

Socialist Voice

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Brexit reverberates in the corridors of power

Eugene McCartan

THE DECISION by a majority of the people within the British state to leave the European Union continues to reverberate through the corridors of corporate power.

The mass media, both private and state-owned, went into overdrive, predicting doom and gloom if the people voted to leave. Then the people were condemned for not taking that advice. The English working class in particular were singled out for attention, all being roundly condemned for being racist and ignorant.

In recent decades, western

governments have gone to war to impose “democracy” upon the peoples of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and many other countries and peoples, killing millions to make them free, laying waste whole countries. They have subverted and overthrown governments around the globe, armed, trained and financed fascists and religious fanatics, who murdered and slaughtered their way through cities, towns and villages from Ukraine to Syria. And the political elite and their media conduits continue to lecture such countries as Venezuela and Cuba for not being “democratic.”

continued overleaf



“Germany . . . has a responsibility to actively help shape the world order.”

Draft report by German Ministry of Defence, July 2016.

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continued from page one

Yet when the majority of people within the British state voted to leave the EU, that carefully crafted veneer of democracy slipped.

The state and the media continue to pillory the people, dismissing the result as a vote of ignorant people or bigots, asserting that big decisions should not be made by the people but by those who really understand what is at stake. The people have increasingly become an obstacle to what global corporate power needs to achieve.

Finance capital, in the form of the City of London, has not yet given up on winning back its position within the EU. The battle is on between those who want a complete departure and those who advocate “Brexit Light.”

The Lexit campaign, made up of trade unions, the Communist Party of Britain and other political forces, while small, made a very important intervention in the referendum debate. To secure a progressive exit will require the mobilising of working people to fight for their own demands.

The ruling elite can see no other way forward for the peoples of Europe but the one they impose upon us. Their contempt for the people’s vote in Britain is just another indicator of their shallow commitment to democracy and to the opinions of the people. This

contempt for the people is built in to the very structures of the EU, which is being constructed to remove the possibility of change from the people at both the national and the EU level.

Here in Ireland we have the spectacle of a party, some of whose members fought a thirty-year war to end British interference in Ireland and to establish an independent, sovereign Irish republic, now surrendering to that very corporate power. At one time it was a major opponent of membership of the “rich man’s club” and of the many treaties that have been passed to facilitate the construction of this bastion of corporate power.

Along with other democratic forces, including the Communist Party of Ireland, it resisted these treaties—and history has shown our criticism to have been correct—bringing to the attention of the Irish people the grave dangers posed to national democracy and sovereignty by the constant drive for greater centralising controls, as contained in these treaties, the constant attempts by the EU to marginalise the people and remove from them any possibility of changing economic and social policies at the national level. The EU is being constructed to subvert the democratic will of the people and to prevent any alternative to capitalism emerging at the national level.

That party has moved from opposition to the EU to being one of the main conduits for promoting the illusion among working people that the EU can be reformed from within; it has become a vehicle for disarming radical voices here in Ireland. It has fallen for one of the oldest ruses of the establishment: Come into our political tent and you can reform it for us.

What has been exposed is the way this party views the world through a very narrow nationalist prism and the shallowness of its anti-establishment

rhetoric.

Another fact revealed by the Brexit vote is the complete marginalising of the people in the north-east of our country. They have little or no power to change anything, to change in any real sense their economic or social conditions. What has also been exposed is the fact that many of the services that people have come to rely on are discretionary, there so long as external funding is available from either the British exchequer or the European Union.

Many of these services are absolutely needed by working people. Hundreds of services receive sufficient funds to keep them on life support but not enough to exist independently. Those involved need to recognise these as mechanisms of control and not as a means of empowerment. The lack of democracy is the essential weakness of the internal settlement in the north-east of our country, just as it is of the European Union.

The people in the north-east experience the highest level of social deprivation, the lowest wage levels (on average £108 per week), the highest rate of zero-hour contracts and precarious employment. No amount of pleading for special treatment from either London or Brussels will end this blight upon the people’s existence.

Now is not the time to retreat or to see our world through a narrow nationalist or loyalist prism. We can defeat the EU only with a clear anti-imperialist, anti-corporate understanding of the forces that are the obstacles faced by our people, to the right of the people to change the economic and political system, to develop a strategy for placing real economic and political power in the hands of working people.

All wealth is produced by the hands and brains of labour—by working people. The wealth that is produced by workers is not owned or controlled by us but rather by those who own and control the means of producing wealth. True democracy can only be brought about when wealth and the means of creating wealth are held in common ownership by the people.

Membership of the EU is for preventing a new, different Ireland emerging. If the people are to achieve real and meaningful change this will be in spite of and in opposition to the EU, just as political institutions established by partition were not established to meet the people’s needs but rather the needs of British imperialism.

These institutions are not vehicles that can bring change but instead have to be replaced for a new and radically different Ireland to emerge.

The plunder of the poor



Jimmy Doran

MORE THAN a hundred years ago Karl Marx pointed out that “the veiled slavery of wage labourers in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the New World as its Pedestal.” The discovery of gold and silver in America, the conquest and plunder of India and the colonisation of Africa are inextricably linked to capitalism and imperialism—its highest form. Colonialism was a necessity of capitalism: it designed and created it.

The treasures captured outside Europe by undisguised looting, enslavement and murder flowed back to the mother countries and were turned into the capital that financed the Industrial Revolution in Europe. These workshops, mines and mills turned out massive additional profits for their owners, who had already plundered the natural resources of the colonies in the global south, on the backs of generations of exploited workers throughout Europe.

This plunder and desecration of peoples and environments still goes on today. It is much more subtle than the plunder carried out by invading armies, but it also reaps a much higher reward for capital.

Globalisation is the preferred army of plunder today to satisfy the insatiable appetite for ever more and ever increasing profits.

To increase profits and overcome the stagnation in capitalism, new markets were needed and cheaper production costs. Globalisation was

their answer. It began in the form of foreign direct investment, whereby transnational corporations moved their production facilities to the developing world in the global south to benefit from cheap labour and favourable tax breaks by local governments.

Eventually, however, this led to bad publicity back home, as the poor working conditions and wages of workers were exposed in the way massive profits were being made on the designer goods being sold in the developed world. Workers in foreign branches of transnationals also started to get organised in trade unions and to fight for better pay and conditions, which led to an increase in production costs and more bad publicity, as the intimidation, blacklisting and, in some cases, the murder of trade union leaders received publicity in the developed world, most notably the Coca-Cola Company in Colombia, Mexico, and El Salvador.

The corporations did not want their “good name” being linked to such atrocities, as it was not good for business. They changed their policy of direct investment to what is known as “arm’s length” investment, where production is outsourced to local factories under a franchise or contracts.

This led to a further decrease in costs, as the local capitalists competed ferociously with each other to win contracts through reductions in wages and in safety and environmental considerations.

In this way the corporations could increase their profit to massive levels, while they could not be linked to the

sweatshop conditions suffered by the workers, as they would say they have no control over local employers and the way they treat their workers.

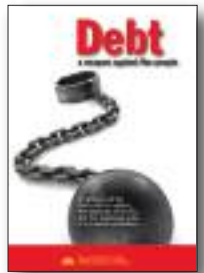
This is the modern method of achieving the “unqualified slavery” of workers in the global south today, where plunder, pillage and genocide was the way in colonial days. Much larger financial gains are being achieved today through globalisation and arm’s length outsourcing of production in the developing world.

This transfer of production has the same devastating effects on the local population and environment that colonialism had in the past. From these sweatshops in the global south half a trillion euros is repatriated to the global north every year in profits—that is, €500,000,000,000 in wealth transferred every year from the poorest countries on the planet to the richest, created by the slave wages paid to the local workers.

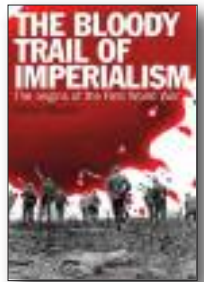
To put this transfer of wealth in context, it is the equivalent of 15,000 tonnes of gold being shipped from the colonies every year back to the motherland—that is twice as much gold in one year as was plundered in the entire 350 years since Columbus set sail.

Neither slavery, genocidal clearances of indigenous people nor the worst excesses of colonialism achieved a wealth transfer of this magnitude from the poorest to the richest countries.

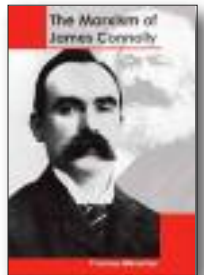
What military forces failed to achieve in the past couple of centuries, market forces are achieving on a massive scale every year, and with an enormous and devastating cost for humanity.



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The first step in a new departure

Tommy McKearney

AN IMPORTANT first step in what we may well come to describe as our “new departure”—this was how the recent summer school of the Peadar O’Donnell Socialist Republican Forum was described by one of the participants.

Cautioning against a pedantic comparison with historical events, she pointed to the coming together of hitherto divergent currents in an effort to advance the cause of a workers’

Communists, republicans and socialists from around Ireland gathered last month in Co. Tyrone to take part in the event. While the forum organised a very successful celebration of the 1916 Rising earlier this year, the summer school was by far its most ambitious and also its most successful happening to date. In spite of a full and often challenging agenda, all those attending agreed that the time spent had been worth while, productive and, best of all, greatly encouraging.

Speaking during a break in the schedule, Eugene McCartan said that the purpose of the forum is to provide

a vehicle to facilitate informed political discussion.¹ This, he said, will hopefully allow for a consensus to emerge on the interpretation of socialist republicanism that encourages the coming together of people prepared to strive for the establishment of a workers’ republic.

This outlook was endorsed by Breandán Mac Cionnaith, who reminded those present of one of the forum’s principles when he quoted the lines “that to struggle to undo the conquest it is necessary to oppose and actively resist both the imperial interests and their domestic gatekeepers. That struggle has the potential to draw into activity all those who suffer the effects of this dual domination. In effect, this means the vast majority of the Irish people.”

From its formation, the forum has been clear that it draws inspiration and insight from the Republican Congress of the 1930s. Nevertheless it has also proceeded with the clear understanding that the world does not stand still, and that any analysis has to be grounded in contemporary reality.

Acting in this light, the summer school agenda included an exploration of present-day imperialism, socialist republicanism, women’s rights, damaging trade agreements, the privatisation of health services, and the need to effectively communicate the socialist republican message.

Demonstrating the power of effectively communicating a contemporary message, Patricia Campbell opened the summer school with an incisive presentation on the damaging effect of privatisation on health services, north and south. Drawing on her many years of nursing experience, she illustrated how imposing private companies on the health service diverts resources from patient to shareholder, with a particularly devastating effect on the elderly.

The opening session was followed by an outline (coupled with a facilitated discussion) of contemporary imperialism, with an emphasis on its financial manifestation and therefore illustrating the injurious role played by transnationals as well as by Britain, the EU, and the United States.

The next session was a workshop examining the reality and perceptions (or misconceptions) of socialist republicanism today. Overseen by Frankie Quinn, this sitting utilised to the full the forum’s desire to practise a participative rather than didactic method of engagement. With the aid of a series of thought-provoking questions, participants explored socialist republicanism honestly and robustly, sparing no sensitivities.

Eoghan Ó Néill, author of *Trading Away Democracy: How TTIP and Other Trade Agreements Will Destroy People’s Rights*, guided the participants through a workshop demonstrating the threat posed by a number of impending trade agreements. He pointed to the dangerous Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) but also the lesser-known, although no less harmful, Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada.

Valerie Hayes brought the second day to an end with a workshop examining the lack of women’s rights in Ireland, north and south. She drew a comparison between the reactionary attitudes shared by right-wing groups in both jurisdictions and demonstrated how ingrained conservative attitudes towards women also help to reinforce the unhealthy status quo.

Finally, the summer school devoted

time to the question of organisation. This is a matter of huge significance, as ill-conceived structures are inimical to progress. Several speakers emphasised the need to reject political sectarianism and resist the temptation of a selfish form of “party-building” that excludes others. There was broad agreement, therefore, that it is essential to cater for and encourage maximum co-operation among different political entities on a set of shared principles that address current concerns.

These issues involve the *status quo*, which the summer school agreed must change radically if the Irish working class is to overcome the profoundly unequal and debilitating political and economic system, a regime in the Republic that has caused a recurring series of recession, emigration and homelessness over decades and is now on the verge of creating American levels of income divergence between the wealthiest 10 per cent and the much more numerous cohort earning the average wage, or even less,² while in the North the BBC recently reported that people there have “on average, the lowest disposable incomes of any UK region.”

Coupled with these long-standing harmful economic conditions are recent developments that are now creating circumstances demanding answers and simultaneously offering a fresh opportunity to the left. The working out of the most recent crisis within capitalism, and resistance to its imposition of a bail-out and austerity on Ireland, has altered the party-political landscape in the Republic. More recently in the North the result of the EU referendum has posed a series of difficult questions for the

ruling elite throughout Ireland. The larger pro-EU parties in both jurisdictions confine their arguments to whether there would be a “hard” or a “soft” border, without asking why there is a border at all. Moreover, they have failed entirely to address the impact of TTIP on workers and working-class communities within the EU.

Exacerbating these difficulties for those in power here are doubts afflicting their masters abroad, as evidenced, for example, by the turmoil within the IMF as it admits to “a series of calamitous misjudgements” in its dealings with the EU.³

In the light of this, not only did the forum’s summer school in Co. Tyrone cover relevant issues but its convening was timely. Moreover, by drawing together previously divergent currents in a dialogue on issues of shared concern, the forum is in step with other, similar initiatives. A vibrant initiative, for example, is under way among the most progressive elements of the trade union movement to examine how best to promote the interests of Ireland’s working class.

The summer school shone a light on the possibility of a fresh departure for left politics in Ireland, and hopefully this will prove what Victor Hugo once said, that “nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come.”

1 <https://socialistrepublicanforum.wordpress.com/about>.

2 Carl O’Brien, “Ireland at risk of reaching US levels of income inequality, says study,” *Irish Times*, 16 February 2015.

3 Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, “IMF admits disastrous love affair with the euro and apologises for the immolation of Greece,” *Daily*

Payback time for the boys and girls of the EU

THE FORMER PRESIDENT of the EU Commission, José Manuel Barroso, has been given a plum job for being a good handmaiden to global finance, European finance houses and banks with his appointment to the investment bank Goldman Sachs. He follows in a long line of those who came through the revolving door between the political servants of big business, politicians, top civil servants and bureaucrats and the more open public lobbying for corporate interests. They can drop the pretence that in office they were looking after all interests equally.

Barroso, as president of the EU Commission from 2004 to 2014, was the person at the top during the global financial crisis and helped to shape the EU’s austerity policies imposed on the people of Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain and now spreading from the peripheral countries to the core countries, with devastating effects on workers. These policies were also imposed by the EU on countries it did business with, devastating the lives of billions of people. Barroso secured this lucrative gig barely eighteen months after he left his job as president of the EU Commission—from one plum job into another one.

Goldman Sachs admitted to defrauding investors between 2005 and 2007. The US Department of Justice fined it \$5 billion (loose change for a finance house like Goldman Sachs) for its role in the global financial crisis.

This is just one more in a long line of examples of the links between political institutions, the state, and big corporations and global finance. Workers need to be aware of this interconnected relationship between global institutions and corporate power. They are indistinguishable. Governments are but committees for administering, looking after and promoting the interests of the rich and economically powerful.





The left and immigration

Nicola Lawlor

THE LEFT must embrace the debate about immigration from a working-class viewpoint and not run away from it, or shout over it, or ignorantly paint all workers who have fears and concerns as racists.

The recent British referendum has revealed a number of serious weaknesses of the left, and consequently a lot of working-class anger and frustration is expressed through right-wing groups.

The social-democratic left jumped to the defence of the European Union, a regional political, economic and social structure of monopoly capital, largely Franco-German, while the self-proclaimed “radical” left spent much time calling for “open borders” as a counter to the anti-immigration rhetoric of the leading Leave campaign groups. There were, of course, exceptions to this, in the RMT Union, NIPSA, the Communist Party of Britain, and the daily *Morning Star*.

The social-democratic position has obviously failed workers, and humanity, in that it allies itself with the very forces exploiting and abusing workers, creating increasingly violent and

uncontrolled divisions and wrecking the environmental system that we require to sustain our lives. It seeks to defend the free movement of labour, which in reality is the freedom to exploit. It is the creation of an internal EU reserve army of labour, which drives down wages and divides working-class organisations.

But the “radical” left position is equally destructive to working-class unity and to building an actual working-class movement in opposition to capitalism.

“Open border” policies when monopoly capitalism remains the dominant social order will only benefit monopoly capital, economically in its greater access to cheaper labour within core economies but also politically, when inevitably workers will be further divided along racial lines and racism will be used to manipulate, control and disrupt organised fight-back.

It will be different when monopoly capitalism is being challenged seriously by socialist states, with military back-up, and by socialist international structures. But that is not, sadly, the present balance of class forces. The socialist policies of transformation and struggle towards socialism have to be very different

from the socialist policies of a socialist hegemonic, or near-hegemonic, order.

Samir Amin, quite rightly, sees the movement we must build as being both anti-imperialist and anti-liberal.

Our task is to give new life to workers’ internationalism. Workers and working people ought to unite at all levels, both within their countries and across borders, and stop competing with each other. This can only happen on an anti-imperialist basis, working with an anti-liberal strategy.

The cornerstone of liberalism as an ideology, and also of monopoly capitalism as practised through a managed technocratic system within the EU, and dominant globally, is the free movement of capital, goods, services, and labour. An anti-imperialist and anti-liberal strategy needs to challenge all four of these points, at both the national and the international level, by progressive movements but also progressive states, where the workers’ movement has gained hegemony within a state or even become the ruling class within a state.

While Marx favoured free trade and the growth of capitalism, that was in the context of breaking down old feudal structures and ideology, when capitalism was still in its progressive

The cornerstone of liberalism as an ideology, and also of monopoly capitalism as practised through a managed technocratic system within the EU, and dominant globally, is the free movement of capital, goods, services, and labour

phase. It has now, of course, moved well beyond that, and so our policies must too.

Again, Samir Amin sees this strategy based within national boundaries but with an obvious international dialectic.

A precondition is to restore priority to national policies over international ones. Nations need self-determination—not just for cultural reasons, nor because they are black or white, Christian or Muslim, but because of their political history. A high degree of national independence is necessary to reduce inequalities between nations in the world today. That's how we must define working-class unity.

This debate must come from the grass roots. I see no contradiction between national and international levels, but I think that no progress will ever be made on the international level as long as there is no progress on the national level. Things always start to happen through a bottom-up process, and essentially this means on the national level.

While it is fair to say that the media and establishment politicians wanted the Brexit debate centred around immigration and not democracy, public services, the environment, war, workers' rights, or real economic sovereignty, the left still failed to engage in that immigration debate from a solidly anti-imperialist and anti-liberal standpoint.

Workers have fears, concerns, and worries. Some are perceptions, some are based on ignorance, some are manufactured; but some are legitimate, and the roots of these views are real. This talk of Leave voters from some on the left as being racists or misled is itself deeply ignorant as well as being politically arrogant and obnoxious enough to turn people off the left altogether, which indeed it does.

This argument was brilliantly espoused in a post-Brexit article headed "The demonisation of the working class shames our nation" by Paul Embury, regional secretary of the Fire Brigades Union in Britain, published in *Huffington Post*, where he wrote:

A group of people, the most exploited within our society, are under attack . . . Few among the political class really understand them. These people live in modest homes in the grittier parts of the country. They work in factories, call centres and on building sites

. . . They like football and watch Coronation Street . . .

They are the people who tipped the balance to lead us through the EU's exit door. They are the new scapegoats. They are the working class . . .

The sneering contempt displayed towards these and all 17 million who voted Leave by the resentful new alliance of metropolitan liberals, know-all academics, no-mark "celebrities" and know-nothing-yet students should trouble us all . . .

The opprobrium heaped on working-class voters post referendum demonstrates just how little their critics know of their lives . . . They considered their own lives, the perpetual strains they were under, the financial hardships, the impact of near decade-long austerity, the lack of affordable housing, the ravages of deindustrialisation, the challenges of mass and unrestricted immigration in their communities and its resultant pressure on wages and local services, and they concluded that the elite in neither Brussels nor Westminster gave a fig for their predicament . . .

So the backbone of the nation, the people upon whose labour we rely, the section of society which creates the wealth, stands condemned, vilified by the pro-EU liberal intelligentsia, voiceless and without a political party it can truly recognise as its own.

A recent survey showed that only 35 per cent voted leave on the basis of immigration issues or concerns. But for this 35 per cent, do we write them off, or do we engage in a real conversation and with a solidly based position on immigration and borders that can help to educate but also be a fundamental principle of internationalism and national sovereignty?

Firstly, we should listen. Brexit has shown that the social-democratic left and many trade unions are largely out of touch with and irrelevant to most of the working class. They are not the political influencers or leaders of our class in Britain, and the same can be said for Ireland.

Capitalism is a barbaric and inhumane system that remains hegemonic because it is based on a political and media structure that creates division, sows hatred and fear,

and does not always present the working class or the left with simple questions, or questions as we would like them presented. While Rosa Luxemburg's proposition, "socialism or barbarism?" is ultimately correct, that is not the immediate political question.

So we must face questions like Brexit in a form and a way presented to us by the establishment. We have to tackle questions such as immigration in the context of a barbaric system and how it creates these contradictions. As Julian Jones wrote in the *Morning Star*:

The grim economic reality behind this free movement is in essence a free exploitation of a primarily young European work force with no job security and no prospects . . . Quite simply, those at the bottom of the pile are more likely to have witnessed the basic principle that if a boss can use a cheaper foreign work force, they will do so.

The economic structure of monopoly capitalism today includes an openness of borders within politically defined areas for the purpose of the exploitation of working people, cultivation of a bigger, more mobile reserve army of labour and driving a race to the bottom as well as a closed approach to borders for defined areas "outside," where immigration policy can pick and choose as a form of brain drain from peripheral regions within the global economic order.

Indeed Marx noted that the English bourgeoisie "exploited the Irish poverty to keep down the working class in England by forced immigration of poor Irishmen . . . Ireland constantly sends her own surplus to the English labour market, and thus forces down wages and lowers the material and moral position of the English working class . . ."

The policies we must put forward on immigration during the struggle for socialism are different from the absolute policies that would be pursued under socialism. It is the right of all sovereign states, and an essential part of the transition to socialism, to control their borders as regards capital, labour, goods, and services.

This is a vital distinction. If the political left doesn't realise it soon it will move further and further away from the working class and hand influence and the leadership of our class to the right, with all the dangers this presents.



Seventeen contradictions and the end of capitalism

Nicola Lawlor



"A consistent and intelligent voice on the left."—*Financial Times*

"A stimulating new book on capitalism and the world we might build beyond it."—*Morning Star*

NOT MANY books or authors get reviews like that from both the *Financial Times* and the *Morning Star*, but in some ways it is fitting for Harvey, and also understandable, as they are the two most honest and class-conscious papers in Britain, only from opposing class positions. They understand capitalism better than most.

Anyway, David Harvey's *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* did get these reviews—and deservedly in this reviewer's opinion.

David Harvey
Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism
(London: Profile Books, 2014)

For starters, he didn't pick five or ten or twenty contradictions—handy numbers for a handy title. It isn't a handy ten-point plan. Seventeen is just the number of the crucial contradictions of capital—not necessarily of capitalism, as there are more political and social contradictions that Harvey does not cover, but of capital and its production and accumulation process, the economic engine of capitalism, the social, economic and political system.

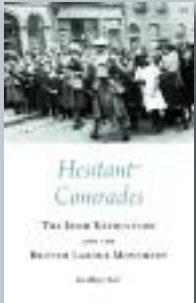
Harvey starts by introducing clearly his method and his understanding of contradictions. His method is to take Marx's approach and essential class definitions, but not necessarily to take the conclusions Marx arrived at. But while many people say they do this, Harvey seems to. While it absolutely is a crucial Marxist book, it can also challenge more traditional-thinking Marxists.

In the introductory chapter Harvey explains his interpretation of "contradiction." There are two main concepts. The most common understanding is black versus white: two opposing concepts or positions, so both cannot be true. Then there are the more complicated but real contradictions (in understanding the actually existing world): dialectical contradictions, where two seemingly opposing positions or processes can in fact be one and the same event, and conflict and balance and rebalance in that particular event, affecting both it and themselves in a continuous process.

Markets, on the one hand, exist but are in fact non-markets, run by monopolies. Competition, on the one hand, exists but in the same space as cartels and monopolies. This, while more complicated, helps us to

Hesitant comrades

Seán Byers



THE DECADE of Centenaries continues to generate much scholarly interest in the Irish revolutionary period, with established and younger historians making new contributions and revisions to our understanding of the tumult of 1916–1923.

While these studies tend to focus primarily on the dynamics of the revolution from an Irish perspective, giving some attention to its considerable international dimensions, Geoffrey Bell's *Hesitant Comrades* is a ground-breaking survey of the British labour movement, its Irish connections, its complex relationship with British imperialism, and its response to key events of the period.

Bell is to be commended, firstly, for the painstaking research that has gone into the book. The range of state, trade union and party political archives, party newspapers and private collections consulted by the author is remarkable, a benchmark of sorts for budding labour historians. Consequently, *Hesitant Comrades* is packed with fascinating anecdotes and quotations relating to the attitudes of individuals and groups spanning the full spectrum of British labour opinion, from the

British Labour Party and its wartime leader Arthur Henderson, the Trades Union Congress and its pre-eminent representatives, Sylvia Pankhurst and her radical paper the *Workers' Dreadnought*, to the British Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain.

For example, he has unearthed this from the radical Scottish socialist Arthur McManus, writing in a review of a book on Connolly published eight years after his death:

Consequently, when he, in his dying moments, complains that the "Socialists . . . will all forget that I am an Irishman," he was speaking at a moment when the Socialist movement had not reached an understanding of the significance of struggling subjected nations. He was speaking at a moment when the leading International Socialists of the various countries could see no difference between Connolly fighting for, and defending, Ireland against Britain, and they themselves entering their several Cabinets to defend and participate in the prosecution of what Connolly termed a "war of freebooters and thieves." (p. 20).

And this statement issued by the CPGB executive in November 1920,

when the War of Independence was at its height:

A nation is being murdered under our eyes . . . There are Communists who say it is not our concern. This is a Nationalist struggle . . . we are internationalists . . . In such a case as Ireland—the case of a small nation held in forcible suppression—the National struggle and the class struggle are inseparable from one another . . . The Irish workers are suffering . . . and the British workers do nothing . . . From the British working class they [the Irish] expected better things. They see every device of imperialist tyranny employed against them with . . . the acquiescence of the British working class (p. 112).

Bell demonstrates a detailed understanding of the Irish political landscape, the details of which will be familiar to many readers on this side of the Irish Sea. But it is in tracing the "parallel movement of the British working class movement" (p. 30) that the book comes into its own, skilfully navigating the various ideological threads within British labour and the development of its Irish policies during the period in question.

Geoffrey Bell
Hesitant Comrades: The Irish Revolution and the British Labour Movement
(London: Pluto Press, 2016)

understand a world of tensions, conflict, compromise, class interests, social lives and work better than the black-and-white approach. Marx used it to provide the most brilliant exposition of capital and capitalism up to his time, and Harvey does too.

Harvey splits these seventeen contradictions into three groups, those he describes as foundational contradictions, moving contradictions, and dangerous contradictions.

The first seven are “foundational,” in that they hang together, interlock, and capital couldn’t operate—or wouldn’t be capital—without them. They are: use and exchange value, the social value of labour and money, private property and the state, private appropriation and common wealth, capital and labour, capital as a process, and production and realisation.

The next seven, “moving contradictions,” are evolutionary and on a trajectory but not strictly defined and can be altered. They interact with

human agency and class struggle. They are subject to change, and their history and future can be understood over time. These contradictions are: technology and human disposability, the division of labour, monopoly and competition, uneven development and space, inequality of income and wealth, social reproduction, and freedom and domination. And the final three are “dangerous contradictions,” because, according to Harvey, they can vary over time and space. They are: endless compound growth, capital’s relation to nature, and the revolt against universal alienation. Those fifty years ago may not be the ones Harvey identifies. And—depending largely on the middle seven—those in fifty years (if we survive his final three) will be different again.

That’s class struggle, and that’s dialectics.

While there are laws of motion of capital, all is not predetermined. Class struggle is relevant and necessary. The three contradictions that Harvey

identifies he says are most dangerous in the present, and are dangerous to both the system itself and to the initial seven contradictions but also to the reproduction of the species.

Just as these are potentially lethal to humanity, they are also potentially lethal to capital, but only if a revolutionary movement arises out of and from these contradictions; and that is the essence of Harvey’s view of contradictions derived from Marx.

Finally, Harvey rejects the view some have of Marx that he analysed the contradictions of capital and uncovered the eternal truth that it would collapse as a result of its own contradictions. He rejects the cold, dogmatic, doomsday Grim Reaper version of Marx, more often portrayed by those “explaining” Marx than by actual Marxists.

No, Harvey sees the Marx who is a revolutionary humanist, as he puts it; and that’s what makes this book interesting, refreshing, and an enjoyable read.

It is clear that, at crucial junctures during the revolutionary period, the British labour leadership’s rhetorical support for a form of self-rule in Ireland and often fierce criticisms of the British government routinely stopped short of the action necessary to change the course of British and Irish history.

It should come as no surprise to activists on the Marxist left that prominent individuals within the Labour Party and the TUC were Empire enthusiasts and used the movement’s bureaucratic structures to frame and modify the debate in a way that frustrated the attempts of militant unions to co-ordinate direct action on Ireland. J. H. Thomas, for example, is adjudged to have used his role as general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen and his position on the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC to oppose such action on many occasions, and to have failed to press the issue on others.

Crucially, however, Bell cautions against unreserved criticism of Thomas and other trade union leaders, noting, for instance, that a motion supporting direct action against the military in Ireland, carried at a TUC special congress in July 1920, was not followed by affiliated unions organising ballots to secure a mandate for such action (p. 84).

In a departure from the conventional Marxist tendency to blame labour leaders for the movement’s

weaknesses and failures, Bell’s central argument goes some way in the opposite direction. “The neglect or discomfort shown in respect of all these matters [relating to Ireland], evidenced in this book, not just by the leadership of the working class but also by those who offered themselves as alternatives, meant that any potential the working class as a whole may have had to intervene decisively into the Irish crisis went uncultivated” (p. 221).

It is suggested, and indeed demonstrated with expert use of case study evidence, that the militancy of the British working class in the crucial period 1920–21 did not extend to Ireland, and that it did not see the emergence of a bold and radical leadership on which Irish socialists and republicans could depend. The “hesitant comrades” to whom the author refers, therefore, encompass the entire British working-class movement, not merely a small number of pantomime villains.

Although he could perhaps have done more to tease out the various ways in which right-wing leaders shape and control trade union responses and purposively limit the politicisation of its members, this small caveat does not detract from a convincing thesis and a remarkable contribution to our understanding of the subjects under discussion.

By 1921, Bell explains, “both the Labour Party and the TUC had

conditioned their acceptance of Irish self-determination on protection for minorities in Ireland. By this they meant the Unionist population of north-east Ireland” (p. 94). Thus, when loyalists in the Belfast shipyards carried out a pogrom against Catholic workers and “rotten Prods” (Protestant socialists) in July 1920, the outcome of the TUC’s response, intentional or otherwise, amounted to a betrayal of the Carpenters’ Union and others who sought to oppose the expulsions, not to mention the victims themselves.

This is one of the more shameful episodes discussed in the book, though it does not necessarily represent any particular malice on the part of any one group or individual but rather the level of apathy, lack of interest and misunderstanding that pervaded the movement at the time.

Geoffrey Bell has written a book that will be of huge interest and value to students of British and Irish labour, and contemporary activists on the left. It is a shame that in some ways he has been let down by his publisher, whose lax approach to proofreading has allowed a number of basic spelling errors and misprints to slip through. However, this is no reason to avoid reading what is an excellent, arguably definitive study and an invaluable companion to key texts on the Irish revolutionary period.



Class-based unions fight back

Paul Dobson

AS IN many countries with similar socio-economic-political conditions, elements of the fragmented Venezuelan trade union movement have historically been led away from defending the interests of the working class and have come to defend the interests of the bourgeoisie (both Venezuelan and foreign). Other elements have taken workers' movements and converted them into yes-men for red-shirted ministers, leaving class-based struggles well behind.

Such examples of weakness (while not being the norm) have only encouraged reformist, opportunist and corrupt elements from increasing their stake of power in the Bolivarian government, posing a real threat to the entire process of national liberation. The relative strength of such elements is dialectically opposed to genuine socialist advance and the empowerment of the working class.

The Communist Party of Venezuela is successfully developing a policy of strengthening the class-based sections of the trade unions, increasing the levels of struggle, and combating the ills that have affected this vital sector of revolutionary advance.

The communist-affiliated National Struggle Front of the Working Class (FNLCT) has representation in most industries, including the crucial oil industry, through the Jesús Faría Movement of Class-Conscious Oil Workers (CCTP-JF), just one of numerous groups within the Unified Federation of Venezuelan Oil Workers (FUTPV), which represents more than 45,000 workers. (Jesus Faría was a communist leader of the Great Oil Strike of 1936, when the Venezuelan peasants and fisherman first began transforming themselves into an organised proletariat.)

At a recent aggregate meeting of the CCTP-JF, with more than sixty union leaders present, this public statement was issued (translated from Spanish):

Document To the workers of the Venezuelan oil industry

To the trade unionists who support the Bolivarian process of national liberation . . . receive a fraternal greeting in the name of the Jesús Faría Movement of Class-Conscious Oil Workers, an instrument in the decisive struggle in defence of the economic, social and political interests of those who work at the service of PDVSA [Venezuela's nationalised oil industry] and in general in our oil industry and related activities.

Our struggle is part of a wider fight of the working class and trade union movement to advance towards the conquest of power for the working class and working people from the city and the countryside. This struggle has the objectives of achieving the demolition of the bourgeois state, the overcoming of capitalist relations of production, and the construction of a society without oppression or exploitation . . .

After 20 months of delay, the electoral process of the Unified Federation of Venezuelan Oil Workers (FUTPV) has begun. Our grouping has evaluated the context and circumstances in which these elections are being held and have weighted up the confronting forces. This electoral process should serve to advance the process of accumulation of class-based forces, who are in counter-position to the declassed sectors and tendencies, particularly those who place themselves directly or indirectly at the service of the plans of foreign imperialist powers who are seeking to retake complete control of our natural riches, suppress our national sovereignty, and liquidate the gains achieved by our people . . .

Without a doubt Venezuela is living a heightened struggle of class interests in the context of a deep crisis of the world's capitalist system. On one side are the forces in favour of the strategy of neo-colonial domination by the USA and its allies in the European Union, who, with the participation of the great productive and commercialisation monopolies, submit our people to a sustained multifaceted aggression. Also there are the corrupt and opportunist tendencies who, from the state bureaucratic apparatus, attempt to find a "way out" of the crisis of the oil-dependent capitalist model by refounding the same model and favouring the power of Capital. However, on the other hand are our working people, who resist the onslaught of neo-fascism and the inconsistencies of opportunism and corruption; there are the class-conscious, popular, patriotic forces who struggle to save and deepen the revolutionary process

In this complicated context we will have, on the 30th August, the elections of the federation of unions of oil workers, and this is why our grouping calls on the oil workers and on those who identify themselves with the revolutionary process in the union movement to make all necessary effort to achieve—despite existing differences—the strongest possible unity based on class and anti-imperialist principles. We also call on them to present a truly unifying and revolutionary programme so as to impede the pro-imperialist right from winning over the national direction of the FUTPV but also so as to advance towards the democratisation and transformation of this federation and all oil unionism, to convert it into an authentic instrument at the service of the working class and the forces who are able to lead the struggles of all our working people to use their power to defeat social injustices.

We call the workers to fight for a FUTPV which genuinely defends and strengthens the rights of the oil workers; which, together with the base trade unions, combats outsourcing and precarious employment, which still exists; which opposes any attempts to reprivatise the industry; which makes sure that the contractual gains are fulfilled; which confronts the anti-worker and corrupt bosses; which struggles for dignified and adequate working conditions in all work areas and centres; which proposes a transformation of PDVSA with the protagonist participation of the workers so as to put it at the service of national sovereignty and social development.

In summary: we need a democratic and inclusive FUTPV, which acts with independence and autonomy from the private and public bosses. The CCTP-JF, on the eightieth anniversary of the Great Oil Strike of 1936, the first and highest anti-imperialist action taken by the Venezuelan people, led by the oil proletariat, calls on the workers to impede the oil union federation falling into the hands of those who work for US imperialism, the neo-liberal right, and those involved in the guarimbas [violent coup attempt of 2014]. We also propose the goal of placing class-conscious leaders in the national leadership of the FUTPV so as to deeply transform it and make it a real instrument of combat for labour conditions, for clear national liberation and the emancipation of the working class and working people in general.

For a union movement at the service of the working class and the people!

Neither fascism nor opportunism, consolidation of national sovereignty, and a deepening of the revolutionary process!

Féile na bhFlaitheartach, 2016

Liam and Tom O'Flaherty Weekend Festival

The Aran Islands will host, for the fourth time, Féile na bhFlaitheartach (the Liam and Tom O'Flaherty Weekend Festival) on 27 and 28 August. The theme of this year's Féile is *Fis 1916 / The Vision of 1916*.

The main speech at this year's festival will be given by the historian and former editor of the *Irish Press* Tim Pat Coogan. His talk, which will deal with the ideals of 1916, is titled "All changed, changed utterly."

Appropriately, the school will be opened by Fearghas Mac Lochlainn, a grandnephew of Patrick and William Pearse.

The O'Flaherty brothers were born and raised on Árainn (also called Inis Mór). Liam, the radical novelist and short-story writer, is without doubt the most famous, but Tom too made his literary mark in the short-story genre, although probably more so as a left-wing activist and polemicist in the United States. In this, the centenary year of the 1916 Rising, the festival will naturally concentrate on the events of 1916. However, it will be a commemoration with a difference, as it will examine the period and its aftermath through the radical lenses of Liam and Tom O'Flaherty. This will be achieved in a series of ways. For the first time ever, there will be a dramatic retelling in Irish of Liam O'Flaherty's last novel, *Insurrection*, which presents his view on the 1916 Rising. This will be performed by Máirín Mhic Lochlainn and Aisteoirí Chois Fharráige.

The First World War

Another first will be the public reading in English by Fionnghuala Ní Choncheanainn of a virtually unknown story of Liam's, "The Discarded Soldier," which was written at the request of his brother Tom, to be published in the daily paper of the Communist Party of the USA, the *Daily Worker*, in 1924. This short work can be traced directly to Liam's experiences as a soldier in the First World War, and it is more than appropriate to reproduce in this centenary year of the bloody and senseless Battle of the Somme. As the story's title indicates, the author realised that soldiers are seen as totally expendable, of little or no importance during and after war. This is a powerful piece of anti-war literature.

Tom O'Flaherty's short story "Na Líonta: Ar Chírín na Breachlainne Móire" (The nets: On the crest of a tidal surge) will be read by Máirín Mhic Lochlainn in the Garden of Remembrance next to the O'Flaherty homestead on the Saturday afternoon.

The Aran Islands connection and 1916

As with every year at Féile na bhFlaitheartach, links are made with the people of the three Aran Islands. This year is no exception. Indeed for the first time the Aran Drama Youth Group will take centre stage with its award-winning sketch "Comóradh Fir Chróga 1916" (Commemorating the brave men of 1916) on the Saturday evening.

A favourite section of the Féile takes place at 12:30 p.m. on the Sunday in Tí Joe Mac, Cill Rónáin. This year's theme is appropriately entitled "What was Aran like in 1916?" The broadcaster, film-maker and former county councillor Seosamh Ó Cuaig will pose the question: Where were Liam and Tom O'Flaherty in 1916?

This will be followed by Máirín Ní Chonghaile remembering Seán Ó Briain of Inis Meáin, who fought bravely in 1916. Then the memories of Brian Seoige from Inis Oírr, who also took part in the Rising, will be retold. And finally, Fionnghuala Ní Choncheanainn will read Liam O'Flaherty's story "The Discarded Soldier." As always, each of these themes will prompt a lively discussion.

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The discovery of Utopia

Jenny Farrell



Thomas Metscher
Thomas More, or the Discovery of Utopia (Dublin: Connolly Books, 2016)

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 was 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 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) 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).

The great famine conspiracy

Gabriel Rosenstock

THIS POEM, in Irish and English, is dedicated to Christopher and Mary Fogarty.

The Irish-American Christopher Fogarty believes that there is a conspiracy about the so-called Great Famine and that the word "genocide" is more appropriate.

He argues (in his words, based on meticulous research) that (1) "the land of Ireland was then 'owned' by landlords, nearly all English, in multi-thousand-acre estates; (2) that the output of Irish labour was usurped by those landlords, many of whom, as members of Britain's Houses of Lords and Commons, had the clout to use the British army to seize for their exclusive benefit that Irish output and have it escorted at gunpoint to Ireland's seaports for export, thus starving the people; and (3) that it took more than half of Britain's then empire army to perpetrate that genocide, 67 regiments of its total of 130, and they were used only when the 12,900-man constabulary and 37,000-man militia met too much resistance."

To the Famine Dead

(for Chris and Mary Fogarty)

Stars look down
but you cannot see their tears
your eye sockets empty
hunger has torn your vocal cords
you cannot speak
your mouths stuffed with earth
that once again is fruitful
stars look down
on golden corn
that never will be bright flour
or bread on your table

The berry on the holly
is trembling—
Redcoats hollering
left right left right left right left
thunder of livestock on its way to
England

Stars, look down
until the sun is nothing
but a black dwarf

Do na Mairbh ó Aimsir an Ghorta

(do Chris agus Mary Fogarty)

Féachann na réaltaí anuas
ach ní léir daoibhse a ndeora
folamh bhur meallta súl
réab an gorta bhur dtéada gutha
níl sibh in ann labhairt
bhur mbéal pulctha leis an gcré
atá torthúil arís
féachann na réaltaí anuas
ar an ngrán órga
nach meilfear go deo ina phlúr geal
ná ina arán ar bord

An chaor ar an gcuileann
ar crith—
clé deas clé deas clé deas clé
na gCótaí Dearga
trup na mbeithíoch ag imeacht go
Sasana

A réaltaí, féachaig' anuas
go dtí nach mbeidh sa ghrian
ach abhac dubh

