
Interesting times again

■ I began the editorial for the last issue of this Journal (IMR 26) by quoting the famous Chinese curse, ‘May you live in interesting times!’ and also by noting that while the first two months of 2020 were certainly interesting this created certain difficulties for the production of a journal of socialist analysis. Well if January and February were ‘interesting times’ what shall we say about the last three months?

When beginning to plan this issue three months ago we decided, for obvious reasons, to produce a ‘COVID 19 special’. We have delivered on that, big time, with six major articles on different aspects of the pandemic: by Mike Davis, Seán Mitchell, Kieran Allen, Eddie Conlon, Brian O’Boyle and Marnie Holborow. Then in the last three weeks before publication the epic Black Lives Matter rebellion swept across the US and resonated round the world. We have responded to this, not with a narrative or rounded analysis of the struggle – impossible as it is still dramatically unfolding before our eyes – but with a piece by John Molyneux noting its scale and significance and drawing out some of its key characteristics in the context of global struggle.

We are particularly pleased to have a contribution from the renowned US socialist writer Mike Davis. Mike is author of the path breaking *City of Quartz*, about Los Angeles, the award winning and hugely important *Late Victorian Holocausts* and other books too numerous to list. In the present context his 2005 work *The Monster at our Door* about avian flu threat gives him genuine prophet status. His article here, ‘C’est le Lutte Finale? Covid 19 and the Crisis of Humanity,’ offers a truly global overview of the pandemic and the international capitalist response and draws revolutionary political conclusions. It is magisterial in both its broad sweep and its mastery of significant detail.

The Mike Davis article is complemented by Seán Mitchell’s ‘Last Exit to Socialism?’, a strategic analysis of Covid as unavoidably a continuation of class struggle which deploys the concepts of ‘capitalist equilibrium’ [Trotsky] and bourgeois hegemony (Gramsci). Davis’s and Mitchell’s conclusions are very similar.

Kieran Allen’s ‘The politics of Covid 19’ offers a searing indictment of the Southern Irish State’s handling of the crisis, with particular reference to the

appalling situations allowed to develop in nursing homes, meat packing plants, in Direct Provision and among health care workers, as public health was sacrificed to private profit. In 'Workers, Resistance and Covid-19' Eddie Conlon fleshes out Kieran Allen's argument focusing especially on the question of the development of working class resistance both now in relation to Covid and to the coming austerity onslaught. Brian O'Boyle in 'Paying for Covid – Who Says we are in this Together?' uses the Irish Government's response to the 2008 crash as a starting point for how they will respond to the economic crisis triggered by Covid. He shows how from 2008 onwards they chose to implement austerity policies that impoverished working people while shifting wealth to the already rich. He predicts they will do the same this time and calls for resistance. His article is a treasure trove of useful information and data which will be an important resource in the battles ahead. The Covid crisis shone a spotlight on the Irish health service, both North and South, and it was found badly wanting. In 'The Irish state's pact with private health care: time for it to end', Marnie Holborow shows how a hundred years of commitment to private medicine and market mechanisms in the Republic left health care in such a parlous state and notes how the necessities of the pandemic have pointed to the only real solution: an all-Ireland national health service. But despite the all-consuming dominance of Covid, other things have been happening in the world. From a socialist standpoint two of the most important have been the Sanders campaign for the Democratic

nomination in the US and its eventual failure and the defeat of Jeremy Corbyn in the British general election, followed by Corbyn's resignation and the defeat of the left in the Labour Party. Paul Le Blanc from the US analyses the former and Shaun Doherty from the UK, the latter and both examine the challenges these developments pose for the Left.

Finally we have reviews of a number of books of interest to socialists: of Hilary Mantel's superb Thomas Cromwell trilogy by Mary Smith; of Peter Linebaugh's *Red Round Globe Hot Burning* by Paul O'Brien; and of Jane McAleevy's *A Collective Bargain: Unions, Organizing, and the Fight for Democracy*, and Caroline Moorehead's *A House in the Mountains*, both by Andrew Keegan.

John Molyneux