Justice rulings banning trade union and government action to enforce equal terms and conditions for migrant workers.

Defeating the Blairite coup and consolidating the new direction Labour has taken, establishing united action around an anti austerity agenda, confronting racist ideas and tendencies in the working class, asserting the principles of popular sovereignty around the democratic mandate to leave the EU and grounding the unity of the labour movement around a progressive government programme would change the balance of class forces in Britain.

Nick Wright is the media head of the Communist Party of Britain

1 Kevin McKenna, “EU vote truly signals the end of a Union dearer to me,” *Herald*, 25 June 2016, at <http://bit.ly/293ZN Y8>.

2 Timothy Garton Ash, “The fading of Europe is a result of both its failures and successes,” *Financial Times*, 11 June 2016.

3 Pew Research Center, “Euroskepticism beyond Brexit (<http://pewrsc.ch/1 ZvrKcY>).

EU democracy

1992 Denmark: Maastricht Treaty defeated . . . made to vote again

2001 Ireland: Nice Treaty defeated . . . made to vote again

2005 France: EU constitution defeated . . . result ignored

2005 Netherlands: EU constitution defeated . . . result ignored

2008 Ireland: Lisbon Treaty defeated . . . made to vote again

2015 Greece: “Bail-out” defeated . . . result ignored

Cherishing all the nation equally

Jimmy Doran

THE 1916 Proclamation wanted us to cherish all the children of the nation—all the people of Ireland—equally. Some argue that a fairer, more even distribution of some of the output can attain a decent society; but, for economic and political reasons, if the inequality that exists at the point of production between those who own the wealth and those they employ to work still exists, it will not succeed.

There is no such thing as a nicer, fairer type of capitalism. It is by design unfair and unequal. It will always produce an elite who cream off the profits that are created by the work that the rest of us do.

Ireland is now the most unequal society among the OECD countries by market income before tax is calculated. Income is not the only measure of inequality: it is also wealth, power, happiness, security, health (mental and physical), quality of life, opportunity, starting-point in life, to mention but a few.

Labour's share of income has been steadily falling as a share of total income since the 1980s: the rich have been getting richer, and continue to do so. CEOs' pay is now a staggering 160 times that of shop-floor workers. Unlike the worker, their wage is directly linked to the profits of the company. A lot of their payments are paid in share options, equity grants and other capital-related arrangements on

which they don't have to pay standard levels of income tax, as they come under capital gains, which is taxed at a lower rate than income.

It is difficult to get an accurate measurement of the total wealth of the elite, as a lot of it is hidden offshore and is drastically underdeclared. Most of this wealth is not from salaries, so it is much easier to conceal. For the rest of us on PAYE, this is not the case. So let us look at who earns what in Ireland.

Gross income	Number of people or tax units
€0–10,000	360,000
€10,000–20,000	370,000
€20,000–30,000	375,000
€30,000–40,000	280,000
€40,000–50,000	195,000
€50,000–60,000	125,000
€60,000–75,000	125,000
€75,000–100,000	100,000
€100,000–200,000	80,000
€200,000 +	20,000

Average income is €35,000; but 66 per cent of the people earn less than that—well over one million people. The top 10 per cent earn more than €75,000; 90 per cent of the people earn below €75,000. Half the population earn less than €28,500.

The figures above are from the Revenue Commissioners and refer to "tax units," so a married couple who share their tax credits only come up as one income, and in fact an unknown number of these incomes are actually shared by two people.

The top 1 per cent of earners' share of income peaked



More time bombs

Alan Hanlon

THIS GOVERNMENT is highly unstable. Following the victory of the working-class and community groups in the first stage of the attempt to privatise water, the current Government is frightened that the pay-by-weight bin charges will produce the same reaction.

The attempt to privatise water is not over, but the bourgeoisie know they have a fight on their hands.

The current Government, made up of a partnership between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil and a motley crew of so-called "independents," is nothing more than a cynical exercise by the right to try to hang on to power no matter what and continue the privatisation programme in some form.

It won't wash. Local authorities and public-sector plumbers have been effectively providing clean drinking water for more than two hundred years. Throughout Europe, where water provision was handed over to private operators, local authorities have had to take back control because of the inefficiencies of the private sector.

If the Government was serious about protecting this national resource it would adopt appropriate by-laws and other measures to assist citizens in conserving water by way of tax breaks and grants. The fact that there are no moves to protect this natural resource through a constitutional amendment is proof positive that the current Government has every intention of continuing the privatisation programme

once they can cobble together some sort of obfuscation.

It is against this background that the minister for agriculture, Simon Coveney, wants to park the plan to introduce pay-by-weight bin charges for a year. Once waste collection was privatised it was inevitable that the companies involved would at some stage try to maximise profits at the expense of the common good. Most of these companies, it was recently revealed, have set up tax-avoidance structures by registering in tax havens. Consequently, the amount of profit they are making is opaque.

There has also been an increase in fly-tipping, illegal dumping and other anti-social practices as a result of privatisation. This is likely to continue and to increase if these private firms are allowed to maximise profits with another form of stealth tax.

None of this bothers Coveney. If bin charges become an issue like water, with hundreds of thousands taking to the streets, then Fianna Fáil would probably withdraw from the current partnership, and some of the independents would waiver.

Coveney on "Drivetime" with Mary

at 72 per cent of all earnings in 2007. This fell to 70 per cent in 2012 but has been rising steadily since.

Let's compare the earnings of the average worker, the top 10 per cent and the top 1 per cent in 1975 and 2006.

	Average	Top 10%	Top 1%
1975	€15,188	€43,467	€90,518
2006	€35,490	€134,384	€444,190

In 1975 the top 1 per cent earned roughly 6 times the average wage, but by 2006 they had doubled their share to over 12 times the average.

So what about share of wealth? The most recent figures are from a survey by Credit Suisse in 2014.

Top 1%	Top 5%	Top 10%	Top 35%	Bottom 65%
27%	46%	59%	95%	5%

There is nothing unusual about such figures in the "developed" world. The Gini coefficient is a measurement tool used for comparing equality and inequality. It is between 0 and 1; the nearer to 1 you get the more unequal the distribution.

Ireland is about average, at .71, Denmark the worst, on .88, and Belgium the best, on .63. So the developed world is a very unequal society as far as the distribution of wealth is concerned.

So what does all this mean in reality?

Food deprivation affects 1 in every 13 people in Ireland in 2016; that is to say, more than 180,000 people cannot afford a meal with meat or fish every second day. 10½ per cent suffer from clothing deprivation; put another way, 374,000 Irish citizens cannot afford new clothes.

25 per cent of people cannot afford to replace worn-out furniture. 21 per cent suffer from energy poverty; 5½ per cent suffer from extreme energy poverty. 13 per cent go without heating at some point in the year; 8½ per cent cannot afford to keep the house warm; 391,000 people can't afford to heat the house at all.

23 per cent of people have neither health insurance nor a medical card.

The poor are always discriminated against; and the poorest of the poor are discriminated against even more so. Let's look at Travellers, for example. Travellers' life expectancy is 10 years less for women and 15 years less for men. 68 per cent of Travellers are illiterate; 89 per cent are unemployed; 94 per cent are living in poverty; suicide rates are 6½ times the national average.

This all brings to mind what James Connolly said.

If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the Green Flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the socialist republic, your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule through her capitalists, her landlords, financiers, and through the whole array of commercial and industrial institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs.

So, sadly, despite the intentions in the Proclamation of 1916, we most certainly do not cherish all the children of the nation equally. The most fitting way to commemorate the men and women of Easter Week would be to set about achieving their aims and rid this country of the gombeen class that seized power after the British were driven out and begin to build the republic that they fought for.

“Several factors have contributed to the rise in profit margins. The most important is a decline in labor’s share of national income.”—Research note by Goldman Sachs on the American economy, quoted by Richard Tomkins, Financial Times, 13 October 2006.

Wilson on RTE Radio (21 June 2016) stated that he wants to convince the public that pay-by-weight is good for you. What arrant nonsense! Pay-by-weight is a cash cow for the waste companies. If they manage to introduce the principle then they will have a free hand to increase charges. This is a measure that will damage the environment and simply encourage illegal dumping.

All this is taking place against a more worrying undercurrent of unrest for the Government that is slowly gathering momentum. Back in March, Kieran Mulvey, then director-general of the Workplace Relations Commission, said the economy was “on a slow-ticking time bomb to September.” He

was referring specifically to strikes in schools and colleges. However, other speakers on behalf of bosses at the same conference organised by Industrial Relations News referred to widespread unrest, with strikes or work to rule throughout industry and pay rises over 2 per cent being sought.

At the time of this conference the Luas dispute was escalating. When workers at Transdev rejected a deal negotiated by Mulvey it was clear that the era of “partnership” was over. By the beginning of June, Transdev was forced to settle with the workers following twelve days of all-out strikes and the threat of further action.

Transdev conceded the bulk of the demands, despite the usual anti-worker propaganda from RTE and the right-wing press. The workers won because they were organised, stuck together, and were willing to fight for just wages and conditions. In effect they won pay increases of 3½ to 4 per cent per annum up to 2020.

The Government had expected the workers at Transdev to be defeated. Following the hammering the Fine Gael-Labour coalition received at the general election the Government does

not want to face the electorate in the present climate.

There is further bad news in the pipeline. The railway unions are also seeking pay increases along the lines of the Luas workers. Worse still is the fact that the three civil and public service unions have agreed to merge. This would create a union of 80,000 members in the civil service, HSE, local authorities, and VECs. These unions want to revisit the Lansdowne Road agreement and the savage cuts imposed.

Worst of all, the Labour Court in June ruled that Freshways Food (a company that provides sandwiches to retailers) should pay its 170 workers a living wage of €11.50 an hour. This is €2.35 more than the minimum wage. Lidl, Aldi and Ikea also plan on paying the same living wage. Freshways does not recognise unions, so the Labour Court ruling may only apply to the sixty-seven union members. If this is the case then it could drive an increase in union membership.

IBEC is unhappy with the ruling, and the Government is deeply worried at the increasing taste for militancy by the working class.



GAA facing a stiff challenge



Graham Harrington.....

THE GAELIC Athletic Association is one of the largest mass organisations in Irish society, with more than 500,000 members. To illustrate the significance of this, the ICTU has approximately 830,000 members.

While the GAA may seem like a simple sports body, its substance is far more than that.

The GAA was founded in 1884 as a co-ordinating body for Irish games and culture. This is significant, as Ireland was under the heavy boot of British dominance at this time, with the British having for centuries suppressed all manifestations of a unique and Irish culture, including sports. The goal was clear: to remove the distinct cultural identity of the Irish and substitute for it a British identity, thereby removing the will to resist British rule.

In the late 1880s this was doing well, with no organising bodies to help Irish culture and identity survive. The GAA was formed around the beginning of the period of the Irish Revival, when the Irish people took the cultural offensive and began promoting and preserving Irish language, sports, theatre, and music.

Many of the GAA's original members came from a working-class or small-farmer background, although the Revival meant it had a petit-bourgeois intellectual leadership.

The contribution of the Revival to politics can be seen as the first step on the road to revolution, which would erupt in 1916. We can fairly say that the GAA has a radical, even in a sense a revolutionary, background. However, it is also true to say that the GAA represents a broad church of interests and class forces.

During the revolutionary period the GAA continued to act as a cultural base for the Republican forces. It suffered also from British repression. In 1920 the RIC Auxiliaries, backed up by the British army, in reprisal for the killing of British intelligence operatives, opened fire on a crowd watching a football match in Croke Park, killing thirteen spectators and one of the players. The Hogan Stand in Croke Park is named after the player killed.

Partition also took its toll on the GAA, with the unionist authorities seeing it as a dangerous and subversive manifestation of republicanism, while in the South the government made links to the GAA in return for support.

In measuring the GAA's influence on Irish politics we need look no further than Fianna Fáil's dominance in the South, which was built on networking

and populist campaigning as well as “jobs for the boys” corruption. Many of these networks were built through the GAA, with the organisation acting as a type of meeting-ground for big farmers, property developers, and politicians. Of course this was not in the interest of the members of the GAA.

The GAA, especially in rural Ireland, has lost thousands of members through emigration—the establishment’s policy of exporting Irish youth. The GAA, despite its immense social weight, seen as the hub of the parish, has never campaigned or made more than a token gesture against this, despite it being one of the main obstacles to the organisation. In some parts of Ireland, especially in the west, some areas have seen entire teams lose people in the 18 to 25-year-old brackets through



emigration and lack of investment in these communities. This illustrates the insanity of the GAA's cosy relationship with the establishment.

The main strength of the GAA can be seen in its collective outlook. In every town in Ireland the GAA is the bedrock of the community, being a rival to the Catholic Church in its social influence. It promotes such concepts as teamwork and community-building for its young members.

In the north of Ireland this was reflected in the repression of the GAA by British forces, as they feared the organisation of nationalist youth would inevitably lead to resistance to their presence. This can be illustrated by the infamous film showing British helicopters and a military presence around Crossmaglen Rangers' GAA grounds, an overt operation of intimidation.

The GAA manages to pack tens of

thousands into stadiums every year, yet there is still a sense that the organisation is declining. Its games are amateur sports; its players do not get paid and have to manage full-time jobs around training and matches. The GAA does not have the resources that sports such as soccer have, such as international tournaments watched around the world by millions, or stadiums capable of hosting competitions of Olympic Games standard. There are far fewer sponsorship deals for the GAA by international corporations.

Still, Gaelic games are our most popular sports. The GAA promotes competitiveness and individual sacrifice but blends this with a cultural and community outlook in an amateur setting. This faces a very stiff challenge. In recent years the tendency in the GAA has moved towards viewing players as commodities, with immense pressure put on players to work at a professional level while playing for an amateur sport. In any sport this is a problem, with players being viewed more for their usefulness to the GAA's sponsors and financial contributors than for their usefulness to their club and community.

Major events such as the all-Ireland finals are becoming more and more indistinguishable from soccer tournaments, where celebrity millionaires with haircuts more entertaining than their playing skill fall on the ground after a small bump.

The corporations swoop on these events like vultures, trying to get their name in prominent places. Of course this is lucrative for the GAA, so there is a lesser emphasis on local club matches as a result. Corporations aren't too interested in spending money for the few hundred watching Lough Rovers play St Finbarr's.

The emphasis on this excessive style poses problems such as mental health issues and heart problems for the players, as well as making the GAA another haven for elitism, challenging the inclusiveness the GAA has always promoted. The focus of resources is inevitably on the clubs that perfect this, which means that the problem develops further. It also calls into question the amateur status of Gaelic games. “If players are being expected to act like professional highly paid athletes,” is the refrain, “then why aren't they paid as such?”

Over the past two decades this is the direction the GAA has been heading in, with its highly placed

stakeholders (or is that shareholders?) being happy with the results so far, even going so far as to sign a lucrative deal with Rupert Murdoch's British Sky Broadcasting for showing GAA matches as a type of pageantry for the British consumer who's interested in what the mad Irish get up to in their spare time.

There is also more and more emphasis on professional sports training, such as physios and energy shakes and all that nonsense. It may not mean much for the community, but it does for the companies trying to sell health products that have signed deals with the GAA.

The GAA has abandoned its rule on banning members of the British forces from joining, meaning that the armed forces that murdered Michael Hogan and that maintain five thousand troops in the north-east of our country are allowed to participate in a body that is meant to represent Irish values.

In general, the GAA is fast moving away from its community-based, grass-roots cultural organisation that gave it its strength and towards another commercialised and boring sport.

One pundit, Joe Brolly, didn't obfuscate the issue: “The GAA hierarchy has been unable to deal with the huge problems facing us over the past 20 years. There has been no strategy. No radical action. The vacuum this inertia created was filled by capitalism. Capitalism always fills the vacuum.”

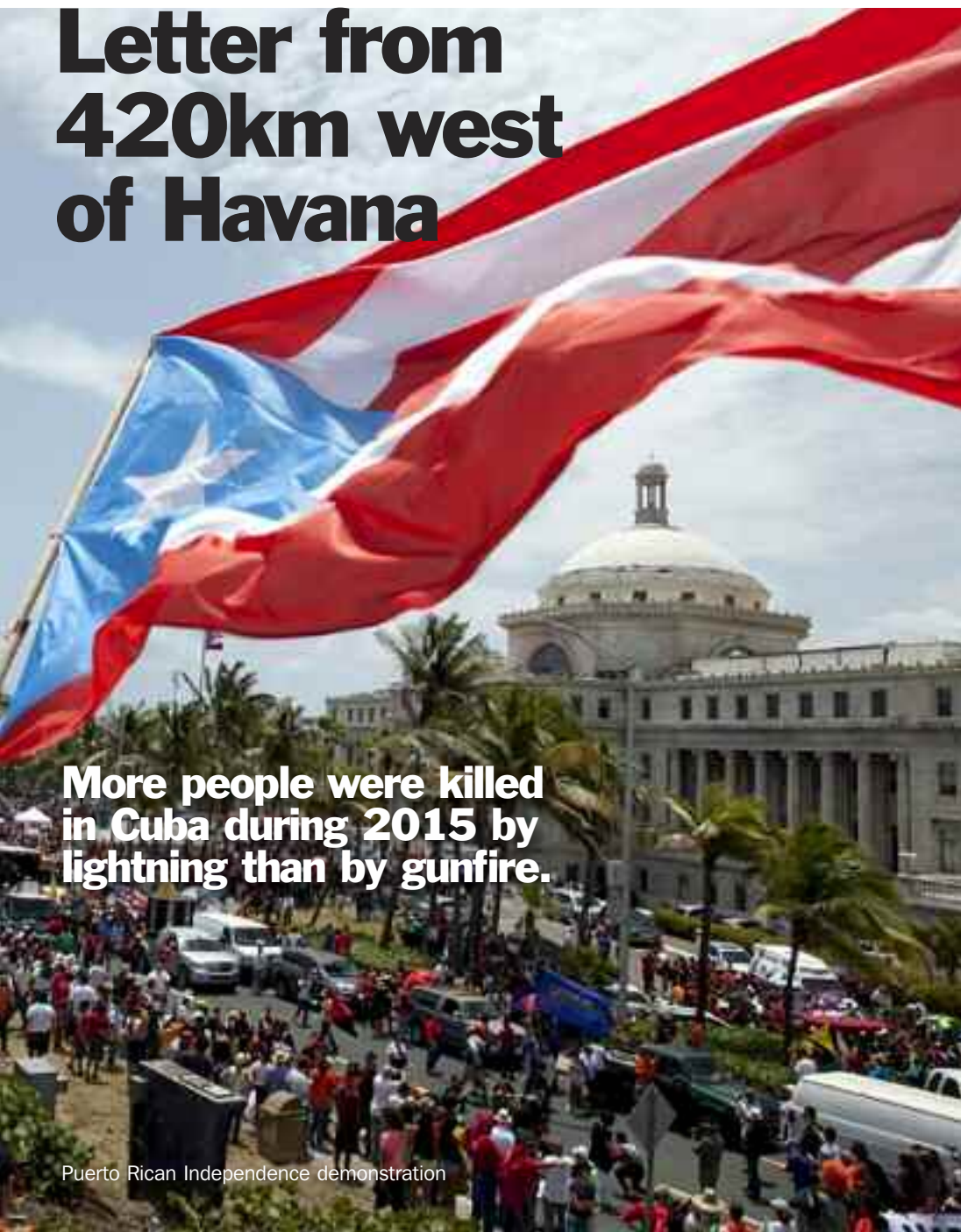
The GAA's history and its social strength mean that it must be looked at seriously by revolutionaries. It is a necessary vehicle for the promotion of collective values in our communities, as well as the promotion of our native language and culture in very challenging times. We should not be afraid to politicise the GAA. The establishment have always sought to keep it on side, using the GAA to reinforce its section 31 ban on republicans, for example.

The GAA has always been political. It has a radical and progressive origin and is a mass organisation of our people. If corporations want to advertise at GAA games, we should go to these games with our own leaflets and banners. If the local supermarket employing people on zero-hour contracts sponsors the local team, we should get our trade unions to do the same.

The class struggle is also a battle of culture, and we shouldn't find it ludicrous to consider the GAA a serious ground for action.



Letter from 420km west of Havana



More people were killed in Cuba during 2015 by lightning than by gunfire.

Puerto Rican Independence demonstration

Seán Joseph Clancy

ONE OF the most significant and transcendental conquests of the Cuban revolutionary process lies beneath such relatively low gun and drugs crime statistics.

Cuba is an island nation situated strategically on the route between where vast amounts of the raw materials required to manufacture drugs, and drugs themselves, come from in South and Central America and where they are consumed in vast quantities, in the northern portion of the continent.

There are of course drugs, and guns, on the streets here. There are addicts and armed delinquents and all the tragic suffering that both tribes breed.

Although there are people who suffer the dire consequences associated with these twins, conceived in the test tubes of capitalism and consumerism, it is not at all unrealistic to say that neither has a broad enough impact on society as a whole to justify being considered social problems.

Addiction issues here are complex and hard to define and address because of the amount of mainstream and prescription drugs around—at prices that can only be described as symbolic—and consumed for legitimate medicinal as well as recreational or addictive and compulsive reasons.

These are in reality free, because pharmacy prices are generally less than, or just about cover, the cost of packaging, distribution, and dispensing.

From aspirin to the most advanced cancer and retroviral drug treatments that typically cost a patient in excess of € 75,000 there are some eight hundred mainstream and hundreds more complementary and “green” medicines available through the state

The Discovery of Utopia

Jenny Farrell

THOMAS MORE’S book *Utopia* was written five hundred years ago, in 1516. It is the first modern envisaging of a democratic communist society. More’s *Utopia* is in the public domain and can easily be found on line.

This landmark book is the topic of Thomas Metscher’s newly published pamphlet, *Thomas More, or the*

Discovery of Utopia, available from Connolly Books.

Thomas More, one of the foremost Renaissance humanists, lived from 1478 to 1535. He was a counsellor to King Henry VIII, lord high chancellor of England from 1529 to 1532, and then beheaded for high treason. He stood for a politics of peace and challenged the politics of power.

Metscher brilliantly outlines the way in which More criticises the condition of England, and Europe, in the Renaissance. He was perceptive like none other in the literature of his day in grasping the nature of early modern capitalist society, and fearless

in penning it. It is shocking to read and understand just how little has changed in the essence of class relations over the past five centuries. *“I can perceive nothing but a certain conspiracy of rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of the common wealth. They invent and devise all means and crafts, first how to keep safely without fear of losing that they have unjustly gathered together; and next how to hire and abuse the work and labour of the poor for as little money as may be.”*

Against this, as Metscher illustrates in detail, More pitches positive, utopian examples of how societies

pharmacy network (except in cases where the US blockade makes them impossible to obtain or to reproduce generically). I have never seen any priced at more than the equivalent of \$1.50 US. Most can also be obtained at no cost in cases of hardship.

Things can become a bit distorted and complicated at times because of petty corruption or infrastructural problems, but generally things work well enough.

Addicts seeking help here can go into a residential treatment scheme, can do inpatient detox and transfer to outpatient self-help or professional group or individual community-based therapy, can attend twelve-step recovery meetings, and can avail of ancillary physical and psychological support services.

There is no such thing as a waiting-list for any of these.

It would be far easier to obtain help for oneself or a family member here in Cuba than in the post-Tiger Ireland of today.

Back on track . . .

Puerto Rico was freed from Spanish colonial rule 116 or so years ago. It did not graduate—as Cuba did, for a large part under the guidance of José Martí and later Fidel—to freeing itself from the US yoke.

North American forces only entered the fray against the Spanish—who they would have lived with were they not somewhat in shreds and vulnerable—because they considered that a French or British colony would be detrimental to their regional control and expansionist interests. The concept of a sovereign state never even crossed their minds.

One (there are many) direct consequence of this is that there are

can find a better way. Crucial factors in achieving this, as Metscher points out, are the sovereignty of the people and a republican state. It is astonishing how much this still applies as we observe these core principles being undermined by the EU today.

Metscher also shows how More uses irony as “a safeguard and a disguise of what was certainly a subversive, if not a revolutionary content.”

In his pamphlet Thomas Metscher does more than guide us through and enhance our enjoyment of More’s significant book. He outlines the history of a second (oppositional)

now more guns in Puerto Rico than there are people.

The symbiotic relationship dynamics between guns, drugs and US imperialism are vast, profound, and undeniable. They stretch from ghettos all over the continent to the twin towers of the Pentagon and the White House and leave their bloody mark on all social strata in between.

Cuba—a small, underdeveloped, poor and blockaded Third World Caribbean nation—stoically maintains the requisite degree over the two former, in no small part because it has kept the latter at bay.

The social benefits are enormous and beyond my space here and scope to delve further into. Suffice it to say that I have no doubt that my six-year-old son, Fidelito, will get through his primary, secondary and third-level education without ever encountering (unless he goes to considerable trouble to find some) street drugs or being exposed, even at a distance, to gun crime and many of the other social malaises that have somehow been normalised elsewhere.

A journalist from the *Washington Post* who was here in April made some nasty and unfair comments about a visit she made to a school in Havana. She claimed that children were “little robots,” who churned out pro-government propaganda, and that their school was a sterile and sombre place.

She quietened somewhat when asked if she had any trouble getting through the metal-detectors at the door, or finding the Pepsi and McDonald’s franchises in the school canteen.

My son—not even slightly robotique—is thriving in school here in every way that a loving parent could hope for.

Viva Cuba Socialista!

culture, of radical thinking from antiquity to the present day, giving specific examples that encourage further reading and exploration and conveying a sense of excitement that we are part of this tradition, of which Thomas More’s *Utopia* is such a landmark.

★ This is the third recent Connolly Books publication by Thomas Metscher. The other two are *The Marxism of James Connolly* (2015) and *The Radicalism of Swift* (2016). Thomas Metscher, *Thomas More, or the Discovery of Utopia* (Dublin: Connolly Books, 2016; ISBN 978-0-9935785-1-9)

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A terrible beauty

Gabriel Rosenstock

No, it wasn't some Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa—he would scarcely have been three at the time—or a latter-day Guy Fawkes who set fire to the Houses of Parliament. The blithering idiots did it themselves in 1834 when the Exchequer burned two cartloads of tally sticks, an obsolete system of counting. The whole place went up, much of it made from the finest Irish oak.

London had seen nothing like it since the Great Fire of 1666. Naturally, it attracted artists to the scene—the photographers of the day—one of whom was J. M. W. Turner.

The Times called the conflagration, among other things, “a spectacle of terrible beauty.” (Where have we heard that phrase before?) The Tsar of Russia, no less (on whom the *Skibbereen Eagle* was keeping a close eye), described it as “divine retribution.”

William Cobbet MP was in Limerick at the time and heard that the Parliament had been “set afire” and that Londoners raised “a savage shout of exultation.” He continued:

And this “unreflecting mob” might in this case have reflected, that in the building which they then saw in flames . . . the Act was passed for turning the Catholic priests, who shared the tithes with the poor, out of the parishes, and putting Protestant parsons in their place, who gave the poor no share at all of the tithe . . .

(Source: *Cobbett in Ireland: A Warning to England.*)

Red dawn of freedom

This is a haiku in Irish and English by Gabriel Rosenstock in response to Turner's masterpiece.

Japanese version: Mariko Sumikura.

Dutch version: Geert Verbeke.

Greek version: Sarah Thilykou.

Scots version: John McDonald.

camhaoir dhearg na saoirse!
parlaimint na breataine
ar bharr lasrach

red dawn of freedom!
the british parliament goes up
in flames

自由の朝焼け
英国会が
火の海に

rode vrijheidsdageraad!
het britse parlement gaat op
in vlammen

ελευθερία!
η βρετανική βουλή
μέσα στις φλόγες

reid daw o scowth!
the breetish pairlament gaes up
in flams

▲ The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons, October 16, 1834
JMW Turner