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CAPITALISM IN DECAY

DIMENSIONS OF THE CRISIS

BY JOHN MOLYNEUX

PLUS CAMILLA FITZSIMONS ON ROE V WADE & FEARGHAL MAC BHLOSCAIDH ON ARTHUR GRIFFITH

IMR

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Editorial:

A System in Decay

The main theme of this issue is the general crisis of a capitalist system in deep decay, which is increasingly threatening all life on the planet on multiple fronts. In our lead article, ‘Capitalism in decay- dimensions of the crisis’ John Molyneux offers an overview of the main elements of the crisis – economic, health, geo-political and ecological – and explores how they intersect and reinforce each other. He warns of the serious political dangers deriving from this interaction but argues it also offers major opportunities for socialists if they move to take them. Other articles which relate to this theme are Eddie Conlon’s timely analysis of the cost of living crisis in Ireland and the fightback against it, Camilla Fitzsimons’ analysis of the continuing importance of the issue of reproductive rights in the light of the US Supreme Court’s reactionary ruling on *Roe v Wade*, and Maurice Coakley’s examination of some of the wider implications of the Ukraine War.

One symptom of this general crisis is political turmoil in which the ‘mainstream’ centre which has dominated European and North American politics since the Second World War comes under pressure from multiple directions. A particular instance of this has been the meltdown of the British Tory Government which has unfolded before our eyes as this journal has passed through its final stages of preparation. The omnishambles that were the final weeks of Boris have turned, with the speed of light, into the public take down of Liz Truss who, after only 44 days in office, has

become the shortest-serving Prime Minister in British history.

Socialists would be less than human if they didn’t take pleasure in the disintegration of the nasty reactionary piece of work that is Truss but there are a couple of serious points that need to be made.

The first is that what got Truss into such trouble was simply that she tried to pursue an economic policy that the bulk of the capitalist class didn’t want and thought was stupid because it involved massive unsupported state borrowing and a certain very limited amount of handouts (to use their language), to ordinary people. Truss, as the media put it, ‘upset the markets’ i.e. but the markets are not some neutral disembodied force. Upsetting the markets simply means upsetting the investors and speculators. For the new and none too bright Tory PM this was a sharp lesson in what should be understood by any would-be Tory leader, namely that what you say to the Tory rank-and-file and, indeed, the public, should bear no relation to what you actually do. The ‘markets’ i.e. the capitalist class are your real boss and they are well able to discipline you if you go walkabout. From this it follows that whoever succeeds Truss will need, as they keep repeating, to ‘reassure the markets’ and that will involve pursuing an economic policy that is even tougher on working people than the one Truss was touting. In other words it was fun while it lasted but there will be serious fighting to be done.

The second is that what is good for the goose is good for the gander. What was done by ‘the markets’ and the IMF to Truss will be done with even greater ferocity to any Labour leader who steps out of line and attempts even modest redistribution of wealth and even mild social

reform. Of course there is very little chance of any of that from Keir Starmer whose ‘strategy’ is to sit there saying and promising nothing other than singing the National Anthem and pledging to restore stability while waiting for power to fall into his lap. But it should be a salutary lesson to left reformists, either inside the British Labour or elsewhere on the political spectrum who harbour the illusion that a left or reformist government would be allowed to implement its programme without fierce resistance.

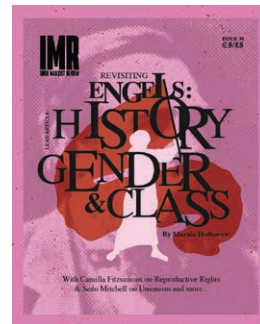
Also symptomatic of capitalism’s organic malaise and instability is the meteoric rise of Georgia Meloni and the Brothers of Italy. Meloni became Italy’s new prime minister on 22 October on the basis of a 26% vote for the Brothers in the recent general election, which made them the largest party in a far right coalition with Salvini’s Lega and Berlusconi’s Forza Italia. The Brothers and Meloni herself have their political roots in Italy’s fascist tradition going back to the MSI (Italian Social Movement) after the war and she is the most far right prime minister in Europe since the Second World War. This doesn’t mean Meloni is about to install a fascist dictatorship in Italy; at present she lacks the forces to do that, but it will mean a government that is extremely hostile to refugees, migrants and LGBTQ people and workers’ rights. It is also a major boost and encouragement to the far right across Europe and round the world. Above all it serves as a warning about the need for a strong socialist alternative able to articulate and focus working class anger from the left.

Irish Marxist Review has a strong tradition of publishing socialist and Marxist analyses of Irish history and in this issue we have two major pieces: Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh

contributes a devastating analysis and critique of Arthur Griffiths, the so-called ‘father of the Free State’, and Kieran McNulty an important study of ‘Labour, the civil war and executions in Kerry.’ We will return to the other aspects of the Irish Civil War in future issues. Two other very topical articles are Dave O’Farrell’s excellent critique of the appalling record, including on environmental issues, of the Green Party and Damian Gallagher’s piece on this autumn’s World Cup in the stunningly inappropriate location of Qatar which situates this within a wider critique of sport under capitalism. Finally we have, as usual, a number of reviews of interesting and relevant books.

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Capitalism in Decay—Dimensions of the Crisis

John Molyneux

The present crisis is in important respects unprecedented and symptomatic of a capitalist system which is in profound decay. It is what Gramsci called an ‘organic crisis’ and comprises multiple interlocking elements. These statements are not made lightly and the first purpose of this article is to justify them. Its second purpose is to draw out some political conclusions from this diagnosis.

Let us begin with the obvious, and what is obvious is that there are four main elements in this crisis: the economic crisis of inflation and likely recession; the health crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic; the geo-political crisis of the Ukraine War and growing international tension; and the climate change crisis.

I will take each of these in turn, starting with the economy.

The economic crisis

Approximately twenty thousand people marched through Dublin on September 24th in what was the largest demonstration since the campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment in 2018. It was called by the Cost of Living Coalition. This is because the economic crisis of capitalism currently presents itself first and foremost in terms of inflation. The current rate of inflation in Ireland stands at 8.7 percent for August 2022, slightly down from 9.1 percent in July, the highest for thirty-eight years.

This is part of an international trend with inflation across the Eurozone running at 10 percent; in Germany at 10 percent; in the UK at 9.9 percent; in the Netherlands at 14.5 percent, in Russia at 13.7 percent, Sweden 9.8 percent and in the US at 9.1 percent. Obviously rates vary considerably by country, with China claiming only 2.5 percent, Japan 3 percent, France 5.6 percent (still considerable), and India 7 percent. But in Poland it is 17.2 percent, Ukraine 24.6 percent, and Nigeria 20.5 percent. There are also a number of countries where the figure is extremely high, for example Argentina at 78.5 percent,

Turkey 83.5 percent, and Sudan 125.4 percent.¹ In terms of the impact on the mass of people, this is compounded by the fact that in many countries the rate of increase of the essentials of food and energy is above the general rate of inflation. In the US, food prices are rising at 11.1 percent and energy at 32.9 percent. In the UK, the rate for food is 13.1 percent and energy a massive 57.7 percent. Across the OECD it is 14.4 percent for food and 35.2 percent for energy.

The cause of this inflationary surge is ‘officially’ attributed (i.e. by our and other Western governments) to the war in Ukraine—‘Don’t blame us, blame Putin!’ is their message. In reality prices had started on their upward spiral before Putin’s invasion. The Ukraine War is, of course, a substantial contributor, particularly by virtue of its effect on energy prices, but before Ukraine there was the Covid-19 pandemic, which severely disrupted multiple supply chains and created an accumulation of unspent funds looking for an outlet in the hands of the middle classes, and climate change, which is seriously affecting food production and driving food prices up.

While the inflationary impact of energy prices on food costs is readily apparent, it is becoming clear that climate issues are also a growing inflationary force and one that is likely to intensify.

At its most simplistic, climate change, resulting in rising global temperatures and environmental degradation, is eroding agricultural productivity, driving up the cost of food...As the planet is placed under greater stress, its productivity will fall...According to the IPCC WGII Sixth Assessment Report, published in October 2021, global warming is affecting agricultural productivity in both land- and ocean-based systems. Crop yields are impacted by degrading soil conditions; rising temperatures affect crop developments, and extreme weather impacts crop harvests.²

Then there is the factor never mentioned by mainstream commentators, the massive competitive profiteering by big corporations. Thus, in the second quarter of 2022, British Petroleum (BP) tripled its profits to £7 billion,³ Shell raised its earnings to \$11.1 billion (up

from \$9.1 billion in the first quarter),⁴ and in July, Exxon Mobil announced second-quarter earnings of a staggering \$17.85 billion, up from 'only' \$5.48 billion in the first quarter.⁵ This is particularly important in the context of a long period of stagnant or declining profits in what Michael Roberts has called 'the long depression' since 2008.⁶

Inflation is very troublesome and dangerous for capitalism and capitalist governments. In the first place it is highly disruptive of their own projects and 'action plans.' For example, a headline in the *Business Post* on the 9th of October read, 'Soaring inflation puts "vital" new gas-fired power plants at risk.'⁷ Similarly, as Kieran Allen has pointed out, inflation has driven a coach-and-horses through the already inadequate plans of the Irish government for rolling out electric cars (to reduce carbon emissions) and for tackling the housing crisis.⁸ And this applies internationally. The absolute mess the (admittedly incompetent) British Tory government has gotten into over recent weeks is evidence of this. Here it is worth noting that, alongside the comic-opera meltdown of Liz Truss and her cabinet with their spinning U-turns, they nearly collapsed the UK pensions market, which would have had catastrophic implications.

In the second place, inflation generates mass resistance. It can lead—as it has in the UK and Northern Ireland in recent months, and as it did in the UK, Ireland, and elsewhere on a huge scale in the late 1960s and '70s—to wage militancy and strike waves. It can also produce mass riots and feed into revolutionary outbursts. It is not accidental that the two countries seeing the most dramatic popular uprisings in 2021 have been Sri Lanka and Iran.⁹ In Sri Lanka in July, inflation was running at 60.2 percent, and in August it surged to 70.2 percent.¹⁰ In Iran it is currently at 52.2 percent.¹¹ Price hikes, especially in the price of bread, were a background feature of the Arab Spring in 2011, and it is worth remembering that the closest Germany ever came to a socialist revolution (that would have changed world history) was during the crazy hyperinflation of the summer and autumn of 1923.¹²

Precisely because inflation is so dangerous to the system, it became capitalist orthodoxy that suppressing it was the first priority of economic policy. This was what lay behind the shift in the late seventies from the hitherto dominant Keynesianism to what was then called the 'monetarism' of Thatcher, Reagan, Milton Friedman, and the Chicago School. Their central idea was that inflation was caused by 'too much money chasing too many goods'

and that the remedy for inflation lay in governments acting to restrict the money supply. The main mechanism for doing this was by raising interests. This was what was done by Paul Volker of the US Federal Reserve Bank in 1979–84, and the effect was indeed to curb inflation but also to plunge the US and much of the world into a deep recession.¹³

In this respect, there are many signs that history is repeating itself. The US Federal Reserve Bank has started to raise interest rates—by 0.75 percent three times so far this year—and as I write these lines, Reuters reports:

The Federal Reserve is seen delivering another large interest-rate hike in three weeks' time and ultimately lifting rates to 4.75–5 percent by early next year, if not further, after a government report showed inflation remained stubbornly hot last month.¹⁴

The likelihood is that this will tip the already fragile global economy into recession with immense if incalculable economic, social, and political consequences.

The Covid-19 Pandemic

In terms of the mainstream media and mainstream political discourse, the pandemic is now being treated as effectively over, a nightmare from which we have successfully emerged thanks largely to vaccination programmes and which is best forgotten about.

But the most elementary facts fail to bear this out. According to the officially registered figures, global cases are currently running at about five hundred thousand cases a day (548,075 on September 14th, 2022). This compares to 3.8 million cases on January 29th, 2022, at the very height of the pandemic, and 1.2 million in July 2022, or indeed 440,000 in February 2021. In other words, things are far better than they were at their worst, especially in terms of deaths rather than cases—a current average of 1500–2000 a day, compared 16,600 a day in January 2021—but certainly not 'over.' Also, it is increasingly evident that while vaccination programmes have been crucial for mitigating the spread and seriousness of infection, they not by themselves been capable of eliminating the virus or offering guaranteed protection against it, even for the vaccinated. It remains, at the very least, possible that there will be further Covid-19 surges.

But what is the scale of the disaster so far? According to the 'official figures' (i.e., officially registered cases and deaths), total global cases stand at 617,108,036 and total deaths at 6,530,616. This is a higher death toll than any

war since WW2. However, these figures mask a multitude of problems. First, the enormous variation between different countries. For example, in the US there have been ninety-seven million cases and over one million deaths (compared to US deaths of 655,000 in the Civil War, 405,000 in WW2, and 58,000 in Vietnam), whereas in India, a country with more than four times the population, there have been, on official figures, only forty-four million cases and 528,000 deaths, giving a death rate of only 375 per million of the population compared to 3218 per million in the US.

What explains such a great disparity, with the much poorer country seeming to fare so much better than the much richer country? Moreover, this apparent anomaly turns out to be far from rare. Thus, Bangladesh, one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world, with a population nearly half that of the US, reports only two million cases and 29,000 deaths, giving a death rate of only 174 per million. One possible explanation for these otherwise puzzling variations may lie in the countries' respective testing regimes: the US, with a population of 335 million, has carried out 1,110 million tests, or 3.3 million per million of the population; in contrast, Bangladesh, with a population of 168 million has administered only 14.8 million tests, or only 88,000 per million. India provides an intermediate case with 891 million tests in a population of 1.4 billion, or 632,100 per million.

But once we start to interrogate the official statistics in this way, their wider reliability comes into question. For example, how credible is it that in Nigeria, population 217 million, there have been only 3155 recorded deaths, or fifteen per million, or that in China, population 1.4 billion, there have been only 5226 recorded deaths, or four per million, when in little Ireland there have been 7862, or 1554 per million?

Obviously such an in-depth investigation of these statistics could continue almost indefinitely and would probably require at least a book-length study, but two reports—by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the *Economist* magazine—provide a very useful corrective. On May 5th, 2022, the WHO reported:

New estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that the full death toll associated directly or indirectly with the COVID-19 pandemic (described as 'excess mortality') between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021 was approximately 14.9 million (range 13.3 million to 16.6 million).¹⁵

And the *Economist* estimates a death total of twenty-two million, or 3.4 times the official figure, with a possibility of over twenty-four million. World in Data comment:

This work by *The Economist* is one of the most comprehensive and rigorous attempts to understand how mortality has changed during the pandemic at the global level. But these estimates come with a great deal of uncertainty given the large amount of data that is missing *and* the known shortcomings even for data that is available.

We can think of them as our best, educated—but still ballpark—estimates. Some of the specific figures are highly uncertain, as the large uncertainty intervals show. But the overall conclusion remains clear: in many countries and globally, the number of confirmed deaths from COVID-19 is far below the pandemic's full death toll.¹⁶

So any kind of certainty or exactitude is impossible, but it is clear we are looking at a death toll that exceeds that of WW1 and that this in turn ignores the wider economic and social implications of this global calamity: the loss and disruption of production with its implications for inflation, the augmentation of poverty and inequality, the increase in mental distress, the assistance it rendered (in some countries) to the far right and conspiracy theorists, and so on.

But however deeply we investigate the effects and consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, we still fail to grasp its dimensions if we do not refer to its causation and to the likelihood of its recurrence. These questions are for all intents and purposes completely passed over in the mainstream discourse, but they are obviously linked and of profound importance. Covid-19 is an example of zoonotic infection, a virus that has leapt from animals to humans. And as the Marxist epidemiologist Rob Wallace has shown, such cross-infection is made enormously more likely by the profit drive of giant agri-business to encroach ever deeper into the wild and by modern methods of intense large-scale factory farming. Then the spread of any such infection is made wider and more rapid by the huge expansion in global food chains and global travel.

As Lee Humber put it at the start of the pandemic:

Viral epidemics are not uncommon. This year's flu season is shaping up to be the worst in years, according to the US Centre for Disease Control. In the US alone there

have been 19 million illnesses, 180,000 hospitalisations and 10,000 deaths...

Globally, the 2009–10 strain of flu—H1N1 (2009)—killed 579,000 people in its first year, although this was fewer than predicted. It produced long-term complications in 15 times as many cases as initially projected, having spread globally in less than nine days. Major flu epidemics have been a constant feature across North and South America in the 21st Century. This is the context in which to understand the coronavirus outbreak, which began in China. We live in a world in which there is a real threat of deadly viral pandemics...

Industrial practices inherent in the capitalist mode of production, now globalised and intensified by 50 years of neoliberalism, are actively breeding more and more virulent and deadly pathogens. This pattern of epidemics is not accidental. It is a consequence of the way the food we eat is produced.¹⁷

In other words, the possibility of the emergence of a different virus, even a more deadly virus, in the not too distant future, is all too real. As Rob Wallace, reflecting on the succession of viruses in recent years before Covid-19, ominously put it:

Hendra, Ebola, Malaria, SARS, XDR-TB, Q fever, simian foamy virus, Nipah, and influenza. One of these bugs, or an as yet undiscovered cousin, will likely kill a few hundred million of us someday soon.¹⁸

The Ukraine War and inter-imperialist rivalry

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the war that has followed it has, with no end in sight, already claimed many thousands of lives and raised the spectre of the use of nuclear weapons in a way not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The Doomsday Clock, maintained by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, was set at seven minutes to midnight in 1947 at the onset of the Cold War; it was put back to seventeen minutes to midnight in 1991, and set at one hundred seconds in 2022.¹⁹

If the statistics on the pandemic are unreliable, those for casualties in Ukraine are even more so. This is often ascribed to the ‘fog of war,’ as if it were a weather phenomenon, when really it is the fog of war propaganda and lies. However, various current estimates suggest Russian military casualties run to over 20,000 killed and perhaps much more injured, up to say 100,000, with a similarly broad range of estimates for Ukrainian military and civilian casualties.²⁰

But whatever the truth of these claims, what is beyond dispute is that the war has produced a massive exodus of refugees. According to the UN, over one million refugees fled Ukraine in the first week of the invasion, rapidly rising to eight million but then falling to 6.1 million as some refugees returned. To this should be added the figure of approximately eight million displaced within the country. Regarding the destination of refugees, the UN High Commission for Refugees states that, as of May 13th, there were 3,315,711 refugees in Poland, 901,696 in Romania, 594,664 in Hungary, 461,742 in Moldova, 415,402 in Slovakia, and 27,308 in Belarus, while Russia reported it had received over 800,104 refugees. As of March 23rd, over 300,000 refugees had arrived in the Czech Republic. Turkey has been another significant destination, registering more than 58,000 Ukrainian refugees as of 22 March, and more than 58,000 as of 25 April.²¹

To this we must add the economic impact of the war. Here we have to note that for the Irish government and many other governments Ukraine is serving as their alibi for the cost-of-living crisis and soaring energy prices, when in fact the inflationary surge began before the Russian invasion. Nevertheless, the war has undoubtedly made things considerably worse, and the fact that the region is one of the world’s largest producers of wheat and grain has had major consequences.

According to the European Commission, Ukraine accounts for 10 percent of the world wheat market, 15 percent of the corn market, and 13 percent of the barley market. With more than 50 percent of world trade, it is also the main player on the sunflower oil market. According to statistics from the US Department of Agriculture, Ukraine was the world’s seventh-largest producer of wheat in 2021/22, with thirty-three million tons. Only Australia, the US, Russia, India, and China produced more.²²

Ukraine exported up to 6 million tonnes of grain a month before Russia invaded the country on Feb. 24, but in recent months the volumes have fallen to about 1 million tonnes, sparking global grain shortage concerns and price spikes. Ukraine reached 54.9 million tonnes of wheat, corn and barley exports in 2019–2020, but dipped to 44.9 million tonnes in 2020–21, mostly on lower wheat production, according to the US Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Feb. 1 Foreign Agricultural Services (FAS) quarterly report. Before Russia’s invasion,




Ukraine had been projected to export 63.7 million tonnes of the grains in 2021–22.²³

Inevitably, the most devastating impacts of this have been seen in north-eastern African countries (Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya, among others), which were already poor and suffering food insecurity due to climate change related droughts, but the consequences are also severe across North Africa and the Middle East. Yemen is an example. Yemen imported 90 percent of its food, including 42 percent of its wheat, from Ukraine, and the country, affected by seven years of devastating war, saw the price of basic foods increased by up to 45 percent between March and June of this year. Indeed, ultimately, they impact the total global market.

It would, however, be a serious mistake to treat the Russian invasion and subsequent war as if it was a stand-alone shock, a factor exogenous to the system as a whole which suddenly erupted to disturb business as usual. Even in the narrowest factual terms this is not the case, in that Russian and Ukraine had been engaged in an ongoing war, largely ignored by the media but claiming about ten thousand lives, since 2014. But the main point is that the current war is just one episode, one particular escalation, in a developing global inter-imperialist rivalry. Five years ago I wrote following:

At the same time we see the return, especially over the Ukraine, of the spectre of the Cold War, supposedly long laid to rest. Even more importantly in the long run, we see growth of tension between the US and China in the South China Sea which is symptomatic of emerging rivalry between the world's two largest economies. In terms of real policy rather than media rhetoric (overwhelmingly focused on the threat of Muslim 'extremists') the US under Obama has already undertaken its 'Asian pivot' making China the real object of its long-term strategic concerns.

While US share of world GDP has been declining, that of China has been rising (from 4.5 percent in 1950 to 15.4 percent in 2014) displacing first Germany and then Japan in the pecking order of the world economy and placing it within striking distance of the US. What this could mean in military terms is shown by a 2014 report from the UK Ministry of Defence which outlines projected defence expenditure of major powers for the year 2045 as follows:

Rank	Country	Spending in PPP (\$ Bn.)
1	 <u>United States</u>	1,335
2	 <u>China</u>	1,270
3	 <u>India</u>	654

Obviously, such a projection for thirty years ahead is guess work but it is a guess that will haunt the minds of the strategists in the Pentagon. And one thing we can be fairly sure of is that fear of such parity will drive the policies of the American ruling class for decades to come. An era of peace and stability is not on the agenda.²⁴

The US and its NATO allies saw in Putin's invasion a major opportunity: a) to recoup the ground lost in their defeats in Iraq and Afghanistan; b) to seriously weaken Russia by means of a proxy war 'to the last Ukrainian,' without the political risk of US or EU casualties; c) to over-reinforce the hegemony of the US over its European allies as a leader of 'the democracies' against the 'authoritarian' states. Whatever the immediate outcome in Ukraine, which remains unpredictable, it is clear that this will be only an episode in an ongoing conflict likely to stretch into the foreseeable future.

Inter-imperialist rivalries go back over centuries: England versus the Dutch in the seventeenth century; Britain versus France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; Britain and France versus Germany and Austria in the first half of the twentieth century; the US versus the Soviet Union in the Cold War. These rivalries have involved numerous wars: the Anglo-Dutch Wars of 1652–54 and 1665–67; the Seven Years' War of 1756–63; the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars of 1793–1815; the First World War; the Second World War; the Korean War; the Vietnam War—to cite only the leading examples. It is more than likely that the same will happen in the twenty-first century with incalculable consequences.

The environmental crisis

The three crises we have discussed so far—the economic, the pandemic, and the Ukraine War—have tended to

eclipse the environmental crisis in terms of government responses during this year; witness the substantially reduced media hype surrounding the Cop 27 conference in Sharm El-Sheikh compared to Cop 26 in Glasgow in 2021. But in reality, far from abating, it has actually become much more severe, and it remains ultimately the most intractable and most dangerous of the multiple threats faced by humanity. The environmental crisis emphatically cannot be reduced to climate change. It has many different dimensions ranging from river and air pollution to toxic waste in working-class neighbourhoods, to the biodiversity crisis,²⁵ all of which are symptomatic of the metabolic rift between capitalism and nature, but I will focus here on the question of climate, because it is the leading and most devastating edge of the overall crisis.

The very specific geological and climatic position of Ireland insulates it from much of what is afflicting the planet globally, but here is a succinct summary by John Bellamy Foster of recent events in terms of heat waves:

Since the 1980s, there has been a seven-fold increase in concurrent large heat waves affecting multiple regions in the medium and high latitudes of the Northern Hemisphere. A large heat wave is defined in the scientific literature as a high-temperature event lasting three or more days, occupying at least 1.6 million square kilometers (close to the size of Alaska). Concurrent heat waves of this size or larger have increased by 46 percent in mean spatial extent over the last four decades. In the 1980s concurrent heat waves occurred approximately twenty days per year. This has now risen to 143 days, with a maximum intensity 17 percent higher.

This July, concurrent heat waves spread across the Northern Hemisphere threatening the lives, living conditions, and general welfare of hundreds of millions of people. Major wildfires arose in Greece, Portugal, Spain, and France. In Spain and Portugal alone, more than 1,700 people died from the July heat waves and wildfires. Temperatures in the United Kingdom broke all historic records. In North America, tens of millions were subjected to searing heat, drought, and out-of-control wildfires. Heat waves also struck North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and China. The vast territorial range of these concurrent heat waves, stretching around the globe, indicates that heat waves and other extreme weather events emanating from climate change are now emerging as a universal phenomenon requiring universal solutions.

The other side to heat waves is flooding. In recent weeks we have all seen the appalling floods that have hit Pakistan, with thousands dead and millions displaced, but this is only one extreme example of an epidemic of disastrous flooding. In July 2021, severe floods spread across Europe. They started in the UK but then moved to several river basins, including in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and elsewhere. At least 243 people died, including 196 in Germany. The Belgian minister of home affairs described the events as ‘one of the greatest natural disasters our country has ever known.’²⁶ In Durban, severe flooding and landslides caused by heavy rainfall on 11–13 April of this year caused the death of 448 people, displaced over 40,000 people, and completely destroyed over twelve thousand houses in the south-east part of South Africa. In Kentucky in July, a total of thirty-eight people were killed as a direct result of floods, and these in turn were part of wider flooding which claimed forty-eight lives in all. In Australia there were, in this year alone, life-claiming floods in January, February March, and July. As I am writing these words, on September 23rd, the website *Flood List* reports as occurring *over the last few days* deadly floods in Nigeria (300 dead, 100,000 displaced), Niger (168 dead, 227,000 displaced), Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.²⁷

Unfortunately, the most important, ultimately decisive facts about climate change can only be expressed in the language of dry, ‘abstract’ statistics, not emotive human consequences. First there is the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Carbon dioxide measured at NOAA’s Mauna Loa Atmospheric Baseline Observatory peaked for 2022 at 420.99 parts per million in May, an increase of 1.8 parts per million over 2021, pushing the atmosphere further into territory not seen for millions of years. Scientists at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, which maintains an independent record, calculated a similar monthly average of 420.78 parts per million.

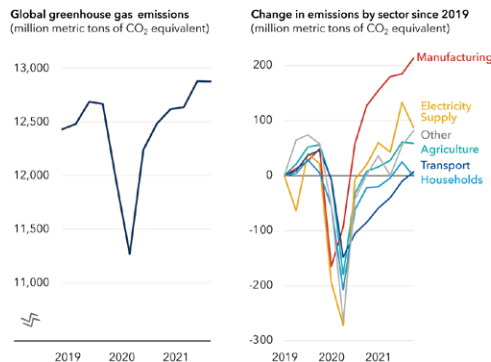
Carbon dioxide levels are now comparable to the Pliocene Climatic Optimum, between 4.1 and 4.5 million years ago, when they were close to, or above 400 parts per million. During that time, sea levels were between 5 and

25 meters higher than today, high enough to drown many of the world's largest modern cities. Temperatures then averaged 7 degrees higher than in pre-industrial times.²⁸

The fundamental fact is that, no matter what declarations are made by politicians, what plans and pledges are issued by governments or mission statements by corporations, as long as this easily checkable statistic continues to rise, global warming will continue. So what is the current trend? According to the IMF, emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases plunged 4.6 percent in 2020, as lockdowns in the first half of the year restricted global mobility and hampered economic activity, but in 2021 annual global greenhouse gas emissions rebounded 6.4 percent last year to a new record, eclipsing the pre-pandemic peak as global economic activity resumed.

All but a blip

Global greenhouse gas emissions are back above pre-pandemic levels, with emissions rising across all sectors again in 2021.



Source: IMF Climate Change Indicators Dashboard.
 Note: Emissions are seasonally adjusted. The right panel shows change in greenhouse gas emissions from Q1-2019 levels.



The problem is that these statistics do translate inexorably into an ever-growing tide of terrible disasters which we see on our television screens, a few of which I listed above.

This horrific prospect should not however be taken to mean that humanity faces imminent extinction. This was an understandable but mistaken conclusion that many activists drew from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report in 2018. But the notion that the IPCC was predicting human extinction by 2030 was wrong. It was saying that we had until 2030 to stay

within 1.5C warming. Today we can say that it is almost certain that warming will exceed 1.5C and that it will most likely head for more than 2C in short order, but the world population is close to eight billion, and that many people will not be wiped out overnight. What it means is those eight billion will face increasing climate-generated disasters, but they will be able to respond and fight back.

The intersection of the crises

The most striking and significant feature of the four crises discussed above is how they intersect and interact with each other to form an organic crisis of the capitalist system as a whole. I now want to look at some examples of this intersection, advance a proposition about theorising the root of the crisis, and then consider the political implications, including the implications for socialist strategy.

When we looked at the causes of the cost-of-living crisis, we found that the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and climate change, along with profiteering of course, were all factors in the surge in inflation. When we looked into the causes of the Covid-19 pandemic, we found it was profoundly linked to capitalism's relationship to nature, to the metabolic rift between society and nature that also lies at the root of climate change. When we look at the responses to Covid-19 of governments and the effects of the pandemic, we find they were deeply affected by the commitment to profit and by the class and racialised structure of society.²⁹ The inter-imperialist rivalry fuelling the war in Ukraine and careering towards conflict with China has among its causes not only the economic and military rise of China but also the relative decline of the US, itself a product of the underlying decline of the rate of profit. The war in Ukraine immediately served as an excuse for governments to long-finger plans to combat climate change and move away from fossil fuels while the war itself also threatens an environmental catastrophe at Ukraine's fifteen nuclear plants. Above all, we have the fact that if the system (and it is a very big if) is able to negotiate the cost-of-living crisis without plunging into recession, or even if it emerges the other side of recession and resumes capitalist economic growth, this will only drive further climate change, and escalating climate change means poverty, hunger, war, and uncountable refugees. So capitalism has no foreseeable way out the crisis other than through unimaginable catastrophes.

A useful way of theorising the organic nature of this crisis is to go back to Marx’s classic statement on the dynamics of history and revolution in his Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*.

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production...At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution.³⁰

The contradiction between the development of the forces of production and capitalist relations of production lies at the heart of all the crises we face as well as their manifest interconnection. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote, ‘The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production,’ and that it ‘has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic Cathedrals.’ That was written in 1848. Consider these figures:

World GDP

Total output of the world economy adjusted for inflation and expressed in international-\$ in 2011 prices

1000	\$210.14 billion	
1500	\$430.53 billion	[c. The Renaissance and Reformation, Columbus]
1820	\$1.20 trillion	[c. The Industrial Revolution]
1900	\$ 3.32 trillion	[c. Classic imperialism]
1950	\$9.25 trillion	[c. post-WW2—beginning of ‘the great acceleration’]
2015	\$108.12 trillion	

<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/world-gdp-over-the-last-two-millennia>

By their very nature these figures, especially the older ones, are approximations, and the method of calculating them can be disputed in numerous ways, but the basic

facts that for thousands of years growth of global production was at a snail’s pace, that with the birth of capitalism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it started to speed up, that the Industrial Revolution was a huge turning point, and that since WW2 (with the Anthropocene and ‘the great acceleration’ as it is known³¹) production has exploded—these are indisputable. And with this expansion of the productive forces have come huge increases in scientific knowledge, in technology, and in medicine of all kinds. And yet humanity is still staring at catastrophe.

In the most immediate national terms this means that Ireland can be ranked the third-richest country in the world (by GDP per capita³²) and yet have over ten thousand people in homeless accommodation and approximately 20 percent of its population in poverty. Particularly telling is the story of the United States, which we are so accustomed to thinking of as the richest country in the world. The US is still, in absolute terms, the biggest economy in the world, with gross GDP of \$22,996 billion in 2021, followed by China, catching up fast, at €17,734 billion (with Japan, Germany, and the UK a long way behind)³³ In terms of military spending, the lead of the US is even greater. In 2021, its military budget stood at \$801 billion, more than the next nine countries (China, India, the UK, Russia, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and South Korea) combined.³⁴ But when it comes to the UN Human Development Index (HDI), a statistical composite index of life expectancy, education, and per capita income, the US stands in only twenty-first place, way below Ireland in eighth and even South Korea in nineteenth place.³⁵

According to UNICEF, US infant mortality in 2020 stood at 5.4 per 1000 live births, compared to the UK at 3.6, France at 3.4, Germany at 3.1, Ireland at 2.6, and Norway at only 1.7.³⁶ And in terms of life expectancy, the US, at an average of 79.11 years, stands in a scandalous forty-sixth place behind countries such as Costa Rica, Chile, Cuba, and even Puerto Rico.³⁷

In short, the US, which holds the greatest absolute accumulation of wealth and of armaments in the history of the world, is a disaster when it comes to the welfare of its own people, and it is getting worse. In August 2022 it was announced that

life expectancy in the U.S. declined again in 2021, after a historic drop in 2020, to reach the lowest point in decades...In 2021, the average American could expect to live until age 76, which fell from 77 in 2020 and 79 in 2019. That

marks the lowest age since 1996 and the largest 2-year decline since 1923.³⁸

But the US is just the lead example of what is a general and global trend. On September 8th, the United Nations issued its latest Human Development Index Report which records that:

For the first time in the 32 years that the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has been calculating it, the Human Development Index, which measures a nation's health, education, and standard of living, has declined globally for two years in a row.

This signals a deepening crisis for many regions, and Latin America, the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia have been hit particularly hard.³⁹

The foreword to the report states:

*We are living in uncertain times. The Covid-19 pandemic, now in its third year, continues to spin off new variants. The war in Ukraine reverberates throughout the world, causing immense human suffering, including a cost-of-living crisis. Climate and ecological disasters threaten the world daily. It is seductively easy to discount crises as one-offs, natural to hope for a return to normal. But dousing the latest fire or booting the latest demagogue will be an unwinnable game of whack-a-mole unless we come to grips with the fact that the world is fundamentally changing. There is no going back. Layers of uncertainty are stacking up and interacting to unsettle our lives in unprecedented ways. People have faced diseases, wars and environmental disruptions before. But the confluence of destabilizing planetary pressures with growing inequalities, sweeping societal transformations to ease those pressures and widespread polarization present new, complex, interacting sources of uncertainty for the world and everyone in it. That is the new normal.*⁴⁰

In one respect, Marx's diagnosis of the contradiction between the forces and relations of production should be modified. He speaks of the relations of production as a 'fetter' on the development of the forces of production. This fitted very well for the transition from feudalism to capitalism, but more important today is the distortion and perversion of the productive forces into forces that are alien and hostile to humanity, that are turned against their makers. This also was anticipated by Marx. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* he argued that capitalism rested on alienated labour (i.e., labour not owned or controlled by the worker but sold to the capitalist) and as a consequence,

the object which labour produces—labour's product—confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer...

The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.

Nuclear war and catastrophic climate change are two extreme examples of humanity being dominated, threatened, and perhaps ultimately destroyed, literally by the 'hostile and alien' products of our own labour.⁴¹

Prognosis, politics, and perspectives

We have said more than enough to indicate the scale and depth of the present crisis, but how will it develop in the future? Antonio Gramsci issued a salutary warning regarding attempts to predict the future.

In reality one can 'scientifically' foresee only the struggle, but not the concrete moments of the struggle, which cannot but be the results of opposing forces in continuous movement, which are never reducible fixed quantities since within them quantity is continually becoming quality.⁴²

Manifestly, the global crisis is one in which there are 'opposing forces in continuous movement.' Will the standard neo-liberal response of raising interest rates squeeze inflation out of the system as it did with the Volcker Shock of 1980, and will this provoke a new recession, as seems very likely? Or will we face the combination of inflation and repression? If there is a new recession, how long will it last? Will capitalism, at least temporarily, revive? Will there be another surge of Covid-19, or will a new, more deadly virus emerge? And what would be the economic consequences of another pandemic? Will the war in Ukraine grind on indefinitely or will it escalate further? Could there be some kind of peace deal, albeit a rotten one? And if there is such a peace, how long before the underlying rivalry between the US and China erupts in conflict in the South China Sea or over Taiwan?

The answers to these questions are, I think, imponderable. But there are some things we can say with confidence: on the economic front there will be no return to stable prosperity or steady growth in the system's core countries; and with the greatest certainty that, without a major change in direction (of which there is no sign), climate change and the wider environmental crisis will escalate with immense economic,

social, and political consequences over the next decade. With equal certainty we can say that we are looking at an era of intense political turmoil.

One of the most important features of political life in recent decades, especially since the 2008 crash, has been the erosion and decline of the mainstream so-called moderate centre. In Ireland, Fianna Fáil, for long the dominant party in the state, has shrunk to the point where it is stuck in the mid-teens in the opinion polls. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, one or other of whom won every general election since 1927, were forced in 2020 into coalition with each other (and the Greens) in order to cling to power, and found that even together they are matched by Sinn Féin. In the US, still the most influential country in the world politically, we have seen ‘mainstream’ Republicanism devoured by Trumpism, even after the debacle of January 6th, 2021, and a serious challenge to centrist Democrats from Bernie Sanders, AOC, and the like. The US is now a society in which an internet awash with far-right and fascist conspiracy theories exists alongside the biggest street mobilizations in the country’s history for Black Lives Matter, and as I write these lines, thousands of school students in Virginia are walking out of schools in support of their transgender schoolmates.

In Sweden, the classical land of social democracy, the Social Democrat vote has fallen from 50.1 percent in 1968 to 28.3 percent in 2018 and 30.3 percent in 2022. Significantly, in 2002 50 percent of blue-collar workers still voted Social Democrat: by 2022 that had fallen to 32 percent.⁴³ In contrast, the far-right Swedish Democrats have risen from 0.1 percent in 1991, to 5.7 percent in 2010, to 20.5 percent in 2022.⁴⁴ In the first round of the French Presidential Election earlier this year, the far-right Marine le Pen came second with 23.15 percent (to Macron’s 27.85 percent), with the radical-left Mélenchon on 21.95 percent but the once mighty Communist Party (PCF) languishing on 2.28 percent and the Socialist Party of Francois Mitterand and Francois Hollande reduced to only 1.75 percent.⁴⁵ In Italy, what was once the largest political party of any kind in Europe, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), ceased to exist in 1991. Its moderate centre-left replacement polled 19.07 percent in 2022 (as part of a motley ‘left-of-centre’ coalition which got 26.13 percent). But the far-right Brothers of Italy, founded in 2012, has rocketed upwards from only 2 percent in 2013 and 4.4 percent in 2018 to victory with 26 percent (as leading party of a right-wing coalition with 43.79 percent).⁴⁶ Nor is this kind of development restricted to Europe. In India, Congress, the traditional party of the Indian bourgeoisie, which ruled almost continuously from 1947 to 1991 and regularly polled votes in the forties, crashed to 19.3 percent in

2014 and 19.5 percent in 2019.⁴⁷ The far right BJP (a Hindutva, anti-Muslim Hindu-supremacist party), however, leapt from 18.9 percent in 2009 to 31.3 percent in 2014, and has now reached 37.4 percent.⁴⁸

These are just snapshots, and are far from presenting a rounded or complete picture. The overall situation is extremely complicated, mixed, and uneven. In Germany, the far-right AfD have so far been held at bay with 10.3 percent in 2021, and an increase for the SPD to 25.7 percent.⁴⁹ In the UK, the Tory Party has been captured (under Johnson and Truss) by the Brexit Right, but the outright far right and fascists have been marginalised and the Truss Government is in meltdown as I write, with Starmer’s right-wing flag waving Labour seventeen points ahead in the polls.⁵⁰ (The previous line was written on the morning of September 29th. By the afternoon there was a new opinion poll showing Labour a record thirty-four points ahead!) In Ireland, the far right seem confined to the ranks of the lost and bewildered. Nevertheless, some limited generalisations are possible.

First, the political situation is very fluid and volatile; old loyalties are breaking down and ‘all that is solid is busy melting into air.’ Parties can move from the margins to centre stage very rapidly. The dramatic successes of the far right are predicated above all on the repeated failures of mainstream politics, including and especially of social democracy, to deliver anything, not even much in the way of protection, for working-class people. Business-as-usual simply isn’t working, and where anger and bitterness remains unsatisfied, they seek expression elsewhere. Also a factor in this situation is the failure of the far left, of real socialists and revolutionaries, even to register as players in the consciousness of most working people in most countries (Ireland is an exception here), and I will return to this in a moment. The only thing that prevents the present political conjuncture being utterly catastrophic is that on their journey towards office, parties such as the Swedish Democrats and Brothers of Italy—and the same applies to Marine le Pen and National Rally—have tried to distance themselves from their fascist roots. As a result, they do not have the street-fighting forces needed (and possessed by both Mussolini and Hitler) to suppress bourgeois democracy, smash the trade unions and the left, and install fascist dictatorships. There is no justification for complacency in this, but it does give the left the time and the opportunity to heed the deadly warnings that are being given and mount a serious challenge to the system.

This, of course, is easier said than done. The inability of reformist social democracy (including in its Eurocommunist form) to resolve any of the multiple crises engulfing capitalism in decay is, I believe, inherent and incurable. It

lacks either the political will or the political means to overcome the resistance of the forces of capital and the capitalist state to any attempt at even serious reform. The left reformist strategy has been subject to two major tests in the last decade: the Syriza government in Greece and the Corbyn moment in the British Labour Party. In the Syriza case, the party leadership simply capitulated in the face of economic pressure from the European Central Bank, the EU, and the IMF, and was allowed to do so by the majority of the party. In the case of Corbyn, the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party twice undermined his attempts to win general elections and collaborated with the media (and Zionist and state forces) to destroy his leadership and the left as a whole. In both examples, reformist leaderships crumbled even before any decisive battle with the system was joined. The notion that they would have held firm in a real confrontation is entirely fanciful. Moreover, these failures were repetitions of failures that go back a century through Chile in 1973, the Popular Fronts in the thirties, to German Social Democracy in the Weimar Republic.⁵¹ Interestingly, the notion put forward by Podemos in the Spanish state that it could transcend the division between left and right and the debate between reform and revolution through some form of intellectual gymnastics simply evaporated into thin air with the passing of time as it settled down into being another centre-left reformist formation. This does not mean socialists should not campaign for and support left parties and left governments against the right, but this is not enough to produce a fundamental solution.

But what of the revolutionary socialist left? Internationally, the main problem of the real Marxist and socialist left is that it is small and isolated from the working class. This rift with the mass of the working class developed originally for historical reasons. It was produced by the great historical defeats of the fascist and Stalinist counter-revolutions of the 1920s and '30s. But prolonged isolation also damaged the revolutionaries and produced all sorts of sectarian habits and practices through decades in which small groups got accustomed to speaking mainly to themselves and like-minded individuals. In the current historic crisis of the system, it is a matter of urgency that these habits be overcome.

Concretely, this means taking the risks necessary to break out of small-circle politics and relate to the working class as it is today. This does not mean making concessions to racism, sexism, homophobia, or transphobia, but it does mean championing what working-class people need and are actually fighting for, not attempting to impose ready-made schemas or programmes.⁵²

This is not a question, as is sometimes supposed, of counterposing 'economic' class politics to identity politics or environmentalism. The working class today is enormously more internationalised, multi-ethnic, feminised, and generally diverse than was the case a generation or so ago. No workers' movement, no mass strike movement, today can fail to combat oppression without destroying its own unity: it is a necessary part of the working class reconstituting itself as a fighting force. It doesn't mean shying away from the climate crisis on the basis of narrow trade and national protectionism. Vast swathes of the working class internationally are already, and are destined to be in the near future, immediate victims of climate change. The cause of a just transition is the cause of labour, to echo James Connolly.⁵³ We must bring climate struggles and workers' struggles together, and there are welcome signs that this may be happening, for example with climate activists and unions combining to demand climate justice and support picket lines and cost-of-living mobilisations.

What it means is understanding that if, in a desperate cost-of-living crisis or indeed a recession or other crises facing the class, we do not step forward with demands and actions that articulate the anger of the mass of working people, we leave the door open to the right. This in turn requires a willingness to learn how to work together in united fronts or other formations with people with whom we have only partial agreement and sometimes substantial disagreements. It is past failures of the far left (not only of the Stalinists and the reformists) that created in Italy the vacuum into which Giorgia Meloni and the Brothers of Italy stepped. And it means grasping that industrial and street mobilization needs to be complemented, as part of the struggle for the political consciousness of the working class, with serious electoral invention.⁵⁴ Again, vacating this space gifts it to the right.

The points made here about the revolutionary left are a compressed version of an argument I have made elsewhere at much greater length.⁵⁵ They also approximate broadly the project we have made a modest start on with People Before Profit.⁵⁶ My view is that they have a certain general validity. In an inverse way, the rapid rise of the Swedish Democrats and the Brothers of Italy shows, as did the spectacular rise of Corbyn, what can be achieved by the far left in the conditions of today, provided we are 'at the races' (i.e., a factor in the consciousness of wide layers of the working class). At any rate, with capitalism in serious decay, the basic problem of overcoming the rift between socialists and the working class is a vital necessity if we are to avoid the dreadful fate of fascist barbarism and seize the real opportunities available to us.

1 All these figures are taken from <https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/inflation-rate>. It should also be said that all these figures are changing continually and are bound to be different by the time this article is printed or read.

2 <https://kraneshares.com/climate-change-is-a-growing-and-persistent-driver-of-inflation/>

3 See <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/aug/02/bp-profits-oil-prices-ukraine-war-energy-prices-cost-of-living-crisis>

4 hell.com/investors/results-and-reporting/quarterly-results/2022/q2-2022/_jcr_content/par/toptasks_1119141760.stream/1658963233980/ea8d3faec80bcc262226933fa722b4955a5e83a/q2-2022-quarterly-press-release.pdf

5 https://corporate.exxonmobil.com/news/newsroom/news-releases/2022/0729_exxonmobil-announces-second-quarter-2022-results#:~:

6 Michael Roberts, *The Long Depression: Marxism and the Global Crisis of Capitalism*, London, 2016.

7 ‘Eamonn Ryan...said it was “vital” the projects were developed to offset the power supply crisis facing this country. It has now emerged that some of the plants may not go ahead. Industry sources have told the Business Post that the projects are no longer economically viable due to rising cost inflation.’ *Business Post*, 9–10 October, 2022.

8 See Kieran Allen, ‘The politics of inflation’, *IMR*, 33. p.6.

9 In Iran, of course, the issue of the enforced hijab and the oppression of women was central to the revolt, along with the overall tyrannical nature of the regime, but the economic crisis contributes to the mass discontent and the popularity of the rebellion.

10 <https://tradingeconomics.com/sri-lanka/inflation-cpi>

11 <https://tradingeconomics.com/iran/indicators>

12 See Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution: Germany 1918-1923*, London 1982.

13 See the account in Kieran Allen, as above.

14 <https://www.reuters.com/markets/us/fed-seen-driving-interest-rates-higher-inflation-sears-2022-10-13/>

15 New estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) show that the full death toll associated directly or indirectly with the Covid-19 pandemic (described as “excess mortality”) between January 1st, 2020, and December 31st, 2021, was approximately 14.9 million (range 13.3 million to 16.6 million).

16 <https://ourworldindata.org/excess-mortality-covid#estimated-excess-mortality-from-the-economist>

17 Lee Humber, ‘What makes a disease go viral?’ *Socialist Review*, 455, March 2020, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/socialist-review-archive/what-makes-disease-go-viral/>

19 <https://thebulletin.org/2022/03/bulletin-science-and-security-board-condemns-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-doomsday-clock-stays-at-100-seconds-to-midnight/>

20 See, for example, the various estimates here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Russian_invasion_of_Ukraine#Casualties

21 See statistics here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Russian_invasion_of_Ukraine#Refugee_crisis

22 Rob Wallace, *Big Farms Make Big Flu*, p.280.

23 <https://www.world-grain.com/articles/16997-ukraine-grain-exports-reach-472-million-tonnes-so-far-for-2021-22>

24 John Molyneux, *Lenin for Today*, London 1917, p.14–15.

25 On October 14th, the World Wildlife Fund issued a ‘devastating’ report recording a 69 percent decline in the global world wildlife population since 1970. <https://www.rte.ie/news/newsletters/2022/1014/1329197-living-planet-report/>

26 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_European_floods

27 <https://floodlist.com/africa>

28 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidbressan/2022/06/05/carbon-dioxide-peaked-in-2022-at-levels-not-seen-for-millions-of-years/#:~:text=%5B%2B%5D&text=NOAA-.Carbon%20dioxide%20measured%20at%20NOAA's%20Mauna%20Loa%20Atmospheric%20Baseline%20Observatory,seen%20for%20millions%20of%20years.>

29 See, for example, Mark Walsh, ‘Intellectual Property, Patents and the Pandemic’, *IMR*, 32: <http://www.irishmarxistreview.net/index.php/imr/article/view/450> and Seán Mitchell, ‘Last Exit to Socialism?’ *IMR*, 27: <http://www.irishmarxistreview.net/index.php/imr/article/view/371>

30 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>

31 See the discussion and data in Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene*, New York, 2014, especially pp.38–58.

32 This does not mean Ireland’s people are the third-richest in the world, as GDP per capita figures are greatly inflated by the fact that Ireland functions as a tax haven.

33 <https://www.worlddata.info/largest-economies.php#:~:text=With%20a%20GDP%20of%2023.0,ninth%20place%20in%20this%20ranking.>

34 Figures from the Stockholm Peace Research Institute: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures

35 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index#2021_Human_Development_Index_\(2022report\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index#2021_Human_Development_Index_(2022report))

36 https://data.unicef.org/resources/data_explorer/unicef_f/?ag=UNICEF&df=GLOBAL_DATAFLOW

37 <https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/life-expectancy/>

38 https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2022/20220831.htm

39 <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1126121>

40 https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf

41 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>

42 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London, 1971 p.438.

43 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swedish_Social_Democratic_Party#Statistical_changes_in_voter_base

44 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweden_Democrats#2022_election_\(2022%E2%80%93\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweden_Democrats#2022_election_(2022%E2%80%93))

45 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_French_presidential_election#First_round

46 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Italian_general_election#Results

47 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_National_Congress#General_Election_Results

48 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharatiya_Janata_Party#General_election_results

49 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_German_federal_election

50

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opinion_polling_for_the_next_United_Kingdom_general_election#2022

51 For a fuller analysis, see John Molyneux, 'Understanding Left Reformism,' IMR, 6.

52 It is worth remembering that this is just a paraphrase of what Marx said in *The Communist Manifesto*. '[Communists] have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole... They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement... The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.'

53 'The cause of Ireland is the cause of labour.'

54 It probably needs to be said again that this not some sort of electoralist or reformist deviation but orthodox Leninism. See Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder*.

55 See John Molyneux, 'Socialism and the Working Class Today' in John Molyneux, *Selected Writings on Socialism and Revolution*, London 2022, pp.41–72.

56 See John Molyneux, 'What is People Before Profit?' IMR, 32: <http://www.irishmarxistreview.net/index.php/imr/article/view/448>

2,920	1.710	1.720
2,917	0.314	0.316
2,100	1.180	1.190
2,179	0.332	0.338
10,000	0.460	0.47
10,000	7.120	7.5

The Cost of Living Crisis—Building the Fight Back

Eddie Conlon

The cost-of-living crisis is having a profound effect on working people, raising key questions about the operation of the free market and its ability to meet the needs of the majority in society.¹ Households are reeling from the huge increases in energy and food costs. In June 2022, the children’s charity Barnardos reported that families are having to make hard choices between eating, lighting, and heating, and that many were cutting back on food purchases: ‘70 percent of parents said that cost of living increases have negatively affected their children over the past six months.’² With energy prices rising, energy poverty is at all-time high, affecting 29 percent of households. If current trends in energy costs continue, this could rise to 43 percent, almost double its previously recorded high of 23 percent in 1994/95.³ Some projections suggest it could be as high as 70 percent.⁴ In general terms, it is estimated that many households will be €4000 worse off by the end of the year due to rising prices.⁵ Some will see their energy bills increase to €6000 per year from under €2000 in 2021.⁶

This cost-of-living crisis has coincided with a deepening housing crisis, which has seen homelessness surpass pre-Covid levels. In July, there were a record number of people homeless, 10,568, of which 3,137 were children.⁷ Rents in Ireland have risen more rapidly than in the rest of Europe. While the average increase across Europe was 15 percent between 2010 and 2019, it was 63 percent here, the third-highest increase.⁸ According to Social Justice Ireland, almost one-fifth (19 percent) of the population, 935,182 people, including nearly 300,000 children, is living below the poverty line when housing costs are factored in.⁹

High costs, low social wage

While the inflation crisis is having a devastating effect on households, it has added to a situation wherein prices in Ireland were already higher than in other European countries. Recent Eurostat data¹⁰ shows that Ireland, along with Denmark, has the highest price levels in the EU, 40 percent above the EU average. We have the third highest energy and food prices. Housing costs are 88 percent higher than the EU average. On average, renters are paying a third of their income on rent, but a quarter are paying over 40 percent.¹¹ These high rents are a direct effect of a failure to invest in social housing and an overreliance on the private rental sector and vulture funds to meet housing needs.

The value of the social wage for workers is lower than in many other EU countries, meaning that households in Ireland pay for health, education, childcare, and other vital services, which are generally free in other countries. Ireland has the lowest level of public spending per person when compared to similar EU countries; on average, we spend €14 billion less per annum. One reason for the gap is that the tax take is also relatively low. Most of the shortfall arises from low taxes on employers.¹²

Low levels of social spending mean that every time you go to a doctor or into hospital, you have to pay. While education is supposed to be free, parents have to pay for books, uniforms, school and transport and make so-called voluntary contributions to keep schools afloat. A recent survey from Barnardos found that ‘the basic cost of sending a child to school in 2022 remains substantial across primary and secondary: the average cost of the basics needed for a fourth class pupil is €424; a first year pupil is €814 and a fifth year pupil is €722.’ Unsurprisingly, over two-thirds of primary and three-quarters of secondary school parents were worried about meeting costs this year.¹³

College fees are the highest in the EU, and scandalously, some households are paying the equivalent of a second mortgage to cover childcare costs. Out-of-pocket childcare costs for the average working couple with two preschool children are 20 percent of their joint disposable income. Meanwhile the state spends 0.3 percent of GDP on childcare, when UNICEF recommends 1 percent.¹⁴

Profit restraint, not pay restraint

The origins of the current crisis were examined in the previous issue of the IMR.¹⁵ But it's worth reiterating the extent to which it's driven by profiteering and the impact of imperialist rivalries being played out in the Ukraine War, and how the elites in society can escape its effects, while those at the bottom are immiserated.

We know, for example, that inflation is hitting poorer households harder. Data from the CSO¹⁶ to June 2022 shows that inflation was 9 percent. But because they spend a higher proportion of their incomes on food, transport, and energy, those in households with the lowest incomes experienced higher annual inflation, up to 10.3 percent, as did those over 65, at 9.8 percent. These households are more likely to experience fuel poverty.¹⁷

It is worth noting, that while there has been much focus on energy costs, food inflation has been accelerating as the crisis and Ukraine War has gone on. So while food inflation was at 3 percent in the year to March, by August the annual increase was 8.8 percent. The annual increase for basics such as bread jumped from 8.3 percent to 14.9 percent, while for milk it went from 8.6 percent to a massive 22.6 percent. A report in August from Kantor, which monitors trends in retail, reported that food inflation was at a fourteen-year high and stated that 'everyday essentials such as butter, milk, flour, eggs and bread are seeing some of the biggest price rises. This rise means that the average annual shop could rise by a staggering €662 if consumers buy the same products as they did last year.'¹⁸ This is driving many households to seek help from charities such as St Vincent de Paul, which reports record levels of calls, with one in three coming from those facing food poverty,¹⁹ a stark illustration of how inflation and war sanctions are hurting those at the bottom.

While those at the bottom are forced to make real choices the capitalist class and their hangers-on face no such dilemma. The wealth and earnings of the wealthiest in society are rising dramatically.

The median pay packages of top CEOs rose by 42 percent to €2m in 2021.²⁰

Oxfam says the wealth of Ireland's nine billionaires has increased by a massive €15.55 billion since the start of the pandemic.²¹

A report on the pay of directors of Irish companies shows many of them recorded maximum bonus payments in

2021. The average non-executive director (basically a part-time 'job')

was paid €107,000 last year. The average for executive directors was close to €1 million.²²

Much of this increased wealth is based on greedy profiteering by corporations, which has contributed directly to rising inflation. Energy companies, in particular, have been increasing prices for households while reporting increased profits. Electric Ireland made an additional €63 million in 2021, with profits reaching €679 million. Bord Gáis operating profits grew 74 percent in the first half of 2022 to €39.4 million. Both companies announced numerous price increases throughout 2022. In September we learned that profits from the Corrib gas field tripled to €560 million for the first half of 2022,²³ while profits at the ESB for the same period also tripled from €390.3 million.²⁴

While this gross profiteering takes place, some want us to believe that wage restraint is necessary to stop a wage-price spiral. There is no evidence of any wage-price spiral here or anywhere else. Data from the CSO²⁵ shows that in the year to the end of June, weekly wages rose by 2.4 percent and hourly wages by 2.7 percent. Inflation was 9.1 percent in June. Therefore real wages are being cut on a massive scale not seen since the financial crash. And this in the context where the wage share in national income is collapsing. In 2019, the labour share for Ireland reached an all-time low of 30 percent, down from 49 percent in 2010, and it has continued to decline since 2019.²⁶ This reflects a longer-term trend of increasing profits. As the People Before Profit Budget 2023²⁷ shows, there has been a spectacular rise in corporate profits over the last decade, which have grown by 158 percent since 2012, with growth only halted in 2020 by the global pandemic. But with the surge in the corporate tax take in 2021 and 2022, it is clear that profits have increased again at an exceptional rate.

Finally, it can be noted that, despite the fact that there is no evidence that inflation is being caused by excess demand, the ECB, in line with monetarist orthodoxy, has proceeded to increase interest rates twice this year by 1.25 percent. For a mortgage of €250,000—which is the average mortgage in Ireland—that means an extra €1,680 a year.²⁸ Ireland's mortgage rates are the second-highest in the Eurozone after Greece. The weighted average interest rate on new Irish mortgages was 2.77 percent, compared to the Eurozone average of 1.59 percent.²⁹ Increasing rates will put further financial pressure on struggling

households without solving the problems that are actually causing inflation in the first place. The effect is 'more likely to cause stagnation in investment and consumption, thus provoking a slump.'³⁰

The Cost of Living Coalition

The reason for surveying this terrain is to make the simple point that building a campaign around the cost of living is not simple. The crisis raises very immediate issues for people across a number of fronts, but also a more fundamental issue about relying on a profit-driven system based on markets to meet fundamental needs. Further, given the centrality of energy costs to the current crisis, it provides a real opportunity to argue for effective climate action to reduce energy use and reliance on fossil fuels and thus reduce both costs for households and emissions.

While there have been many references to the water charges campaign as a point of comparison for what we are trying to do in the Cost-of-Living Coalition (COLC), the comparison fails when we examine the range of issues facing cost-of-living campaigners and those who were opposed to water charges. The question of water charges was a relatively simple question of whether people were for or against water charges. There were significant differences around the tactic of non-payment, but clear agreement that the objective was to stop water charges. The COLC throws up a wider range of issues, especially when the objective is to unite workers, the unemployed, single parents, pensioners, students, and climate campaigners in a single campaign to protect incomes, control prices, and reduce energy use.

The COLC grew out of discussions within People Before Profit and between our TDs and a number of pensioner groups and student organisers. The work that Brid Smith had done on a bill to give pensioners access to the state's industrial relations machinery provided an important platform to reach out to pensioner groups, such as the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament and retired worker groups such as the ESB Retired Staff Association. Because these groups were on board, Sinn Féin agreed to participate and attend the first meeting in April 2022, as did important campaigning groups such as SPARK (Single Parents Acting for the Rights of Kids), the National Homeless and Housing Coalition, the Union of Students in Ireland, and trade union activists associated with UNITE and the Dublin Council of Trade Unions.

This breadth has been the strength of the coalition, which has expanded to over thirty groups ranging from the socialist left through the Communist Party and Right to Change to the Social Democrats and a significant number of groups campaigning on disability, including Enable Ireland, and on issues such as MICA, climate change (Extinction Rebellion), post-graduate students' rights, and racism and the rights of asylum seekers (MASI). While the left of the trade union movement is supporting the coalition, including the Trade Union Left Forum, no union has yet affiliated, but the ICTU has supported the demonstrations called by COLC. Others, such as the Community Action Tenants Unions (CATU) and Friends of the Earth, have not affiliated but have also supported the demonstration on September 24th, which was the largest demonstration Dublin has seen for some considerable time, with real estimates of between 15,000 and 20,000 attending. By any measure, and following a long period of inactivity due to Covid, this must be considered a success and arguably put pressure on the government to increase spending on one-off measures in the recent budget.

A united front?

It can reasonably be argued that PBP have been at the core of COLC and done much of the heavy lifting to make it work. Through exercising a genuine commitment to building a united front and not insisting that its demands be adopted by all in the coalition, it has created a space to allow many groups to cooperate and to build opportunities for the public to mobilise and convey their anger to the government about the cost-of-living crisis.

The essence of the united front tactic for radical and revolutionary left parties is that it provides a mechanism to reach to layers of people beyond its membership and supporters and to reach an audience imbued with reformist ideas or delusions about capitalism.³¹ The success of the tactic 'lies in the ability of the organisers to work with people or groups who agree on a single issue or range of issue while maintaining independence on other issues.'³²

It allows the socialist left to engage with and mobilise alongside those supporters of political projects led by reformist parties with the hope of winning them over to a project of radical change, in an atmosphere of mobilisation rather than of isolation. Through working in united fronts with reformists, we can demonstrate the superiority of revolutionary politics over reformism both by our actions and commitments but also our political

ideas. Rather than arguing abstractly with the supporters of reformism, the united front offers the ability to educate workers through joint struggle.

To use the tactic effectively requires, on the one hand, a non-sectarian approach to those who command support in the working class, such as Sinn Féin and trade union leaders, while at the same time maintaining a political independence which allows the left to put forward its own programme and solutions to the issues facing the working class. Additionally, the tactic allows us to demonstrate the importance of people power and of action on the streets; ‘Through extra-parliamentary action, workers would see this...activity as a sign of their own power to make a difference, compared to the passivity of waiting for parliamentary resolutions.’³³ It requires more than just a focus on the demands of the movement: ‘More important is that the demands themselves are implemented through the direct action of the workforce.’³⁴

Finally, the adoption of the united-front tactic is a useful foil to all those who argue that the left is inevitably divided and that the radical left is incapable of uniting with other others to fight for real gains in the here and now.

Demands

So, in pulling the coalition together the emphasis has been on creating a mechanism to allow a wide range of groups to unite behind a call for mobilisation. Considerable flexibility has been demonstrated in pulling the COLC together. While early meetings were dominated by discussions of demands, with the inevitable production of a laundry list, flexibility has been demonstrated by not insisting that all groups sign up for every demand. As the letter inviting affiliations says:

There are a broad range of groups in the Coalition, with different emphasis in terms of specific demands, but broadly we are calling for action to control energy and housing costs; inflation-proof incomes and introduce a Living Wage; remove charges for vital public services such as health, education and childcare; and to share the wealth of this country and stop profiteering. While there is diversity in which demands different groups in the Coalition emphasise, we strongly agree that the public must be provided with an opportunity to send a message to the government that urgent action is needed now.

While this might demonstrate a certain vagueness in the approach of the coalition, it did allow groups to join who did not agree with every demand, such as the Social Democrats, who do not agree with scrapping the carbon tax. There is agreement that the coalition should fight to:

1. *control energy costs*, including price controls on energy and an immediate insulation programme to reduce energy use;
2. *protect incomes* for workers, pensioners, students, and those reliant on social welfare such as single parents and disabled people (the demand for additional payment for those with a disability, given the extra costs of being disabled, has meant that a bloc of groups campaigning on disability has played an important role in the COLC);³⁵
3. *make housing affordable* by controlling rents and banning evictions;
4. *invest in public services* by making childcare, education, health, and public transport free; and
5. *share the wealth* by placing a windfall tax on the profits of energy companies and increasing the taxes on corporation profits and the super wealthy.

What seems significant in the above is the inclusion of demands in relation to housing and climate action, which broadened the scope of the COLC, but also demands on taxing the rich, which, while argued for by the socialist left, were not resisted. They have allowed the COLC to point to resources which could allow the demands of the campaign to be funded.

Challenges

While COLC has been relatively successful so far, it faces two key challenges.

The first is in the unions. In his recent article,³⁶ Kieran Allen points out that, historically, inflation has been fought on the streets and in the workplaces through strike action. Unfortunately, we have seen little of the latter in the South. No Mick Lynch or Sharon Graham has emerged to capture the popular imagination and legitimate the right of workers to strike for wage increases that match inflation. Despite the inflation crisis and tight labour markets, there has been no significant dispute over wages in the South. Up to June 2022, there have been just three strikes.³⁷ There has been no significant increase in recent years, despite the extent of the cost-of-living crisis and weekly wages rising by just 2.4 percent in the year to

June 2022. Hourly earnings in the accommodation and food sector went down by 3.6 percent.³⁸

The union leadership remains addicted to social partnership, and despite the willingness of workers to support unions, there has been no major campaign to recruit workers or expand collective bargaining rights. A recent study³⁹ showed that four out of ten of those not in a union would be willing to vote to join. But it also showed that membership among sixteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds is 14 percent, and that coverage of collective bargaining had fallen to 43 percent in 2021 from 48 percent in 2009. OECD data shows it is as low as 34 percent.⁴⁰ Union membership is now 25 percent, but is much lower in parts of the private sector such as retail (11 percent) and accommodation and food (3 percent), where earnings are far below average earnings and where workers need substantial pay increases.⁴¹

Union leaders negotiated and promoted a public services pay deal that offers 6.5 percent over two years; way less than inflation and not much better than the 5 percent deal offered by the government in June, which the unions rightly rejected. While many shapes were thrown in the intervening period and it was agreed to ballot members for industrial action, the unions balked at the prospect of a fight with the government. In agreeing to put the 6.5 percent to ballot, they said they expected the budget to deliver for union members because, as Kevin Callinan, general secretary of Forasa admitted in a letter to members, ‘In the absence of other measures to improve the social wage in the form of better services and financial supports, the proposed pay increase would constitute a reduction in the value of wages in real terms.’ This did not stop him pushing this awful deal, and many unions asked members to vote before the budget, which was deemed by ICTU to have cut the living standards of many workers and those reliant on social welfare.⁴² There was no significant boost to the social wage.⁴³

Given their attachment to social partnership, it’s not surprising that ICTU has had a somewhat lukewarm approach to the COLC. It is not committed to an active fight against falling living standards and remains suspicious of the radical left. While it did actively promote the march of June 18th, it did not actively promote the march on September 24th, although individual unions did. The COLC now needs to focus on getting individual unions and branches to affiliate in order to build trade union support. The fact that large number of workers voted for the deal is not surprising given the weakness of the left in the unions and that it involved a

back payment to February that would give many workers vital cash in back pay that they need. Also, it was clear to workers that even if they rejected it, the unions were not going to fight. But no sooner had the pay deal been agreed than it became clear that all estimates for inflation next year had risen. The demand for pay increases to match inflation remains, and the argument needs to be taken up in the COLC that strike action to demand inflation-matching pay increases is required.

The other challenge is building the COLC on the ground. The COLC has been built as an effective united front from above. It’s essentially an alliance of organisations and groups representing a range of groups representing the exploited and oppressed across society. But if it’s going to match the water charges campaign, it has to sink deep roots in the communities and build groups in local areas open to those who are not members of affiliated organisations. To date, that has not proven easy, and local attendance at activities has been uneven. While PBP has a commitment to building a united front on the ground, others need to embrace this commitment and grow the local protests on November 12th so that they can be used to build local activist groups in every area as a basis for developing the COLC as a significant social movement across the country. The potential to do so will increase as the winter progresses and as the effect of the one-off payments provided in the budget wear off. The fantastic walkout in colleges on October 14th must also be built on to develop the campaign amongst students.

A left government?

The rise of the COLC and the centrality of PBP and Sinn Féin in it has posed the question of whether it is some precursor to a left government. The question is being posed by journalists when they see Mary Lou McDonald and Richard Boyd Barrett standing side-by-side and calling on the public to get in the streets. Given the passivity of the unions and the weakness of the left within them, it’s likely that the Irish working class will express their anger with a riot at the ballot box in the next election. Recent opinion polls show Sinn Féin sustaining their high ratings, but they also show that PBP have passed out Labour, the Social Democrats, and the Greens.⁴⁴ PBP have gained from leading the fightback on the cost of living, but also from being associated with the mood for change in the country, which is currently expressed in support for Sinn Féin. The danger, of course, is that in being too closely associated with Sinn Féin, the public may not understand the need to put PBP’s fighting

left-wingers into the next Dáil who can give real expression to the demand for change and keep pressure on Sinn Féin to deliver what people need.

While the commitment to work with others to mobilise the largest numbers is at the heart of the united-front tactic, to make gains from this strategy requires that the socialist left maintain a strong left profile within the united front to distinguish it from other forces. This not always easy. As Bois comments on the use of this tactic by the German Communist Party in the 1920s, ‘The art of being neither too close to the SPD [Social Democratic Party] nor too isolated was the greatest challenge to the application of the politics of the United Front.’⁴⁵

So while we need to promote the fightback by being the best builders of a real united front which has significant social weight, we also need to argue that socialist solutions are needed to the cost-of-living crisis; socialist solutions that Sinn Féin have shied away from as they make themselves ready for government, court the corporate establishment, leave open the option of government with Fianna Fáil.⁴⁶

There are three key things socialists should argue for in the current crisis: First, the end of the reign of the market in energy and in health, education, and childcare. Currently, the demand to take the energy system into public ownership is the only solution that makes any real sense in a context where people are calling for price controls. Some are arguing that imposing price controls in the current energy market requires the state to subsidise highly profitable energy companies who have made vast profits from rising prices. Sinn Féin say in their budget that ‘under our proposal the state would compensate electricity suppliers for the difference between summer 2021 rates and the wholesale price that the suppliers themselves must pay to electricity generators.’ They oppose the nationalisation of the energy system.

Price controls combined with nationalisation of the energy sector are a better option than continually subsidising private companies. This will give us control over energy prices and supply, while the current approach means pouring money into companies who just keep raising prices. In the first instance, the for-profit mandate of the ESB needs to be changed. They should revert to being a not-for-profit state company. This will incur no costs. The reality is that the energy market is not working. Already four suppliers have left the market, with customers reverting to the ESB (Electric Ireland). If price controls were imposed on the providers, they would also

desert the market, leaving the ESB to absorb their activity at no cost. A state controlled and planned energy system would also allow us to better plan for a future based on renewables.⁴⁷

Secondly, we need to demand substantial increases in pensions and benefits and a living wage of €15 an hour to take households out of poverty. The PBP Budget 2023⁴⁸ shows that, for too long, welfare payments in Ireland have been too low and below the minimum-required disposable income to avoid poverty, which in 2021 was €286 per week for a single person. In 2021, the poverty rate was 11.6 percent, compared with 13.2 percent in 2020. But without Covid-19 income supports, it would have been 19.9 percent. This illustrates the important role that the €350 PUP payment played in reducing poverty and providing people with an adequate income.

In order to immediately move people above the poverty line, PBP propose that all basic social welfare and benefit payments be increased to €300 this year, with the aim of moving them to €350 in budget 2024. Disabled people have faced a cost-of-living crisis for decades. Disabled people’s poverty rates are three to five times the national average. PBP therefore support a fifty-euro cost-of-disability payment for every disabled person. The cost of these measures would be €5.8 billion. But a wealth tax, as proposed by PBP, would raise €5.9 billion. These radical measures, which unfortunately Sinn Féin do not support, would have a huge impact on the cost-of-living crisis facing poorer households.

Finally, the left also needs to clearly link the current crisis to the war and the manner in which it and the sanctions against Russia are hurting working people not just through rising energy costs but also food costs, given the central role of Ukraine and Russia in global food production.⁴⁹ While the UN index of global food prices hit an all-time high in February 2022, rising by 24 percent and reflecting problems across the global food system, this was surpassed in March following the outbreak of the war. Food prices were 34 percent higher than in March 2021. While the Index has fallen in recent months, it remains elevated, with risks associated with the war expected to push it up in coming months. A recent UN Food and agriculture Organisation report points out that ‘in Ukraine between 20 and 30 percent of the areas where winter crops are sown are likely to remain unharvested during the 2022/23 season,’ while in Russia, sanctions ‘could disrupt its imports of agricultural inputs it is highly dependent on, especially pesticides and seeds. This could result in less planting, lower yields and lower qualities of

crops in the future.⁵⁰ This means not only continued high prices for us but also devastation for the additional nineteen million people who face undernourishment as a direct result of the war.⁵¹ The demand for the ending of sanctions, and an end to the war, must be given greater prominence.

Conclusions

The COLC has been a success to date. It has managed to pull together a coalition that has allowed the public to ventilate its anger at a government that has failed to address the cost-of-living crisis, or the housing crisis, or the crisis in health, which will have deadly effects over the winter. With the prospects of a recession hanging over us,⁵² the effects will be devastating for working people.

While the achievements of the COLC should not be overstated, it provides the basis for building a fightback and a significant social movement aimed at forcing the radical measures we need to address the cost-of-living crisis. It also raises the prospect of a movement emerging that could see the end of the rule of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The radical left, and People Before Profit in particular, while continuing to build the COLC, needs to raise the wider questions about the sources of the current crisis and the socialist solutions needed to address them. It also needs to ensure that the prospect of a left government is kept on the agenda, keep the pressure on Sinn Féin to rule out coalition with the right, and deliver on the radical changes needed to really transform Irish society.

¹ This section builds on my introduction to People Before Profits Budget 2023: Cost of Living and Housing Emergency: A Radical Budget for System Change. <https://www.pbp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL-BUDGET-23.pdf>

² See <https://www.barnardos.ie/policy/the-issues/cost-of-living-2022>

³ <https://www.esri.ie/news/energy-poverty-at-highest-recorded-rate>

⁴ Irish Times August 24, 2022.

⁵ Irish Times August 26, 2022.

⁶ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40952831.html>

⁷ <https://www.thejournal.ie/record-homelessness-emergency-accommodation-5850318-Aug2022/>

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210708-2>

⁹ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/publication/housing-costs-and-poverty-2022>

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Comparative_price_levels_of_consumer_goods_and_services and <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/wdn-20220623-1>

¹¹ ICTU (2022) *The Social Wage*, Dublin.

¹² ICTU (2022).

¹³ <https://www.barnardos.ie/media/15931/barnardos-back-to-school-survey-2022.pdf>

¹⁴ SIPTU (2021) *New Deal for Early Years*, Dublin.

¹⁵ Kieran Allen (2022). The Politics of Inflation. *Irish Marxist Review* Vol 11 Issue 33

¹⁶ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/frm/frp-eihc/estimatedinflationbyhouseholdcharacteristicsjune2022/>

¹⁷ <https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS144.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.kantar.com/uki/inspiration/fmcg/2022-wp-grocery-inflation-in-ireland-hits-highest-level-in-14-years>

¹⁹ Irish Times August 23 2022.

²⁰ Irish Times July 29 2022.

²¹ See <https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2022/0522/1300533-irish-billionaires-wealth-up-16bn-during-the-pandemic/#:~:text=Irish%20billionaires'%20wealth%20rose%20%E2%82%AC16bn%20during%20the%20pandemic&text=The%20wealth%20of%20Ireland's%20nine%20individuals%20to%20%E2%82%AC51%20billion>

²² Irish Times June 3, 2022.

²³ Irish Times September 16, 2022.

²⁴ Irish Times September 17, 2022.

²⁵ <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/earnings/earningsandlabourcosts/>

²⁶ See <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/ppii/productivityinireland2020/chapter4gvaandthelabourshare/> and <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/ppii/productivityinireland2019/chapter4gvaandthelabourshare/>

²⁷ See <https://www.pbp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FINAL-BUDGET-23.pdf>

²⁸ Irish Times September 9, 2022: <https://www.thejournal.ie/ech-raises-inflation-5822504-Jul2022/>

²⁹ Irish Examiner June 8, 2022.

³⁰ Michael Roberts (2022). Inflation: Wages versus profits. <https://braveneweuropa.com/michael-roberts-inflation-wages-versus-profits>

³¹ See Daryll Horan (2021). The Comintern and the United Front, *Irish Marxist Review* 2021 Vol 10 Issue 31, and Marcel Bois (2017). The KPD and the United Front During the Weimar Republic. Available at <https://www.rs21.org.uk/2017/05/19/revolutionary-reflections-the-kpd-and-the-united-front-during-the-weimar-republic>

³² Horan (2021) p.86.

³³ Bois (2017).

³⁴ This quote is from Ernst Meyer, chair of the German KPD in 1921. Quoted in Bois (2017)

³⁵ In December 2021, the government published a report on the extra costs of having a disability. For people with intellectual disabilities, the extra costs (on top of regular living costs) range between €9000 and €13,000 per year.

³⁶ See Allen (2022)

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<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/id/industrialdisputesquarter22022/>

³⁸ <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-elcq/earningsandlabourcostsq12022finalq22022preliminaryestimates/>

³⁹ John Geary and Maris Belizon (2021). *Union Voice in Ireland*. <https://www.smurfitschool.ie/t4media/7791%20NERI%20UCD%20Union%20Voice.pdf>

⁴⁰ See note 38.

⁴¹ Union membership data was provided to me by the CSO. Thanks to Martina O Callaghan. For earnings data see note 38.

⁴² <https://ictu.ie/news/budget-fails-low-paid-and-low-income-households-face-highest-inflation-1984>

⁴³ For the PBP analysis of the Budget see <https://www.pbp.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Budget-2023-Briefing-People-Before-Profit.pdf>

⁴⁴ see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Next_Irish_general_election for all polls since the last election.

⁴⁵ Bois (2017).

⁴⁶ Pat Leahy, “Sinn Féin still has plenty of work to do in order to take power”, *Irish Times*, 8 October, 2022.

⁴⁷ See Patrick Bresnihan and Sinéad Mercier (2022) “Time to look to our own history for inspiration on national energy security” *Irish Examiner* September 5, 2022:

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/commentanalysis/arid-40953707.html>

⁴⁸ See note 1.

⁴⁹ See *The Importance Of Ukraine And The Russian Federation For Global Agricultural Markets And The Risks Associated With The War In Ukraine*, UN Food and Agricultural Organisation, 20 June 2022. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>

⁵⁰ See note 49, p.2.

⁵¹ See note 49, p.3.

⁵²

<https://notesonthefront.typepad.com/politicaconomy/2022/09/recession-hangs-over-budget-2023.html>



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Roe v. Wade: How Did We Get Here, What Should We Do?

Camilla Fitzsimons

Abortion has always been part of human existence. For centuries, ending a pregnancy before 'the quickening' (i.e., when foetal movement is felt) wasn't particularly controversial. There is reference to abortions when the pharaohs ruled Egypt, the dynasties ruled ancient China, and within early texts of Judaism, some versions of both within Islamic and Catholic doctrine.ⁱ Where historic concerns are recorded, these often relate to the dangers of late abortionsⁱⁱ or to the poisonous nature of certain remedies that were used.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, many early US laws were introduced to protect women from unscrupulous vendors who profited from peddling unsafe medicines.^{iv}

Abortion is also normal. Although it is impossible to calculate the exact numbers, the World Health Organisation (WHO) reckon one-third of all pregnancies end in this way.^v One-quarter of all US women will have an abortion—59 percent of these are mothers.^{vi} In England and Wales, over 200,000 are legally performed each year. Abortion enables millions of people to exercise choice in deciding when and with whom to have children, if at all. It allows women in particular to pursue life goals otherwise denied to them, to counter decades of discrimination in terms of their social and economic progress, and to manage their care burden.

Abortion is healthcare. The WHO describes abortion seekers as 'active participants in—as well as beneficiaries of—health services.'^{vii} Because of pharmacological advances, most people opt for medical abortions, meaning they take pills, often in their own homes. If surgery is preferred or needed because of timing, this is a simple, non-invasive procedure that only involves a few hours in a healthcare facility. Abortion is also part of 'critical care,' meaning bans and restrictions force pregnant people to put their health and even their lives at risk. To illustrate, the

day before the US Supreme Court (SCOTUS) overturned *Roe v. Wade*, an American woman holidaying in Malta was airlifted to a Spanish hospital. She was miscarrying, but doctors weren't allowed perform an abortion because of a heartbeat, despite the fact that the foetus had zero chance of surviving.

Bans create other problems also: medical abortions move outside of the healthcare system, pregnant bodies are placed under surveillance, and pro-choice activists break the law by providing the information and medication that people need. This is what happened in Ireland before our near ban on abortion was lifted in 2019. Thousands got help from both Women on Web and Womanhelp or through an ad hoc network of illegal importation organised by Irish activists who regularly risked criminal charges that could have resulted in lengthy prison terms. Where medical abortions weren't appropriate or available, as many as 170,000 people went overseas, self-funding their travel, accommodation, loss of earnings, and medical costs. Many were helped by activist groups such as the London-based Abortion Support Network.

In the absence of constitutional protections, similar workarounds are happening in the US as abortion healthcare fundamentally changes. Thirteen states have now introduced total bans and others have instituted severe restrictions. Clinics have been forced to close or relocate, meaning states with abortion services are completely overwhelmed. There are other impacts, too, that affect people who aren't even pregnant, as some medicines that are commonly used to treat other conditions are being denied because of their abortifacient properties. For example, in Arizona, a fourteen-year-old girl was denied treatment for arthritis and osteoporosis because the drug methotrexate can potentially induce a miscarriage.^{viii}

Despite the best efforts of the remaining services and the work of organisations such as AidAccess, who distribute abortion pills, people will inevitably give birth to babies they do not want and/or cannot care for. Maternity deaths will also rise. This is because an already present chill effect has been heightened for doctors, who make complex medical decisions, often in emergency situations, when dealing with miscarriages, ectopic pregnancies, and other obstetric complications. Since Poland introduced a near ban in 2020, we know of two women who have died because doctors failed to perform abortions during treatments for pregnancy complications. Their names were Agnieszka T. and Izabela Sajbor. There will also be

fatalities because of unsafe abortions, as is evidenced where bans have existed for some time, such as in El Salvador, Madagascar, Egypt, Jamaica, Senegal, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Philippines. Overall, the WHO estimates that 23,000 women die each year from unsafe abortions.^{ix}

There have been mixed international reactions to the SCOTUS decision, some of which have been positive. Many European countries, including Ireland, saw protests calling for more reproductive freedoms, and solidarity gestures extended across the Atlantic. Some governments had already begun improving reproductive rights in anticipation of change in the US. For example, Dutch laws have recently been amended to ditch a five-day waiting period and to extend prescriptive authority beyond dedicated abortion clinics. In France, two days after the SCOTUS decision, a cross-party bill was put forward to make abortion a constitutional right. National Assembly member Marie-Pierre Rixain exclaimed, ‘What happened elsewhere must not happen in France.’^x

In other European countries there are fears that the decision will embolden an anti-abortion movement whose overall mission is to ban abortion all over again. The base from which they seek their backsliding reforms can be low. Not everyone realises that abortion is still a criminal offence in the Republic of Ireland and that our law is highly restrictive. Abortion is only available on demand before twelve weeks, and comes with a built-in pause period. After twelve weeks, two doctors must certifiably guarantee a risk to life or health, or that the baby would die within twenty-eight days. In part because of conscientious objection, availability is patchy, especially in rural areas. Nearly half of our publicly funded maternity hospitals don’t even offer abortion care. Because of these restrictions, people likely still buy pills online when they don’t have the time, money, and/or freedom to travel. Others may self-medicate for fear of stigma. Medical abortion without medical supervision is safe and typically uncomplicated. But when it is criminalised, it creates difficulties where backup care is needed because people can be afraid to present at a healthcare service for fear of prosecution. This isn’t pie-in-the-sky thinking. In recent years, several British-based women have been investigated for self-managed abortions under the 1861 *Offences against the State Act*.^{xi} Abortion is decriminalised in Northern Ireland; however, at the time of writing, services are practically nonexistent because of a failure by government to commission them.^{xii}

In countries where severe restrictions are in place, for example in many African countries, the SCOTUS ruling may reduce the likelihood that draconian laws will be revoked. Amukelani Matsilele writes,

The stats show that African countries with restrictive abortion laws have high numbers of maternal deaths resulting from illegal abortions being conducted in backdoor clinics. African women have been denied the right to choose. Overturning *Roe v Wade* will only increase the negative sentiments around abortion and likely will be used to bolster restrictions denying rights to women’s health in African countries that are looking to revisit their abortion laws.^{xiii}

Similar concerns have been voiced in the Philippines, a country where tens of thousands of women are hospitalised for complications from unsafe abortions and as many as one thousand die each year.^{xiv}

How did we get here? A brief history of US criminalisation.

Given this context, it seems fair to ask why abortion and reproductive rights more broadly are the focal point of so much concern. Why is such an obvious human right so embroiled in political and legal debates? Getting to grips with this question involves delving into the second half of the nineteenth century, when moral arguments about the ethics of abortion most notably entered the fray. Before the mid-1800s, newspapers regularly advertised various oral remedies that would induce a miscarriage, and abortion care was mostly performed by skilled midwives who were trusted healthcare workers. It is widely accepted that the catalyst for change was the professionalisation of doctors, particularly through the creation of the male-led, conservative-thinking American Medical Association (AMA, est. 1847). The AMA made outlawing abortion one of its principal goals. This was, in part, to ensure university-trained, mostly male physicians could gain power over then unregulated, mostly female midwives. Rickie Solinger explains how the AMA’s position had little to do with medicine and a lot to do with preserving the patriarchal family unit as the cornerstone of social order: if women were allowed to manage their fertility this would be ‘a threat to the social order...that would

undermine the social arrangements that mandated families in which husbands held power and made all the important decisions.^{xv} The AMA weren't operating alone; they were supported by a growing religious conservatism, much of which came from the Catholic Church, which, in 1869, declared all abortion murder—a standard position that remains the Church's stance to this day.^{xvi} Together with other social structures of power, including political institutions, they created a narrative that to choose abortion over motherhood was immoral. Abortion, and also contraception, would be restricted so that families could flourish. By the early 1900s, abortion was criminalised across the US except on the rare occasions a doctor felt it necessary.^{xvii} Their interest in supporting families to grow was, however, highly selective, as many of these same doctors participated in a longstanding colonial eugenics movement that controlled mostly Black and Latino bodies through state-sponsored coercive sterilisations.^{xviii}

Multiple births became the norm for many women, forcing them into the domestic realm, where they occupied a lower-status position in a patriarchal society. Many resorted to unsafe, back-street abortions, and just like today, thousands died and tens of thousands ended up in hospital with complications. The sheer scale of these deaths across the US led to some attempts at reform from within the medical profession. However, these remained outside of the control of women, and were driven rather by a patriarchal desire for a male-dominated, racist profession to be the gatekeepers of bodily autonomy.^{xix}

Real change only happened because of what is sometimes called an 'abortion revolution' that connected with wider antiwar and civil rights activism as thousands of American women campaigned for reproductive rights. Two such groups, the Chicago-based Jane Collective and the Californian Society for Humane Abortion, not only provided abortions, they tirelessly agitated to take reproductive decision-making out of the hands of politicians and doctors. This is the context within which, in 1969, Jane Roe (a pseudonym), with the support of her legal team, successfully argued the right to abortion, despite Texan law only allowing the procedure if her life was at risk. District attorney Henry Wade appealed the ruling to SCOTUS, where he lost 2–7, with the court ruling that Roe's right to privacy extended to her right to abortion. This built on a previous 1965 ruling, *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which overturned two laws that banned contraception, again because of privacy rights.^{xx}

Although *Roe v. Wade* did protect the right to abortion, its privacy focus was a negative interpretation, and the ruling gave each state significant leeway in choosing how it would legislate. This leeway would soon be exploited by a Christian right movement that would come to exercise significant power within the US political terrain. Initially, many religious groups weren't particularly concerned with the liberalisation of abortion rights. One 1973 news document from a Baptist church states that “although the Roman Catholic Hierarchy insists the Supreme Court blundered...most other religious bodies and leaders, who have expressed themselves, approve the decision,” continuing, “social, welfare and civil rights workers hailed the decision with enthusiasm.”^{xxi} According to Katherine Stewart, what an emerging 'New Right' did care about was preserving segregated schooling. But such an unpopular platform would never galvanise the support they sought in order to topple Jimmy Carter's Democratic presidency, so they chose an anti-abortion platform. She explains:

Abortion turned out to be the critical unifying issue for two fundamentally political reasons. First, it brought together conservative Catholics who supplied much of the intellectual leadership of the movement with conservative Protestants and evangelicals. Second, by tying abortion to the perceived social ills of the age—the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, and women's liberation—the issue became a focal point for the anxieties about social change welling up from the base.^{xxii}

The tactic of this now anti-abortion Christian right was to change society one legal reform at a time. And so they began to carve away at abortion rights (and later other fundamental rights) through what are sometimes called TRAP (targeted regulation of abortion providers) laws. TRAP laws feign concern for pregnant people but are ultimately designed to create the maximum level of disruption possible. Examples include unnecessary pause periods, tight gestational limits, and/or the insistence that doctors have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals even though these would rarely be needed. When people have resources, these barriers are discriminatory and hugely inconvenient; when people are financially and/or time poor, live in coercive circumstances, are disabled, and/or are impacted by borders, these barriers can be insurmountable. Although many TRAP laws were struck

down, each one was introduced with one eye on a successful SCOTUS. In 2021, Texas implemented *Senate Bill 8*, or the heartbeat law, which effectively banned abortion at six weeks. When this was appealed to the SCOTUS, it was allowed to stand despite clearly violating the constitutional right to abortion. However, it was the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organisation* ruling that, in June 2022, eventually overturned *Roe* and also *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, arguing both cases were wrong to provide constitutional protection.

These court rulings didn't happen in isolation but rather went hand in glove with political decisions that also chipped away at reproductive rights. In 1976, the Republican Party deliberately adopted an anti-abortion platform as a tactic that would enable them to grow their base amongst catholic and social conservative voters.^{xxiii} That same year, the US House of Representatives passed the *Hyde Amendment*, which blocked the use of federal funds for abortions for certain insurance policy holders including those enrolled in Medicaid, a scheme used by many poorer people, especially women of colour.^{xxiv} In 1984, Ronald Reagan introduced the global gag rule (or the Mexico City Policy), which banned overseas charities in receipt of US funding from providing or promoting abortion services. This was despite the fact that, while he was governor of California, Reagan had signed off on some of the most liberal abortion reforms in US history.^{xxv} To give you a flavour of the impact of the global gag rule, one Ugandan-based study directly linked it to an increase in unwanted pregnancies because of the loss of community healthcare workers.^{xxvi} This is in a country where 75 percent of abortions are unsafe due to legal restrictions and where there is severe abortion morbidity and mortality.^{xxvii}

Democrats have been quick to point out that all five of the nine unelected US Supreme Court justices who overturned *Roe* were appointed by Republican presidents. This is true.^{xxviii} It is also true that Bill Clinton was the first president to openly support abortion rights. He lifted several restrictions on abortion and supported laws to protect healthcare workers, who were frequently under attack when doing their jobs. Clinton also removed the global gag rule, as did Obama and Biden. But these presidents (especially Obama) had ample time to introduce the political reforms needed to codify *Roe v. Wade*, which means passing a law that would give people the right to abortion without government restrictions and in a way that didn't depend on a privacy ruling.

Furthermore, Hilary Clinton, the Democrat's poster girl for reproductive rights, has consistently promoted a platform of 'safe, legal, but rare,' a message that fuels moral ambiguity and ensures ongoing stigma.

Clinton's stance succinctly reveals the Democratic Party's unwavering support for an individualised choice paradigm, an approach that is also preferred by liberal feminists. There are a number of problems with this individualist rhetoric, one of which is that it absolves politicians of their role in creating the conditions within which reproductive options exist. 'My body, my choice' may be a catchy sound bite that holds weight in describing the very personal nature of bodily autonomy, but it fails to illuminate the impacts of forced migration, poverty, and the absence of contraception, and the influence of precarious housing and/or employment in a person's decision-making. It also ignores how abortions typically increase during periods of austerity and socio-economic difficulty and how reproductive oppressions disproportionately impact racialised people, who already have worse maternal and neonatal health outcomes because of structural racism within healthcare. In fact, the now popular 'reproductive justice framework' created by Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice (WADRJ) in 1994 was conceived of in direct opposition to the Clinton administration's approach to reproductive healthcare. WADRJ also justifiably criticised the mainstream feminist movement for its failure to challenge the racist, neoliberal state.

Nothing much has changed in the intervening years. Joe Biden's principal response to the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* was to try to galvanise votes for Democrats in the upcoming midterm elections. Meanwhile, Nancy Pelosi clung to her power base by shedding tears for *Roe* while continuing to support an anti-abortion Democratic candidate.^{xxix} The Democratic Party's failure to act clearly parallels the situation in Ireland, where, although claiming to be pro-choice for years, the Irish Labour Party did little to advance this when in government.

What do we do?

Ideally, there should be no laws about abortion. The same general healthcare guidelines that ensure informed consent and safe, supportive environments should be the only rules. Prescriptive authority should be extended to pharmacists, midwives, and auxiliary nurses, and conscientious objection should be banned. This is because refusal of care privileges the rights of the healthcare

worker over a person's right to access a service they are legally entitled to. Perhaps most importantly, we must locate reproductive healthcare in its socio-economic circumstances and demand widespread social supports for individuals, families, and communities.

As Lola Olufemi puts it, 'Perhaps the greatest trick of recent history has been to convince women that the state cares for their wellbeing.'^{xxx} These aspirations will never be delivered by neoliberal politicians and the liberal feminists that support them. Instead, they cut care and welfare supports, thereby exponentially increasing private reproductive labour, most of which is undertaken by women. This hollowing out of state supports concretises the patriarchal family as the normative form of kinship, despite mountains of evidence, even from the United Nations,^{xxxi} that the heteronormative family is the most dangerous place a woman can be.

The logic of this commitment to the patriarchal family is based first and foremost on its being an economic unit. Its function in capitalist society is twofold: Firstly, the family is the principal provider of care through a model whereby mostly one parent, typically the mother, stays at home for all or part of the working week. Privileged families often outsource this care labour by hiring low-paid, mostly migrant women either within their own homes or at childcare facilities. The second function of the family is to ensure the generational flow of material inheritance, a mechanism that presents a significant obstacle to financial equality. These essential functions—the provision of care and the protection of wealth—explain why politicians who claim to support church-state separations turn a blind eye to the impact of the Christian right's crusade to maintain the heteronormative family—a crusade they call 'family values' and which justifies their waging war on women and LGBTQI+ people. The Christian right's vision of the world may be different to that espoused by secular politicians, but it is their shared dependence on the family unit that creates sufficient grounds for a coalition and which explains why so little is done to advance the radical reforms needed to protect reproductive rights. People do have the right to oppose abortion, but this right must cease when it meets another person's right to bodily autonomy.

Change happened in Ireland because of mass mobilisations, strikes, artistic protest, acts of civil disobedience, and targeted court interventions, and abortion was legalised in spite of, not because of, the politicians in power. As my book *Repealed; Ireland's*

unfinished fight for reproductive rights explains, politicians only supported the movement when public opinion was overwhelmingly on the side of change, and they continue to drag their heels in reforming Irish law. As a result, pro-choice activists must continue to agitate through marches and other demonstrations as they seek fundamental improvements in the quality of our law and the availability of services both north and south of the border. Ireland isn't an isolated case. In Argentina, it was the Ni Una Menos (not one less) movement which pushed for, and won, access to abortion despite significant and sustained opposition by the Catholic Church. In the UK, grassroots feminist organisations, including Sister Supporter and Back off Scotland, continue to fight for much needed exclusion zones outside abortion providers amidst increases in vigil-type anti-abortion demonstrations that deter doctors and shame service-users.^{xxxii}

It is the mass protests that have swept the streets of the US, and not the empty promises made by politicians, that will win back abortion rights. These protests have, at times, been backed by the labour movement and it is positive step that union leaders within the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) have described recent events as 'a devastating blow to working women and families' and 'a reckless decision.'^{xxxiii} As we join together, our politics must centre those most impacted by current restrictions and our demands must be much more ambitious than the liberal choice paradigm's singular issue of abortion. Standing firm on reproductive justice objectives, the right to have, or not have, children and the right to parent in a safe, supportive environment, means thinking collectively as well as structurally. It means building rebellious movements that expose capitalism's reliance on exploitative, patriarchal reproductive labour and see it for what it is—the linchpin of capitalism's own survival.

If you are in America and you need an abortion contact AidAccess by emailing info@aidaccess.org who will direct you about how to buy pills online. To find out about your options in Ireland call the Alliance for Choice abortion doulas on 07397, 902774.

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ⁱ Kissling, 2017, p. 1–2.

ⁱⁱ Riddle, 1992, pp. 4–7.

ⁱⁱⁱ Potts & Campbell, 2002.

^{iv} Kissling, 2017.

^v WHO, 2021.

^{vi} Guttmacher Institute, 2022.

^{vii} WHO, 2022, p. 12.

^{viii} Cheung, 2022.

^{ix} Centre for Reproductive Rights, 2021.

^x Cited in Mahdawi, 2022

^{xi} Proudman, 2022.

^{xii} Carroll, 2022

^{xiii} Matsilele, 2022.

^{xiv} Finer & Hassian, 2013.

^{xv} Solinger, 2005, p. 7.

^{xvi} Hovey, 1985.

^{xvii} Dynak, Weitz, Joffe, Stewart, & Arons, 2003.

^{xviii} Schoen, 2005.

^{xix} Reagan, 1997.

^{xx} It was a similar Irish right to marital privacy ruling in *McGee v. The Attorney General* that spearheaded the creation of the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign (PLAC), which successfully campaigned to insert an abortion ban into the Irish constitution.

^{xxi} Baptist Press, 1973.

^{xxii} Stewart, 2022.

^{xxiii} Williams, 2011, p. 514.

^{xxiv} National Partnership for Women and Families, 2019.

^{xxv} This was through the *Therapeutic Reform Act* (1967).

^{xxvi} Giorgio, et al., 2020.

^{xxvii} Atuhairwe, et al., 2021.

^{xxviii} Clarence Thomas by George H.W. Bush in 1991 and Samuel Alito by George W. Bush in 2006. Neil Gorsuch (2017), Brett Kavanaugh (2018), and Amy Coney-Barrett (2020) were all appointed by Donald Trump.

^{xxix} Tracey, 2022.

^{xxx} Olufemi, 2020, p. 25.

^{xxxi} United Nations, 2018.

^{xxxii} Lowe and Page, 2022.

^{xxxiii} Mueller & Niedzwiadek, 2022.



Arthur Griffith: Reactionary Father of the Free State

Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh

In 1910, Arthur Griffith's *Sinn Féin* carried a review of James Connolly's *Labour in Irish History*, repeating the well-rehearsed criticism of the material conception of history that in making sense of the past, one factor (class) cannot dominate the others since 'the skein of human affairs is too complex to be unravelled by any system so simple.' Griffith had 'no hesitation' in warning 'that class war in Ireland,' as promulgated by Connolly, 'would destroy every vestige of the possibility of restoring our nationhood.' In short, for Griffith, Connolly's book strove not to 'present a scientific analysis of our history and its relation to the labour question,' but 'to propagate the socialistic idea.'¹ His criticism rang hollow, however, considering the dominant factor in his own worldview — the imagined community of an Irish nation, the irrational foundation for the castles in the air Griffith conjured across a quarter century of public life.

A century after his death, this article offers a necessary corrective to the analysis contained in two recent biographies of Griffith. The most recent, from Colum Kenny, labelled Griffith an enigma.² Yet the intellectual inconsistency that typified his prolific journalism make Griffith's politics mysterious only if we insist on situating him within the Enlightenment tradition rather than reactionary nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anti-humanism. Irish nationalism is commonly understood as a battle between moral and physical force, as defined by Daniel O'Connell in the early decades of the Union. But this is a false dichotomy, and one that obscures a far more fluid and appropriate definition. The Irish nationalism that emerged in the modern period as a reaction against colonialism encompassed not only the liberal and radical strands of the Enlightenment but also included the anti-humanist irrationalism of the right.

In an earlier and more problematic biography, Owen McGee positions Griffith as champion of a secular, French-style Irish republic promoting economic development; he's depicted as an heir to the lost Irish

Republican Brotherhood [IRB] tradition, the 'democratic and republican social ideal' outlined in McGee's earlier study of the IRB.³ For McGee, Griffith combined the French *code civile* and the German banking tradition to imagine a nation state that promoted the native entrepreneur at the expense of foreign profiteers. Pointing to Griffith's concern for the poor and promotion of self-improvement, McGee aims to redeem him from a reputation as a conservative. A problem emerges, however, when we read what Griffith actually wrote, assess where he ended up, and above all, when we delve into McGee's conspiratorial analysis, which contends that Ireland's private sector, with British connivance, fomented the civil war 'to ensure that the London-centred dynamics of the economy could not be altered. For a long time, many in Ireland suspected that this was a reason for the existence of so-called republican undergrounds in the country.' In McGee's vivid imagination, such British agents included Ernie O'Malley — whose 'escape to America' the British allegedly facilitated — and Erskine Childers, who apparently launched the tradition of IRA-Marxist analyses of labour politics in perpetual opposition to the idea of an Irish state-directed economy.⁴ Apparently, Childers and O'Malley were spies, and Griffith's republicanism was subverted by British intrigue!

While Kenny's more recent analysis doesn't require recourse to the tinfoil hat, its conclusions are equally questionable. For Kenny, Griffith emerges as a consistent democrat and a consummate pragmatist, hung out to dry by lesser men (de Valera looms large) who lacked the acumen and courage to concede on partition and the unattainable (but thrice democratically sanctioned) Republic. Griffith stands as the 'father of us all,' who laid the foundation of the successful Irish state that emerged from the imbroglio of civil war. Kenny seems oblivious to the problem that his homage to Griffith's ideological influence on Sinn Féin and Irish-Ireland implicates him as progenitor of the illiberal, chauvinistic, conservative authoritarianism that typified the narrow minds of the early Free State élite.⁵

Kenny goes to great pains to rehabilitate Griffith, excusing his racism, antisemitism, and antipathy to trade unions by pointing to his association with figures like James Joyce and Connolly and highlighting his support for Zionism and sympathy for the poor. Here, unfortunately, Kenny handles concepts of race and class like a child uses crayons. His lazy conclusion that a

supporter of Zionism couldn't be an anti-Semite might impress readers in British Labour Party HQ or Trump's embassy in Jerusalem but hardly convinces as historical argument. Griffith remained a national chauvinist and petit-bourgeois reactionary whose politics and social thought channelled the irrationalism and anti-humanist philosophy of the continental radical right through the prism of Ireland's colonial history.

In 1913—the year he sided firmly with Church and capital *against* Dublin's poor—Griffith penned the foreword to an edition of his hero John Mitchel's *Jail Journal*, vociferously defending Mitchel's support for slavery by rejecting the 'inalienable right of every human being to life, liberty, and happiness.' Griffith credits Mitchel for pointing out 'to the dupes of this cant that no human being ever had or could have such inalienable right.' In his rendering, Mitchel stood tall in the nationalist pantheon as pioneer in 'the essential work of dissevering...Irish independence from theories of humanitarianism and universalism.' Irish nationalists, therefore, needed no excuse in 'declining to hold the negro his peer in right. When the Irish nation needs explanation or apology for John Mitchel,' he wrote, 'the Irish nation will need its shroud.' In short, Griffith rejected 'theories of human perfectibility and equality,' professing a hatred for 'the altruism which sees in the criminal a brother to be coaxed, not a rogue to be lashed.' He lionised Mitchel as 'a sane Nietzsche in his view of man,' adding that 'the right of the Irish to political independence never was, is not, and never can be dependent upon the admission of equal right in all other peoples. It is based on no theory of, and dependable in no wise for its existence or justification on the "Rights of Man".'⁶

Humanism represents a universalist position, acknowledging commonality in our shared nature: it holds that our rationality and sociability permit humanity to overcome the constraints of nature—to make progress. Modern science has of course confirmed this, with all of humanity sharing 99.9 percent of our DNA. There can therefore be no scientific justification for racism or, indeed, for any racial categorisation. Yet, Irish nationalism encompassed competing tendencies—from liberal and radical humanism on one side (each tracing its origins to the Enlightenment, but with very different emphases in terms of the thorny issues of progress, civilisation, or colonialism) to, on the other, a chauvinistic, occasionally racialised, and reactionary nationalism. 'Antihumanism rejected ideas of equality and

human unity, celebrating instead difference and divergence, and exalting the particular and the authentic over the universal.'⁷ It is not difficult to gauge where Griffith fell on this spectrum: he concluded his foreword by insisting that 'he who holds Ireland a nation...no more commits himself to the theory that black equals white, that kingship is immoral, or that society has a duty to reform its enemies than he commits himself to the belief that sunshine is extractable from cucumbers.'⁸

Early life, journalism, and anti-Semitism

Born into a mixed marriage in 1871, Arthur Griffith followed his father into the printing trade but was brought up in his mother's Catholicism. An autodidact, he joined the IRB and, like most, sided with the Parnellites during the split. Griffith moved to South Africa in 1897, where he worked as a newspaper editor and then in gold mining. There he developed a strong affinity for the Boers, before returning to Dublin in 1898 to co-launch the *United Irishman*, named after the paper of his idol. Like Mitchel and the Boers, Griffith was a racist. His role in the 1798 centenary and later associations with Fenians and socialists occluded the marked divergence in their politics. In 1897, for instance, James Connolly and Maud Gonne collaborated in protesting Queen Victoria's Jubilee by throwing a coffin inscribed with 'The British Empire' into the Liffey. This incident helped spark a revival of radical nationalism centring on protests surrounding the Jubilee, the 1798 Centenary celebrations, nationalist support for the Boers, and then opposition to two royal visits in 1900 and 1903. Here Marxist internationalist and reactionary populist sheltered under the separatist umbrella. Yet each held diametrically opposite views on a parallel controversy raging in the Third French Republic.

In 1899, Alfred Dreyfus, a former Alsatian artillery officer of Jewish descent, returned to France from imprisonment on Devil's Island to face his second trial for espionage. Dreyfus had been wrongly convicted five years earlier for passing secrets to the German Embassy in Paris. Then, after becoming aware of his innocence in 1896, the French Army suppressed new evidence and concocted false documents to maintain his prior false conviction. The new trial divided French society between pro-republican, anti-clerical Dreyfusards and the mostly Catholic, reactionary right.⁹ Griffith and Gonne stood firmly in the latter camp, while Connolly canvassed Jewish support in the 1902 Dublin municipal elections by publishing leaflets in Yiddish, which proclaimed,

You ought to vote for the Socialist candidate and only for the Socialist candidate. The Socialists are the only ones who stand always and everywhere against every national oppression. It is the Socialists who went out onto the streets of Paris against the wild band of anti-Semites at the time of the Dreyfus case.¹⁰

Griffith, however, gravitated to the populist, anti-Semitic, ultra-nationalism of the anti-Dreyfusard, Boulangist tendency, an outlook shared by his friend Gonne. Indeed, Griffith later horsewhipped Ramsay Colles, editor of the *Irish Figaro*, for insulting her.¹¹ His *United Irishman* sought to draw a distinction between the ‘Dublin reptile journals’ that tacitly sided with the Dreyfusards and its own ‘patriotic’ position, which labelled Dreyfus a Judas Iscariot with ‘the brand of traitor on his brow.’¹²

In one lurid description of a mass meeting in London’s Hyde Park, the *United Irishman* condemned the coalition of ‘wild, savage, filthy’ Jews that swarmed ‘from the Yiddish ghetto of Whitechapel’ and their ‘loving comrades’ in the ‘mob of blathering English agitators, non-conformist tub thumpers, and radical ranters.’ Noting the ‘phenomenal ugliness and dirt’ of the Jews, who came ‘out of their East End dens at the summons of their rabbis,’ the piece concluded that ‘if they hated France, it was also evident that they detested soap and water still more acutely.’ The tone and reactionary politics earned a rebuke from Connolly’s *Workers’ Republic*.¹³

The United Irishman consistently promoted an international conspiracy between the British Empire and Jewish finance. In a Boulangist vein, the paper lambasted France’s ‘rotten parliamentarianism,’ which bent to ‘the underhand diplomacy of England’ and the ‘corruption of the Jew.’ Griffith then turned his spleen to South Africa, where the former Liberal prime minister Rosebery acted the part of ‘a worthy son-in-law of Jew Rothschild, to hound on the dogs of war against the free [Boer] Republics, which bar the way to the Jew-Jingo brigands of the gold mines of Johannesburg.’ Such organs called for war ‘with the unanimity with which Iscariot and company called out for Barabbas.’¹⁴ Indeed, Griffith later confided to historian Alice Stopford Green that ‘I equally distrust and dislike the British Liberal with the British Tory.’¹⁵ In short, the paper consistently challenged the influence wielded by ‘the innumerable Anglo-Jew organs of London’ and the wider press ‘throughout Europe and America, wherever the Jew capitalist has got a grip.’ All swelled ‘the chorus of the Jingo blood cry against the free republics of South Africa’ in a ‘universal outburst of the

Jew swindledum [sic.] in the service of the pirate empire.’¹⁶ Griffith’s paranoid fantasies would shortly fuel a public defence of anti-Semitic violence in Ireland itself.

In 1903, Michael Davitt published *Within the Pale*, which detailed the Kishinev Pogrom, when predecessors of the notorious Tsarist black hundreds murdered over three thousand Jews. Fleeing the pogrom and its aftermath, around 150 Lithuanian refugees settled in Limerick. Griffith had already condemned Jewish peddlers in Ireland, but he unleashed a torrent of anti-Semitic tropes in January 1904, when a sermon by local Redemptorist priest, Fr. John Creagh, incited two hundred of his flock to attack Jewish families concentrated in present-day Wolfe Tone Street. Davitt accused Creagh of ‘preaching a cowardly vendetta of anti-Semitic prejudice,’¹⁷ but Griffith immediately leapt to Creagh’s defence, asking how any patriotic Irish person can view without apprehension the continuous influx of Jews into Ireland and the continuous efflux of the native population, the stalwart men and bright-eyed women of our race pass from our land in a never ending stream, and in their place we are getting strange people, alien to us in thought, alien to us in sympathy, from Russia, Poland, Germany and Austria, people who come to live amongst us, but who never become of us... Mr Davitt’s sympathy for the Jew is credible to his good heart, but our sympathy—insular, perhaps, it may be—goes only to our countryman the artisan whom the Jew deprives of the means of livelihood, to our countryman the trader whom he ruins in business by unscrupulous methods, to our countryman the farmer whom he draws into his usurer’s toils and drives to the workhouse or across the water. In short, our sympathy is so much drained by that dreary weekly procession of our flesh and blood out of Ireland that we have none left to bestow on the weekly procession of aliens coming in.¹⁸

Creagh intervened again in March, and in April Limerick’s Jews suffered a further forty attacks. The same month, Griffith applauded Limerick citizens’ efforts to free ‘themselves from the octopus grip of the Jewish usurers, who were swarming into this country to prey upon its people.’¹⁹ Creagh then called for a boycott, which lasted until October, when only six Jewish families remained.²⁰ Once more, Griffith offered whole-hearted support for the boycott, asking what ‘greater “persecution” could be inflicted upon the Jew as to prohibit him taking his pound of flesh?’ For Griffith, ‘in all countries and in all Christian ages,’ the Jew was a ‘grinder of the poor,’ ‘usurer and parasite of industry.’

who ‘produces no wealth himself,’ but ‘draws it from others.’ The only exception was the ‘honest and patriotic’ Zionist, who did not propagate the ‘great Jewish humbug of “persecution,”’ which went ‘merrily and profitably on since the coward fear of the Jewish money bags restrains the journalist and the politician from exposing the fraud.’²¹

In the next issue of the *United Irishman*, regular contributor Frederick Ryan—an anti-imperialist journalist and a founding member of Connolly’s ISRP—took exception to Griffith’s previous claim that if you ‘attack a Jew—other than a Zionist Jew—all Jewry comes to his assistance,’ denouncing it as ‘the very spirit of race prejudice’ since it condemned ‘conduct in another race which we applaud in our own.’ In line with Connolly’s previous criticism, Ryan drew a parallel between Griffith’s position and

that of continental reactionary parties. It may seem good tactics on the part of corrupt militarists and capitalists to set [the world’s problems] at the heels of the rich Jews. But the cause of true liberty has nothing to gain by being associated with such tricks, and the very personnel of the parties who resort to them ought to warn us of their objects.

Ryan preferred to ‘fight for liberty as liberty and put down capitalist greed as capitalist greed but let us resolutely shut our eyes to questions of race and creed, which are only raised by these reactionaries to create disorder in the camp of progress.’²²

Griffith retorted that he had not attacked the Jew for ‘his creed or his beliefs—it has solely to do with his character and actions.’ He repeated his defence of Creagh, arguing that both Ryan and Davitt had quoted the priest selectively, before adding that ‘we heartily commend his advice to Irish men to keep the Jewish moneylender, the Jewish peddler with his deferred payment system, and the Jewish sweater with his cheap wears at arm’s length.’

The first Sinn Féin

While Griffith exposed his reactionary politics during the Limerick pogrom, he was also formulating the Sinn Féin policy for which he would become famous. Griffith founded the National Council in 1903 to campaign for an independent Irish legislature under a dual monarchy—a deliberate throwback to Grattan’s Parliament and the Act of Renunciation of 1782, which, Griffith argued inaccurately, meant that Britain had no right to legislate

for Ireland. In late 1904, his *Resurrection of Hungary* (based on a series of articles earlier that year) cited the equally spurious continental precedent for dual monarchy in the Budapest parliament of 1867. The book, however, sold five thousand copies and sparked a lively national debate. More practically, Griffith outlined a policy of passive resistance, which would see abstentionist Irish MPs taking up positions in a native assembly while boycotting all British judicial and state institutions, and which advocated the purchase of Irish manufactured goods and the demand to burn everything English but their coal.

When a libel action forced the *United Irishman*’s closure in April 1906, Griffith immediately launched *Sinn Féin*, which would receive financial support from the IRB and Joseph McGarrity, the treasurer of the Clan na Gael, in particular. Indeed, the Clan effectively financed *Sinn Féin* as a daily paper between August 1909 and the fateful January 1910 General Election that handed the balance of power at Westminster to Redmond’s Home Rulers. Not for the last time, Griffith’s location within the separatist milieu allied him with republicans whose universalist outlook and aspirations for a democratic republic made for uncomfortable bedfellows. While McGarrity and a cohort of young Northerners looked to Tone and 1798 as their point of origin, Griffith harkened to Grattan, Flood, and 1782. When these neo-Fenians championed Fintan Lalor’s demand to undo the conquest, Griffith lionised Mitchel, and while they emphasised Davitt and Devoy’s input into the New Departure, for Griffith, Parnell remained the uncrowned king.

McGarrity and Devoy directed the IRB’s attempt to subvert constitutional nationalism through the Dungannon Clubs, formed by Denis McCullough and Bulmer Hobson in 1905 in Belfast. Both believed the National Council had declined into a mere electioneering body in municipal politics and the ‘Dublin crowd’ needed to be driven ‘back onto the advanced nationalist track.’²³ Pessimistic about the chances of armed struggle, this generation of young republicans (which also included Seán Mac Diarmada) adopted *Sinn Féin* as a vehicle for achieving a republic through passive resistance, endorsing its call for Irish MPs to abstain from Westminster in favour of a national parliament. Thus they stripped Griffith’s programme of its monarchical baubles, concentrating on the policy as a non-insurrectionary means for achieving complete independence.

By April 1907, the Dungannon Clubs merged with another separatist group to form the Sinn Féin League, while Griffith's National Council remained aloof. Indeed, Belfast Quaker and Dungannon Club founding member Hobson later described the Hungarian policy as Fintan Lalor's moral insurrectionary 'policy of 1847 come home with a foreign dress and a foreign prestige.'²⁴

We were violently attacked by...parliamentarians, who accused Griffith of falsifying Hungarian history. I was much too busy to find out if Griffith's account was entirely accurate or not, but I declared at public meetings that the issue was not one of accuracy or inaccuracy about Hungarian history, but whether the policy of abstention was the right one for the Irish people to pursue.²⁵

In fact, the National Council did not amalgamate with the Sinn Féin League until August 1907, under pressure from Clan na Gael and two months after the Irish Party MP for North Leitrim, Charles Dolan, converted to Griffith's programme. Dolan sought re-election, and the resulting contest exposed Griffith's political limitations. Writing in retrospect, Fermanagh Sinn Féiner Cahir Healy claimed that during the 1908 by-election, when Dolan only secured a quarter of the vote, Griffith's dry account of economic statistics and Hungarian history at an election rally led one local Sinn Féiner to advise Healy to 'send home the wee bloke with his goggles and his figures.'²⁶

As the Sinn Féin policy's architect, Griffith's racist attitudes also undermined republican solidarity with non-White anti-imperial movements, particularly in India and Egypt. Richard Davis argues that, like Mitchel, Griffith over-reacted to 'the popular nineteenth-century English and American nativist belief in the Irishman as a white nigger' and, in response, adopted 'an aristocratic conception of Irish liberty akin to that of the Greek, Roman and American slaveholders.'²⁷ Similarly, Griffith's attachment to '82ism—the reintroduction of the Lords and Commons of Ireland under the British crown—embarrassed Northern republicans. Griffith may have felt a keen sense of 'affronted proprietorship' at the Sinn Féin League's use of *his* brand name, even though the term originated in the Gaelic League. He had a poor relationship with Hobson, which deteriorated further when McGarrity chose the young Belfast man as spokesperson on the 1907 American tour. As late as April 1909, Patrick McCartan—McGarrity's Irish 'eyes and ears' and a fellow Carrickmore man—remarked that 'Griffith has no *gradh* for any of us northerners or the Americans.'²⁸

While republicans sought to remain outside parliamentary politics, Griffith's faction attempted to come to an arrangement with William O'Brien (whom Griffith had previously criticised for his attachment through marriage to Jewish gold). O'Brien had left the Irish Parliamentary Party, politically and physically bruised by attacks from Belfast Hibernians at the February 1909 'Baton Convention.' He established the Cork-based All-for-Ireland League (AFIL), with Tim Healy the political mouthpiece of the Catholic hierarchy and business elite led by William Martin Murphy. Griffith's initiative was defeated at the December 1909 Sinn Féin Convention, but he had clearly signalled both his attraction to the Healyites and his alienation from the republicans in Sinn Féin.²⁹ In 1910, McCartan directly linked Griffith's 'intrigues with O'Brien and the moderate men' with his earlier resentment at opposition from the Young Turks: 'You see everything was directed to carry off the O'Brien deal and Hobson was supposed to be in the way just as the Dungannon Clubs were in the way of the new Repeal movement.'³⁰

By 1910, with Redmond holding the balance of power at Westminster, the Irish Party could easily rebuke calls for abstention. For the IRB, the Sinn Féin policy was dead. The young cadre then staged a coup against the ageing Fenian leadership, receiving financial support from McGarrity and guidance from Tom Clarke, who had returned to Ireland from the USA in December 1907. Between 1910 and 1912, this group took over the IRB and initiated a decidedly republican (and eventually insurrectionary) strategy. This takeover revolved around control of the new Fenian paper, *Irish Freedom*, an explicitly republican and anti-imperialist challenger to Griffith's ailing *Sinn Féin*, which McGarrity had stopped funding. *Irish Freedom* carried Fintan Lalor's famous invocation in every issue: Not to repeal the Union, then, but to repeal the Conquest—not to disturb or dismantle the empire, but to abolish it forever—not to fall back on '82 but act up to '48—not to resume or restore an old constitution, but to found a new nation, and raise up a free people.³¹ The contrast with Griffith's dual monarchy and his fetishisation of Grattan's Parliament could not have been clearer.

The first Sinn Féin fractured due to tensions between universalist republicans and 'creatures' in Dublin prepared to 'grovel at the feet of Arthur Griffith.'³² By 1910, McCartan predicted that 'the men who make movements a success' in Ireland 'will not in the future

have confidence in Griffith on account of his intrigues with O'Brien.³³ The evidence suggests that 1910 also marked Griffith's final estrangement from the IRB. McCartan wrote McGarrity in October that Griffith had 'resigned from the Family Business' as 'he would not confer with his brothers' and 'was getting a swelled head and thought he carried all the brains in the country. He was rude to everybody and was always quarrelling.'³⁴

Griffith's violent chauvinism, his Anglophobia, and petit-bourgeois irrationalism conjured the febrile dream of a twenty-million-strong, Gaelic-speaking autarky that underpinned his politics across two decades of public life. This irrational basis to his separatism facilitated the breach with republicans, but his elevation of indigenous capital as the bedrock of his future nation state meant that alongside breaking with the 'men who make movements a success' in the IRB, Griffith viciously attacked and slandered the emerging trade union movement as a threat to social harmony and future national prospects—a convenient position for any propagandist attempting to form an alliance with the political representatives of William Martin Murphy and the Catholic hierarchy.

Labour, Larkin, and lockout

The same year as the Leitrim by-election (1908), the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) emerged as an indigenous general union for Ireland's army of 'unskilled' workers. Griffith responded by waging an incessant propaganda war against its leader, 'Big' Jim Larkin. Writing from the US ahead of his return as ITGWU organiser in 1910, James Connolly publicly dismantled the platform of his 'friend' Arthur Griffith. Shortly after the Leitrim by-election, Connolly 'heartily agreed' with the Sinn Féin doctrine which teaches the 'Irish people to rely upon themselves, and upon themselves alone, and teaches them also that dependence upon forces outside themselves... will ever be disastrous in its results.' Indeed, Connolly criticised some doctrinaire socialists (like his colleague Frederick Ryan) for their antipathy to the language revival on the grounds of internationalism: 'Nations which submit to conquest or races which abandon their language in favour of that of an oppressor do so, not because of altruistic motives, or because of a love of the brotherhood of man, but from a slavish and cringing spirit.' Connolly went on to dismantle Griffith's '82ism, arguing that legislative independence 'left untouched the power of oppression, political and economic.' Grattan's Parliament had been 'as alien to the Irish people as the Council of the

Governor-General of India is alien to the Indian people.' He paraphrased 'Fintan Lalor's masterly argument upon this subject'—namely that "'this is not 1782, this is 1908," and every political or social movement which hopes for success must express itself in terms of present conditions, or on the lines of future developments.'³⁵

The following year, Connolly again praised Sinn Féin's policy of self-reliance but criticised Griffith's economic platform for 'appeal[ing] only to those who measure a nation's prosperity by the volume of wealth produced in a country, instead of by the distribution of that wealth amongst the inhabitants.'

Hence, when a Sinn Féiner waxes eloquent about restoring the Constitution of '82, but remains silent about the increasing industrial despotism of the capitalist; when the Sinn Féiner speaks to men who are fighting against low wages and tells them that the Sinn Féin body has promised lots of Irish labour at low wages to any foreign capitalist who wishes to establish in Ireland, what wonder if they come to believe that a change from Toryism to Sinn Féinism would simply be a change from the devil they do know to the devil they do not know!³⁶

As Emmet O'Connor has succinctly put it, 'The root of Larkinism lay in employer hostility to the unionisation of unskilled workers.'³⁷ This had been the crux of the Belfast Dockers' and Carters' strike in 1907, and—despite the appalling backdrop of Dublin's tenements and the titanic personality clash between Larkin and Martin Murphy—the right to combine remained the core issue in the monumental 1913 Lockout. In response, Griffith promoted a corporatist position akin to the continental radical right, which ignored the employers' intransigence and characterised the emerging ITGWU as foreign anarcho-syndicalists driven by an English dictator. In his lurid rendering, Larkin simultaneously promoted red ruin and his own financial well-being, all at the expense of Irish dupes.

As in the Limerick pogrom, Griffith positioned himself as the radical voice of truth, castigating the 'thousands too timid... no matter where the merits lay, to speak to the men with any voice but the voice of commendation for all their actions, lest they be denounced as a capitalists and supporters of capitalistic tyranny.' He insisted that *Sinn Féin* was 'the one journal in Dublin that capital has never been able to influence nor power to silence.' Nevertheless, 'as we have spoken to the capitalist, we shall speak to the working man and tell him that his duty to his class can

never transcend his duty to his country—the interests of Ireland are above the special interest of any of its classes.’ Within this conception,

the name of Irishman will never be secondary to the name of aristocrat or democrat, capitalist or labour, Catholic or Protestant, unionist or home ruler, while we live with a hand to write or a tongue to speak. This country shall never be divided into hostile camps of employer and employee... That they should be subject to the dictatorship of any man from England or elsewhere who sets up in business as a ‘labour leader’ is impossible if this country is to go on and prosper.³⁸

Griffith’s vitriolic denunciations of Larkin predated the lockout, and an analysis of his early editorials sheds light on his subsequent position. The 1911 Ironmongers’ Lockout in Wexford and a simultaneous ‘powerful and contentious demonstration of class solidarity’ on the railways had offered compelling evidence of the antagonism between universalists and chauvinists in the ranks of Sinn Féin. Like the Belfast employers, Wexford bosses refused to permit association between ‘unskilled’ workers. This time, however, rather than the British based National Union of Dockworkers, Larkin and his deputy—the leading Fenian P. T. Daly—promoted the ITGWU, which aimed for ‘an industrial commonwealth’ that would ‘obliterate poverty and help realise the glorious time spoken of and sung by the Thinkers, Prophets, and the Poets.’³⁹

Bridling under rampant inflation and stagnant wages, many Irish workers responded to the militant strike wave in Britain and across Europe by swelling the ranks of Larkin’s new union. When the ITGWU arrived in Wexford in August 1911, employers decided that ‘Larkin’s union had to be destroyed in its embryo stage.’⁴⁰ By the end of the month, almost seven hundred foundry men were locked out in a violent conflict that would last six months. In September, Griffith poured scorn on Larkin, whom he claimed demanded ‘no surrender on the question of the recognition of the Irish Transport Workers’ Union—that is the recognition of himself.’ In relation to calls by the British-based National Union of Railwaymen for sympathy strikes in Ireland, and with Larkin’s Liverpool origins in mind, Griffith concluded that ‘an Englishman whether he calls himself Tory or liberal, capitalist or socialist, is anything but an Englishman first and last—one for whom a ni**er is a ni**er, and an Irishman is only an Irishman.’⁴¹

In the following issue and, again, commenting on the railway strike, Griffith crowed that some Irish railwaymen had refused to go out on sympathy strikes, noting that ‘the English allies of Mr. James Larkin have shot their bolt and missed.’ In typical form, he continued that ‘the political union of Ireland with England was defined by a witty man as the union of the shark with its prey. The union of the Irish railwayman with the railwayman of England supplies another illustration for the definition.’ In short, like everything else that emanated from England, trade unionism was wicked: ‘The green flag has a lot of English fists shaken at it but waves today over the rout of the Auld enemy in his new dress.’⁴²

In a subsequent, important issue, Griffith rejected criticism from a correspondent that the Wexford dispute hinged on the men’s right to combine. Rather, Griffith stated that they should not join any union in which ‘Larkin is the boss and the prophet’ because the ITGWU ‘is intended to comprise *all* the unskilled workers of Ireland without distinction.’ Larkin hid behind the ‘mask of trade unionism...to cover the introduction of the syndicalism’ whose ‘weapon is a sympathetic strike’ and ‘methods terrorism’. The ITGWU, therefore, would ‘paralyse all trade and commerce and hold up all the activities of the country.’

As an alternative, Griffith promoted conciliatory native craft unions which would advance ‘the interests of Irish workingmen,’ thereby ‘maintaining harmony between employer and employed.’ This would also ‘form a solid barrier against the exploitation of this country by adventurers and doctrinaires whose ultimate message to man is to give up his God, his country, his family.’ In short, ‘against the red flag of communism,’ Griffith proposed that ‘we raise the flag of an Irish nation. Under that flag there will be protection, safety, and freedom for all. Tyranny, whether it be the tyranny of the capitalist or of the demagogic terrorist will find no shelter beneath the folds of the Irish nation’s flag.’⁴³ The depths of Griffith’s Anglophobia can be measured in his concurrent opposition to the National Insurance Act, since it ‘placed Irish mothers on the same level as English harlots’ and ‘virtuous Ireland’ should not ‘have to pay for English bastardy.’⁴⁴

The correspondent alluded to by Griffith was Éamonn Ceannt, who, ‘as an individual Sinn Féiner,’ sought to ‘disassociate’ himself ‘from the general tone of your recent pronouncements on the Wexford labour trouble.’ Ceannt criticised *Sinn Féin* for giving the ‘cold shoulder’

to 'the so-called lowest class in the social scale, the unskilled workers,' judging that Griffith agreed that the 'employers of Wexford have the right to dictate whether their men shall or shall not join a particular union.' Indeed, he noted that Griffith offered 'no condemnation of the employers' federation or is there one law for them and another for their servants?' Ceannt then admitted that his 'sympathies go out unreservedly to the men' who had an 'unquestioned and unquestionable right to organise', adding that 'neither the editor of *Sinn Féin* nor the employers have the right to dictate to them on that point.'

In answer to Griffith's chauvinism, Ceannt drew lines of affinity between Larkin and the Gaelic League, mentioning support for the ITGWU leader from fellow future 1916 leader Pádraig Pearse before arguing that Larkin was 'an Irishman who has founded in Ireland an Irish union governed by Irish men.' In a veiled attack on Griffith himself, he concluded that the ITGWU's 'methods may seem strange to those who are up in the clouds and give not half a thought to the cause of the labour volcanoes that are bursting forth all over the continent of Europe. But practical politics cannot afford to wait while these dreamers are awakened.'⁴⁵

The Wexford Lockout eventually ended in February 1912, with a partial victory for the ITGWU organiser, James Connolly. However, Griffith falsely maintained that the settlement resulted from the 'good work' of the Wexford priests, who in fact had consistently sided with the employers.⁴⁶ He then criticised Larkin, who sought to 'crown himself the dictator of the Irish working classes,' falsely claiming that the 'Wexford dupes' had abandoned the ITGWU and returned to work.⁴⁷ In fact, Connolly addressed a five-thousand-strong crowd on February 17th to celebrate the employers' concession allowing the formation of the Irish Foundry Workers' Union as an associate of the ITGWU: 'Despite the objections from the pulpit, the wielded baton, the political cold shoulders and the alien scabs. The Wexford lockout marked a victory for workers over the established pillars of Irish society.'⁴⁸ Rather than stand in solidarity with the workers, Griffith clearly lined up with the pillars.

As Ceannt's letter demonstrated, Griffith's hostility to Larkin and tacit support for the employers during the 1913 Lockout marked him out from other separatists who publicly backed the workers. In one piece, Griffith railed against claims that Larkin, 'the dictator of the Irish transport union,' was related to one of the Manchester Martyrs, before totally stripping the Fenian movement of

its socially radical and universalist content (so apparent in the 1867 Proclamation) by characterising Michael Larkin (Jim's namesake) as 'a simple Irish artisan who lived and died in the faith that the enemy' Ireland 'had to fight was not any section of itself, but the foreign government that has exploited, oppressed and impoverished this island.' He concluded that

Irish workingmen will be more exalted through the fact that they give the nation such men as Michael Larkin than they could be through all the shibboleths and fallacies of the Internationals whose conversion to admiration for Irish patriotism, when they found the sentiment too strong even in their own honest followers to be derided or ignored, is as sincere as the tears of the famous Carpenter for the fate of the oysters on whom he designed to sup.⁴⁹

Across his long journalistic career, Griffith promoted a corporatist outlook akin to future fascist models that propagated ideas of harmony among social classes, but which, in any country where it ever operated, ignored the reality of existing exploitative class relations, subordinated labour to capital, and typically fostered widespread corruption and cronyism. In short, Arthur Griffith was a reactionary.

The second Sinn Féin and the Irish Counter-Revolution

Griffith watched the Ulster Crisis and the rise of the Irish Volunteers from the political sidelines, content to oversee a moribund party, circulate his gad-fly journalism to an ever-diminishing readership, and pontificate on all matters political to an even smaller coterie of acolytes and drinking partners. His prior association with many within the IRB led some to label the Irish Volunteers the Sinn Féin Volunteers, a moniker many resented because of Griffith's politics and personality. When war broke out, Griffith opposed Redmond's recruiting call and the authorities banned *Sinn Féin*, which he replaced with the ingenious *Scissors & Paste*, which republished material that passed the war-time censor in different form. While he may have attended a meeting in September 1914 when Tom Clarke announced that a rising would take place before the end of the war, Griffith remained a revolutionary non-entity, apparently sent home from the GPO after volunteering at the beginning of Easter Week.⁵⁰

Yet, his internment and changing popular attitudes to the inaccurately named 'Sinn Féin Rising' once again brought Griffith to public prominence. Nevertheless, he had to

step aside as president in favour of de Valera at the new party's Ard Fheis in October 1917, because the first Sinn Féin now constituted a reactionary rump within a wider national liberation movement pledged to Easter Week. His earlier policy of passive resistance and abstention retained its prominence, however, but it was now linked to the enormous hostage to fortune that was Ireland's appeal to the Peace Conference. British victory in the war stripped the Peace Conference idea of any efficacy and Griffith himself recognised that its chief strength lay in assuaging popular anxiety about abandoning attendance at Westminster, envisaging that Sinn Féin would be permitted to do little more than 'stand on the stairs [of the conference] and harangue the world outside.'⁵¹

This begs the question as to why Griffith was allowed to regain prominence after his virtual exclusion from the 1916 Revolution. The first reason appears obvious: the post-Rising executions effectively eliminated the leadership cadre. A second is that the labour movement essentially excluded itself. Peadar O'Donnell recalled that at the establishment of Sinn Féin, 'nobody noticed that Connolly's chair was left vacant, that the place Connolly purchased for the organised labour movement in the independence struggle was being denied.'⁵² Through the abstention of the Irish Labour Party, under Tom Johnson and William O'Brien, the quarter-of-a-million-strong Irish trade union movement effectively abdicated its role within the revolutionary leadership. Yet, from 1917 to 1921, a genuinely popular mass mobilisation emerged, largely organic and island-wide (except for two and half northern counties), which exhibited regional variations and levels of intensity but was clearly directed towards full independence infused with concepts of social equality and revival. The 'great men' version of history ignores the reality that what emerged as the second Sinn Féin responded to rather than directed popular politics. Similarly, the Irish Revolution was 'ignited by international as well as national forces, [and] its outcome must also be assessed in terms of the arid postwar settlement that contributed to interwar fascism and authoritarianism.'

Various tendencies struggled to fill the post-1916 leadership vacuum, among them Griffith's rump. With a keen sense of the direction in which the political wind was blowing, the Healyite tendency also quickly jumped on the second Sinn Féin bandwagon. By early July 1917, with Sinn Féin's steady progress evident, the leading Healyite politician in Tyrone, George Murnaghan,

revealed to George Gavan Duffy that he favoured 'friendly co-operation with the advanced section' but was unsure if it was 'politic to ask for the establishment of an Irish Republic.' Nevertheless, he believed that his tendency should be 'on a controlling body as a steadying factor.'⁵³ Both men would subsequently serve, with Griffith, on the Irish delegation to London during the treaty talks. None ever lost a sense of where their class interests lay.

Both conservative factions (the dominant elitist and cynical Healyites and the supplicant chauvinistic and populist Graffities) were lifted and carried on a wave of mass republican enthusiasm that swept across the island. Indeed, Sinn Féin scored a landslide victory at the 1918 General Election, its manifesto leaving little doubt as to its anti-imperialist and republican intentions. Yet, the Griffith-Healyite incubus sowed the seeds of counter-revolution: their social status, education, existing profile, and prior record of collaboration meant that when the British came to negotiate, it was with elements of militant republicanism and an effective fifth column. Lord French recognised as much when he told the British cabinet in early 1919 that 'Sinn Féin itself was breaking into two parties,' moderates, and extremists, with Griffith the most prominent figure in the former grouping and the man with whom they should cut a deal.⁵⁴

Griffith was still in jail, due to the spurious post-conscription German Plot of May 1918, when the first Dáil met on January 21st, 1919. His release on March 8th permitted him to assume a role in the cabinet as minister of home affairs when Dáil Éireann met again on April 1st. De Valera's departure to the USA meant that Griffith acted as president in his absence. The largely symbolic nature of Sinn Féin's counter-state can be gauged by the fact that Griffith continued with his journalism and conducted much of his government business from snugs in his two favourite pubs.⁵⁵ While he remained tight-lipped on the IRA's developing guerrilla campaign, Griffith did not overtly call for violence against the British. His reticence regarding political violence subsequently changed, however, after republicans refused to recognise the treaty, when he bridled under Michael Collins's attempts to avert a conflict.

The system of Dáil courts represented one area where Sinn Féin's theory was put into practice, however. Griffith appointed the Tyrone Healyite Kevin O'Shield's as land commissioner, when 'eastbound trains brought to Dublin large numbers of terrified [unionist] landowners, who

came beseeching the Dáil Government for protection.’ In line with his own social conservatism, many of O’Shield’s judgements favoured the original proprietors.⁵⁶ The development typified the reactive nature of the Dáil ministry, exposing it as little more than a paper administration. The court system, like initial IRA activity, relied on local initiative. With courts already in existence in twenty-eight counties by June 1920, ‘the Dáil government, viewing developments with something like injured dignity covering neglect of duty, was forced to act.’⁵⁷

With de Valera's return at the end of 1920, Griffith, who had been imprisoned under very lenient conditions in Mountjoy after Bloody Sunday, resumed his subordinate role. Nevertheless, after the truce of July 11th, 1921, and a series of preliminary talks with Lloyd George, de Valera notoriously appointed Griffith in his stead as head of the Irish delegation for talks in London that eventually led to the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Two key issues loomed large in the negotiations: the Crown and partition, or as Lloyd George quipped to his cabinet, ‘Men will die for Throne and empire. I do not know who will die for Tyrone and Fermanagh.’⁵⁸

Griffith had conceded on Crown and empire two decades previously, and de Valera privately admitted that he had ‘no doubt’ Griffith would again yield ‘under pressure.’⁵⁹ Furthermore, despite his election as MP for North-West Tyrone the previous May, Griffith was unlikely to allow the issue of partition to scupper the prospect of an independent Irish state (no matter how truncated). A meeting with Northern nationalists prior to the treaty negotiations exposed the impracticality of his politics, confirming Ceannt’s description of Griffith as a dreamer with his head in the clouds. Griffith told anxious delegates that with a third of the population ‘utterly opposed to Partition and thoroughly organized,’ the Belfast ‘Parliament could not function.’⁵² Yet, the Dáil’s campaign of passive resistance hardly met with universal success even in areas where it could claim unquestioned electoral support. Griffith’s ruminations about a third of the population passively rendering Craig’s Orange government inoperative, backed by a formidable military capacity financed from London, were naïve and laughable.⁵³

After the first plenary phase of negotiation, between the 5th and 16th of November, Lloyd George cornered Griffith in personal talks, disingenuously claiming that he could convince Craig to compromise on essential Irish

unity. The overture, nevertheless, engineered Griffith’s acceptance of partition. Armed with this concession, the prime minister pressed a settlement on the Irish delegation, ultimately threatening war if an agreement was not reached. John Regan argues that Griffith ‘played a remarkably maladroit game in London and in the process compromised the entire position of the Irish delegation.’⁶⁰ His aptitude was surely impaired, moreover, since Erskine Childers reported how Griffith arrived each morning ‘muzzy with whisky’ with ‘the fate of Ireland being settled higger-mugger by ignorant Irish negotiators and A. G. in genuine sympathy with many of the English claims.’⁶¹

On November 12th, after Craig’s rejection of essential unity, Griffith unilaterally promised not to obstruct the Boundary Commission idea. Kenny places unnecessary weight on the nature of this undertaking, but, in one stroke, Griffith nullified the option of breaking on partition, although Lloyd George did disingenuously promise a significant territorial transfer.⁵⁴ When the Dáil cabinet met in Dublin on December 3rd, de Valera claimed that the proposed settlement required amendment on the oath and on Ulster. They were to return to London, ‘prepared to face the consequences—war or no war’; Griffith left with instructions to ‘try and put the blame on Ulster.’⁵⁵ At the crucial conference on December 5th, however, Lloyd George, ‘with the air of a conjuror pulling a rabbit out of a hat,’ revealed ‘Griffith’s earlier undertaking regarding the Boundary Commission’ and the Irish negotiators caved in.⁵⁶

Arguably, Collins and Griffith shelved the partition issue to reach terms, a decision hastened by Lloyd George’s threat of ‘immediate and terrible war.’ There is, therefore, an inexorable logic to Regan’s conclusion that

“Griffith and Collins became, through the advocacy of the treaty and the threat of renewed British violence, the arbiters of British policy in Southern Ireland. The treatyite army fought the civil war as the proxy of the British state whatever about its aspirations towards a stepping-stone republic or freedom to achieve freedom.”⁶²

There was significant discrepancy, however, between Griffith’s agreement on November 16th that the redrawn border be ‘in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants’ and the actual proviso in Article 12 that such wishes be ‘compatible with economic and geographic conditions.’⁶³ At a cabinet meeting on December 6th, Lloyd George hailed ‘Ulster—the rock upon which all

previous efforts had been shattered' as the central triumph because 'the extremists had accepted a situation in which it was open to Ulster to contract out of a united Ireland.' Significantly, he suggested that the Boundary Commission 'would possibly give Ulster more than she would lose.'⁶⁴ The British then gave public and private assurances to outraged Ulster Unionists that the boundary change would not exceed minor rectification, especially after the treaty had passed through Dáil Éireann.⁶⁵

A bitter nationalist chauvinist to the end, Griffith responded to a question from Childers during the Dáil treaty debates by thumping the table and refusing to 'reply to any damned Englishman in this Assembly.'⁶⁶ In terms of partition, Griffith argued that 'the Treaty recognizes the essential unity of Ireland' and that government policy reflected de Valera's previous admission that 'he would not coerce Unionist Ulster, but equally we shall not permit Nationalist Ulster to be coerced.'⁶⁷ The leader of the constitutional nationalists, John Dillon, wrote that 'Collins and Griffith are in a desperate difficulty...If they give in, the Catholics of Tyrone, Fermanagh and Derry &c will be furious,' but, 'if they commit themselves to a fight with Craig on this question, it will destroy the Provisional Government and the Treaty.' He concluded that 'their position is so weakened by the Republicans that they are afraid to quarrel with.'

Collins would struggle to avoid fratricidal conflict until June, and, ultimately, power lay with the young Corkman, not with his conservative cabinet colleagues. Dillon perceptively stated that 'without Collins, Griffith would not last a fortnight.'⁶⁸ In the months before the attack on the Four Courts, Collins vainly sought to write a republican constitution, implement an electoral pact between pro- and anti-Treaty Sinn Féin, secretly organise an IRA offensive against Craig's Orange government, and apply diplomatic pressure to help relieve the onslaught on the North's beleaguered Catholic minority.

In June 1922, Lloyd George claimed that 'there was only Griffith. Collins was just a wild animal—a mustang.'⁶⁹ Ultimately, however, Collins chose to quarrel with republicans and side with the Crown and empire, a decision which caused far more soul-searching for the 'Big Fellow' than for his colleagues in the Free State government. Indeed, after both men died, in August 1922, the British military admitted that 'Arthur Griffith was the only genuine Free Stater' and that Collins and his followers 'merely accepted the treaty as a stepping-stone

to the...republic' and in response to the 'universal desire' for peace.⁷⁰

The Anglo-Irish Treaty constituted the foundation document of the Irish counter-revolution, for it consummated the alliance between the Healyites and the populist chauvinists led by Griffith. The Healyites eventually dominated the new Free State, after the purge of 'revolutionaries, Irish-Irelanders and most especially the militarist-republicans' from the government.⁷¹ This élite singularly failed to challenge partition and, while consolidating the Free State (or the birth of Irish democracy, as revisionists would have it) carried out a proxy war on behalf of the British Empire against militant republicans and working-class radicals.

Conclusion

In one respect, then, Kenny's recent biography contains some merit—'father of us all' marks a fitting and accurate subtitle for the biography of a man who embodied the contradictions of those who reaped the Free State counter-revolutionary harvest (that is, of all the worst characteristics of the Free State, the pseudo-republic, and Irish capitalist society—and of their continued subservience to imperial power). Ultimately, Sinn Féin represented a nationalist, petit-bourgeois revolution that drew support from across Irish society and included various shades of nationalism, including republicanism and socialism—Ireland's heirs to the radical Enlightenment. Nevertheless, many who sheltered under the post-Rising Sinn Féin umbrella were socially conservative and lukewarm on the republic, including Griffith. As outlined previously, the first attempt to implement the Sinn Féin policy ended in acrimony before the 1910 elections, when the young Northern cohort in the IRB criticised Griffith's monarchism and his attempted rapprochement with the AFIL, the party of Catholic conservatism and political pet of William Martin Murphy.

Yet the false dichotomy that lies at the heart of Irish nationalist common sense does a disservice to more fundamental ideological divisions. The IRB under Clarke and Mac Diarmada after 1907 were not unreconstructed physical-force men. At that stage, they sought to adopt Griffith's passive resistance policy to further a republican agenda based on civic virtue, anti-sectarianism, and anti-imperialism. Griffith's vitriolic opposition to Larkin and working-class politics prior to and during the lockout marked a clear line of distinction between his orientation and that of colleagues in Sinn Féin like long-time trade

unionist Éamonn Ceannt, other Gaelic Leaguers like Pádraig Pearse, and the leadership of the IRB, who, while unsure of Larkin, expressed consistent public sympathy for the workers. On the one hand, the ‘constitutionalist’ John Redmond clearly had no objection to imperial violence. On the other hand, the radical humanist coalition of 1916 operated not solely or even primarily out of a tradition of physical force, but, as Connolly outlined just before his famous ‘interview’ with the IRB military council: ‘We believe in constitutional action in normal times; we believe in revolutionary action in exceptional times. These are exceptional times.’⁷²

The fact that the Rising gained the retrospective and inaccurate Sinn Féin label spoke to the persistence of the constitutional-versus-physical-force dichotomy within popular understanding. Yet, as Griffith’s earlier anti-Semitic tirades demonstrated, the humanist-versus-anti-humanist divergence appeared more fundamental. By the time of the Limerick pogrom, Michael Davitt, former Fenian and lifelong socialist, was a (rather unconventional) constitutionalist, while Griffith sat firmly outside the ‘constitutionalist’ fold. It should, however, be noted that while Griffith espoused naked racism against the ‘Kaffirs,’ Davitt’s obvious sympathy for Black South Africans did not extend to rejecting their definition by the Boers as ‘savages.’⁷³ The distinction between separatist and constitutionalist, or between constitutional and physical-force nationalism, obscures the more fundamental divergence along a nationalist spectrum encompassing humanist and anti-humanist thought.

Griffith stood out as the mouthpiece for a chauvinistic petit-bourgeois nationalism prepared to subordinate the rights of every citizen to the interests of the nation state, interests ultimately identical with those of its captains of industries, priests, and paymasters. The dominant personality in the Free State counter-revolution and a relative by marriage of Tim Healy, Kevin O’Higgins, dismissed the 1919 Democratic Programme as ‘mostly poetry’—there are no grounds to suggest that Griffith would have challenged the perspective of his cabinet colleague had he lived. This represents the legacy of Griffith and of the Blueshirts. Michael McDowell, the grandson of Free State grandee Eoin MacNeill offers a weekly dose in his *Irish Times* column—the nationalism of the 2004 Citizenship Referendum. Yet this is also the legacy of another Limerick anti-Semite reactionary, Seán South, who died on an IRA raid on Brookeborough led by Seán Garland, and who would end up as general secretary

of the Workers’ Party! The false moral-versus-physical-force dichotomy persists, but it is a reductive and redundant tool in understanding Irish nationalism yesterday, today, or tomorrow.

The paint-by-numbers history which posits Free Staters versus Republicans, or Redmondites versus 1916 Rebels, or Constitutionalism versus Provisionals as a democrats-versus-dictators polarity is detrimental to historical understanding and replicates perhaps Griffith’s most fatal flaw—the reification of irrational concepts which then operate as the idealised basis for ideological positioning and political action. This article has presented Irish nationalism as a spectrum conditioned by the country’s colonial history. Irish nationalism encompasses anti-humanist reaction, liberal humanism, and radical humanism. Rather than reified, mutually exclusive poles, a dialectical relationship exists between these three tendencies.

Griffith, it has been argued, exhibited a form of anti-humanism that marked him out from other significant historical agents within the radical and separatist milieu. He may well have been a radical, but his worldview mirrored much of the reactionary character of the continental, petit-bourgeois right. That he is now lionised by many who position themselves (and the twenty-six-county state) within the tradition of the liberal Enlightenment reminds us of the Frankfurt School’s famous dialectic of the Enlightenment, which recognised the contradiction between European emancipation and the road to Auschwitz, between human progress and colonial domination for those subject to Europe’s civilising mission. This permits the political heirs of the Blueshirts to masquerade as democrats while they fawn before the US hegemon in similar fashion to their predecessors donning top hat and tails and paying homage to the King Emperor. A drunken crank, Griffith gave populist ideological cover to the material reality of class politics in Ireland. He represents a fitting father to the Free State and a cautionary reminder that nationalism of any variety remains constantly vulnerable to the fleshpots of the radical right.

If any tendency within Irish nationalist history can act as a lamp at our feet, it is not Griffith’s xenophobic atavism, which sought constant ‘inspiration from the smouldering records of the past.’ Nor is it, for that matter, some general physical-force tradition, although many worthy of consideration have been shoehorned into this redundant category. Rather, those set on fulfilling the ‘glowing hopes of the living present’ and ‘vast possibilities of the mighty future’ can only follow the trajectory of the radical humanist universalism of Tone, McCracken, and Russell, the

Fenians, Davitt, and Connolly.⁷⁴ Under different historical conditions, we are faced with the same dilemma. As Liam Mellows outlined in his *Notes from Mountjoy*, shortly before his extra-judicial murder at the hands of the Free State,

In our efforts to win back public support for the Republic we are forced to recognise, whether we like it or not, that the commercial interests and the gombeen man are on the side of the

Treaty. We are back to Tone—which is just as well—relying on that great body, ‘the men of no property.’ The ‘stake in the country people’ were never with the Republic. They are not with it now and they will always be against it—until it wins! We should recognise that definitely now and base our appeals upon the understanding of those who have always borne Ireland’s fight.⁷⁵

¹ *Sinn Féin*, 3 Dec. 1910.

² Colum Kenny, *The Enigma of Arthur Griffith: Father of us all* (Kildare, 2020).

³ Owen McGee, *The Irish republican Brotherhood* (Dublin, 2007) p. 357.

⁴ Owen McGee, *Arthur Griffith* (Merrion, 2015), p. 348.

⁵ Kenny, *The Enigma of Arthur Griffith*, *passim*.

⁶ Arthur Griffith, Foreword to *Jail Journal* (Gill, Dublin, 1913, 3rd edition 1918), pp xi-xiii.

⁷ Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race* (Macmillan, 1996), pp 236–237.

⁸ Foreword *Jail Journal* (Gill, Dublin, 1913, 3rd edition 1918), p. xv.

⁹ Richard Barret, ‘The Dreyfus Affair in the Irish Nationalist Press, 1898–1899’, in *Études Irlandaises*, 32, 1, 2007. pp 77–89.

¹⁰ Quoted in *Saothar*, vol. 13, 1988, p. 130.

¹¹ Colles claimed that Gonne lied when she claimed that Irish soldiers in the British Army were transported to the Boer War with manacled wrists (Senia Pašeta, ‘Nationalist responses to two royal visits, 1900 and 1903’, in *Irish Historical Studies*, 31, 124 (Nov 1999), p. 493.

¹² *United Irishman*, 23 Sept 1899.

¹³ *United Irishman*, 23 Sept 1899; *United Irishman and Workers’ Republic* pieces also cited in Richard Barret, ‘The Dreyfus Affair in the Irish Nationalist Press, 1898–1899’, in *Études Irlandaises*, 32, 1, 2007. pp 77–89.

¹⁴ *United Irishman*, 21 Oct 1899.

¹⁵ Griffith to Stopford Green, 7 Apr 1906 (NLI, Alice Stopford Green papers, MS 15,077/5/11/2).

¹⁶ *United Irishman*, 14 Oct 1899.

¹⁷ Kevin Haddick Flynn, ‘The Limerick pogrom, 1904’ in *History Ireland*, vol. 12 (summer, 2004).

¹⁸ *United Irishman*, 23 Jan 1904.

¹⁹ *United Irishman*, 30 Apr 1904.

²⁰ Kevin Haddick Flynn, ‘The Limerick pogrom, 1904’ in *History Ireland*, 12 (summer, 2004).

²¹ *United Irishman*, 23 April 1904.

²² *United Irishman*, 28 May 1904.

²³ Marnie Hay, *Bulmer Hobson and the Nationalist Movement in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Manchester, 2009), p. 47.

²⁴ Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Tralee, 1968), p. 19.

²⁵ Bulmer Hobson, BMH WS, 82, pp 5–6.

²⁶ ‘Reminiscences on people I Knew’, undated (PRONI, Cahir Healy Papers, D/2991/B/140/31); elsewhere McCartan admitted that Griffith wouldn’t ‘be in it with Hobson as a speaker’ (McCartan to John Devoy, 13 June 1909, NLI, John Devoy papers, MS 18,007/19/2).

²⁷ Richard Davis, *Arthur Griffith and Non-violent Sinn Féin* (Dublin, 1974), pp. 107–9.

²⁸ McCartan to McGarrity, 7 April 1909 (NLI, McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/79).

²⁹ For a good, private outline of the tensions, see Peter Devoy to John Devoy, 17 Oct 1910 (NLI, John Devoy papers, MS 18,004/6/21).

³⁰ McCartan to McGarrity, 21 January 1910 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/92).

³¹ *The Irish Felon*, 24 June 1848.

³² McCartan to McGarrity, 18 Sept. 1909 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/86).

³³ McCartan to McGarrity, 21 Jan 1910 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/92).

³⁴ McCartan to McGarrity, 27 Oct 1910 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers, MS 17,457/118).

³⁵ James Connolly, *Harp*, Apr 1908.

³⁶ James Connolly, ‘Sinn Féin, Socialism and the Nation’, *Irish Nation*, 23 Jan 1909.

³⁷ Emmet O’Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland* (UCD, 2011), p. 78.

³⁸ *Sinn Féin*, 16 Sept 1911.

³⁹ O’Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland*, p. 81.

⁴⁰ K. S. Roche, ‘The forgotten labour struggle: the 1911 Wexford lockout’ in *History Ireland*, 4, 21 (July–August 2013).

⁴¹ *Sinn Féin*, 23 Sept 1911.

⁴² *Sinn Féin*, 30 Sept 1911.

⁴³ *Sinn Féin*, 30 Sept. 1911.

⁴⁴ Michael Laffan, ‘Griffith, Arthur Joseph’, 2009, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁴⁵ *Sinn Féin*, 30 Sept 1911.

⁴⁶ *Sinn Féin*, 10 Feb 1912.

⁴⁷ *Sinn Féin*, 24 Feb 1912

⁴⁸ Roche, ‘The forgotten labour struggle.’

⁴⁹ *Sinn Féin*, 20 Sept 1913.

⁵⁰ Laffan, ‘Griffith, Arthur Joseph’, 2009.

⁵¹ Quoted in Fergal McCluskey, *Fenians & Ribbonmen* (Manchester, 2011), p. 257.

⁵² Peadar O'Donnell, *There will be Another Day* (Dublin, 1963) p. 14.

⁵³ George Murnaghan to Gavan Duffy, 6 July 1917 (NLI, Gavan Duffy papers, MS 5581/170).

⁵⁴ General Officer Commanding in Ireland, 15 May 1919 (The National Archives, London, CAB 24/79).

⁵⁵ Arthur Mitchel, *Revolutionary Government in Ireland: Dáil Éireann, 1919-21* (Dublin, 1994), p. 51.

⁵⁶ Kevin O'Shiel, BMH WS 1770/7, p. 933.

⁵⁷ Mitchel, *Revolutionary government*, p. 139.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Michael Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland* (Dublin 1993), p. 78.

⁵⁹ De Valera to McGarrity, 27 Dec. 1921 (NLI, Joseph McGarrity papers MS 17,440).

⁶⁰ John M. Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution, 1921-1936* (Dublin, 2001), p. 22.

⁶¹ Childers' diary, quoted in Paul Murray, *The Irish Boundary Commission and Its Origins, 1886-1925* (Dublin, 2011), p. 75.

⁶² Regan, *The Irish counter-revolution*, p. 374.

⁶³ "Tentative suggestions" for a Treaty presented by Thomas Jones to Arthur Griffith', 16 Nov. 1921

(NAI, DÉ 2/304/1); Anglo-Irish Treaty, 5 Dec 1921 (TNA, CAB 24/131).

⁶⁴ Cabinet conclusions, 6 Dec 1921 (TNA, CAB 23/27/17).

⁶⁵ *HC*, 8 Feb. 1922, vol. 150, c. 205; *An Phoblacht*, 14 Feb. 1922.

⁶⁶ Dáil Éireann debate, Tuesday, 10 Jan 1922, Vol. T No. 17.

⁶⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 3 Feb 1922.

⁶⁸ John Dillon to T. P. O'Connor, 23 Mar 1922 (TCD, Dillon papers, MS 6744/880).

⁶⁹ Quoted in Murray, *The Irish Boundary Commission*, p. 76.

⁷⁰ GOC Ireland, 5 Sept 1922 (TNA, CAB 24/138).

⁷¹ Regan, *Counter-revolution*, p. 259.

⁷² *Workers' Republic*, 4 Dec 1915.

⁷³ Carla King, *Michael Davitt* (UCD, 2009), pp 66-7.

⁷⁴ Quoted passages from James Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, 13 Aug 1898.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Conor McNamara, *Liam Mellows, Soldier of the Irish Republic: Selected Writings, 1914-1922* (Dublin, 2019), p. 142.



Flying Under a False Flag—Why the Green Party Fails

Dave O' Farrell

The Green Party are now over two years into their second stint in government and—unsurprisingly to anyone familiar with their first stint in government—it is not going well. The government is beset with multiple crises; the housing crisis worsens by the day, with new records for homelessness set on a regular basis; the health service continues to crumble, with record waiting lists, massive staff shortages, and the threat of further Covid-19 waves as we enter winter; there's an intensifying cost-of-living crisis with spiralling inflation and seemingly continual energy price hikes; climate measures have proven inadequate and the government repeatedly fails to meet even these targets; and all this on the back of the continuing war in Ukraine, which has seen many in Irish politics and the media launch a fresh attack on Irish neutrality and attempts to deepen our involvement in EU military operations and cosy up to the US and its NATO allies. Only a few years after their best ever local and general election results, the Greens have plummeted in opinion polls, and all indications are that they are on course to repeat the electoral annihilation that marked the end of their last stint in government. How have the Green Party ended up in this situation, slavishly propping up the two traditional parties of government, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, while achieving nothing tangible for their troubles?

Organic growing pains

Let's take a brief look at the history of the Greens. The Green Party was initially formed as the Ecology Party of Ireland in 1981, with their inaugural meeting promising 'a radical alternative to both capitalism and socialism.' In addition to their environmentalism, they also put forward some policies that were essentially social democratic in nature—and certainly to the left of the then growing neoliberal consensus of the Reagan and Thatcher era—such as a universal basic income. The party grew slowly throughout the 1980s and 1990s, gaining their first councillor in 1985, their first Dáil seat in 1989, and a pair of European Parliament seats in 1994. In the early 2000s, the party made significant electoral gains, with six TDs elected in 2002, followed by eighteen councillors in the 2004 local elections (although they also lost both of their MEP seats at the same time).

During this period, the Greens were involved in campaigning on numerous environmental issues, such as the Shell to Sea campaign against the Corrib gas pipeline, the campaign to reroute the M3 motorway away from the Hill of Tara, and opposition to

the construction of the Ringsend incinerator. In addition, the party was involved in antiwar activism around the invasion of Iraq and the use of Shannon Airport by the US military. The Greens also campaigned for no votes in the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty as well as both referendums on the Nice Treaty.

The party's growth was not entirely straightforward, however, and it underwent significant organisational change over this period. In common with many green parties internationally, the Irish Green Party has often contained conflicting views on the way forward for the party, in particular a divide between those more focused on grassroots activism and campaigning versus those with a more electoralist approach. While the party has contested elections since its founding, there existed a number of members and local groups who focused more strongly on campaigning and some who were opposed to electoral politics. These tensions played out in the renaming of the party as the Green Alliance in 1983/84, with an accompanying change in their organisational structure from a centralised decision-making apparatus to a decentralised one with more local decision-making and autonomy for local groups. Most of those opposed to the electoral approach left in 1986, with the party adopting its current title, the Green Party, in 1988.¹ Despite the apparent victory of the electoral wing of the party, the Greens still resisted some of the trappings of traditional Irish political parties, and it was only at a special leadership convention in 2001 that they formally adopted the position of having a national leader, when Trevor Sargent was elected to the position.

First as tragedy—the 2007 election

The Greens approached the 2007 general election with a strong emphasis on entering government, with a manifesto entitled *The Green Party in Government ...it's time*.² The manifesto's contents gave an oblique indication of how far they were prepared to go for a seat at the cabinet table; the document almost entirely lacked political commentary, and bar a few brief opening paragraphs, it outlined a somewhat 'middle of the road' set of policies and crucially no concrete commitments on many of the key issues they had previously campaigned on. There was no mention of the Shell to Sea campaign, despite party leader Trevor Sargent having spoken at a Shell to Sea press conference the previous year supporting the campaign's call for an independent commission into the Corrib deal—even going as far as to state that it was 'comparable, in historic terms, with the Act of Union of 1800, in the way a dodgy deal can be made to look legitimate.'³ Opposition to the routing of the M3 was reduced to a pledge to 'respect existing road contracts but, where there is concern about potential damage to communities, environment or heritage, [we] will investigate how this can be minimised within the scope of the contract or through renegotiation.'

There were some positives in the manifesto reflecting the party's previous positions, such as their stance on US Military's use of Shannon: they pledged to 'end the use of Shannon Airport by US military forces involved in the war in Iraq' [emphasis in the original] and defend Irish neutrality, including calling for a referendum to define it in the constitution. There were also

modest environmental proposals, like a 3 percent annual cut in carbon emissions and continued opposition to incineration of waste, a promise to link the lowest social welfare payments to 50 percent of per person average income, a five-year banking levy of € 200 million a year, as well as the usual pledges to increase social housing, hospital beds, and public transport.

Overall, however, in keeping with the party's 'neither left nor right' approach, the manifesto was a confused affair that displayed the worst sort of muddled thinking around market approaches to public services. On housing and planning there were pledges to build social and affordable homes and promises to implement windfall taxes on development land and ensure that local authorities compulsorily purchased development land prior to rezoning, but also a policy to encourage institutional investors to enter the rental market. On communications there were pledges that the Greens would carry out a feasibility study into the state's retaking control over Eircom while divesting any commercial operation, keeping only the fixed-line network, and 'setting the mobile phone operators, cable companies and Eircom into direct competition to get cheaper, faster and more integrated broadband services.' On health they stated they were 'not opposed to private hospitals per se,' and in a standout, deliberate misunderstanding of the nature of private businesses and the profit motive, they proposed they could provide 'facilities to the public sector on a not-for-profit basis.'

The party's campaigning during the election followed a similarly contradictory approach. The campaign was critical of the outgoing Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrat coalition, with then party chairman John Gormley declaring at their 2007 party conference, 'Let there be no doubt, we want Fianna Fáil and the PDs out of government,'⁴ and Trevor Sargent repeatedly stated that 'I won't be leading the Green Party into coalition with Fianna Fáil' but also that he would be open to negotiation 'with all parties'—a position that many commentators pointed out was clearly contradictory.⁵ One of the media's highlights from the campaign was a confrontation between John Gormley and the Progressive Democrats' leader (and Gormley's constituency rival) Michael McDowell, which they dubbed the 'rumble in Ranelagh.'⁶ During a press conference at which McDowell erected a poster with the slogan 'Left Wing Government? No Thanks,' Gormley angrily approached him to take issue with what had been written about the Green Party in Progressive Democrat election leaflets, mainly disputing the claim that the Greens would increase corporation tax. Of course the claim the Greens wanted to increase corporation tax was as unfounded as the possibility of a left-wing government that had so incensed McDowell, with the only policy on corporation tax included in the Green's manifesto being one lower the rate in the North to equal that in the South. The manifesto also proposed a lowering of employers' PRSI contributions—already one of the lowest in Europe.

The election did not result in any gains for the Greens, who emerged with the same number of seats (six), with Fianna Fáil remaining the largest party, although their coalition partners in the Progressive Democrats suffered heavy losses, including

Michael McDowell, while the main opposition alliance of Fine Gael and Labour failed to gain sufficient seats to form a government. On the day of the count, Green TD Ciarán Cuffe, clearly seeing how the electoral calculus had panned out, mused on his blog that 'a deal with Fianna Fáil would be a deal with the devil. We would be spat out after 5 years, and decimated as a Party. But...would it be worth it?'⁷ He never answered the question, but the Greens entered coalition talks with Fianna Fáil.

Negotiations were dutifully completed and a programme for government consisting of Fianna Fáil, the Greens, the Progressive Democrats, and independents was agreed and presented to a meeting of the Green Party, where it was approved with an 86 percent yes vote—despite including very little of what the Greens had previously advocated, even in their very moderate manifesto. In a rare instance of an election pledge (albeit a strange one) being promptly fulfilled, Trevor Sargent resigned his position as leader and was replaced by John Gormley, and the following day they voted to make Bertie Ahern taoiseach, taking two ministerial positions in the new government: Gormley as minister for the environment, heritage, and local government, and Eamon Ryan as minister for communications, energy, and natural resources. Trevor Sargent was appointed as minister of state at the Department of Agriculture, again technically fulfilling another of his pledges during the campaign, that he would not sit in cabinet with Fianna Fáil.

Of course the new government was quickly overtaken by a recession following the collapse of Lehman Brothers—not to mention the collective chickens of the Celtic Tiger and the associated property bubble coming home to roost—rendering the adopted programme little more than aspirational prose. As the crisis deepened, talk of a 'soft landing' and 'sound fundamentals' gave way to the realisation that the Irish banks were on the verge of collapse, and by September 2008, Fianna Fáil minister of finance Brian Lenihan had announced a blanket guarantee for the six largest banks, followed in December by plans to recapitalise AIB, Bank of Ireland, and Anglo Irish Bank—which would later be nationalised. The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) was established in late 2009 to take bad loans off the banks' balance sheets—funded by borrowing. The Greens 'put on the green jersey,' talked of the national interest, and voted in favour of these measures. They also voted in favour of a series of budgets and mini-budgets which introduced a series of austerity measures, including new income and health levies (which later morphed into the Universal Social Charge), cuts to social welfare, and public-sector pay cuts. Green TD Paul Gogarty defended the party's stance during a debate on the social welfare bill for Budget 2010, saying, 'It's regrettable but necessary,' and that 'everyone on this side of the house is going to stand by it, because it has to be done'⁸—even as some Fianna Fáil backbenchers voted against their own party.

With the arrival of the troika⁹ and a bailout in late 2010, it was clear the government's days were numbered and the Greens called for a general election to be held in late January of 2011. Even then, John Gormley was keen to stress that before an

election he wanted to secure EU/IMF funding, produce a four-year plan to balance the state budget, and pass a budget for 2011.¹⁰ After taking part in negotiations with the EU/IMF and agreeing to the four-year plan of austerity, including € 6 billion in cuts for Budget 2011, they staggered on until, in the wake of revelations surrounding taoiseach Brian Cowen's undeclared contacts with figures in Anglo Irish Bank and cabinet resignations from Fianna Fáil and Mary Harney (then an independent, following the demise of the Progressive Democrats as a party in late 2009), they finally pulled the plug and left government on 23 January 2011.¹¹

When a general election was eventually held, in March, the ruling parties saw their votes collapse. The Green Party received only 1.8 percent of the vote, dropping below the 2 percent threshold for state funding, and was left without a single representative in the Oireachtas for the first time since 1989. So with Ciarán Cuffe's prediction of electoral destruction and burn out, what did the Greens have to show for it? The Corrib pipeline went ahead, with Eamon Ryan the minister responsible; John Gormley signed foreshore licences for the Ringsend incinerator; the M3 went ahead as planned; and US troops continued to use Shannon Airport. They promised a bank levy, yet delivered a bank bailout with no bondholder, even the unsecured, left behind. Promised social welfare increases were replaced with cuts, and public services suffered greatly. Carbon emissions did indeed temporarily fall in the following period, but as a result of a biting recession rather than a climate policy. Civil partnership legislation was passed, but this enjoyed cross-party support, so the Greens were hardly required in government for its adoption. They did achieve one of their climate-related goals with the introduction of a carbon tax in Budget 2010, but the regressive nature of the tax, which applies to the end user, and the lack of affordable alternatives to carbon-emitting energy sources for many, particularly the poorest, means it continues to be a problematic and controversial measure to this day. Similarly, NAMA ended up acting to bailout some of the largest developers while creating cheap deals for others, such as Project Cerberus's sale of much of its Northern Irish portfolio. Likewise, the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation, which was set up to work out the loans of the nationalised Anglo Irish Bank, was mired in controversy over many of its deals, like the sale of Siteserve to Denis O'Brien.

If the Greens' time in government should be remembered for anything, it's that when it came down to it, they were willing to vote for multiple austerity budgets and commit the state to several more in order to get loans from the troika to bailout the banks and pay back bondholders, all to maintain the financial markets and the capitalist status quo.

Catching a wave

Following their electoral wipeout, there was little indication the Greens had changed their basic approach—they maintained they did what was necessary in the national interest—and following John Gormley's resignation as leader, they elected his fellow former minister Eamon Ryan as leader. As opposition to the new

Fine Gael/Labour government began to take shape, boosted by the election of five left-wing TDs in the United Left Alliance as well as left and left-leaning independents, the Greens were nowhere to be seen. This is perhaps not surprising given that campaigns against the household charge and later against property tax were agreed to in the deal Fianna Fáil and the Greens signed with the troika and that, in line with their market-based approach to environmentalism, they supported water charges—even in the face of one of the largest mass protest movements the country had seen in decades.

The Greens did, however, have one thing going for them in recovering from the 2011 election: the existential threat from climate change continued to grow. As ever more alarming scientific reports were published, the Greens began to reappear more regularly, often serving as the go-to party for many media reports on issues around the climate. In the 2014 local elections, they had their first successes, with eleven councillors elected—including former junior minister Ciarán Cuffe—although Eamon Ryan failed to take a seat in the European elections. As climate change continued to receive even more coverage, particularly in the wake of the Paris Agreement in 2015, the climate movement was reinvigorated and the Greens managed to capitalise on this—beginning to grow and recruit new members eager to push for the radical action needed to tackle climate change. This growing movement helped the Greens during the 2016 election, which saw Eamon Ryan and new deputy leader Catherine Martin win seats. The election also saw the Fine Gael/Labour government replaced by a minority Fine Gael/Independent Alliance government backed from opposition by a confidence and supply deal with Fianna Fáil, which opened the field for other opposition parties to take the lead in criticising government policy.

As awareness of the true scale of the climate crisis continued to grow with reports from the likes of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), increasing extreme weather events, and ongoing climate inaction—not to mention the disastrous policies adopted in some countries, like the US under Trump and Brazil under Bolsonaro—we witnessed the emergence of ever more radical climate action campaigns like the Fridays for Futures school strikes and Extinction Rebellion. While these movements were often to the left of the Greens, with a much greater emphasis on the role of the capitalist system in driving climate change, the Greens still continued to capitalise and grow further, a trend that only increased as they continued to rise in opinion polls. This resulted in a much larger party with a much more pronounced left wing, who also demanded action on issues other than climate change, like the housing crisis.

The 2019 local and European elections saw the Greens win forty-nine council seats and two MEPs. Such was the groundswell in support that they also picked up an additional Dáil seat later in the year when Joe O'Brien won a by-election in the Dublin Fingal constituency.

Second as farce—the 2020 election

In the run up to the general election in early 2020, it was clear that the long decline in the share of the vote going to Fianna Fáil

and Fine Gael was continuing, while Sinn Féin were gaining in popularity, making the election a three-way race for the position of largest party. It was also clear that the continued fracturing of the traditional two- or two-and-a-half party system was likely to result in a messy government formation process, with a multitude of possible coalition arrangements looking like mathematical possibilities.

The Greens went into the general election looking likely to make gains and quite possibly to be in a position to make up the numbers required to be in government. They made no secret of their desire to be in government again, and Eamon Ryan stated throughout the campaign that they would talk to all parties about forming a government. Their manifesto, titled *Towards 2030: A Decade of Change*,¹² reflected this, putting the need to tackle climate change at the centre of all their policies. They promised 7 percent annual cuts in carbon emissions, a ban on licences for fossil fuel exploration and extraction, a ban on the importation of LNG, a massive investment in offshore wind energy, and a Just Transition Commission to ensure a fair transition to a low-carbon economy. There was a lot of talk about building up indigenous business to reduce reliance on multinationals, but very little in terms of concrete proposals that could deliver their goal of ‘making sure that our enterprises serve our society and the environment and not just their own short-term interests.’

Many of the non-climate promises in the manifesto very clearly reflected the wishes of their more radical members and a desire to win over voters looking for real change on key issues such as housing and the health service. With this in mind, the manifesto pledged a programme of building public homes on public land and a single-tier health service funded by general taxation.

Between the proposed climate actions and housing and health policies closely resembling those of parties on the left of the spectrum, the overall effect was that many Green members and voters saw them as being left wing, and they were often included in the lists of left-wing candidates in various areas, with the slogan ‘vote left, transfer left’ becoming popular during the campaign.

The election resulted in Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Sinn Féin all roughly level, but with no immediately clear option for a government. The Greens became the fourth-largest party, ending up with their best ever result and twelve Dáil seats. Negotiations on government formation began immediately, but ended up being very protracted, particularly with the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic. Eventually the Greens agreed to back an historic coalition of the two main right-wing parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and a programme for government was agreed. Reflecting the new makeup of the party, there was some dissension in the ranks of the parliamentary party, with three TDs abstaining on a vote to present the programme to the party membership.

Before the membership voted on the deal, TD Roderic O’Gorman said that in the event of the other parties not carrying through on the commitments contained in the agreement, ‘We can bring the government down.’¹³ The Greens head negotiator during the talks, Catherine Martin, invoking the national interest

and apparently forgetting the financial crisis that marked their last period in government, justified the deal by claiming, ‘We are in the midst of a period of immense and unprecedented challenge. We face a seismic economic setback the like of which has never been experienced before. We need to work together for our country.’¹⁴ The programme for government was eventually agreed by the party membership on 26 June, with a 76 percent yes vote.

Dissension in the ranks did not end here however, and several members, including high-profile candidate Saoirse McHugh, left rather than join the coalition. Other members, including TD Neasa Hourigan, who had opposed the coalition, formed the Just Transition Greens, a group within the party who professed a green-left/eco-socialist outlook. Since Green Party rules require a leadership election after a general election, one was held, with Eamon Ryan and Catherine Martin standing—the outcome was remarkably close, with Ryan winning by only forty-eight votes. This was widely seen as reflecting the internal dispute over the coalition in the party, with Martin seen by many as more likely to stand up for their policies and deliver on a just transition. The Greens’ internal woes continued throughout the remainder of the year, with many more departures, including four councillors, two of whom went on to form a new explicitly left party, An Rabharta Glas—Green Left.

So what have the Greens achieved this time round? The answer, on the back of their best ever general election result and holding the balance of power in probably the most fractious Dáil to date, is not much.

On climate the Greens much-vaunted climate bill¹⁵ is failing; having promised 7 percent reductions each year, they settled for a target of 4.8 percent a year, but actual emissions rose in 2021 by 5.4 percent. Agriculture gets away very lightly in terms of reduction targets, and there are no measures to decrease the national herd, which continues to grow year on year. The carbon tax from the previous Fianna Fáil/Green government remains and has been increased again, although the latest increase has had to be offset by cuts in other fuel levies, providing ample evidence that the tax itself is no more than climate window dressing. Eamon Ryan described the decision to offset as an ‘appropriate measure.’¹⁶ When it comes to offshore wind, the government’s new Maritime Planning law is entirely developer-led, with no provision to force development once a licence has been granted, allowing developers to sit on sites as they increase in value.

The failings when it comes to the government’s handling of the ongoing pandemic could fill several articles in their own right, but a particular stand out failure is the refusal to back the use of HEPA filters to mitigate the risks of transmission in indoor settings—particularly when the Green manifesto promised to ‘roll out indoor air quality sensors and dataloggers in all public buildings for people vulnerable to cardio-respiratory problems, including school classrooms, patient areas in hospitals and care facilities, nursing homes and other relevant institutional buildings, and make the results publicly available on a website.’¹⁷ Elsewhere in health, waiting lists continue to grow

and there has been no progress on resolving the recruitment and retention crisis that has plagued the health service.

Record levels of homelessness and ever increasing rents speaks to the failures of the government's housing policies—they're a long way from the public homes on public land promised in the Green manifesto. The Greens have long championed local decision-making and transparency in planning, but An Bord Pleanála is embroiled in ongoing controversy over conflicts of interest and questionable planning decisions. The government have responded by attempting to limit the public's ability to initiate judicial review cases around planning, despite the fact that of the forty-four cases decided since 2018, thirty-two have been successful, strongly suggesting the problem lies with the planning authority and not the number of court cases taken.

The war in Ukraine has presented an opportunity for those in government who wish to abandon neutrality, and yet despite their stated position, the Greens voted against a People Before Profit bill that would have enshrined neutrality in the constitution.¹⁸ Despite stated support for the Palestinian cause, the Greens also voted against the Occupied Territories Bill, which would have banned trade with illegal Israeli settlements, with TD Joe O'Brien saying it would be 'more useful for the Palestinians over the next four years' for him to remain as a junior minister than to vote for a bill which was likely to fail.

As the cost-of-living crisis deepens and an energy crisis looms, with threats of blackouts over the winter,¹⁹ the government's response has been marked by inaction. Instead of taking on the energy companies making record profits while repeatedly raising their prices, they have proposed limited energy credits which will go straight to the companies. Instead of acting to reduce energy consumption, they continue to allow new energy-intensive developments like data centres; in fact, when South Dublin County Council voted to ban the construction of new data centres in the area on foot of a People Before Profit motion, the housing minister overruled the council.

In short, the Green Party's second term in government is shaping up much like its first; when it comes to the difficult choices, they will choose to protect big business and their profits over the rest of us every time.

Conclusion

So what is it that leads the Greens to behave like this? It is not simply that they are 'bad people'; I don't doubt that their TDs feel bad when they vote against something they actually support or vote through measures they know are harmful or inadequate. Neither are they stupid; they knew quite well what joining this government would entail—they have not only their own previous stint in government to go on but the records of numerous other coalitions; they are willing to face the prospect of another electoral drubbing when the time comes. The answer to why they repeatedly sell out and betray their professed principles lies in their ideology.

By their ideology, in this case, I do not mean their environmentalism. I mean their capitalism. The Greens are utterly wedded to the capitalist system and committed to operating within its structures. They fully accept the restrictions of capitalist markets with their drive towards competitive accumulation, and will not take any action that might interfere with it. We see this time and again, whether it is a reluctance to deal with spiralling rents or an unwillingness to go after the profits of energy companies.

Capitalism operates on the basis of competitive accumulation and all businesses are forced to follow this market logic or fail. Governments under capitalism are not immune from this logic; they might be able to make some changes here and there or slightly trim some of the worst excesses of the market, but they cannot fundamentally change it. Usually a few threats of foreign direct investors pulling out or warnings of a dip in GDP are enough for them to sound the retreat.

The limits placed on governments by the system is, of course, not a surprise to Marxists, and they are a large part of the reason we believe real change doesn't come from within parliament but from mass struggle. This is a position borne out by history: the most significant societal changes are always driven by mass action, from civil rights movements to revolutions and anti-colonial struggles—the change needed to end the capitalist system's absolute dependence on fossil fuels certainly feels like a struggle on par with any of the greatest in history.

This is not to say that governments cannot affect significant change; left governments and even social democratic ones can at times provide real meaningful change for their populations—think of the British Labour Party and the establishment of the NHS. They cannot, however, fundamentally alter the nature of the capitalist system from within. In general, they are limited to expanding direct state provision of services, which while not immune from market forces, can at least ensure access isn't based purely on ability to pay and act to keep prices in various sectors in check by setting a floor—as with the provision of social housing.

Of course, entering a coalition with right-wing parties with a very recent history of privatising state assets is a very different story, and it is here that the Greens want to be, as they put it on their website, 'our Green voices...in the room, at the decision-making table, where we need to be.'²⁰

More radical members of the Greens may feel they have a voice within the party while they are in opposition, but once the party enters government, it quickly becomes a very cold house for them. A party so utterly subservient to the capitalist system simply cannot deliver the type of change needed to solve the climate crisis or any of the other myriad crises facing us, like housing or health.

The Greens are such a party, and as their history has shown us, the only way²¹ they will ever be red is in the sense of the capitalist system: red in tooth and claw.

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Labour, Civil War and Executions in Kerry

Kieran McNulty

This essay¹ examines the period of the Civil War in Kerry, seeking to move beyond the traditional narrow focus on the military conflict between the IRA and Free State. Specifically it aims to analyse the response of the labour movement to the National Army's summary or extra-judicial executions of Republican prisoners. This is an aspect of the Civil War that has received little attention from academic historians. This article will pose the question, by accepting the Treaty and remaining in Dáil Éireann were the Labour TD's complicit in the actions of the Free State regime regarding the execution of prisoners? It will argue that the many speeches and protests in the Dáil by the Labour Party leader, Thomas Johnson, had absolutely no effect in ending the Free State's policy of executions. These Labour leaders were not socialists in the mould of Connolly or Larkin, and seemed more concerned with limiting the actions of militant workers - the National Union of Railwaymen, the postal workers, the dockers, the soviets etc rather than supporting a movement of mass class struggle. Only a radical form of protest, withdrawal of Labour TD's from the Dáil and a general strike could have had any hope of challenging the counter-revolution. These were actions the conservative leadership of the labour movement had absolutely no intention of pursuing and unfortunately for the Irish working-class no alternative revolutionary socialist party existed to challenge the Labour Party.

The historian, Gavin Foster has noted the recurring argument as to whether the Free State 'constituted a bourgeois counter-revolution' against republican goals which naturally aligned with the interests of the working-class?

Subsequent scholarship has found little evidence to support such a black-and-white-picture of the conflict's

messy class dynamics, though many historians generally concur that ... the Free State Government drew its staunchest support from the middle class, large farmers ... and other pillars of the Irish establishment.²

Kieran Allen has argued however, that behind the 'symbols' and 'mythology' of their 'abstract republic', 'there was an important point at issue' for the anti-Treatyites who 'sensed their former comrades were accepting a dependency relationship with their imperial foe'. This became abundantly clear when Collins ordered the shelling of the Four Courts on 28 June 1922, and in contrast to Foster's thesis, Allen suggests that the Free State Government

... claimed that they were merely restoring law and order, but it was an order where the poor knew their place and where there would be no more talk of land redistribution or better conditions for workers. With the first shot of the Civil War, the Irish counter-revolution had begun.³

After the truce was agreed, negotiations were initiated between Sinn Féin and the British government. The terms of the Treaty signed on 6 December 1921 meant that the new regime would not be a republic but a free state with dominion status within the British Empire and would demand that Dáil members swear an oath of fidelity to the King of England. Furthermore, it would consist of twenty-six counties, with the six north eastern counties being granted their own government. All this meant that London still had ultimate control over Irish affairs. On 7 January 1922, the Dáil voted to endorse the Treaty by 64 votes to 57. The anti-Treaty TD's, including Austin Stack from Tralee, had the support of the majority of the IRA. To counter this threat Richard Mulcahy, head of the pro-Treaty forces and Minister of Defence, began recruiting unemployed young men into the National Army, with the British supplying this new force with arms and ammunition.

Civil War in Kerry and Labour

At a special conference of the Irish Labour Party & Trade Union Congress (ILPTUC) in February 1922, the leadership moved decisively towards a pro-Treaty position. One labour historian has noted of Johnson, whose influence as leader of the Labour Party was to prove decisive, that

“[F]or all his English nonconformist conscience, he had a duplicitous streak which infuriated his critics. A rhetorical revolutionary when called upon, he now believed the revolution was over. In his British labour party mind set, a constitutional settlement promised the end of the national question and an open road to “normal” class politics.”

However, I would contend that it seems increasingly likely that the labour leadership came to the conclusion that ‘the revolution was over’ a full year before the Treaty was signed, essentially when martial law was declared on 10 December 1920 and the ILPTUC called an end to the railway boycott and strike action of any kind. Thus it was not a surprise that the Labour Party accepted the Treaty and its TDs took the decision to take their seats in the Dáil. The left opposition led by the Larkinites and the communists argued that ‘entering Dáil Éireann and taking the controversial oath of allegiance would legitimise the regime’. Their ‘abstentionist resolution’ was defeated by 115-82.⁴ After the republicans occupied the Four Courts, the ILPTUC called a one day general strike against the ‘militarism’ of both sides. The strike was essentially anti-Republican and was widely seen as such.⁵ In the General Election of 16 June 1922, Sinn Féin’s pro and anti-Treaty factions concluded a pact, which was largely honoured in Kerry, with the unopposed election of eight ‘Sinn Féin’ TDs, including Austin Stack amongst the five anti-Treaty members returned.⁶ The Labour Party won an impressive seventeen out of eighteen contested seats, receiving 21.3 per cent of the vote, nearly matching the total vote for Anti-Treaty Sinn Féin. ‘Clearly the Labour vote had a class aspect and suggested working-class interests in social and economic issues even in the midst of the great national debate’.⁷ Labour could have won more seats if they had stood more candidates but, ‘[U]sed to an electoral monopoly neither Sinn Féin faction relished the prospect of competition’, attempting to persuade or ‘intimidate’ Labour candidates from standing. Indeed hard line Republicans in Tralee including Sinn Féin TD, Austin Stack and IRA man John Joe Sheehy supported the farmers, the land owning class against the farm labourers. Also Niamh Purcell claims ‘four Labour candidates were intimidated into dropping out’ of the election.⁸ Labour ran no candidates in Kerry, the reasons behind this decision still remain unclear. In May, the *Kerry People* reported a letter from the Secretary of the

ITGWU Tralee Branch, Jeremiah Murphy, to Tralee Trades Council ‘stating that the members of the branch were of opinion that it would not be advisable to put forward a labour candidate at the coming election’. It was noted that ‘the majority of affiliated societies and also those of Newcastle West and Killarney being (sic) against’ standing candidates. The Council therefore duly accepted this position even though the ILPTUC stated that ‘finances would be forthcoming in the event of a candidate being put forward’ and the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation had ‘granted £500 for the purpose of the election’.⁹

In an attempt to ‘promote peace’, on 24 July 1922 Kerry Farmer’ Union called a ‘peace meeting’ which was held in the Courthouse in Tralee. Amongst those in attendance were members of Tralee Harbour Board and two representatives of the Labour Party, Mr Fleming a school teacher from Kilcummin and Mr Breen from Killtallagh. Also invited to the meeting was Commandant H. Murphy of the Kerry command of the National Army whom they hoped to impress upon their desire to avoid conflict and restore peace to the county. Though the meeting passed a resolution to this effect and wired it to the Government in Dublin, the war was to soon intensify even further in Kerry.¹⁰ Observing this gathering one is tempted to ask how the local Labour Party saw such a “coalition for peace” advancing the cause of labour and Connolly and Larkin’s goal of a workers’ republic?

Executions

At 10.30 on the morning of 2 August, 450 members of the Dublin Guards disembarked at the port of Fenit on the north-west coast of Kerry. By that evening they had control of Tralee, just nine miles to the east of the port for the loss of eight soldiers. The following day another 240 members of the Guards sailed across the River Shannon to Tarbert further strengthening the National Army’s offensive.¹¹ The *Kerry People* reported that ‘at midnight 13 August ... Killarney, the last irregular stronghold in Kerry fell ...’ to the National Army.¹² On 28 September the Dáil passed the Army (Special Powers) Resolution which according to Gerard Shannon, ‘allowed for the introduction of military courts of tribunal and introduced the brutal, draconian executions policy against anti-Treaty republicans’,¹³ therefore ‘any semblance of due process

was quickly abandoned'.¹⁴ Life soon changed dramatically for the worse for many of the citizenry of the Kerry with the Free State forces within weeks of arriving in the county launching a campaign of systematic execution of Republican prisoners, including seventeen-year-old Bertie Murphy from Castleisland by David Neligan, brother of the late Kerry Irish Transport & General Workers' Union (ITGWU) official, Maurice Neligan.¹⁵ The Squad stayed loyal to Collins after the Treaty and formed a key component of the officer corps of the Dublin Guards.¹⁶ By November 1922 seventeen Cumman na mBan members had been arrested in Tralee alone,¹⁷ and by 2 January 1923, seventy-nine Republicans and fifty-two Free State soldiers had been killed in Kerry.¹⁸ By the end of the Civil War in May 1923, the conflict would claim the lives of approximately 170 people in the county making 'the conflict a deadlier one for the county than the entire two-and-a-half campaign against the crown forces'.¹⁹ At the beginning of 1923, Brigadier General Paddy Daly, also of the Dublin Guards, assumed responsibility for Kerry Command, subsequently characterising his conduct in suitably brutal terms: '[N]obody asked me to take kid gloves so I didn't'.²⁰ From the onset of the Civil War the Labour Party came under increasing pressure to take a stand in defence of republican prisoners. Indeed, the party leadership suffered considerable international criticism. For instance, the Chicago Federation of Labour messaged the leading ILPTUC figure and TD for Louth Cathal O'Shannon, in late 1922, stating '[B]arbarous killing of prisoners of war has stunned the civilised world. Urge you to resign from parliament as a protest'.²¹ S. Duggan sent a telegram to O'Shannon on behalf of Cumann Poblacht Na H-Eireann N-Albain in late November 1922 stating that at a 'mass meeting held in Glasgow' a resolution was passed 'condemning execution of prisoners of war' and urged 'withdrawal of Labour Party from Provisional Parliament established by England. Must share responsibility for executions if its participation continues'.²²

On 6 March the IRA placed a trigger mine in road barricade near Castleisland, which resulted in the deaths of five soldiers.²³ As a result of this incident a wave of reprisals was unleashed across Kerry by the National Army. On the morning of 7 March, at Ballyseedy, near Tralee, nine Republican prisoners were tied together

around a mine and it was then detonated.²⁴ One prisoner escaped, Stephen Fuller, and recalled how, '... a Capt. Breslin from Donegal handed round cigarettes and told us that they would be the last cigarettes we would smoke. He said that they were going to blow us up with a mine, the same as Knocknagoshel'.²⁵ To add to the tragedy, because the military believed Fuller had been killed, nine coffins were prepared including one for Fuller. In Tralee none of the prisoner's relations were able to identify the bodies blown up, so bad were the injuries. Macardle describes how the 'frenzy' that gripped Tralee and Kerry at the time 'was terrible': the women seemed demented as a kind of 'madness' and horror spread amongst the people of the county.²⁶ The republican news sheet *Eire the Irish Nation* reported that 'the funerals were the largest and most impressive seen in the county for years'. As a consequence of this militant action by republican women a new edict was issued by the Government to Kerry Command, 'Prisoners who die while in military custody ... shall be interred by the troops in the area in which the death has taken place'.²⁷

Fuller's evidence the army tried to discredit by claiming 'he has become insane'.²⁸ On the same day at Countess Bridge, Killarney four prisoners were killed by a mine and on 12 March five more prisoners were killed at Caherciveen. Ultimately, the official army inquiry presided over by O'Daly, cleared Kerry Command, claiming that the Ballyseedy prisoners died removing a barricade that the IRA had previously mined and concluding that the allegations of murder were 'untrue and without foundation'. Indeed the inquiry concluded that,

... the allegations contained in the irregular propaganda submitted to the court particularly with reference to the maltreatment of prisoners are untrue and without foundation ... in view of the abnormal conditions which prevailed in this area ..., the discipline maintained by the troops is worthy of the highest consideration.²⁹

According to Ernie O'Malley's account in *The Singing Flame*, by 'February 1923, ten Kerry men had been murdered while in custody, but during the month of

March twenty five prisoners were murdered ...' in the county.³⁰

In Kerry, an increasingly hostile popular attitude developed towards the new régime over the issue. Several members of the Dublin Guards then broke ranks and forwarded statements to the Labour Leader, Thomas Johnson, who had previously raised the prisoner's issue.³¹ Lieutenant McCarthy, for instance, claimed to have witnessed 'murder', resigning from the Guards in protest. Similarly, a publican in Caherciveen overheard a National Army soldier named Griffin, 'boasting publicly he shot prisoners ... on their knees'.³² On 17 April Johnson raised the Kerry killings in the Dáil:

'I want to urge that this inquiry that has been made by a court consisting of three military officers should not be accepted as finally closing these incidents ... the Dáil have no right to assume, and the military have no right to assume that every prisoner who has been arrested is guilty of an offence'.

In reply, Minister of Defence, General Richard Mulcahy was 'quite satisfied that the occurrences were thoroughly investigated and that the findings were correct' and expressed his 'fullest confidence' in the inquiry's findings. He also refused Johnson's request 'to bring forward the evidence that was produced at those inquiries'.³³ When, in the same debate, Johnson asked Minister for Home Affairs, Kevin O'Higgins '[I]s it still possible to hold an inquest?' O'Higgins replied, 'I see no factor that would make it impossible. Whether there were factors that would make it desirable would be a matter for consideration'. Johnson also raised questions about the role of the Criminal Investigations Department, like the Dublin Guards made up of men who previously worked under Collins during the War of Independence, an organisation separate from the newly established Garda *Síochána* and now directed by O'Higgins.³⁴ However, Johnson's request for information and action on the mass murder of prisoners got no further than the Dáil chamber.³⁵ *Eire the Irish Nation* was not in the least convinced by Mulcahy's claims, arguing that '... murderers who try themselves cannot be expected to find otherwise than this court',³⁶ and referred to General Daly as having '... established for himself a reputation equal to that of Cromwell in Wexford ...'³⁷ In response to Johnson's

efforts to uncover the truth, republicans asked: 'If Mr Johnson be honest in his desire to investigate the Ballyseedy crime, he will make a journey to Tralee, where he will be able to satisfy himself whether the tragedy was murder or accident'.³⁸ Johnson never took them up on the offer.

The Catholic Church

Militant trade union activists and female Republicans not only faced the ire of Free State soldiers in Kerry. Throughout the Civil War, the Catholic hierarchy lent its full moral force behind the Treaty. On New Year's Day 1922, a Sunday, just days before the start of the Treaty debate in Dáil Éireann at 'all Masses' in parishes throughout Kerry 'the prayers of the congregation were asked for the ratification of the Treaty'.³⁹ The Republican press fought hard to undermine the influence of 'the pro-English clergy', whose hierarchy Peadar O'Donnell dismissed as a 'feudal remnant' that Republicans 'lumped ... in with the reactionary middle class and their allies'.⁴⁰ In Kerry, IRA member and school teacher, Séamus O'Connor recalled becoming so infuriated with his parish priest in Knocknagoshel, that he told 'him what would happen if he would ever so preach about us [sic] again'.⁴¹ Yet once again women were in the forefront of Republican attempts to challenge the official discourse, fracturing traditional modes of deference in the process. On 27 August 1922, the congregation at Sunday mass in Killarney Cathedral heard a letter from the Bishop of Kerry, Charles O'Sullivan, which accused the IRA of being in 'utter conflict with the moral law' and of 'military despotism ... an immoral usurpation and confiscation of the peoples' rights', prompting one Cumman na mBan (CnB) member from Kenmare to remonstrate with the bishop, promising no longer to hear mass 'and listen to insulting remarks'.⁴² In March 1923, Free State military intelligence reported that in Saint John's Church, Tralee, '... in defiance of the bishop's ban, when the priest had left the altar at the conclusion of the night's service, members of CnB proceeded to offer up prayers for dead Irregulars'.⁴³ Due to the militant activities and outright acts of defiance of CnB the Church viewed republican women as a threat to its moral authority. Cardinal Lodge described them as being 'involved in this wild orgy of violence and destruction' while the Most Reverend Dr. Coyne referred to 'half-

crazed, hysterical women' who were undermining the clergy and assisting 'in the slaughter of some of the best and bravest of Irish sons'.⁴⁴

The Defeat of the Workers' Movement

A general election was called for 27 August 1923. This was only months after the Civil War ended on 24 May with the 'dump arms' order issued by the Republican leadership. A total of 172 combatants and civilians had their lives in Kerry as a result of the conflict, the third highest loss of life and the highest per capita figure for any county during the war.⁴⁵ The Labour Party, for the first time decided to participate in a general election in Kerry standing two candidates, Cormac Breathnach, former president of the INTO from Caherciveen and Patrick Casey, of the Bakers' Union and President of TWC.⁴⁶ Kerry's economy was severely depressed and as recently as March, a National Army report stated that 'unemployment is rife' in the county.⁴⁷ Labour organised an energetic campaign with its candidates addressing public meetings throughout Kerry and which were reported in full due to the lifting of the Government ban on the publication of the county's newspapers. At a meeting in Killarney on 16 August, *The Liberator* reported Breathnach declaring that the 'ideal' of the Labour Party 'was a workers' republic and they would use any means at their command, except the gun, to obtain their goal'.⁴⁸ In reality this was more a case of rhetoric than substance. Nationally the results represented a significant reversal in electoral fortunes for Labour. While the number of seats in the Dáil increased from 128 to 153, Labour's representation in the chamber fell from 18 seats to 14. The Party's share of the national vote now stood at 10.6 per cent, half the corresponding figure for the 1922 General Election. In Kerry the Party's fortunes were equally unimpressive with Breathnach receiving 1,974 first preference votes and Casey receiving 2,829 in a constituency in which seven candidates were to be elected and the quota was 6,856.⁴⁹ The combined Labour vote in the county came to 10.01 per cent of the total ballot with 'roughly 40 per cent of the Kerry's registered voters [sitting] out the election'⁵⁰ suggesting widespread

apathy. However, 'the most important factor in the "green election" of 1923 was the Civil War and Labour's failure to adequately address the issues which led to the conflict – was one of the primary reasons for party's result in that election.⁵¹ Labour's disastrous showing at the polls was as a consequence of 'Larkinate attacks on it in Dublin' and to the party's 'position during the Civil War [which] won it no plaudits and left the party in the unhappy position of being held in contempt by both sides'.⁵²

By taking seats in the Dáil, the Labour Party legitimised the Free State and by extension its institutions including the National Army. The marked moderation of the Labour Party's leaders appeared matched only by republican myopia concerning the working-class struggle. The 'unwillingness of republicans to develop joint positions with the labour movement ... was a perennial weakness in republican strategy'.⁵³ For left-leaning republicans such as Liam Mellows, 'the blame lay firmly with Labour, rather than republicans' who argued that by their 'acceptance of the Treaty', the Labour leaders '... have betrayed not alone the Irish Republic but the labour movement in Ireland and the cause of the worker and peasants throughout the world'.⁵⁴ However, Peadar O'Donnell, member of the IRA Executive, suggested that 'we were a very pathetic executive, an absolutely bankrupt executive. It had no policy of its own'. In an interview late in his life he commented in greater detail:

'The economic framework and social relationships... were declared outside the scope of the Republican struggle; even the explosive landlord-tenant relationship, the rancher-small farmer tension. The Republican movement was inspired by 'pure ideals'. In the grip of this philosophy the Republican struggle could present itself as a democratic movement of mass revolt without any danger to the social pattern; without any danger to the haves from the have-nots... under the shelter of pure ideals the Irish middle-class held its place within a movement it feared.'⁵⁵

It has been argued that the 'depth of the 1921-23 catastrophe was unique in the way it turned Labour against itself, and obliterated the memory of the glory

years of 1917-21: the general strikes and the soviets, of the ambition to make One Big Union and a Workers' Republic'.⁵⁶ In Kerry, only seven ITGWU branches survived by 1923, down from fourteen in 1919, with a loss of over a third of their members.⁵⁷ An alternative socialist leadership did not exist to the likes Johnson and O'Brien due at least in part to Connolly and Larkin's adoption of the syndicalist theory of workers' organisation. This led the union bureaucracy to focus on the idea of an all-powerful 'one big union' but fail to establish a party based on 'Connolly's Marxism'⁵⁸

committed to fighting for a workers' republic as an actual reality, not merely as rhetorical utterances whose sole intention was to seek an accommodation with imperialism and capitalism. This leadership finally achieved their goal with their support for the Treaty which unleashed the counter-revolution establishing a Catholic theocracy and one of most conservative and reactionary states in Europe.

¹For a more detailed account of the period, 1921-23 see Kieran McNulty, 'Class, Gender and Civil War in Kerry, 1921-1923' in Francis Devine and Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh, (ed), *Bread not Profits: provincial working-class politics during the Irish Revolution*, (Dublin, 2022), Umiskin Press.

² Gavin Foster, 'The social basis of the Civil-War divide' in Crowley et. al. (ed.), *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, pp. 665.

³ Kieran Allen, *1916: Ireland's Revolutionary Tradition*, (London, 2016), Pluto Press, pp. 100-1.

⁴ Emmet O'Conner, *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824-2000* (Dublin, 2011), UCD Press, p. 124; see also Kieran McNulty, 'War and the working-class in Kerry 1919-1921' in *Saothar*, (Vol. 45, 2020), ILHS, pp. 87-98.

⁵ Mike Milotte, *Communism in Ireland: the pursuit of the workers' republic since 1916*, (Dublin, 1984), Gill and MacMillan, p. 56.

⁶ *Kerry People*, 27 May 1922.

⁷ Brian Hanley, "Merely tuppence half-penny looking down in tuppence"? Class, the Second Dáil and Irish Republicanism', in Liam Weeks and Micheál O Fathartaigh, (ed), *The Treaty: Debating and Establishing the Irish State*, (Newbridge, 2018), pp. 103-4.

⁸ Puirseil, 'Held in contempt by both sides'?

⁹ *Kerry People*, 27 May 1922.

¹⁰ *Kerry People*, 29 July 1922.

¹¹ *Kerry People*, 5 August 1922; Calton Younger, *Ireland's Civil War*, (Glasgow, 1982), Fontana Paperbacks, p. 407.

¹² *Kerry People*, 26 August 1922.

¹³ Gerard Shannon, "'You will be executed. ... as a solemn warning". Government opted for official reprisals for the murder the previous day of Sean Hales TD in *The Civil War, Ireland in 1922*, *Irish Times*, 10 May 2022.

¹⁴ Darragh Gannon and Fearghal McGarry, (ed), *Ireland 1922, Independence, Partition, Civil War*, (Dublin, 2022), Royal Irish Academy, p. 314.

¹⁵ Dorothy Macardle, *Tragedies of Kerry*, (Dublin, 1924), Irish Freedom Press, p. 9; see also Paul Dillon, 'Maurice Neligan: A Labour organiser in Kerry, 1918-20' in *The Kerry Magazine*, 2, 30, (2020)

¹⁶ Dillon, 'Maurice Neligan'; Tim Pat Coogan, *Michael Collins: a biography*, (London, 1990), Arroe Books, p. 209; the Dublin Guards were originally an elite section of the IRA's Dublin Brigade and came into existence after the Custom House debacle shortly before the end of the War of Independence. It was the only unit of the IRA to transfer intact to the National Army due

mainly to their loyalty to Michael Collins. All the remaining IRA units took the anti-Treaty side. see Pdraig Yeats, Dublin in Crowley et. al. (ed.), *Atlas of the Irish Revolution*, pp. 589-91.

¹⁷ Cal McCarthy, *Cumman na mBan* (Cork, 2007), p. 204.

¹⁸ Karl Murphy, General 'W.R.E. Murphy and the Irish Civil War' [Unpublished M.A. Thesis, N.U.I. (Maynooth) 1995], p.46; see also Macardle, *Tragedies of Kerry*, who claims that almost one hundred republicans were killed in Kerry between January and May 1923.

¹⁹ Gavin Foster, 'The Civil War in Kerry in history and memory, in Maurice J. Bric (ed.), *The Kerry History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, (Dublin, 2020), Geography Publications, p. 478.

²⁰ Karl Murphy, 'W.R.E. Murphy', p. 48; Karl Murphy, *History Ireland*, vol. 13, no. 6, (Nov. - Dec. 2005), pp. 10-11

²¹ Cathal O'Shannon papers, (ILHS), COS 93/12/85(IV).

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Luke Keane, *Knocknagoshel Star - Then and Now*, (Tralee, 1994); National Army, Kerry Command, CW/OPS/12C, IMA, 6 March 1923.

²⁴ *Eire the Irish Nation*, 7 April. 1923; *Kerryman*, 30 January 1981, 'Interview with Stephen Fuller'.

²⁵ *Eire the Irish Nation*, 7 April 1923; *Kerryman*, 30 January 1981, 'Interview with Stephen Fuller'.

²⁶ *Kerryman*, 9 January 1981; Macardle, p.19.

²⁷ Macardle, p.19.

²⁸ Kerry Command, CW/OPS/12C, 7 March 1923.

²⁹ 'Memoranda concerning alleged atrocities in Kerry' in Thomas Johnson's papers, National Library of Ireland [NLI], MS 17,140; Kerry Command, CW/OPS/12JK, 1 May 1923 Army intelligence also however, referred to 'the plan of having planted Irregular mines removed by Irregular prisoners'.

³⁰ Ernie O'Malley, *The singing flame*, Anvil Books Ltd., (Dublin, 1978), p.239; see also Michael Hopkinson, 'The Guerrilla phase and the end of the Civil War' in John Crowley et. al. (ed.), *Atlas of the Irish revolution*, (Cork, 2017), Cork University Press, p. 716.

³¹ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, 8 December 1922.

³² Thomas Johnson papers, Memoranda concerning alleged atrocities in Kerry during the Civil War, 1923, NLI, MS 17, 140.

³³ *Dáil Éireann Debates*, 17 April 1923, 185-88

³⁴ *Irish Examiner*, 26 April 1923.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 April 1923, 188-90

³⁶ *Eire the Irish Nation*, 9 May 1923.

³⁷ *Eire The Irish Nation*, 5 May 1923.

³⁸ Thomas Johnson papers, NLI, MS 17, 140.

³⁹ *Kerry People*, 7 Jan 1922.

⁴⁰ *Eire the Irish Nation*, 19 May 1923; Peadar O'Donnell, *The gates flew open; An Irish Civil War Prison Dairy*, (Cork, 2013), p. 4.

⁴¹ Seamus O'Connor, *Tomorrow was another day*, (Dublin, 1987), ROC Publications, pp. 101-13.

⁴² For pastoral letter, see *Irish Times*, 30 Aug 1922; for female republican reaction, Diarmaid Ferriter, *A nation and not a rabble: The Irish Revolution 1913-1923* (Dublin, 2015), p. 285.

⁴³ Kerry Command, CW/OPS/12K, 12 March 1923.

⁴⁴ Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'The Control of Women: while men of violence were denounced, church and State deplored the emancipation of women' in *The Civil War, Ireland in 1922*, *Irish Times*, 10 May 2022.

⁴⁵ John Dorney, 'The dead of the Irish Civil War', in 1921-1923, *The Split: From Treaty to Civil War*, *History Ireland*, 2021, according to Dorney, including the deaths resulting from the conflict in the Six Counties, approximately 2,000 people lost their lives due to political violence in Ireland in the years 1922-24.

⁴⁶ *The Liberator*, 21 August 1923; *The Liberator*, 23 August 1923; *Kerry People*, 26 August 1922.

⁴⁷ Kerry Command, CW/OPS/12K, 14 March 1923.

⁴⁸ *The Liberator*, 21 August 1923.

⁴⁹ *The Liberator*, 4 September 1923.

⁵⁰ Foster, 'The Civil War in Kerry', p. 478.

⁵¹ Arthur Mitchell, *Labour in Irish politics 1890-1930: The Irish Labour movement in an Age of Revolution*, (Dublin, 1974), Irish University Press, pp. 190-1.

⁵² Puirseil, 'Held in contempt by both sides'?

⁵³ Connor McNamara, *Liam Mellows: soldier of the Irish Republic, selected writings, 1914-1922*, (Newbridge, 2019), p. 134.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134-5.

⁵⁵ James Plunkett, *The Gems She Wore* (Arrow Books, 1978), p. 161, as cited by Willy Cumming, review of Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Between two Hells, the Irish Civil War', (London, 2021), Profile Books, 2021 in *Irish Marxist Review*, Vol. 11, No. 32, file:///C:/Users/Owner/Downloads/456-1794-1-PB.pdf

⁵⁶ Emmet O'Connor, 'War and syndicalism 1914-1923' in Donal Nevin, (ed.), *Trade Union Century*, p. 64.

⁵⁷ Francis Devine, 'The Irish Transport & General Workers' Union in Kerry, 1909-1930', *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society, Series 2, Vol. 20 (2020)*, p. 107-8.

⁵⁸ Mary Smith, 'Women in the Irish revolution, in *Irish Marxist Review*', 2015, Vol. 4, No 14, p. 42,



Ukraine— The Costs of War

Maurice Coakley

The war in Ukraine has been the most destructive conflict in Europe since the Second World War. It is also having a major political and economic impact across the world, not least in Europe.

All conflicts get enveloped by the fog of war, but rarely has there been a campaign of disinformation so intense as this. Anyone relying on Western media for information on the Ukraine conflict could only conclude that this is a war between pure good and pure evil and that it began with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia on February 28th of this year. The reality is a little more complicated.

Contemporary Ukraine is an amalgam of populations with different histories and speaking different languages. Most of Western Ukraine was part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and is Ukrainian-speaking; most of Eastern and Southern Ukraine was part of the Tsarist Empire and is Russian-speaking. These regions were amalgamated into a single Ukrainian state a century ago to form a Soviet Republic.

The current war is a continuation of what has been an ongoing conflict—essentially a civil war—in Eastern Ukraine since 2014. That civil war emerged in response to the actions of a new Ukrainian government that came to power following the Maidan Revolution in February of that year. The revolution was in part a genuine popular revolt and in part a US-supported coup against the elected government of Viktor Yanukovich. One consequence was that right-wing nationalist currents gained far more strength, including overtly neo-Nazi elements like the Azov Battalion.

One of the first actions of the new government was to exclude the Russian language from official use and to marginalise its use in education. Previously, both Ukrainian and Russian were official languages of state. Given that around 40 percent of Ukrainians are Russian speakers, the effect of this was to transform much of the

population into second-class citizens. Not all the Russian-speaking people of Ukraine are ethnically Russian (that is, some don't see themselves as Russian), but a significant percentage are, especially in the Donbass region, in Odessa, and in Crimea.

The Russian government's response was to occupy the strategically important region of Crimea. A few months later, there were uprisings in Eastern Ukraine, in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. While backed by Moscow, these were genuine popular revolts that enjoyed substantial support across these regions. Elsewhere, popular protests against these discriminatory policies were crushed, most notably in Odessa. The establishment of separate 'Peoples' Republics' in Donetsk and Lugansk was followed by a sustained military assault—including attacks on civilians—by the Ukrainian army and far-right militias like the Azov Battalion (later the Azov Regiment after it was formally made part of the Ukrainian National Guard).

The French and German governments brokered an agreement, known as the Minsk 2 Treaty, between the Ukrainian and Russian governments, and the local separatists ended their fighting. Crucial to the Minsk 2 Treaty was an agreement to demilitarise the region and recognise the autonomy of Donetsk and Lugansk within Ukraine. The agreement was resisted by right-wing nationalist currents in Ukraine, and successive Ukrainian governments have demanded full control over the separate regions before they permit elections there and before the Ukrainian parliament passes a law permanently changing the Ukrainian constitution to accommodate autonomy for the Donbass region. The US government formally adhered to the Minsk 2 Treaty, but in practice it did nothing to encourage Kiev to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the Donbass.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected in 2019 with a huge mandate to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflicts in Ukraine, but once in office, he backed down before threats from the far-right and began instead, with US encouragement, to build up the Ukrainian Army for a confrontation with Russia.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine was not driven solely, or perhaps even primarily, by the need to protect the Russian-speaking community there. The tensions between Russia and Ukraine were hugely exacerbated by the US's project of expanding NATO up to the Russian borders to include Ukraine and Georgia.

The eastward expansion of NATO

The declared purpose of NATO was to protect Western Europe against Communist aggression. In the period leading up to German re-unification, the Americans promised Gorbachev that if the Soviet forces withdrew from Eastern Europe, they would not attempt to move their forces eastwards. Indeed, in the wake of the fall of the USSR, it was widely assumed in Europe that NATO would no longer be needed. Instead, under pressure from Washington, NATO not only persisted but began to expand eastward, up to the borders of Russia.

Serious concerns about NATO expansion are not confined to Putin's inner circle but are much more widely shared across the Russian state and, to a considerable extent, within Russian society more broadly. We are told today that NATO is needed in order to curtail the threat of Russian aggression, but this explanation is unconvincing. Russia had ended the Warsaw Pact and pulled its troops out of Eastern Europe.

During the early period of Putin's presidency, he specifically requested at a meeting with President Clinton that Russia be permitted to join NATO. Clinton is reported to have said that he would personally favour Russia joining, but the US made no attempt to integrate Russia in its military alliance.

In his *Grand Chessboard* (1997), Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former US national security advisor, outlined the logic of US foreign policy: The greatest threat to American global primacy would be the emergence of an alliance of key states across the Eurasian continent. A convergence of interests between Paris, Berlin, Moscow, and Beijing would be the ultimate nightmare for Washington. This notion goes back to Halford Mackinder's argument, published by the Royal Geographical Society in 1904 and which influenced British foreign policy in the early twentieth century, that Britain was the 'offshore' power in relation to Europe in a way that is analogous to the United States' role in relation to Eurasia today. The crucial strategic task of the US in the post-Cold War period has been to prevent the emergence of a Eurasian power bloc.

This would certainly explain much about American foreign policy over the last three decades, but it raises some other questions. Given that China has the largest (or second-largest, depending on what measures are used) economy in the world and the largest population, and that

it is still governed by a Communist party, would it not make more sense to include Russia within the 'Western' camp as a bulwark against China?

It would seem that a debate on this issue did occur within the 'foreign policy establishment' in Washington in the years following the fall of the USSR. Putin himself, and much of the Russian elite, certainly wanted to be accepted as part of the 'Western' club, and their exclusion has certainly rankled. So why was Russia not accepted? Why was it not permitted to join NATO?

The argument that is given today, that Russia is autocratic whereas NATO members are democratic, is hardly plausible. NATO was quite happy to have military dictatorships in Greece and Turkey as members. So why not accept Russia, where the president had actually been elected?

If Russia had been permitted to join NATO, this would have had the effect of evening out the balance of military power between Europe and the USA. The countries of the European Union, taken together, have a larger economy (and a larger market) than the US. If there were to be an 'evening out' of nuclear military power between America and Europe, then the US would become just one more power. It would still remain the largest national economy and the most powerful military state, but it would now become *primus inter pares*—the first among equals. It would no longer possess 'preponderant' power.

Successive US governments are indeed committed to preponderant power or 'full-spectrum dominance,' but it is not obvious why. Across most of the world, communism has suffered a historical defeat, and in China, the Communist government made a significant structural compromise with capitalism. Why can rich Americans not just sit back and rest on their laurels, collecting dividends and rent? Why does the American elite need, or think they need, to be the preponderant power in the world? Why do they think that they have to dominate the world?

In so far as the issue is addressed at all, two culprits tend to be offered: the power of the military-industrial complex and the weight of American supremacist ideology, usually referred to as neo-conservatism. But the truth is that the project of global dominance enjoys broad support across the American elite, far beyond corporations involved in weapons manufacturing.

Over the last four decades, US capital has shifted a huge amount of its productive base outside of the United States

(to benefit from lower wages and easier access to local markets). Alongside this—and closely linked to it—US finance has greatly expanded and the wealth of America's super-rich has become heavily dependent upon US global possessions and upon maintaining the dollar as the world's dominant currency. This is often presented as representing a massive strengthening of US capital, but there is a case for suggesting that it actually represents a weakening of US capitalism and of its state power.

American military expansionism is not driven by America's overwhelming economic power but by its increasing fragility. The US does not have the economic clout it once possessed and is now hugely reliant on the continued role of the dollar as the world's dominant currency. What Washington has not yet grasped is that its desperate effort to shore up its global primacy is already having the opposite effect of undermining the global role of the dollar.

War with Russia

Long before the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, leading American scholars like the historian Stephen Cohen or the international relations theorist John Mearsheimer warned Washington that the strategy of expanding NATO across Eastern Europe would more than likely lead to future wars with Russia, especially if they moved into Ukraine (precisely because of its internal ethnic complexity). Washington chose to ignore these warnings.

To argue that Washington provoked this war is not to endorse Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. Far from it. The invasion has come at a huge human cost and the Russian government is held responsible for this. Some observers argue that the Russian invasion was a pre-emptive move, designed to block a Ukrainian invasion of the Donetsk and Lugansk autonomous regions, but even if this were true, the invasion was still a mistake, because it has made the Ukrainian government and their American backers look like innocent victims. Had Zelenskyy's forces launched a full-scale military assault against the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, Russia would have been in a strong position to resist this, and would have won wide international and domestic support for doing so.

If anything, Putin seems to have marched blindly into Washington's trap. The invasion has hugely strengthened popular support (at least among Ukrainian speakers) for the Zelenskyy government, which prior to the invasion had fallen to a record low. The invasion has also unified

the European states against Russia and has enormously consolidated American political and economic control of Europe.

In 1996, eight years after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan,

former director of the Central Intelligence Agency Robert Gates revealed in his memoirs that the US government actually began funding the Mujahidin (the Islamist guerrillas) in July 1979, six months *before* the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Three years later, in a 1998 interview with the French newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Zbigniew Brzezinski admitted that, with this covert aid to the Mujahidin, the US government deliberately increased the chances that the Soviets would invade Afghanistan. Brzezinski defended this decision, saying: 'That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap... We now [had] the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam war.'

All the evidence suggests that American neo-conservatives likewise hoped to draw Russia into a war that the US did not have to fight, just as they had successfully drawn the Soviet Union into a war in Afghanistan four decades earlier. What they had not fully calculated, then or now, was what the consequences of all this might be.

Western commentators assure us that Russia had hoped to conquer all of Ukraine. This seems unlikely. The evidence suggests that Putin hoped that the rapid advance of the Russian military would compel Kiev into a serious peace agreement. Indeed, they came close to this in March. But Washington had other plans. Boris Johnson was dispatched to Kiev, presumably with Biden's blessing, to block a peace agreement and to persuade the Zelenskyy government to continue the war. Instead of a short, localised conflict, the end result of Washington and London's intervention has been to ensure a protracted war in which there is a very real possibility that it could escalate into a nuclear conflict.

The frontline between Ukraine and Russia is longer than the Western Front in the First World War. Indeed, the Ukraine conflict has come to resemble the Great War in many respects. Both sides are deeply entrenched and the

conflict is turning into a war of attrition. The Russians control the airspace—the Ukrainian Air Force was eliminated in the first days of the war. They also have an overwhelming artillery advantage, despite the shipment of NATO weapons to Ukraine. But they have a shortage of troops. Successful invading armies are supposed to have a 3:1 advantage, but the Ukrainian forces probably outnumber Russian troops, who have relied heavily on local militias in the Donbass region.

Russia has made significant gains over the last few months, most notably the capture of the city of Mariupol, where the neo-Nazi Azov Regiment was based. They have also taken much of the Donbass region. Ukrainian military resistance has been strong, but they have suffered enormous casualties: tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have been killed. Russian advances have been slow and they have suffered some setbacks, notably in the Kharkov region.

The Moscow government appears to have concluded that no peace agreement is likely and that they need to escalate the war against Ukraine by increasing their troop numbers. They have also held referenda in the parts of the Russian-speaking regions that they control, which has led to these regions being formally incorporated into Russia. The longer the war lasts, the more damaging it will be to Russia. While most Russians appear sympathetic to the plight of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians, a protracted conflict runs the risk of generating widespread domestic discontent.

The sanctions war

For over a century now, military conflict has been accompanied by economic war, in many cases superseding it. The US in particular has launched economic sanctions against a range of countries, many of which, like Venezuela or Cuba, had engaged in no military challenges to the US but had sought greater control over their own economies.

It was widely assumed that the economic sanctions against Russia would have a devastating impact on its economy, causing political unrest and forcing Moscow to capitulate. The plan was, in Joe Biden's words, to reduce the rouble to rubble. Washington certainly succeeded in persuading the European Union to introduce a wide range of sanctions against Russia, but the plan has backfired badly.

Russia is a major supplier of gas, oil, and a variety of precious minerals like lithium. It is also a major exporter of wheat and fertiliser. The effect of these sanctions was to hugely increase the global price of these commodities, compensating Russia for any loss of trade.

Across the Global South, most of the larger states refused to go along with the Western sanctions and have continued to trade with Russia. It was to be expected that China and Iran would ignore Washington's warnings to boycott Russia (especially as they themselves had been subjected to similar sanctions), but what has surprised most observers is the wide range of states which have adopted a position of neutrality in what they see as a proxy conflict between the US and Russia. These have included Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Brazil, Argentina, most of South-East Asia, and most crucial of all (because of its huge population), India. Many of these states had been seen as close allies of the US.

Since the Second World War, most international trade has been conducted using the dollar, which has also been the major reserve currency (other states need to save dollars in order to secure the stability of their own currencies). This has been enormously advantageous to the United States because it enabled them to earn wealth vastly greater than their declining industrial base permitted.

Following the financial crash of 2008, many states across the Global South began to discuss alternatives to the dollar as a currency of trade, but the move away from the dollar has been slow. The West's sanctions against Russia since the beginning of the Ukraine War have rapidly accelerated this shift away from the dollar. A whole range of countries are now working out alternative approaches to trading in dollars. In part they are motivated by a concern that they might be subjected to sanctions by Washington at some future point. They also have a somewhat different perspective on the history of the modern world and are unconvinced by the arguments of the Western governments or the propaganda of their media.

If the Ukraine War has seen a loosening of Washington's grip over the Global South, it has also seen a remarkable consolidation of their power over Europe. For decades, the US has sought to discourage European countries—especially Germany—from receiving oil and gas supplies from Russia. Washington actively campaigned against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, targeting any companies involved in its construction. Germany and other European countries

resisted American pressure because the price of gas and oil received from Russia was significantly lower than fuel imported from the US or elsewhere.

Two days before the invasion, severe sanctions were imposed against Russia, including closing Nord Stream 2, after the Russian parliament officially recognised the Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk. Once Russia invaded Ukraine, these sanctions were escalated, but European officials seem to have given very little thought to how these sanctions might impact Europe's own economy.

The radical American economist Michael Hudson claims that the NATO-backed war in Ukraine was primarily directed not against Russia but against Europe. This might seem far-fetched, but following the bombing of the Nord Stream pipelines, it appears more plausible. The Russians will most likely be blamed by the Western media for these attacks, but this is not remotely credible. The Russians controlled the flow of gas through these pipelines, and as the Western media never tire of pointing out, it gave them leverage over Germany and the rest of Western Europe.

The attack on the pipelines occurred in shallow waters close to the Swedish and Danish coasts, an area that is heavily policed by both the Swedish and Danish navies. It could scarcely have been carried out without their knowledge. As it happens, a US naval force capable of such an attack was in this region of the Baltic at the time.

It is not just that the US Navy were the only force likely to have carried out the attacks on the gas pipeline; the US government promised they would do so. In January, Victoria Nuland, Washington's leading foreign policy strategist is on record as saying, 'With regard to Nord Stream 2, we continue to have very strong and clear conversations with our German allies...If Russia invades Ukraine, one way or another, Nord Stream 2 will not move forward.' A few weeks later, President Biden echoed this sentiment at a press conference with the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz: 'If Russia invades...there will no longer be a Nord Stream 2, we will bring an end to it.'

What the Western media is reluctant to discuss is that the US government regards Germany as a serious economic rival. Since the end of the Second World War, the US has seen Germany and Japan less as allies and more as satellites. Not only does the US have military bases in Germany, the German Army is directly under NATO command (the only European army under the formal

control of NATO). WikiLeaks revealed that the NSA, the US intelligence agency, spied on German chancellor Angela Merkel and other leading German politicians, using Germany's own intelligence service to do so.

Washington was willing to tolerate Germany and Japan as significant economic rivals precisely because they were political/military satellites. The end of the Cold War threatened to undermine this subordinate relationship. In particular, Germany's deepening economic relationship with Russia and China was seen as a worrying development. Not only does Germany supply China with high-quality engineering goods, it also imports large quantities of manufactured consumer goods from China. And of course it buys a large amount of its oil and gas supplies from Russia.

The war in Ukraine has been a great boost for Washington's project of ensuring the continued subordination of Europe, and in particular its largest economy, Germany. Not only that, the sanctions against Russia have had a very damaging effect on the German economy, and this damage will deepen the longer the war lasts. Many key German industries that rely on Russian gas face closure.

Even if there had been no war in the Ukraine, the global economy would be heading into a recession. The low interest rates that were necessary to prevent a full-scale depression after the last global financial crisis have had the effect of building up huge amounts of debt across much of the world's economy (and weakening important sections of financial capital, like insurance and pension funds). If the US and other governments maintain low interest rates, these debts will increase, making the whole financial order very fragile. If they raise interest rates—as they have—the global economy is heading into a major recession. Seasoned analysts of global markets, like Nouriel Roubini and Yves Smith, are predicting a new global financial crisis which will likely be at least as severe as that of 2008. These economic difficulties have in turn been greatly exacerbated because of the sanctions imposed against Russia. This crisis will most likely be particularly severe in Europe, and may well threaten the survival of the European Union.

As winter approaches, it has begun to dawn on Europe's political leaders that things have not worked out as planned. Russia has not collapsed and the states of the Global South have not submitted to the West's commands to sanction Russia. It has become increasingly clear that

Europe will pay a high price for the sanctions war. The French foreign minister, Bruno Le Maire, and the German economic minister, Robert Habeck—both enthusiastic advocates of sanctions—have criticised the United States for over-charging for gas. The Belgian prime minister, Alexander De Croo, has warned that Europe is facing deindustrialisation and the severe risk of fundamental social unrest: ‘A few weeks like this and the European economy will just go into a full stop.’ Across Europe, there have been widespread protests against the cost-of-living surge, against the sanctions, and against the war.

If Russia miscalculated by invading Ukraine, they were not the only people who miscalculated. Modern wars are not zero-sum games where one side wins all and the other side loses all. Increasingly in war, both sides lose. The combination of a deep recession, a global financial crisis, and a major political backlash flowing from the sanctions war will put serious strains on America’s project of global primacy.



Sport Is the Opiate of the Masses:

Qatar, the World Cup, and the End of Football Activism

Damian Gallagher

Introduction

Sport is often lauded as a cure-all for society's problems. Speaking at the 2000 Laureus World Sports Awards, South African president Nelson Mandela declared that 'Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to Unite in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair,' a quote regularly favoured by sports organisations when seeking increased funding and by various government ministers when justifying government spending on sports already rich in private resources. The author has even heard first hand a sports minister invoke this quote at the beginning of a short speech that ended with them proudly boasting of how they would like to compete against an opposition politician so that they could cause them serious physical harm! He left quickly afterwards in embarrassment.

The intention of this article is to highlight issues and topics in sport that Karl Marx may well have considered in his writings if he were alive or if sport had played the role in nineteenth-century society that it does today. It will focus on the upcoming Qatar World Cup and is intended to provide a snapshot of contemporary footballer activism and an assessment of the likelihood that footballers will utilise their *power to unite* and *change the world*.¹ The examples and predictions put forward in this article are intended to stimulate the reader's own predictions and are to serve as a snapshot for the purposes of further reflection and articles in the aftermath of the Qatar World Cup itself.

A brief overview of the development of sport, spectatorship, and football

¹ Without intention to cast aspersions on anyone noted or alluded to therein.

The word 'sport' is a derivative of the word 'disport' (to amuse or enjoy oneself through recreation or physical activity as a means of diversion from work or serious matters) and has its roots in the Latin term *des-porto* (to carry away). It is as old as humanity itself and is intrinsically bound up in its survival. With the necessity for early humans to keep warm, hunt, and defend themselves, their tribes, and later their countries from others and wild animals, the necessity for them to develop running, jumping, and swimming skills is inherent in their evolution.

Originally, sport developed as a form of religious worship, with participants engaging in sporting contests as a form of worship; improved harvests and fertility among cattle would be their reward.¹ Many of today's modern sports have their origins in ancient religious rites, with the most famous being the Olympic Games, which ancient Greeks dedicated to the Olympian gods in the eighth century BC.² The first recorded Olympics, in 776 BC, marked a decisive change in the world of sport, with people starting to gather to watch the contests and spectatorship, as well as participation, becoming a diversion from the drudgery of everyday life.

As crowds grew, arenas and stadia were built. To attract the best athletes and bigger crowds, prize money was offered. Gymnasiums, swimming pools, and health clubs were also soon invented. Other competitions followed, with the Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean games in Greece, the Circus Maximus in Rome, and the Tailteann Games at Teltown, Co. Meath. The sports themselves also evolved from athletics, archery, and gymnastics into horse or chariot racing. In the twelfth century AD, horseback jousting was the greatest spectator sport of its age, with participants competing for profit in front of large, chanting audiences as part of national sides with team colours, big salaries, transfer fees, and celebrity.³

From the thirteenth century AD, many kicking ball games had become popular across the world. 'Mob' or 'Medieval' football was played across many towns and cities in England, although they lacked any rules, meaning that the use of hands and sticks was also allowed, and high levels of physical violence were not unusual or unexpected by the large crowds who followed games that lasted hours.⁴

The birth of modern football came in October 1863 at the Freemasons' Tavern in London, where a gathering of various representatives of football clubs adopted a motion

to form the Football Association and the rules of football, or soccer (an original slang term developed from the term *association*), were initially established. With proper organisation, few material resources required, and a workforce seeking *a means of diversion from work or serious matters*, the appeal and popularity of football grew quickly in Britain, especially in working-class industrial factories and areas. By the end of the nineteenth century, football was booming, with one million spectators per season. It grew so quickly that many grounds couldn't cope.⁵ As with other 'English games,' like rugby, hockey, and cricket, football followed its soldiers, teachers, and missionaries to British colonies, and it was soon adopted by the locals.⁶ In Ireland, it has long been viewed as the 'garrison game,' as its growth started in the towns where British garrisons were in place.

Over the past thirty years, the English Premier League has seen its revenue grow by 2400 percent to almost €5 billion, and it expects to see revenue exceed €6 billion this year. In 2020/21, total attendance at English Premier League games was fifteen million, and despite having no match-day revenue due to Covid-19, the European football market increased its revenue by 10 percent to €27.6 billion.⁷ FIFA (the International Association of Federation Football), the world's governing body for football, reported in 2021 that its revenue of \$766.5 million was a 187 percent increase from 2020⁸.

Marxism and sport

Writing in the nineteenth century, Marx gave little attention at all to sport. In Vol. 1, Chapter 27 of *Capital*, he highlights the role of deer forests in the Scottish Highlands, being a matter of sport for some and solely a source of profit for others. In Vol. 2, Chapter 20, he uses sport only as a metaphor to highlight the capitalist extraction of surplus value as 'indulging in the useless sport of advancing £100 in money and giving in exchange £80 in commodities, instead of advancing £80 in money and supplying in exchange for it £80 in commodities,'⁹ There is no doubt that this paucity reflects the role and status of sport at the time, before the rapid growth in the mass organisation of sport and latterly its mass commodification and commercialisation. However, had Marx been writing today, there is little doubt that the philosophy, politics, economics, and sociology of sport, and the 'people's game' of football, would receive much more attention.

Scholars and Marxist analysis to sport!

Executive Committee of the Workers Sport Alliance of America¹⁰

Sport does not exist in a vacuum

Perhaps the most profound and widely cited analogy used in deference to the role that sport plays in society today is the adaptation of Marx's renowned philosophical proclamation on religion,¹¹ the assertion that it is sport that is the *opiate of the masses*,¹² a temporary means used by the wealthy elite to mask class divisions and distract the disenfranchised working class from economic and social injustices and the damaging reality of the capitalist system by paradoxically uniting and dividing them into 'them and us.'¹³ Sport also serves as a more permanent means of pacifying the working class with 24/7 entertainment and producing ideological and nationalistic hegemony on a local, national, and global scale.

Qatar and World Cup 2022

On the 2nd of December, 2010, FIFA made the surprise announcement that the Persian Gulf state of Qatar would host the 2022 World Cup, a country then ranked outside the top one hundred (behind Malawi, Grenada, Togo, and Syria) and beaten by Irish League club side Linfield FC in July 2022. Costing \$220 billion to host, it will be the most expensive World Cup in history¹⁴ (second was Brazil in 2014 at \$15 billion)—more than all other world cups put together. In return, the local economy will be boosted by a mere \$20 billion, a relatively low return of 9.1 percent on any investment hardly seems logical!

The discovery of oil in the Qatari region in the 1940s provided the foundations for modern-day Qatar. Until then, its economy was largely based on fishing and pearl hunting. It has been ruled by the Al Thani Family since 1825, and gained independence from the UK in 1971. Over the course of the last twenty-five years it has become a significant player on the world stage, and in 2008 it launched the Qatar National Vision 2030 to ensure that 'Qatar becomes an advanced society capable of sustaining its development and providing a high standard of living for its people' through the four pillars of human, economic, social, and environmental development,¹⁵ a vision developed in response to Qatar's realisation that its long-term sustainability could be compromised by over-reliance on oil and gas and a need to develop its private sector, small businesses, and tourism.

Currently, its economic pillar is well supported. In 2021, while average global GDP was \$12.259 per capita,

Qatar's was \$61.276 per capita, or \$179.5 billion in total.¹⁶ In 2009, its total GDP was \$97.8 billion.¹⁷ As a result, the human pillar (prosperity) is also well supported. Per inhabitant, they have the fourth-greatest purchasing power in the world. However, this financial success has come at a severe cost, with their social (realising a *just and caring society*) and environmental (*harmonious protection*) pillars needing some considerable attention.

The 2021–22 Amnesty International report on the state of human rights in Qatar¹⁸ highlights continuing human rights abuses against migrant workers, women, the LGBTI community, and ongoing curtailments of the freedom of expression and assembly. Over 90 percent of Qatar's three million inhabitants are migrant workers, and despite claims of reforms by the government, they continue to face indefensible working conditions and systemic abuse.

Migrant workers are prohibited from joining or forming a trade union and are often subject to wage theft by their employers. Over thirty thousand additional labourers from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Philippines have been employed to build the eight stadiums that will host the World Cup. There are reports that between two and seven thousand migrant workers have died in Qatar since 2010, with heart attacks and heat stroke prevalent in the high temperatures, and there has been little in the way of reparations for their families. Many also report that six-day weeks and thirteen-hour days are the norm in return for wages of \$1.50 per hour and squalid living conditions.

Qatari women face discrimination in both law and practice. They continue to be tied to a male guardian whose permission is required for key life decisions (e.g. to get married or go to university). Women also forgo guardianship of their children if they get divorced. The forty-five-member Consultative Assembly legislature has no women.

Homosexuality is illegal in Qatar, and it is among the most dangerous places in the world for LGBTI travellers. Homosexual males can face up to seven years in prison for having sex, and gay Muslims can face the death penalty.¹⁹ While gay fans are officially being told they are welcome in Qatar for the 2022 World Cup, they are also being told not to demonstrate with rainbow flags and to use common sense for their own protection. A potential paradox waits for the LGBTI community in a country with low crime rates and where violence is rare. With public displays of affection frowned upon, goal-scoring

players are well advised to show restraint—especially in the ninety-fifth minute of a game! Qatar's ongoing abuse of human rights is at great odds with FIFA's human rights position, which states that it 'embraces its responsibility to respect human rights across its operations and relationships.'²⁰

Despite its relatively small size and great vulnerability to rising sea levels, Qatar has been criticised for being too slow to alleviate the effects of climate change. It is the largest supplier of liquified natural gas (LNG) and the biggest per capita polluter in the world. In 2020, it had emissions of almost 107 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) from fossil fuels and industry.

Despite its misleading claim that it is helping tackle climate change as gas produces less CO₂ than fossil fuels, it has criticised promises for net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and has been reticent to look beyond a 25 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, a position that is also odds with both FIFA's own promise of a 50 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2040,²¹ as well as with the UN Sports for Climate Change Framework, which calls for action on climate footprints and transformative climate action.²² Given how many contradictions exist between Qatar and the various articles, statutes, and policy documents of FIFA, it is a curiosity how and why Qatar was even awarded World Cup 2022.

Sportswashing, bribery, and the Qatar World Cup 2022

Sportswashing is a political tool that is used by corrupt, tyrannical, or repressive states and countries to airbrush the stains of human rights abuse from their tainted reputation and public image. It involves the cynical use of sport to divert attention away from their violations by creating positive images or highlights to pretend that all is okay. Its use can be traced back decades across a range of sports and sporting events. These include, for example, the 1936 Olympic Games in Nazi Germany; the 2008 Olympics in Beijing; the Grand Prix of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Qatar in Formula One racing; the 1976 'Rumble in the Jungle' boxing match between Ali and Foreman in Zaire; and the 1978 World Cup in Argentina. More recent examples are seen in Saudi Arabia's purchase of Newcastle United FC in England and their financing of the LIV Golf tour using the Public Investment Fund, the sovereign wealth fund of the country. Qatar's hosting of World Cup 2022 has obviously been subject to many

claims of sportswashing, which although highly unethical, is not illegal.

What is illegal, though, is corruption and bribery. In 2011, former FIFA vice president Jack Warner alleged that Qatar had bought the World Cup, and in various reports, the *Times* newspaper has made claims that Qatar sabotaged rival bids for the World Cup with a ‘black ops’ campaign of dirty tricks and secret \$880 million payments to FIFA. Qatar has always denied wrongdoing, and a 2014 Sepp Blatter-run FIFA investigation cleared Qatar of any wrongdoing, a view not shared by the United States Department of Justice, which in October 2021 said that representatives working for Qatar had bribed FIFA officials to secure the World Cup and charged several people with crimes that included wire fraud and money laundering.²³

Sport, football, and political Activism

Despite the pronouncements and various policies of FIFA, it was never likely to reverse its decision to award the World Cup to Qatar. Similarly, with much of Europe reliant on Qatari LNG gas and 34 percent of Qatar’s foreign direct investments being in Europe alongside over \$400 billion in investments across forty countries around the world (with the UK alone benefiting from investments worth over £35 billion²⁴), it was unlikely that any other nation would be willing to raise any substantial objection beyond rhetoric as useful as FIFA’s policies! However, this reticence has not always been so prevalent, though it has increased significantly since sport became the mass-market commodity and commercial success that it is today.

Despite the cries of sporting purists that sport and politics do not and should not mix, it has long been apparent that they inextricably do, and that sports people should be political too.²⁵ As well as sportswashing, nation states also use sport to enhance their prestige and standing with rival countries by peaceful means, or as George Orwell put: sport is ‘war minus the shooting.’ This was best exemplified during the Cold War era, when 67 out of 147 countries, led by the US and their objections to the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, boycotted the Moscow Olympics of 1980. In response the Soviet Union and its allies subsequently boycotted the Los Angeles Olympics of 1984. In another example, the International Olympic Committee excluded South Africa from competing at their games from 1964 due to the crimes against humanity perpetrated as part of apartheid,

but they were happy to allow the Beijing Olympics of 2008. South Africa also faced bans from a wide range of sporting bodies, including rugby, athletics, golf, football, and cricket associations, though their cricketers themselves did sometimes compete: between 1982 and 1990, several lucrative ‘rebel’ tours of South Africa by cricketers from England, Australia, Sri Lanka, and the West Indies took place against the wishes of International Cricket.

However, as the political activism of nation states and sports organisations has subsided, the same cannot be said of sports people themselves—rebel cricketers aside. There is a long history of political activism by sports people around the world, who have used their platform to elevate and advance political and social causes for a global audience. 1960s America saw Muhammad Ali refuse to enlist in the Vietnam War and the 1968 Black Power Salute of Tommie Smith and John Carlos in protest at the treatment of Black Americans and other minorities in the US. In the 1970s tennis player Billie Jean King was an active campaigner for gender equality, while Martina Navratilova was an advocate for gay rights in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, five-time NBA champion and twelve-time All Star ‘Magic’ Johnson became a campaigner for safe sex and education around HIV and AIDS after bravely announcing that he had tested positive for HIV contracted through heterosexual activities. More recently, in 2016 Colin Kaepernick ‘took a knee’ during the US national anthem to protest police violence against minorities and elevate the Black Lives Matter movement to a wider audience, inspiring many others to do the same, including Megan Rapinoe, of the US national soccer team, who also advocates for LGBTI rights, gender discrimination, and equal pay rights for female footballers. Most recently, Manchester United’s Marcus Rashford successfully campaigned for a change in government policy during the Covid-19 pandemic that saw 1.3 million school children receive free school meals during the school holidays, and he continues to fight against child poverty.

Rashford was rightly praised and recognised with awards for his brilliant work. However, the active sports person making a political stand is not always so well recognised or rewarded. Kaepernick’s actions are widely thought to have cost him his career, and Tommie Smith was banned by the International Olympic Committee and faced financial hardship and death threats. Closer to home, footballer James McClean has suffered supporter insults,

sectarian abuse, and death threats since refusing to wear the remembrance-day poppy on his shirt in protest against the actions of the British Army in Derry during the Troubles and particularly on Bloody Sunday, when fourteen innocent people were murdered without justice for their families. The power of sports people today was perhaps best seen when Cristiano Ronaldo removed bottles of Coca-Cola during a press conference at the 2021 European Championships: the coverage went viral and the value of Coca-Cola dropped by \$4 billion. While probably an act of impulse and non-political, it nonetheless shows what could be done if footballers decided to use their activism at times of maximum exposure.

Conclusion—Will Qatar be the end of footballer activism?

At the time of writing, there are forty days until the 2022 World Cup kicks off in Qatar, and the world of football activism has been relatively muted. There have been fan banner protests calling to 'Boycott Qatar 2022' in France, Denmark, and Germany. Watford also cancelled a pre-season friendly with Qatar after fan group objections. However, various media outlets are reporting that there is now a shortage of accommodation for the 1.5 million fans expected to attend. Several French cities have stated that they will not organise fan zones, but the mayor of Paris claims it is not a boycott of the event or the Qatari regime. Hummel, sponsors of the Danish team, have also unveiled a kit designed as a protest of Qatar's record on human rights. While these are all commendable, they carry relatively little exposure in the media beyond localised and time-limited coverage.

There is no doubt that footballer activism has a massive role to play in realising social change, and it will continue. Many footballers quietly campaign against racism and Islamophobia, and for refugee rights, improved education, and many other social issues. However, will any of them be brave enough to use the global stage of a world cup, one already under scrutiny, to elevate their cause to a level perhaps never seen before?

Perhaps the problem in Qatar is what to stand against! Homophobia, climate change, or human rights? Perhaps in the age of multi-million-pound transfers, wages, and endorsements, players are reluctant to jeopardise their financial security. As with philanthropy, perhaps activism exists only to launder the reputations of the footballing rich. Or perhaps the simple act of wearing a pair of

rainbow laces and the reaction of the hosts will be revolutionary enough.

With the eyes of the world on Qatar from November 20th to December 18th, it is the best opportunity there has ever been to test the theory of American journalist and one-time member of the Socialist Party USA Heywood Brown that 'sport does not build character it reveals it.'

¹ Brasch, R. (1986) *How Did Sports Begin*, Tynron Press, Scotland.

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BOOK REVIEWS

LIBRARY

John Molyneux. Selected Writings on Socialism and Revolution. Edited by Huw Williams (2022) Bookmarks

Mark Walsh

Most readers of this journal will likely have some familiarity with John Molyneux, either as writer, activist, comrade or friend. While I feel I know John well enough to consider him both a comrade and a friend, I first encountered him while an undergraduate in the late 1990s when I read his pamphlet: *The Future Socialist Society*. During those formative years in my political life, I read avidly books and articles by a plethora of excellent socialist thinkers. John's pamphlet, outlining a possible socialist future, was one that had a pronounced effect on me. I was struck by the boldness required to take on such a task and it occurred to me that its writer must be a person with a powerful imagination, a keen analytical mind and a reservoir of experience in the struggle for a more decent world.

All of this is evident in John's latest book, a collection of his writings over the last fifty years. On first perusing it, I was delighted to see that extracts from that delightful pamphlet on a possible better future had made the cut. The book itself is a tour de force. It draws from John's immense "back catalogue" of writings on a vast array of topics concerning socialism and revolution, climate change, philosophy, racism, trans rights and the practical challenges of building a revolutionary party. Not only does this list not do justice to the variety of writings contained in this hefty volume, it is extraordinary to think there are many subjects on which John has written extensively which are not contained in this collection. The most notable of these is John's lifelong study of art history, interested readers must seek out a copy of his 2020 work: *The Dialectics of Art*.

Readers of *Selected Writings* may prefer to dip in and out, reading select articles as their tastes dictate. However, the book is organised into themed sections. The opening burst, *The Working Class, Revolution and The Revolutionary Party* contain articles dealing with the very practical matter of building a movement capable of overthrowing capitalism and reflections on the lessons learned. Some of these articles are quite recent, such as the opener, a 2018 Irish Marxist Review piece on the working class, while others date back to the 1970s and 1980s. My personal favourite from this opening salvo, is a short article entitled *What is Marxism?* dating from a 1985 book, *What is the Real Marxist tradition?* As someone

who knew nothing of the original book, I found John's disentangling of this knotty problem a hugely informative delight to read. His conclusion, that Marxism is the "theory of the international worker's revolution", is arrived with mathematical elegance.

The fourth section, *Socialism*, contains two pieces, the latter extracted from the above-mentioned pamphlet, making the case for a socialist society. The first of these articles, *Socialism Can Work*, is superb example of how to persuasively argue, in simple language, for a qualitatively better society based on socialist principles. This clarity of writing becomes especially important in the next section on *Philosophy*, dealing as it does with some reputedly difficult topics. For anyone who has found some of the language associated with the Marxist tradition daunting or, like me, tried to read Hegel and could not make head or tail of it, John's article on 'dialectics' is a breath of fresh air. It is in this section for me that John's ability to explain really comes into its own. The hairy topic of 'determinism' is covered with the usual clarity in the next piece but my favourite article of the section concerns religion. Entitled, *More than Opium*, and written in 2008 for the International Socialist Journal, it delivered a much needed antidote to the crude neo-liberal war-serving pronouncements of Christopher Hitchens and the rather naïve analysis of Richard Dawkins on the subject of religion. It also acts as helpful companion when reading Marx's famous writings on the subject in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*.

The remaining sections of the book include articles on Ireland, (where John has resided since 2010) climate change and a host of shorter tracts concerning issues like trans rights and the plight of refugees, as well as a very important critique of the view that overpopulation is the cause (or a cause) of our environmental crisis. Regarding Ireland, John writes about the issue of partition and the question of a border poll and the rise of racism and the far-right. One article, which appeared quite recently in this journal, and should be a high priority for IMR readers is John's account of the People Before Profit movement. This is a detailed description of how PBP came into being, the struggles it spearheaded and where it finds itself now.

Part of that struggle is of course the struggle to prevent climate catastrophe. Over the last couple of decades John has made the cause of eco-socialism a top priority and has written in depth on the subject. Two of the three articles featured here were written for Global Eco-Socialist Network, an international movement involving some of

the most significant thinkers in the intersection of socialist and environmentalist thought, and a setting for ongoing and lively debates. John has emerged as a major contributor in this field and his views are well worth listening to.

Something which is evident in all John's work, but is particularly important here is the fact that as well as a formidable theorist, John is an activist, a revolutionary. These two aspects necessarily reinforce each other and provide much of the power behind the writing in this book. A collection of writings like this, with its scope and intellectual clarity, is a rare thing and deserves a place on the bookshelf of any socialist. It represents the written culmination, to date, of many decades of a furious commitment to revolutionary struggle both practically and intellectually. Long may that struggle, and the writings John draws from it, continue.

Jason Hickel, *Less Is More. How Degrowth Will Save The World* (2021), Penguin Books

Mark Walsh

The British Tory government's most recent economic debacle, where the proposal of radical tax-cuts to enrich the already super-rich led to market panic and the collapse of the value of the pound sterling, was justified on the grounds that it would stimulate "economic growth". And while the spectacular failure of Liz Truss's mini budget led to almost universal condemnation and the ridiculing of her premiership, the underlying notion that economic growth is not only desirable but indeed essential went largely unchallenged. The "need" for economic growth is repeated ad nauseam by virtually every member of the political establishment, both in Ireland and across the industrialised world. Unending expansion is presented by conservatives, liberals and social democrats alike as the only way to end poverty. And while the economic benefits of such expansion are enjoyed disproportionately by the already well-off, most see this as a necessary price for the improvement in living standards, economic growth is assumed to deliver.

There have always been problems with this assumption, something which Jason Hickel's book "*Less is More*" goes to great lengths to describe. A rising Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which essentially measures a nation's overall economic activity, is assumed by mainstream economists to lead to rising standards in health, education and overall quality of life. In practice, the situation is much more complicated. Hickel explains how on many basic measures such as life expectancy, nations like the United States fall well behind much smaller nations with comparatively tiny GDP: Costa Rica or Portugal for example. A booming economy often leads to all manner of social ill: rising house prices, increased traffic, higher levels of stress for workers and increased levels of economic inequality. Hickel makes the obvious point that when it comes to economic activity, investment in a strong social safety net, say, goes a lot further in improving a population's quality of life than the investment in armaments or advertising. The problem of course with GDP is that it is an overall measure of every kind of economic activity and thus an extremely blunt instrument. Some kinds of economic activity are necessary, some are useless, and some are downright harmful. Thus, using economic growth as a progressive instrument is extremely problematic.

Nowhere is this clearer than when one considers the environmental consequences.

Much of Hickel's book concerns precisely this: the catastrophic ecological implications of unbounded economic growth on a finite planet. Hickel begins with a brief history of capitalism detailing the horrors of its phase of "primitive accumulation" from the enclosure acts to colonialism. He goes on to describe the effects of rampant extraction to feed capitalism's ever-growing need to expand: the razing of forests, the poisoning of our oceans with plastic, the filling of our atmosphere with greenhouse gasses, the wiping out of entire species and, potentially, the complete collapse of our eco-system. Hickel argues, correctly, that simply switching to "greener" methods of production, even ones which are carbon-neutral will not solve the problem. The unbounded squeezing of ever more out of a finite planet will be the end of us either way. Nor, Hickel argues, is it feasible that technology can possibly allow us to continue to extract at an exponentially increasing rate.

The rise of capitalism and the “ideology of growthism” is rooted, Hickel claims, in the fact that the human species abandoned certain “animistic” ideas where humans saw themselves as a part of nature and attributed agency and even a form of personhood to the elements of the natural world. This included trees and rivers for example. In its place, he argues, humans embraced the “dualistic” ideas of thinkers like Descartes and Bacon, seeing nature as separate from humanity and as something to be tamed and exploited. Hickel returns to this notion throughout the book. Later, he describes various Amazonian peoples, such as the Achuar, who he argues have a much more harmonious relationship with the natural world. He writes that:

“... the Achuar know that their existence depends on maintaining good relations with the teeming community of non-human persons with whom they share the forest. They know that they are fundamentally interdependent; that without them they would be nothing – non-existent. Their fates are bound together.”

Hickel insists that a return to some version of this “animism”, where the natural world or its constituents are given some form of “personhood” or “agency” and ultimately respect, where the interconnectivity of the Earth system is at the heart of our economic system, is therefore essential if the human species is to survive. Central to this is the notion of “degrowth”. This means significantly scaling down much of our economic activity (in particular economic activity which is harmful or useless) to achieve a more balanced relationship with nature.

Hickel finishes with a list of demands that the environmentalist movement should make toward this end. These include ending *in-built obsolescence* in capitalist commodities (deliberately designing products to break down early so that consumers must purchase more of them), a significant reduction in advertising, the end of food waste and the scaling down of destructive industries like weapons manufacture or meat production. He argues for government intervention to reduce inequality by, for example, placing floors and a ceiling on wages and calls for the cancellation of large amounts of debt especially those inflicted on the global south.

Much of what I have outlined here seems reasonable. However, as I will argue there are some serious problems with Hickel’s position. The first, and least serious, is that even on the aspects where Hickel gets it right, there is really nothing all that interesting or original about anything he says. Yes, unbounded growth across the whole economy leads to a plethora of very serious problems and Hickel makes this (rather obvious) case convincingly. It is also absolutely true that, under capitalism, the natural world is treated merely as a resource to be exploited. Moreover, capitalist economists assume almost axiomatically that this resource is infinite, in the sense that innovations in technology will always allow for deeper and deeper levels of extraction. The environmental crisis our species faces, and the complete implausibility of a technological solution to it shows in stark terms the folly of this position. Incidentally, this latter point is treated very thoroughly by Naomi Klein in her book *No Is Not Enough*.

Hickel’s treatment of this crucial problem ignores decades (indeed centuries) of serious scholarship on the subject. The most egregious example of this is the fact that in a book of just under three hundred pages, seeking to explain the problem of growth under capitalism and its impact on nature, there is not a single mention of the extensive and highly sophisticated work of Marx and Engels on this subject or any other. Marx’s name appears once in the text as the coiner of the term “primitive accumulation of capital” and nowhere else. Despite its exposition by prominent environmentalist scholars like John Bellamy Foster (who Hickel acknowledges as a source of useful conversation), the author seems entirely ignorant of Marx’s theory of the Metabolic Rift. This theory, inspired by the work of the organic chemist Justus von Liebig, elegantly explains how capitalism ruptures the relationship between humanity and the natural world. Hickel’s explanation of this phenomenon, essentially that people were simply seduced by a bad idea, is not really an explanation at all.

It is worth emphasising that Marx, in his writings on this subject in *Capital*, is not unsympathetic to the yearning that many of us feel for a return to a more harmonious relationship with the natural world. While the term “animistic” is not one, I am sure, Marx would invoke, he

does write poetically in *Capital* about the alienating effects of the metabolic rift on the human spirit.

Marx's writings on this show that he profoundly understood the tenderness felt by indigenous peoples, such as the Achuar, toward their forest home. Marx also saw, in the work of chemists like Liebig, the power of modern science to fully comprehend the damage wrought by capitalist methods of production on the natural world and the potential to heal this rift.

All of this leads to a more serious objection to Hickel's thesis. While he does certainly criticise the capitalist system more generally, he concentrates his fire on one feature: uncontrolled growth. Now this in and of itself need not be a problem. However, Hickel seems to view growth not as an inevitable feature of capitalism but as an ideology in its own right, one he calls "growthism". Here Hickel seems to suggest that capitalist growth is simply a bad idea. This has it backwards. The ideology used to defend growth arises out of the capitalist system in the first place. Capitalism does not lead to unbounded expansion because individuals have been corrupted by growth ideology. Rather, growth ideology is used to justify the fact that, by the logic of the system, individual capitalists must ceaselessly grow their businesses, or they will not survive. As Ian Angus puts it in *Fossil Capital*:

"Capital exploits labour and nature to produce goods that can be sold for more than the cost of production in order to accumulate more capital, and the process repeats. Growth ideology does not cause perpetual accumulation – it justifies it."

Hickel's rather idealistic understanding of capitalist growth means that, when it comes to laying out a serious strategy to challenge the system, Hickel has very little to offer. The list of demands laid out towards the end of the book, in a chapter entitled *Pathways to a Post-Capitalist World*, are all perfectly reasonable things to fight for. However, Hickel's approach seems mostly to involve attempting to persuade the political and corporate class of the folly of growth and to encourage them to pass more progressive legislation. To achieve this, no doubt Hickel supports civil disobedience and movements such as Extinction Rebellion. And of course, popular protest and parliamentary struggles for reforms should be supported. But what is needed to avert ecological collapse is the

taking of power into the hands of the great majority of humanity and the setting up of a system where production is organised democratically, based on human need and in harmony with natural cycles. To achieve this, what Hickel proposes is not remotely enough.

The gap in Hickel's strategy is of course the working class. It is workers, whether in factories, on farms, in research laboratories or in the myriad service sectors of the modern economy, that have the power to transform society into something of the sort Hickel wishes to see. Hickel is rather vague on this subject, saying very little about how precisely any of the goals he sets out could be won. Regardless, without a substantial movement of the working class, nothing in Hickel's list could be ever achieved. And it is in this process of building an eco-socialist movement within the wider working class, that the language we use and the issues we emphasise really matter. Terms like "growth" and "degrowth" are problematic precisely because they are not well-defined. At times, some things need to be grown. We may need more schools, hospitals and houses. Other things need to be reduced. We need fewer weapons, less advertising and less single-use plastics. Thus, when we speak of "degrowth", we need to be very careful to explain what we mean.

Of course, Hickel knows all this, and no doubt agrees. But the emphasis on growth above all else leaves our movement vulnerable to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Politicians on the right will of course claim that a strategy of *degrowth* threatens jobs, inhibits technological progress and impoverishes working people. In the important practical work of building the struggles against capitalism, clarity is everything. For so many people, the immediate problems they face are predicated on the *lack* of something: a lack of affordable housing or a lack of access to healthcare. In principle, one can carefully explain the nuanced intended meaning in the term "degrowth". In practice though, with limited time and resources, and competing with other forces doing their utmost to confuse and undermine, attempting to organise a working-class fightback under the banner of degrowth (with all the ambiguity that term contains) seems a hopeless strategy.

For anyone doubting the severity of the crisis humanity faces, or who is under the illusion that enticing large corporations with tax-breaks or incentives to grow the economy is a sensible way to deal with it, *Less Is More* may well be good antidote. It contains numerous examples of the environmental devastation wrought by capitalism and does a reasonable job in debunking illusory claims that there is a technological fix to our environmental woes just around the corner. That said, in the writings of Ian Angus, John Bellamy Foster, John Molyneux, Chris Williams, Paul Burkett and Andreas Malm, to name a few, there are far better places to obtain all of this.

The deeper problem though, is in Hicckel's lack of analysis of the causes of economic growth and of what can be done to control it. It is certainly true that capitalist competition induces an irresistible pressure on the system as a whole to grow. This has long been understood. As Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*:

“Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty, and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.”

As a consequence, capitalism has bequeathed to us the ability to create great abundance. This is both a blessing and a curse. The real problem is that, at present, humanity has no control over what sort of abundance we create, the way in which this abundance is created or how it impacts our environment. The problem therefore is not growth. It is capitalism. Capitalism obstructs us from rationally controlling our relationship with nature. The obstruction exists at all levels where even captains of industry, powerful as they are, are locked into the logic of extraction, expansion and accumulation. What we need is a system where we can both grow, or degrow, whatever it is we require and in a way which respects and nourishes our place in the web of life.

Leo Zeilig. *A Revolutionary for Our Time: The Walter Rodney Story* (2022) Haymarket Books

Joe Moore

Walter Rodney was born in Georgetown, British Guyana on March 23 1942. He was assassinated by the 'socialist' government of independent Guyana on June 13 1980. He was just 38 years old when he died. In his short life,

Rodney was a political activist, academic, writer and revolutionary. His major work *“How Europe Underdeveloped Africa”* was published in 1972. However, for many on the left, little else is known about Rodney. Leo Zeilig has rectified this with the publication of an in-depth political biography.

Rodney was born into a political family. His parents were members of the People's Progressive Party (PPP). The young Rodney helped his parents canvassing and leafletting for the PPP. The PPP represented both African and Indian Guyanese. This was important as both the British ruling elite and the local bourgeoisie continually worked to create ethnic tensions in the country. The African community were descendants of the enslaved plantation workers, while the Indians were the descendants of indentured labourers who were brought from the Indian sub-continent in the wake of the abolition of slavery in the British empire.

The PPP leader, Cheddi Jagan, was seen by the authorities as being too radical and was overthrown by the actions of both the US and Britain. This resulted in Forbes Burnham abandoning the PPP and establishing the People's National Congress (PNC), an exclusively Afro-Guyanese party. The PNC came to power in the independent Guyana and was the party responsible for Rodney's assassination.

Rodney was a bright student and won a scholarship to the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. He came of age in the immediate aftermath of the Cuban revolution. During his holidays he visited both Cuba and the USSR. These journeys opened his mind to Marxism. After completing his degree, Rodney began a PhD course in the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. This is where he challenged the right-wing perspectives of the teaching staff. His dissertation entitled, *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1545-1800*, was one of the first studies to examine the effects of the slave trade on African societies. Up to that point the majority of slave trade histories concentrated on its impact on Europe.

While in London Rodney sought out various Marxist groups but he felt none of them treated racism as the central issue that it was. He did however befriend CLR James and became an active member of James's study group.

Once his studies in London were completed Rodney and his wife Patricia wished to return to the Caribbean but first, they opted to spend some time in Africa, a continent

then emerging from colonialism. Initially they planned to visit West Africa but when he was offered a teaching position in Dar-es-Salam, he accepted it. The newly independent Tanzania attracted activists and academics from across the world. Its leader Julius Nyerere was admired by many on the left internationally for his proclamation of a socialist country, based on a humanist interpretation of pre-colonial Africa called Ujamaa. This in essence appealed to an egalitarian past as a model for a socialist future.

The Rodneys threw themselves into life in Dar-es-Salam. Walter began what became his hall mark, meeting and interacting with ordinary Tanzanians outside of the university campus. He debated with students and staff and met with liberation fighters from South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

When Rodney was offered a teaching position in Jamaica, the family returned to the Caribbean. They choose to live not on the campus but in the community. He was sought out by the Rastafarian community because he had spent time in Africa and was widely regarded as an expert on African history. This brought Rodney to the attention of the Jamaican special branch, who already had a file on him. The leaders of the newly independent Caribbean had made their peace with the former colonial powers and were therefore fearful of the influence of Black Power.

Resulting from his discussions with students, workers and Rastafarians, Rodney published *The Groundings with My Brothers* in 1969. This work covered racism, slavery, colonialism and white-power. The book was rejected by academia because Rodney wrote it for ordinary people, as he said himself in a style that could be easily understood by second level students. Zeilig gives a detailed review of *Groundings* in chapter 4 of his book. Rodney was now regarded as a subversive by the Jamaican government and while on a speaking tour in Canada he was expelled from the country. Such was his popularity amongst ordinary people that many took to the streets to protest his expulsion. These events are referred to as “the Rodney riots.”

The family returned to Tanzania and it was while here that he completed and published his magnum opus, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. The political situation in Tanzania had changed since Rodney was last in the country. There were now debates between Nyerere who was firmly on the reformist road and with those who wanted socialism. The country had become a melting pot

of debate, discussion and argument, with inputs from activists and academics from Europe and the US and members of national liberation movements from across Southern Africa.

Rodney fell foul of Nyerere by using Franz Fanon’s analysis of African leaders that did not have to fight for but negotiated independence, referred to as “briefcase revolutionaries.” Real liberation was still required in these petit bourgeois regimes.

How Europe Underdeveloped Africa is one of the key works on Africa, using Marx’s historical method, to be published in the late 20th century. In it Rodney describes development in Africa before the arrival of Europeans, the beginning and expansion of the slave trade and its impact on various African societies, the division of almost the whole of the African continent by the European imperialist powers and how this affected the continent until countries achieved independence in the second half of the 20th century.

The book is written in the accessible style which was now a hallmark of Rodney. To quote Zelig, “it is a full-frontal assault on the academic training he had received and the closely guarded protocols of scholarly life: peer review, references, deference to scholarship and most importantly, the purge of political content.” *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* is required reading for all Marxists and anti-racists.

The 6th Pan-African Congress was held in Dar-es-Salem in June 1974. This was the first such congress to be held in Africa, in a newly independent African country and attended by the leaders of newly independent countries, both in Africa and the Caribbean. Rodney led the left-wing opposition to these leaders. Many of these leaders ruled countries that oppressed their own people although they themselves claimed to be socialists. Rodney was supported by CLR James and the Nigerian poet and novelist Wole Soyinka. However, many of the leaders from newly independent Caribbean countries objected to Rodney being in attendance.

Nyerere turned against those who advocated any form of self-emancipation, which resulted in many opponents being deported. It was time for the Rodney family to return to the Caribbean, this time back home to Guyana. Rodney returned to a country rife with political turmoil. The ruling party, the PNC, was still led by Burnham, and represented the Afro-Guyanese community. Burnham

came down heavily on his political opponents. The main opposition, the PPP, had its support in the Indian community. Rodney became active in the left-wing Working People's Alliance. One of its main aims was the unification of the Guyanese working class. The WPA supported workers' strikes and actions by labourers in rural plantations.

Despite the increase in political activity, Rodney continued to study and write. The result was *A History of the Guyanese Working People 1881-1905* which was published after his death. This work was intended to be the first in a three-part series. In it Rodney exposed the roots of the division between African and Indian workers.

After being installed as leader as a result of a CIA/MI6 coup, Burnham changed sides in the cold war and declared himself a socialist. As a result, the WPA was refused support from other "socialist" leaders such as Castro, Mugabe and Grenada's Maurice Bishop. The WPA was isolated. A fire in a government department in Georgetown on July 11th 1979 gave Burnham the opportunity to crack down on the WPA. A number of its leading members were assassinated. On June 13th 1980 Rodney collected a walkie-talkie set from a man who was a government agent. The set contained explosives. When Rodney switched it on, the explosive detonated, killing him instantly.

Zelig's biography outlines in detail the life, work and political activity of Walter Rodney. It analyses how Rodney drew on Black Power as well as the writings of Marx and Lenin to help the struggles of working people in Tanzania, Jamaica and Guyana. The biography highlights the work of a revolutionary who is not as well known as he should be. He remains as Zelig declares "a revolutionary for our time."

Leo Zelig, *Lumumba. Africa's Lost Leader*, (2008) Haus Publishing Ltd

Darragh Adelaide

"Lumumba, Africa's Lost Leader" tells the story of the first prime minister of the Congo, Patrice Lumumba, who was executed in 1961 following a military coup supported by Belgium and the USA and aided by foreign

mercenaries. In 2002, Belgium formally apologised for its role in his execution.

Born in 1925, in the aftermath of the Belgian King's reign of terror - which saw over half of the Congolese population exterminated by famine, exploitation and genocide - Lumumba was a bright young child. In the absence of a public school system, few Congolese children were educated. Many worked from young ages so that their villages could afford colonial taxes, and numerous male children were required to serve local mining companies.

Zelig writes concurrently of Lumumba's youth - educated by missionaries, recruited into the civil service, and elevated to prominence by his nationalistic zeal - and of the development of the Congolese independence movement, as the world wars drove the development of industry and urbanisation in the colony. In the strictly racially segregated capital of Léopoldville, Lumumba became an 'évolué', one of the few educated Congolese people considered "evolved" enough to participate in parts of society normally reserved for white Europeans.

Although short, Zelig gives great insight into the development of the Congolese independence movement. The évolués, who were for the most part moderately wealthy and educated Congolese civil servants, sought equality with Europeans, the opportunity to own property, and the right to administer an independent Congolese state. Lumumba in his early years even extolled the benefits of Belgian colonialism, but became an ardent nationalist following time in prison.

In response to the coup he appealed for aid from the US and UN. When this refused he turned for help from the Soviet Union, providing confirmation of his alleged communism. Though the truth is that he was never the "communist sympathiser" as condemned by the United States.

As Zelig describes "*For Lumumba the notion of class struggle was a dangerous idea imported from the north that could only serve to divide a fragile national unity. Why add this divisive concept, he asked, when there was already the potential of ethnic division in the Congo?*"

Zelig gives a short, yet detailed, illustration of brutal regime imposed by the Belgian government, and the radicalisation of the Congolese people into a movement which unravelled Belgian authority in a relatively brief period. Importantly, the failure of the strictly nationalist

Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) - far less radical than the Congolese masses – to construct a programme of social transformation beyond just independence in the end, could not challenge the strength of colonial powers in the region.

Had the radicalisation of the Congolese masses been furthered with demands for the expropriation of colonial corporations, national strikes and occupations, could Lumumba have countered the other évólvés who betrayed Congolese independence with the support of the US, Belgium, France, and Britain?

Michael Sturza, *The London Revolution: Class Struggles in 17th Century England*, In the Weeds Provocations, New York, 2022.

John Molyneux

From the 1950s through to the 1970s English history writing was dominated by a brilliant cohort of Marxist historians. Their roots lay in the Communist Party Historians Group founded in 1946 which included in its ranks the likes of Christopher Hill, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, John Saville, Dona Torr, Rodney Hilton, A.L. Morton, Dorothy Thompson, Raphael Samuel and Victor Kiernan. Their main project was to produce between them a Marxist account of English history from the Middle Ages onwards and the crucial period of the English Civil War or English Revolution of 1642-49 was taken on primarily by Christopher Hill in a series of outstanding works such as *Puritanism and Revolution* (1958), *The Century of Revolution 1603-1714*, (1961) and *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972). Later the baton for this period passed to Hill's pupil, Brian Manning in works such as *The English People and the English Revolution* (1976) and *The Far Left in the English Revolution* (1999). [Interestingly Brian Manning joined the Irish Socialist Workers Party when he moved to Ulster University in the 1980s]

From the mid-1970s a reaction started to set in within English historiography, much as it did in the wider society with the rise of Margaret Thatcher. A series of conservative and anti-Marxist historians came to the fore who rejected all history based on historical materialism and concepts of class struggle. It was a development which paralleled, from a different angle, the rise of post-

modernism with its 'scepticism towards all grand narratives'. For these conservatives the Marxist account of the English Revolution as a bourgeois revolution was a major target. A number of 'revisionist' historians emerged, such as Conrad Russell and Geoffrey Elton, who challenged not only the idea that the Civil War could be understood in class terms (they much preferred to see it as primarily a religious conflict) but even the idea that there was a revolution at all. Similar operations were conducted in relation to the French Revolution and also in defence of the British empire and against the idea that the First World War was an imperialist war.

Michael Sturza's book is an intervention in this debate and a very welcome one, a blow against the conservative revisionists. He builds on the pioneering work of Christopher Hill and Brian Manning, quoting copiously from their books, but adds to this a focus on the mass revolution from below in London in the years 1640-43. Sturza argues that this crucial element was insufficiently studied by Hill, Manning and others and that as a consequence the key agency, the driving force of the English Revolution, was neglected. He maintains that it was this revolution in the streets which led to the Civil War not the Civil War to the revolution. This an overtly Marxist work, replete with quotes from Marx, Engels and Trotsky, which makes few concessions to academic niceties and conventions – a fact which may limit its reception but is far from being a bad thing in my view.

The truth is I lack the detailed historical knowledge confidently to evaluate all or most of Sturza's specific claims. Nevertheless he makes an impressive and convincing case. There are a number of features of the book that I enjoyed. First, the way he locates the events of the 17th century in a longer view of English history highlighting specific events such as the signing of Magna Carta in 1215, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and Reformation under Henry VIII, which combined to hinder the emergence of monarchical absolutism in England on a scale that matched that in France and which facilitated the development of capitalist relations of production. 'Thus,' says Sturza, 'before the end of the 16th century England was an *economically* capitalist country, despite the large majority of the population still engaged in agriculture' [p.17].

Second, his sophisticated (and Marxist) handling of social classes and class relations: see for example his account of the contradictory role of the gentry. 'The dual role of the gentry came from having a foot in each of two

incompatible social systems, feudalism and capitalism, which could not indefinitely coexist' [p.43]. Moreover this goes hand in hand with his nuanced analysis of the role of religion, especially Puritanism, which understands its class roots and how it articulated class interests without reducing it to a simple cipher or mask of immediate economic interests. Sturza doesn't lose sight of the fact that these people really believed in the interpretations of God and the bible they were willing to fight and die for.

Third, there is the centre piece of the book, his account of the mass mobilizations on the streets of London. These are not (and couldn't be, working class mobilizations. They are predominantly demonstrations by what were known as 'the middling sort' led by the Atlantic Merchants whom he describes as 'the bourgeois vanguard of the English Revolution' [p.65]. Nevertheless, the scenes he narrates remind one vividly of scenes from much later revolutions such as the French Revolution or even the Paris Commune. Here are a few excerpts relating to crucial events in January 1642.

On 3 January 1642 the king charged five reform leaders of the House of Commons with treason...on 4 January, Charles personally led a retinue of 100 royal officers to arrest John Pym and four other leading MPs on the floor of the Commons... Warned in advance, the intended prisoners hid in a radical district of London. The king was forced to retreat empty handed...

The streets were filled with armed citizens. The same day... the London Common Council set up its own Committee of Safety by order of the House of Commons... The Common Council were now in a position to fight for Parliament against the king, led by its most radical and dedicated men who did not shrink from armed struggle.

On 5 January, with the shopkeepers still on strike, and the armed people "standing in their doors" the king appeared in front of the Common Council... As the king left, a large group of "ruder" people unanimously chanted "Privileges of Parliament". Thousands besieged [the king] in the house of the City Sherriff where he had gone for dinner, and followed his carriage with the same cry...After escorting the king safely home, the Lord Mayor and some aldermen were knocked off their horses, women called him traitor and pulled his chain of office of his neck. The officials had to walk home being taunted all the way...

The following night, 6 January, a rumour quickly spread that soldiers on foot and horse were approaching the city. The citizens again went on the alert, Tens of thousands of thousands of armed men went into the streets while women built barricades and prepared pots of boiling water to use against the enemy. [pp.114-15]

The combination of clear Marxist analysis and such exciting narrative makes this book both a very useful and enjoyable read.

Oliver Eagleton, *The Starmer Project: A Journey to the Right*, (2022) Verso.

Stewart Smyth

The stage is festooned with Union Jack images, the leadership plod out in front of them, stand to attention and start singing "God Save the Queen". This was the opening of the in-person Labour Party conference under the leadership of Sir Keir Starmer.¹ It wasn't long before there were social media comments and posts likening Starmer's patriotic, monarchy-loving spectacle as more akin to a BNP meeting from the mid-1990s.

The point of this show was to (yet again!) nail the message to the British establishment that Labour is (again) a safe pair of hands – any future Labour government under Starmer's leadership would not challenge their wealth and power.

This is just one vignette of the British Labour Party under Starmer, and why Oliver Eagleton's book is so welcome. I had two questions in mind before reading Eagleton's book – first what did Starmer do earn his knighthood; and second, how did he navigate his way to becoming leader?

Eagleton's book gives answers to both questions.

Starmer – the Lawyer

Starmer has curated something of a myth that he is working class lad made good. His mother was a nurse but he often mis-represents his father as a tool-maker, which was his trade, but Starmer's father owned the tool-making factory. I highlight this point to illustrate the character of

the man, even when he worked as a lawyer, including becoming Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), he was a political operator seeking to present himself in the most appropriate light.

In 2013 Starmer was awarded the Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (KCB) for services to the Law and Criminal Justice. If you looked at what was included in the supporting case you would have thought Starmer was some sort of a progressive campaigning reformer that had changed the nature of the criminal justice system in Britain and around the world.

The official government case supporting Starmer's KCB includes the following:

"His achievements include successful appeals leading to the abolition of the mandatory death penalty in certain Caribbean countries; persuading the House of Lords that evidence obtained by torture should be inadmissible in British courts; and achieving the CPS's highest rate of conviction for domestic violence and for those charged with rape or serious sexual offences."ⁱⁱ

One of the strengths of Eagleton's book is that he looks beyond the headlines of each of these claims, often discovering a more complex context or straightforward contradictory evidence. For example, Eagleton reports that from 2011 to 2014 the numbers charged with rape declined by 14 percent, following a change in charging guidelines instigated by Starmer.

Eagleton shows how at each turn, on each issue Starmer has chosen the side of power and the existing state. Starmer willingly allowed US secret services to engage in rendition of a UK citizen; he dropped any potential charges against police officers involved with attacking protesters; he encouraged a white-washing report of the Spycops scandal (where undercover police officers infiltrated left-wing and activist groups, some having long-term relationships and even fathering children); he cosied up to the Coalition government, enthusiastically implementing their austerity agenda in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). This is far from a complete list of the choices and actions Starmer carried out while at the CPS.

The Belfast connection

Any progressive impulses the young lawyer may have had (Starmer assisted the two defendants in the McLibel case) disappear as his legal career took off. A good example of

this comes in the legal work Starmer did in Northern Ireland. The young Starmer had been part of a group of socialist lawyers who carried out a fact-finding mission in 1992, investigating police brutality and the use of the Diplock trials. Their report was scathing and called for an end to the use of such trials.

Yet, Starmer was also to defend British soldier Lee Clegg, who shot dead Karen Reilly in West Belfast in 1990. Clegg was originally convicted of murder but after several retrials, throughout the 1990s, Starmer helped get Clegg cleared.

After the Good Friday Agreement Starmer was hired as an adviser on human rights law for the newly formed Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB). As Eagleton points out this was a great opportunity for Starmer to implement the recommendations of the 1992 report he had helped produce. Yet when the NI Human Rights Commission criticised the NIPB for a "lack of accountability, transparency and community engagement"ⁱⁱⁱ, Starmer sided with the NIPB uncritically praising the policing body for its commitment to human rights.

In concluding his analysis of Starmer's legal career, Eagleton quotes a former colleague of Starmer's saying he (Starmer) identified with "a strong statist tradition", and for the "effective use of the criminal justice system to provide for effective state". Or as Andrew Murray said, "He stands for the state, its servants, its perquisites and their protection from the toils of democracy".^{iv}

This is why Starmer is now *Sir Keir Starmer*.

Starmer – the Politician

As for how Sir Keir became leader of the Labour Party, many will remember the role played by the right-wing in the Labour Party in undermining Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and sabotaging their election chances in both 2017 and 2019. In spite of the coup attempts (Starmer was part of what has become known as the "Chicken Coup" attempt to oust Corbyn as leader in 2016), the endless briefings against Corbyn (as a Russian stooge, a terrorist, etc.) and the weaponising of the anti-Semitism allegations, it was ultimately Brexit that meant Labour lost the 2019 general election and with it Corbyn resigned the leadership.

Central to Labour's post-2017 election Brexit policy was Sir Keir Starmer, in the role of Shadow Brexit Secretary.

Following the surprisingly close election result in 2017, the Corbyn leadership was moving towards a position on Brexit that not only respected the result of the 2016 referendum but saw the opportunity to steal a march on Theresa May's dithering, and reframing Brexit in radical Left Populist terms – not just a jobs first Brexit but one that allowed greater state intervention for social purposes and, crucially, policies based on the re-distribution of wealth as a guiding principle.

Starmer was having none of this but recognised that he need to stay within the Shadow Cabinet to exert enough influence to wreck the Corbyn project. For example, Corbyn's leadership team were to make a major announcement of their new position on Brexit in February 2018. In the run up to that announcement Starmer was losing the argument about the new policy in internal meetings. In one such meeting Eagleton reports, Starmer exploded "Enough, ... this is completely outrageous"^v, claiming he had not been given prior sight of the new policy and threatened to resign if the policy was not re-written with major input from his own team.

Eagleton concludes that this episode highlights Starmer's inability to argue about policy, and quotes one of Starmer's former aides that such behaviour was "typical of Keir. He can't argue from a political standpoint; it always has to be about process".^{vi}

Following mediated talks between Starmer and Corbyn a compromise was reached that Labour would commit to 'a customs union' with the EU. Corbyn's leadership team knew the importance of making it clear that a customs union was a means to an end, so as to avoid the charge of being seen as "remain-y".

On the Sunday before the new policy was to be announced Starmer appeared on the Andrew Marr Show, having been explicitly told not to mention the new policy and "a customs union". Eagleton explains what happened next:

"Within the first minute of the Marr interview, Starmer not only announced the customs union policy, he made every effort to collapse the distinction between "a" customs union and "the" customs union."^{vii}

The effect of this was to prime the press to interpret Corbyn's new Brexit policy as a concession to the Remain camp, and "the opportunity to reframe the Brexit debate on Labour's terms had been lost".^{viii}

It is also noteworthy, that if the roles had been reversed with Starmer in the leadership and one of his Shadow Minister's deliberately contravening a direct instruction on policy communication in the media, he would have been sacked – as happened to Sam Tarry who turned up on picket line to support rail workers in July 2022, only to be sacked immediately by Starmer.^{ix}

The customs union manoeuvre was just one of a series that Starmer (and others) engaged with including supporting the People's Vote campaign for a second referendum and changing Labour Party policy through a conference motion, which meant that by the time the 2019 election came around, Labour was seen as the party of Remain. Johnson and the Tories relentlessly exploited this and the seats in the Red Wall fell.

Eagleton's book goes on to cover *Starmer – the Candidate* and *Starmer – the Leader*, that further explore how Sir Keir came to the leadership of the Labour Party and what he has done in office.

Understanding Starmer

So how can we make sense of how such a faithful supporter of the British establishment came to be leader of the Labour Party. For this we need to go back to Lenin's understanding of the British Labour party, a party that is mostly comprised of workers in both membership and through its link with the trade union movement. However, Lenin argues, it is not enough to look only at the membership, it is the leadership, actions and tactics that decide if a party is one of the proletariat:

"Regarded from this, the only correct point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act in the spirit of the bourgeoisie."^x

Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein neatly summarise Lenin's insight by stating "the Labour Party is a 'capitalist workers' party'."^{xi} After the brief hiatus of the Corbyn leadership, where for once a non-reactionary (if not a revolutionary) socialist led the party, normal service has been resumed.

Eagleton's book gives us the evidence and examples of just how establishment and reactionary a figure Starmer actually is, and what a future Labour government under his leadership would look like.

ⁱ [“Labour conference: National anthem sung in tribute to Queen”](#). BBC News, 25 September, 2022.

ⁱⁱ [“The New Year Honours List 2014 – Higher Awards”](#) (PDF). [GOV.uk](#). 30 January 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eagleton (2022), p. 17.

^{iv} Eagleton (2022), p. 59.

^v Eagleton (2022), p. 90.

^{vi} Eagleton (2022), p. 90.

^{vii} Eagleton (2022), p. 92.

^{viii} Eagleton (2022), p. 93.

^{ix} “Sam Tarry fired for making up policy on the hoof, says Keir Starmer”, BBC News, 28 July, 2022.

^x Minutes of the Second Congress of the Communist International, Thirteenth Session, August 6, 1920.

^{xi} Tony Cliff and Donny Gluckstein (1996), *The Labour Party: A Marxist History*, Bookmarks.

