

Irish Marxist Review

Editor: John Molyneux

Deputy Editor: Dave O'Farrell

Website Editor: Memet Uludag

Editorial Board: Marnie Holborow, Sinéad Kennedy, Tina MacVeigh, Paul O'Brien, Peadar O'Grady

Cover Design: Daryl Southern

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SWP PO.Box 1648 Dublin 8

Phone: John Molyneux 085 735 6424

Email: IMR@swp.ie

Website: www.irishmarxistreview.net

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Editorial: Interesting Times

‘May you live in interesting times’ is a well known Chinese curse. These are certainly interesting times in Ireland at the moment. But for socialists not completely addicted to the quiet life these are also times with a lot to recommend them.

Yes it is true that with accelerating climate change and general ecological devastation, plus war, refugees and racism along with Trump and Clinton and looming global recession, the world shows every sign of going to hell in a handcart.

It is also true that the by now very familiar dysfunctional features of Irish society are if anything getting worse. The massive economic inequality with the rich getting ever richer just keeps on growing. The housing crisis intensifies, the numbers of homeless increase, and the Government’s attempts to address the issue merely shovel money into the pockets of developers and landlords. The hospital waiting times and waiting lists lengthen. The stink of corruption and malpractice in high places ranging from NAMA to An Garda Síochána grows stronger. All this we know.

At the same time there is much that is very positive. In the Republic the minority Fine Gael government, dependent as it is on support from the Independent Alliance and Fianna Fáil, is clearly very weak. This is seen repeatedly in their tendency to back down (as over waste collection charges) or kick for touch, as over water charges and the 8th Amendment. And their weakness is potentially the Left’s strength. For the government’s weakness is not just a matter of seats in the Dáil and parliamentary arithmetic – it reflects an underlying political shift to the left in Irish society, which has been developing over years. Ideologically Enda Kenny and co are on the defensive. And, in a somewhat different way, this is also the case in the North where a new generation has emerged fed up with Sinn Féin- DUP austerity, as the spectacular rise of People Before Profit has shown.

Most importantly we see a revival in the industrial struggle as all of the estab-

lishment’s talk of recovery has given rise, not surprisingly, to workers demanding their share. The LUAS workers led the way, followed by the bus workers and now, at the time of writing, ASTI teachers. Even the Gardai are getting in on the act.

The autumn has also seen major demonstrations. On September 15 about 30,000 took to the streets again over the water charges, on the strong demand for abolition not suspension, which showed that the networks built in the movement had not gone away. A week later another mass movement hit the streets with the magnificent March for Choice heralding a huge battle to repeal the 8th Amendment and for a woman’s right to choose and proving once again how much Ireland has changed. On October 19 there was a very large and militant student demo over fees. There is an obvious cross-over between the student movement and the movement for choice and if this conjuncture leads to an increased engagement of students with radical politics this will be very positive indeed.

The substantially increased parliamentary representation of the radical left is another big step forward. It gives serious socialists a voice in the national political debate in a way that is currently exceptional by international standards and so far our elected representatives have done an excellent job of rising to this challenge. Particularly important in this context has been the election of Gerry Carroll and Eamonn McCann as People Before Profit MLAs in Stomont. This gives visible expression to the idea of a socialist challenge to the two reactionary states, north and south.

Another major positive is the absence in Ireland of any significant fascist or racist right organisation, any equivalent of Golden Dawn, Jobbyk, Front National or UKIP. This does not, however, mean there is not a serious problem with vicious state racism on many fronts e.g. against refugees and asylum seekers and, of course, against Travellers. And inevitably this is reflected in a good deal of ‘popular’ racism at street level

though again it is not as yet comparable to the situation in many European countries including England. In this context the emergence of United Against Racism as an active anti-racist united front with its campaign to end the cruel Direct Provision system is very important.

One symptom of this general radicalisation has been the growth of People Before Profit on the ground, again north and south. A recent registration drive showed that it now has over 1100 members nationwide – a significant number in a country of only 6 million – and over 45 branches. What PBP is uniquely placed to do is to ‘join the dots between the different issues and campaigns and translate them into an all-Ireland challenge to the system. There is, naturally, no room for complacency here. This is not a given but an opportunity that needs to be seized.

This issue of *Irish Marxist Review* addresses a number of these features of the Irish political scene. In ‘The Politics of Abortion’ Melisa Halpin and Peadar O’Grady offer a detailed critique of the politics of restricting abortion rights and a robust statement of the case for a ‘Woman’s right to choose’. On foot of the Apple fiasco Kieran Allen provides a forensic dissection of

tax-haven Ireland showing how this is not a series of ‘special cases’ but the essential economic strategy of the Irish ruling class and also how it is set to unravel, turning Ireland into the weak link of European capitalism.

Marnie Holborow examines the notion that the EU can be reformed by a process of ‘critical engagement’ and finds it wanting. Alan Byrne sets Fianna Fáil’s current attempts at a comeback as the A-team of Irish capitalism in their historical context. Our interview with Gerry Carroll MLA provides a picture of how this modest young man has come to play such a significant role in the politics of the North.

On different fronts John Molyneux looks at how the concept of secularism has given rise to much confusion on the international left; Dave O’Farrell analyses the relationship between Marxism and science; Ivanka Avotna revisits the issue of socialism and the politics of disability; Damian Lawlor offers a snapshot of the history of Connolly’s Starry Plough; Shaun Doherty reviews Kieran Allen’s recently reprinted *The Politics of James Connolly* and Conor Kennelly welcomes Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*.

- John Molyneux

Equality, Democracy, Solidarity: The Politics of Abortion

Melisa Halpin and Peadar O'Grady

The protests in Ireland and Poland, along with international solidarity protests, against restricted access to abortion services, have revitalised the campaign for reproductive rights and women's rights and sent a challenge to conservative politicians that a new movement for women's rights is on the political agenda. More than 30,000 marched in Dublin on September 24th 2016 for the 5th annual 'Rise and Repeal March for Choice' organised by the *Abortion Rights Campaign* with solidarity protests in more than 20 cities around the world. This more than tripled the numbers from the year before, which itself had at least double the numbers from the year before that. More than 65 groups making up the *Coalition to Repeal the 8th*, including women's rights and reproductive rights groups, civil and health rights advocates, trade unions and left-wing political parties, actively supported and promoted the march, but the size of the crowd, its youth, enthusiasm and determination surpassed most people's expectations. Predominantly young and female, on a miserable rainy day, the marchers called for a repeal of the 8th Amendment, passed in 1983 before any of the marchers under 33 years old was even born and before any under 51 had been entitled to vote.

The March for Choice was a march demanding a right for women to have the choice to either decide to have an abortion or to decide to have a child. In the centenary year of the 1916 rebellion against imperial tyranny, the march organisers focused on getting rid of the effective block on abortion posed by the 8th Amendment inserted into the constitution in 1983, hence 'Rise and Repeal'. The variety of banners, slogans and chants on the march that day showed that something new was happening, with new perspectives, opinions and visions unappreciated and largely unexpressed in the mainstream press and media.

The next Saturday, October 4th, follow-

ing the Dublin march, a National 'Women's strike' in Poland across more than a hundred towns and cities involving hundreds of thousands of protesters resulted in the shock, landslide defeat of the proposed total ban on abortion there, which had already comfortably passed the first stage in Parliament. On October 6th the Polish Parliament voted 352 to 58 against the bill including 186 of the 227 right-wing, governing Law and Justice party, who had all solidly supported the bill before the protests. Abortion has been heavily restricted in Poland since the 1993 law restricted access for 99% of the women who wanted an abortion, with more than 100,000 travelling to countries such as neighbouring Germany for abortions or taking abortion pills illegally at home. The unexpected defeat of a majority government in Poland gave hope and confidence to activists in Ireland that concerted pressure on the smug but weak Fine Gael government and their Fianna Fáil and Independent backers, could yield victory. Also encouraging was the success over the past year of campaigns and marches for an extension of the UK 1967 Act to Northern Ireland, forcing court judgements on the injustice of restrictions on abortion there, while the ban on the abortion law stayed in place.

On October 7th the *Irish Times* reported: 'Irish Times poll: Majority want repeal of Eighth Amendment' and revealed that 74% were in favour of repeal with 18% against and 8% undecided.¹ The *Irish Times* didn't publish the figures excluding the undecideds, as they usually do to indicate likely voting patterns, even though these are easily calculated: 80.4% for repeal and 19.6% against, predicting a landslide victory for repeal if a referendum were held that day. If one looks at the overall trend for 2016 by including the two earlier *Irish Times* Ipsos/MRBI polls this year, on

¹Stephen Collins (2016a)

February 23rd² and July 8th,³ we see support of 64% (72%) rising to 67% (76%) and then 74% (80%) respectively for repeal (excluding undecideds in brackets) with opposition to repeal falling from 25% (28%) to 21% (24%) and then 18% (20%). Despite the evidence of overwhelming and rising support for repeal the paper emphasised that of the 74% in favour ‘only’ 19% favoured ‘UK-style Abortion’ and 55% ‘limited abortion’ and argued that:

However, if the introduction of a strictly limited regime is opposed by those who support the current prohibition and those who favour a liberal abortion regime band together a referendum could be a close-run thing.

How this ‘banding together’ might occur, the article, by columnist Stephen Collins (who has been, accurately, described as a ‘de facto government spokesman’⁴), did not say, but suggested a tactic of splitting the support for repeal on the basis of the planned level of restriction connected to the referendum. Neither did he explain why those who favour fewer restrictions on abortion did not in his opinion favour a ‘liberal regime’ when it had to be more liberal than the 99% restriction of the current 2013 Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act (PLDPA) and certainly more liberal than the effective total ban on legal abortion under the previous 1861 Offences Against the Person Act. Collins as the spokesperson for, or advisor to, the government, seemed to be suggesting how the democratic will of the people to repeal the 8th amendment might be defeated, or at least, practically diverted along lines of internecine conflict to give cover for ongoing delay and deferral by a weak government. However, the July poll in the *Irish Times* showed that Fine Gael voters were overwhelmingly in favour of repealing the 8th Amendment by a margin of 66% (73%) to 24% (27%). A tactic of deliberately complicating the repeal referendum in

order to draw out negotiations and deny a clear victory to the prochoice movement is of course clear, when the discussion of restriction could easily be had afterwards with the severely restrictive PLDPA in place, and this tactic of kicking the can down the road is a mirror image of the one taken with water charges. So when the right-wing politicians of Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil claim this is a ‘moral issue’ we can rest assured that there is no evidence of morality in their tactic of ducking the issue. This notion of uncertainty about winning a referendum, prevalent in the mainstream media, in the face of opinion poll evidence to the contrary, seemed to affect supporters of repeal also, with Labour’s then Minister, Aodhán O’Riordáin saying after the 2015 March for Choice:

If [the Referendum] happened in the morning, it would be lost and it would be trounced and it would be 20 years before we can return to it...But it’ll happen, I would imagine, quite late towards the end of the [next] government because we’re nowhere near winning it.⁵

Labour’s role in government in introducing the 2013 PLDPA legislation showed that supporters of liberalising abortion laws could tolerate criminalising legislation, with certification procedures involving up to 6 doctors to access abortion services, resulting in 99% of women being denied access to abortion in practice. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael continue to use the language of unreasonable ‘extremes’ and a reasonable ‘middle’ to muddy the waters of the debate. With 80% of the public likely to vote for repeal it is unclear who this excluded middle is. Unexplained also is why the prochoice ‘abortion on request’ position is extreme, as it accommodates both women who disagree and women who agree that abortion is the best option in their personal circumstances and is the position most in keeping with international standards of safe medical practice.

²Stephen collins (2016b)

³Pat Leahy (2016)

⁴Julien Mercille (2015)

⁵Sorcha Pollak, Carl O’Brien (2015)

The antichoice position is in fact a candidate for the ‘extreme’ label in that it advocates avoiding a democratic vote on an issue, for fear that the opinion of each pregnant woman might be taken into account instead of a minority conservative religious and right-wing political ideology. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are happy to continue to pander to the conservative antichoice lobby while pretending to be sympathetic to improving access to abortion and they will do whatever they can to obscure the debate and delay any decision so that the most restrictive possible outcome is obtained. It becomes important then to put pressure on the government to hold a referendum without preconditions and to put pressure on those who claim to support the Repeal the 8th campaign to support bills or motions to put the 8th Amendment to a referendum vote. We need more democracy to win more equality.

Why Repeal the 8th?

The right to choose whether or when to have a child is a right that has been greatly advanced and facilitated by advances in technology: barrier methods such as condoms or coils, the oral contraceptive pill, the morning after pill, the abortion pill and various early and late surgical methods. ‘As early as possible, as late as necessary’ is a rule that applies to the full spectrum of forms of birth control including abortion. In all other areas of healthcare access to treatment is ethically restricted by the consent only of the person undergoing the treatment, unless their capacity to do so was in question.

The lack of equality in this denial of women’s capacity to consent is not covered by any plausible suggestion as to who should decide instead. Restricting access to birth control, including abortion, tends towards more abortions in general and later abortions in particular. As with any other treatments in healthcare, only the person receiving the treatment should make the final decision and give consent and for birth control that is the woman who wants to avoid pregnancy or the woman who is pregnant and deciding if she wants to give birth. The

only man who should have the final say in an abortion decision is a pregnant transgender man, and that view is strongly and widely supported in the new movement.

Abortion is a healthcare issue, restriction of abortion is a political issue and not an abstract ethical one. The control of birth control is a political issue. Controlling women’s decisions about birth control means controlling an intimate detail of their lives, possibly the most intimate. Splitting the population as a whole and the working class in particular is a well-worn strategy of the ruling class of politicians, clergy, senior civil servants and big business. While the ruling class are increasingly in favour of birth control they give up control of it only with a struggle. That struggle has resulted in women’s rights being advanced in many countries, but, while often acknowledged in court rulings or legislative changes, change has always been won by mass movements on the streets. The Roe Vs Wade ruling in the US and the 1967 Abortion Act in the UK were victories recorded in official documents, but that resulted from decades of struggle for sex education, contraception and abortion alongside fights on a wide range of fronts. The ‘Liberation’ movements of the 1960s in the US were inspired by the black civil rights and antiwar movements and spread questions about legitimate authority and human rights to the areas of women’s rights, gay rights and the rights of disabled people. Advances in civil liberties were not handed down gently from a benign, benevolent ruling class but had to be fought for over decades and with political organisation and development, coordination and disagreement, but ultimately, only by struggle.

In Ireland, fearing the spread of these advances and the demise of the catholic church’s stranglehold from the 1960s onwards, with the legalisation of contraception and moves to legalise divorce, conservatives planned to take a stand on abortion by inserting a clause into the constitution that would block efforts to improve access to abortion. In 1982 Fianna Fáil, under Charles Haughey, passed a bill in the Dáil with a wording for a new amendment

to the constitution. Fine Gael, under Garret Fitzgerald, suggested an even more restrictive wording that would ensure a continuing absolute ban on abortion, similar to the recent Polish proposal, but this was defeated. Fianna Fáil's wording for the 8th Amendment would add a new subsection to Article 40 section 3 of the Irish constitution. The new Article 40.3.3 stated:

The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.

The leaders of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour, without consulting their party members, agreed the wording, and the subsequent Referendum in 1983 was passed by a two-to-one majority. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael hid behind the conservative Catholic hierarchy and the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC) while the forces of the Left campaigned as the Anti-Amendment Campaign. The pattern of a coalition between conservative nationalists in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael with the Catholic church hierarchy was heavily damaged by the scandals of corruption in the building and meat industries that rocked Fianna Fáil and the scandals of institutional abuse in residential homes and the covering up and hiding of paedophile priests that seriously undermined, including for previously loyal ordinary churchgoers, any notion of moral integrity, especially in the area of sexual morality, in the Catholic hierarchy. Anti-choice groups such as the Life or Iona institutes increasingly try to take the place of the discredited hierarchy but lack the reach of the traditional church or the wealth and fundamentalist base of their US counterparts. Their use in deflecting the debate from the social and political issues of women's rights and their role in giving cover to the mainstream right of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael is still relevant. Calling Fianna Fáil and Fine

Gael directly to account can help to sideline these minority organisations and more directly address the issues of travel and abortion pill use. Identified barriers to travel include being too young too sick or disabled, too poor or impeded by detention in prison or the direct provision system. Barriers to using the pill are largely the uncertainty of support and follow up by the health service and the threat of arrest and imprisonment under the draconian PLDPA.

Opposition by church hierarchies and Antichoice groups to abortion has not been confined to the Catholic church nor has it been consistent in history, changing particularly in the 19th century. For example, the 1861 Act which was the relevant law in Ireland until 2013, was passed in a British Parliament where the predominant religion was not Catholic but overwhelmingly Protestant. Furthermore, the Catholic Church teaching was not consistent over time either. As Patsy McGarry reported:

Up to [1869] Catholic teaching was that no homicide was involved if abortion took place before the foetus was infused with a soul, known as 'ensoulment'...In 1591, Pope Gregory XIV determined it took place at 166 days of pregnancy, almost 24 weeks.⁶

The change allowed the Catholic church support laws that criminalised abortion as murder without having to draw distinctions about term limits that would have been difficult to implement at the time. The modern arguments about abortion as murder and the need for term limits or restrictions on selective abortions deny both the lack of consistency in church teaching but also the failure to ethically support having an alternative source of decision-making to the woman, that is, why even a consistent moral view of a church institution should be deemed superior to the moral view of the actual woman involved.

⁶Patsy McGarry (2013)

Term limits

Abortion, particularly early abortion, is one of the most common and safest procedures in medicine. As modern societies increasingly reject the dogmatic and inconsistent teachings of religion that abortion is the same as murder, opponents of a woman's right to choose have changed tack and tried to argue that abortion is dangerous to the woman concerned. False claims of greater risks to life or health than the alternative choice of giving birth have been repeatedly debunked.⁷ No greater risk of mental or physical health problems is taken by choosing an abortion than by choosing to continue a pregnancy and the antichoice movement just cannot get any health experts to support them outside of antichoice doctors or organisations. The other more traditional antichoice approach is to focus on the foetus, to equate the foetus to a baby or child by using the prefix 'unborn' and to emphasise a foetus as an independent entity with independent rights. As pregnancy proceeds and the foetus develops, it attains features increasingly resembling a full-grown foetus, which if portrayed, especially visually, separately from the woman carrying it, as antichoice portrayals usually do, seems to support the notion of an independent human person that might have rights of its own. Many prochoice supporters, unfamiliar with later abortions, do not know how common or rare later abortions are, and can also easily forget the key factor in access to abortion: who decides? The reality is that in a developed health service with well-developed abortion services such as in the UK, abortions become rarer as pregnancy advances. The vast majority of abortions, in countries with developed health services, are accessed early. In round figures: 90% happen before 12 weeks gestation, more than 99% are carried out before 20 weeks and more than 99.9% are carried out before 24 weeks. So, fewer than 1 in 1,000 abortions are carried out after 24 weeks and abortions after 28 weeks are almost unheard of.

One antichoice argument is that a less re-

strictive abortion regime without term limits would increase the number of later abortions, but in fact, restricting access to early abortion is an identified cause of increasing the number of later abortions because of the delays caused by restrictive practices. Restrictions including term limits will increase later abortions not decrease them, especially when concessions lead to encouraging anti-choice legal and legislative measures to bring about even more obstacles to early access rather than fewer, all often in the name of better care for women.

The truism that abortions should be carried out 'as early as possible, as late as necessary' is a starting point rather than a conclusion of a consideration of later abortions. In general, 'earliest is best' seems an overarching general rule on its own but it is not a practical one for several reasons. The earliest avoidance of unwanted pregnancy is either through abstinence, the rhythm method or the varying forms of barrier and pharmacological contraception and the 'morning after pill'. However, choosing between these methods depends firstly on being informed about how they work, their safety and effectiveness, but also in having access to them. We also have to take into account the relative success of each method, including our own human failings in correct use or remembering to use them in a timely way, as well as the brutal circumstances of rape, where the need for contraception is not foreseeable. The failings at each level is why unwanted pregnancies will always occur and abortion will always be required as an important and valuable method of birth control.

However, the use of early alternatives to later abortion (ie the morning after pill in the first 5 days of pregnancy, safer medical and surgical abortion techniques earlier in pregnancy) are also often delayed and missed due to lack of availability; delayed diagnosis of pregnancy or fetal anomaly; or a change in a pregnant woman's circumstances involving social, physical or mental health factors. One study concludes:

Bans on abortion after 20 weeks will disproportionately af-

⁷E. G. Raymond and D. A. Grimes (2012)

⁸Diana Foster (December 2013)

fect young women and women with limited financial resources.⁸

While some of these delays are avoidable by better information and better access to health services, particularly for young, poor or otherwise vulnerable women, there are nevertheless several situations which will continue to arise late in pregnancy. The late diagnosis of pregnancy or of fetal anomalies as well as significant changes in social or health status are such examples. The contradictions of the antichoice focus on later abortions are that the restriction of access to abortion increases the number of avoidable late abortions and that this only causes the imposition of more suffering on an already distressed woman. It is a fact that abortion is more common, as well as later and more complicated, where access to abortion is restricted. Ireland is a good example of this, where women present for abortions later, due to delays in accessing the information, money and supports necessary to travel abroad or to obtain an abortion pill, and these women suffer more unnecessary complications as a result. Women whose pregnancy is diagnosed with a fetal anomaly often experience delays in diagnosis because of restricted access to proper maternity and reproductive health services. It is for this reason that antichoice arguments about viability, fetal pain and the unpleasant nature of late abortion are at the very least hypocritical, given their responsibility for increasing their number. The argument around ‘viability’ also ignores the consequences of severe disability, not just the likelihood of survival, that even a prospective parent has to struggle to consider after a spontaneous miscarriage. The arguments for alternatives of adoption, perinatal hospices or bringing up the child following delivery cannot be forced on women but in any case these suggestions ring hollow, coming as they usually do from right-wing political organisations, like Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, that are most associated with systematic cuts in health, welfare and childcare services.

While many factors can influence a woman’s decision whether or not to have an

abortion, there is nothing about the circumstances of late abortion that supports the notion that imposing a restriction on it will improve the situation in terms of numbers or outcomes. The opposite is the case. The argument for limits is aimed ever downward with, for most antichoice activists, the aim being to ban all abortions, and for many of them to ban sex education, artificial contraception and the morning after pill too.

The young rape victim in the Y case who was forced to give birth to an extremely premature infant at very high risk of disability, by caesarean section without her consent, when she had consented to an abortion at 8 weeks of pregnancy, is both a clear example of how restricting access to abortion, in this case for a young, poor, migrant, rape victim, can lead to a later abortion, but also, how not honoring the decision of the woman who is pregnant, at any stage of pregnancy, can lead to a level of barbarity that is truly shameful.⁹

Selective Abortion

The focus on women’s reasons for having an abortion often ignores the fact that not wanting to be pregnant is often based on many factors and not just one. Forcing women to justify their decision is unique to abortion as a medical treatment. In her book: *The Moral Case for Abortion*, an excellent review of the arguments around abortion care, Ann Furedi comments:

Any laws and regulations that insist on grounds, or specific reasons, that limit when a woman can choose abortion, or when a doctor can perform one, underscore that a woman’s decision is not sufficient. And when mandatory regulations insist on a certain level of medical care, it implies that abortion is risky, and that abortion doctors cannot be trusted to base the level of care on their knowledge and ethics. No special laws or regulations govern when a doctor can repair

⁹See Kitty Holland (2014) for a timeline of this travesty of healthcare

a hernia, or set a fractured arm; the existence of special laws for abortion begs the question: ‘why is abortion different?’¹⁰

As Furedi outlines this situation of requiring a justification for a decision to consent to treatment, only occurs in the context of restrictive legislation which allows abortion only when an eligible reason for it has been certified by a professional, usually a doctor.

However, the use of information about the foetus regarding gender or impairments, from scans or blood tests, to inform a decision to have an abortion, has led to concerns that abortion access should be restricted in these cases. Gender disparities in countries such as China have led to calls to ban selective abortion on gender grounds as it is usually female fetuses that are selected for abortion. It is worth noting that practices such as abandoning female infants and infanticide mean that restricting selective abortion, as with restricting abortion generally, will not necessarily reduce the identified problem, in this case gender prejudice or sexism. It is also the case that a state policy of putting pressure on parents through a system of fines for having more than one child, is a system that is antichoice and should also be the focus of reform.

Similarly, for fetal anomalies, there is a concern that having an abortion, on the basis that a foetus has a physical anomaly, is disrespectful to disabled people and an example of eugenics, that is, a discredited social policy, aiming to improve the health of a human population by selective breeding and, at its extreme, the killing of disabled people. Central to eugenic ideas is a denial of the social causation of poverty and disability where instead individuals and their physical make-up are blamed, in particular their genetics and ethnicity, and targeted for eradication, that is, it is an antichoice philosophy.

Even though non-directive counselling should prevail in abortion services, disability is often portrayed as something equivalent to

the reported impairment, rather than as the result of social discrimination against people with impairments. There are also pressures on a pregnant woman to consider the cost of childcare and any additional or longer-term commitments to care that should be socially supported but are not. A woman deciding to have an abortion in this context is not the same as a deliberate, antichoice social policy of reducing the birth rate of infants with congenital impairments and in particular is not equivalent to eugenic policies of forced contraception, forced sterilisation or forced euthanasia where the person involved does not consent and constitutes serious assault and murder respectively. Many people, following genetic counselling, whose family members suffer from an inheritable condition, deliberately restrict their family, by contraception and abortion, to avoid having more affected children. This is not eugenics and should not be an argument against giving the information from medical tests or that the parent does not value the lives of their affected family members.

Antichoice social policies including eugenics need to be sharply distinguished from people using birth control methods including abortion to avoid giving birth to children with impairments. What selective abortion only demonstrates is that many people do not believe that a foetus is equivalent to a human being and that abortion is not equivalent to murder. Restricting access will not improve the situation for women, disabled or otherwise. As one study noted:

The literature indicates that the reproductive rights of disabled women are constrained by: the assumption that disabled women are asexual; lack of reproductive health care, contraception, and sexuality information; and, social resistance to reproduction and mothering among disabled women. Disabled women are at risk for a range of undesirable outcomes, including coercive sterilization, abortion or loss of child custody.¹¹

¹⁰Ann Furedi (2016), Kindle Location 1321-1325

¹¹Virginia Kallianes and Phyllis Rubinfeld (2010)

Disabled women should have the right like any other woman to choose when or whether to give birth, including in the case of a fetus with an identified impairment, without being coerced either to give birth or to have an abortion. In selective abortion, resistance to sexism and disability prejudice will not be advanced by removing the right of a woman to access information about her pregnancy and make an informed decision about whether to give birth or have an abortion. It is most poignant to suggest that the way to prevent women being pressured to adhere to a particular social prejudice is to force them to adhere to a different one. Resolving discrimination against women or disabled people will not be advanced by restricting a woman's right to choose. As with later abortions it is the same right-wing politicians who slash budgets for disability, mental health, maternity, childcare or schools who will pretend to be interested in the welfare of women or disabled people when it comes to restricting access to abortion.

Legislation and the Citizens' Assembly

It follows from the argument for a 'Woman's Right to Choose' that restrictive laws are unjustified morally and politically. They are also unjustified medically as causing harm through delay and diversion to unsafe services to avoid criminalisation. Medical consensus up to World Health Organisation level is that abortion is a safe procedure carrying less risk than childbirth and that restricting abortion leads to illegal, unsafe abortion and causes 5,000 deaths and 5 million disabilities globally on an annual basis.¹² The view that the foetus is a separate 'patient' requiring separate arrangements for consent is not a medical view but a political and religious one. Since the UK 1967 Act and the 1992 amendments to the Irish Constitution on information and travel, the risks of harm in Ireland from restrictive laws have been hugely reduced and related to those women unable to travel for reasons including

poverty, age, health, disability or detention.

Canada stands as possibly the only country that has removed abortion from the criminal law, because it was deemed an unconstitutional restriction on civil liberty. Legislation that starts by criminalising abortion and then allowing exceptions is restrictive legislation where the proportion of abortions carried out legally can range between: less than one percent (Ireland), one to two percent (Poland) to almost 100% (UK). This approach both medicalises, stigmatises and restricts access to abortion services.¹³

This means that the presumption that abortion is a social good and a valuable part of health care and birth control is precluded, and women have to justify their case by giving reasons that fit the acceptable medical criteria. When the level of restriction is high, as in Ireland this means that 'exceptions' such as Fatal Fetal Abnormality (FFA), rape or incest will have to be 'proven' in order to be 'certified' with unspeakable traumatic consequences, not to speak of unnecessary delays for the women involved. In this context the question of 'which women will be denied access?' is worth asking. Those excluded will include those whose experience meets the criteria but who do not have the evidence to prove it? Those women who decide early, in the first 12 weeks to have an abortion because they are not in a position to have a child for various reasons, are particularly vulnerable. Restrictions such as only allowing FFA or rape would exclude the vast majority of these women, as would 'risk to health' as a criterion of eligibility. As we have seen abortions in the first 12 weeks constitute the vast majority of abortions (over 90% in the UK an ever increasing majority of which involve the use of the abortion pills). This majority will either be excluded and diverted elsewhere, or have to rely on an argument of the 'mental health risks' of having an unwanted pregnancy, of being forced to give birth. Most will probably avoid the humiliation and delay and go online to access abortion pills and carry out their abortion at home supported by helplines and their GP or Emergency De-

¹²World Health organisation (2016)

¹³Ann Furedi (2016), *Kindle Locations 1287-1290*

partment in the rare event of complications requiring medical assistance. This is currently a powerful trend and likely to continue and intensify. Any current legislation restricting access, such as the PLDPA 2013 and Regulation of Information Act 1995, need to be repealed and abortion included with all other forms of healthcare. Criminal sanctions already exist for healthcare procedures, for example for severe negligence, and recourse to civil law in terms of loss or damage short of criminal negligence. Relevant regulations already exist for healthcare such as arrangements for conscientious objection or the ability to sanction doctors for poor practice and only require to have abortion included. The only form of justifiable legislation is legislation to ensure funding of services so access is real. This does not necessarily require specific criminal sanctions and could be part of a much needed campaign to improve access to healthcare generally such as NHS-style legislation with abortion specifically included to avoid discrimination.

However, the often missing political context of legislation is the pressure on right-wing political forces to balance their desire to control women and appease their social conservative supporters with conceding rights to abortion under increasing public pressure. The second contextual issue is the pressure on left-wing political forces to do the same. There is a responsibility on parties claiming a left political perspective, such as Sinn Féin, to move on from an apologetic and often obstructive stance on abortion to promoting and developing a Prochoice position.

Talk of ‘better access’ or ‘medical complexity’ in theory can give cover to restriction in practice and hide political ambiguity and cowardice. There is an important difference between compromise and collaboration. Preparing legislation that is more restrictive than their party’s policy, and without membership support, is precisely what the Labour Party has done in preparation for the repeal of the 8th Amendment, with restrictions that are unsupportable, and allowances such as in the case of rape, that are practically unimplementable. Further con-

sideration of the lack of medical or legislative justification of an alternative to a ‘Woman’s Right to Choose’, through a Citizens’ Assembly or by other means, serves only to delay taking action to decriminalise abortion and improve access, but also serves to give cover to politicians who do not wish to confront the unjustifiable control of women’s decisions about their own bodies or to address the inadequacy of healthcare provision of abortion, or indeed access to good health and welfare services generally.

Conclusion: Solidarity

As we have seen in this discussion of the political issues around abortion, the ongoing criminalisation of abortion is not justified in terms of safety, healthcare, civil liberty or any consistent morality. Restriction of access to abortion is a political issue that only facilitates unjustifiable social control. A prochoice position of a ‘Woman’s Right to Choose’ respects the decision of any individual to decide whether to have an abortion or not and should raise also the political issue of access to services that facilitate either decision. The choice of abortion requires access to a range of reproductive health services including access to abortion, while the choice to have a baby requires a range of maternal and child health and welfare services that are sorely inadequate in Ireland today. The antichoice position respects neither position and its political advocates in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have a track record in opposing health and welfare services that would facilitate either choice. Katha Pollitt in her book *Pro* shows the antichoice position of the US right-wing Republican Party, like Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil here, is riven with hypocrisy:

The party that claims to care about babies cuts government programs that benefit pregnant women, infants, and children, including the seriously sick and disabled children they want to force women to bear. The party that claims people don’t need government to tell them

how to live thinks women cannot be trusted with the decision of whether or not to continue a pregnancy. And of course, the party that claims to care about 'life' is tightly allied with the National Rifle Association. Guns don't kill people, pregnant women kill people.¹⁴

The fantastic victory of the Marriage Equality referendum in 2015 signalled a major change in social attitudes to sex and sexuality in Ireland, and many of those who were part of that campaign will also support a 'Woman's Right to Choose' and the repeal of the 8th Amendment and other restrictive legislation. However support for the fundamental importance of sexual freedom evident in LGBTQI rights does not automatically transfer to support for a 'Woman's Right to Choose'. While the issue of the freedom to decide when and whether to engage in sexual relations certainly raises the issue of the right to decide when or whether to have a child resulting from sexual relations, the centrality of the control of women and the class divisions between women in terms of access to birth control and public services mean a more fundamental challenge to the capitalist system. The economic advantages of birth control, for a capitalist class of large scale employers who require more women in the workplace with smaller families and planned births, is offset by the political loss of control entailed in allowing the freedom of a 'Woman's Right to Choose' as well as the prospect of encouraging further political demands and struggles for better health and welfare services.

The politics of abortion then have to do with differing political strategies to support or oppose women's oppression, class oppression and political control under capitalism. The socialist tactic of the United Front, will involve solidarity, uniting on common ground with other forces on the left such as women's groups, trade unions, health and civil liberty advocates as well as other pro-choice forces, to fight for greater personal freedom and access to services. A socialist strategy will also draw on the wider lessons of the fight against capitalism and its systematic exploitation and oppression of the vast majority, and the power of working class solidarity, to challenge the system as a whole:

Too often activists on the left make the mistake of thinking that you must choose between a focus on fighting oppression or ignoring oppression because it divides workers, and instead focusing on questions of class. However, the only way to effectively challenge oppression, and ultimately to destroy it, is to link the struggle against oppression with the struggle against capitalism. That is why Marxists argue that the struggle for women's liberation is not separated out from the wider struggle against the capitalism system. It is also why it is vital that we make our struggles reflect women's aspirations and demands and make these demands part of the wider struggle against capitalism.¹⁵

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¹⁴Katha Pollitt (2014), p.133

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Into the limelight: tax haven Ireland

Kieran Allen

The political establishment are appealing against the EU Commission's ruling that Apple should pay €13 billion to Irish taxpayers - plus interest that will amount to between an extra €5 and €6 billion. They cite the 'reputational damage' that might follow acceptance of such a ruling. There was not, however, a similar level of concern when the UN found that Ireland's ban on abortion in the case of fatal foetal abnormality constituted 'cruel, inhuman and degrading' treatment.¹ The linking of the interest of the Irish state to those of a global corporation is only an accentuation of an already established pattern. The state has a long established pattern of handing over its natural resources to foreign multi-nationals. It scores remarkably well on the Heritage Foundation's, 'Freedom Index'. It comes in eighth place in the world's wish list for neoliberal wonderlands.²

How do we explain this subservience to multi-nationals? Or to put it differently, why is there such a gulf between the outlook of the 26 county political elite and the leaders of a rebellion they claim gave rise to their state?

Historically, the central project of the Irish state was promoting Griffith's notion of a Gaelic Manchester. The founder of Sinn Féin was a bigot and an opponent of militant trade unionism. He was a virulent opponent of British rule but his primary aim was to create an Irish capitalist republic. He argued that it was 'not capitalism but the abuse of capitalism that oppresses labour'³ and this abuse came primarily from English influence. Griffith's 'Gaelic Manchester', however, never saw the light of day. Instead what emerged was a puny, weakened version of capitalism. Despite dramatic shifts in strategy, the Southern elite proved unable to develop a sustainable model of accumulation that was not punctuated by long crises. Instead, their society swung between debt fu-

elled booms and painful economic crashes. One indication of their relative failure was the manner in which Ireland became a storehouse for emigration. There was a decline in net outward migration in only one period before the Celtic Tiger, in the years between 1971-1979. This phase was, however, marked by a re-emergence of economic recessions in the global economy rather than any spectacular economic advance in Ireland. Since the economic crash of 2008, emigration has returned to very high levels with about 80,000 people leaving Ireland on an annual basis. It is a testimony to the continuing weakness of Irish capitalism. Four main phases in the development of Irish capitalism can be described.

Phase 1: 1922- 1932 The Neo-Colonial Phase

The first strategy of the political elite who took control after the Civil War was to set Ireland up as a neo-colony of Britain. Although Cumann na nGaedheal originated from a Sinn Féin movement that had advocated protectionism, this policy was immediately dropped on assuming power. Instead Southern Ireland became a food producer for the UK market, mainly exporting primary produce. Britain took 92% of all Free State exports and these were overwhelming composed of live cattle exports. The tiny manufacturing sector was concentrated in areas of low added value and was naturally protected. Only 0.7% of the country's labour force was involved in manufacturing goods for exports. At this stage, Ireland was accurately described by De Valera as an 'out-garden' of Britain.⁴ Only the larger farmers who were the main support base for Cumann na nGaedheal stood to benefit from the continuation of this agro-export model. But even this class had limited resources and never approached the power wielded by the

¹UN says Ireland's abortion ban 'cruel, inhuman or degrading' *Irish Times* 9 June 2016

²<http://www.heritage.org/index/pdf/2016/press-releases/THF-2016-Index-Overview.pdf>

³P. Yeates, *Lockout: Dublin 1913*, Dublin Gill and Macmillan 2000 p.354

⁴Dáil Debates, Vol 25, Col. 478, 12 July 1928

latifundia owners in Latin America.

Phase 2: 1932 -1958 The Protectionist Phase

The economic crash of 1929 and the arrival to governmental office of the Fianna Fáil radicals produced a major switch in strategy. Fianna Fáil wanted a return to Arthur Griffith's original model of building up Irish industry behind protectionist barriers. They moved quickly to increase tariffs on imported goods from 9% in 1931 to 35% by 1938. The Economic War with Britain that ensued put the big farmers at a considerable disadvantage but their social weakness meant that they could not mount a significant challenge to Fianna Fáil - although they gave considerable backing to the Blueshirt fascist movement. Sometimes Fianna Fáil's project has been presented as a return to romantic traditionalism - as an effort to turn Ireland into an island of 'comely maiden's dancing at the cross roads'. However, this misses the ambiguities of nationalism. Behind the use of a traditionalist rhetoric lay a determined effort to modernise Ireland and break from a neo-colonial model. Fianna Fáil's early base amongst workers arose from their success in pulling together a coalition of native capitalists and workers to challenge the agro-export model.

Initially, the strategy showed limited signs of success. Industrial employment rose from 170,000 in 1931 to 227,000 in 1951. The sectoral composition of manufacturing broadened to include clothing, footwear, metals and engineering - even if the size of workplaces remained relatively small. Industry was, however, almost totally geared to a small domestic market and by 1960 only 1.4% of the total labour force was employed in manufacturing exports.⁵ The limited size of domestic market meant that the protectionist strategy eventually ran aground. One indicator of the failure was the fact that a total of 440,000 people left the country during the 1950s—one in seven of the entire population. Another change of direction was required.

Phase 3: 1958 -2001 Foreign Direct Investment for industry

The third phase may be characterised as using Foreign Direct Investment to build an industrial base. In 1958, the Irish state did an about turn and relaxed the requirement for majority Irish share ownership of companies. Two other landmarks followed to allow for a new orientation to export led development. In 1965, an Anglo-Ireland Free Trade Agreement area was concluded and in 1973 Ireland joined the European Economic Community. A range of incentives were put in place to attract foreign direct investment in order to build an industrial base. Multi-national companies were offered capital grants of up to two-thirds of the cost of fixed assets along with labour training grants and relief from corporation tax on profits derived from exports. It was thought that the influx of foreign investment would create a dynamic economy and so help expand indigenous Irish capital.

At first the policy appeared to yield impressive results. 70% of additional employment created up to 1974 was in foreign firms. In 1960 exports of merchandise contributed to 27% of GDP but this figure rose to 75% in 2000. At its high point in 1980, manufacturing accounted for 248,600 jobs, nearly a quarter of the working population. From an Irish capitalist viewpoint, the drive to turn Ireland into a platform which US and British companies used for export was beneficial. It did not saturate the home market with cheaper goods or cause a crowding out of opportunities for Irish firms. Instead, new spaces were created for servicing an expanding economy and, to a much lesser extent, for some linkages with the multi-national sector.

However, by 1982, an official Telesis report warned that there was an over reliance on foreign industry as Irish capitalism was not expanding as quickly as they liked. They called for a reduction in the level of grants offered to foreign firms and greater support for indigenous industry. They pointed out that the foreign firms tended to operate branch plans with research and development being

⁵E. O Malley, *Industry and Economic Development*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989 p.68

conducted elsewhere. They concluded that

Foreign-owned industrial operations in Ireland with few exceptions do not embody the key competitive activities of the businesses in which they participate, do not employ significant numbers of skilled workers; and are not significantly integrated into traded and skilled sub-supply industries in Ireland⁶

This report was a harbinger of the problems ahead. The recessions of the 1980s led to a sharp reduction in foreign investment and a new wave of mass emigration begun. The IDA responded by offering even greater incentives to flagship companies such as Intel in the hope of creating new clusters of foreign capital. But even though this strategy, appeared to work for a period, the electronics industry - which was a particular IDA target- eventually began to migrate to Eastern Europe where even cheaper labour was available.

The Irish elite, however, got lucky due to developments at EU level over which they had little influence. In 1987, EU member states signed the Single European Act and the process of full integration was completed by 1992. This in turn put pressure on US companies who wanted a platform for entry into that market to find a location inside the EU. Ireland's offer of generous grants and tax incentives combined with a good supply of an educated, relatively cheap and an English speaking workforce made it a favoured destination. The structural weakness of using FDI to create an industrial base which was visible in the 1980s disappeared again from view. Instead a new spurt of US investment laid the basis for the first phase of the Celtic Tiger. By 1998, over 26 percent of all greenfield sites set up by US companies in the EU were located in Ireland. The amount of US capital deployed per worker was a staggering seven times the EU average.

However, this late spurt was an anomaly because the third phase of seeking to con-

struct an Irish industrial base ended in failure. In 2001 there were 251,000 workers employed in manufacturing but today this has declined to 183,190, the lowest number in recent decades. A number of factors were involved here. There was a global shift of investment to developing countries. By 2015, for example, 55 percent of global FDI was going to developing economies whereas previously it represented less than a third.⁷ Second, US investment decreased substantially after the 2001-2 downturn as corporations began to hoard cash or move towards financial speculation. Thirdly, the crash of 2008 further accelerated the flight of foreign capital from industry. Approximately 50,000 jobs were lost in the three years since the crash. Moreover despite fifty years of a strategy designed to stimulate indigenous industry, Irish industrial capital remained small, extremely weak and geared to the more naturally protected home markets. Only 3% of Irish SMEs (small and medium size firms with up to 249 employees) are active in manufacturing, whereas the equivalent figure for the EU is 10%. 83% of manufacturing enterprises employed less than 10 people and 95% employed less than 50 people. These were essentially the Irish firms.

Tax haven capitalism

Phase 4: 2001 - present, Tax Haven Capitalism

It might be suggested that the failure to build an industrial base did not matter because Ireland, like the rest of Europe, was becoming a service economy. In terms of its statistical profile, Ireland does not differ markedly from Britain or Denmark in having 11% of the workforce employed in manufacturing. However this ignores the specific character of the service economy that developed in Ireland.

At the core of this economy was a tax shelter for global corporations. In simple terms, the country was marketed as a centre for tax dodging. The key sectors of this economy relied on tax breaks and around these was built a low level service economy.

⁶NESC, *A Review of Industrial Policy* (Tesis Report) Dublin: NESC, 1982 p.115

⁷UNCTAD, *World Investment Report* 2015, Geneva, UN Publication, 2015 p.2

Despite much vaunted discussion on how Ireland was moving up the value chain, the services sector was mainly characterised by low productivity levels, small enterprises and was geared to a domestic economy. There are two main reasons why the Irish elite moved towards creating a tax haven.

First, the long history of weakness in Irish capitalism meant that the state was seen as a direct helper for individual businesses. Marx defined the capitalist state as the 'committee for managing the common affairs' of the rich and by this he meant that one of its functions was to forge a common strategy for competing elite actors. The Irish state performed this function but it was also viewed as a generous supporter for individual companies. The state could be prevailed upon to bend rules and to do special favours for particular business interests. The extraordinary links between the Goodman group of companies and the Irish political elite is one example. This company was picked as a winner by the Irish state and received huge amount of grants and preferential access to foreign markets. When it went bankrupt, the Dáil was re-called to help rescue it. The manner in which the state rescued the privately owned Allied Irish Bank after one of its subsidiaries, the Insurance Corporation of Ireland, lost €400 million is another example. In brief, the weakness of Irish capitalism helped to create a 'frictionless relationship' between the political and corporate elites.

Second, this relationship reached a new intensity under the leadership of Charles Haughey. Haughey's regime was characterised by blatant corruption connected to tax dodging. A cabal of business people contributed funds to support his extravagant lifestyle from an offshore tax account known as the Ansbacher account. Tax dodging was already common practice amongst the wealthy as this account was opened in 1971 and involved the 'great and good' of Irish society. The leading organiser of the account was Haughey's bagman, Des Traynor, who was the chairperson of Ireland largest company, CRH. The main reason wealthy people 'invested' in Haughey was to gain further tax favours from the state. The Dunne fam-

ily, for example, contributed to the Haughey benevolent fund in the hope that the trust status of the firm - which was due for renewal - would stay in place.

By the mid 1980s, these practices led to a re-structuring of Irish capitalism around three main pillars which relied on tax dodging. These were financial services; the multinational export sector; the property speculation. The prospect of building an industrial base simply disappeared. A fourth pillar the food export industry grew out of the long established role that Ireland played in supplying primary produce. Let us look at the three centres of tax dodging in turn and defer consideration of the food industry to a later stage.

a) The IFSC

Given the historically close relationship between the corporate and political elite, it took no stretch of the imagination to extend the practice of tax dodging to the global corporate world. One of the most significant moves in this direction was the creation of the Irish Financial Services Centre. This arose from a proposal by the businessman, Dermot Desmond, to his friend, Charles Haughey. Desmond had previously commissioned a report from the accountancy firm PWC and it was immediately accepted by Haughey and the Fianna Fáil party. One senior civil servant described how the 'frictionless relationship between the corporate and political elite moved to a higher level,

The IFSC was a success in my view primarily because of the excellent working arrangements between the private and the public sector. The IFSC product was clearly defined around the favourable taxation benefits and the capability of an educated workforce. These factors combined with the willingness of the authorities to meet and discuss the specific requirements of prospective corporations made for a competitive product offer-

ing.⁸

One of the ways the close relationship was maintained was through the creation of a committee which brought together bankers, financiers, the Revenue Commissioners and key civil servants to plan out a centre for light regulation and significant tax dodging.

The IFSC has expanded dramatically since then. Originally founded as a designated, low tax zone in Dublin's docklands, it now refers to a virtual space for the export of traded financial services. Total assets of the financial sector amounted to €3.6 trillion in 2012, or 2,147 per cent of Irish GDP. This puts Ireland just behind Luxemburg and Malta in its reliance on finance as a key motor of its economy. Since the economic crash of 2008, the IFSC's attraction for tax dodgers has grown dramatically. From 2008-2014, investment funds have increased four-fold and Ireland has also moved to the centre of global speculation by hedge funds. Currently, for example, 40 percent of the world's hedge funds are managed in Ireland.

The various forms of 'asset management' undertaken in the IFSC involve rich people putting money into investment funds that can be moved about the world to gain maximum advantage. It represents the purest form of capital, disconnected from any immediate tie to a local unit but, through its endless movement, creating a global rate of profit. These funds are typically organised through a three-fold division of labour: *promoters*, who advertise and guarantee that the money is not misused; *investment managers*, who decide where to put the money; *administrators*, who carry out the low-key clerical duties associated with caring for rich people's money. The investment managers are at the top of the food chain, charging a fee of 2 percent a year and taking a cut of 20 percent on the profits made. Typically, the investment managers sit in plush offices in Mayfair, London and use administrative

companies to track the earnings and keep accounts for their clients.⁹ Dublin's niche market lies in the lower level administrative companies and it functions essentially as the grunt worker for the speculative activity conducted in London and New York. However as well as performing administrative tasks, its main attraction is 'tax neutrality' and light touch regulation.

There are now 1,300 Financial Vehicles Corporations and Special Purpose Vehicles operating inside the IFSC. These are entities which have been established by banks or other financial institutions. A Financial Vehicle Corporation is normally established for the purpose of 'securitisation' - bundling together loans, mortgages or rents into a package which guarantees an income stream. There are 779 Financial Vehicle Corporations with assets totalling €415 billion in the IFSC, a wealth that is equivalent to twice the size of the Irish economy. There are nearly ten times as many FVCs and FVC assets in Ireland as there are in Germany. Closely related to the FVCs are the Special Purpose Vehicles. These are entities set up for specific purposes - including securitisation - but, crucially, they do not have to be registered. There are 600 SPVs in the IFSC and they control €150 billion of assets.

The main reason why these entities are in the IFSC is to enjoy the tax neutral benefits of Section 110 of Tax Consolidated Acts 1997. A company has only to be officially resident in Ireland and to deal in 'qualifying assets' such as shares, bonds, money markets, commodity speculation, carbon emissions or leases. The market value of these assets must be at least €10 million to gain tax neutrality. Typically the shadow bank needs only to make contact with an Irish tax planner to ensure it claims its tax breaks. As Matheson explains, 'no special rules or authorisations are required in Ireland in order for an SPV to achieve tax neutral status'.¹⁰ More broadly, the IFSC is regarded as a clean, safe tax haven that lies inside the

⁸'Memoirs of the IFSC' in *Finance Magazine* no date http://www.finance-magazine.com/display_article.php?i=2303&pi=142

⁹D. MacKenzie, 'An Address in Mayfair', *London Review of Books* Vol. 30, No. 23 December 2008, pp.9-12.

¹⁰Matheson, Ireland: *The SPV Jurisdiction of Choice for Structured Finance Transactions* Dublin: Matheson, 2013, p.2

EU. Irish investment funds are virtually exempt from tax on their income and gains. There are no 'withholding taxes' when the income is distributed to non-resident shareholders. There is a network of tax treaties which allow tax advantages to be retained when the money is brought back to the investors' home country.

The IFSC presents an image of complying fully with EU regulations while providing enough 'flexibility' to avoid over-intrusive supervision. A Qualifying Investor Fund, for example, can be authorised within 24 hours on receipt of the paper work, provided the fund manager works through an Irish accredited administrator. There are very few restrictions so that investment managers can borrow heavily to gamble and invest their money in under-regulated but more risky funds. Once an investment fund is listed with the Irish Stock Exchange, it can be 'passported' throughout the EU, meaning it can attract investors from across the continent.

The other big advantage is that state policy is shaped by financial interests, with the state acting as both a lobbyist for these interests inside the EU and constantly introducing legislative changes to facilitate them. Irish policy on financial services is still effectively managed by the IFSC Clearing House Group, a body made up of top public servants and representatives of the financial services industry. It includes figures from Bank of America, Citibank, BNY Mellon, State Street and the Irish Bankers Federation.¹¹ The Clearing House Group is not a lobbying agency because it is officially embedded in the key Department of the Taoiseach. It helps devise government strategy and advises on tax changes that are incorporated into the annual Finance Bills. In addition, the chair of IFSC Ireland, the former Taoiseach, John Bruton promotes public lobbying for the IFSC. His position is funded by the industry but the IDA provides administrative support. The power of the IFSC Clearing House Group is indicated in this report from the *Financial Times* of a meeting held in November 2011,

They met under the auspices of the 'Clearing House', a secretive group of financial industry executives, accountants and public servants formed in 1987 to promote Dublin as a financial hub. The participants thrashed out 21 separate taxation and legal incentives sought by the financial industry at the meeting which took place in room 308 in the prime minister's office...

The lobbying was done in secret behind closed doors, says Nessa Childers, an Irish member of the European parliament, who got minutes of the meeting using freedom of information laws last year. 'The bankers and hedge fund industry got virtually everything they asked for while the public got hit with a number of austerity measures.'¹²

The Irish state's collusion with financial interest was in evidence when the EU Commission suggested a small Financial Transactions Tax. The proposal was for a 0.1 percent tax levy on share and bond transactions and an even smaller 0.01 percent tax on derivatives. This tiny tax could have raised significant money for the hard pressed Irish exchequer. The EU estimated that €500 million could be garnered from this tax - the equivalent of what the government intended to raise with the property tax. Eleven countries in the EU - including France and Germany - agreed to go ahead with the tax but Ireland refused to. As soon as the EU proposal became known, the Department of Finance convened a meeting of the main corporations operating in the IFSC and asked them to make their case against it. No independent research was commissioned on the impact of such a tax on Ireland. Instead the state used material derived from a survey of financial corporations to come out vehemently against the proposal.

The reality about how the IFSC really works has been hidden behind a barrage of

¹¹Written Answers, Department of the Taoiseach, 13 March 2012

¹²'Great tax race: Ireland's policies aid business more than public' *Financial Times* May 1 2013

state propaganda that stresses its contribution to the Irish economy. Its supporters claim that it contributes up to 20% of Corporation Taxes but the official figure used by the Minister for Finance in response to a Dáil question was that €630 million was paid in 2010.¹³ That was from a total corporate taxable income of €3.9 billion which in turn was only a fraction of the vast amount of wealth that flows through the IFSC. This tax, in fact, represented 16% of all corporate taxes or only 2% of total state revenue. Compared to the reported assets of €1,165 billion in domiciled funds that are invested in the IFSC, this is a miniscule figure. It indicates that the centres acts as a magnet for tax dodging.

b) The multi-national sector

Multi-national companies account for 90% of Ireland exports and are increasingly using Ireland primarily as a base for tax dodging rather than as a production centre. Goods and services are certainly made in Ireland but these activities are tied to, and dependent on, tax dodging. Employment in manufacturing is contracting and the multinationals only employ 80,000 manufacturing workers compared to 89,167 in 1991. The MNCs have shifted their focus to ‘internationally traded services’ as Table 1 indicates. This is a vague category that is used by the Central Statistics Office and includes such sectors as aircraft leasing which offers a particularly dramatic example of tax dodging.

Ireland has become the leading global centre for this business as Irish based multinationals own or manage 19 percent of the world’s commercial aircraft. The biggest leaser is a subsidiary of General Electric - a company that has an unequalled record of tax dodging in the US. It made profits of \$14 billion in 2010 but paid no US taxes. Its extraordinary success, according to the *New York Times*, is based on ‘an aggressive strategy that mixes fierce lobbying for tax breaks and innovative accounting that enables it to concentrate profits offshore’.¹⁴

Ireland plays a minor role in this aggressive strategy through one of its subsidiaries, GE Capital Aviation Funding. In 2011, the Shannon based aircraft leasing finance company recorded pre-tax profits of \$765 million, making it one of the most profitable companies in Ireland. Yet it had no employees and only paid \$379,000 in corporation profits tax to the Irish state. It used Irish tax laws to claim ‘group relief’ and so paid only 0.5 percent tax on its profits.¹⁵ In 2014, the top aircraft leasing firms SMBC, Pembroke Capital, AWAS Capital, GECAS and Avolon, showed aggregate pre-tax profits of \$650m (€572.9m) generated from revenues of \$3.25bn. They paid just €23 million in tax or just 4% of their profits.

Table 1: Employment in foreign owned enterprises.

| | 1991 | 2010 |
|---|--------|--------|
| Foreign owned manufacturing | 89,167 | 80,089 |
| Foreign owned internationally traded services | 7,398 | 59,110 |

Source: F. Barry Eveolution of FDI Intensity www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/seminars/FDIIntensity.ppt

The manner in which the multi-nationals use Ireland as a base for tax dodging was illustrated in the extraordinary claim that the Irish economy had grown by 26% on an annual basis in 2016. One reason for this statistical miracle was a practice known as inversion whereby a US company takes over a small Irish company as its headquarters for tax purposes. The National Treasury Management Agency recently stated that,

The reclassification of several large companies as Irish resident expanded the capital stock in 2015 by €300bn or c.40%. The goods produced by the additional capital were mainly exported. ...Net exports grew by 102.4% in 2015. Complicating matters, the goods were produced through ‘contract manu-

¹³Dáil Eireann, Written Answers – Financial Regulation, 15 December 2011, 40673/11

¹⁴‘GE’s Strategies Let it Avoid Taxes Altogether’ *New York Times* 24 March 2011.

¹⁵‘Pre-tax Profits of €606 million for aviation leasing firm’ *Irish Times* 20 June 2012.

facturing'. The result of contract manufacturing is this goods export is recorded in the Irish Balance of Payments even though it was never produced in Ireland. There is little or no employment effect in Ireland from this contract manufacturing.¹⁶

More broadly, the multi-national companies - and large Irish companies - manage to dodge taxes through a variety of mechanisms. There is an official rate of 12.5% corporation tax which is the lowest rate in the OECD. Ireland's rate is rivalled in Europe only by countries like Cyprus and Bulgaria. This tax rate, however, only acts as a headline invitation to multi-nationals. When they delve deeper into matters, they discover - thanks to the help of Ireland's vast tax planning network - that actual taxation is much lower than 12.5%. Table 2 illustrates how the effective rate is far lower by looking at the returns for 2008.

Table 2: Corporation Tax for Accounting Period ending 2012 in €million.

| | |
|--|---------|
| Profits | 72,533 |
| Minus allowances for losses, plant machinery, charges, industrial buildings and plus rental income | -11,017 |
| Total Income and Gains (before deduction) | 61,516 |
| Further Deductions of Taxable Income | 3,673 |
| Gross Tax Due after 12.5% standard rate | 5,273 |
| Further Reliefs | 775.8 |
| Tax Payable | 4,173 |
| Effective Rate of Tax on declared profits | 5.7% |

Source: Revenue Commissioners Statistical Report 2012 Corporation Tax Distribution Statistics, p 5

In 2012, €73 billion was declared in profits but just over €4 billion was paid in tax. That amounts to an effective tax rate of 6 percent - which is half the official rate. The table also gives some indication for how this reduction is achieved. The four main

categories used to reduce tax on profit are allowances, losses, deductions and reliefs. When a company suffers losses - as many did with the crash - they can be stored up and used to claim tax relief. Losses in one part of company can also be used to reduce taxes in other subsidiary entities. Only a small proportion of the losses that were written off for tax purposes were used in this accounting period and so far more can be used in the future. There is also a host of other deductions and reliefs and this is where Ireland's vast army of 'tax planners' come into play. Ireland's many tax attractions are made available to both the multinationals and Irish business by planners who charge substantial fees.

There are very limited rules concerning transfer pricing. These refer to a practice whereby multi-nationals manipulate their internal pricing structure to make it appear that extra profits were made in countries that have low tax rates. Until 2009, Ireland simply had no rules and corporations could artificially reduce prices of components used in Irish subsidiaries so that larger profits appeared to be made there. Limited legislation was introduced in the Finance Act of 2010 but it was designed to give legal cover to the existing lax practice. As Deloitte put it in their tax planning pitch to companies, 'the presence of a formal transfer pricing regime should provide additional credibility for Revenue when dealing with (foreign tax jurisdiction) cases' but would not impose a 'significant additional burden' on multinational corporations.¹⁷ The new law is based on an OECD concept of 'arms length' transactions, which suggests that internal company prices should appear as if they were transacted between independent bodies. But as Michael Durst, a US treasury official, put it there are no 'uncontrolled comparables' to check if a corporation is manipulating internal prices.¹⁸ It is even more difficult to apply 'arms length principles' to 'intangible' items such as patents and royal-

¹⁶NTMA, *The Irish Economy and Public Finances*, <http://www.ntma.ie/business-areas/funding-and-debt-management/irish-economy/>

¹⁷Deloitte, *Transfer Pricing Legislation in Ireland - A New reality*, Dublin: Deloitte, 2010, p.48.

¹⁸Quoted in D. Spencer, 'Transfer Pricing: When will the OECD adjust to Reality' *Tax Justice Network* 24 May 2012.

ties which Ireland specialises in supporting. The Tax Justice Network claims that the only effect of new legislative changes is to give a boost to ‘auditing firms and law firms and economic consulting firms which derive substantial income from advising and consulting about those (OECD) Guidelines’.¹⁹

Ireland has no ‘thin capitalisation’ rules. Companies may be funded through a variety of mechanisms, typically selling shares or through borrowing. A company which borrows heavily will pay a large amount of interest but one advantage is that this can be written off for tax purposes. Companies, therefore, often want to fund their operations through debt in order to reduce their tax bill. However, many countries have rules to prevent this type of tax avoidance - known as thin capitalisation rules - but in Ireland there are none. As a result, a holding company with nominal share capital is in a position to fund its operations by virtually unlimited borrowings and interest on these borrowings can be deducted for tax. Meanwhile, the directors can laugh all the way to the bank.

There are also no ‘Controlled Foreign Company’ regulations that designate income from subsidiaries of Irish registered companies as taxable in Ireland. In other countries, CFC rules demand that tax be paid on profits of a foreign subsidiary, even if they are not distributed as dividends. The absence of CFC rules is marketed heavily by the Industrial Development Authority when Ireland is pushed as a venue for holding companies. Subsidiaries of these holding companies tend to be located throughout Europe, the Middle East and Africa. The big advantage is that no tax is imposed on the profits, dividends or capital gains that flow in.

Ireland offers extraordinarily generous support for wealthy people who want to take their money out of Ireland. A corporation can be formally incorporated in Jersey, - where even more lax provisions prevail - and resident in Ireland for tax purposes. It can then receive streams of income from its subsidiaries across the world and pay out huge dividends on the profits. But these dividends will not be taxed if the person or com-

pany receiving them is resident in another EU state or one of the many countries Ireland has a tax treaty with.

Up to recently, Ireland allowed companies to be incorporated in Ireland but not tax resident. They merely had to show that they were effectively controlled from elsewhere. They could do this by having their board of directors meet regularly in another country and have regular conference calls with directors based in Ireland. This loophole was abolished after the US senate began to investigate the ‘double Irish scam’ whereby US companies were using this to dodge taxes. However, even though it is officially abolished there is a ‘grandfather clause’ to allow companies who originally enjoyed this provision before the date of its abolition to continue to benefit from it until 2020.

Ireland offers special tax breaks for companies involved in Research and Development. These began in 2004 when a special tax credit of 25% was available for expenditure on R and D but this was then extended in the 2015 budget when a special rate of 6.25%, known as a ‘Knowledge Development Box’ rate for intellectual property, was introduced. The official explanation for this strategy was that it aimed to create an information society. In reality, however, the R and D tax reliefs are tailor made for the pharmaceutical industry and, with slightly more onerous paper work, for the software industry. These can claim that much of their products are based on ‘intangible’ knowledge, which is patent protected by showing that some research and development has been carried out in Ireland. The US parent company will conduct most of the research in its home country and then - at the final stage- transfer some additional research work to Ireland. It can then licence the Intellectual Property rights to an Irish subsidiary and gain tax free income from it because the Irish government has written its tax laws to help this type of activity. However, the scope for manipulation is massive. Two hundred special audits were carried out in 2013 and it was found ‘several multinational firms have been found to be aggres-

¹⁹Tax Justice Network, Statement on Transfer Pricing, 21 March 2012

sively and improperly claiming tax credits for research and development to lower their corporation tax bills’.²⁰

The Apple case has exposed how major corporations also benefit from individual tax rulings from the Revenue Commissioners. When a multi-national is establishing in Ireland or plans to expand its operations, its representatives typically meet with the Revenue Commissioners to get ‘Advanced Price Agreements’. These are essentially understandings of how transfer pricing will work and what will be considered to be taxable income. In the case of an Apple subsidiary, a ruling meant that it paid less than 1% of its income on tax from 2003 onwards and this declined even further to 0.005% in 2014. In defence of these arrangements, the Irish government admitted that, ‘Ireland does not have a statutorily binding tax ruling system’.²¹ In other words, there are many more cases of such rulings being made. In reply to a Dáil question, Finance Minister Noonan stated that 99 rulings were given to companies in 2010, 128 in 2011 and 108 in 2012.²² This information was only made available because it was requested by the EU Commission. In general, the Irish state refuses to divulge any details of such rulings, citing confidentiality. However, it may be assumed that other companies benefit from such arrangements as the Irish government is appealing the EU Commission ruling on the basis that Apple received no special treatment.

These measures have helped to establish Ireland as one of the premier tax havens in the world. There is now overwhelming evidence that corporations are artificially declaring greater business activity and profits in Ireland purely for tax purposes. The table below from Martin O’Sullivan was presented as testimony to a US hearing on tax havens. It illustrates how profits per Irish worker are exceptionally high and comparable to that of other tax havens, with the exception of Bermuda and Barbados. Despite the attraction of the latter, however, more profits are declared in Ireland because it has

the semblance of real economic activity and an aura of greater respectability.

Table 3: Profits and Profitability of US Multinationals in 2008.

| | Before Tax Profits (\$m) | Effective Tax Rate | Profit as a % of sales | Profit as a % of assets | Profit as a % of worker compensation | Profit per worker |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Ireland | \$46,337 | 7.3% | 18.6% | 117% | 708% | \$520,640 |
| Switzerland | \$16,352 | 11.5% | 5.9% | 141% | 189% | \$200,638 |
| Bermuda | \$8,354 | 4.8% | 14.3% | 132% | 2,234% | \$2,610,625 |
| Barbados | \$44,263 | 6.9% | 38.0% | 251% | 11,218% | \$4,263,000 |
| Singapore | \$12,255 | 8.1% | 4.3% | 84% | 227% | \$103,157 |
| Five Tax Havens Total | \$87,561 | 7.9% | 10.0% | 119% | 417% | \$298,334 |
| World Wide Total | \$408,720 | 35.2% | 7.9% | 42% | 93% | \$40,372 |

Source: Martin O’ Sullivan Testimony to Committee on Ways and Means, US House of Representatives, January 20, 2011. Based on data from Bureau of Economic Analysis of the US Department of Commerce, Data do not include banks.

c) Property

Construction and property have traditionally been highly attractive for Irish capitalists. The building industry is a better-protected sector than others as it is more difficult to import cement and bulky materials than, say, washing machines or computers. Irish capitalists who invested in construction were, therefore, sheltered from the full rigors of competition on the global markets. The property market is also more easily influenced by state intervention. The capital-spending programmes of the state or its taxation policy can quickly expand the market. The state is also a major landlord and where it decides to rent can have a major impact on individual property values. At a local level, decisions on land re-zoning can bring about major speculative gains. Political relations are, therefore, a necessary part of business in this sector and the Irish wealthy are more than adept at establishing these connections.

Property speculation creates the possibility of short-term profits and this is typically the time frame that a weaker form of capitalism prefers. Large loans can be taken from banks and can be re-paid quickly if the market is booming. Simon Kelly, son of the

²⁰‘Multi-nationals ‘exaggerated’ research activity to lower tax bills’ *Irish Times*, 3 September 2015

²¹‘State to ‘vigorously defend’ position as EC probes Apple’s tax deal’ *Irish Independent* 12/06/2014

²²Dáil Debates, Vol.883 no 1 Written Answers 82-91

property developer Paddy Kelly, summed up the mentality, ‘when the market heated up, buying meant winning: every time you bought land, you made money. It seemed as easy as that’.²³ Irish capitalists, therefore, saw property as nearly risk free with little capital tied up in machinery over an extended period. The mania for property was most evident during the Celtic Tiger years. In 1999, a third of all lending to Irish capitalists went to property and construction but, by 2007, this had jumped to three quarters. Ireland was constructing more housing units per head of population than anywhere else in Europe.

And then, of course, the bubble burst. The Irish rich stood to lose billions but, fortunately for them the state was there to lend a helping hand - even if it led to a housing crisis.

In order to salvage as much of their fortunes, as they could, FG led governments adopted a number of measures to boost the property market. They cut back on social housing and introduced a number of schemes to subsidise private landlords who housed those in need. In addition, they resorted once more to the tactics of facilitating tax dodging to attract in US ‘vulture funds’ to buy up distressed Irish property and thus help re-start a property boom. Tax relief - in the form of Section 23 tax breaks, the Seaside Resort Scheme, and a student accommodation relief scheme - had traditionally been used by Fianna Fáil to stimulate property speculation prior to the Celtic Tiger collapse. Fine Gael, however, moved to even more dramatic reliefs to turn a property bust into a recovery. Their strategy was to bring foreign capital into Ireland’s distressed property market and state official and senior politicians actively engaged with the lords of finance. The Department of Finance met with investment fund managers on 65 occasions between 2013 and 2014, and Enda Kenny personally held a private meeting with Blackstone in late 2011. The Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan, met

with Lone Star capital three times and with Apollo capital twice in 2013 and 2014. The government also put in place, a number of specific measures to help these funds avoid tax.

At an early stage they introduced a limited ‘Capital Gains Tax holiday’ which exempted any gain realised on the sale of real estate purchased between 7 December 2011 and 31 December 2014 and held for at least seven years from Capital Gains Tax. Non-resident investor funds could also limit their tax liability to 20% of rental income, in addition to enjoying the CGT holiday. Wealthy investors in property were also encouraged to form Qualifying Investor Alternative Investment Funds (QIAIF). These were simply funds that were regulated and registered with the authorities. A host of helpful Irish tax planners from legal and accountancy firms were on hand to do the necessary paper work. Once the QIAIFs were registered, rich people could enjoy a tax exempt vehicle for property speculation. They did not have to pay tax on rental income or pay capital gains tax on the profits they might make from resale. The only condition was that they were not Irish resident. There were no withholding or exit taxes applying on income distributions or redemption payments made by an Irish QIAIF to non-Irish resident investors. In the word of PWC, ‘the Irish QIAIF is an exceptionally efficient real estate holding vehicle.’²⁴

As if this were not enough, wealthy people could also invoke the Section 110 provision to write off tax by balancing their liabilities against apparent loans - often from parent companies. They could also use a strategy of ‘orphan’ charitable trusts to buy up property and reduce their tax liability even further.

The chief economist with the Central Bank has estimated that the vulture funds have bought up €300 billion of Irish assets but only a small fraction of these are liable for tax.²⁵ The largest purchasers of Irish loan books have been Goldman Sachs,

²³S. Kelly, *Breakfast with Anglo*, Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2010, p.36.

²⁴PWC, *Irish Real Estate Investment Structures*, Dublin: PWC, 2016 p.4

²⁵‘€300 billion of assets in Irish vulture funds’ <http://www.todayfm.com/300-billion-assets-in-Irish-vulture-funds>

Cerberus, Deutsche Bank, Lone Star, CarVal and Apollo. These companies often hire Irish front men - often from among the very builders and bankers who helped trigger the 2008 crash - and tax planners from lucrative accountancy and legal firms. Apollo Management, for example, is a particularly interesting case. It is owned by the former Drexel Burnham Lamber banker Leon Black – one of the richest men on Wall Street but it is fronted up by Brian Goggin, the former CEO of Bank of Ireland who retired on a pension package of €626,000 a year.

The vulture funds have made fortunes buying up Irish distressed assets but have paid virtually no tax. Goldman Sachs subsidiary Beltany generated income of €44 million in 2014 - but paid just €250 in corporation tax. Cerberus generated more than €140 million of revenue on its Irish assets, but paid less than €2,500 in tax. Cayman-linked Mars Capital generated revenue of €14 million in 2014 but also paid just €250. So too did Launceston Property Finance, a spin off from the Luxembourg-registered CarVal which generated €16 million.

Unstable

Ireland's role as the respectable Atlantic tax haven is detrimental for Irish society in a host of ways. It helps to create an extremely unequal society where the poorest sections are deprived of proper public services. The strategy of boosting the property market, for example, has had a major impact on those who pay exorbitant rents or who have been rendered homeless.

Sometimes, however, the issue is posed as: 'do we want better public services OR reduced taxes'. The Nevin Institute, for example, point to Ireland's relatively overall low tax take as a proportion of GDP and suggest that it is better to retain taxes such as the USC because it is 'progressive' and will help fund public services.²⁶ But this framing assumes that there is a mythical 'taxpayer' who has been cast adrift from any class po-

sition or social relations. It accepts the parameters set by Irish state and focuses on how revenue from income, indirect taxes and excise can be divided up. However the tax loopholes for corporate sector and the absence of a wealth tax means that Irish workers are paying more tax just to maintain basic services. This has become particularly apparent since the Celtic Tiger crash when the state's strategy was to offload the burden of paying for the crash on to the mass of the population. These were hit with extra taxes to bail out banks and to protect the existing tax haven.

Workers on average income pay an extra €800 a year due to changes in tax bands. The PAYE sector as a whole is contributing €4 billion more in a Universal Social Charge, with half of that coming from those with incomes less than 440,000. This is on top of extra user fees for water and a tax on the family home. Instead of accepting a parameter of more income tax cuts versus spending on public services - which is the dominant framing in the political discourse - it would be more appropriate to examine ways in which corporations and the wealthy could pay more tax in order to cut taxes on workers and improve public services.

Tax dodging has other less obvious detrimental effects on Irish society, some of which are captured in the concept of a 'financial curse' developed by Nicholas Shaxson and John Christensen.²⁷ It leads to an oversupply of credit which causes the type of severe distortions evident in the Irish property market during the late Celtic Tiger era. Vast amounts of mobile finance in search of 'tax neutrality' can also crowd out other forms of investment by raising property prices. Moreover by generating high salaries for a few they can distort education and training. A culture of tax dodging reduces political discourse to a debate about how best to 'attract' foreign investment. Every item from environmental controls to the regulation of labour standards is viewed through

²⁶Nevin Institute Opening Statement to Select Committee on Budgetary Oversight, 6 September 2016 <http://www.nerininstitute.net/blog/2016/09/13/opening-statement-to-the-budgetary-oversight-commi/>

²⁷N. Shaxson and J. Christensen, *The Finance Curse: How oversized financial centres attack democracy and corrupt economies*, London: Tax Justice Network 2013

the prism of how it might attract or repel foreign investment. The local advocates for the tax dodgers - the large accountancy and legal firms - assume greater dominance over political debate. Typically, they shift from finding tax loopholes to acting as research consultants who win tenders from government departments to draw up reports which restrict parameters for debate. Inside the machinery of the state, the principal advocate for foreign investment - the Industrial Development Authority- gains more influence and even freedom to issue pronouncements on behalf of its clients.

The overall economy is increasingly at the mercy of volatile capital flows. When there is an abundance of distressed assets for sale, there is an influx of capital seeking quick profit and tax neutrality. But in a jittery world market when corporations require a ‘flight to safety’, emerging economies suffer from severe dislocations due to the outflows of capital. In Ireland’s case there is already a significant growth in income outflow in the form of royalties and dividend payments as Table 4 illustrates.

Table 4: Net Factor income to the rest of the world (000s).

| Year | Net Factor Income to the rest of World |
|------|--|
| 1995 | -5,948 |
| 2000 | -15,327 |
| 2005 | -24,819 |
| 2010 | -28,457 |
| 2015 | -53,173 |

Source: CSO National Income and Expenditure Series.

In the longer term there is an even deeper threat to the Irish tax haven.

Global capitalism has entered a period of instability and stagnation. In response to the crash of 2008, many of the advanced economies engaged in ‘quantitative easing’ to stimulate demand and investment. This in turn has produced a new fiscal crisis for many states as governments run up large debts. According to McKinsey Global Institute, global government debt more than doubled from \$22 trillion in 2000 to \$58 trillion in 2014 (figures are in constant 2013

exchange rate).²⁸ This represents an increase in the global debt to GDP ratio from 246% to 286%. Significantly, these large increases are accompanied by rising household and corporate debt. Much of this debt has been undertaken by the most advanced economies as these have been particularly worried by the continuing slowdown of their economies.²⁹ These in turn have the power to exert pressure on other states that are deemed to be depriving them of tax revenue.

This is the background to a new discourse about ‘cracking down on tax havens’. The OECD has developed an agenda of demanding transparency and country by country reporting of profit and income. The attack on tax havens is by no means a determined one and in the short term Ireland has continued to attract tax dodging investment. But in the longer term, the mere fact that it has begun to be named as a tax haven represents a threat to its continued existence.

The other major problem which Ireland faces arises from Brexit. The centrepiece of the current tax dodging strategy is to offer investors a location within the EU that has the appearance of compliance with wider EU directives but which contains enough loopholes for tax reduction. Behind the appearances lay a practice that amounted to a game of ‘beggar thy neighbour’. Ireland took advantage of EU membership to attract footloose investment but sought to skive off revenue from its larger neighbours by allowing corporations to funnel profits made in Germany, France or Italy through Ireland. As long as it was seen as a minor player on the edge of Europe, it was able to sail below the radar and not attract too much attention. But in the new era after the EU Commission’s Apple judgement, it will no longer be able to do this. Moreover, it has lost a major ally in the City of London and by extension, the British government, who afforded it some protection from these continental pressures.

Both these developments mean that an economic strategy that relies on tax dodging is inherently unstable. Ireland is set to become a weak link in European capitalism.

²⁸McKinsey Global Institute, *Debt and (not Much) Global DeLeveraging*, McKinsey and Company 2015 p.11

²⁹*ibid.* p.26

Can the European Union be reformed?

Marnie Holborow

Can the EU be reformed? Can it be made more accountable to the peoples of its member states? Last summer, in Greece when the government capitulated to the Troika, these questions went to the heart of what was wrong with the Syriza project.

Reforming the EU resurfaced again during the Brexit vote in the UK. The left Remain position in the Brexit referendum vote turned on two arguments. Firstly, the EU, however misguided it had become, could be changed through pressure from within. Remain and reform, in varying degrees, was the call from the Labour Party, the Scottish Nationalists, the Greens the trade unions, Another Europe is Possible grouping, and others although little detail was given on what reform would actually mean. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin backed the Remain campaign loosely on this basis, although its main focus was on the implications of Brexit for the border. A second argument on the left in England and Wales was that a remain vote would counter the racist right, and that the EU, while having many defects, stood against nationalism and was therefore the lesser of two evils.¹

This article argues that believing that the EU can be changed from within or that it is somehow progressive is not only an illusion but an obstacle to enacting radical left alternatives. The Eurozone's protracted economic crisis, the EU's neoliberal dictats, its shameful and racist handling of the migrant crisis, its growing militarisation will all inevitably lead to further clashes between the EU and its peoples. Therefore, a clear, political understanding of the role the EU plays will be vital for the struggles ahead.

¹Only a small section of the socialist left, including People before Profit in Ireland, called for a Leave vote from a left-wing, anti-racist and internationalist position, although their voice was not much heard in the mainstream media.

²Yanis Varoufakis, *The Global Minotaur: America, Europe and the Future of the Global Economy*, London 2015, p.75.

³Perry Anderson, *The Old New World*, London, 2011, p.17.

⁴Paul Ginsberg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, London 1990, p.160.

Behind closed doors

It is often argued that the EU has been a counterweight to the free-for all capitalism and global power of the US. The truth is the EEC provided the framework for the European capitalist states to pursue their interests in step with US hegemony. From the end of WW2, US administrations 'cajoled, pushed, threatened and sweet-talked' the Europeans into a union.² They were aided in their efforts by the chief-architect of Europe, international banker and financier, Jean Monnet, who had a 'direct line to Washington' and whose initiatives depended on US support.³ The US needed new markets for its goods, to recreate European capitalism along its own free trade and federalist lines and, at the same time, secure a firm military ally to counter the communist threat.

From the beginning, the EU was never a union of equals. Germany and France provided the core axis. Germany's industrial machine, geared towards exports, was rapidly becoming an economic powerhouse, and European integration provided an acceptable face of Germany's rise. France played a counterbalancing political role as the creator of the strongly centralised European institutions; with nuclear weapons, and originally a member of NATO, it also supplied a strong military dimension. Italy, the third largest European economy, became the model for peripheral countries like Spain and Greece, who would join later. Free movement of capital and labour would deliver industrial development and supply workers for Northern European industries, and lower Mezzogiorno unemployment into the bargain.⁴

The post-war boom allowed European unity to be built, initially, on a Keynesian

economic policy regime of welfare states and managing effective demand in pursuit of full employment,⁵ which lent it the label of ‘social Europe’. In actual fact, the creation of the EEC occurred entirely at the instigation of capitalist elites and their political bureaucracies, with no popular participation. The founding Treaty of Rome had been brokered, not by an elected politician, but by Beyen, a former executive for Phillips and a director of Unilever parachuted straight from the IMF into the Dutch cabinet (the sort of technocratic by-pass of democracy with which we in the EU today have become all too familiar). In 1975, the European Council was instituted as periodical meetings of existing Heads of State. In 1979, the European Monetary System came into force and decreed, following the German Bundesbank regime, that members’ currencies should be tied to a narrow 2.5% band of fluctuation. As Perry Anderson observes, voters across the states were ‘neither a motor nor a break’ on developments as they were never consulted.⁶ The undemocratic and unaccountable nature of the EU was there from the start. There were referenda on new membership, in the seventies and then later, selectively, on some treaties, but by then the corporatized, highly bureaucratic character of the EU was structurally entrenched.

Corporate agenda

In 1972, When Ireland joined the European Economic Community - along with Denmark and the UK - the top-down bureaucracy of this process was hidden behind the rhetoric of the creation of a peaceful and prosperous Europe. The Irish experience of the EU, despite it being one of the smaller, peripheral states, in many ways encapsulated the corporate logic and the ruinously undemocratic outcomes of the union.

At the time of joining, Fianna Fáil and

Fine Gael were united in seeing the EEC as a way out of economic backwardness. Together they had the political weight then to ensure that the referendum was carried by 82% of the population and they took it for granted that Europe was good for Ireland. The Common Agricultural Policy did indeed ensure growth and returns for big farmers and opened the way later for mega-profitable indigenous agribusiness. After the Delors Package of 1988, Ireland - as a so-called Objective One country - became a main beneficiary of regional funds. Later, following the Single European Act of 1986 and then the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, EU funding for projects in transport was granted to member states whose GNP per capita was less than 90 per cent of the overall EU average. The result was that between 1988 and 1992 Ireland benefitted to the tune of £7.2 billion from EU structural and cohesion funds, doing better than other peripheral states such as Greece Portugal and Spain. These subsidies, according to one commentator, effectively amounted to a mini-Marshall plan for Ireland.⁷

The politicians’ enthusiasm for the EU had little to do with notions of a social Europe. Ireland’s position behind European wide tariff barriers and its very low corporate tax regime made it the choice location for many US multinationals. US investment grew dramatically in the 1980’s and 1990’s and in 1997 the IDA could claim that 26% of all greenfield projects established by US firms in Europe were in Ireland.⁸ It was on this basis that the Celtic Tiger was born from a combination of elements, most of which were encouraged by the EU: a burgeoning financial services centre which attracted investment for European banks, a convenient tax haven for global finance, a relatively cheap, skilled, well-educated and English-speaking workforce, a system of social partnership which kept industrial peace

⁵Alex Callinicos, ‘The Internationalist Case against the EU’, *International Socialism* 148. <http://isj.org.uk/the-internationalist-case-against-the-european-union/>

⁶Perry Anderson, *The Old New World*, p.17.

⁷John Brennan, ‘Ireland and the European Union: Mapping Domestic Modes of Adaption and Contestation’, Dublin, 2010. http://eprints.maynoothuniversity.ie/2919/1/JOB_Ireland_and_the_European.pdf

⁸Kieran Allen, *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership*, Manchester 2000, p.26.

⁹Fintan O’Toole, *Ship of Fools*, London 2009, Kieran Allen, *The Celtic Tiger* pp.21-29.

and wage increases down, and a stable pro-business political climate.⁹ Brussels even gave its blessing to policies that appeared to go against its official line, especially when they encouraged big business. For example, in 1998, it allowed Ireland to continue its very low level of corporation tax. This accommodation to big business and finance led directly to property bubbles, the worst crash since the 1930s, and the world's most expensive banking fiasco. The Irish economy, rather than experiencing a balanced development under the tutelage of the EU, harboured glaring social inequality and resembled a black hole through which mainly US corporation profits literally vanished.¹⁰ In retrospect, the Irish left's original opposition to entry to the EEC because it was a 'bosses' union'¹¹ and a Sinn Féin poster which warned that the EEC would 'put Ireland up for sale' 'for short term investment with guarantee of profits' and which would be to the detriment of the Irish people now sound strangely prophetic.¹²

A neoliberal machine

Under the pressure of global economic crisis and mounting competition from the US and Japan, the rise of unemployment and 'eurosclerosis'¹³ in the eighties, the EU switched from promotion of the welfare state to the liberalisation of markets. The European Round table of Industrialists, who first met in 1983 at the Paris headquarters of Volvo (with Irish business represented by Michael Smurfit and Peter Sutherland) drove forward the preparations for the single market. Its objective was to change the way

Europe was managed. The recovery of profit margins was to be achieved through free markets and deregulation instead of through government policies and social obligations. Central social elements of post war capitalism were gradually revoked and labour markets and social security systems altered in the name of 'flexibilisation' and globalisation. Reagan and Thatcher may have initiated the neoliberal agenda but, by the new century, the EU, through a plethora of treaties, protocols, directives, was outstripping the Anglo-Saxon version.¹⁴

The first key step to the neoliberal regime was the Delors-inspired 1986 Single European Act, whose convergence policies for the peripheral economies was driven by the EU's commitment to market expansion in the shape of the 'four freedoms': the free movement of goods, the free movement and establishment of services, the free movement of workers, and the free movement of capital.

Second, there was the move to reduce public spending and state subsidies, called 'market distortions' under the EU Directorate for Competition. This paved the way for massive state sell-off across Europe, including Ireland. EU Directives were issued to promote the 'liberalisation' for Telecommunications (1990) for railways (1991) for electricity (1996) for postal services (1997) and for gas (1998). The fate of An Post - the break-up of a vital service - was steered through by Irish Commissioner Charlie McCreevy.¹⁵

Finally, and most crucially, the SEA laid the basis for monetary union and marked the beginning of the EU becoming in Wolfgang Streeck's words 'a machine for the liberal-

¹⁰Kieran Allen, *The Celtic Tiger*, Chapter 2. Conor McCabe, *The Financialisation of Ireland*, Coulter Nagel, *Ireland under Austerity, Neoliberal Crisis, Neoliberal Solutions*, Manchester, 2015.

¹¹See 'EEC: Bosses Answer', *The Worker*, No 4, 4th May 1972. <http://www.clirishleftarchive.org/workspace/documents/thework72.pdf>

¹²Poster in 1972 anti-EEC campaign, Sinn Féin 'For Sale by Private Treaty : Oppose the Common Market'. Dublin: Sinn Féin. <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vt1s000551244>. The poster, not much heeded at the time, was issued by 'Sinn Féin, Gardiner St', the forerunner of the Workers Party. 'Sinn Féin, Kevin St' at the time became today's Sinn Féin.

¹³'Eurosclerosis' was the term given for economic stagnation and low growth rates.

¹⁴Official EU policy documents are now stuffed full of neoliberal-speak, more so than their equivalents in the US. See Marnie Holborow, *Language and Neoliberalism* London 2015.

¹⁵Kieran Allen, *Reasons to Vote No to the Lisbon Treaty*, Dublin 2008, pp.15-16.

¹⁶Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* London 2014, p.105. See chapter three for a blistering account of the conversion of the EU into a vehicle for the liberalisation of European capitalism.

isation of European capitalism'.¹⁶ The engine of this machine was the European Central Bank, established in June 1999, whose role effectively hollowed out democracy in the EU. Modelled on the Bundesbank, the ECB as stipulated in the Maastricht Treaty of 1999, ensured that currencies in the then European Monetary Union would be tied together under a rigid fiscal lock-in system, called the Growth and Stability Pact. No member state would be allowed to run an annual deficit above 3% of GDP or accumulate a total debt greater than 60%. The only option for economies which fell behind was so called internal devaluation - i.e. wage-cuts. The economy was conceived as a free standing market and taking precedence over everything else enacted, according to some, what the founder of ordo-liberalism, Hayek, had only dreamed of.¹⁷ A decade later, Ireland, as we know, was treated to the full force of the ECB when on 19 November 2010, its then President Jean- Claude Trichet, pointed 'a loaded gun' at Former Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan threatening to cut off all funding unless Ireland immediately bailed out its banks.¹⁸ This bullying was repeated with even worse effects in Greece three years later.

Totally unaccountable

Official 'Eurosystem' literature plainly lays out the role of the ECB. It states that the ECB has 'a clear and unambiguous mandate' to maintain price stability', and that this is now 'an overarching objective to the EU as a whole'. The ECB is 'granted full independence from political inference in the fulfilment of this mandate'.¹⁹ Politics thus becomes engulfed by neoliberal doc-

trine. The ECB's extensive power directs policy across the other co-institutions of the EU, they too removed from democratic control.

One of the main institutional players, the European Commission, from the 1990's drove through the privatisation of the public sector using competition law.²⁰ The Commission, the *de facto* executive of the union, is an unelected body composed of functionaries designated by national governments and selected by the President of the Commission (whose present incumbent, incidentally, is Jean Claude Junker, under investigation for granting sweetheart tax deals to Amazon and McDonalds during his time as prime minister of Luxembourg).²¹ Another key institution is the Council of Ministers, a configuration of meetings between departmental ministers of each member state, and whose decisions, arrived at by qualified majority voting (by which the bigger countries get more votes) become law. Perry Anderson describes the Council as a 'hydra-headed entity in virtually constant session in Brussels, whose deliberations are secret... sewn up at bureaucratic level and whose outcomes are binding on national parliaments'.²² Then there is the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg composed of judges appointed by the member states who adjudicate on the legality of the directives of the Commission. The ECJ, often understood as the upholder of individual rights, acts also as protector of the 'free market' as the recent ECJ ruling that the Irish government should impose a 25% VAT rate on tolls levied on all state-owned motorways. Finally, there is the European Parliament, the only elective body of the EU and where, it is often assumed, all these decisions are put under democratic

¹⁷See Chapter Three, Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*, London 2014.

¹⁸'The ECB letter was a gun stuck in the ear of the Government - leading economist', *Irish Independent*, 6 Nov 2014 <http://www.independent.ie/business/irish/the-ecb-letter-was-a-gun-stuck-in-the-ear-of-the-government-leading-economist-30723102.html>

¹⁹European Central Bank, the Monetary Policy of the ECB, Frankfurt 2011. <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/pdf/other/monetarypolicy2011en.pdf>

²⁰True to form, in July of this year, the Commission ruled that Ireland is signed up to the Water Framework Directive and that Irish water charges would have to be imposed.

²¹Simon Bowers, 'Jean Claude Junker cannot shake off Luxembourg's tax controversy', *The Observer*, December 14, 2014 *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/14/jean-claude-junker-luxembourg-tax-deals-controversy>

²²Perry Anderson, *Old New World*, p.22.

scrutiny. The reality is that the European Parliament has no control over the budget, no real say over appointments and meeting variously in Strasbourg, Luxemburg and Brussels, is not even deemed worthy of a permanent home. The European Parliament, lacking any real legislative control, has been described as a ‘symbolic façade’ not unlike the monarchy in Britain.²³

In a damning account, *Ruling the Void* the late Irish political scientist, Peter Mair, lays bare the appalling democratic deficit of EU. The institutions are made up of people who have risen from national governments, but whose elevation to European-wide roles extends their influence but removes them from democratic control. Phil Hogan, Irish politician discredited at home over his imposition of Irish water charges has served, since 2014, as European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, showing how EU top jobs make a handy escape from the people’s verdict. Mair explains how ‘any opposition regarding the institutionalisation of Europe is voiced within the European channel where no relevant competence lies’.²⁴ So we may see stirring speeches in the European Parliament but they cannot influence the decisions taken by the EU bureaucratic elites. This gives rise not only to a serious democratic flaw at the level of the EU but also, because EU directives are then applied to member states, a filtering back of unaccountability to the member states themselves. When EU policy is rejected in referenda - as, for example, in the Lisbon Treaty poll in Ireland in 2008 - the EU, with ‘notoriously meagre’ concern for electoral mandates, simply asks voters to vote again until they get the right result.²⁵ In the case of Greece, the wishes of the voters are trampled on by the EU machine with their own government becoming its whipping boy.

Mair’s verdict on the EU is that it is has been constructed as a protected sphere, safe from the demands of the voters and

as such, amounts to ‘a remarkable under-politicisation of the Europeanisation dimension’.²⁶ The revolving door between investment banking and top EU positions, such as Mario Draghi, from Goldman Sachs to ECB president or Jose Manuel Barroso from Commission President to Goldman Sachs, is further proof of how much the untouchable interests of finance dominate. Short of exiting the institutional cage of the EU, it is difficult to see how any one member-state could ever go against the EU nor how, in its rigid institutional form, any redirecting of policy could occur.

Social Democracy and the EU

The Labour Parties of Europe bought heavily into the EU and its creation of a single currency. They assumed, according to one account, that the EU would herald ‘the advent of a kinder, gentler capitalism in which the power of the multinationals would be matched by the transnational organisation of labour that would recreate the shared prosperity of the post-war golden age’.²⁷ Meanwhile, many top positions in the EU have often gone to Labour Party politicians. The first President of the ECB for example was Wim Duisenburg from the Dutch Labour Party, the present President of the European Parliament is Martin Schulz from the German SPD and the aforementioned Jose Manuel Barroso, most identified with taking a hard line against any relaxing of austerity, was from the Portuguese PPD/PSD-Social Democratic Party.

The EU’s adoption of neoliberal policies coincided almost exactly with the Social Democratic parties’ own neoliberal conversion. The agenda was set in 1983 when the French Socialist Party government under Mitterand abandoned their initial Keynesian programme, prompted by his finance minister at the time, Jacques Delors, who two years later would become President of

²³Perry Anderson, *Old New World*, p.23.

²⁴Peter Mair, ‘Popular Democracy and the European Union Polity’, European Governance Papers C 05-03- 2005, p9. http://edoc.vifap01.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2455/pdf/egp_connex_C_05_03.pdf. See also Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void; The Hollowing out of Western Democracy*. London, 2013

²⁵Peter Mair, *Popular Democracy*, p.6.

²⁶Peter Mair, *Popular Democracy*, p.10.

²⁷Larry Elliot and Dan Aitkinson, *Europe isn’t working*, London 2016, p.8

the EU Commission. New Labour under Tony Blair and the German SPD's *die neue Mitte* (the new centre) government from 1998 dropped the emphasis on 'a social Europe' and promoted the European Union under 'the four freedoms', which did not include the freedom for workers to go on strike.²⁸ On the eve of the 1998 European elections, Blair and Schröder issued a joint 'Third Way' statement, calling on social democrats across the continent to accept the logic of 'modernization' and adapt to changing conditions. It soon became clear, as Streeck puts it, that social democracy far from reforming capitalism was being re-formed by capitalism itself, and had become neoliberalism's chief enabler. It was the SPD government under Schröder which introduced the Hartz IV law reforms, which slashed workers' wages and led to a sharp increase in German inequality, and became the template for 'structural reforms' and EU austerity today.²⁹

Other sections of the left also had illusions in the European Union but for different reasons. The so-called Eurocommunists during the 70s and 80's, from which Syriza emerged, saw the EU as a means of distancing themselves from the former eastern bloc and of showing their commitment to peaceful coexistence with the capitalist west. Some in the forerunner of Syriza, Synaspismos, were sympathetic to the Third Way and what was termed quaintly the 'cosmopolitan democracy' of the EU.³⁰ The official trade union movements, headed by the ETUC, confronted with globalisation put its

faith in the EU's Social Chapter. But, as they retreated into 'social partnership' arrangements, in pursuit of 'a culture of responsibility for performance in the labour market', the EU became, in the words of a former British trade union leader, 'the only show in town'.³¹ Irish trade union leaders' enthusiasm for the EU did not cool, despite the fact that employment and social policy concerns became virtually absent from EU monetary and competition policies.³² It is true that SIPTU withheld backing for the Lisbon Treaty, first time around, but only as a bargaining chip to persuade the Government to legislate for collective bargaining. They rushed to back Lisbon 2, claiming that ratification of the Treaty had the potential to improve workers' rights.³³

In the past, much was made by the Labour Party and others about how the EU has been a progressive force for Ireland, particularly in the area of women's rights. This forgets that the EU has been able to bend its rules to allow member states to continue along their own, sometimes conservative, social policy path. For example, a protocol was added to the 1992 Maastricht which prevented Irish women from using any aspect of EU law to gain information about or access to abortion facilities. Rights in these areas had to be won by Irish people themselves, mobilising on the streets over the X case in the same year. The various EU directives - from the Equal Pay Directive of 1975 to the EU Gender Equality Recast Directive of 2006 - have spectacularly failed to close today's gender pay gap of 16% across the EU.

²⁸Joan Birch and George Souvlis, Interview with Wolfgang Streeck, 'Social Democracy, Last Rounds', *Jacobin* June 2016.; <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/02/wolfgang-streeck-europe-eurozone-austerity-neoliberalism-social-democracy/>. Streeck's condemnation of social democratic illusions in the social market are all the more strident in that he was once - a decision regretted by him now - an official advisor to Schröder.

²⁹In Germany, the wage share after the announcement of Agenda 2010 fell drastically from what was already a low level to the lowest level for more than 50 years. See Oliver Natchwey, 'Die Linke and the Crisis of Representation' *International Socialism*, 124, 2009 <http://isj.org.uk/die-linke-and-the-crisis-of-class-representation/>

³⁰See Chapter 2, Kevin Ovenden, *Syriza Inside the Labyrinth*, London, 2015, and also Alex Callinicos *Against the Third Way*, Cambridge 2001. p.99.

³¹Ron Todd, General Secretary of the TGWU, quoted in Elliot and Aitken, p.38. For ETUC preference for a partnership approach see the conclusion of the *Industrial Relations in Europe Report* published by the European Commission, 2014. ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13500&langId=en

³²For details see Chapter Four, Roland Erne, *European Unions: Labor's Quest for a Transnational Democracy*, New York 2008.

³³Martin Wall, 'SIPTU backs Lisbon Treaty', *Irish Times* September 3 2009. <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/siptu-backs-lisbon-treaty-1.845712>

In Ireland, women still earn 14.4% less than men, a figure that has actually risen since 2010. Furthermore, EU directives on childcare provision have had no impact on the laissez faire, unregulated childcare situation in Ireland.³⁴ Delivery of reform via the EU is a long waiting game.

Voters ignored

When concrete proposals on the direction of the EU are put to the vote, the Irish - like populations elsewhere - have become less and less keen on the EU. The SEA and the Maastricht treaty were approved with almost 70% of the votes cast for the Yes side. By 1998, 62% voted for the Amsterdam Treaty. By the time of the Nice (first) referendum, in 2001, while the turnout was only 35%, it was rejected. Then, in 2008, after a campaign in which the entire Irish establishment and the EU liberal enthusiasts rallied behind the Lisbon Treaty (which both Taoiseach Brian Cowan and foreign Minister Micheál Martin had not bothered to read) the No vote gathered 53% of the votes cast. Furthermore, rejection was strongest in working class areas.³⁵

Already the French in May 2005 and then the Dutch in July of the same year had rejected an attempt to introduce an EU Constitution (an 'absolutely unreadable' 500-page document)³⁶ which set out the dictates of 'free and undistorted' competition, the deregulation of the labour market, and the privatisations of public services. Its rejection, twice, sent shock waves through the EU establishment. Some cosmetic changes were

made - removing flags and symbols - and the document was brought back re-packaged as the Lisbon Treaty. Ireland was the only country to hold a referendum on the new Treaty. Then, when Ireland voted no, the government, under pressure from the EU, asked the people to vote again. In the aftermath of the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the beginning of the financial collapse, the Government ensured Lisbon 2 was shunted through. Clearly EU Treaties and democracy do not mix.

The anti-capitalist movement, of which opposition to these treaties was part, seldom targeted the EU itself. Indeed, some anti-capitalists, such as the influential autonomist Toni Negri, declared themselves in favour of a strengthened EU on the grounds that it could counter US dominance, protect the world from rampant globalisation and make 'crap nation states disappear'.³⁷ Many more saw the main battle as curbing the recent excesses of globalisation - the power of the corporations, tax havens, climate change, erosion of workers' rights, the war on Iraq - which were seen not as systemic to capitalism, but as a neoliberal distortion. Susan George, a leading member of the French organisation, Attac, tasked the movement with curbing the unfettered market and returning to the 'progressive traditions' of the Enlightenment which defended the common good.³⁸ The European Social Forum directed its fire on the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO passing over the enabling role of state institutions, seen as immovable 'boulders' which had to be worked around.³⁹ In the Social Movements

³⁴See Centre for Social Educational Research report, *An Accessible Childcare Model*, Dublin, 2005 for how Ireland has lagged behind in this area. <http://www.dit.ie/cser/media/ditcser/images/accessible-childcare.pdf>

³⁵Daniel Finn, 'Ireland the Left and The European Union', in Colin Coulter and Angela Nagle *Ireland under Austerity, Neoliberal Crisis, Neoliberal Solutions*. Manchester, 2015, p.249-50.

³⁶Italian politician Giuliano Amato's words, quoted in Kieran Allen, *Reasons to Vote No*, p.6.

³⁷'Oui, pour faire disparaître cette merde d'Etat-nation' Interview with Toni Negri by Christian Losson and Vittorio De Felippis, *Liberation*, 13 May 2005. http://www.liberation.fr/france/2005/05/13/oui-pour-faire-disparaitre-cette-merde-d-etat-nation_519624

³⁸Susan George, *We, the Peoples of Europe*, London 2008 pp.75-83

³⁹The boulder image was one used about the state by prominent anti-capitalist Naomi Klein but it could equally apply to how many activists saw the institutions of the EU. 'We are up against a boulder. We can't remove it so we try to go underneath it, to go around it and over it.' quoted in Chris Harman, 'Anti-capitalism, Theory and Practice', *International Socialism* 2;88, Autumn 2000. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/2000/xx/anticap.htm>

⁴⁰William F. Fisher and Thomas Ponniah, *Another World is Possible*, London, 2003, p.349

Manifesto, published in 2003, for example there was no mention of the defects of the EU.⁴⁰ Ironically, the movement's very effective highlighting of western capital beating down the global South with punitive debt repayment conditionalities made little mention of similar emerging developments in the EU. The slogan 'Another Europe is possible', while evocatively popular, skirted round the political question of the EU. The depth and scale of the crisis today and the degree of political string pulling by the EU no longer allows us such luxuries.

Fortress, racist Europe

Perhaps more than anything else, it has been the terrible spectacle of thousands of refugees drowning the Mediterranean which has showed up the moral bankruptcy of the EU. The European Convention of Human Rights is supposed to act as the conscience of the EU but recent events would show that the principles of human rights count for nothing when it comes to the EU's treatment of refugees. 2016 has been another murderous year for migrants trying to reach Europe. There were no less than no less than 3,034 deaths by the end of July. In just one week of that month, 39 bodies were washed up on Libya's shores. According to UNCR, last year a million people made the journey to Europe, many of whom are unaccompanied minors.⁴¹ This appalling humanitarian crisis has been met in the EU with squabbling and bargaining over numbers. The EU treats these refugees as if it had no part in their making. The top three nations from which maritime refugees to the EU come are Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea, countries that the EU has either actively participated in, or supported, being bombed. The European Commission only talks of 'strengthen-

ing the protection of the EU's external border', 'stemming the flows', 'developing sustainable reception capacities in the affected regions' and stepping up 'implementation of the Return Directive' are its priorities.⁴² This directive, known by human rights activists as the 'shameful directive', abjectly fails to respect migrants' dignity and human rights, criminalises them, and calls for measures, such as prolonged 'pre-removal' detention and a ban on re-entering the EU.⁴³ The EU's record on its treatment of refugees will surely go down as the dark stain of this century.

It is striking that when it comes to refugees, EU rules, normally so strict, can be easily bent. Last year, Germany and Austria unilaterally suspended the existing Schengen Agreement and closed its borders to refugees. In direct contravention of the UN 1951 Refugee Convention, the EU is pursuing a policy of exclusion. Flouting the agreed principle of non-refoulement (i.e. forbidding the return of refugees to a place where their lives would be at risk) the EU now returns asylum seekers and migrants to transit countries of regions of origin before they reach countries where they could make a claim for refugee status. Even pathetically low targets of refugees are not met or are quietly shelved. Under the Resettlement Programme, Ireland pledged to accept 4,000 refugees with particular emphasis on families and unaccompanied minors. As reported in September this year, only 300 refugees had been received in Ireland and only *one* of whom was an unaccompanied minor.⁴⁴ Our Tanaiste, Frances Fitzgerald, is cruelly oblivious to the reasons which make refugees flee: she refuses to improve Ireland's disgraceful Direct Provision system, because to do so would act as a 'pull factor'.⁴⁵

To make matters worse, the EU's em-

⁴¹<http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/12/5683d0b56/million-sea-arrivals-reach-europe-2015.html>

⁴²European Council Conclusions, October 2015, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/10/16-euco-conclusions/>

⁴³Anneliese Baldaccini, 'The EU Directive on Return: Principles and Protests', *Refugee Survey Quarterly* (2009)28 (4): 114-138.doi: 10.1093/rsq/hdq002

⁴⁴<https://www.oco.ie/2016/09/ireland-has-assisted-in-relocation-of-only-one-unaccompanied-minor/>

⁴⁵<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/changes-to-direct-provision-would-create-pull-factor-for-asylum-seekers-343410.html>

brace of neoliberalism has ensured that the policing of migrants is a profit-making venture. The EU has outsourced policing of its external borders on to Frontex, a semi-autonomous agency, which runs a series of 'push-back' operations in the Mediterranean including the forcible removal of many of those who arrive in Europe or their imprisonment in detention centres. Frontex operates in a secretive corporate security world and this year received €114 million with another €9.5 million for deportations. Ireland contributes to Frontex, financially and operationally. Frontex sees itself as a business enterprise which sends its staff to migrant centres in 'migrant hotspots', such as Lampedusa, where migrants are 'debriefed' in order to gain information about the people smugglers.⁴⁶ Of course, Frontex's focus on smugglers, oft echoed by the UK government and others, conveniently deflects from the causes of migration - war and terror - for which the western powers are responsible.

Confronted by the EU's hostility to refugees, many thousands of people have done what they can to help. They have visited refugee camps, sent clothes and provisions to Calais welcomed refugees as they arrive. On the island of Lesbos despite being ravaged by austerity and economic collapse, local fisherman rescue people from the sea and local people feed children arriving on the beach. These spontaneous acts of generosity, perhaps more than anything else, show how wide is the gulf which now separates the EU bureaucracy from the people.

The policing of the EU's external border contrasts with the EU internal migration system, the so-called EU freedom of movement, frequently celebrated as one of the EU most progressive principles. The right have focused on this aspect of the EU to whip up anti-immigrant hatred and their racism must be opposed. But those who have an idealised notion of the EU's freedom of movement should also recognise its roots, not in multiculturalism, but in the pursuit

of profit. From the post-war 'guest workers', from Turkey and Italy who worked the factories and mines of Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, to the freedom of movement arrangement today the EU's major concern is labour shortages, not lofty principles. Lack of available skilled labour means that Germany needs to add 400,000 skilled immigrants to its workforce every year to maintain its economic strength.⁴⁷ Furthermore, it is the effects of the EU permanent austerity measures which have forced workers of newer member states to leave their country to work in the economies of northern Europe. No less than 3 million Polish workers been forced to emigrate to work in other countries leaving behind 400,000 'Euro-orphans'.⁴⁸

This emptying out of populations stems from uneven capitalist development within the EU. Like in mass emigration from Ireland to Britain in the 19th century migrant labour could be sucked into industry through the political and economic control that Britain had over Ireland, although no-one called it 'freedom of movement' then. Today, freedom of movement and no borders across Europe must be defended against racist notions of border control and against state repression of migrants. We stand with all those who are forced to move from one part of Europe to another to earn a living and with those who enter Europe seeking refuge from war and persecution. The priority must be to show solidarity to our fellow workers to assist where we can with the organisation of migrants into trade unions, to fight against low-pay, to defend migrant workers in our jobs and to build a strong and visible anti-racist movement.

Post-Brexit

The Russian revolutionary Lenin described politics as concentrated economics. The Brexit vote is an expression of what people have suffered since the crash of 2008 and an indication of the degree of politi-

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⁴⁷Anthony Advincula, 'Labor Shortage: Germany Needs More Immigrants', *New American Media* January 4, 2015. <http://www.alternet.org/world/labor-shortage-germany-needs-more-immigrants>

⁴⁸See Jan Symanski, Polish migrant worker speaking at a Lexit rally in London on 13 June 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=212ULdpyff8>

cal uncertainty and instability that the economic crisis has brought in its wake. Divisions within ruling parties and ‘the coming together of strange bedfellows’, as noted by Wolfgang Streeck, always occurs in times of systemic disintegration and radical uncertainty.⁴⁹ But politics has ‘its own language, grammar and syntax’,⁵⁰ and is not always easy to read. This has certainly been the case for the politics of Brexit in Britain, but also in Ireland, but reading its political significance is important for our understanding of the EU.

The vote to leave in Britain while an expression of different things, was widely recognised as being ‘a roar against the elites’, including those of the EU. The wide ranging Ashcroft post-referendum poll found that support for Brexit, in the working class especially, reflected a fear of falling living standards, and political powerlessness in general, but also a defence of ‘the principle that decisions about the UK should be taken in the UK’, an issue cited above the question of immigration.⁵¹

There has been much debate about whether the vote was about the EU at all, and if it was not mainly a symptom of the racism seething under the skin of British social life.⁵² I will not deal here with the differing interpretations, as they have been discussed fully elsewhere.⁵³ Nevertheless, from the point of view of a political understanding of the EU, it is important to say that the reaction to Brexit from those on the radical left, and others, across Europe was to welcome the vote. This approach was summed up by veteran campaigner against EU treaties, Eric Toussaint from Belgium, who saw the Brexit vote as a rejection of

the neoliberal EU and as laying ‘the basis for future exits around Europe on a radical left basis’. Similarly, Zoe Konstantopoulou, former Syriza president of the Greek parliament, compared the Leave vote to the ‘Oxi’ referendum in July 2015 that rejected EU austerity.⁵⁴ In Ireland, People Before Profit TD Brid Smith expressed a similar sentiment when she said, welcoming the vote, the Brexit vote has shown that the EU’s recent treatment of Greece and Ireland shows its primary concern is not the welfare of citizens or refugees but the welfare of the banks and the bond holders’.⁵⁵

The vote certainly did cause shocked consternation among the EU elites and looks set to usher in a further period of uncertainty for our rulers. Such a situation will see shifts and lurches from the left and the right. The challenge for socialists will be to give voice to the anger against neoliberal austerity and not let it go in a right-wing racist or fascist direction. This year, in France while Le Pen’s Front National may have been able to capitalise on the anti EU feeling at the end of June, only a week earlier thousands of trade unionists and socialists had taken to the streets to oppose Hollande’s and EU- backed Work Law. Even when the racist right is strong, their rise is not guaranteed and the battle is not over.

In the North of Ireland, the response to Brexit and the EU has been on a different political terrain. The DUP who had called for a Leave vote used the outcome, predictably, to reinforce their unionist stand. Sinn Féin, on the other hand, had campaigned for a Remain vote. The strongest vote for Remain in Northern Ireland was in Foyle, where 78% backed EU membership,

⁴⁹Wolfgang Streeck, ‘The post-capitalist interregnum; the old system is dying but a new social order cannot be born’, *Juncture* Vol 23, Issue 2, p.68

⁵⁰This description of politics was by the French Marxist Daniel Bensaïd. See his piece, ‘Leaps, Leaps, Leaps, Europe Solidaire, Sans Frontières’, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bensaïd/2002/07/leaps.htm>

⁵¹Ashcroft, Lord. 2016. *How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday... and why*. [online]. [Accessed 4 August 2016]. Available at <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/>

⁵²Laleh Khalili ‘After Brexit: reckoning with Britain’s xenophobia and racism’. In: *After Brexit: the Verso Report*, London, 2016

⁵³Charlie Kimber, ‘Why did Britain vote Leave’, *International Socialism* 152 Autumn 2016, pp.21-43

⁵⁴Quoted in Charlie Kimber, ‘Why did Britain vote Leave’, p.24

⁵⁵<http://www.peoplebeforeprofit.ie/2016/06/people-before-profit-alliance-press-statement-on-brexit-vote/>

followed by West Belfast at 74%. The Remain vote won both in Northern Ireland and Scotland with 56% and 62% respectively. The Irish result raised the same question as in Scotland: the problem of the union. It brought into sharp focus the injustice of the six counties in Ireland being tied to the UK.

After the poll, Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness expressed the view that Brexit represented 'a snub' to the Belfast Agreement of 1998 and represented 'a major setback' for the political process in Northern Ireland.⁵⁶ Sinn Féin had opposed Brexit, but when Brexit prevailed, it created a constitutional crisis which provided them with the opening to make the case for a united Ireland. They immediately called for a border poll on Irish unification as not for the first time, England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity.

To take advantage of a post-Brexit situation however, demanded that Sinn Féin tone down its criticisms of the EU. Sinn Féin, it should be remembered, had been prominent in opposing earlier EU treaties: Nice in 2001, and Lisbon, 2008 and 2009. Their grounds for opposing the Lisbon Treaty was 'a bad deal for Ireland', it gave 'the EU too much power' and reduced 'our ability to stop decisions that are not in Ireland's interests'.⁵⁷ Indeed Sinn Féin is often described as Eurosceptic. However, coming up to the Brexit vote, in June 2016, Gerry Adams announced that 'Sinn Féin's approach to the European Union would be one of 'critical engagement'. 'Where measures are in the interests of the Irish people, we support them. Where they are not, we oppose them and campaign for change'.⁵⁸

It is deeply ironic that Sinn Féin should say these things now. Only a year earlier Greece's attempts to change the direction

of the EU had not only spectacularly failed but had also converted the Syriza government into the worst austerity-implementers. The Greek debacle had proved beyond doubt that the EU was an austerity cage from which no member state could escape. Also, Sinn Féin has been identified, in the South, with the anti-austerity movement, and this included being opposed to EU-imposed austerity. Alignment with the EU must have come as a surprise for many of their supporters in the South, all the more so that 'critical engagement' with the EU was not elaborated on in Sinn Féin's brief statements. Enlisting membership of the EU as a means to assert national sovereignty when the EU has recently crushed economic self-determination for its peripheral states, conveniently brushes aside the fact that the EU's surveillance regime resembles a colonial structure itself.

Conclusion

In Ireland, like Britain, the capitalist class is divided over Brexit, which has added to the sense of crisis. Like the Remainers in the British government and among most of the ruling elite, the Southern government saw Brexit as extremely risky and hoped it would not win, although their tone throughout was deliberately more low key. Once the vote happened, the minority government was keen to contain any sense of crisis attached to Brexit and stressed that full contingency plans were in place.

The employers' organisation, IBEC, declared that Irish jobs would be further under threat and there would be a 'full-blown currency crisis' which would hit Irish exports 'very hard' and 'things could get much worse'.⁵⁹ Some sections of the Irish establishment interpreted Brexit as a diplo-

⁵⁶McGuinness saw the calling of the vote as placating the 'UKIP racists and the looney right'. Martin McGuinness, 'Remain must mean remain: why we need an all-Ireland response to Brexit'. *The Irish Times*, 19 August 2016. <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/remain-must-mean-remain-why-we-need-an-all-ireland-response-to-brexit-1.2760915>

⁵⁷Sinn Féin, *Ireland Deserves Better: an Alternative Guide to the EU*, 2008. <http://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2009/LisbonAlternativeGuide.pdf>

⁵⁸Gerry Adams, 'Irish Government and Fianna Fáil must respect the vote in the north'. *An Phoblacht / Republican News*, 29 June 2016 <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/40575>

⁵⁹Fiona Redden 'Irish jobs under imminent threat due to Brexit fallout'. *The Irish Times*, 2 August 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/irish-jobs-under-imminent-threat-due-to-brexit-fallout-1.2741540>

matic and military disaster. A former officer in the Irish army, and a security specialist, saw Brexit as representing not only a threat to the Good Friday Agreement but also as posing 'profound and grave implications for British and European security, defence, peace and stability'. Brexit would place European defence in France and Germany's hand and leave Ireland no longer serving under Britain's EU battlegroup, out on a limb.⁶⁰

The more finance-orientated sections of the Irish ruling class were more opportunistic. David McWilliams, for example, judging Brexit as representative of 'a nasty, flag-waving, petty, imperial England in a post-imperial world' jumped at the opening that it created for Ireland. Inc. A post-Brexit Irish International Financial Services Centre could take advantage of England's 'self-inflicted misery' and Dublin become the new London, and 'a magnet for global capital'. His claim, in an outpouring of praise for British free marketeers, was that Ireland with people 'speaking the same language and 'to all intents and purposes ... quasi-British' could become the antidote to the Brexit mentality, 'a safe harbour in all this chaos with free, unfettered access to Europe'.⁶¹

Causing further disarray, the *Financial Times* commentator Wolfgang Münchau, has said that the Apple ruling has shown that Ireland is 'a failed business model'. For Münchau, Ireland's low corporate taxes and tax avoidance for foreign investors is unsustainable, and the combination of Brexit, the long-term loss of its business model and the ongoing crises in the Eurozone could see Ireland following the UK out of the EU. 'Those in favour of EU membership should give some thought to what could go wrong. They

might otherwise end up in the same place as the over confident Remain supporters in the UK - bitter and without influence'.⁶²

A ruling class which is split and anxious about Brexit means that there will be no certainty for this weak minority government, already under pressure from the anti-austerity movement.

But this is not the time to line up with the Southern Irish establishment alongside the EU. Nobody wants to see the reimposition of a hard border between North and South. All hard borders, including those within the EU, are against the interests of working people. But simply arguing for a united Ireland within the framework of existing institutions - whether the North-South structures or under the aegis of the EU - ignores what is going wrong across this island and promises little change. Austerity measures under The Fresh Start Agreement have allowed poverty to increase, making Northern Ireland one of the eighth poorest regions of Northern Europe.⁶³ Southern Ireland's refusal to close the tax loopholes for corporations or tax the rich has denied the poorest in society a basic right to a house, to a national health service, to equal access to higher education, and has made the South a society with the fourth worst inequality gap in the EU, a divide that has widened with austerity imposed by the EU.⁶⁴

The radical left is in a unique position in Ireland to make the case that tying ourselves to the EU offers only more austerity and more directives to privatise our public services. The miserable crumbs from the recent Budget in the South has highlighted how much the EU sets the rules. The small €1.3 bn 'budgetary adjustment' allowed to us by EU fiscal rules is nothing compared to the €28.5 bn which has already been spent

⁶⁰Tom Clonan. 'Thanks to Brexit, the fragile peace in Ireland is under threat'. <http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/brexit-security-impact-tom-clonan-2844168-Jun2016/>

⁶¹David McWilliams, 'Brand Britain is ours for the taking'. *The Sunday Business Post*, 3 July 2016 <http://www.businesspost.ie/brand-britain-is-ours-for-the-taking>

⁶²Wolfgang Münchau, 'Ireland may have to consider leaving the EU', *The Irish Times* Monday October 10, 2016 <http://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/wolfgang-m%C3%BCnchau-ireland-may-have-to-consider-leaving-eu-1.2823535>

⁶³http://inequalitybriefing.org/graphics/briefing_43_UK_regions_poorest_North_Europe.pdf

⁶⁴<https://www.unicef.ie/2016/04/14/new-unicef-report-shows-growing-inequality-among-children-in-high-income-countries/>

on the bank bail-out, on what the EU calls servicing ‘sovereign debt’. This debt enslavement, which will leave us with poor and more privatised public services for decades, is a direct result, as explained above, of the EU neoliberalisation machine.

No one can foresee where the next clashes will come, nor what struggles will pit us yet again against the forces that are determined to make the working class pay for this protracted crisis. But we do know that the EU will be on the other side. Clarity about whose interests the EU institutions serve can only help us in the battles ahead and put us in a position to offer real alternatives.

We have to break with the idea that Ire-

land must stick to the EU at any cost. This only provides the Troika, as Greece proved, with a stick to beat countries into line. The socialist left should put forward its own demands: a write-down of the debt, the nationalisation of natural resources, a reversal of privatisation, the right not to be bound by the rules of the fiscal compact, regardless of whether these are acceptable to the EU. These simple demands go against what the EU stands for in its current form. Therefore we should also be in favour of a new Europe, not one based on austerity and enforcement of market madness, but one based on democracy and control of capital.

Secularism, Islamophobia and the politics of religion

John Molyneux

There are moments when a single flash of lightning lights up the night sky and illuminates the whole landscape below which was previously shrouded in darkness. Such was the moment when Michael Brown was shot by a US cop in Ferguson, Missouri on 9 August 2014. And such was the moment when photographs appeared of armed police forcing a Muslim woman to disrobe on a French beach. It both illuminated and encapsulated in concentrated form the whole offensive against Muslims that has been waged by French politicians and the French state, not just for the last year or so but for the last twenty years.

Of course this offensive is by no means confined to France and has a thoroughly international character - essentially it originated in the United States and is raging in Britain, and many other places including Ireland. Nevertheless it does seem particularly intense in France at this point in time and has the peculiarity of being waged in the name of 'secularism' and 'the French Republic' and this ideological device has given it a significant radical cover and legitimacy and secured for it a degree of 'left' support and acquiescence higher than is generally the case elsewhere. This is because secularism has long been seen as a 'value' or 'principle' that the left, including revolutionary socialists, should defend and advocate. This article is an examination of the relations between secularism, Islamophobia, racism and the politics of religion.

As it happens Ireland and Irish history constitutes an interesting and useful vantage point from which to start this examination.

The View from Ireland

Because of the pretty much unique position of dominance held by the Catholic Church in Irish society during much of the 20th century the issue of secularism is alive and well in Ireland today. It is there in the Repeal the 8th campaign and in the slogans of the pro-choice movement: 'Not the church and not the state! Women should decide their fate!'

and 'Get your rosaries off our ovaries!'. It is there in way in which the horrible legacy of the Magdalene Laundries, the Industrial Schools and the brutal Christian Brothers still haunt the memories of so many of our people. And it is still there in the inflated power that the Church hierarchy still exercises over our schools.

On all these issues any socialist will stand full square for the principles of secularism. There should be a complete separation of church and state. We are for complete freedom of religious belief and religious worship but as a private matter. No religion should hold a position of power or privilege in the state or be state funded. It is also probably the case that many, though certainly not all, socialists are non-believers and while not wanting in any way to prohibit religion nevertheless look forward, like Karl Marx, to a world in which people no longer require the services of the opium of the masses.

But shift the focus back in time to 1916 and the Irish Revolution. How would we respond to an argument that ran as follows?

'The 1916 Rising was led by Catholics, in particular that well known Catholic fanatic Padraig Pearse. By far the majority of the Volunteers were Catholics and even the socialist leader of the Irish Citizen Army, James Connolly, was a Catholic of sorts. Moreover, the Proclamation which constituted the programme of the Rising explicitly states that it is written 'In the name of God' and that 'We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessings we invoke upon our arms'. Therefore it is clear that this was a sectarian Catholic uprising intent on establishing a traditionalist authoritarian Catholic state and that no socialist should have given or should give retrospectively any support whatsoever to such a backward obscurantist movement dominated by a religion from the middle ages. Indeed objectively it was forces of the British Army, rough as they may been at times, who represented progress and had to be backed

by all those who value freedom, the enlightenment, and especially the rights of women’.

The answer that I trust every socialist, beginning with those ardent atheists Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, would give to this argument would be unequivocal. It would be that it is manifestly a manipulation and abuse of the principles of secularism to provide a justification for imperialism. The 1916 Rising, regardless of the religious affiliations of its leaders or the wording of its Proclamation was not fundamentally about religion at all but about national liberation. It was not about Catholicism versus Protestantism but about whether or not Britain should rule Ireland. And that therefore all socialists (and all democrats and progressives), as opponents of imperialism and defenders of the rights of oppressed nations to self determination, should stand unconditionally on the side of Irish freedom and with the Rising.

From this point of view whether or not the majority of the Irish, or the British for that matter, were Catholics, Protestants, Hindus or Jews was an entirely secondary matter and in no way the determining factor in the conflict. As to whether the ensuing independent Ireland would be reactionary, oppressive to women and so on that would be determined primarily not by the religious ideas in the heads of Padraig Pearse or the other signatories but by which social class emerged from the struggle for independence as the class in the saddle. If the working class and its leaders such as Connolly, Markievicz, and Lynn had come out on top then Ireland would have taken its place alongside revolutionary Russia in the vanguard of the struggle for sexual equality and women’s liberation.

Fast forward to the Troubles and the imagined dialogue above reappears with a vengeance in the British media. The conflict between predominantly Protestant Unionism and predominantly Catholic Nationalism is depicted as primarily a religious conflict with the idea that the conflict is about religion being seen as evidence of Irish stupidity and backwardness. After all hadn’t people in ‘civilised’ Britain stopped fighting about religion in the 18th century? More-

over the role of the British state in this conflict was to stand outside and above the two irrational warring tribes and mediate between them, while isolating and defeating the evil terrorists (the IRA).

The term ‘secularism’ is not much used but popular hostility to religion and especially religious fanaticism (in Britain) is skilfully harnessed to mask the obvious fact that this conflict is not at all about the doctrine of transubstantiation or the infallibility of the Pope but about whether Northern Ireland should be ruled by Britain or be part of the Irish Republic and that in turn is fuelled by systematic social, economic and political discrimination against the Nationalist community. And while this is obscuring the real nature of the conflict it is simultaneously legitimating the role of the British army which is actually acting to sustain the sectarian state and British rule.

Today, however, although the issues of oppression and British rule have not gone away the fact that the war has ended and that Sinn Féin is in government with the DUP means that questions related to secularism like marriage equality, LGBT+ rights and a woman’s right to choose come more to the fore.

What these examples show is that although secularism is a goal which socialists support the banner of secularism can be used to serve a number of purposes, reactionary as well as progressive. Therefore it is necessary always to make a concrete assessment of the concrete situation to determine the role being played by this slogan. How does it relate in the given historical circumstances to the interests of the working class and the struggle against oppression?

French secularism in perspective

Secularism has a long and complex history. Its origins in Europe stretch back to the beginnings of the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Copernicus and Galileo took on the Church and ‘the spiritual dictator-

ship of the Church was shattered'¹ Elements of it can be seen in the Dutch Revolt of 1565 - 1600 when religious tolerance was established in the Dutch Republic in order to unite the Dutch people against Habsburg Empire based in Counter Reformation Spain. It develops further among the philosophers of the eighteenth century enlightenment (Diderot, Voltaire etc) and comes into its own with the French Revolution of 1789-94.

In August 1789, shortly after the Storming of the Bastille, the Revolution abolished the privileges of the First (the clergy) and Second (Nobility) Estates and abolished the tithes gathered by the Church. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 proclaimed freedom of religion throughout France. On October 10 the National Constituent Assembly seized the properties and land held by the Catholic Church and sold them off at public auctions. In 1790 the Assembly formally subordinated the Roman Catholic Church in France to the French government and in September 1792 divorce was legalised and the State took control of the birth, death, and marriage registers away from the Church. In 1791, Jews were emancipated—receiving full civic rights as individuals but, significantly, none as a group. At the height of the Revolution during the Jacobin period (1792-94) there was an active campaign of dechristianisation in which religious statues and icons were destroyed and an attempt was made to launch a kind of substitute religion in the form of a 'Cult of Reason'. There were also riots in which priests were massacred.

It should be noted that secularism also featured in the American Revolution with Thomas Jefferson writing into the American constitution the amendment that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof' as a result of which the US has no established or state religion to this day.

In contrast to the US the reaction that followed the French Revolution and rise to power of Napoleon with his restoration of

the Empire also brought with it the restoration of the Church. However secularism lived on as a republican ideal throughout the nineteenth century and was also adopted by the working class and socialist movement. In the Paris Commune of 1871 one of its first decrees separated the church from the state, appropriated all church property to public property, and excluded the practice of religion from schools. In theory, the churches were allowed to continue their religious activity only if they kept their doors open for public political meetings during the evenings but this seems not to have been implemented.

The Commune, of course, was crushed after only 74 days but in 1881-2 France established a mandatory, free and secular education system that relied on state-paid professional teachers rather than on Catholic clerics. And in 1905 a new law was passed on the separation of church and state which remains the legal foundation of French secularism (*laïcité*).

What is evident from this brief overview is that the struggle for secularism - in the scientific revolution, the Dutch Republic, the enlightenment and the French and American Revolutions - was an integral part of the rise of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois democratic revolutions against feudalism. It was directed, first and foremost, against the Catholic Church which economically, politically and ideologically was the principle ally of the feudal aristocracy, absolute monarchy and feudal reaction as a whole. The consistently reactionary and counter revolutionary role of the Catholic Church from the days of the Medicis, through to 1789 and 1848 and the Spanish Civil War, also turned the European workers' movement against it. In this respect secularism, like the bourgeois democratic revolutions of which it was a part was thoroughly progressive.

But this is not the end of the story. If the bourgeois revolutions against feudalism were progressive it also the case that, from the moment of its conquest of political power, the bourgeoisie embarked on a policy of colonial conquest and enslavement

¹F.Engels, 'Introduction to the Dialectics of Nature', Marx/Engels, *Selected Works*, Vol.II, Moscow 1962, p.63.

of the rest of the world. Thus the Dutch Republic, within a decade of winning its independence from the Habsburg empire in what was perhaps the first war of national liberation, and becoming the most progressive society in Europe at the time, had established a colonial empire which stretched from Batavia (today's Indonesia) in the far east to New Amsterdam (New York) and Pernambuco (Brasil) in the Americas, which they naturally ran with great brutality. Similarly the bourgeois revolutionary Oliver Cromwell, had no sooner cut off the head of Charles I in January 1649 than he embarked in August of the same year on the conquest of Ireland with consequences that remain legendary. Bourgeois Britain then went on to establish the global empire on which the sun never set and the blood never dried.

France's war of revolutionary defence in 1793, turned with Napoleon into a war of conquest, whose oppressive ferocity was shockingly recorded by Goya in his *Disasters of War*, while at the same time he invaded Egypt and Syria and attempted to restore slavery in Haiti. In 1830 France decided to 'share its culture'² with Algeria by invading it in a war of conquest that by 1870 had reduced the Algerian population by one third. This was the beginning of the extensive French empire in Africa, second only to Britain's, that stretched across the Maghreb to Morocco and down to Senegal, Mali, Congo, Madagascar and elsewhere along with colonies in Indo-China (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), New Caledonia in the Pacific, and in the Caribbean. This was an empire which lasted until after Second World War and came to an end only with being driven out of Vietnam by the Viet Minh in 1954 and the horrendously ferocious Algerian War of 1954-62.

As the British Empire was depicted as 'the White Man's Burden' so the French

colonial project was presented as a 'civilising mission' (*mission civilisatrice*) bringing civilisation to backward and benighted peoples, and in this context the meaning of secularism changed profoundly. From being a progressive value directed against oppression it became seen as a marker of national pride and superiority which could be used to justify colonialism and all the oppression it entailed.

During the post Second World War economic boom, 'les trente glorieuses' as it was known in France, there was large scale immigration from North Africa as workers were sucked in to meet labour shortages in the expanding economy. It was a process very similar to what occurred in Britain during the same period, with the migrant workers in both cases being drawn from the former colonies³. In France this inevitably meant that a high proportion of these immigrants were Muslim⁴. And in this situation 'secularism' became a slogan behind which racists and racist organisations could mobilise anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment.

In itself there was nothing uniquely French to this. The British far right have tried repeatedly to make things like halal meat and the building of mosques a pretext for racist campaigns and the notion that immigrants should 'conform to our values' whatever they might be, is doubtless a seam mined by racists everywhere. Nevertheless the specificities of French history made the notion of 'secularism' well suited for this purpose. What made it particularly effective was that it invoked what had been a progressive tradition and this gave it a purchase among French liberals and sections of the French left, including sadly some of the far left, that 'British values' never had with the British left.

Thus, when in the late eighties the wearing the hijab or headscarf by school students

²September 8 2016, the former French Prime Minister and future presidential candidate, François Fillon, said that France is not guilty because it only wanted to share its culture with its former colonies.

³Ireland, of course, does not have former colonies and did not experience anything comparable to the western European boom of the fifties and sixties. The parallel here would be what happened in the Celtic Tiger.

⁴The French census does not record people by religion and estimates for the number of Muslims currently in France vary considerably. A recent report from the Interior Ministry puts the figure at 4.15 million (around 6.2%) compared to 2.7 million in Britain (around 4.5%).

became an issue, left wing teachers⁵ were among those making the running in the call for a ban and in the nineties there were actually some teachers' strikes over this question - not something which, to my knowledge, has occurred in other countries.

The 'progressive' credentials of secularism were further augmented by throwing feminism into the mix. In relation to the hijab and other forms of the Islamic veil (niqab, chador, burka etc) the argument was made that this was a marker of women's oppression imposed on Muslim women by their patriarchal families and their backward misogynistic religion. It was therefore a blow for women's liberation to ban the hijab etc from public institutions.

This argument, not confined to France but particularly potent in France, rested on several errors. First it was based on a one-dimensional and stereotyped view of the hijab which refused to listen to what many Muslim women themselves were saying on the issue. Yes, historically the veiling of women was linked to the oppression of women but in the world today it is also linked to Muslim identity (in the way that the 'Afro' hairstyle was linked to Black identity in the sixties) and therefore is often adopted by Muslim women voluntarily and as a statement of defiance and pride in their identity in the face of racism and exclusion. Second, it was based on a patronising top down conception of emancipation in which the liberation of Muslim women was to be handed to them from above rather than taken by those women themselves. Third, it violated the very simple democratic principle that people should be allowed to wear what they want and, indeed, that there should be freedom of religious expression. Fourth, it lined up progressive feminism in common cause with the growing forces of the

racist and fascist right, especially the Front National. Fifth, it chimed with a wider deployment of the feminist card by the US state and others (the likes of Hilary Clinton) to justify imperialist interventions and wars. 'We should invade Afghanistan to liberate Afghan women from the Taliban!'

Unfortunately the extreme cynicism and hypocrisy of this last point - the United States has never invaded anywhere to liberate women, or men for that matter, but only and exclusively in pursuit of its economic and strategic interests - has not prevented it having a certain effect. And this effect has been particularly pernicious because the invocation of the radical values of secularism and feminism has worked to variously co-opt, confuse and demobilise precisely those progressive, left and socialist forces who should have been at the forefront of resisting the rise of racism and fascism in France which, tragically, have been given a relatively easy ride.

However all of this has reached the peak it has because it has coincided with a phenomenon that is by neither peculiar to France nor French in origin - the global rise of Islamophobia.

The Rise of Islamophobia

White western Europeans⁶ have viewed non-Europeans and people of colour with a combination of hostility and contempt for approximately five hundred years - that is since Europe began the process of conquering and enslaving most of the rest of the world. This means that in the larger scheme of things, as Alex Callinicos has remarked, 'Racism is a historical novelty'⁷ but half a millennium is nonetheless a long time in the development of our social consciousness. By comparison Islamophobia is of really recent origin. I am

⁵Unfortunately a particularly shameful role was played in this regard by members of *Lutte Ouvrière*, one of the main French Trotskyist organisations. See 'The Islamic veil and the subjugation of women', http://journal.lutte-ouvriere.org/2003/04/24/foulard-islamique-et-soumission-des-femmes_6495.html and Chris Harman 'Behind the Veil', *Socialist Review* 180, Nov. 1994. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1994/11/veil.html>

⁶I am referring here to the attitudes of dominant social groups and the dominant ideology, not to all Europeans.

⁷Alex Callinicos, *Race and Class*, London 1993, p.16

⁸The longer Oxford English Dictionary contains a reference to the use of the word in 1923 but this was clearly a completely isolated example.

looking at a 1980 edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary - it does not contain the word 'Islamophobia'⁸ A standard sociological textbook from 1990, E.Cashmore and B.Troyna, *Introduction to Race Relations*, does not discuss the phenomenon and has no reference to the word in its index, nor does Alex Callinicos' *Race and Class* from 1993. Of course, the people who are now subject to Islamophobia have long been the objects of racism, but it was on the basis of their skin colour, nationality, ethnicity (so-called 'race') and alleged culture, not their adherence to Islam or their Muslim identity. They were seen and labelled as 'Arabs' or 'Pakis' or 'Asians' or 'wogs' or 'blacks' etc. not as Muslims.

So when, how and why - the questions are interconnected - did Islamophobia develop? A commonplace view is that it emerged as a response to 9/11 and an accompaniment to Bush's 'war on terror'. Obviously these were an important turning point and marked a definite escalation but they were not the origin. Samuel P. Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* was the key founding intellectual text of Islamophobia. It was published in 1996 and was the working up of an article written in 1993 and a lecture given in 1992. In the 1993 essay he wrote:

The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another. Why will this be the case? First, differences among civilizations are not only real; they are basic. Civilizations are differentiated from each other by history, language, culture, tradition and, most important, religion...

These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes.⁹

This then gives us an indication as to when and how Islamophobia began to gain momentum. It was in the early to mid-nineties. I do not mean by this that Huntington through his essay or his book *started* the phenomenon or is responsible for it. Huntington was, in the words of Tariq Ali, a 'state intellectual'¹⁰. He was director of Harvard's Centre for International Affairs and the White House Coordinator of Security Planning under Jimmy Carter. This means that his 'theories' were from the outset fashioned to meet the needs of the US ruling class and, in so far as they were taken up and propagated it was because that class and its representatives in the White House, the Pentagon and then the media deemed useful.

This particular theory was then seized upon and disseminated with great vigour and with ever growing intensity after 9/11. Such is the global hegemony of the US bourgeoisie in these matters and also the confluence of material interests of British, French and European imperialism, that the notion of Islam and Muslims as a threat to our way of life was soon appearing not only from the mouths of leading political figures but also, at least by innuendo and implication, in the headlines of innumerable newspapers and TV news broadcasts around the world, until within a matter of years it had become almost 'common sense'.

But if that is when and how, what about why? The two main background factors were the Iranian Revolution of 1979 with its Islamist outcome and the collapse of Communism and end of the cold war in 1989-91. The Iranian Revolution overthrew the Shah of Iran who, together with his regime, was a key US ally in the Middle East and possessed major oil reserves. The Islamist regime of Ayatollah Khomeini which emerged from the Revolution then gave a huge impetus to Islamist movements throughout the region. The appeal of Islamism, or political Islam, across the Middle East was aided by the complete failure of nationalism and communism (Stalinism), which had previously been

⁹<http://edvardas.home.mruni.eu/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/huntington.pdf>

¹⁰'State intellectuals are those who have worked for and emerged from the bowels of the US state machine: Kissinger, Brzezinski, Fukuyama and Huntington typify this breed'. Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*, London 2002, p.302

the predominant forces, to successfully challenge imperialism in the area. During the Cold War the West had tended to view the Islamists with indulgence as potential or actual allies in the fight against the godless communists, as in US support for forerunners of the Taliban against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. But with the Cold War over and the communist threat eliminated US imperialism increasingly saw Islamism as the main threat to its interests, above all in the oil rich Middle East.

Noting the fact that the Islamophobic drive began before 9/11 is important because it is often presented as emerging as a response to 9/11. In reality the rise of Islamophobia was, along with US imperialism's general record in the Middle East, one of the causes of the attack on the Twin Towers. However it is clear that 9/11 and the subsequent 'war on terror' with its invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq ratcheted up the whole vicious cycle of war, terrorist atrocity, more war, more terror and ever more racism and hatred.

Some observations about how racism works: first, once a group is stigmatised and demonised by official society they become a target for all sorts of bigots and bullies. These range from the bully in playground looking for a child to intimidate to fascist and Nazi parties trying to build on the basis of hatred. For fascists the ultimate enemy is the working class movement and socialism but they will use any scapegoat going to help them attract support to defeat the working class and the left; it can be Jews, asylum seekers, Poles, blacks, Roma - whoever is being singled out by the media and the establishment. Once the media identified 'Muslims' as 'the problem' every fascist, big or small, leapt on the band wagon even to the point, in many cases, of becoming pro-Israel.

Second, when a racist band wagon is rolling it becomes a case of 'any stick to beat a dog' - drag in any argument that lays to hand, especially those you can use to wrong foot or embarrass ideological or political opponents. Thus, for example, inserted into the discourse of Islamophobia, is the claim that a marker of Muslims 'not sharing our

values' is Muslim homophobia. This notion is promoted with a straight face as if belief in LGBT+ equality were a 'traditional' Western value by people who a decade or two ago would most likely have been grubby homophobes. And in this toxic context using secularism (with a dash of misogyny parading as feminism) as a weapon to further estrange and isolate Muslims was an obvious move.

Two Coups

The issue of the abuse of secularism as a pitfall which can seriously derail the left and serve reaction is not confined to France or Europe. On the contrary it has played a significant role in two recent major events in the Middle East: the Egyptian military coup of July 2013 and the attempted military coup in Turkey in July 2016.

To understand how this worked it is necessary first to dispel a false Islamophobic view of the Middle East as one vast Muslim Islamist mass. Of course it is true that the overwhelming majority of people in the Middle East, including Turkey, and across North Africa are Muslim by faith, much as the overwhelming majority of Irish were (until very recently) Catholic. Nevertheless there were in the 20th century and across the region large secularist and modernising political movements of various kinds. This secularist spectrum ranged from right wing bourgeois movements and regimes that acted as agents of or collaborators with, imperialism, through bourgeois nationalist movements and regimes that were to some degree anti-imperialist to the Communist/Stalinist left. Examples, moving round the Mediterranean, would include the Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front), Nasser and Nasserism in Egypt, the PLO in Palestine, the Ba'ath Party in Syria and Iraq, Mohammed Mosaddegh (Prime Minister of Iran until overthrown by a CIA coup in 1953), the various Kurdish parties such as the PKK in Turkish Kurdistan, Kemal Ataturk and Kemalist parties in Turkey and the Communist Parties of Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.

The picture is complicated by the fact that these categories were fluid and the la-

bels often misleading. Thus, a movement e.g. Kemalism, could begin as to some extent anti-imperialist and morph into a pro-imperialist force; a bourgeois nationalist movement e.g. the Ba'ath Party of Saddam Hussein (and that of the Assad family), could describe itself as socialist and include socialist in its official name, without harbouring the slightest intention of opposing capitalism or liberating the working class¹¹ and the Communists were quite often largely middle class in terms of their entire leading layers and pursued a policy of subordinating themselves to bourgeois nationalists such as Nasser.¹² But what all these forces had in common was a desire to 'modernise' their respective nations and a perception of the Muslim masses, both peasants and workers, as a 'backward' obstacle to this process. This elitism towards the mass of ordinary people sank deep roots in large sections of the region's 'left' and 'progressive' forces.¹³

One effect of this approach was to isolate much of the left from the religious masses and consequently make it easier for the Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Erdogan's AKP (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey, to present themselves as the principle opposition to the pro-imperialist regimes and pro-Western military. However where this particular chicken really came home to roost was with General Al-Sisi's military coup of 3 July 2013.

Because the Muslim Brotherhood were seen by the Egyptian masses as the main opposition to the hated regime of Hosni Mubarak the victory of the anti-Mubarak revolution in early 2011 and the holding of Egypt's first real elections produced a Muslim Brotherhood government and Muslim Brotherhood President, Mohammed Morsi.

But this government, behaving rather like the Irish Labour Party and other right wing reformist parties, collaborated with the military, with the state and with Egyptian capitalism and did nothing at all for the mass of the people who had elected them. Indeed for the majority of Egyptians things got worse as the economy deteriorated and state institutions became increasingly dysfunctional. This in turn produced a mass movement against the government which culminated in vast anti-MB demonstrations on 30 June.

At this point, and it was clearly planned in advance (perhaps with the aid of the CIA), the military were able to take advantage of the mass discontent and stage their coup. When the Muslim Brotherhood protested against the coup in the name of democratic legitimacy and organised sit-ins at al-Nahda Square and Rabaa al-Adawiya Square. The military responded on August 14 with a deadly massacre at Rabaa which claimed, in a few hours, somewhere between 800 and 2000 lives. Human Rights Watch called it, 'one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history'¹⁴ On the basis of this the Al-Sisi regime was able to consolidate its thoroughgoing counterrevolution and re-establish all the features of the Mubarak dictatorship.

The tragedy was that many political forces and individuals who had played leading roles in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 now supported the anti-Muslim Brotherhood coup on the grounds that the military were a lesser evil than the Islamists. Perhaps the worst case of this was Hamdeen Sabahi, the Nasserist leader who was jailed seventeen times under Mubarak and who had stood as a semi-left candidate in the 2012 Presidential election, coming third with 21% of the vote. The April 6 Youth Move-

¹¹This was particularly the case in the era when adopting the label socialist facilitated receiving aid and or protection from the Soviet Union.

¹²This policy derived from the 'stages' theory adopted by Stalin and the Comintern in the mid-1920s and the Popular Front strategy of the 1930s. For an account of the relation between 'Communism' and third world nationalism see John Molyneux, *What is the Real Marxist Tradition?*, London 1985. See <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/molyneux/1983/07/tradition.htm>

¹³For a discussion of these attitudes in relation to the Turkish working class see Ron Margulies, 'What are we to do with Islam? The case of Turkey', *International Socialism* 151. <http://isj.org.uk/what-are-we-to-do-with-islam/>

¹⁴<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/12/egypt-raba-killings-likely-crimes-against-humanity>.

ment, who were a major factor in the street mobilizations in 2011, also gave partial support to the coup.¹⁵ As a result there was very little effective resistance to the counter revolutionary coup.

At the heart of this failure was the widespread tendency to see the fundamental division in society as ‘modern’ secularism versus ‘backward’ Islamism, rather than the class struggle and hence to regard the Muslim Brotherhood, not the military, as the main enemy.

Another position taken by many on the Egyptian left is that of the Third Square¹⁶ which rejects the army and the Brotherhood as both equally reactionary, both equal poles of counterrevolution.¹⁷ But this, though clearly preferable to Sabahi’s out right support for the coup, is still inadequate. To treat two political forces as equal poles of counterrevolution when one is in power and massacring and imprisoning the other and when one is the main representative of the ruling class and the embodiment of the capitalist state and the other is a predominantly petty bourgeois opposition with a mass base among the poor is, intentionally or not, to give aid to the oppressor. Instead, in order effectively to build resistance to the al-Sisi dictatorship it is necessary for socialists to defend all those suffering repression, regardless of their religion and including the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁸

The attempted coup in Turkey on 15 July raised similar issues though the outcome was very different. The similarity lay in the fact that many forces on the left, in Turkey and internationally, were reluctant to wholeheartedly or actively oppose the coup because they thought that the Islamist Erdogan government was as bad as (or perhaps worse than) rule by the secular military. The whole event was over in a matter of hours so there was little time for

parties and movements (still less academics) to take formal positions, nevertheless the phenomenon I refer to was evident in terms of who did not come out onto the streets and in the commentary on social media. Anyone on that night who posted clear anti-coup statements was immediately assailed by objections from many sides including people of ‘the left’. And this was despite the fact that the Turkish military had form - that two previous coups in 1960 and 1980 had been brutal and repressive in the extreme.

One argument put forward to justify failure to oppose the coup is that it was a ‘fake coup’ staged by Erdogan himself to strengthen his position. Given the seriousness of what occurred that night, the bombing of parliament and the presidential place and the more than two hundred people killed this can be dismissed as fanciful but the reason for the ‘theory’ (and the fact that it was advanced by many people with very scant knowledge of Turkey) was clearly that it got people off the hook of having actually to oppose it.

Another argument was the notion that Erdogan was/is a fascist. This had been popular, including in certain anarchist/autonomist circles, at the time of Gezi Park and it resurfaced in relation to the coup. This characterisation is false for many reasons. It is an instance of the tendency to call all instances of capitalist state repression fascist, as in Thatcher was a fascist, Donald Trump is a fascist and so on. In reality fascism was and is a counterrevolutionary mass movement that destroys bourgeois democracy and the working class movement (the trade unions and all the left) - destroys and eliminates not attacks and weakens. This is the basic distinction between Mussolini, Hitler, Jobbyk, Golden Dawn and the Front National on the one hand and Thatcher, Trump, Bush, UKIP, Cameron, Merkel etc

¹⁵To their credit they later withdrew this but by then the worst damage had been done.

¹⁶See <http://www.france24.com/en/20130729-egypt-third-square-activists-reject-army-mohammed-morsi>

¹⁷This position has also been theorised internationally by Gilbert Achcar (SOAS Professor and member of the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France) in his book *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising*, London 2016.

¹⁸For much fuller analyses of the Egyptian Revolution and its fate see John Molyneux, ‘Lessons from the Egyptian Revolution’ *Irish Marxist Review* 13, and Philip Marfleet, *Egypt:Contested Revolution*, London 2016.

on the other. Erdogan and his government do not meet these criteria at all. In addition calling the AKP fascist has affinities with the Islamophobic term 'Islamofascism' used by former leftists like Christopher Hitchens and Nick Cohen to justify their support for George Bush and Tony Blair.

The third and superficially most plausible argument for not opposing the military coup is that Erdogan has been able to use his victory to reinforce his own power and to extend that power in an increasingly authoritarian direction. There is no doubt that this has happened and that the crack-down against those responsible for coup, the so-called Gulenists and putchist elements in the Military, has extended way beyond the ranks of those who could have been involved: Erdogan's Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag has himself stated that the number of arrests has reached 32,000.¹⁹ Nevertheless this argument is false for two reasons: first because in terms of scale and severity this does not compare with the repression meted out by the military. According to *The Economist*, 'Turkey's army has overthrown no fewer than four governments since 1960. The bloodiest coup came in 1980, when 50 people were executed, 500,000 were arrested and many hundreds died in jail'²⁰ Second because progressive and left wing forces would be in a much stronger position to resist this anti-democratic authoritarianism in so far as they clearly opposed the coup from the word go.

Why then was the Turkish coup unsuccessful, while the Egyptian coup swept all before it? Partly because the Turkish army was not united but mainly because the Turkish masses, primarily the Turkish working class, came out onto the streets in huge numbers immediately, on the night of 15 July, to confront the tanks and stop the coup in its tracks. They did this at the call of Erdogan (though not all who came out were AKP supporters.. But the reason has little

to do with religion and everything to do with economics. In Egypt the capitalist economy was deteriorating and so Egyptian Islamism bitterly disappointed many of its supporters. In Turkey the capitalist economy experienced an unprecedented boom and this enabled Erdogan, by means of limited but judicious reforms, to retain and increase its base in the working class. If we want an Irish parallel we could say Erdogan's AKP resembled Fianna Fail in the Celtic Tiger whereas the Muslim Brotherhood was like Fianna Fail after the crash of 2008.

What both these cases demonstrate is the folly of seeing secularism versus theocracy as the main dividing line in society rather than the politics of class conflict.

Marxism and Religion

This article as a whole should be understood as an application to contemporary events of the basic Marxist analysis of religion which in turn is part of the general historical materialist theory of ideology. This is not the place for an exposition of this underlying theory²¹. However, two points need to be made here by way of conclusion.

The first is simply that people make religions not religions people. Religion as a whole and every religion in particular is a social product, a response to a real set of material circumstances and therefore as society changes, as material conditions change so do religions and people's interpretations of religious texts and doctrines. This applies equally to Christianity, Islam, Judaism and all the rest. As Chris Harman has said:

The confusion often starts with a confusion about the power of religion itself. Religious people see it as a historical force in its own right, whether for good or for evil. So too do most bourgeois anti-clerical and free

¹⁹See <http://www.rte.ie/news/2016/0928/819767-turkey-arrests/>

²⁰'Erdogan and his generals', *The Economist*, 2/2/2013 <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21571147-once-all-powerful-turkish-armed-forces-are-cowed-if-not-quite-impotent-erdogan-and-his>

²¹For my take on these matters see John Molyneux, 'More than opium: Marxism and religion', *International Socialism* 119. (2008) and John Molyneux, *The Point is to Change it: an introduction to Marxist Philosophy*, London 2011.

thinkers. For them, fighting the influence of religious institutions and obscurantist ideas is in itself the way to human liberation.

But although religious institutions and ideas clearly play a role in history, this does not happen in separation from the rest of material reality. Religious institutions, with their layers of priests and teachers, arise in a certain society and interact with that society²².

The second is that in determining the socialist and Marxist response to political movements with a religious colouration - of which there are a multitude - the starting

point is not the theology or doctrine of the movement but the social force or forces it represents and its role in the class struggle. This is the criterion Marxists have generally applied to movements with a Christian ideology from Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement to the right wing Moral Majority to the Easter Rising and the IRA and Chavez in Venezuela. It is the criterion that must be applied to Islamist movements in their equally great variety. Hamas and Hezbollah, Al Qaeda and Isis, the Muslim Brotherhood and the AKP cannot all be lumped together in one Islamist pot. It is necessary to make a concrete analysis of each in its specific circumstances. And exactly the same principle applies to secularism.

²²Chris Harman, 'The Prophet and the Proletariat', *International Socialism* 64 (1994) p,4-5. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/harman/1994/xx/islam.htm> It should be said that this outstanding and pioneering article paved the way for many of the arguments presented here.

A Socialist in Stormont

An interview with Gerry Carroll MLA

Irish Marxist Review interviews Gerry Carroll of Belfast People Before Profit who, together with Eamonn McCann for Foyle, was recently elected as an MLA in Stormont.

IMR: Could you begin by telling us a bit about yourself and your upbringing etc.

Gerry Carroll: I was born in West Belfast and raised in the Andersonstown area. I am the second eldest in a family of seven children. My father worked as a coal man and a black taxi driver when I was growing up. My mother worked in the house and later as a classroom assistant in the local school when she went back to work. It was a big family, always someone to play with, and usually more than one to argue with.

I was born in 1987 and grew up at the tail end of the troubles. I am old enough to remember the British Army patrolling the streets, and can remember our primary school being evacuated after a bomb scare was reported. Stuff like that was just normal, and I'm not sure I was old enough to really comprehend it. I didn't have any other experience to compare it to. But my formative years were after the ceasefires. I can remember hundreds of cars driving up and down the Andytown Road with tricolours when the IRA called a ceasefire. It was like a big party in the area.

And I remember as well the excitement when Bill Clinton came. The whole family went into town to see him. The place was packed, brimming with people. It seems strange looking back. But it was the hope that something different was on the way, something better. I was ten when the Belfast Agreement was signed. I remember the document lying about the house, it was sent to every home. I doubt if I even looked through it, but you certainly heard a lot about it. My generation was supposed to be the first generation without violence. The first generation with a future beyond prisons and repression. I'm not sure I thought of it that way at the time of course. But that was the context.

I went to St John the Baptist primary school, and then to St Mary's Christian Brothers Grammar school. I liked my time at both. I suppose I wasn't a star pupil. In fact I know I wasn't. I was more into football and music. But I learnt enough to get by, and I am very grateful for that. My only regret is I didn't stick at learning the Irish language, which is a big part of West Belfast since its revival in the last few decades. I have been going to classes in recent years to try and make up for it.

IMR: How did you first get involved in politics?

Gerry Carroll: My family were largely republican in political persuasion, and some of my relatives were involved in Sinn Féin. Some still are. Had I been born ten years earlier maybe I would have joined them. Who knows? But by the time I was a teenager the radical gloss had gone off Sinn Féin. Maybe not completely, but that was the sense. This didn't come from some sort of sophisticated analysis. It was just your experience. You would see them on TV in suits, and then you would see them at the weekend, trying move you on from street corners. Whether or not they were part of the establishment, they certainly felt like the establishment in the area. There was a gap growing between the party and young people. Those young people who did join tended to be sons or daughters of Sinn Féin members. In fact if you did join, you were likely to be a target for mercilessness slaggin by your peers.

I suppose the first political thing I did was a walk out of school against the war in Iraq in 2003. We walked out of school much to the dismay of Senior Management - who later gave a day's detention to everyone who decided to take a principled stand against the war in Iraq and walk down the school lane. I distinctly remember watching the TV coverage of the bombs being dropped on Iraq. It filled me full of rage.

In 2005 I was part of organising a 'Students Against Poverty' bus to the Make

Poverty History demonstration in Edinburgh. We organised a bus of school students from across West Belfast and the wider city to the demonstration. I will never forget the powerful experience of being on a protest with hundreds of thousands of people and the real sense that if people across the world stood together then fundamental change could be achieved. There was a fantastic feeling of solidarity and collectivism in the camp in Edinburgh with exciting discussions about how we can shape the world. This experience had a lasting impact on me and really helped begin to shape how I view the world today.

In 2008 and 2009 I was elected as the student's union president for the Jordanstown campus at the University of Ulster. It was a lot of fun. We organised mystery bus tours and fresher's events but also demonstrations against Fees and tried to instil radical politics into the student movement. It was where I really cut my teeth politically and whilst it was certainly a new experience - we constantly attempted to present a political student's union that was against war, for free education and opposed to racism.

IMR: You were banned from Belfast City Centre for a time for being involved in a protest weren't you?

Gerry Carroll: Yes, and it was a long legal battle. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone, nothing glamorous about it at all. The whole thing went on for about two years. But we were right to have protested, and we were right to have taken a stand. I was arrested at a student protest at Belfast City Hall against fees on December 9th 2010. Hundreds of students and supporters had gathered there to protest against the hike in tuition fees. It was a brilliant day: with hundreds of young people, from both sides of the divide, joining together to say no to a future of debt.

A botched attempt by the police to clear the area at the end of the protest resulted in hundreds of people standing on the road. A sit down protest began. The PSNI singled myself out for arrest (because I had a megaphone and was therefore a 'ringleader'), and dragged me from the protest. I was held overnight, and released the next day under

strict bail conditions. I was barred from entering the city centre under any circumstances and barred from attending protests of any kind.

Over the next year some of the restrictions were lifted. I was allowed back into the city centre and eventually allowed to attend protests again: under the proviso that I contacted the local PSNI station to alert them of my presence. I was again arrested a year and half later when I was leafletting in the town about unemployment rights, whereupon I was approached by two police officers who arrested me. I was on a protest they said, and had not rung the police station. This was not a protest I argued, which it wasn't, but I was brought back before the Judge again nonetheless. It was just petty harassment.

Some of the charges were dropped, including the ridiculous notion that I had resisted arrest. At the trial my solicitor held up the front page of the Belfast Telegraph. There was a photo of me being dragged by the police from the protest by my legs, with about four other people holding my arms and coat. I was hardly in a position to 'resist' arrest. That charge was dropped instantly after that photo was shown. I was convicted, however, of engaging in a 'provocative act', partly because I had chanted 'they say cut back we say fight back' on a megaphone. Ludicrous stuff.

IMR: When did you first stand for election?

Gerry Carroll: I first stood in 2011 - when I was still banned from the city centre - in the Assembly election for West Belfast. We had been involved in local campaigns from 2006; from the fight against water charges, a campaign to protect public land at the former Andersonstown Barracks site from being sold off to a private developer and campaigns against parking charges. We were very energetic about the area, and our campaign mainly involved young people.

People Before Profit were known around the community for being involved in grassroots activism for a few years. We did very well in the election, getting 1661 votes. Not long after that Gerry Adams resigned his Westminster seat to move to the South. We

stood again, and were the only party to increase our vote in that election.

These results were much better than anything left wing parties had scored in the North in decades. Naturally, some people refused to accept its significance, arguing it was a fluke or that we borrowed votes from others. But we never bothered with them, and kept doing what we were doing.

IMR: Tell us about getting elected as a councillor and how you operated as a socialist in that role.

Gerry Carroll: We knew we had a real chance of taking a seat on the City Council in 2014 based on our previous election results and our consistent campaigning on the ground. And while much of the media never gave our campaign the time of day, this spurred us on we came 100 votes away from topping the poll in the Black Mountain Ward in West Belfast. This puzzled a lot of the establishment who thought that politics could only be demarcated in the North along Nationalist and Unionist lines. And for the first time in decades there was a socialist voice in the chamber of Belfast City Council. Our election came not long after the period of the 'Flag Protests'. There was a lot of pessimism around that period but also a deep sense of frustration about the recession and attacks on public services. And not long after the protests we saw trade union strikes against public sector cutbacks and the growth in the idea that there needed to be an alternative to cutbacks.

I think the election sparked a resurgence in street protests and social movements in the city. We organised large scale demonstrations against the slaughter of Palestinians by the Israeli state, demonstrations against racism, the war in Syria, racism and for equal marriage. On the council we proposed a motion which passed, calling for the implementation of the living wage for Health Workers in Belfast, a motion supporting striking workers, a motion creating Belfast city councils first Transgender policy which provided support to staff transitioning and also committed the council to raise awareness of Transgender rights. Of course the larger parties sought to sideline us, to make it seem like they 'deliver' and we were

ineffectual. But people aren't stupid and could see past what they were doing. Our support was growing.

IMR: Your election campaign for MLA this year was obviously a triumph - what were the key factors in its success?

Gerry Carroll: Our result was indeed a fantastic triumph and it was down to a number of factors. Firstly, we had a good team ethic and a lot of people who did a lot of hard work-writing the leaflets, putting up posters and knocking the doors. This was our fifth election in five years so we had accumulated a lot of experience running in elections.

Some quarters tried to present our vote as simply a 'protest vote'. But this completely missed out on the fact that we had a coherent argument about what could be done to fight against austerity. Sinn Féin and the DUP argued that austerity was the only option, like some force of nature that couldn't be stopped. On the other hand, we argued that the Assembly where complicit in austerity and doing the dirty work of the Tories. The Assembly crafted the Stormont House Agreement which ludicrously argued for corporation tax to be slashed to 12.5% and £700 million to be borrowed to abolish 20,000 public sector workers-Thatcherite politics pure and simple. We argued for Stormont, instead of begging David Cameron to cut taxes for their corporate friends, to call for corporations to pay their way. We also argued that the £700 million borrowed could be used to create a crash programme of house building which would give people homes and create jobs for the unemployed sparks and brickies.

I think we also tapped into something deeper. There is a growing sense of the need for society to take a different direction. This was encapsulated in our slogan of 'Building a Socialism for the 21st Century.' We were the local version of the Sanders, or Corbyn phenomenon. That same mood exists in West Belfast as it does across Ireland. The election of comrades to the Dail earlier this year also helped us in terms of showing that PBP was campaigning for an alternative vision North and South, which could build an all-Ireland movement based on people power

and capable of real change.

IMR: What has been your experience so far in Stormont and how are you responding to the situation politically?

Gerry Carroll: It has definitely been a strange experience - in the sense that I have been involved in activism for over eleven years but never did, and still don't, see myself as a traditional politician. It is also strange seeing people you are used to shouting at on the TV or screaming at on the radio walk past you on a daily basis.

It can be frustrating at times, especially considering how they have stitched up the speaking time to decrease opportunities for People Before Profit to speak, and to put us to the bottom of the list, a shameful act by the DUP and Sinn Féin, something which the old Official Unionist Party would be proud of.

When we do speak, we try and act like a megaphone inside Stormont for everyone outside it. Be they classroom assistants fighting against job insecurity, same sex couples fighting to get marriage equality enacted, or the thousands of people who are waiting to be housed. It's clear that Stormont has failed ordinary people. Our job is to give voice to those people left behind, and the failure of the system to deal with people's needs in everything we do on the Hill- every time we speak or present a motion. For me it's great to have two MLAs up in Stormont especially someone with the experience of campaigning that Eamonn has. And we have a great team around us. But in the end the important thing is what happens on the streets. As I said in my first speech; 'what Stormont does, the people can undo.'

IMR: Could you explain how you and People Before Profit are dealing with the issue of Irish unity and the call for a border poll.

Gerry Carroll: PBP support a border poll on principle. We are for every exercise in democracy. We think people should be allowed to have a discussion about the border in a serious way. We can't have a 'not in front of the children' approach to the National Question. Let people discuss it, let them debate it. And guess what? Some Protestants will be for a united Ire-

land. And some Catholics will be for the border. It isn't all determined by religion. Things are much more pragmatic than that. And in that discussion we can put our own unique position, that is neither nationalist nor unionist but socialist. One that calls for an Ireland that isn't divided into two horrible states, nor one based on the Sinn Féin vision of corporate tax haven Ireland where big business are given free handouts, and unity is promoted as a new way to cut the public sector through all Ireland efficiency. No one is going to be won to that vision unfortunately. That's why support for a United Ireland is so low at the moment. And that's why Sinn Féin's strategy strengthens partition.

So there is a difference between having a border poll and winning one. PBP look at the national question through the prism of James Connolly's ideas. We live on a small island which is divided into two-this creates a division between workers in the North and the South. It also creates a divide between workers in the North. We want to see the unity of working class across Ireland, North and South, and an upheaval against both states. We believe the only way people can be convinced in large numbers of the case for a United Ireland is through a grassroots movement from below, that is actually about transforming their lives, not about flags or nationality. We see the potential for this unity through kinds of mass movements we have seen in recent years; whether the big water charges movements in the South or the public sector strikes in the North. But we need a much bigger mass movement. And when there's a convergence of struggles on both sides of the border, Ireland can begin to be reshaped in the interests of working class people. We are for a 32 County Socialist Ireland, one everyone can have a stake in, whatever your background.

IMR: PBP seems to be expanding in the North as it is in the South; can you report on the situation at present.

Gerry Carroll: We certainly are expanding since the election results. We now have seven branches across Belfast. We have had requests to join from all parts of the North since the Assembly election results. We have

grown in Derry too, where the party is doing fantastically well. I think the platform that we have in Stormont to put across principled, anti-capitalist politics that emphasises the importance of people power, strikes a chord with a lot of people who are angry about the way society is going. No doubt there will be challenges for PBP in the coming period, and we will be attacked from all sides by all sorts of parties and forces.

We have been called Unionists, Nationalists, Dissidents and everything else under the sun. But it's a bit like that scene in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, when Jack Nicholson's character is desperately trying to escape from the asylum, while everyone else looks on doing nothing and he and says to them; 'But I tried didn't I? Goddammit, at least I did that!' That's how I feel about what we are doing as well.

Fianna Fáil: Past and Present

Alan Byrne

Fianna Fáil were the dominant political party in Ireland from their first term in government in the 1930s up until their disastrous 2011 election. The party managed to enjoy large support from the working class, as well as court close links with the richest people in Irish society. Often described as more of a 'national movement' than a party, their popular support base has now plummeted. As this article goes to print, the party (officially in opposition but enabling a Fine Gael government) is polling at 26% approval.¹ How did a party which emerged from the losing side of the civil war come to dominate Irish political life so thoroughly? This article aims to trace the history of the party, analyse their unique brand of populist politics as well as their relationship with Irish capitalism and the working class.

Fianna Fáil was founded in 1926 by Eamon DeValera following a split within the Sinn Féin party, of which he was president. The split centred around Sinn Féin's policy of abstention from the newly formed Free State Dáil. In order to understand their formation, some background analysis to the origins of the Free State is required.

The 'War of Independence' is often portrayed as owing its victory to a clandestine military operation, however it was a genuinely popular *revolution* in which the working class played a huge and crucial part.² Factory occupations and working class action effectively forced the British state to cease to function in Ireland, which led to negotiations resulting in the Anglo Irish Treaty of 1921. Supporters of the treaty split from Sinn Féin and formed Cumann na nGaedheal, while the remainder of the party remained opposed to the treaty. This

prompted what is usually referred to as a civil-war but as Kieran Allen argues in an earlier issue of this journal, the Free State in effect mounted a successful *counter-revolution* which was thoroughly opposed to the working class movement.³ The defeat signalled the end of the aspirations of the Irish revolution and the stagnation of the state economically. Emigration was particularly high in this period, and the state was thoroughly conservative. The Catholic Church fostered strong links with Cumann na nGaedheal, often denouncing republicans in its sermons.

There were distinctive class elements to both the pro and anti-treaty sides. The Cumann na nGaedheal government drew its base from large farmers, who could rely on exports to Britain. Ideologically, they were close to the British establishment, having secured parity with the pound, and co-opting many British state institutions. The government had also presided over the victimisation and blacklisting of republicans during the 1920s. Sinn Féin were hostile to talk of class, but DeValera was astute to the feelings of workers. The inauguration meeting of Fianna Fáil stressed the need to address the social and economic problems of the time.⁴

Fianna Fáil, as an electoral organisation, went from strength to strength following their formation. DeValera took the Oath of Allegiance, as a formality, and led the party into the Dáil having won 57 seats in the general election of September 1927.⁵ The party aimed to address the social problems of the time by offering improvements in wages and employment conditions, as well as the break up and redistribution of large farms. At the same time they promoted a version of economic nationalism whereby native industries

¹<http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/irish-times-ipsos-mrbi-poll-results-underpin-uneasy-stability-1.2818066>

²See for example *Irish Marxist Review* Issue Number 14; Conor Kostick, 'Revolution in Ireland', (London, 1996)

³Kieran Allen, 'The 1916 Rising: Myth and Reality' in *Irish Marxist Review* Issue Number 14, (Dublin, 2015) pp.3-17

⁴Kieran Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour : 1926 to the Present* (London, 1997) p.14

⁵J.J.Lee, *Ireland 1912-1914 : Politics and Society*, (Cambridge, 1989), p.155

would be built up through a system of ‘protectionism’. This was to be achieved by a series of tax breaks for native firms, while also discouraging foreign investment. Much of their early rhetoric was focussed on the negative impact of *British* industry and banks, rather than at capitalism itself. Allen argues that this had a large appeal in the context of the 1929 crash and global economic crisis.⁶

The dynamic between Fianna Fáil and the working class bears some examination. The Labour Party had originated in earlier syndicalist movements but had abstained from the 1918 general election, and as a result had been sidelined in Irish politics from the outset. This trend continued throughout the 1920s as union membership and strike activity fell. As the decade progressed, The Labour Party moved away from the radical language of Connolly and embraced parliamentarism and legal respectability. In this regard they often became indistinguishable from Fianna Fáil, arguing in 1927 for the establishment of a native industry, for example. Allen cites the lack of Labour’s willingness to challenge capitalism as one of the key reasons that they were brought closer to Fianna Fáil, whose strategy was to reconcile the workers movement to native capitalism.⁷

In a few short years, Fianna Fáil had become a serious political machine, enjoying large success with its populist policies. The scale of their success even prompted a ‘red scare’ from Cumann na nGaedheal, who claimed Fianna Fáil were taking orders from Moscow!⁸ In the 1932 general election, the party had secured enough seats to form a minority government with the backing of Labour.⁹ Now in power, Fianna Fáil began their policy of protectionism by imposing tariffs on imports, while subsidising Irish companies. They also stopped the re-

payment of land annuities to Britain. In this time a number of state companies were formed including Aer Lingus, Bord na Móna, The Irish Sugar Company and Irish Life.¹⁰ A large-scale and ambitious house-building project was undertaken to deal with the tenement conditions in Dublin, giving rise to housing estates such as Crumlin, Drimnagh, Finglas and others.

From its inception, Fianna Fáil began to court the approval of the Catholic Church. The church’s attitude had varied during the war of independence, but it backed the pro-treaty side in the civil war. DeValera’s Fianna Fáil attempted to appear even more fervently Catholic than Cumann na nGaedheal had been. This was despite the fact that many of them, as anti-treaty Republicans, had been excommunicated only a few years earlier.¹¹ Fianna Fáil deputy leader Sean T.O’Kelly made their position explicit during the ’32 campaign : ‘[O]ur policy was that of Pope Pius XI’.¹² The Eucharistic Congress was held in Dublin in 1932 with lavish state backing. The government built a high powered radio-station in Athlone in order to transmit a papal broadcast to the congress.¹³

Fianna Fáil adhered to catholic social teaching in their policies regarding the banning of contraception and the regulation of dance halls, to pick two examples. The Constitution of 1937 recognised the ‘special position’ of the Catholic Church. Bryan Fanning points to articles 40-44 of the Constitution as clearly influenced by Catholic social thought.¹⁴ DeValera invited bishop Edward Cahill to write the preamble. Cahill desired that the Constitution for Ireland should be, ‘if not confessedly Catholic (which may at present not be feasible), at least definitely and *confessedly Christian*’.¹⁵ The relation-

⁶ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.15-23

⁷ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.29-35

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⁹ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.36-37

¹⁰ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.38-39

¹¹ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, p.40

¹² John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid : Ruler of Catholic Ireland*, (Dublin, 1999), p.72

¹³ Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid*, p.72

¹⁴ Bryan Fanning, ‘A Catholic vision of Ireland’ in Tom Inglis (ed) *Are the Irish Different?*, (Manchester, 2014), p.47

¹⁵ Author’s emphasis. ‘Fanning, A Catholic vision of Ireland’, p.47

ship between church and state ran both ways; catholic social teaching became enshrined in law, while the state benefited from a docile population under the influence of a conservative religious hierarchy.¹⁶

Allen notes that Fianna Fáil's 'strong conservative edifice' was not a barrier to their efforts to appeal to the working class.¹⁷ They introduced the Conditions of Employment Act in 1935, which established collective bargaining in labour disputes. This was done with the aim of curbing union militancy, and creating greater reliance on the state by co-opting union leadership. The increase in industrialisation also created an unwanted increase in strike activity, however.¹⁸ The Act also attempted to ban women from certain industries, having entered the workforce in large numbers owing to industrialisation.¹⁹ This attempt at cohesion between trade unions and state bodies also fit neatly with one of the Catholic Church's ideological inspirations at the time: corporatism. Corporatism offered a framework whereby employers and the state would form vocational organisations which could stem the perceived extremes of both capitalism and communism,²⁰ despite it having some influence on Salazar in Portugal and Franco in Spain.

The 'Blueshirt' movement was an attempt to muster a fascist styled response to the new government. Known formally as the Army Comrades Association (ACA), their membership was limited to 'Christians of Irish birth'.²¹ Headed by ex-Garda commissioner Eoin O'Duffy, they emulated European fascists and attacked communist meetings around the country, with mobs inspired by clerical speeches following suit.²² De Valera reacted to this activity by launching the Public Safety Act in an attempt to ban

the ACA. The ACA merged with Cumann na nGaedheal and the Centre Party to form Fine Gael. This was another factor which drew Fianna Fáil and the labour movement closer together, with the union leaders keen to use the state machine to halt the fascists, despite several major anti-fascist riots emerging.²³

As the decade drew to a close Fianna Fáil had managed to create a boom on the back of their industrialisation policies. They were able to deliver some gains for workers in the form of housing and employment, all while managing to co-opt both the Labour party and the union leadership. They had also managed to woo the Catholic Hierarchy, having gone from being pariahs to embracing Catholic social teaching. The benefit of this alliance meant that when material aspirations for workers could not be realised, Fianna Fáil could rely on the teachings of the Catholic Church to offer the population 'spiritual comfort.'²⁴

Despite remaining officially neutral in the Second World War, *The Emergency* as it was referred to had a significant impact upon Ireland. Sean Lemass as Minister for Supplies ramped up the protectionist policies of the party in an attempt to make the state the largest sector of the economy by far, even toying with the idea of introducing labour camps for the unemployed.²⁵ Measures to ban industrial action for the duration of the war were mooted, but met with resistance from the ITGWU. Fianna Fáil backed down and once more attempted conciliation with the union leadership. The Labour Party managed to grow in this period owing to the hardship suffered by workers. Anti-communist rhetoric re-appeared with the aim of blurring class consciousness in favour of rallying around 'the community'.

¹⁶ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.46-47

¹⁷ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, p.47

¹⁸ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.47-49

¹⁹ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, p.58

²⁰ Fearghal McGarry, *Irish Politics and the Spanish Civil War* (Cork, 1999), pp.154-156

²¹ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.51-52

²² Mike Milotte, *Communism in Ireland: The pursuit of the Workers' Republic since 1916*, (Dublin, 1984), p.117

²³ Allen argues that it was the lack of an urban middle-class base which halted the growth of fascism. Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.53-55

²⁴ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.62-63

²⁵ Bryce Evans, *Seán Lemass – Democratic Dictator*, (Cork, 2011), pp 145-148

In essence, the war provided cover for Fianna Fáil to consolidate its efforts around a 26-county framework, dropping much of its founding rhetoric of being a 32-county republican organisation. This helped with Fianna Fáil's professed image as a catch-all, classless party.²⁶

Ireland did not experience a post-war boom, as had happened in much of Europe and elsewhere. The ending of the war also posed serious problems for Fianna Fáil, who were no longer in a position to deliver on their earlier promise of solid material improvements for the population. These years saw an upturn in workers' struggles including the Irish Women's Workers Union strike, as well as strikes by millers, the ESB, bus workers and other sectors. The Industrial Relations Act was introduced to deal with this militancy, and focussed around a process of 'mediation'; a measure which was to set the tone for industrial relations in Ireland for years to come. Fianna Fáil also faced two by-elections in 1947. Clann na Poblachta, a newly formed left-leaning organisation whose programme emulated much of the early Fianna Fáil, gained one of the seats in Dublin.²⁷ Their newly elected TD, Noël Browne, recalled in his memoir some years later: '[Establishment politicians] had offered nothing but unemployment, much human distress, and mass emigration.[...] There were many of my age with a general radical outlook who were weary of the gross incompetence of a succession of civil war politicians.'²⁸

The general election of 1948 saw Fianna Fáil ousted after an unbroken run of 16 years in power. They were replaced by a mixed coalition of Fine Gael, Clann na Poblachta, Clann na Tamhlan and National Labour (a right-wing offshoot of the Labour Party). In the short lifetime of this mixed-bag government, they had managed to declare Ireland a Republic, but soon fell apart over opposition to the ill-fated 'Mother and Child Scheme' by the medical profession and the Catholic

hierarchy. Fianna Fáil returned to power in 1951, increasing their vote by 61,000, but still falling short of an overall majority.²⁹

The 1950s exposed the limits of Fianna Fáil's protectionist strategy of building up Irish capitalism. Industrial output declined and, as before, promises of material improvement could not be met. The unions began to drift from their association with the party and efforts were made to introduce 'development councils' a forerunner of social partnership (more of which below).³⁰ By 1958 the party, now under Lemass' leadership, began to abandon protectionism in favour of the free market, with Ireland also making attempts to join the EEC. The years '58-'63 saw something of a boom in the building trade, but was also met with union militancy, once more with action by ESB and bus workers. These strikes were particularly significant as they demonstrated something of a split between the rank and file, who were willing to organise activity themselves, and the union leadership. This was yet another factor which brought the union leadership closer to the Fianna Fáil party. Lemass' reaction to this was to encourage a system of 'social partnership', which was somewhat similar, but not identical, to the policy of 'corporatism' favoured by the Catholic Church of the 1930s. The implications of social partnership meant that union leaders would try to curb militancy in return for small wage increases and a consultancy role in national policy making.³¹

The boom of the 60s saw Ireland's economy begin to move away from agriculture, with the arrival of multi-nationals into the state. These companies were attracted by low wages and state incentives. Greater numbers of women entered the workforce than ever before, changing the role of the family, which began the slow undermining of catholic hegemony over the following decades. Access to secondary education was made free and provisions were introduced for the introduction of third level grants. De-

²⁶ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.70-84

²⁷ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.87-91

²⁸ Noël Browne, *Against the Tide*, (Dublin, 1986) p.97

²⁹ Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, p.319

³⁰ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.103-104

³¹ Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.106-115

spite the opportunities afforded by these developments, workers still bore the cost of the grants to multi-nationals through taxation. With an increasingly enlarging workforce came further militancy, with some efforts to unionise large companies being successful.³²

It was during this time that the influence of wealthy party backers was beginning to carry significant sway, particularly with the formation of TACA, a group of 200 businessmen, who were allowed direct access to ministers. The shift in the economic landscape of Ireland changed Fianna Fáil's image from a professed 'workers party' to an explicitly pro-business one.³³ The party were criticised from some of their younger members for this turn towards embracing large capitalists (particularly from the building trade) and thus efforts were made to keep the associations more subtle. There was also some resentment about the personal wealth being amassed by one Charles J. Haughey, son-in-law of Lemass, and later Taoiseach.³⁴

The late 60's also saw the emergence of a civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, aimed at ending anti-catholic discrimination.³⁵ With the escalation of state violence against protestors and the resurgence of the IRA, some members of Fianna Fáil, including Haughey, were sacked and put on trial for alleged importing of arms to the North. Haughey was later acquitted, but this episode would serve to drive a wedge between the Labour Party and Fianna Fáil, the former wishing for containment of the violence, and reacted with a view to propping up state institutions and appealing to respectability.³⁶

Despite claiming 'The 70's will be Socialist', Labour entered into a coalition with Fine Gael in 1973, a pattern which would repeat throughout the 70s and 80s. Fianna

Fáil had managed to present a more nationalist view than Labour in relation to Northern Ireland. An anti-republican campaign by the coalition, along with a rise in unemployment helped Fianna Fáil return with a landslide victory in 1977.³⁷ The party adopted a more Keynesian policy in order to stimulate industrialisation and employment, as well as continuing the social partnership arrangement with the unions.³⁸ The cost of this policy led to an increase in PAYE tax, and was met with some of the largest marches in the history of the state.

Fianna Fáil also continued to court stronger links with the capitalist class at this time. This was embodied in the figure of Charles J. Haughey, seen as something of an aristocrat, who had a massive personal wealth. He had won the leadership of Fianna Fáil in a factional struggle in 1979. The policy of Keynesianism faltered in the midst of an international slump, leading Haughey to hypocritically profess that the Irish were living beyond their means.³⁹ The failure to provide material gains once more saw Fianna Fáil slide back onto the conservatism of the church, however Ireland was now liberalising somewhat and the church could not provide the disciplinary role it had in earlier decades. Fianna Fáil also suffered a split in the mid-80s, with the formation of the Progressive Democrats (PDs), who would later return to prop up a number of Fianna Fáil governments. Haughey resigned over a bugging scandal in 1992.

Despite a decline in Fianna Fáil support politically, the copper-fastening of social partnership had laid the ground for the emergence of the 'Celtic tiger' boom of the mid 90s onwards, by restricting strike activity and providing a base for the expansion of capital.⁴⁰ The Haughey years also saw Fianna Fáil establish further personal links

³²Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.124-131

³³Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.137-138

³⁴Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland: 1900-2000*, (London, 2004) pp.560-561

³⁵For a socialist analysis of the Northern civil rights movement and subsequent 'Troubles' see Eamonn McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, (London, 1993)

³⁶Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.129-131

³⁷Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.149-150

³⁸Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.151-156

³⁹Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, p.158

⁴⁰Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.172

with foreign multi-nationals. One such relationship was that of Ray Burke, Minister for Energy in the late 80s, and the oil industries. Burke, who was later jailed for corruption, removed royalties relating to the exploration of oil and set up a scheme whereby oil companies could offset their costs against tax over a 25 year period.⁴¹

Fianna Fáil, now under Albert Reynolds once again courted the Labour Party, and despite earlier protestations about their credibility, the labour leader Dick Spring eventually agreed to form a coalition. Commenting on the pre-governmental negotiations, Brian Lenihan (Snr) wrote in his book *For the Record*: 'There was a shared understanding between Labour and Fianna Fáil in the 1930s when de Valera was Taoiseach. That understanding must be recast for modern times to ensure future stability in the political system. It would be a stability based on the principled support of people sharing similar social and national values.'⁴² Reynolds himself was dogged by various scandals, including granting of passports to backers of his family beef business, questions over the appointment of the Attorney General, as well as allegations of a cover-up in an extradition case for paedophile priest Brendan Smyth.⁴³ The collapse of the coalition led Labour to form yet another alliance with Fine Gael.

'He's the man, he's the best, the most skilful, the most devious and most cunning'.⁴⁴ These were the words used by Haughey to describe Bertie Ahern. A loyal Haughey supporter since the 70s, Ahern had served as both Minister for Labour and Minister for Justice, before assuming leadership of the party following Reynold's exit. More than anyone else, Ahern embodied the two sided nature of Fianna Fáil. Ahern had

close links with Ireland's elites, and was to be dogged by scandals over his personal finances. Ahern also presented himself as a regular working class person with a passion for pints of Bass and Manchester United Football Club. Once infamously describing himself as a socialist, Ahern at one time drew the largest salary for a serving prime minister in the world!⁴⁵

Fianna Fáil formed a minority government with the Progressive Democrats in 1997 on the back of a growing economy and rapidly expanding foreign investment and building trade. In this time they could boast about the party adopting the 'spirit of the 1916 Proclamation' throughout their 70 years in existence.⁴⁶ The FF/PD coalition was renewed in the general election of 2002. Despite their confidence, the economy was increasingly becoming enveloped in a property bubble. As Fintan O'Toole pointed out, employment in manufacturing was in serious decline in the years 2000-2006, but this was masked by a huge increase in the numbers involved in the building trade.⁴⁷ One publication makes the links between Fianna Fáil and the building trade explicit. *Republican Days : 75 Years of Fianna Fáil* contains a number of contributions on the party's history, as well as photocopies of archive material. Brazenly, the publication also includes a whopping 43 paid advertisements from property developers, estate agents, surveyors and construction companies, many of whom offered their congratulations, proud associations and best wishes to the party!⁴⁸ Despite this boom, there were serious problems in the Irish school and health systems. As O'Toole points out, Fianna Fáil dropped all mention of alleviating poverty in their 2007 election manifesto.⁴⁹

Ahern came under increasing fire over

⁴¹Amanda Slevin, *Gas, Oil and the Irish State : Understanding the Dynamics and Conflicts of Hydrocarbon Management*, (Manchester, 2016) pp.72-73

⁴²Stephen Collins, *The Power Game : Ireland Under Fianna Fáil* (Dublin, 2001), p.252

⁴³Collins, *The Power Game*, pp.276-292

⁴⁴Charles J. Haughey, quoted in Arnold and O'Toole : *The End of the Party*, p.24

⁴⁵Fintan O'Toole, *Ship of Fools : How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger*, (London, 2009), p.89

⁴⁶Bertie Ahern, 'Celebrating 70 Years and Towards the New Century', in *Taking the Long View : 70 Years of Fianna Fáil*, Edited by Philip Hannon and Jackie Gallagher, (Dublin, 1996), p.1

⁴⁷O'Toole, *Ship of Fools*, pp.20-21

⁴⁸Máirtín Breathneach (Ed), *Republican Days: 75 Years of Fianna Fáil*, (Dublin, 2007), p.1

⁴⁹O'Toole, *Ship of Fools*, pp.93-94

statements made to the Mahon Tribunal relating to the signing of blank cheques while serving as Minister for Finance. The *Irish Times* printed leaks from the tribunal which claimed Ahern received ‘dig-out’ money from a cabal of businessmen in the early 90s while going through a marriage separation.⁵⁰ Ahern attempted to brush off these payments as personal favours, however a number of his benefactors were later to be given jobs on boards of state companies. Even more astoundingly he claimed that he didn’t have a bank account while serving as Minister for Finance.⁵¹ Ahern managed to weather this storm, returning to power in the 2007 general election with the PDs and somewhat surprisingly, the Green Party. In little over a year, further allegations forced Ahern to step down, to be replaced by serving Táiniste Brian Cowen.

Fallout from the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the US impacted heavily on the Irish property market. This led to the much criticised bank guarantee of September 2008. Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan Jnr met with representatives of Bank of Ireland, AIB, the Irish Central Bank, and the Department of Finance and agreed to ‘guarantee all the liabilities - the customer and interbank deposits, and also the vast majority of bonds - of the six Irish banks’.⁵² Irish house prices collapsed, with the average family losing half of their assets. The State also established the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA) in order to take over bad loans to developers,⁵³ making the Irish state liable for massive private debt.

Anglo Irish Bank was known for being close to Fianna Fáil and property developers, and the nationalisation of its bad loans contributed enormously to the devastation suffered by the workers of Ireland. Revelations over corruption at Anglo marred Brian Cowen, who had previously given a speech at their investors dinner, as well as being a

golf-buddy of its Director, Seán Fitzpatrick. Despite these close links, Cowen claimed to have no prior knowledge of potential insolvency at Anglo.⁵⁴

The subsequent years of ECB/IMF bailouts, as well as austerity measures contributed to Fianna Fáil’s annihilation in the election of 2011, losing all but one seat in their heartland of Dublin. Conor McCabe notes that the bailout effectively meant that ‘[Fianna Fáil] could no longer sugarcoat its business-led economic policies with political gestures and tax breaks for PRSI workers’.⁵⁵ Their current leader Micheál Martin summed up their position : ‘I am sorry for the mistakes we made as a party and for the mistakes I made’. As Arnold and O’Toole note, he never made explicit just what these mistakes were.⁵⁶

In the aforementioned publication *Republican Days*, Bertie Ahern boasted that : ‘Any reading of the 75-year history of Fianna Fáil indicates the extent to which the party has been a force for political progress and radical social reform. It was Fianna Fáil after all which to all intents and purposes, removed the link with Britain and placed a Republican Constitution before the people. On the social front, it was Fianna Fáil which introduced the massive programme of slum clearance and social housing. We are also the party which established our public health service and the system of free secondary education we enjoy today’.⁵⁷

This self assessment offers no insight into why these policies were initiated, or the material conditions in which they were introduced. Kieran Allen has observed in his book *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, that there are a number of concrete reasons for their domination of Irish politics. Returning to the 20s, their initial appeal was based on protectionism, and their radical social programme made sense for workers alienated by the hardship of the decade. The

⁵⁰Arnold and O’Toole : *The End of the Party*, p.38

⁵¹Arnold and O’Toole : *The End of the Party*, pp.38-42

⁵²Conor McCabe, *Sins of the Father*, (Dublin, 2011) p.170

⁵³O’Toole, *Ship of Fools*, p.9

⁵⁴Arnold and O’Toole : *The End of the Party*, pp.58-59

⁵⁵McCabe, *Sins of the Father*, p.154

⁵⁶Arnold and O’Toole : *The End of the Party*, p.221

⁵⁷Breathneach, *Republican Days*, p.5

defeats of syndicalism also meant that the Labour Party was to remain a weak organisation. Fianna Fáil successfully co-opted union leadership through their philosophy of 'social partnership'. This had the aim of curbing union militancy. Material benefits were afforded to workers at certain times, but these were generally only available when an economic boom was underway, via protection or laissez faire policies. Where material benefits could not be provided, they could rely on the Catholic church to act as a 'spiritual anti-depressant'. As the century drew on, the material benefits and increasing workforce led to the slow dismantling of the catholic church, which could no longer instil discipline upon the population.⁵⁸

As this article goes to press, Fianna Fáil are currently at an all time low in terms

of seats. The Fine Gael minority government is extremely weak, itself consisting of a shaky alliance with several independent TDs. The Labour party is utterly discredited for their hand in implementing austerity on the working-class, including the hated water charges, which Fianna Fáil originally planned to introduce, but now make statements opposing them. The lack of a large scale labour movement in Irish history has left Fianna Fáil in a unique position to be able to appeal to the working-class while maintaining close personal links with Irish capitalism. The task remains for the Irish left to offer a genuine alternative movement of the working class, in the interests of the working class. The decline of the Fianna Fáil party helps us immensely with this task.

⁵⁸Allen, *Fianna Fáil and Irish Labour*, pp.181-182

The socialist tradition in the disability movement: Lessons for contemporary activists

Ivanka Antova

Introduction

The Law Faculty of the University where I am a PhD student recently built a brand new, beautiful building. On the top floor of the new Law School there is a Wellbeing room, a quiet place where staff and students can enjoy the spectacular view of the city and exercise their mindfulness. Presumably, by taking a breath of air and re-focusing their positive energy, the workers in the University can somehow shift the feeling of stress and discomfort that the organisation of their labour has created. As if the root of their work related problems is somewhere within themselves, and not in the exploitative working conditions that the institution has imposed on them.

The Wellbeing room is not only peaceful, but also disability accessible, unlike many sites on campus. Despite the lack of a comprehensive and proactive disability plan for the University, the good news is that disabled staff and students can also be part of the corporate cop-out that is mindfulness. The glass walls of the room allow for an interrupted view of the otherwise inaccessible environment, and also hinder the possibility to take your discontent further. What is higher than the top floor? And who will hear you shouting from there?

This glass Wellbeing room is a good metaphor for the position in which disabled people find themselves in 2016. In the era of human rights, disabled people are routinely treated as second class citizens by punitive means, such as the unfair targeting of disabled benefits claimants in the context of the ongoing welfare reform. Despite the continuous calls for emancipation and independence, institutions still hold many disabled people captive; accessibility continues to be an issue. Poverty, unemployment, and marginalisation are still seen as personal failures, as opposed to a failure of society to facilitate the substantive equality of disabled people. The voices of disabled people, their

families, carers, allies, of the self-advocates and activists, continue to be ignored, or are rendered inadequate to the neo-liberal quest for personal responsibility and efficiency.

I suggest that the disability movement has been segregated to a room on the top floor of the neo-liberal society, in full view of everyone on the outside, and has been put under pressure to re-examine its internal response to oppression, rather than the external oppressive environment itself. To give an example with the welfare reform in Britain again, disabled benefit claimants are expected to adapt to the punitive cuts and improve their employability, as opposed to question the harmful ideology that inspired the reform in the first place. The fact that the recent disability protests against the welfare reform have gone largely unnoticed suggests that the proud radical tradition of challenging the hostile oppressive society that results in disability and is separate from impairment has perhaps become old fashioned.

Anyone interested in disability studies or disability activism will recognise that this understanding of disability, disability as societal oppression imposed on top of impairment, is known as the radical social model of disability. A group of disabled socialists coined this controversial term and consequently inspired generations of disability scholars and activists. At a time when we are aggressively encouraged to internalise unfairness and inequality, it is important to recollect the Marxist tradition of the disability movement.

Disability movement history

Those of us interested in the history of the disability movement in Britain consider the 1970s to be a key period for disability activism and organisation. Whilst reflecting on the fact that the history of the movement as a whole predates the 1970s, the focus of this article is the activists and socialists who in 1972 formed the Union of the Phys-

ically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and consequently developed the radical social model of disability.

A brief overview of this period would reflect on the letter that Paul Hunt, a physically impaired activist, wrote to The Guardian in 1972. In his letter Hunt passionately critiqued the oppressive structures of society and the regimes of restrictions and isolation within institutions that segregated disabled people. He called upon people with physical impairments to join forces and tackle together the oppression that creates disability.¹ Another prominent disabled activist, Vic Finkelstein, responded to the letter and soon after a group of disabled Marxists joined him and Hunt to form UPIAS. The main aim of UPIAS was to engage in a relentless and critical attack of the medicalization of disability and the plight of the disability institutions, which were seen as the ‘ultimate scrap-heaps of this society’ and a ‘prisons for life’.²

UPIAS stood out among the other disability organisations that existed at the time; it was also a different group of activist for the organised Left as a whole. Judy Hunt, a key member of UPIAS, recollects that at the time the Union was formed few comrades saw the struggle of disabled people as interlinked with the struggle of the marginalised communities against the oppression of capitalism. Hunt, however, argues that ‘the term disability is a capitalist creation. Historically one can say that disability was used to define a category of people unable to work. Disability is about not having control over your life.’³ The UPIAS activists were socialists and saw their struggle for independence and control over their life as an intrinsic part of Left wing politics. This particular feature of UPIAS has made

them a unique organization for the British disability movement and is the focus of this article.

At a time when institutionalization was being questioned and the integration of people with impairments was becoming more mainstream, the members of UPIAS aimed to offer an ever more radical understanding of the ‘true nature of [their] oppression and the radical changes necessary to overcome it’, calling for a ‘fight to change the conditions of life which oppress [them]’.⁴ The work of UPIAS focused on the emancipation of people with physical impairments in particular, but this emancipation was not separate from the fight for justice of other disadvantaged groups, such as blacks, unskilled workers, the elderly, the mentally handicapped and the low income earners.⁵ Comparing the segregation of disabled people to apartheid, UPIAS argued that ‘the disabled people’s movement involves challenging the social culture that denies people rights of self-determination and it’s about being part of the mainstream of life.’⁶

The activity of UPIAS was envisioned to include publishing pamphlets and a Newsletter; leading campaigns on various issues; building up information and advice services; and organizing various kinds of assistance to people with physical impairments. Although the Union eventually disintegrated, a number of important advances were made that continue to resonate with contemporary disability scholars and activists. It is worth pointing out two contributions UPIAS made to the disability movement: the pursuit of an ‘objective, practical and hands on approach towards the struggle for social change’; and the development of the understanding that ‘disability is created by a world designed for able-bodies living rather than by the way our

¹Judy Hunt, ‘A revolutionary group with a revolutionary message’ (2001) *Greater Manchester of Disabled People’s Magazine ‘Coalition’*. The article is available via the University of Leeds Disability Studies Archive, free and online.

²UPIAS Manifesto 1972, paragraph 7.

³As above No.2.

⁴UPIAS Manifesto 1972, paragraphs 4-5. A full text of the Manifesto is available via the University of Leeds Disability Studies Archive, free and online.

⁵I am using the original language and terminology of the Manifesto.

⁶As above No.2.

⁷Vic Finkelstein, ‘Outside, ‘Inside Out’ (1996) Coalition GMCDP April. The article is available via the University of Leeds Disability Studies Archive, free and online.

bodies are impaired.’⁷

The socialist tradition: the activist agenda of UPIAS

This was the message of both the radical social model of disability and the disability activism that followed the establishment of UPIAS. Both theory and activism are fascinating and important topics and deserve an in-depth analysis. The radical social model as a theoretical approach has had a tremendous impact on disability studies as an academic discipline and continues to be the most accepted and used model of disability within contemporary scholarship. For the purposes of this article, however, I will focus on the activist agenda of UPIAS. As a disability researcher I appreciate the strengths (and weaknesses) of the social model of disability for the production of critical and politically engaged research. As an activist I have a far greater need to reflect on the radical history of the movement, in order to be able to draw conclusions about where socialist disability activism should go next.

It is important to point that both the activist agenda of UPIAS and their radical model of disability were considered controversial by many. For example, at a time when other groups were campaigning for the civil rights of disabled people, the UPIAS activists were increasingly concerned with how the quest for anti-discrimination legislation was overtaking the work of many disability organizations. As important as civil rights were, UPIAS ultimately saw them as a ‘single-issue campaign’, or ‘pressure group politics taking priority over grass root work’, thus neglecting the general membership of the disabled community, who were advocating for a much broader and more radical re-organization of society.⁸ Instead, UPIAS pursued a socialist agenda: to locate the struggle of disabled people against stigma and isolation with the struggle of other op-

pressed communities by critiquing ‘all the manifestations of prejudice and discrimination’.⁹ An example of this ethos was the frequent reference to the apartheid in South Africa, or to the black Americans movement in the USA, who were also seen as ‘rejects from ordinary life, and subject to the same experience of devaluation by society’.¹⁰ UPIAS were skeptical of the traditional ‘mode’ of disability activism that focused on isolated issues and emphasized the special nature of disability activism and instead argued for a struggle for full integration that would develop the strengths of the disability movement and would bring them into contact with many groups who also have an interest in influencing social change.¹¹

Connected with their socialist activism was the use of highly politicized language, often accused of isolating those disabled people who were not interested in disability politics, but were looking for empowerment through other means, most noticeably through the arts. An example of this political language was the use of the term ‘disabled’, as opposed to ‘with impairments’. At the time UPIAS was active the term ‘people with disabilities’ was becoming more mainstream. The same term now dominates the international and domestic human rights documents, policy documents, academic articles and the popular media. UPIAS saw the use of seemingly positive, or neutral, language, such as ‘people with disabilities’ as a withdrawal from ‘the uncomfortable, subversive position from which we act as a living reproach to any scale of values that puts attributes or possessions before the person’.¹² Although the widely accepted ‘people with disabilities’ terminology claims to put the person first and the disability second, Finkelstein has argued that it portrays disabled people as ‘tragic figures whose lives are wholly dominated by difficulties and a desire to be normal’ and thus has the effect of imposing the abled-bodied version of ideal

⁸As above No.8.

⁹Paul Hunt, ‘A Critical Condition’ in P. Hunt, *Stigma: The Experiences of Disability* (1966, London: Geoffrey Chapman)

¹⁰*ibid.*

¹¹UPIAS, Comments on the discussion held between the Union and the Disability Alliance on 22nd November 1975. The article is available via the University of Leeds Disability Studies Archive, free and online.

¹²As above No.9.

person as a role model or an aspiration.¹³ Since disability was understood as a particular form of social oppression brought about by unnecessary isolation and exclusion from full participation, UPIAS insisted on using the term ‘disabled people’, thus breaking the causal link between impairment and disability and attributing the second to the harmful effect of a disablist segregationist environment

The socialist activist agenda of UPIAS, combined with their call for disabled people to get involved in the politics of disability, allowed them to break away from one of the stigmas associated with disability: the label of the tragic a-political and therefore pliable burden to society. Instead UPIAS demanded that disabled people are not only formally reconsider as equal citizens, but also that they have the exclusive power to control their agenda, activities, their livelihood, identity and position in society. Thus UPIAs rejected the liberal projects of charity and compassion and exposed the hypocrisy of the able-bodies community. ‘[The able-bodied person] admits equality as a theory, but when you *act* as though you are *equal* then the crucial test comes. Most people are good-willed liberals towards us up to this point, but not all of them survive close contact with disability without showing some less attractive traits.’¹⁴ UPIAS countered the political and cultural dominance of the non-disabled by relying on grassroots activism that would eventually build the mass movement necessary to achieve the radical transformation of the disablist society. When asked about disability and culture, Finkelstein defended the concept of a disability cultured based on grassroots activism and mobilisation. ‘If we are to make our unique cultural contribution to society then this must come collectively from the people, it cannot be imposed on us by leading disabled individuals from

the top down’.¹⁵ Hence the long term aim of UPIAS was to inspire many disabled people to be proactive in the shaping of their own personal and political reality. ‘A general mass movement of disabled people, and our increasing integration into normal work and other social situations, will radically improve our social status as a group.’¹⁶

Conclusion

So what can a recollection of the socialist tradition within the disability movement do for the contemporary disability activist agenda? It was the activist group of UPIAS who first discussed the social construction of disability. It was their legacy that inspired the see-through wellbeing room metaphor: disability is not a problem that you can overcome by changing your attitude whilst confined within the walls of the institution. Disability is a problem of the capitalist society and theory and activism should seek to smash its see-through walls.

The socialist tradition of UPIAS continues to be extremely relevant to the current situation and could be used to direct and inspire the efforts of the contemporary disability movement: critique the oppressive environment; deconstruct and destabilise oppressive processes and knowledges on disability that are not coming from disabled people themselves; increase political consciousness and intensify disability resistance; work on the grassroots level and demand nothing less than absolute control and independence.

The Left wing allies, be it academics or activist, should aim to support the formation of a mass disability movement, whilst accepting that disabled people themselves must be in control and avoiding tokenistic interventions that go ‘no further than to document the poverty and deprived conditions under which disabled people [are] living.’¹⁷

¹³Vic Finkelstein, ‘Disabled People and Our Cultural Development’ (1987) Paper presented at the first annual meeting of the London Disability Arts Forum. The article is available via the University of Leeds Disability Studies Archive, free and online.

¹⁴*ibid.*

¹⁵As above No.11.

¹⁶As above No.13.

¹⁷Vic Finkelstein, ‘Researching Disability: setting the agenda for change’ (1992) National Conference 1st June 1992. The article is available via the University of Leeds Disability Studies Archive, free and online.

Disabled people's struggle for fairness and equality should be a priority for the Left, ensuring that the disabled voices are not being silenced and that their radicalism and passion is not being diluted.

We as a Union are not interested in descriptions of how awful it is to be disabled. What we are interested in, are ways of changing our conditions of life,

and thus overcoming the disabilities which are imposed on top of our physical impairments by the way this society is organised to exclude us. In our view, it is only the actual impairment which we must accept; the additional and totally unnecessary problems caused by the way we are treated are essentially to be overcome and not accepted.'¹⁸

¹⁸ *UPIAS Manifesto* 1972, paragraph 14.

Science, Politics and Public Policy

Dave O'Farrell

However one looks at it modern science must stand as one of pinnacles of human achievement. The fruits of scientific inquiry and practice are so ubiquitous to us that it is impossible - or at the least as close to impossible as to make little difference - for anyone in the modern world to conceive of any form of day to day reasoning which does not rely to some degree on the methods of science and scientific knowledge. Science and scientific methods provide us with tools which enable us to evaluate the world in which we live, both the 'natural' world and also our own societies. In many ways science offers the ultimate source of legitimacy in modern society, not many would offer up a policy or proposal without supporting it with some sort of scientific data or justification - even if the data or justification is more science-like than science¹.

In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in public debate about what can be called 'bad science', the use of science-like language and presentation to promote theories and practices with no scientific basis, biased and sensationalist science reporting in the media and the misuse of science in formulating public debate and policy. These topics have been discussed in numerous books over the last number of years such as the former *Times* science editor Mark Henderson's *The Geek Manifesto*², and the *Guardian's* Bad Science columnist Ben Goldacre's *Bad Science*³ and *Bad Pharma*⁴. These books and others like them are very welcome in highlighting many episodes where science or scientific methods have been misrepresented or misused by in-

dividuals, governments and companies however they are often quite 'woolly' when it comes to the interactions between science and politics or political decision making.

This is probably not surprising in that the main goal of much of the recent writing on this topic has been around the promotion of a scientific and evidence based approach to evaluating everything from medical treatments to government policy. The critique of how exactly science is misused is generally excellent and the reasons why are often grounded in very real material conditions such as conflicts of interest or ideological grounds. Likewise many of the prescriptions on how to better use scientific methods to evaluate policies - while unlikely to produce revolutionary outcomes - seem very sensible. Where the analysis seems lacking is in how it deals with political ideology. The treatments vary from statements like the suggestion by Henderson that 'precisely what politicians think is less important than how they think⁵' - a statement that should worry anyone with a political outlook - to the superficially similar but much more subtle outlook of those like Goldacre who argue for the use of scientific methodology in evaluating policy outcomes, -does the policy actually achieve it's stated aim(s)? - while making clear that a similar methodology cannot answer the question of whether the underlying ideology behind the policy is valid⁶.

In this article I want to argue that Marxism offers an excellent framework to examine issues relating to the interactions of science and ideology in society. I intend to briefly examine what exactly science is, the scien-

¹One need only look at the statements of the Catholic right in the 2015 Marriage Equality Referendum or in the current debate around abortion rights. Despite claiming a strong Catholic ethos most of these groups do not - at least in public discourse - resort to a religious claim to justify their arguments. Instead they attempt to quote scientific studies - often disingenuously.

²Mark Henderson, *The Geek Manifesto*, 2012, Transworld Publishers, London

³Ben Goldacre *Bad Science* 2008, Fourth Estate, London

⁴Ben Goldacre *Bad Pharma*, 2012, Fourth Estate, London

⁵Henderson p.7

⁶See for example a talk given by Goldacre where he answers the question of how evidence from randomised controlled trials deals with a policy driven by political ideology. 'Dr Ben Goldacre on randomised controlled trials for public policy' TEDxDHFastStream 22 June 2012 Royal College of Paediatrics & Child Health, London. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzRs7cPrrfE> (Question at 23mins)

tific roots of Marxism, why Marxists should care about science and scientific argument, how Marxists should approach some key scientific debates and make a case for the better use of scientific analysis both in criticizing existing political policy and, as importantly, in advancing our alternatives.

Science - What exactly are we talking about?

Although most of us would feel we have an intuitive understanding of what we mean by science, attempting to define 'science' is not a straightforward problem. Thankfully for the purposes of this article a strict definition is not a necessity, indeed given the ultimate desire to investigate the role of science and its interaction with ideology a rigid definition may in fact be more of a hindrance than a help. I will confine my remarks about what science is to a few comments about what, in a broad sense, science is and by extension, perhaps as importantly, what science is not.

In a broad sense science refers to branches of study seeking to understand or explain phenomena of the material world. Science generally refers not only to the knowledge gained from such study but also to the methods used to gain this knowledge - the scientific method, the processes of systematic observation, measurement or collection of data and the use of experiment in the formulation, verification, falsification and modification of hypotheses and theories. This picture of science - while broadly correct - can if taken too literally give a false impression of the workings of science. Science is not always the cold, abstract and dispassionate activity which may be suggested by the basic description outlined above and there has been much written by philosophers of science as well as scientists themselves on how science and the scientific method is influenced by society.

Bertrand Russell observed this influence in discussing the roll of a scientific education:

The kernel of the scientific out-

look is a thing so simple, so obvious, so seemingly trivial, that the mention of it may almost excite derision. The kernel of the scientific outlook is the refusal to regard our own desires, tastes, and interests as affording a key to the understanding of the world. Stated thus baldly, this may seem no more than a trite truism. But to remember it consistently in matters arousing our passionate partisanship is by no means easy, especially where the available evidence is uncertain and inconclusive⁷.

In this passage Russell highlights the tension between the aim of science towards a dispassionate analysis and the difficulty of actually achieving such dispassionate analysis given our own preexisting ideas and cultural preferences and biases. Others such as Karl Popper have also noted the unavoidable cultural components of the scientific method:

The belief that science proceeds from observation to theory is still so widely and so firmly held that my denial of it is often met with incredulity. I have even been suspected of being insincere - of denying what nobody in his senses would doubt. But in fact the belief that we can start with pure observation alone, without anything in the nature of a theory is absurd Observation is always selective. It needs a chosen object, a definite task, an interest, a point of view, a problem. And its description presupposes a descriptive language, with property words; it presupposes similarity and classification, which in their turn presuppose interests, points of view, and problems.⁸

⁷Bertrand Russell 'The Place of Science in a Liberal Education' in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays*. George Allen & Unwin Ltd. London. 1963

⁸Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*

This phenomenon is also acknowledged by many scientists themselves. The physicist Richard Feynman is often quoted as saying 'The first principle is that you must not fool yourself, and you are the easiest person to fool.' The evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould has written extensively on these subjects and his book *The Mismeasure of Man* - which includes a masterful critique of the mistakes, biases and ideological influences in a wide range of supposedly scientific justifications for racism - offers a concise and insightful commentary on how exactly science functions within society

Science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity. It progresses by hunch, vision, and intuition. Much of its change through time does not record a closer approach to absolute truth, but the alteration of cultural contexts that influence it so strongly. Facts are not pure and unsullied bits of information; culture also influences what we see and how we see it. Theories, moreover, are not inexorable inductions from facts. The most creative theories are often imaginative visions imposed upon facts; the source of imagination is also strongly cultural⁹

Gould also notes that not all scientists agree with these assertions but argues that they are well backed up by the evidence of the history of scientific development.

This argument, although still anathema to many practicing scientists, would, I think, be accepted by nearly every historian of science.¹⁰

Indeed the history of science is clearly not simply a gradual accumulation of knowledge leading to ever greater knowledge but

an often erratic process where ideas and theories compete to explain various phenomena all influenced by prevailing ideologies and cultural assumptions. It is characterised by often quite abrupt 'paradigm' shifts where one theory is superseded by a new one which although explaining the same phenomena does so in a radically different way - such as Einstein's theory of relativity superseding the Newtonian theory of gravitation.

While the examples above deal with what are sometimes termed 'hard sciences' - physics, chemistry, biology etc. - they apply in much the same way to so called 'soft sciences' such as sociology and the social sciences in general. Indeed if the view of science given above is not how many - including some scientists - think when they consider science it closely resembles the basic critique many of the same people might make of the social sciences. I would contend the essential difference between these so called 'hard' and 'soft' sciences is essentially a combination of the inherent difficulties in acquiring hard and easily interpreted evidence and data from human society and the subsequent increased possibility of ideological and other biases to enter into the process. I could also go further and suggest that in these cases where the available evidence is far from clear and requires significant interpretation that ideology and cultural influences are a necessary component to a meaningful interpretation, the less clear and more contradictory the evidence the more assumptions must be made and the greater the 'creativity' required in making sense of the evidence¹¹. Where such research stops being science and can better be described as ideology is of course a difficult - if not intractable - problem I won't begin to address except to give what I feel is a good general starting point, namely the principle that good scientific inquiry in these areas should fully acknowledge the biases of the researchers and be clear, in as much as is possible, where their ideology comes into

⁹Stephen Jay Gould *The Mismeasure of Man*, revised edition, New York : W.W. Norton 1996 p.53

¹⁰*ibid.*

¹¹The same can of course be said about the 'hard' sciences when evidence is lacking. For a brief account of the role of ideology in regard to one of Engels ventures into scientific debate in relation to human evolution see Dave O'Farrell 'The Politics of Evolution' *Irish Marxist Review* 4 <http://www.irishmarxistreview.net/index.php/imr/article/view/42/45>

the research not just in terms of the analysis but in the problems and questions posed in the research.

The Scientific Roots of Marxism

Marx and Engels both shared a deep interest in science. Indeed Marx expressed the view that science ‘underlies all knowledge’¹². In setting out their theories of socialism Marx and Engels did not simply borrow superficially from science and the scientific method, they set out their theory in great detail using all the current knowledge and evidence available to them from a number of fields of not just science but also philosophy and history. Starting from their observations of the world around them and working within the framework of their materialist critique of Hegel’s dialectical philosophy and influenced by the history of human society they synthesised a systematic world-view which aimed to explain not just the society in which they lived but the whole development of human society and crucially to extrapolate about the future possibilities for society. Marxism offers us not just a critique of capitalism or an argument for socialism, it provides a rich framework of philosophy, in dialectical materialism, and history, in historical materialism, which enable us to understand not just society as it exists today but also how our society came into being, how and why it operates the way it does, how it can develop in the future and - crucially - how we can shape that future.

In formulating their theories Marx and Engels displayed much of what is valuable in scientific methodology. Their methods avoided many of the pitfalls which often accompany the application of science. They were keen to not simply apply a superficial explanation or extrapolate from a specific example to construct an overall explanation. Marx’s methodology in *Capital* serves as an example of this. In setting out the functioning of a capitalist economy Marx does not simply describe the day to day operations of capitalism, he doggedly sets out to un-

derstand capitalism not simply as it appears but to tease out the essence of its inner workings - being highly critical of those ‘vulgar’ economists who concentrate merely on the outward appearance of things.

It should not astonish us, then, that vulgar economy feels particularly at home in the estranged outward appearances of economic relations in which these *prima facie* absurd and perfect contradictions appear and that these relations seem the more self-evident the more their internal relationships are concealed from it, although they are understandable to the popular mind. But all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.¹³

Marx and Engels were similarly critical of those who simply took a static view of the world and extrapolated from it or reflected their analysis backwards in time. Their general philosophical framework of dialectical materialism views the world and human society as being in a constant state of motion with these states coming into and out of existence and displaying internal contradictory tendencies or behaviours. Simply describing even the essence of the underlying functioning of capitalism was not sufficient for Marx and he sought to elucidate the fundamental factors of human society which could form the basis from which these essential functions developed - in doing so Marx, along with Engels, had to develop not just a scientific framework for analysing capitalism but the whole of human history. The importance placed by them on this scientific basis of explanation, with general principles applicable to any human society is apparent in Engel’s speech at Marx’s grave.

Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human

¹²Quoted in the preface to F. Engels *Dialectics of Nature* Progress Publishers Moscow 1972 p.6

¹³Marx *Capital* Vol. III Chapter 48 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm>

history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means, and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of vice versa, as had hitherto been the case.

But that is not all. Marx also discovered the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production, and the bourgeois society that this mode of production has created.¹⁴

That this scientific, materialist dialectic is at the centre of Marx's revolutionary outlook and criticism of capitalism is then made apparent. The arguments he advances for socialism are not based on a purely moral argument against the 'evils' of capitalism but are grounded in a scientific analysis of the nature of human society and its development. According to Marx the dialectic

In its rational form ... is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it

regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary.¹⁵

Broadly speaking it can be said that a scientific world-view is an essential component to a Marxist understanding of the world.

Why Marxists should be concerned with scientific debate

The previous section has shown the importance Marx and Engels placed on a scientific framework for understanding the world in their development of Marxism and such an understanding is just as important for Marxists today. I would argue a basic understanding of science and how scientific evidence is formed is necessary not only to grasp scientific aspects of debate but to help to reveal ideology and bias masquerading as scientific argument.

In general science has penetrated so much of our daily lives that it has almost become the 'language' of modern political debate. No matter what the policy it is more than likely presented in a science-like manner. Invariably some form of evidence will be advanced and it will be asserted that either it was the result of some policy or it justifies the implementation of some policy. Here a knowledge of science and its attendant methods can be very useful in arguing for a political perspective. Not only can a knowledge of science help us to spot blatant spin but also the basic - or occasionally quite convoluted - errors made in assessing evidence as a justification - retrospective or preemptive - for a particular course of action.

This is not intended to be an argument for the supremacy of scientific argument over ideological debate, indeed going down this

¹⁴Frederick Engels 'Speech at the Grave of Karl Marx' Highgate Cemetery, London. March 17, 1883 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/death/burial.htm>

¹⁵*ibid.*

route where ideological goals or motivations are sidelined almost always ends in a cul de sac. There is no 'neutral' space free from ideology and if socialists are not advancing an ideological argument for changing society then we are stuck arguing within the framework of the dominant neoliberal capitalist ideology.

A rather depressing example of this route can be found in *The God Species*, a book by the well known environmentalist Mark Lynas. The book is ostensibly a scientific analysis of the dangers of climate change and an outline of some of the possible solutions. While the vast majority of the science in the book is quite correct (and very well referenced) and some of the criticisms of the environmental movement are justified in his engagement with the science of climate change Lynas, formerly quite a radical environmentalist, seems to have abandoned any trace of a desire to change the economic system which drives climate change. Any sort of change in how society is run is ignored in favour of technical solutions that fit comfortably within the capitalist framework, such as carbon trading schemes. These are ultimately justified by asserting that

Markets are human instruments, and can be targeted to achieve any environmental objective if cleverly designed with that end in mind¹⁶

without any acknowledgment that such schemes have totally failed to halt rising CO2 emissions while making massive profits for many of those trading.

In reality the scientific element to political debate is generally less important than the ideological element but the ability to evaluate and use the evidence in a scientific manner can be crucial to making a coherent argument - it is little use outlining your political views and then backing them up with

bad science! I now want to examine two areas of debate where I think the arguments that need to be advanced are primarily scientific or political. Space constraints preclude any detailed analysis but I hope these examples can serve to clarify the roles of scientific and ideological arguments.

Biological determinism

In brief biological determinism can be described as the view that '...all human behaviour - hence all human society - is governed by a chain of determinants that runs from the gene to the individual to the sum of the behaviors of all individuals... that human nature is fixed by our genes'¹⁷ It is a world view advanced most famously by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* and ultimately seeks to offer a scientific justification for the way society, with all its inequality and injustice, is structured.

This world view has been challenged both scientifically and politically and both challenges are necessary although given the 'scientific' nature of the arguments advanced the scientific criticisms are of great importance. In *Not In Our Genes*, Richard Lewontin, Steven Rose and Leon Kamin offer an instructive guide to making such an argument. Pointing out that they disagree strongly with the political conclusions of biological determinism and 'believe it is possible to create a better society than the one we live in at present'¹⁸ they continue with scientific arguments that 'to show that the world is not to be understood as biological determinism would have it be, and that, as a way of explaining the world, biological determinism is fundamentally flawed'¹⁹

In advancing their arguments they are also critical of those on the left who advocated equally fallacious - even if more ideologically palatable to those on the left who want to change society - theories of cultural determinism which sought to 'see human na-

¹⁶Mark Lynas, *The God Species: How the planet can survive the age of humans*, 2011, Fourth Estate, London. p.155

¹⁷R.C. Lewontin, Steven Rose, Leon J. Kamin *Not in our genes: Biology, Ideology, and human nature* 1984, Pantheon Books, New York. p.6

¹⁸*ibid.* p.9

¹⁹*ibid.* p.9

²⁰*ibid.* p.10

ture as almost infinitely plastic, to deny biology and acknowledge only social construction'²⁰ The point that this misuse of science was so contrary to 'actual lived experience' that it often served to reinforce the view of biological determinism as simply 'common sense' is an important one.

GM Crops

Genetically modified crops are often strongly opposed by the left. There are many good political reasons for this but few scientific ones. Despite the often repeated claims of the danger to human health there have been no recorded instances of any ill health effects attributable to GM foods - despite the fact that many people in North America have been eating large quantities of GM foods for the better part of two decades. There are certainly health implications related to diet (and lifestyle) in North America but these are shared across the 'developed' world and the blame must lie squarely at the feet of the capitalist system which produces and aggressively markets so much food with poor nutritional value.

The evidence on environmental impact of these crops is much more mixed and difficult to make a clear judgment on. Many properties of GM crops, such as increased yields and reduced requirements for artificial fertilisers and pesticides, could potentially be environmentally beneficial but other properties, such as resistance to glyphosate weed-killers like Roundup or tendencies towards monoculture, may have negative environmental effects. These potential problems are however also shared with non GM crops in capitalist agricultural production.²¹

The political reasons for opposing GM are many but can possibly be summed up in one word - Monsanto. The despicable behaviour of large corporations when it comes to GM crops includes aggressive patenting of 'their' crops and taking legal action against anyone found growing their crop even if it is only a case of unintentional cross pollination of the field with a patented GM crop.

In many instances large companies such as Monsanto have managed to turn farmers into near vassals who appear to exist only to make profits for the company.

If the potentials of GM crops are to be in any real sense used for the benefit of humanity then a political fight to take on the power of multinational corporations is a necessity. Part of this fight may involve opposition to GM crops but as socialists we should be clear the opposition is directed at the companies and how they use the technology - not the technology, or indeed the concept, itself.

Science and public policy

Having looked at the role of science in some political debates it is worth considering the role of science in formulating public policy.

Firstly it should be restated that science cannot a priori determine if a policy is 'good' or 'bad' - this is an ideological question. What science is very good at is determining if a policy actually achieves its stated goals and this is something that socialists should be very interested in.

How often have you heard a statement from a Government Minister about how some new policy was going to improve something or resolve some crisis? Now how often have you heard them revisit the policy and decide if it actually achieved what they claimed it would? It is fair to say that the evaluation of evidence for much public policy is rather poor and idea of carefully considering the available evidence before proposing a policy is often ignored due to a 'something must be done, this is something, therefore it must be done' approach on foot of criticism from opposition groups, the media, or the public.

Globally there has been an increase in the use of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in areas of public policy²². In the UK some very simple trials have been performed and the previous governments Behavioural Insights Team, with others, in-

²¹For an excellent overview of agriculture under capitalism see Martin Empson 'Food, agriculture and climate change' *International Socialism Journal* 152 October 2016

²²This blog post from Ben Goldacre's Bad Science site lists a sample from 2011. <http://www.badscience.net/2011/05/we-should-so-blatantly-do-more-randomised-trials-on-policy/>

cluding Ben Goldacre, have published a document on how government departments can use trials to assess new policies and interventions²³.

While the trials in this report are unlikely to make any major differences to most people's lives many of the procedures involved would be of great benefit to socialists in critiquing government policy.

While there is now a commitment from government to 'equality proof' budget measures the information on how budget measures will affect people often amount to little more than spin. Forcing governments to not only state what they want to achieve but also how exactly they will measure the success of their policies ahead of time would be a valuable tool for the left. Knowing how

a given policy will be evaluated in advance significantly reduces the government's room for spin and obfuscation.

Conclusion

Scientific knowledge and a scientific framework are vital for evaluating data on society. When combined with a Marxist framework and an understanding of the ideological biases prevalent in society, a good grasp of science can help to make a powerful critique of our society. Marxists owe it to the great project of transforming our society to make every attempt to understand and apply these techniques in any campaign we are involved in, anything less would be an abandonment of the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels.

²³Laura Haynes, Owain Service, Ben Goldacre, David Torgerson *Test, Learn, Adapt: Developing Public Policy with Randomised Control Trials* UK Cabinet Office 2012

The Starry Plough – a historical note

Damian Lawlor

On the 5th of April 1914 the Irish Citizen Army paraded their colours, the Starry Plough, at a meeting. The flag was unlike any other used in Ireland and is made up of an agricultural plough with superimposed upon its structure the star constellation Ursa Major (also called the Great Bear or Plough or Big Dipper). The flag had a gilt edge, the background is green, the plough itself is yellow and the stars are silver.

The original suggestion that the ICA should have its own flag came from Jim Larkin but the actual design of the flag is credited to Belfast artist William H. Megahy. At the time of designing the flag he was working as a teacher in the School of Art located in Kildare Street in Dublin. Sean O'Casey (the then secretary of the Citizen Army) carried out research into the origins of the flag and in 1954 submitted the original drawing of the design to the National Museum. The only major difference between this and the flag produced is that in the drawing the flag has a blue and not a green background. The identity of the person who decided to change the colour is not known. It was produced by the Dun Emer Guild. In a picture of the flag outside Croydon House, Fairview in the summer of 1915 the flag is being carried on a pole with a red band on the top - this is the symbol of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

The Imperial Hotel on O'Connell Street was probably not occupied until the Tuesday of the Easter Rising, when a detachment of volunteers who had previously been based on Westmoreland Street were moved into the building. Later on in the day another section of rebels was sent from the G.P.O. to reinforce those already there and early on Wednesday the rebels hoisted a tricolour over the building. Later on during the day James Connolly sent over the Starry Plough

Frank Thornton tells how, 'During the Insurrection I received a request from my commander-in-chief, James Connolly, to erect 'The Plough and the Stars' on the Im-

perial Hotel alongside the Tricolour already flying there. I immediately agreed, and only succeeded after great difficulty as it had to be erected under fire, but up it went - 'The Plough and the Stars' -and there it stayed, although only the front wall of the building remained after the fight had concluded.'

Connolly would have been well aware that the Hotel was owned by William Martin Murphy, who was the employers' leader during the 1913 lockout. The message from Connolly was clearly that in the new Irish Republic workers would be in the ascendant over the exploiters who lived off their sweat and toil.

After the Rising it was widely believed that the flag had been burned along with the rest of the hotel. However it still flew over the front of the building and remained flying there right through till the following Saturday evening. A Lieutenant of the 9th Reserve Cavalry Regiment then occupying O'Connell Street spotted the flag flying above the G.P.O. With the help of a police officer he removed it and took it as a souvenir. The National Museum acquired it from him in 1955.

In 1934 it was decided to re-establish the ICA in conjunction with the launch of the Republican Congress. A number of the members of the original ICA were consulted and their recollections of the design of the original flag were recorded. Some of these differed radically. Eventually the new Starry Plough was produced but it was significantly altered with the agricultural plough now missing and the background colour blue. Seven white stars which make up the star constellation of the Plough were kept. It wasn't until 1955 when the National Museum managed to acquire the original and authenticate it that the difference in the two flags was accepted.

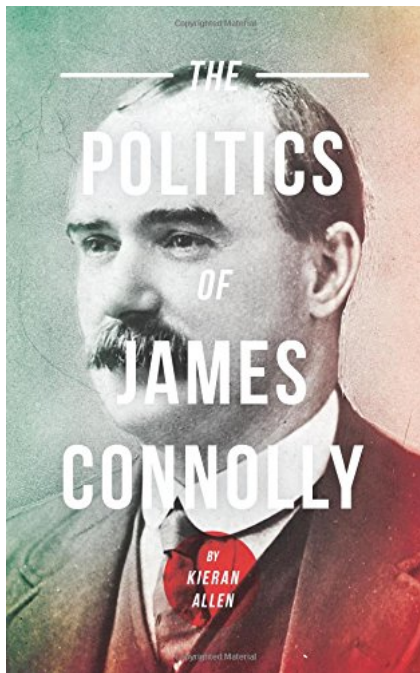
Sean O'Casey wrote the following lines about the flag, 'Be worthy, men, of following such a banner, for this is your flag of the future. Whatever may happen to me; though I should mingle with the dust, or fall to ashes

in a flame, the plough will always remain
to furrow the earth, the stars will always be

there to unveil the beauty of the night, and
a newer people, living a newer life, will sing
like the sons of the morning.'

Review: Kieran Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly*

Shaun Doherty



Kieran Allen, *The Politics of James Connolly*, Pluto Press, 2016. £13.00

The timely re-publication of Kieran Allen's *The Politics of James Connolly*, first published twenty six years ago in 1990, should be read alongside his recent *1916: Ireland's Revolutionary Tradition*. The intervening years have demanded that we continue to review Connolly's legacy and measure it against changing political circumstances. In doing so we can affirm Connolly as the pre-eminent Irish revolutionary Marxist, despite continuing attempts to appropriate him for a range of competing traditions. The thrust of Allen's earlier political biography was to challenge this appropriation of his legacy, while his more recent book challenges prevailing assessments of the Easter Rising and identifies it as the harbinger of the revolutionary upheavals in the years that followed leading to partial independence in 1921. Connolly's role in this process was pivotal.

In his introduction to the political biography Allen identifies three competing versions of Connolly. Firstly, the sanitised view of him as an Irish patriot and Catholic apologist; secondly, the view epitomised in C. Desmond Greaves *The Life and Times of*

James Connolly that he had to subordinate any socialist ambitions to the primacy of the struggle for national independence and finally, the view of Austin Morgan and others who sought to repudiate his anti-imperialism and give pre-eminence to his work as a trade union organiser. Allen demonstrates beyond any dispute that Connolly's writings, his commitment to freeing Ireland from British imperialism and his understanding of the centrality of working class, place him in the revolutionary Marxist tradition. It is interesting to remember that the book was first published before the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the ensuing 'peace process' with its establishment of power-sharing in the North and before the collapse of the 'Celtic Tiger' and the imposition of austerity politics in the South. Its analysis has stood the test of time and is even more relevant to today's political situation. This is particularly true given the transformation of Sinn Féin from militant republicanism to constitutional nationalism, which has led it to take contradictory political positions either side of the border.

Connolly has suffered the fate of those who are vilified during their lifetimes as dangerous threats to the establishment only to be turned into harmless icons after their deaths. This is particularly true of the version that is happy to name railway stations after him and to herald his role in 1916 as a patriot. It coincides with the conservative counter revolution of 1923 and its aftermath described vividly in Allen's latter book as 'A most Conservative Country.' It is a version that seeks to either expunge Connolly's Marxism or to render it harmless as a form of guild socialism or mild social reformism. It also emphasises Connolly's Catholicism, even to the point of his biographer Owen Dudley Edwards arguing that he perceived essential interdependence of socialism and Catholicism and was 'one of the best and most enlightened apologist the Catholic church has seen since the industrial revolution' (O.Dudley Edwards *James Con-*

nolly: *The Mind of an Activist*). This assessment was clearly in tune with a country where the social conservatism of Archbishop Charles John McQuaid had been wedded to the conservative nationalism of Eamon De Valera.

To some extent this unconvincing version of Connolly was effectively repudiated by the Greaves' biography. Informed by the politics of the Communist Party it does give a more detailed account of Connolly as a lifelong activist and working class organiser, but is hamstrung by its adherence to one particular version of the stages theory of national liberation: namely that there should be an alliance between the working class and progressive sections of the bourgeoisie in order to fight for national liberation and that social demands should be postponed until after this had been achieved. This view was taken one stage further by Peter Beresford Ellis in his preface to the 1985 edition of *The History of the Irish Working Class* who wrote, 'In Ireland today as in previous centuries, the mainspring of socialism is in the national struggle.' Allen argues conclusively that far from Connolly subscribing to this view, in his most famous work *Labour in Irish History* he had argued exactly the opposite. In an argument that in many ways pre-figures Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, Connolly asserts that Nationalists like Sarsfield, Grattan and O'Connell all feared the masses more than the British rule because they threatened their own class position and material wealth and power. As a result, they could never deliver what they claimed to stand for and consequently '...only the working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland.'

The third version of Connolly espoused by Morgan and other apologists for the British State- Bew, Patterson and Gibbon in *The State in Modern Ireland* - criticised him for linking working class struggle to the struggle for independence and went so far as to assert that the effects of imperialism in any classical sense on Irish affairs was slight. Their political motives were to distance themselves from any resistance to the state in Northern Ireland after the Civil Rights Movement of 1968. Morgan went so

far to argue that Connolly ceased to be a socialist in 1914 and instead threw his lot in with militant republicanism.

There were weaknesses in Connolly's analysis as Allen has consistently pointed out. In particular, the mistaken notion that militant republicans would automatically be drawn towards socialist politics after national liberation had been achieved and as a result he failed to establish a lasting independent socialist organisation, but the trajectory of Connolly's life and political commitment is a manifestation of the tension between his lifelong commitment to working class struggle and its centrality to the fight for national liberation. He argued that an all-class alliance based on 'nationhood' would fail to break the stranglehold of Britain. The tension is not just theoretical. The historical developments during the last three years of his life shaped his attitude considerably, but it's worth giving a brief summary of the years prior to that. From 1898 he had been a socialist and trade union organiser in Scotland; in 1896 he moved to Ireland and formed the Irish Socialist Republican Party; in 1903 he moved to the US where he became involved with the Socialist Labour Party and subsequently became an organiser for the International Workers of the World; finally he returned to Ireland in 1910. In 1911 he became the organiser for the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and then its General Secretary in 1913. The great Dublin lock-out of that year proved to be a watershed with a ruthless employers' offensive against Connolly's attempt to extend the unionisation of the workers: an offensive that led to the defeat of the union. The solidarity of rank and file workers in Britain was outweighed by the capitulation of their union leaderships and the TUC backed campaign of scabbing. An embittered Connolly described it as the 'sordid betrayal of our holiest hopes.'

This defeat was followed in 1914 by the outbreak of the First World War. Connolly was in the small minority of the international socialist organisations in opposing the war and the ITGWU campaigned against conscription. He believed the war presented revolutionaries with an opportunity, partic-

ularly in Ireland to strike a blow against the biggest imperial power in the world:

Starting thus Ireland may yet set a torch to a European conflagration that will not burn out until the last throne and last capitalist debenture will be shrivelled on the funeral pyre of the last war-lord.

Out of the carnage of war and the defeat of the working class he became increasingly drawn to the idea of armed revolt against Britain in alliance with the forces of nationalism. In order to follow this through he formed an alliance between his Irish Citizens Army and the National Irish Volunteers that led to his central role in the armed uprising of 1916.

Allen's political biography gives an invaluable and detailed account of this trajectory and at the core of it is the idea of history and the actors in it as part of a dynamic process not a series of static events. The book deals in detail with all the stages in Connolly's political journey and whilst recognising the towering role that Connolly had played in Irish working class history it avoids hagiography and includes detailed discussion of areas in his thought and political practice that merit more critical analysis.

For example, in the complex relationship that Connolly had with religion Allen distinguishes between his scathing attacks on the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church and his residual belief that there was no intrinsic incompatibility between religion and socialist politics. He felt that if the clergy confined themselves to the sphere of religious concerns and kept out of politics, socialists could deal with the latter. He concluded that 'the most consistent socialist or syndicalist may be as Catholic as the Pope if he is so minded.' There was a clear contradiction between his commitment to a 'materialist' analysis of the world and a belief that there were aspects of nature unfathomable to humans and these were the phenomena that religion could address. In engaging with this critical analysis, however, Allen keeps a sense of proportion and avoids the myopic scholasticism of those who make selective

reference to extracts from Connolly's writing to prove that his attitudes to religion were a fatal flaw.

Indeed, there is ample evidence in *Labour, Religion and Nationality* of Connolly challenging the interference of the church in the world of politics. In his polemic against the Jesuit priest Father Kane who in his Lenten discourses had railed against the socialist movement and denounced it as 'mob rule', Connolly 'turned the words round in his mouth' in a marvellous polemic.

There was a time stretching for more than 1,000 years when the mob was without power or influence, when the entire power of the world was concentrated in the hands of the kings, the nobles and the hierarchy. That was the bleakest period of human history... Then the mob started on its upward march to power—a power only to be realised in the socialist republic. In the course of its upward march the mob has transformed and humanised the world. It has abolished religious persecution and imposed toleration on bigots of all creeds; it has established the value of human life... there is not in history a record of any movement for abolishing torture, preventing war, establishing popular suffrage, or shortening the hours of labour led by the hierarchy... All hail to the mob, the incarnation of progress.

As a polemicist in the daily struggle for worker's rights Connolly did not shy away from criticising the role of the church and its representatives when they acted as ideologues for oppression and exploitation.

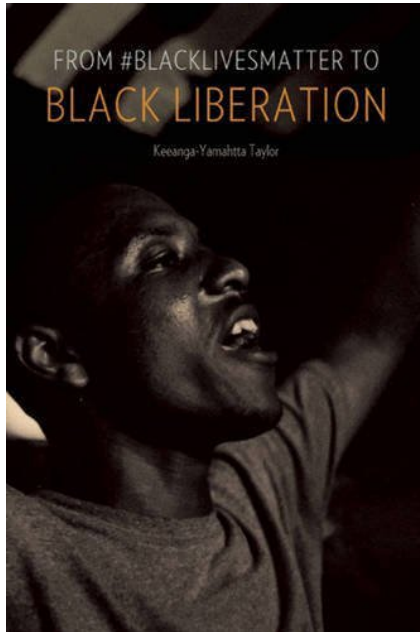
Allen applies the same degree of balance to his criticism of Connolly's view of political organisation and his relationship with republicanism. The crucial factor here is to be able to see the bigger picture, to keep a sense of perspective. In doing so Allen is able to acknowledge and affirm the crucial role that

Connolly played in the struggle for socialism and opposition to imperial oppression. This is particularly important today when we celebrate the anniversary of the Easter Rising and Allen's *1916: Irelands Revolutionary Tradition* provides the same level of consistency and dispassionate analysis as his earlier biography. In achieving that overall perspective of Connolly's contribution we are able to see his continuing relevance to the struggles of today and the need to continue to challenge the false narratives and ruling

class attempt to render him a harmless figure of the past. Today's struggles in Ireland against austerity, women's oppression and anti-immigrant racism owe an immeasurable debt to the real legacy of Connolly. I would strongly recommend everyone engaged with these struggles to take advantage of the republication of Allen's political biography to arm themselves with the lessons of history and Connolly's role within it as a revolutionary Marxist of distinction.

Review: Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*

Conor Kennelly



Kieran Allen, *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*, Haymarket Books, Chicago, 2016. \$ 17.95

Eight years ago millions of people all over the world watched as America elected its first African American president. The dominant theme of Barack Obama's campaign was Hope however vaguely defined. It was especially moving to see elderly African Americans cast their vote when only a few decades previously they had been viciously beaten up by racist police when they demonstrated for Civil Rights.

It can only be dispiriting then to observe the current US election that pits Donald Trump, a vulgar openly racist and sexist billionaire, against Hillary Clinton, an arch imperialist who would be at home in any European right wing party. This comes at a time when the US has the largest prison population in the world, 50 per cent of who are African American and when American police are killing more African Americans than were lynched during the brutal Jim Crow era. Eight years after the first Black president was elected African Americans are actually worse off and have seen their household wealth decline significantly as a result of the 2007 economic crash. The facts are simply staggering. Average household

wealth (as opposed to income) is only \$6446 for African Americans while it is \$91,405 for whites. Four million Black children live in poverty while 240,000 Black people lost their homes as a result of the mortgage crisis.

From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation by American socialist activist and academic Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor is therefore a very timely and excellent analysis of how we got to this stage but also outlines a strategy on how the deep rooted and systemic nature of American racism can be challenged and ultimately overcome.

Taylor opens with a speech given by Martin Luther King only weeks before he died in which he declared that 'I'm not sad that black Americans are rebelling; this was not only inevitable but eminently desirable' and insisted that 'America must change'. These words are as relevant today as they were 50 years ago.

Apologists for the status quo in the US insist that we're living in a post-racial supposedly colour-blind society and that any incidents of racism are merely aberrations from an essentially benign state of affairs. The image of the United States that we are expected to believe is of an inherently democratic entity since its beginnings with the Declaration of Independence in 1776. This argument is used to justify American imperialism and the notion of the US as the leader of the 'Free World' that generously grants these liberties to the rest of the world. Obama echoed this argument when he stated 'America our endless blessings bestow an enduring burden. But as Americans we welcome our responsibility to lead. From Europe to Asia... we stand for freedom for justice for dignity. These are values that have guided our nation since its founding' (Taylor, P.25). More recently it has been used to reinforce the idea that if inequality still exists it's down to individual failings and a so-called 'culture of poverty'.

But as Taylor argues justice is not something that is a 'natural part of the life cycle

of the United States nor is it a product of evolution; it is always the outcome of struggle' (Taylor, P.5). Like anywhere else the democratic rights that Americans enjoy, limited as they are, have had to be fought for and thousands have suffered and died in that struggle.

The Civil Rights marches and the more militant inner city uprisings of the 50s and 60s resulted in the defeat of Jim Crow in the South and a commitment to spend more on social welfare and Government programmes that improved the lives of both millions of African Americans and whites. Affirmative Action measures made some headway towards correcting racial inequality in employment and housing.

The Black movement was the catalyst for other movements especially the anti-war movement where African Americans constituted a disproportionate number of those conscripted. Millions of Americans were making the connection between being asked to fight for democracy abroad while being denied the same rights at home. This is one of the reasons why the movement of the 60s and the Black Lives Matter movement is so important then and today. It exposes the ideological self-image of the US as the land of the free and the American dream where supposedly anyone can make it.

The main beneficiary of the movement was an emerging Black middle-class. Affirmative Action removed previous barriers to promotion especially in the public sector. It also manifested itself in electoral politics so that by 1990 there were over 7000 elected officials.

As the movement receded in the 1970s electoral politics seemed a more attractive option as African Americans were in a position to run local governments in many of America's largest cities primarily through the mechanism of the Democratic Party. But there was a price to be paid for this compromise with the system. The turn came at a time in the early 1970s when the long Post War boom was ending and governments everywhere were adopting Neo-Liberal economics and cutting spending while employers laid off thousands of workers. These cutbacks affected African Americans disproportionately

as spending on inner city projects to lift people out of poverty were severely cut.

Black politicians now found themselves having to manage reduced budgets and implement the very cutbacks that affected their voting base the most. Their only solution to create jobs was to rely on private sector investment and expensive Public Private Partnerships. The ruling class also realized that African American elected politicians could be quite effective in policing their communities. Carl Stokes, the first elected African American mayor of a major US city (Cleveland) was endorsed by President Johnson and received funding from the Ford Foundation.

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 heralded an all-out onslaught on many of the gains of the 1960s. Welfare was slashed while Reagan used coded racist language with reference to mythical 'welfare queens' never mind that a majority of welfare claimants are whites. Black family income declined by 5% in Reagan's first year in office. Instead of challenging the neo-liberal consensus, African American politicians adapted to the right ward drifting mainstream. The most notorious example of this was former Martin Luther King adviser, Ralph David Abernathy, who endorsed Reagan in 1980. Reagan went further with his War on Drugs which was deliberately targeted at African American communities. Much stiffer sentences were imposed for use of crack cocaine than were for powder cocaine which tended to be mainly used by middle-class whites.

Bill Clinton went further with his Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. This act included increased use of the death penalty, life sentences for non-violent offences, 100,000 more police on the streets and the elimination of federal spending on prison education. The act also set aside 10 billion dollars for building prisons while at the same time Clinton cut 80 billion dollars in welfare spending.

Shamefully, the Congressional Black Caucus supported all these retrograde measures that specifically targeted African Americans. They even repeated some of

the racist stereotypes about a 'culture of poverty' and instead insisted that African American men needed to take personal responsibility. This tendency continues today and both Michelle and Barack Obama frequently lecture African Americans, specifically young Black males that they can't make excuses, thereby letting the system off the hook. Taylor quotes Obama 'We have to promote stronger role models than the gang-banger on the corner' (Taylor P.26).

Michelle Alexander quotes Obama in her book *The New Jim Crow* (The New Press, New York, 2010) in a speech he gave on Father's Day in a Chicagoan Church: 'Too many fathers are AWOL. They have abandoned their responsibilities. They're acting like boys instead of men.' (Alexander, P.178) This sanctimony comes at a time when African American men are overwhelmingly represented in the prison population. African Americans are urged to finish their education while the Democratic Mayor of Chicago and former chief of staff in Obama's first Administration, Rahm Emanuel, closed dozens of schools in the inner city where the student population is majority African American. These actions shouldn't surprise us and as Taylor argues, it is not just a matter of Black politicians exhibiting 'whiteness' and selling out, it is because they now have a stake in the system and are expressing their class loyalties.

Taylor concludes her book with an assessment of the Black Lives Matter movement and where it might lead. She argues quite forcefully that any movement for change in America has to grasp the systemic nature of American racism and put it at the forefront. Racism has always been central to the dynamic of American capitalism so therefore any struggle against either racism or economic injustice raises wider questions: 'The struggle for Black liberation then is not an abstract idea molded in isolation from the wider phenomenon of economic exploitation and inequality that pervades all of American society; it is intimately bound up with them'. (Taylor, P 194).

The Black Lives Matter movement emerged only a couple of years after the Occupy Wall Street protests that mobilised

hundreds of thousands of Americans on the streets against the greed of the 1%. The protests had given people the confidence to protest and also to make connections and look at the bigger picture. Small but increasing numbers of whites have begun to join in solidarity with African Americans on Black Lives Matter protests. For several days and nights the city of Ferguson Missouri was in revolt against the racist police murder of Michael Brown as protesters stood their ground and gained confidence that they could resist the violent racism of the police. One of the more heartening events of 2016, was when thousands of Chicagoans put manners on Donald Trump and stopped him speaking at his own election rally. It was noticeable how mixed the protesters were as they joyously chanted 'We stopped Trump'. More recently, large numbers of Americans from all backgrounds have protested in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick, the African American footballer who refused to stand for the national anthem before a football match as a protest against racism.

Like in the sixties when the inner city uprisings connected with the anti-war movement the Black Lives Matter protests have the potential to gel into wider struggles against the system as more people begin to question racial and economic inequality in American society. Taylor cites the example of the successful 1970s mass postal workers strike where activists were able to bring the confidence they'd acquired from the inner city uprisings into the work place and unite Black and white workers on the picket line. Surveys since the Ferguson, Baltimore and other urban protests against police brutality have shown an increased number of white Americans acknowledge that African Americans are unfairly treated by the police.

The other point too is that while white workers harbour racist ideas they do not benefit from racism. While African Americans have been disproportionately affected by the economic downturn and are at the bottom in almost every indicator of wealth and income the real income of the American working class as a whole has remained stagnant since 1970. At the same time,

the wealth of the 1 per cent has grown exponentially as they have benefitted from neo-liberal economic policies under successive Republican and Democratic administrations. Wealth has not trickled down as Reagan famously and dishonestly promised. There are now over 540 billionaires in the US according to Forbes. The wealthiest 400 owned as much wealth as the bottom 60% in 2010 and the gap continues to widen. Ninety nine percent of all new wealth is now going to the top 1 per cent.

In the current vacuum in American politics a racist populist like Donald Trump is able to appeal with some success to white working class Americans (though this should not be exaggerated as studies show middle income Americans are more likely to vote for him than poor Americans) and manipulate people's anger to direct it against oppressed minorities. While this is by no means natural or inevitable it is also mistaken to suggest, as Bernie Sanders once did, that people will automatically unite in economic struggles and racism can be ignored until a later time. Any anti-capitalist movement will need principled socialist and anti-racist politics if it is to move forward.

Taylor reinforces this point when she argues that it's not just simply a matter of moral compunction but rather it is one of

necessity that obliges white workers to oppose racism if struggles against economic inequality are to be successful. A similar analogy can be drawn with Northern Ireland and the issue of sectarianism. Protestant and Catholic workers have united on several occasions on bread and butter issues most notably in 1932 during the Belfast Outdoor Relief Strike. However, socialist activists who played a key role in the strike avoided wider political issues such as the border and sectarianism, thereby allowing the Unionist employers to whip up anti Catholic bigotry and crush the fragile and temporary unity. Similar lessons apply to the US and activists cannot avoid the central issue of racism that continues to divide the American working class.

From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation is highly recommended for anyone who wants to further explore the workings of American racism and how it plays a central role in American society. Taylor expertly takes on several arguments as I've outlined above. But it's not just an academic study and indeed is highly readable and accessible unlike some books on the subject. It is also a valuable guide to strategy and action that anti-racist socialists can employ in the struggle for a better world where racism and inequality are just a distant memory.