Irish Travellers and anti-Traveller racism

Dave Lordan & Peadar O'Grady

After a long campaign by Traveller and other activists, the official recognition of the ethnic identity of Travellers in Ireland on March 1st 2017 was a blow against prejudice, racism and oppression in Ireland.[1] It seriously undermined one of the most consistent arguments against addressing the oppression of travellers, an oppression which can be seen in the systematic discrimination in access to housing, education and employment in particular: the argument that they are not a group with an identifiable culture or ethnicity, that is, that they don't exist. While Travellers have shared much in common with the mistreatment of the poor working class in Ireland since the foundation of the State -- from the impoverishment of the countryside, the drive to emigrate or move into regional big towns and cities, to poor health, poor housing, unemployment, incarceration in Industrial schools and imprisonment -- denial of ethnicity meant a denial of oppression on the specific grounds of being a Traveller. The grounds of ancestry, language and a distinctive nomadic and occupational culture puts the question of the ethnicity of Travellers beyond any doubt; however, racism and prejudice are never based on a fair evaluation of the facts.

Anti-Traveller racism has been based on the effects of a state policy of forced conformity to capitalism, exemplified by the 'Programme for Economic Expansion' and the racist policy of forced assimilation outlined in the early 1960s, and of sowing division and conflict within the population, and within the working class in particular, in order to further that plan with the least resistance. Of course, confronting anti-Traveller racism has to do with understanding the roots of racism and oppression rather than demanding Travellers to justify themselves as an ethnic group. As the Taoiseach finished his speech on recognising Traveller ethnicity in the Dáil that day: "Traveller activist Bernard Sweeney shouted from the public gallery: 'Taoiseach, offer an apology on behalf of the State to the Travellers'". The refusal of the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, to apologise on behalf of the Irish State for the historic, and, more importantly, ongoing mistreatment of Travellers was left unexplained and largely unchallenged at the time in the mainstream media. Acknowledging ethnicity was therefore not, in Enda Kenny's view, as the representative of the Irish State, an admission of any liability or fault in terms of mistreatment, discrimination or oppression of Irish Travellers.

In 2018, a year after the official recognition of Traveller ethnicity, an otherwise irrelevant right-wing bigot, a candidate in the presidential election, and subsequently in the Euro elections as we went to press, attempted to attract support by criticising Travellers for wanting facilities for their horses near their homes and by repeating the traditional denial of the ethnicity of Travellers: "How can I be racist when they're not a separate race?" There was shock but no real surprise when his support increased from less than 5% in polls to over 20% in the actual ballot (in the absence of a candidate from the right-wing government party Fine Gael or its support party Fianna Fáil). This served to underline not just that an ongoing prejudice against Travellers of a significant minority exists, but that this prejudice is strong enough to motivate a vote of support. This meant that a specific anti-Traveller and/or more general racist or right-wing chauvinism is still a significant motivator of political support in Ireland and one that could be exploited by the sort of right-

wing forces making gains in some parts of the US, Latin America and the EU: conservative, racist and opposed to rights for women, LGBTQI or a sustainable environment.

It is the aim of this article to give a brief review of the history of Irish Travellers and the denial of racism, discrimination and hate crime that has only added insult to injury for an ethnic group who deserve much respect and solidarity from socialists.

Nomadry and History
Humans are nomads by nature and we have lived in small, travelling, communal nomadic bands for the vast majority of our existence. Marxists have classically referred to this period of anything up to 300,000 years of ecological harmony and peaceful co-existence as 'primitive communism'. Humans evolved over tens of thousands of generations by way of a primary mode of subsistence or, to put it colloquially, by living off the fat of the land, and in a way that did not include systematic exploitation of fellow human beings, iron hierarchy, or habitat destruction. Irish Travellers, like other modern nomads in Europe with a separate history, such as the Roma or Sinti, are obviously not hunter-gatherers or pastoralists. Although hunting, gathering and animal husbandry do form part of their heritage, they are overall a different type of nomad to the primary type mentioned above, a different type which emerges alongside and in tandem with modern societies and originates in historical trauma. Nomadic groups and ethnicities that emerge inside agricultural and feudal and industrial societies do not live directly off the land but subsist on what can be gained by trading with, providing services for, and labouring for a dominant mode of production. A huge variety of these nomadic groups who survive on such secondary modes of subsistence have existed throughout recorded history and right up to the present day, and among which Travellers can be counted. They are groups who cannot or will not live in the ordinary sedentary way and often originate in sections of the masses which were cast out of sedentary existence at times of crisis such as war, famine, and mass unemployment. Among these peoples of the road are great numbers of seasonal or occupational nomads, like the irish farm labourers who travelled from job to job across the islands from the 18th to the 20th centuries, or

the 25 generations of blind nomadic bards, collectively known as Homer, who made their living going from court to court and fair to fair in the 10,000 villages & communes of Dark Age Greece[2]. The range of economic relationships between nomadic groups and settled rural and village dwellers in the ancient, medieval and early modern periods is vast and includes much that these settled peoples could not have done without, ranging from trading horses and other animals, to providing agricultural metallurgy, to harvesting, to various forms of entertainment including storytelling, music and singing as well as palmistry and tarot reading. Beginning in The Bronze Age and stretching in to the early modern period, new and improved techniques of animal husbandry, crop husbandry, and agricultural metallurgy, as well as new cultural forms such as circus and mummery were repeatedly spread all over Eurasia by nomadic clans, groups, small bands and individuals[3]. Nomadry therefore was the lubricant in the axle of medieval agriculture; feudal society could not have survived without the contribution of travelling workers, traders, entertainers and innovators.

Where did all these nomads come from? Numerous causes led to people abandoning sedentary lifestyles to take to life on the road. Mass evictions, religious persecutions, innumerable wars, pogroms, mass expulsions, famines and economic convulsions would have constantly been forcing individuals, families, and larger groups of people into nomadism and existing on the margins and in the interstices of settled society. The vast majority of these people and peoples left no record and are known to us only by inference through legislation against them[4] or second-hand through the nearly always prejudiced accounts of officials and well-off observers. However, we can infer that once on the road many would have learned, from those already there, ways to make staying on the road economically viable by way of service or commerce. These modes of survival were passed on from generation to generation, so that one family or clan becomes associated with horses, another with pots and pans, a third with songs and stories, and so on. Eventually, by way of such adaptations and intergenerational transference of knowledge and tradition, more permanent cultural identities are formed, such as Sinti, Roma or our own Irish Travellers.

The historical origins and roles of Irish Travellers

Due to a lack of official records, it is impossible to tell exactly when Traveller culture came into being or indeed whether Travellers have one or multiple genealogical origins, though multiple origins and multiple accretions over time seems most likely. Scholars have placed the origins of Shelta, the Traveller language, as far back as the 1100s[5], but it's possible that Travellers adapted Shelta for their own use centuries after it came into existence as a language in general use among different kinds of nomad and outsider group. Traveller cultural practices such as equine husbandry, agricultural metallurgy, and storytelling go back many centuries in Ireland and argue for potentially early medieval origins. In Gaelic Ireland a semi-nomadic group known as as *caoireacht* or "creaghts" existed. They lived "with herds of cattle and driving them seasonally to fresh pastures where they constructed temporary dwellings"[6]. It is possible, and genetic indications seem to back up the possibility[7], that a large cohort of the Travellers is descended from this or some other caste or layer of ruined gaeldom. After the destruction of Gaelic Ireland in the 16th and 17th century, which murdered millions and cast countless into destitution and homelessness, it is also possible that there was a blending of this Gaelic nomad caste with other occupational nomads such as Bards[8], alongside other Cromwell-forged destitutes and 'vagrants'. Some Travellers and scholars also point to the 1845-49 genocide as an origin point and it is likely that the Great Hunger did indeed add to the amount of people on the road,[9] but the Great Hunger is certainly not the first or major origin of Irish Travellers, and Travellers themselves emigrated and no doubt also died in great numbers during the time of the blight and the exporting of wheat.

Besides this, the Travelling community is not a closed one. Over the centuries they have absorbed many settled individuals who have married-in to the Travelling community, and taken in many other non-Traveller nomads and 'vagabonds', from, according to lore, the likes of expelled errant monks, deserting soldiers, runaway wives, escaped prisoners, and evicted widows in past centuries, right up to to some few members of the New Age Traveller communities of the 1980s and 90s. It is no surprise then that the genetic evidence points to at least four distinct ancestral lines for Travellers. However, it isn't genetics which forms the mass common identity called ethnicity. Ethnicity is formed over many generations out of common struggles and common experiences. It is these existential commonalities which form the basis for Traveller identity, not shared bloodlines or biology. These latter are an effect of common identity, not a cause of it - as the right might claim when using genetics as a racist propaganda tool. It is not predestined biology, but unpredictably unfolding historical contexts and material pressures that explain human social behaviour. Common struggle against a common enemy produces a strong communal attachment which is difficult to break. Any family unit that has had to go through an individual tragedy like a death in the family, sudden or prolonged poverty, ongoing police harassment, unjust or abusive treatment by the state or other authorities, knows how one such experience can make or break a family. If the family makes it through it is scarred but at the same time more united than ever. Apply all the aforementioned traumas to an entire community of tens of thousands everyday for generation laid upon generation and it becomes possible to see how Traveller commonality is formed and why, despite the incredible hardship encountered, it has survived and even had some triumphs along the way.

Traveller identity is more than merely reactive. Travellers are very much the authors of their own identity as well. To say that Travellers were forced onto the road and forced to stay out on the road tells only half the story. Without downplaying the hardships, the Traveller life ideally lived has attractive qualities - potential independence from the discipline of the workaday and from the supervision of the state - vis-a-vis the situation of settled persons, especially working class people in slums and crowded, underserviced suburbs. The ongoing popularity of caravanning, and keeping horses, in working class communities is also testament to the popularity of aspects of Traveller culture. The attractions and benefits of a freewheeling life on the road have often been foregrounded in artistic representations of Travellers and other nomads:

We busked around the market towns and picked
fruit down in Kent:
And we could tinker lamps and pots and knives

wherever we went
And I said that we might settle down, get a few
acres dug
Fire burning in the hearth and babies on the rug
She said "Oh man, you foolish man, it surely sounds
like hell.
You might be lord of half the world, you'll not own
me as well.[10]

In the contention between the lovers of *Beeswing*, the songwriter dramatises a stock and idealised clash between two ways of subaltern being which we find recurring over and over in radical literature all the way from *Piers Plowman* to *On the Road* and beyond - fettered versus unfettered, *Look Back In Anger* versus *Easy Rider*, proletarian versus nomadic. Many of us being free spirits would no doubt choose the nomadic life if such a life could be lived without the extreme oppression it now involves.

To dismiss poets' and songwriters' ideal representations of nomadic life as romantic and unattainable misses the point and betrays ignorance of some of the roots and implications of the Marxist tradition. Marxism and revolutionary socialism are the radical children of the artistic and philosophical movement known as romanticism which was inspired by the French Revolution and wedded to ideals of individual freedom and progressive social transformation. In romanticism 'gypsies' often appear as an inspirational sign of freedom and potential escape from the oppressive and soul-destroying life of slums and child-eating mines and factories[11]. But this is not only a dream - the lives of really existing Travellers and nomads of, for example, the mid 19th century, were surely objectively better than those of many contemporaneous industrial workers. When marxists speak of alienation - the disturbing individual sense of not being at-home-in or adapted to this bleak world of over-crowded cities, toxic mass production, endless competitive stress, and hyper consumerism - we are also unavoidably speaking of the natural, nomadic, ecologically harmonious human existence such a life alienates us from and which in a sense is our inheritance and birthright. Instead of dismissing nomads or nomadic lifestyles, traditions, and ecological wisdom as archaic irrelevancies we should treasure and seek to learn from them.

Until well into the 20th century Travellers existed in a symbiotic and mutually beneficial economic and social relationship with the rural Irish, fulfilling a number of important functions and receiving payment, barter, and often temporary accommodation in return. Among the items traded by Travellers were pots and pans, delph, jewellery, textiles, camphor, second-hand clothes, pins, needles, nails, laces, carpets, mats, wooden toys, dolls, soaps, perfumes and countless other knick-knacks and small household and luxury items. Some of these they manufactured themselves and more they purchased in the local big town and added their own tariff on top. Some Travellers were not retailers but advanced metalworkers, known as metal runners, moving beyond the repair and forging of tin goods to the maintenance of crucial machinery such as plows. Many contributed to seasonal harvesting alongside other rural proletarians. Trade in mules, horses, donkeys, goats and sheep was widespread and Travellers were known and respected and often sought out for their knowledge of horses. Female Travellers often told fortunes by way of palm or tea leaves. Musicians and storytellers abounded and were very popular. The following account gives some sense of the colorful spectrum of occupations Irish Travellers took up and became skilled in:

The tinkers sell pins, laces and lots of other things. The people gather around at night to hear the news the people bring from place to place. They were the source of bringing news before the papers came into use.They came up from Cavan to gather potatoes in Meath in the month of October. Travellers visit my house all the time. The Travellers that visit my house most frequently are the O'Briens. They come in families. They repair umbrellas and tins for people. They also sell things such as gallons, saucepans and laces. They beg for alms, such as bread, flour, tea, sugar and milk. They have caravans and they stay along the side of the road. Long ago when travellers visited my district they used stay for a night. They would tell stories and play music. They would go home in the morning.

This is one of around 400 accounts[12] from all over Ireland given by settled people to the Folklore Commission about Travellers in the mid 1930s and available online at Duchas.ie. In the vast majority of these folk depositions, Travellers are described as welcome and in terms which recognise their dynamic

and important contribution to rural Irish life. It was indeed common all over Ireland for Travellers to be given temporary accommodation for a night or two by locals as they passed through a district. Relations between Travellers and rural dwellers were generally good and rooted down for generations on end. Although a small minority of respondents comment negatively on Travellers, there is no evidence of the widespread racism abroad today. It took a prolonged and ongoing campaign of racism by national and local politicians, media, and institutional authorities to bring that about.

Irish Travellers in the Republic

Today, Irish Travellers are an indigenous ethnic minority, making up less than 1% of the population of Ireland, who are self-described as Mincéirs in the Traveller language in its two dialects Gammon and Cant (together these dialects are sometimes referred to by academics as 'Shelta').[13][14] There are also significant Traveller populations in the North of Ireland, the UK and the United States as well as in other parts of the world popular with the Irish diaspora.

The primary focus of oppression for Travellers, since the 1963 *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* in particular, has been forced assimilation, preventing the continuation of a nomadic way of life for Travellers, and the systematic discrimination in access to services and public spaces, most notably in terms of accommodation, in order to force conformity to a settled, wage-earning urban way of life in line with the needs of a developing Irish capitalism.[15] While discrimination against Travellers preceded the foundation of the state, in the new Irish state Travellers suffered disproportionately from regulations targeting the urban poor and small traders in standardising accommodation, education and business in favour of the larger business interests. State building projects and land distribution between the first and second world wars meant an incorporation of traditional Traveller sites into farms or housing estates. Traveller occupations declined with the rise of the use of plastics and machinery, so that demand for horse trading and tin-smithing slumped. With the decline of rural society in general through poverty and emigration the demand for agricultural labour also declined, another traditional occupation for Travellers. By the 1950s, like their 'settled' counterparts, Travellers were emigrating in greater numbers than before, in particular to the UK and the USA, and also migrating internally into Irish towns and cities like Dublin, Cork and Galway pressing the need for major state house-building programmes. Even so, the Irish population as a whole continued to fall, as it had since the famine, reaching an all-time low of less than 3 million in 1958. Travellers increasingly applied for inclusion on housing waiting lists but were denied access through direct refusal and Local Authorities making demands that Travellers be in residence in the locality for a particular period, a requirement not imposed on non-Traveller applicants. Today Travellers are even more urbanised than settled people with the CSO in 2016 reporting 78.6% of Travellers living in an urban setting compared to 62.4% of the total population.[16]

Dr Sindy Joyce[13] sums up the period well:
"Public housing was at the top of the agenda in social policies and a total of 48,875 public houses were constructed between 1933 and 1943. Nomadism was frowned upon and attitudes to us got worse. By 1961 numerous local authorities had received many tenancy applications by Mincéirs (before forced settlement) and many families were taken off the list on the basis that the council was not prepared to house families of the 'itinerant' class... The economic and social relationship between us and the sedentary population also rapidly declined. In the face of such dramatic changes, we were forced to migrate into more urbanized areas where we were not quite as welcome as we had once been in rural Ireland in previous decades. Perhaps the most significant and immediate impact on us related to the issue of accommodation, and the attendant introduction of many laws and restrictions on camping and mobility as outlined in the 1963 report...Authorities soon came up with "a solution" and in 1963 one of the most significant -and racist - reports ever produced in relation to Ireland's indigenous community was published. It was the first Irish government report in relation to us and its commission had no Mincéir representative and had no contact with the community. On the 1st of July, 1960, the inaugural meeting of the commission was held in the Government Buildings, Merrion Street, Dublin. Mr Charles J. Haughey addressed

the members of the commission where he stated that: 'there could be no final solution until itinerant families were absorbed into the general community'. Many recommendations were published with the report including 'to register the whole community, to prohibit tent dwellings where the police could enforce fines and/or prison sentences, to induce them to settle by offering unemployment assistance to those who settle for at least 12 months'... Restrictions on our economic activities resulted in many of us living in poverty with no State assistance and, according to government, this poverty was equated to nomadism. The 1963 *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* was produced to 'enquire into the problems arising from the presence in the country of itinerants in considerable numbers' (p.110). Framing us as a 'problem' from the beginning, it codified the State's ideological opposition to nomadism in a manner which had not previously existed."

In terms of human rights, or any even a rudimentary sense of decency, assimilation is something which might be facilitated but never forced. It was clear from the 1963 report, and subsequent legislation restricting the use of caravans and horses, that it would be the stick and not the carrot that would be used:the stick of prosecution and imprisonment for activities associated with travelling or nomadism and the absence, to the modern day, of any equality in access to public services, especially housing, for Travellers. For those choosing to attempt to continue travelling, Local Authorities denying access to running water, sewage or electricity were the norm with severe effects on Traveller health and well-being.

The move to urban centres intensified from the 1960s onwards, in keeping with the fundamental change in Irish government economic policy outlined in the so-called 'Whitaker Report' and subsequent *First Programme for Economic Expansion* of 1958 (where Taoiseach Seán Lemass promised 'a rising tide lifts all boats' in a homegrown and early version of Reagan's later, neoliberal 'trickle-down economics') and the overtly racist policy of forced assimilation of the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* in 1963. Fianna Fáil's economic policy of 'protectionism' was a failure. Ireland's population was falling, despite a high

birth rate, due to mass emigration, and hit an all time low in 1958. The turn to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) had some initial success in capitalist terms with GDP growth and Industrial development in the Irish economy, after decades of being left out of the postwar economic boom in the rest of Western Europe, but this success was short-lived. Exposure to the world market goes both ways and, following the 1973 'oil crisis' and the end of the postwar boom, with severe global recessions in 1974 and again in 1980, in Ireland there was, again, a long period of economic depression, high unemployment and emigration throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Scapegoating of Travellers for the poverty in housing estates in towns and cities around Ireland became more common with verbal and physical attacks against travellers; what are now referred to as 'hate crimes'. Anti-Traveller racism today continues along these same lines, with a short period of boom, the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' era, in the 90s and early 2000s culminating in the catastrophic crash in 2008 and the austerity which followed to bail out the fraudulent practices of bankers and developers, with a further intensification of systematic state neglect and scapegoating of Travellers as part of that austerity. The collapse of the property bubble has lead to wide-scale suffering in Ireland as the result of the deliberate failure of state intervention to build housing and the failed market-based solutions that have been imposed instead by successive Fianna Fáil-Green (2007-11), Fine Gael-Labour (2011-2016) and Fianna Fáil-supported Fine Gael (2016-) governments.

Calls for reparations and a properly-funded, Traveller-run, statutory body to deal with the Traveller accommodation crisis (compounded by Local Authorities refusing to even draw down or spend the government allocation for Travellers), have fallen on deaf government ears. Following the appalling tragedy in Carrickmines, where ten Travellers died in a fire on the night of October 10th 2015 , the reaction of Local Authorities to their audits of fire safety revealed an ongoing pattern of abuse and neglect of Travellers. Ronnie Fay of Pavee Point could report to the Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness:

Even though we received an assurance that the audits would not result in forced evictions, a number of evictions have taken place throughout the country,

leaving families homeless or forcing people to stay at homes and bays of extended family members...Between 2008 and 2013, the Traveller accommodation budget was cut from €40 million to €4 million – a staggering 90 per cent...Even more shockingly, there was an underspending of 36 per cent of the allocated Traveller accommodation budgets by local authorities...Roughly 5,500, or 18.6 per cent, of the Traveller population are in need of proper accommodation provision. Using Census 2011 figures, this would be the equivalent of 853,415 of the general population in need of housing. Yet, the Traveller accommodation situation has not been regarded as a housing crisis.[17]

In Ireland today the legacy of over half a century of intensified oppression including systematic state neglect, forced assimilation, overt racism and hate crimes, have taken their toll. As has been the experience of the effects of racist state policies on other oppressed groups (such as indigenous people in places like North and South America and Australia, or migrants, increasingly on putative cultural grounds) resistance can raise spirits but defeats and the toll of the multiple traumas of oppression in daily life can also be crushing. The resultant poverty, unemployment, overcrowding, poor sanitation, educational disadvantage and poor health have been well described[18] but consideration of the causes are often hidden in terms that leave open explanations solely to do with the economic decline of traditional Traveller occupations and the effects of poverty rather than an admission of state racism and ongoing systematic neglect. Psychologist, and Traveller activist, Thomas McCann told the cross-party Oireachtas group: "Mental health was not an issue before the 1963 Report of the Commission on Itinerancy," and called for a national Traveller mental health strategy.[19] Reparation for state crimes against Travellers will have to include stopping discrimination against Travellers in access to accommodation, jobs, education or other public services, but also urgent attention will be needed to aid with the physical and mental problems, and related substance use and criminalisation, that will require not just active involvement but organisational control by Travellers.

As Travellers have become increasingly urban and increasingly part of the working class of wage workers, and the early dynamics of punishment for resistance to assimilation become less relevant, the importance of scapegoating for scarce resources could become more a more prominent feature of anti-Traveller oppression. Oppression under capitalism often works as part of two repeated moves: first exploit a group in society in order to maximise profits and then, second, oppression proper, blame them for their own poverty and encourage others to blame and despise them too on the basis of some invented inferiority of their physical or cultural make-up. A divided working class is then easier to rule and control as unity is required for effective resistance to this cycle of exploitation and oppression. Oppression divides workers between the poor and the better off workers, employed and unemployed, between male and female, migrant and 'native', gay and straight, cis and trans, settled and Traveller, indigenous and non-indigenous and many other divisions. Many distinctions are inadequate and inconsistently applied. Oppression is also part of ruling class ideology, that is the set of social structures and ideas that serve to support the capitalist ruling class, that praises their virtues and denies their responsibility for poverty or other social problems by systematically blaming other groups, particularly already marginalised groups in society. Oppression on ethnic grounds by a ruling class generally operates at official level through policy formation and implementation in legislation and enforcement by police and courts, as well as through the promotion and propagation of prejudiced ideas by government departments, press and media. The focus can be on language, religion or other traditional customs or ideas, ancestry, occupation, lifestyle or any combination or all of these.

A fundamental aspect of the appeal to the poor to be agents of racist oppression through direct harassment or repeating racist ideas or slurs is strongly linked to the general trend in ideology to divide the poorer elements of the working class into the deserving and undeserving poor. This is a well-established method of oppression; making people feel to blame for their own poverty and encouraging workers to blame each other for shortages in services or welfare supports rather than blaming the super-rich in our society for exploitation and austerity in their boom-and-bust system. Travellers have suffered much of the brunt of this demonisation of the poor as a whipping boy or scapegoat: a warning

to others that they must condemn or be condemned. The anti-catholic prejudice of poor protestant workers in the North has been described by Eamonn McCann as "tuppence ha'penny looking down on tuppence" and this is a dynamic repeated in sectarian or racist situations as the poor are pressed to scorn those only marginally worse off than themselves as a 'superiority dividend' instead of decent wages and public services. It is poignant that much of the detail of racist slurs against Travellers are exactly the same slurs that were rife in the British Press in the 19th and 20th centuries in relation to Irish people in general. It is also an irony lost on anti-immigrant racists that when they say that first we should look after 'our own', they show no desire to support the needs of Travellers, as of course this appeal to 'our own' is fake and racists are politically just a part of a right-wing nationalist search for 'others' to blame. Racism is both an affront to human dignity for those on the receiving end and a source of shame and weakness in working class organisation against the capitalist system of exploitation, waste and war leading only to disunity and demoralisation.

Marxism is a theory of 'socialism from below' and oppressed groups require this approach at least as much as the working class for any meaningful freedom from the tyranny of oppression to be achieved. The struggles of Travellers, settled workers, migrants and other oppressed groups overlap hugely and warrant both solidarity and an understanding of the different ways in which exploitation and oppression have their impact on each individual person. While the ultimate responsibility is on the state and the ruling class for the abuse of Travellers' human rights and dignity, socialists are also responsible for ensuring that no quarter is given to racists inside or outside the working class and that the greatest solidarity is shown in the struggle against the oppression of Travellers.

Notes

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