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IRISH MARXIST REVIEW

Mapping the Enemy

The far right in Irish politics

by Alexandra Day & Clara McCormack

Plus:

A tribute to John Molyneux

**Eamonn McCann on the anniversary
of the Good Friday Agreement**

and more...

IMR

IRISH MARXIST REVIEW

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Published: June 2023.

SWN PO Box 1648 Dublin 8

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Web: www.irishmarxistreview.net

Irish Marxist Review is published in association with the Socialist Workers Network, but articles express the opinions of individual authors unless otherwise stated. We welcome proposals for articles. If you have a suggestion or contribution, you would like considered please email as above.

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Editorial

The Rise of Sinn Féin

04

The rise of Sinn Féin (SF) is the most important contemporary phenomenon in Irish politics. From a low of just 9% in southern elections in 2019, SF has risen to become the most popular party on both sides of the border – a position recently reinforced by their victory in the north on 18 May. Sinn Féin currently wins support through two key promises. First, they promise genuine change, presenting themselves as the only party capable of throwing out the establishment. Second, they promise genuine progress, positioning themselves within the broad left on social rights, and public spending.

In the south, this has worked remarkably well in the context of mass movements around marriage equality, water rights and Repeal of the 8th; but also, in the context of a Labour Party that destroyed its credibility

by governing through austerity. It is important to stress that SF never led any of these progressive movements, but as the biggest organisation in all of them, it benefited disproportionately from their success.

In the north, they have been helped by the reactionary politics of the DUP, but also by a deeper crisis of political unionism that has allowed SF to present itself as the primary bearer of a progressive future – the very antitheses of old conservatives, who want to divide the north and hold it back. With unionism split between those who look backwards to a ‘sectarian past’ and those who look forwards to a ‘neoliberal future’, SF have been able to enthuse a layer of voters with two major promises. One is to oust the DUP from their primary position within the Assembly, the second is to create a more inclusive Ireland for a better future. The net result is that SF have become synonymous with ending the grip of conservatism across the island, even as they themselves have begun to move towards the centre.

When Pascal Donoghoe accepted an OECD recommendation to increase Irish corporation taxes, SF criticised him for giving up Ireland’s competitive advantage. The party currently wants to lower taxes for smaller firms on both sides of the

border and they have softened their rhetoric around taxing the rich.¹ SF has also moved to reassure the southern elite that they can be trusted by dropping opposition to the Special Criminal Court and by weakening their position on Irish neutrality.² On important social issues SF can also be suspect. They followed their participation in Together4Yes in the south for example, by abstaining on a crucial vote to extend abortion services in the north.³

The rise of SF is therefore a contradictory phenomenon. On the positive side, their growth reflects the aspirations of wide layers of working people who want progressive change on both sides of the border; their messaging is also generally left wing, and they play an important role in insulating Irish society from the rise of the far right. On the negative side, their growth reflects a certain passivity among working people who see change coming from politicians that will 'deliver it for them'. This passivity not only makes revolutionary politics seem less attractive; it also clears the way for conservative moves towards the centre, as the prospect of government becomes more likely. One danger in this context, is that SF will play down the importance of anti-racist work to allow them to govern in a deeply racist state.

Although their spokespeople have come out strongly against racism in their official pronouncements, in most areas they have not led the way in facing down fascists on the streets, nor have they made the running in local 'For All' groups designed to create wider anti-fascist united fronts. Their role in Le Cheile (Together) has also been relatively marginal and there is a danger that they will act strategically with a view to upcoming elections, knowing that some of their supporters – at least according to some recent polls - are uneasy with current levels of immigration.⁴

A second danger is that SF will trade their progressive rhetoric for conservative policies once they are safely in government in a major tax haven. Mary Lou McDonald recently went on a charm offensive in the board rooms of the multinationals and if their record in the Northern Assembly is anything to go by, SF will accommodate themselves to the structures of Irish capitalism and then seek to accommodate the rest of us to their strategic accommodation.⁵ A third danger – particularly in this context – is that SF will not pursue a radical transformation of the island, instead opting for the line of least resistance when it comes to the question of partition. All of this means that socialists must continue to relate to the progressive sentiment that is lifting SF, at the same

time as building revolutionary politics on the ground and continuing to place demands on the SF leadership not to sell out. Nationalist parties can often speak left and fight for basic reforms but as long as they seek to govern through the system, they will frustrate all moves towards workers control and genuine human liberation.

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One way to understand the nature of the current SF project is to ground it historically. In a wide ranging interview to mark the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, Eamonn McCann sat down with Seán Mitchell to discuss the history of the Troubles for the IMR. Three points are particularly noteworthy from their analysis. The first is the centrality of working class struggle as a catalyst for change. The Troubles might have developed into an armed conflict, but they began as a mass civil rights movement to end discrimination – met with the brutality of the state. The second point is that the rise of the Provisional IRA was never pre-determined. Instead, they emerged as the most coherent force in a period when state repression demanded a response, and the different forces of the left were unable to provide it. The third point is that their move to the political centre was pre-determined by a nationalist strategy that was always likely to move from a military

campaign into bourgeois constitutionality. McCann explains all of this admirably, bringing it up to date in the current impasse at Stormont.

The rise of the right

The most worrying phenomenon in recent Irish politics has been the rise of the right. After decades on the margins, the far right has recently begun to make progress here with a series of demonstrations against housing refugees. The far right is a growing cancer everywhere and while we have to face this cancer head on – we must also recognise it as a symptom of a deeper set of crises associated with capitalism itself. Since the turn of the 21st century, ordinary people have had to face the fallout from the Great Recession, a decade of austerity, the consequences of a global pandemic and an engineered cost of living crisis, as firms seek to bolster their profits.

They have also endured a major housing crisis alongside the hollowing out of their public services, and the ongoing spectre of climate change. Capitalist relations are increasingly creating chaos, misery, and alienation, but they are also reinforcing various forms of social division. By scapegoating minorities, asylum seekers and refugees far right activists are feeding into the misery caused by the wider system

and reinforcing a false solidarity between workers and their bosses. Xenophobic nationalism is a core feature of modern capitalism everywhere, as Alex Day and Clara McCormack explain in their detailed assessment of the Irish far right. Their essay outlines the hotchpotch of nativism, authoritarianism, ethnopluralism and familialism that constitutes the core of far right ideology – justifying attacks on minorities and glorifying a return to some mythical ‘Irish purity’. Day and McCormack also make important suggestions for taking them on, including working to transform common sense into good sense through participation in the struggles of ordinary people.

In her assessment of the role of women in far right ideology, Marnie Holborow builds on some of these same ideas, explaining how the right casts women as dutiful wives and mothers in their wider project to revive the ‘purity’ and ‘sustainability’ of the nation. Familialism is central to far right ideology, as the nuclear family – built on conservative gender roles – becomes identified with the appropriate role for women in the reproduction of the nation, and in the deferential role they are expected to play in society. Holborow unpacks these ideas expertly, arguing that the only road to genuine liberation is

through the struggle for international socialism.

My own contribution roots the rise of fascism in the imperialist conflicts that culminated in the First World War, but also in the rapid industrilisation that created a modern proletariat. Worker’s struggle in the period up to the First World War was overwhelmingly progressive. It brought the masses into politics for the first time and forced the conservative elites to look for ways to counter them. Fascism emerged as mass politics on the right in an era of imperialist struggles and mass destruction. It emerged autonomously from the traditional ruling classes but its role historically, has been to divide the working class against itself and to allow the system to recover from crises.

Darryl Horan begins his analysis in the same era, focusing on the united front as a central tactic for revolutionaries isolated from the mass of workers by the twin forces of social democracy and Stalinism. His analysis insists that the core of the united front is working with forces beyond the revolutionary left, whilst avoiding two sets of attendant dangers – one is to assimilate into more conservative forces; the second is to detach your project from the mass of the working class in struggle. Horan then brings these ideas up to date,

arguing that united fronts against the modern far right need three complementary components (1) a core group of activists who will confront them on the streets (2) a broader group of anti-racists who will build wider support and (3) an orientation to the key struggles of working people.

Kieran Allen's piece looks at the toxic relationship between oil and capitalism. It explains the centrality of oil for working class exploitation and situates some of the most important imperialist conflicts over the last hundred years around the need to control fossil fuels. Allen also gives a sobering analysis of the links between fossil-fuelled capitalism and climate chaos, arguing that on the basis of the trillions in stranded assets that would be necessitated by ending our reliance on fossil fuels alone, capitalism is not compatible with sustainability nor with climate justice.

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A tribute to John Molyneux

Mary Smith rounds out this edition with a deeply moving tribute to her partner John Molyneux. As most readers of the IMR will know, John was both the founder and editor of this journal, from its inception in 2012 until his death in December 2022. John's energy and commitment to revolutionary activity were central to

everything good about the IMR. He was involved at every level from helping new writers to find their voice to breaking new ground on important topics such as art and religion, eco-socialism, Marxist philosophy, and the importance of revolutionary organisation.

The guiding strand through all of this effort was John's insistence that a better world was not only possible but that it was possible because it could come about through the self-emancipation of the working class; through the conscious activity of millions of people realising their interests and fighting alongside each other to secure them. His contribution to the working-class movement was immense and his pioneering work on Marxist theory will live on in the struggle. This journal owes John Molyneux a debt which simply can't be repaid. Our small contribution is to celebrate his life and work by rerunning one of his seminal articles on eco-socialism, alongside Mary's wonderful tribute.

Rest in Power John.

Brian O'Boyle - Editor

¹ Sarah Collin and Steven Alexander. 2022. Sinn Fein favours a single 12.5% corporation tax rate for smaller firms on both sides of the border. Belfast Telegraph @ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/politics/sinn-fein-favours-a-single-125-corporation-tax-for-smaller-firms-on-both-sides-of-border>; Daniel McConnell. Is Sinn Fein moving to the centre as it prepares for power? Irish Examiner @ <https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/commentanalysis/arid-40935707.html>.

² Freya Mc Clements. 2012. Sinn Fein drops opposition to Special Criminal Court Irish Times @ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/sinn-fein-drops-opposition-to-special-criminal-court-1.4715275>; Pat Leahy. Sinn Fein Drops Pledge to withdraw from EU and NATO defence arrangements. Irish Times @ <https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/05/13/sinn-fein-drops-pledges-to-withdraw-from-eu-and-nato-defence-arrangements/>

³ Gerry Moriarty. 2021. Sinn Fein accused of speaking out of both sides of their mouth on abortion. Irish times @ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/sinn-fein-accused-of-speaking-out-of-both-sides-of-their-mouth-on-abortion>.

⁴ See for example, Damien Loscher. 2023. Farmers and Sinn Fein voters overrepresented among opponents to refugee obligations @ <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/social-affairs/2023/02/23/farmers-and-sinn-fein-voters-over-represented-among-opponents-to-refugee-obligations>.

⁵ Cliff Taylor. 2022. Can Mary Lou win over the Multinationals? Irish Times @ <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2022/09/17/can-mary-lou-mcdonald-win-over-the-multinationals/>.

Mapping the Enemy – The far right in Irish politics

Alexandra Day and Clara McCormack

On the surface, the far right seems to be organised around a jumbled mess of reactionary ideas. While their views are certainly reactionary, there is a sinister and coherent logic underpinning them, centred on their desire to preserve the ‘purity of the nation’ - both biological and ideological. One aspect of this, is their insistence that the complex social, political, and economic crises currently being caused by capitalism are re-interpreted as symptoms of a deeper crisis, involving a perceived loss of the ‘nation’.

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Recovering this lost national purity is the ultimate goal of the far right globally. They never envisage a world without borders, or without security apparatuses, or without hierarchies based on gender, race, and class. Instead, they hope for an ‘imagined community’, a ‘traditional world’ in which they secure the wealth of the state for a clearly defined national group – as the elites throughout capitalist history have defined it.¹

The far right identifies with the structures of the system and attempts to convince working people to follow suit, regardless of the class-based conflict inherent within capitalism. Elites, in their efforts to extract wealth from the earth and its people, create social hierarchies based on whatever

characteristics they can weaponise to divide the working class – whether that be skin colour, gender, sexuality, nationality, and so on. In Ireland and elsewhere, the views of the far right mirror the state’s most conservative views on such issues and lessen the likelihood for unified action by working people.

That said, the far right in Ireland is still in the novel stages of its political development, having largely been absent from the political scene until the Covid-19 pandemic. Before this, there existed several extremely marginal groups who campaigned around single issues – such as Immigration Control (anti-immigration), Youth Defence (anti-choice on abortion), and so on, but none of whom had any tangible effect on Irish politics. What distinguishes these groups from the contemporary far right, is the formation of a clear ideology and strategies to accompany it. The Irish far right is by no means a totally homogenous movement. There are various groups with slightly different ideas and tactics, however, they all share ‘core’ ideas which define them jointly as far right.

First among these is nativism, often known as ethnonationalism, in which membership in a nation is defined solely by biological

features. The second is authoritarianism, which is characterised by antagonism to inclusive democracies and their policies in favour of leader-centred and identity-based policies.² We can see different manifestations of this in the two main Irish far-right parties: the Irish Freedom Party (IFP) and the National Party (NP). The NP does not attempt to disguise its preference for authoritarian structures, as demonstrated by their lack of internal democracy, donning of branded uniforms, and most importantly, the centrality of Justin Barrett as leader and figurehead of the party.

Their policies also reflect their authoritarian preferences. They favour deportations of immigrants and the reintroduction of the death penalty for ‘serious crimes’ that would likely stretch to their political opponents if they ever won state power. The IFP, on the other hand, attempts to disguise their authoritarianism behind a thinly-veiled commitment to ‘democratic principles’. But this commitment to democracy, only extends to those who agree with their politics, and thus excludes those who do not fit their racist, socially conservative conception of the ‘Irish’. The IFP favours a system of ‘ethnopluralism’ wherein they claim to see all ethnicities as equal but believe in separating them into their respective

nation-states. This is nothing more than thinly veiled racism and an endorsement of “non-violent ethnic cleansing” through what they term as ‘remigration’.³

In this context, it is worth remembering that the shift from biological to cultural racism was a tactic developed by the New Right in France during the 1970s in a bid to move in from the margins. With the ideas of biological racism so thoroughly discredited by the Nazis during World War Two, the New Right changed tack – opting for cultural difference as their excuse for racial exclusion rather than biological superiority.

A nation under threat – Great Replacement Theory

A third feature of the Irish far right is familialism. This may be defined as “a form of biopolitics which views the traditional family as the foundation of the nation and subjugates individual reproduction and self-determination rights [of women in particular] to the normative demands of the reproduction of the nation”.⁴ Natalism (or pro-natalism) is the term that some far right groups use to describe their deeply conservative familialist positions. Crucially, familialism is rooted in nativism, that is, in the ability of the ‘nation’ or ‘race’ to reproduce itself within ‘fixed’ biological boundaries that are seen as fundamental to

the survival of the native community.⁵ Ethnically ‘pure’ women and children are seen as symbols of the nation, making it morally unacceptable and anti-national to either have intercourse with, or bear the children of, someone of a different race or ethnicity.

Threats to the survival of the nation include ‘ideologies’ which are seen to limit reproduction rates by morally ‘corrupting’ women, such as feminism, ‘homosexuality,’ and gender-nonconformity, as well as ‘corruption’ of the ‘purity’ of the nation’s bloodline through miscegenation (sexual relations among different ethnic groups).

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The centrality of familialism to far right ideology and the fetishisation of ‘purity’ and ‘innocence’ – usually of women, children, and bloodlines – is rooted in nativism and can be traced back to fascist ideology.⁶ Familialism is often posited as the solution to the imaginary ‘threat’ of a ‘great replacement’ of the ‘national’ population by immigrant populations. The Great Replacement Theory (GRT) is a conspiracy theory posited by French far right writer Renaud Camus which uses crisis narratives to convince people that there is a concerted, elite-driven conspiracy to ‘wipe out’ the ‘white race’ through migration and ‘anti-natalist ideologies’.⁷ The GRT allows far right groups to

consolidate nativism with familialism and authoritarianism, by simultaneously gendering the nation and adopting authoritarian, anti-liberal positions on bodily autonomy and gender non-conformity.⁸

Proponents of the GRT believe the solution to the imaginary threat is to maximise the ‘white’ birth-rate by imposing traditional, biologically essentialist gender norms on people, banning reproductive rights such as abortion, banning anti-natalist ‘ideologies’ such as feminism, ‘homosexuality,’ and gender-nonconformity, and limiting the rights of ‘non-nationals.’⁹

Aside from banning anti-nationalist ideologies, proponents of the GRT believe that maximising white birth rates is necessary to ‘defend’ the ‘future’ of the nation by ensuring there is always a white majority – a logic which Burnett and Richardson label ‘competitive fecundity’ and ‘racial-reproductive futurity’.¹⁰ ‘Defending the future’ through competitive fecundity (high fertility rates) is a prominent idea on the Irish far right and can be seen in much of their rhetoric, particularly that of the National Party.

It is vital to acknowledge the role that anti-LGBT politics have also played in

buttressing racial arguments made by the far right. Their emphasis on ‘cultural’ racism has been accompanied with an increased essentialisation of gender. The natalist position reinforces the idea that a womb is the most vital measure of womanhood, and that masculinity must be defined along the narrow lines of the patriarch. As such, transgender and gay people whose very existence defies this conception of gender, have been subject to mounting discrimination across the spectrum. In Ireland, transphobic ‘radical feminists’ have found allies in the far right in arguments to protect women and children from encroaching ‘gender ideology’.

In April 2023, a library in Swords, North Dublin, was protested by individuals who claimed that LGBT materials were ‘pornographic’ and harmful to children. This is part of a worrying global trend, from the increasing number of ‘drag bans’ across the United States, to the recent ‘anti-homosexuality’ bill in Uganda, which includes the provision of the death sentence. These ideas thus have a dual function for the right. On the one hand, they serve to buttress the ideals of a racially pure community. On the other hand, they serve to secure the subordination of women within this racially pure community – one that reproduces traditionally conservative views of men, women, and the family.

Another means of ‘defending’ the existence of a white majority is the forced deportation of people who do not fit the far right definition of a member of the ‘nation.’ ‘Remigration’ is a term frequently used by the far right to describe the forced deportation of minorities from their ‘nation-state.’ Remigration avoids using the overtly racist language of white supremacists while seeking to achieve the same result - ‘nations’ separated into their respective ‘nation-states.’ Ebner and Davey describe ‘remigration’ as code for “non-violent ethnic cleansing” in which the legal and bureaucratic instruments of the state are used to enforce strict controls around citizenship and borders.¹¹

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The far right in Irish politics

A defining feature of the far right in Ireland is its development of a set of ‘enemies’ or political opponents, which reveals much about their function within Irish capitalism. The far right has clearly identified their main opponents as socialists and the left in general, along with organisations which campaign for equality, such as LGBTQ rights groups and anti-racist groups, which they describe collectively as ‘NGOs’. This should come as no surprise, as fascist movements of the past – which have largely inspired the far right today – saw the left as one of their primary targets for

violence and eradication.¹² Of course, they also view people of colour, immigrants, queer people, and others who do not align with their views, as opponents and targets for violence. The far right in Ireland is also heavily critical of Sinn Féin on the grounds that it has ‘betrayed the nationalist cause’.

This is indicative of the long-running competition within Irish nationalism between the left and right and their varying interpretations of what constitutes the ‘nation’. Left nationalists – in the tradition of James Connolly and Jim Larkin, view the Irish nation as primarily a political association which should be defined in opposition to British colonialism, capitalism, and all forms of inequality stemming from this, including racism and sexism. Connolly famously argued that the Irish elites were just as capable of oppressing Irish workers in an independent state, as the British ruling class had oppressed them through colonialism.¹³

Right-wing nationalism views the nation as primarily a biological association between ‘ethnically pure Irish’ people: people with white skin and other features which they believe are the defining features of Irishness. Contrary to their left wing counterparts, right nationalists historically offered no criticism of the political economy of imperialism and colonialism.

They had no critique of the political hierarchies and class dynamics of British rule – they merely wanted to replace the British elites with Irish elites, thereby transferring power from a ‘foreign’ to the ‘native’ ethnic group, while maintaining the system of capitalist exploitation which continues to exploit working class people in Ireland today.

Sinn Féin has long attracted Irish nationalists with both progressive and conservative views, but the party has alienated some of its more radical right elements over time. These include former Sinn Féin executive member Gerry McGeough, who left the party in the early 2000s on the basis that it had been ‘overrun with Marxists’ and who went on to assist the European Parliament election campaign for Justin Barrett in 2004.

Another example is former Sinn Féin TD, Peadar Tóibín, who left to form the anti-choice party, Aontú, after Sinn Féin adopted a pro-repeal position in the run-up to the Referendum in 2018. Anti-Sinn Féin sentiment is prominent within the Irish far right precisely because redefining Irish nationalism as a primarily ethnic category is the core issue for the far right and eliminating all other (political and civic) interpretations is a means to that end. Interestingly (though perhaps

unsurprisingly) the far right is also more vocal in its opposition to the left than to the government or the 'establishment' more generally, despite espousing anti-establishment views. This can be explained by their desire to build a mass movement, which is precisely what distinguishes the far right from other right wing parties, which typically organise in a 'top-down', elitist manner. Happy to abuse ideas regardless of their truth content, the far right routinely claims that the left is part of a ruling establishment that seeks to disenfranchise white, straight, Irish men, in favour of women, immigrants, queer people, etc.

This identity based narrative serves to distract attention from the root causes of socio-economic issues - capitalism - and directs anger towards minorities and marginalised groups rather than the economic elites responsible for decision-making. Taking inspiration from the ability of the Irish left to build mass mobilisations, the far right has also adopted and adapted some of the anti-establishment symbols of more progressive forces including their attempted appropriation of republicanism and the legacy of the Water Charges movement.

Pseudo-left demagoguery

Another tactic is to take an issue of real concern for working class people – the housing crisis for example – before presenting it as a problem of race or immigration. The Irish don't have houses because immigrants have them; the Irish can't get hospital beds because foreigners are taking their place. These ideas are used to divide the working class despite the fact that domestic Irish elites decide how many houses are built, and many immigrants live in dreadfully poor accommodation. Foreign nurses are also the backbone of many hospitals, but the far right is not interested in the truth, they are interested in attacking minorities as a way of solidifying their racist ideology.

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This is clear in the solutions they put forward, which always involve rationing public services so that Irish people get them; never about making demands for extra public services for all. As such, we argue that their alleged concern for economic justice is nothing more than pseudo-left demagoguery. An attempt to bolster their (largely unpopular and nonsensical) racist and xenophobic views with a facade of concern for material issues such as housing provision and hospital waiting lists.

Despite their anti-establishment rhetoric, this ensures that the far right acts in parallel to the state. It responds to cues from the government, the Gardaí, and other elites, and serves the ultimate function of reaffirming the state's core right wing ideals in place of potential left wing alternatives. These mechanisms become more pronounced in times of systemic crisis when capitalism and its elites face an existential threat. Just like fascism in the 1930s, the far right has emerged in a period of prolonged and severe crisis for the capitalist system.

16

Since the emergence of neoliberal policymaking in the late 20th century, individual states have delegated power around economic decisions 'upwards' to the international level in order to appease capitalism's need to globalise. In Ireland, funding and responsibilities were taken from local councils and 'centralised' in government departments, before being partially delegated to private companies through what David Harvey terms 'public-private partnerships', and what we may know as 'semi-state bodies'. In short, public power was privatised, removing the ability of members of the public to have input into how their local communities were being governed. The contradiction between delegating economic decisions 'upwards' to international bodies – while leaving

decision-making on social and cultural issues at the national level – has created a general perception that states cannot provide for their people and that necessities (such as housing and healthcare) are in short supply.

Instead of people understanding that capitalism has engineered scarcity for higher profits, it seems like a natural limit which the far right reinforces by framing it as a problem of immigration. They also express racist and xenophobic views which cannot be openly expressed by the state and use violence which cannot be used by the state as long as democratic procedures still exist. All of this strengthens the power of domestic elites and weakens the unity of the working classes.

For example, the state's abandonment of non-Ukrainian (i.e., mostly black, and brown) refugees regarding provision of accommodation in the early months of 2023 has added fuel to a growing far right anti-immigration movement, by tacitly supporting the far right's claims that there are "too many" asylum seekers in Ireland and that accommodation is therefore limited. More importantly, the state has – knowing that Direct Provision centres have been attacked by far right activists many times in the last number of years - opted to leave asylum seekers exposed on the streets

instead of increasing efforts to provide the protection which they are legally obliged to provide.¹⁴

This is a conscious decision by a right-wing government which is ideologically opposed to increasing public spending on the needs of the public, regardless of nationality or skin colour. Capitalism cannot provide for the homeless or asylum seekers because it is the very reason such phenomena exist. As such, the mobilisation of violent far right groups poses only a minor threat to the state in comparison to the more useful role it plays in chipping away at the idea that the state can, and should, provide for all people in need and in attacking the left. While the revolutionary left poses a fundamental threat to the capitalist state, the far right aids its consolidation and attacks its opponents.

How do the far-right organise?

Over the past decade, the global far right has demonstrated a shift in its tactics. Whilst traditional organisations, such as formalised political parties, remain key platforms for building national far right projects, a new phenomenon has emerged – a series of looser, online networks as vital avenues for disseminating the ideas of the far right. This combination of forms allows both groups and individuals to collaborate

on disparate issues, and to converge in particular moments. The far right have shown great adeptness and speed in utilising the internet, from mainstream platforms to messaging apps, to spread their ideas and penetrate into individuals' social networks. However, it would be wrong to characterise the far right as simply 'keyboard warriors'.

This online activism has increasingly moved off the web and onto the streets. Though dangerous, the sporadic nature of these manifestations proves that the organisation of the far right is not infallible, but it raises questions around how the left organises in the post-Covid period to avoid ceding common sense to the right.

Much has been made of the far right's ability to utilise social media not only to whip up fear, but also to make its ideas more relatable to a broader audience. Most recent studies of the far right in Ireland have focused on this aspect of its development. Long gone is the image of far right 'trolls' lurking in the darkest corners of the internet, on forums such as 4chan. Now, the ideas of the far right are being broadcast to wide audiences over the most mainstream of social media platforms, often without the deliberate intention of the sharer. It is vital to note that this strategy does not emerge from a single,

organised group. Rather, we have seen the simultaneous growth of influencers, and of encrypted messaging apps, as the main sources of the far right's online presence. These phenomena tend to bolster one another, though they have specific characteristics to examine.

Right wing influencers

Mainstream platforms, such as YouTube, Twitter, and Twitch, have paved the way for prominent far right activists and influencers to gain a following. These platforms have created networks that lack formal leaders but are easier to join than traditional routes into political activity. Individuals can participate by watching and sharing videos, networking on forums, and taking part in chat services. Though arguably more ephemeral, this type of activism, has a much lower social cost than canvassing and door knocking, distributing leaflets, and attending meetings.

Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the growth of the influencer figure has afforded the ideas of the far right a new relatability. Far right influencers utilise the tactics of 'brand influencers', but rather than selling a product to their audience, they spread ideological content. Examining the growth of 'Alternative Information Networks' on

YouTube, Rebecca Lewis has identified two key currents in the far right's use of social media platforms.¹⁵

Firstly, influencer figures establish an alternative sense of credibility and authenticity to mainstream media sources through their videos or posts. In contrast to television or print media, social media allows content users to engage more readily with these core influencers, primarily through comments. This engagement can foster parasocial relationships between the influencer and the viewer, wherein the viewer feels connected to the influencer without any direct communication between the two figures.¹⁶

Viewers are more likely to take what they are seeing or hearing at face value because of a perceived trustworthiness built upon this relationship. They are not listening to a representative of the establishment, but to someone seemingly like themselves.¹⁷ This type of parasocial relationship makes it easy for audience members to be gradually exposed to, and to come to believe, more extremist positions. Abstract yet dangerous concepts, such as nativism and familialism, are made palatable by being posed as informal conversations among friends, or behind the veil of 'concern'.

Also noted by Lewis, another tendency of far right influencers is to cast themselves into a countercultural or underdog role.¹⁸ Genuine scepticism towards the mainstream media, particularly towards newspapers and news channels, is weaponised to great effect.

The refrain ‘why isn’t anyone talking about this’ is frequently used to introduce loaded concepts such as racialised crime rates, access to housing, or the ‘realities’ of abortion, whilst also reframing the issue as subversive to the ‘establishment’ media. Drawing on references to ‘cancelling’, far right figures frame the broad left as ideologically intolerant and as capable of suppressing their views in workplaces, education institutions and in society more generally, as well as online. This countercultural appeal draws the online communities built around these figures closer, and more thoroughly convinces audiences of far right positions.

There is a third component to the far right’s use of social media, which demonstrates the culpability of the platforms themselves in the spread of these ideas. Recent studies, such as Jesse Daniels’ ‘The Algorithmic Rise of the Far-Right’ and Safiya Noble’s ‘Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism’, have uncovered the in-built propensity of search engines and social media platforms

to recommend extreme right content to viewers.¹⁹ A user who views a video of an apparent racialised attack, or a discussion of women’s ‘safety’, will likely be recommended further content of this nature, regardless of whether it has been searched for. Even more benign video topics such as heavy metal music and anti-establishment movements such as Occupy Wall Street yield similar results.²⁰ Similar studies, such as a 2021 Twitter algorithmic report, also revealed the propensity of the site to recommend more right wing news sources than left.²¹

Part of this is driven by the algorithms of these sites looking to sustain users’ attention by directing them towards ever more scandalising ‘clickbait’ content. However, the latent bias towards far right content remains concerning. For instance, a report by the *Irish Examiner* in January 2023 revealed that at least seven Irish YouTubers were able to monetise livestreams of racist, anti-refugee rallies in Finglas, though this is firmly outside the guidelines of the site.²²

It is not accurate to speak of a deliberate suppression of left-wing sources, though it is well-known that they tend to receive less airtime across mainstream outlets. Presently, computer-generated algorithms are honed around mass data sets and developed to increase engagement with the

given site. However, these data sets can be skewed or made unrepresentative of the audiences they serve. The biases of the engineers who build these models is also an implicit influence. It is worth remembering that behind the algorithm are human computer engineers, equipped with their own prejudices and experiences.

Irish far right influencers remain tiny in comparison to the United States, though they remain a steadily growing group. Nevertheless, they have utilised a combination of perceived authenticity and connection with their audiences, alongside a deliberate positioning of themselves as the present counterculture, to carve out a space for themselves online. In this way, the opportunity for far right ideas to be presented as ‘common sense’ and digested by broader audiences has increased. In addition, the connected nature of the online far right has allowed for messages to be picked up from one context and spread to a wider, global audience, which often blurs the lines between politician and influencer.

For instance, on 11 May 2023, the chair of Britain First, Ashlea Simon, retweeted a video of Boyne Street in Dublin, with the tag ‘Diversity is Not Our Strength’, in reference to the apparent unkempt nature of the road.²³ At the time of writing, Simon has almost 18,000 followers. Previously,

this video had mostly been circulating among much smaller Irish accounts, such as Gearóid Murphy, or on more fringe platforms such as Bitchute, Telegram and Odysee. Even more concerning, an attack on a camp of homeless refugees in Dublin the same day was filmed and shared across the Irish far right online space, before being picked up by Andy Ngô, an American influencer with over a million followers.²⁴ In the tweet, Ngô highlights a violent assault on an activist defending the refugees, though he is careful to avoid explicitly endorsing it. When picked up by a popular account, a local image or claim (no matter how dubious) can be shared by like-minded people across the globe as ‘evidence’ of their cause. It can also serve to bolster people to act on the streets.

From apps to action

The aspect of online far right activism which has been most directly connected with mobilising people onto the streets is the growing use of messaging apps to organise. Compared to mainstream social media platforms, messaging apps are less subject to content moderation, and allow for organisational choices to be made in real time. These apps are usually tied to groups or individual influencers, such as Murphy or Rowan ‘Grand Torino’ Croft, who both have active Telegram channels

associated with their public profiles. These services strengthen the connection of participants with far right ideas and allow them to mobilise effectively.

Joining a messaging app associated with a far right figure is a step beyond consuming and engaging with the content they produce on public platforms. These channels allow individuals to communicate, promote content, spread disinformation, and mobilise. Particularly where a channel was joined from an influencer's public platform, people who take part are likely to already have a sense of community or common purpose with other chat members. The Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) has conducted the most comprehensive analysis of how the messaging app Telegram has been used in the Irish context.²⁵

It is important to note that, though useful, such studies can become quickly outdated owing to the flexibility of the groups to dissolve and reform, and to migrate between platforms. ISD found 34 Irish-based groups on Telegram, with the largest one consisting of some 5,400 members.²⁶ The case studies in their report suggest that, aside from sharing images and videos, far right actors are using these apps to orchestrate information campaigns as entry points to push wider racist and homophobic conspiracies.

One of the most egregious examples of this was the activity across Irish Telegram channels in the wake of the fatal shooting of George Nkencho by Gardaí in December 2020, though similar tactics have been utilised surrounding the 2020 Balbriggan house fire and the homophobic slur campaign against TD Roderic O'Gorman.

The ISD reported that in the days and weeks following Nkencho's killing, activity in the Telegram groups increased. A few hours after the news broke, a list of instructions was posted across Telegram channels that discussed how to react to the shooting. Followers were told to avoid going to protests or getting into discussions with people about the incident. Instead, they were told to, 'stay home... make memes, dig up stats, turn on your VPN and get trolling'.²⁷

In the following weeks, an effective campaign of misinformation was conducted, drawing upon racist stereotypes to discredit Nkencho. In particular, false claims alleging that he had '39 convictions' and that he had beaten up his girlfriend with a hammer and 'robbed numerous other people', as well as threatening Gardaí with a machete, were circulated.

These claims were all found to be false, as reported in a fact-check by *TheJournal.ie* and elsewhere but had already spread widely online and even in discussion on mainstream media platforms.²⁸

The fact that these claims were coordinated and effectively pushed far beyond the reaches of Telegram demonstrates the capability of the far right to infiltrate and shape popular debate. Most concerning, videos of unrelated events (such as an attack on an Everton fan in 2019), migrated from Telegram into social WhatsApp groups, being forwarded hundreds of times throughout unaffiliated social networks.²⁹ Misinformation, which began in far right messaging groups, spread into family and social WhatsApp groups, making the messages much harder to counter.

More recently, far right figures are increasingly using livestreams from popular platforms, including Twitter and Instagram, as a rallying point for their physical activity. In addition, figures such as Murphy, and the Twitter user 'Bleakhouse12', have increasingly used Twitter to attempt to identify (or 'dox') individuals shown in videos in order to intimidate them. These posts are generally compelled to be more cryptic to avoid removal, though they are bolstered by previous coordination in messaging apps.

In reference to the recent attack on the homeless refugees in Dublin, Philip Dwyer, a Dublin-based figure previously expelled from the National Party, made a series of tweets referring to going live from a 'secret location' before broadcasting an attack on a group of homeless refugees to tens of thousands of viewers.³⁰ Several activists and refugees were attacked with iron bars as a result of this coordination, and videos of the assault were shared globally.

This culminated with the burning of the camp where the refugees had been sleeping, all of which was livestreamed to multiple Twitter accounts. These groups have also gradually begun to 'protest' at the homes of political figures, such as People Before Profit TD, Paul Murphy.³¹ Though this is not a new phenomenon, it is an intimidation tactic exacerbated by the far right's ability to coordinate effectively through social media.

The far right has utilised social media and messaging apps to permeate mainstream political discourse with escalating rhetoric, and to make these ideas more relatable to a broad audience. Though they remain relatively small, the Irish far right is linked online with a global movement and is becoming more adept at mobilising its forces. This raises the question of why people are drawn to far right platforms and influencers in the first place. What compels

people to take part in the sharing of overtly discriminatory or untruthful material online? Most vitally, why are the far right experiencing success in winning people to their ideas?

Why people turn to the far right

The question of why people are being won to far right ideas is linked to the wider context of Irish capitalism. Many of those becoming active are from working class communities that have not only been failed by the state, they have also been denigrated by it. As a result, working-class people are increasingly seeking sources of legitimacy and community outside traditional structures of authority. In addition, state housing policies have undermined small, geographically defined communities in recent decades, further driving individuals to seek that connection elsewhere.

This is not to ignore the significant influence of tech billionaires and conservative politicians in the spread of the far right. However, it remains crucial to establish what factors have created the conditions for far right ideas to gain ground. Most importantly, this understanding allows the left to speak to those who remain in the orbit of, yet not fully convinced by, the far right.

Despite the fact that the strategy of the modern far right is rooted firmly in the digital age, the factors which drive people to take part are much older. The concept of alienation, which has its roots in Rousseau, Hegel, and Feuerbach, and was built upon by Marx and Gramsci, offers an insight into why working people feel so little agency in their day-to-day lives. This theory also approaches the issue of how legitimacy is created, and how people are 'won' to particular positions.

Marx developed the idea of alienation by demonstrating that it was not merely an ideological phenomenon, but one shaped by the material forces of a society. In the '*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*', he identified four key aspects of alienation: the alienation of humans from nature, from their own labour, from their own characteristics as human beings, and from each other.³²

Because workers are compelled to spend their working hours in the service of their employers, they usually have little say in the way they spend that time. The act of creating can be life-affirming but when it is commodified, it alienates the worker from their own life-activity. On top of this, the objects created by the labourer under capitalism, and the person of the labourer themselves, are measured by their value as a commodity. This is a fundamentally

dehumanising process which denies the worker creative agency as a human being. Workers lack control over their time at work, over their shift patterns and in certain jobs, such as call centres, even over toilet breaks monitored to the minute. In a busy bar, a worker can put several thousand euros into the till, yet never see more than a fraction of this in return for their efforts. Workers are pitted against one another in competition for better wages or security and, increasingly, for access to housing.

It is perhaps unsurprising that, given the experience of alienation in their everyday lives, some people have become open to far right figures who claim to promise them stability, self-empowerment, and community. In addition, these networks offer individuals a sense of having access to the ‘truth’ withheld from the wider population by the mainstream media. Indeed, while a worker may be utterly dehumanised in their job, far right rhetoric can ‘uplift’ them as bearers of a superior culture or tradition. Across the Irish online sphere, these arguments are made through the profuse employment of supposedly ‘Celtic’ designs and with reference to figures from history, most notably Pádraig Pearse. This positions the white, Irish (usually male) worker in a somewhat empowering lineage, while they remain ultimately subjugated in their workplace.

In some ways, this is comparable to Hegel’s analogy of the religious experience of the poor.³³ Though their material conditions remain unaltered, poor worshipers are effectively alienated from their alienation by taking part in religious processes, where they can become “equal to the prince”.³⁴ Regardless of the exalted position they are allowed in religious thinking, however, they will always return to the degraded conditions of their material life. For many, particularly those who have been most vilified by the state, the sense of belonging generated by this imagery is powerful. Though destructive and oriented around hate, there is a genuine alternative community to be found in the online far right.

Furthermore, the far right target vulnerable groups as the cause of suffering and disempowerment in society. Women and people of colour, drag queens, hate speech legislation, ‘globalism’ and immigration are variously highlighted as the root of the average worker’s anxiety in the rhetoric of the far right. By taking on those more vulnerable than themselves, far right activists feel a sense of empowerment – particularly as this is wrapped up in distortions which suggest that those on the far right are victims of a wider movement to undermine their country and their culture.

The role of neoliberalism

Another element which exacerbates this alienation is the undermining of democracy by neoliberal globalisation. Since the beginning of the neoliberal era - which marked the decline of the welfare state - public services and goods have been increasingly privatised. Decision-making power and funding around economic issues has been transferred from local governing bodies (such as councils) to central governments, and then delegated 'upwards' to private companies and international bodies such as the EU and IMF.³⁵

People have less input into their own day-to-day affairs, while national governments choose to enact economic policy based on the needs of globalised markets, rather than the material needs of ordinary people. The result of this, combined with concerted attacks on left wing parties and trade unions, is a working class which is less empowered to affect economic affairs but retains some influence over socio-cultural or identity-based issues.

Capitalist reality clashes with the rhetoric of sovereignty and democracy and the far right respond by claiming they will bring power back to the national arena. They claim they are the only ones who can reaffirm national identity and re-

consolidate the nation-state. Through this strategy, the far right has been able to mobilise support around the 'defence' of national identity or supposed national 'values' (e.g., conservative views on gender), and to use economic crises to reaffirm these positions.

An example of this, referred to earlier, is the Irish far right's insistence that the housing and healthcare crises are primarily the result of immigration, using a distorted 'supply-and-demand' logic to defend their case. Of course, this argument falls flat when we observe the numbers of vacant properties in Ireland and the impact of economic and political elites in artificially inflating the cost and accessibility of housing - but nonetheless, it remains a powerful rhetorical tool for the far right to argue an immigrant has your home.

Instead of arguing for structural changes to the political economy of the state, the far right is happy to retain this system and 'solve' the issue by limiting access to public goods and services on the basis of identity - be that nationality, skin colour, gender, or sexuality. In this sense the far right works (intentionally or unintentionally) in tandem with the state: offering a 'strategy' for dealing with the crises of capitalism without challenging capitalism or the state, itself. They seek to consolidate the

traditional 'nation-state' in the hopes that this will solve the problems created by capitalism.

This is an easier, if ultimately defeatist, strategy than a genuine revolution. The 'traditional' society agitated for by the far right will always disappoint, however, as their idealised vision of life 'back then' never existed. The pursuit of this aim cannot be achieved, leading to further disenfranchisement. The pervasive effect of capitalist alienation in the lives of workers, combined with the existential threat posed by climate change, means that marginalised groups provide a convenient, yet persistent, scapegoat.

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This reveals the true aim of far right thinking; not the full empowerment of people to control their own lives, but to maintain a permanent mental state of being under attack and fighting on the edges of society against a powerful elite; all-the-while reinforcing this elite by redirecting anger against the victims of the system and dividing the working classes.

At times, this state of perceived victimhood is powerful enough to compel people to the streets to defend 'their' identity, or apparent community. Though not a new argument, in the context of a global online far right capable of permeating personal

social networks, it raises a new challenge for the radical left.

Is there a socialist alternative?

It can appear a disheartening task to contend with the multi-headed hydra that is the modern far right. Where one figure becomes discredited, or a post is proven false, more are waiting to take their place. In many ways, the far right has sought to take ground from the radical left, both in its online rhetoric and on the streets. Running through much of their messaging are allusions to issues common with the left; dissatisfaction with the government, anger towards the housing crisis, and an anxiety borne of the inherent precarity of life under capitalism. Though challenging, this aspect of the far right's strategy offers a path to dissuade working people from their ranks.

It is, of course, vital to counter the misinformation of the far right with persistence, and patience. However, rather than playing ideological 'whack a mole' with the right, it behoves the left to consider how socialist ideas can become the common sense of our time. This requires nothing less than convincing the most alienated and deprived in society of their power as workers, and of their shared cause with other workers, regardless of colour, gender, or creed. But it also means

starting from where working people actually are; it means finding common ground with the majority of decent people and looking for ways to move common sense towards good sense. The left should not engage in heresy hunting or celebrate abstract purity in a society so full of alienation and reactionary ideas flowing from the top.

Instead, it needs to talk to people in a language they can understand – to learn from people with good ideas and to argue in a comradely way with those who have confused and contradictory ones. In the end it is our job to convince people that they can change the world and not merely fight amongst each other for the crumbs. This essay will conclude with some tentative ideas about how this can be achieved.

The left must develop a programme of genuinely uplifting political action to counter the despair drawing so many young people to the far right. However, the struggle against the right must take place on an ideological plane as well as a practical one. The chasm between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ must be overcome if the left is to not only make its ideas understood, but to relate them to modern struggles and modern lived experiences. Rather than exclusively engaging in routines or slogans ‘by rote’, the left should be tactically

flexible and respond to circumstances as they emerge. We have seen that part of the far right’s successful engagements with mass psychology comes from the fact it is unencumbered by tradition. The manner in which they instrumentalise ideas, such as housing or gender, has to cross a much lower bar of scrutiny than those of the left, but this doesn’t mean the left cannot win people to our ideas.

The far right has successfully tapped into the anxieties of alienated people and misdirected them against minorities. We have to relate to people in a different way. We have to start from their lived experiences, look for common causes and move people left through everyday language and common struggles for progressive reforms.

The far right’s ideas emerge as a contradictory ‘hotchpotch’, reflecting the contradictory society from which they emerge. But they can still be enormously effective. When a dubious racist image circulates in WhatsApp groups for example, it can be readily accepted and digested by a far more ‘neutral’ audience. There are serious lessons to be learned from this dissemination of ideas. In a world where a majority of people interact with politics through their phones, we have to ask whether a public meeting in a hotel is the most effective way to get our ideas across?

This raises further questions about how the left has historically communicated and shared its ideas with people beyond the membership of their organisations. These are new challenges for the left.

However, they also raise opportunities to engage in new kinds of activity. Some traditional methods of agitating will remain essential, if used in tandem with newer modes of communication.

As Seán Mitchell argues in ‘Lenin, Elections and Socialist Hegemony’ for example, electoral campaigns are not only a platform for the left, but a “means to sink roots and forge connections, to fight for the political independence of the working class and, crucially, to win socialist leadership within the ultimately determinant class struggle itself”.³⁶ In addition, participation in unions and other community organisations to improve working and living conditions, and to resist evictions ultimately proves that struggle can work. Indeed, it is struggles on a mass scale that can push back the right and open up new opportunities for the radical left.

A major movement on housing would undermine those in the National Party who argue that private property should be sacrosanct for example, and it would open up spaces for interaction between working people and left wing activists. Furthermore,

as Justin Kong, Edward Hon-Sing Wong, and Veronica Yeung argue in their 2018 article ‘Organising the Suburbs’, activists should not shy away from promoting anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-sexist, pro-LGBTQ ideas within these wider struggles.³⁷

Consistently linking these arguments with class politics, and being willing to engage friends, family, and co-workers in a non-dogmatic way, is also vital in winning people away from the far right and making socialist politics relatable.

The radical left must also consider how it engages organisationally with the modern working class. For many, the precarity of housing or working hours makes regular membership of a specific, geographically-bound branch or union impossible. How can we speak to the ‘unrooted’ worker, compelled to move from place to place by evictions, and employed in precarious gig labour? How can we speak to those who consider politics as something separate from their lives, and something they would rather avoid? Whilst organisation remains central to any radical left strategy, opportunities to engage with unaffiliated workers and activists must be not only taken but created.

That said, the online strategy of the left should not be dismissed as unimportant

compared to offline activities (such as leafleting, or attending branch meetings), but as a vital tactic to broaden the reach of socialist ideas among diverse groups. As seen in the case of the far right, the potential for social media to penetrate mainstream discourse is considerable, though it is not their exclusive domain. Beyond the online sphere, how the left relates to and defines community in the 2020s is a question which requires further exploration.

Finally, these issues of hegemony and the online sphere force the left to appraise its present internationalism. In an era defined by war, a global pandemic, worsening climate change, but also unprecedented technological innovation, we are more connected than ever. Despite this, left wing organisations are, in the main, isolated from one another. The same tools at our disposal to build a fairer and more united world are also in the hands of the far right. This article has demonstrated the danger of allowing the far right to emerge as the main transnational political tendency.

Rather than the occasional doffing of the cap towards the idea of general affiliation with an international left, we should carefully consider how we can connect with socialists across the globe in a practical and routine sense. Socialists in Ireland today should not shy from the

potential of well-organised, global networks. Whilst maintaining a focus on national and local events, the left should consider how it can share information and make connections with socialists across the globe. This internationalism is not only of tactical usefulness for the left. Awareness of being connected in a common, global struggle could become the most valuable tool in combatting the ever-increasing isolation and alienation of capitalism.

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Fascism and the far right: misogyny and anti-genderism

Marnie Holborow

The phrase ‘unvetted males’ crops up with predictable regularity in the online messaging of the Irish far right. Males ‘of military age’ are supposedly lurking in migrant housing, ready to attack local Irish women. With its hint at concern for women’s safety, ‘unvetted males’ becomes a fake ‘protecting women’ label covering a vicious racist narrative. As everyone knows, women are far more likely to experience violence in their own homes, and be attacked or killed, not by strangers, but by someone they know.

32 The same trope is used by the Italian fascist party, Fratelli D’Italia. Their leader, Georgia Meloni, now Prime Minister, posted a video during the last election campaign of an asylum seeker raping a woman. “A hug to this woman: I will do everything I can to restore security to our cities” was Meloni’s sick comment under the video. This strategic racism is disgusting. Posting the video, and making such comments, was motivated not out of concern for the victim, but a determination to drive home racist rhetoric. Meloni’s comments came in the wake of the murder of Nigerian street vendor, Alike Ogorchukwu, in the Italian beach town of Civitanova Marche, beaten to death for offering a handkerchief to

his murderer’s partner. Racist violence is on the rise and racist rhetoric helps to drive it. Gary Lineker was right when he recently exposed the Tories’ hate language against refugees – it is horribly reminiscent of 1930’s fascism.

The deliberate racialisation of sexual violence has a long history. Angela Davis has described how, in the US, it was conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the black community were required. In the Southern States, that message lay behind the lynchings and countless barbarities against black men, to stifle opposition.¹ It was a fiction, which shaped post-slavery racism in the US and, as the recent film ‘Till’ recounts, was regularly used to beat down black men.²

But the far right care nothing for women. Instead, they deploy misogyny, and attack what they label ‘gender ideology’, to further their own racist project. They oppose women’s reproductive rights and a significant number of their leading figures cut their political teeth in anti-abortion organisations. Justin Barrett, leader of the National Party in Ireland, was previously a key figure in the rabidly anti-abortion Youth Defence, an organisation which

prided itself on its bully-boy tactics against women. In Poland, the Law and Justice party, who came to power in 2015, have anti-immigration, racism, and anti-abortion as their core policies. Their think tank is the ultraconservative, Catholic *Ordo Iuris*, which orchestrated the vicious backlash against abortion and LGBTQI rights there. The Fratelli d'Italia party have appointed a well-known anti-abortion campaigner, Eugenia Roccella, as a government minister.

The far right, particularly across Europe and Latin America, picks on what it calls 'gender ideology', with feminism and LGBTQI rights in its sights. For example, in Hungary, there have been moves to stop the teaching of awareness about sexual orientation and gender identity in schools. In Poland 'trans-free areas' have been declared to 'purify Poland of corrosive cultural influences'. In Brazil, where the anti-gender movement took hold during Bolsonaro's regime: discussion of gender, anti-racism and diversity in schools was labelled a threat to the nation. In Poland and Hungary, 'genderism' is equated to communism and totalitarianism. In Spain, the far right Vox party, now the third largest political force in the country, calls feminists 'feminazis' and is in favour of scrapping legislation around gender-based violence. The neo nazi Alternative für Deutschland (AFD), presently enjoying a

record high of 17 per cent support in opinion polls, and a ruling party in two *Länder* in Germany, runs campaigns against LGBTQI-inclusive sex education, opposes 'the sexualisation of society', and advocates traditional gender roles and family values.³ Across many US states, a concerted book-banning campaign orchestrated by the right is under way. LGBTQI themed content or books using racially neutral, or 'sexually explicit' language have been censored. In 2022, there were well over one thousand demands to take such books off library shelves, an increase of 38 percent from the year before.⁴ In Ireland, too, we have seen transphobic efforts in Drogheda and Swords on the part of the far right, who targeted public libraries for being too LGBTQI friendly in April 2022.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the last few years have seen a proliferation of reactionary views around gender. In some countries, it has captured the political mainstream. The US Supreme Court decision to overturn the federal constitutional right to abortion in June 2022, means that no less than 22 million women and girls of reproductive age live in states where abortion access is now either banned or inaccessible.⁵ Turkey has withdrawn from the Istanbul Convention on gender-based violence on the basis that gender is a 'foreign word'. Poland's Law and Justice led government, has embraced

‘anti-genderism’, and introduced not only bans on abortion and on non-directive sex education, but also a country-wide pregnancy register which acts as a database for public prosecutors to hunt out women who have had an abortion. The rise of far right anti-genderism takes different forms in different countries, but its common themes are strident opposition to abortion and assisted reproduction, attacks on LGBTQI rights, non-binary sexualities, and non-heteronormative families. It is built on the gross misrepresentation that oppressed minorities are in the driving seat, in public policy, in schools, across society and that this needs to be stamped out. What all these far right inspired movements have in common, as Polish feminists Graff and Korolczuk point out, is the demonisation of gender.⁶

Capitalist disintegration

How has this misogyny and anti-genderism emerged now, and why?

One explanation lies in the depth and extent of the social crisis we are experiencing. The sharp rise in the cost of living, chronic housing shortages, planetary degradation, floods and severe weather events, wars, and greater militarisation in a more bitterly competitive world, all of these are causing human suffering on a

massive scale. There is widespread disgust at the neoliberal politics-as-usual that has presided over all of this. Political disillusion is rife. For example, the turn-out in the 2022 Italian election, which saw Meloni come to power, was at a historic low; in Naples 60.5 per cent of the population did not vote.⁷

Writing in the 1930’s, Antonio Gramsci described the generalised, systemic uncertainty of his time, as an organic crisis of capitalism, during which the ruling common sense of society begins to break down.⁸ Hitherto socially accepted norms become widely contested and the centre cannot hold. Today we see a similar deep unease about the principles which have been the hallmark of the capitalist order over recent decades: the adulation of the rich corporate CEO’s, the wonders of the market, and the infinite possibilities of individualism - all of which increasingly stand revealed as having fuelled new crises and torn society further apart.

Secondly, this many-sided crisis triggers opposition from the right, as well as the left. Some have named this a new populism, although the term is politically imprecise and tends to lump left and right radicalism together, which is misleading. Specifically, concerning the far right, its reaction to the crisis involves a hotchpotch of ideas against global elites which they

put out in the name of ‘the people’. Conspiracy theories, rather than any general social explanation, becomes the easy answer. Anger is expressed, not through collective working-class resistance, but through extreme nationalism and vicious racist scapegoating. Ironically, in this concocted world-view, the victims are the white ‘ordinary’ folk, labelled ignorant deplorables by the liberal order of diversity and ‘woke’ culture.

Leon Trotsky located the origins of fascism in the harsh conditions of capitalist disintegration and a generalised economic impasse in the period after World War One and again during the period of the Great Depression. He identified the lower middle classes and a minority of the most marginalised workers as the social forces behind fascism, who together yearned for change and to tear themselves loose from the ruling social order and their rich backers. This was the social layer who filled the ranks of the new fascist parties, in Italy and in Germany, and made up fascism’s shock troops and street thugs. Trotsky’s acute observation was that while fascism promised the triumph of ‘the little man’, it relied on existing capitalist structures and political parties to win power. Capitalists for their part turned to fascism because, in the end, they saw fascism as less of a threat than socialism.⁹ ‘Better Hitler than Blum’ was their refrain

in France, when Leon Blum, a Jewish Social Democrat, became the French Premier in 1936.

We see a similar, if less generalised, dynamic at play in the rise of far right and fascist forces today. They appear to speak for the plain people against the global elites who spout liberal phrases about diversity and inclusion, even as their policies ravage people’s lives. The far right message relates to a minority of declassed workers who, after years of grinding austerity, have become detached from traditional working class organisations. The reason people even listen to racist arguments from fascists and the far right, lies partly in the rotten conditions they are experiencing in late capitalism but also in the political fact that mass organisations of the working class – mainstream social democrat parties, even trade unions – no longer speak on their behalf. If there are no other channels of resistance, people lash out at the easiest targets and can be pulled into blaming the wrong people.



An example of Afd racism, the caption reads “New Germans, we will make them ourselves.”

Misogyny and racism

36 The racism peddled by today’s fascists and the far right draws on existing divisive ideologies about race, which have always been present in capitalism, but are taken to new levels by the right. Their misogyny also draws on widespread gender discrimination in society, but it is solidified into concoctions of a mythical past in which ‘natural’ gender roles were set in stone and the nuclear family was the core of social stability. Misogyny becomes instrumental to their racist view of the world. Motherhood is fused with nationalism; women are important only as mothers, as the biological and cultural reproducers of the white nation. Their promotion of traditional ‘family values’ fits into this narrative. The AfD in Germany

makes much of a current ‘demographic crisis’ - by which it means a decline in the

birth-rate for white Germans. A recent AfD election poster summed it up. It was a picture of a pregnant white woman with the caption: “*New Germans, we will make them ourselves.*”.¹⁰ Toxic racist misogyny doesn’t come much worse.

Ideas like this are part of the conspiracy theory of ‘The Great Replacement’. This gained traction in the United States among the Alt Right, but its country of origin is France. White supremacist and antisemite, Renard Camus made the claim in his 2013 book, *Le Grande Remplacement*, that French and European people are under threat from

non-Europeans from North Africa and the Middle East, the majority of whom are Muslim, and that this was as a result of the immigration policies pursued by Western liberal governments. Fascist and far right parties in Europe all take up the theme. White women must be in the forefront of resisting this 'population change' and play their 'natural' role as mothers to produce more white babies. Fratelli d'Italia, whose name evokes the nation as family, proposes cutting taxes for larger families to boost Italy's current low birth-rate.

So set are the party on implementing this, that the Italian Ministry for Women has been renamed as 'Family, Natalism and Equal Opportunities'. Meloni, meanwhile, refers to herself as 'un soldato' in the masculine form, or similarly as 'il presidente', instead of 'una soldatessa' or 'la presidente'.¹¹ Such moves make laughable Hilary Clinton's comment about Meloni's premiership being a 'step forward' for women; it also exposes how little mainstream feminism understands the dangers of the far right.

In sum, far-right misogyny takes on a double form. For white women, it is about knowing their place in society - as mothers and homebuilders - within the glorious,

preserved, white nation. For black and brown women, it is about removing them completely as threats to the nation. Motherhood and home building are not desirable attributes for women of colour, as the far right ploughs ahead with new obstacles in the way of family reunification for refugees and talks about the great replacement of cherished natives. For white women, the far right's misogyny agenda is to bury the post-68 era of civil rights and women's liberation, to reverse the gains made since for reproductive rights, and to make a bygone patriarchal order socially acceptable again. For women of colour, it is to remove them completely from the national *demos*.

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Gender politics and 1930's fascism

These gender-racist themes can be traced back to 1920s and 1930s fascist propaganda. *Kinde, Küche Kirche* – children, kitchen, church – was a mainstay of Nazi ideology. This is not to say that (white) women did not participate in Hitler's National Socialist Party, but where they did, it was based on performing suitably 'feminine' defined roles. The Nazi women's group, the NSF, wanted to draw women into supporting the regime through a range of social programmes, which fitted in with creating a mass Nazi movement, aligning state and society, organising for war, and

implementing the horrific racism of ‘the final solution’. But jobs were given to women only in so far as they were not impeded from performing ‘their most obvious service to society in marriage, family and motherhood’.¹² For ‘approved Aryan families’ in mid-1930s Nazi Germany, it was a deeply gendered, cut-off world, coordinated by women but dominated by men. The family became a domestic Nazi cell on which the regime could depend. Hitler’s speeches often lauded the private female world of home, the basic unit of the people’s community -- the *Volksgemeinschaft* -- and the heart of the white nation. Of course, those not of ‘the pure race’ to all intents and purposes had no families; enforced separation, persecution, concentration camps and ultimately the gas chambers were their fate.¹³

For Italian fascism in its early years, it was ‘population politics’ which was front and centre. Emigration and falling birth rates in the cities were accelerating population decline. In 1927, Mussolini prioritised population growth, transforming Italian families, and preparing the nation for war and colonial expansion. The fascist state introduced prenatal campaigns and laws to stop women working outside the home. They created state agencies for motherhood; even a tax on celibacy was

introduced. Women were to be first and foremost procreators of Italians, within marriage and under male authority.¹⁴ However, these campaigns were singularly unsuccessful in reversing the declining birth rate - an indication that women simply ignored the pressures to produce more children.¹⁵ But the official celebration of motherhood and the elevation of the family as the main cell of society, had other uses for the regime. It represented a blanket ideological offensive aimed at a further atomisation of workers, the reduction of civil society to separate individual units, no longer linked to class, and yet another means – beyond imprisonment and brute repression – of limiting resistance.

‘Catholicising fascism’

One of the least explored aspects of fascism in the 1930s is the role played by Catholicism. Pope Pius XII appeased and collaborated with several fascist regimes in the 1930s in order to advance the power of the papacy. In Germany, the Vatican negotiated with the Nazis, the Reich Concordat of 1933, Hitler’s first bilateral treaty with a foreign power, granting him much-needed international prestige. Similarly, the gender politics of Italian fascism cannot be understood without reference to the Catholic Church. The deal

between Mussolini and the Vatican – the Lateran Pacts of 1929 - recognised Catholicism as the official religion of the fascist state. This was extremely important for Mussolini as it delivered a valuable stamp of approval for Italian fascism. The partnership drew together Church and state, a move that some have claimed allowed Italian fascism to endure for twenty years. It cemented the Catholic family as the basic social unit which was, as Alfredo Rocco, the arch-repressive Fascist minister of Justice, put it ‘the primordial cell of the state’s potency and its vital organ of reproduction’.¹⁶ The fascist-Vatican pact stamped women with the sublime vocation of being wife and mother, perfectly suiting the regime’s needs - even if it also made plain the shockingly low moral bar of the Catholic hierarchy.

Ireland, too, in the 1920s and 1930s experienced a similar meeting of minds. The Irish Blueshirts looked to Catholic Europe and saw the potential, in an Irish context, of an entente between fascist forces and the Catholic Church. Mike Cronin argues that the emerging Blueshirts, under Eoin O’Duffy, forged an ideology and a series of policies that were essentially a Catholic-inspired form of potential fascism. Fine Gael (a merger, we should remember, of Cumman na nGaedheal, the small Centre Party and the Blueshirts), and later Fianna Fáil, both sought the support of the

Catholic Church. It was natural for the Blueshirts, in a state in which 95 per cent of the population were Catholic, that they would try to do the same. ‘Catholicising fascism’ meant embracing a view that Ireland should become a corporate state run on vocational, rather than welfare state lines. Blueshirt policies took their cue from papal encyclicals which promoted this specific social order under the ideals of Subsidiarity. This reinforced the traditional view of the nuclear family as well as arguing against all forms of public financial support in the lives of the faithful.

They advocated reducing the role of the state, asserting the common interest of workers and employers, and preserving ‘conservative and catholic values’, including women being primarily wives and mothers. Cronin highlights the influence that a Jesuit journal, *Studies*, had on Blueshirt thinking between 1932 and 1936 and, in particular, the journal’s positive assessment of the transformation of Italian society under Mussolini into a model of the corporate-vocational state.¹⁷

This Blueshirt-Jesuit mix is often overlooked in accounts of gender discrimination in the Irish Free State mainly because it was the anti-Treatyites, under Fianna Fáil, who definitively institutionalised Catholic misogynistic rule across society. Nevertheless, between the Catholic Church and the Blueshirts, there

was a great deal of commonality as regards how women were viewed. Both advocated prolific families and both disliked the radical, often socialist, women involved in struggles for women's rights in the period following World War One. Tellingly, neither the Catholic Church nor the Blueshirts were averse to exploiting young women and girls for their own purposes: within Catholic Mother and Baby homes in the one case, and for displays of fascist loyalty in the other, as the photo below shows.



Young girls giving the fascist salute in Charleville, Co Cork in April 1934.¹⁸

Fascists today

Today is not the 1930s. That period followed massive workers' near-revolutions, whose defeat provided the context for the rise of fascism. In Italy, during the Red Years of 1919-20, there were mass factory occupations, in the aftermath of which socialists and trade unionists were viciously hunted down by the thugs of the fascist *Squadristi*, armed bands whose brutal repression eventually

enabled Mussolini's March on Rome in 1922. In Germany, sailor mutinies at the end of the war were followed by two years of mass strikes and the establishment of workers councils. The movement was brutally put down by armed gangs – the *Freikorps*. Hitler later used street terror, helped by the passive acquiescence of the mainstream parties, to crush not only communists but all voluntary organisations within the state.

This is obviously not the situation today. Today parties with fascist roots are focused mainly on getting elected. Sometimes they resort to street anti-immigrant mobilisations and intimidatory tactics; sometimes their members are caught giving fascist salutes or commemorating their fascist past. But generally, they have smartened up their act in order to slither into the political mainstream. That is not to say that they do not still hold the same ideology as earlier fascism: Marine Le Pen and Georgia Meloni were members of earlier openly fascist organisations and as Mark Thomas has put it, they

‘..... employ a dual discourse, one official and explicit presenting itself as a legitimate part of the political establishment, the other unofficial and implicit, reflecting their anti-democratic authoritarian

agenda. The veneer of respectability must be sufficiently opaque to fool opponents but transparent enough to avoid deceiving its own members'.¹⁹

Just because they have repainted themselves as democratic parties does not mean that their fascism has gone away. Indeed, calling out their fascism remains an important tool in politically confronting them.

Another difference between now and the 1930's is that expectations around women's rights are more deeply entrenched today. Fascists and the far right, in a distorted way, take account of this. Women are leaders of their parties: for example, Georgia Meloni of the Fratelli, Marine Le Pen, former leader of Rassemblement National (now leader of their parliamentary group), and Alice Weidel, of the AFD.

Female leading figures allow far right parties to soften their image and distance themselves superficially from their fascist past. Marine Le Pen on one occasion described herself as a feminist to the extent that she defends women's rights which are threatened by Islam.²⁰ Meloni brands herself as 'an ordinary Italian mother' which, as David Broder points out, helps to soften her party's image and frame their agenda as everyday common sense rather

than 'ideological'.²¹ Meloni, Le Pen, Weidel - or Gemma O' Doherty come to that - are the female faces for an anti-feminist and racist agenda.

The far right and the mainstream

Far right gender-racist rhetoric has not come out of the blue. There is significant overlap between far right racism and official racist policies against immigration, churned out, ever more stridently, by the political mainstream. Meloni's call for a naval blockade of north Africa to prevent migrant boats from setting sail is not a million miles away from the British Tories 'stop the boats', or the European Union's massive commitment in terms of money and personnel to policing the borders of Europe. Long-standing institutional racism and the rising clamour of anti-immigrant rhetoric from governments, has normalised the language of racism and opened the door to the far right.

Liberal feminism has, in some cases, provided a stepping stone for the language around women used by the far right. 'Defence of women's rights' has been evoked in the past to justify war in the Middle East, as it was by western governments when they invaded Afghanistan in 2001. It has been the cover

for some governments' restrictive visa policies, and for the over-surveillance of non-white families.²² 'Defending western values' – of which women's rights are held to be part – is also an underlying theme when it comes to placing female refugees in employment in the EU. Sara Farris has detailed how 'femonationalism' informs white policy makers who seek to make female refugees 'assimilate' into western societies. She cites EU migrant agencies which, under the banner of both integration and female empowerment, steer migrant women into jobs in the care industry, despite the low paid and gender-segregated nature of these jobs.²³ They are also required to adopt western dress codes. This is not quite as brazen as Le Pen's racism, but it is Islamophobic nevertheless and reinforces the idea that Western values are about women's rights which plays into the politics of the far right.

Furthermore, the far right's promotion of the gender stereotyped, heteronormative family is not exactly happening in isolation. There has been a rightward trend in mainstream politics which, on both sides of the Atlantic, has become increasingly vocal against same-sex marriage, trans rights and 'woke culture'. Sadly, some feminists, who have an essentialist binary view of gender, have joined in and declared themselves as vehemently opposing trans rights too, which again lends credence to the far right.

Taking them on

Pointing out that racist-inspired gender politics is part of a chain that goes from the centre to the far right is certainly not minimising the seriousness of the far right or fascist threat. But it does show that the roots of the far right and fascism lie within existing capitalist conditions and politics, and that a successful challenge to them will come from outside the political mainstream.

The liberal rhetoric around diversity, coming from governments who, at the same time, demonise migrants as illegal and unwanted, is a smoke screen. Their immigration policies enact the social exclusion of black and brown people and contribute towards a toxic racist political climate. Mainstream political discourse about countries being 'unable to cope' normalises this further – at the horrific cost of increased attacks on refugees.

Equally, a liberal rhetoric around gender equality and diversity, which simultaneously brands migrants as illegal and unwanted, is long on words but weak in practice. The political mainstream has not taken a clear stand in favour of gender and LGBTQI rights and this has left a vacuum which has aided the far right. In the US, the Democrats proved themselves unwilling to clearly oppose the

criminalisation of abortion, never mind mobilise against it. In Ireland, Fine Gael's newfound feminism has also proved to be less than effective when it comes to establishing full access to abortion for everyone. Standing up to Church control of hospitals and schools is out of the question. The neoliberal mantra of the market for everything, including what should be social services, has deepened poverty across society. It has stood firm against free public provision of housing, of childcare, of care for the sick and elderly. As long as governments stick to this tune, the far right will continue to have an audience. This is why challenging them directly and politically is so important.

It requires a political mass movement from below, united across working class communities, trade unions, anti-racist and women's organisations, to mobilise against them, take them head on, and show up the fascist danger they present. As Thomas Hummel puts it, every democratic space that has been won by movements from below must be defended.²⁴ The stakes are high. Wherever they raise their racist misogyny and anti-genderism – in communities, in schools, in colleges and on the streets - they must be opposed.



Ireland for All anti racist march Dublin February, 18, 2023.

In Ireland, on February 18, 2023, we saw such an initiative, set in motion by anti-racist organisations and People before Profit, which resulted in a huge show of solidarity against racism. It contributed significantly to stalling the far right's recent burst of confidence. It required calling out the far right for their bogus racist and 'unvetted males' arguments and being prepared to mobilise to show that we have the numbers, not them. There is no doubt that, with the present political and social crisis, further such mobilisations will be needed again, in Ireland and across Europe. Anti-racism and taking on the toxic misogyny of the far right are not optional extras, nor issues to be supported on only a sectional basis. Both go to the heart of a different type of society - free of racism and misogyny – and we need a broad, united, movement to win it.

¹ Angela Davis. 1983. *Women, Race and Class*. New York, Vintage Books.

² The film recounts the true story of Mamie Till-Bradley, who pursued justice after the murder of her 14-year-old son Emmett, which occurred in August 1955, supposedly because he had made sexual advances towards a white woman.

³For this poll see Germany: Support for AfD Climbs to All-Time High; Surpasses Greens — The European Conservative.

⁴Luke Savage. 2023. 'Conservatives are banning books in America not liberals'. *Jacobin*, 3.29.2023 <https://jacobin.com/2023/03/library-book-ban-campaigns-conservatives-liberals>.

⁵ Poppy Noor. 2023. UN urged to intervene over destruction of US abortion rights | Abortion | The Guardian 2 March.

⁶ Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk. 2021. *Anti-gender politics in the Populist Moment*. London. Routledge.

⁷Thomas Hummel. 2023. 'Fascism in Italy today'. *Tempest Magazine*, 1 March.

⁸ Antonio Gramsci. 1972. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Vol 111, (ed and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith), London, Lawrence and Wishart, p.178.

⁹Leon Trotsky. 'Fascism: What it is and how to fight it. New York. Pioneer Publishers, 1944 (marxists.org).

¹⁰Katharina Hajek. 2020. The AfD and right-wing (anti-)gender mobilisation in Germany LSE Blog, 27 Feb 2020.

¹¹ Thanks to Giulio di Basilio for this information.

¹²Kirsten Heinsohn. 2003. 'Germany,' in Kevin Passmore (ed) *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe 1919-45*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

¹³ Paul Ginsborg. 2014. *Family Politics; Domestic life, Devastation and Survival 1900-1950*, London. Yale University Press, 2014, pp.356-8.

¹⁴ Perry Wilson. 2003. 'Italy' in Kevin Passmore (ed) *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe 1919-45*. Manchester, Manchester University Press.

¹⁵Paul Ginsborg. 2014. *Family Politics; Domestic life, Devastation and Survival 1900-1950*. London. Yale University Press, 2014, pp.184-6.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.194.

¹⁷ Mike Cronin. 2007. 'Catholicising fascism, fascistising Catholicism? The Blueshirts and the Jesuits in 1930's Ireland', *Totalitarian Movement and Political Religions*, 2007 8:2, pp.401-411.

¹⁸ For this photo, see Maurice Manning 2006. *The Blueshirts*, Dublin, Gill, and Macmillan.

¹⁹Mark Thomas. 2012. 'Fascism in Europe Today'. *International Socialism*, 2:162, 2012, pp.27-65.

²⁰ Quoted in Sara Farris and Catherine Rottenberg. 2017. 'Introduction: Righting Feminism', *New Formations*, 91, 2017, pp.5-15.

²¹ David Broder. 2023. *Mussolini's Grandchildren: Fascism in Contemporary Italy*, London, Pluto Press. p.24.

²² Françoise Vergès 2012. *A Decolonial Feminism*, (translated by Ashley J. Bohrer) London, Pluto Press.

²³ Sara R Farris 2017. *In the Name of Women's Rights*, London, Duke University Press.

²⁴ Thomas Hummel. 2023. 'Fascism in Italy today'. *Tempest Magazine*, 1 March.

Capitalism's Boot Boys – fascism in historical context

Brian O'Boyle

Introduction

Alfred Eichmann was a central organiser of the Holocaust. Captured after the Second World War, Eichmann escaped to Latin America where he vanished until a team of Israeli agents apprehended him outside Buenos Aires in 1960. At his trial for crimes against humanity, Eichmann presented himself as little more than a cog in a much larger Nazi machine. Defining himself as a loyal civil servant, Eichmann described his record as one of dutifully following orders from superior officers who alone determined the morality of his actions. The District Court of Jerusalem was not convinced, sentencing Eichmann to death for his actions.

But for the Jewish political philosopher, Hannah Arendt, Eichmann represented what she famously described as the 'banality of evil' – the supreme ordinariness of an ordinary man, made to do the most appalling things by a Totalitarian Regime.¹ Used by Arendt to describe Hitler's Nazi Regime but also Stalin's distortion of communism, totalitarianism defined a new form of overwhelming state power that eradicated all sense of individual identity along with any private activity outside the state's influence. According to Arendt, totalitarian regimes sought to reorder every

aspect of a person's life. They married terror tactics with modern surveillance techniques to subjugate entire populations, and in-so-doing, transformed people into willing accomplices in destructive drives towards world domination.² Ordinary people were shocked at the moral implications of these ideas, but they were quickly taken up by western ideologues for use during the Cold War.

Although Hitler and Stalin had been sworn enemies during World War II, Arendt's analysis allowed liberals to place them on the same side of the political divide. More importantly, it allowed the revolutionary potential of Marxism to be equated with the destructiveness of Stalinism, as the far right and the far left became equally abhorrent regimes counterposed to liberal democracy and capitalist economies.³ The fall of the Berlin Wall reinforced these ideas as liberals lauded bourgeois democracy as the 'End of History' and the final achievement of the emancipatory potential of the Enlightenment.⁴

Yet within a generation, the Twin Towers had collapsed into the War on Terror while the illusions of bourgeois freedom foundered on deeply authoritarian responses to the Great Recession. The liberal center revealed itself as the liberal

extreme – the purveyors of Imperialism in the Middle East, of borders around the world's poorest people, and of endless austerity to stabilise the global economy. Neoliberal policies have also been chiefly responsible for the re-emergence of a far right that simultaneously feeds off the despair felt by people living under capitalism, while shielding the system from progressive alternatives on the left. Arendt's ideas were only ever superficially correct. She captured authoritarian similarities between Nazism and Stalinism but missed a far deeper truth about the historical roots of their respective ideologies – namely, that communism emerged as the revolutionary alternative to the exploitation of the capitalist system, while fascism emerged as its counter-revolutionary counterpart, deployed to rescue the system from its period of deepest crisis. One movement promised emancipation from below, the other instigated authoritarian oppression and murder from above.

Fascism brought the world exactly what it promised, moreover, while Stalinism was a disastrous degeneration of socialism, born of the failure of the western working classes to emulate the Bolshevik Revolution. Equating Stalinism with communism meant much of this history was obscured, but with the far right once again resurgent, it is vital to recover it; to explain the historical roots of fascism and to insist on socialism, as Marx understood

it - as revolution from below - as the only genuine hope in a world of racism, xenophobia, and capitalist destruction.

Capitalism, nation-states, and racism

Although fascism emerged during the dying days of World War One, its roots were in the fusion of nationalist-states and monopoly capitalism that characterised the final decades of the 19th century.⁵ Early bourgeois societies were characterised by small units of capital in competition with each other, but by the turn of the 20th century, capitalism was based on enormous corporations, each tied to their own particular state. Capital required the resources of the state (military, bureaucratic, cultural) in order to develop, and the early nature of the English Revolution (1640's) meant that the British bourgeoisie had a crucial head start over their continental rivals in the emerging capitalist economy.

Cromwell's Navigation Acts (1650's) helped Britain to become a major maritime power, while over the course of the next 150 years, the British state implemented policies at home and abroad to foster technical development and capital accumulation.⁶ Millions of peasants were thrown off their lands to create the wage labour necessary for capitalist expansion, while overseas, the British Navy gradually supplanted the Dutch and then the French

in the scramble for colonies that offered vital strategic advantages. Capitalism gave great dynamism to the British economy, but it also created internal divisions as peasants were thrown off their land and eventually herded into factories. To cope with this, the state developed a machinery of oppression built around the legal system, but it also sought the consensus of the masses through material reforms and a common identity.⁷

Here nationalism was to play the crucial role. In the early phase of capitalist development, nationalism was synonymous with calls for greater democracy and for the end of feudal privileges. Anxious to enlist artisans and yeoman farmers in their bid to overthrow the king, the bourgeoisie developed a set of natural rights packaged as the birthright of every Englishmen with property to protect. Progressive nationalism also underpinned the Rights of Man that served as a rallying call during the French Revolution and for the United Irishmen during the Rebellion of 1798.

Yet nationalism could also become a force for reaction once the European ruling classes shaped it for their own ends. Here nationalism worked to bind rulers and ruled together regardless of their material differences and allowed the inhabitants of imperialist powers to feel themselves superior to those in the colonies. To understand the lure of this imperialist nationalism, Otto Bauer likened it to a

‘Community of Destiny’.⁸ This refers to the fellow feeling that grows from the constant immersion in a way of life; to the ongoing participation in a socio-cultural milieu that helps to create meaning and attachment among human beings, regardless of their objective relations with each other. Rulers and ruled each feel themselves part of the same national community; “they live in the same town, read the same posters on the walls, the same newspapers, take part in the same political and sporting events and occasionally speak to each other, or, at least, both speak to the same individuals, the various intermediaries between capitalists and workers”.⁹

This immersion in the lived experience of the nation is formalised and further reinforced by the state in a thousand different ways. It creates a common identity around a flag and an anthem; it creates a loyalty to what Benedict Anderson calls ‘imagined communities’ and strives to ensure that “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail...the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship”.¹⁰ Part of its success lies in an ability to project this comradeship back into a mystical past and deep into a sacred soil, tying the nation into the long durée of ‘time’ and ‘space’, and through this, naturalising what are historically contingent and continually evolving social relationships. Imperialist nationalism also creates essentialist boundaries around its native community by

defining it against 'The Other' – those internal enemies, external rivals, and external 'inferiors' to be competed against, removed, dominated, or civilised. It creates cross-class solidarity within the nation, pits this against those outside the nation and creates such deep attachments that men and women have been willing to kill and die for their own 'imagined community'.¹¹ Such are the attributes of ruling class nationalism, which were considerably sharpened by imperialist rivalries in the later 19th century. By this time, Britain was the centre of a vast sprawling empire, taking in around 20 per cent of the world's population and 25 per cent of its landmass. As other capitalist states sought to emulate Britain's 'success', it created nationalist-state competition, along with deep forms of European racism, as the advanced capitalist countries began to dominate the entire world. Indeed, it was this confluence of capitalist power and imperial domination that helped to spawn the racism associated with fascism in the 20th century. Benedict Anderson captures its roots in the following way:

Colonial racism was a major element in that conception of 'Empire' which attempted to weld dynastic legitimacy and national community. It did so by generalising a principle of *innate, inherited superiority* on which its own domestic position was (however shakily) based.... conveying the idea that if, say, English lords were naturally superior to other

Englishmen, no matter: *these other English men were no less superior than the subjected natives.* (Emphasis added).¹²

Marx equally understood the contribution of nationalist chauvinism to the ruling classes, noting how racism against Irish workers allowed their English counterparts to feel themselves part of the ruling nation while simultaneously making English workers tools of the English bourgeoisie 'and thus strengthening the domination over themselves as well'.¹³ This aspect of nationalism has played the same reactionary role time and again throughout capitalist history, but to understand how it could be radicalised into the fascism of the 1920's, it is important to lay out the historical forces that led to the latter's creation.

These include:

- (1) The development of mass working class politics in the latter part of the 19th century. This created a class with the interests and the capacity to overthrow the national state and the capitalist economy. Without mass movements on the left there would have been less need for one supported by the elites on the right.
- (2) The development of colonialism and imperialism as the most powerful monopoly capitalist-states carved up

the world and used racism and xenophobia as their justification.

- (3) The sheer brutality of the First World War which threw all the resources of the state into slaughtering the citizens of other nations while forging bonds of nationalist identity at home.
- (4) The collapse of capitalist institutions (liberal democracy and the profit system) in the aftermath of the war which threw people's lives into turmoil and radicalised large sections of the population - with industrial workers generally radicalising left; peasants and the middle classes generally radicalising right.

And,

- (5) The possibility of socialist revolution as the industrial working class looked set to overthrow the capitalist system in Europe at the end of the war. Bolshevism was the antithesis of fascism creating fears in the ruling class and hatreds among the middle classes torn apart by war and capitalist economic crises.

Fascism was the brutal offspring of this brutalising system, as sections of the masses, saturated by imperialism, brutalised by war and in despair at recurrent capitalist economic crises, rose to

smash 'internal enemies' and restore their nations to their former glories. Fascism was not created by the ruling classes of Europe, but it did serve their interests particularly well, perceiving international socialism as the biggest threat to national recovery and acting as a mass right counter-revolution to the potential for socialism from below. Fascism was the logical outworking of an exploitative system that had convulsed itself in imperialist war, convulsed itself again in counter-revolution and was to convulse itself for a third time in an even bloodier conflict that culminated in the Holocaust. Understanding this reactionary historical role is key to understanding the nature of fascism as a movement and an ideology today.

The conditions for imperialist war

For most of the 19th century, Germany lacked the kind of unified state that would allow rapid capitalist development. The democratic revolutions of 1848 might have brought the bourgeoisie to power, but as Engels was to explain – the German bourgeoisie feared the militancy of the working class more than they desired a state of their own, siding with the forces of reaction during the revolution, while biding their time for a more favorable environment.¹⁴ This environment duly presented itself when the traditional Junker elites around Otto Von Bismarck succeeded in unifying the German state in a series of wars from 1864-1871.

As a representative of the agrarian elites, Bismarck was an unlikely architect of a bourgeois revolution, but his introduction of 'capitalism from above' was designed to allow the conservative elite to sustain their role in the political sphere while harnessing the power of a capitalist economy to compete militarily with the British Empire. The results were astonishing. Over the course of forty years, Germany went from a motley collection of 38 states to the most advanced capitalist economy in the world. Using state power in a more aggressive way than their rivals in Britain and America, the German ruling class created great conglomerates of capital in the chemicals industry, in coal and in steel. They brought finance capital into close alignment with productive capital and invested in the latest technologies to drive an economic expansion rarely seen before or since.¹⁵ German steel production was roughly equivalent to that of France in 1880, but by 1910, it had outstripped its neighbour by a factor of 4:1. German coal production increased sevenfold between 1870 and 1913, a period in which British production increased less than two and a half times.¹⁶

The sheer scale of this achievement helped to create a more unified ruling class, but it simultaneously created two constraints to continued capitalist expansion – a hostile international environment dominated by the British Empire and a labour movement that had grown in lockstep with

industrialisation. German capitalist expansion was bound to upset the traditional European balance of power as it rose to become the preeminent economy, but without the colonial advantages held by the British or the French. The elites in all of the major imperial powers understood the importance of colonies for capitalist investment, cheap raw materials, markets for end-products and reservoirs of cheap labour.¹⁷

Indeed, in the context of a deep recession in the 1870s, it was investment in the colonies that allowed the major capitalist states to stabilise their system domestically even as it brought them into conflict internationally. The various elites also craved the strategic advantage of geographic locations like the Suez Canal, making it certain that the German ruling class would look to secure the same advantages as their Imperial rivals.

The problem, however, was that they sought to achieve colonial expansion in a world that had already been carved up. Thus, as Leon Trotsky explains, "Germany squeezed into the heart of Europe was faced – at a time when the whole world had already been divided up – with the necessity of conquering foreign markets and redividing colonies that had already been divided".¹⁸



Workers during a miners strike in Germany in 1905.

The challenge posed by the workers movement was no less serious. Although it had come into being relatively late, the pace of German industrialisation meant that by the outbreak of World War One, the German workers movement was among the strongest in the world. Founded in 1875, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) was initially committed to revolutionary Marxism, but its theoretical radicalism was belied by a reformist politics that relied on working successfully within the institutions of capitalism.¹⁹ By training a layer of

working-class cadres the SPD showed that it was strong enough to wrest concessions from an expanding capitalism around the turn of the century – recruiting vast numbers in the process and becoming the template for workers parties across the continent.²⁰ The party won 35 per cent of the vote in the 1912 elections for example, making it the most popular party in the German state. The SPD was also deeply embedded in the warp and woof of working-class life, with more than a million members, 90 daily newspapers, 11,000 members on local councils and more than

“100,000 working in its various offshoots or affiliated bodies”.²¹

In addition, the SPD founded the Free Trade Unions (ADGB) which grew from 237,000 members in 1892 to 2.6 million members in 1912.²² Bauer’s ‘Community of Destiny’ certainly applied to the lived experience of Germany’s industrial workers, who found themselves faced with the same daily challenges, routines, and experiences in their workplaces and communities. Forged in the struggles for living wages and political representation, German workers became highly class conscious with traditions and identities that operated in tension with the wider nationalism of their rulers.

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They were also a mobilised minority fighting for trade union recognition and for the popular vote. The German ruling class thus faced a formidable foe that was formally committed to revolution, but there were two weaknesses in the wider working-class movement that had not yet become fully apparent. The first was the danger of reformism, as the very success of the SPD within capitalism increased the dangers of conservatism when faced with the threat of a nationalist war against an external enemy.

With such a large layer of full-time staff, the SPD had a lot to gain from a stabilised capitalism and a lot to risk in a revolution.

The second problem was the persistence of a large petty bourgeois (small employers’ craftsmen, artisans) class along with a mass of rural and Catholic peasants who were to prove more conservative than the industrial workers in the urban centres. As Gluckstein explains, “there continued to be a mass of artisans, craftsmen and others still working in close proximity to their employers.... [and] the continuing existence of a broad middle-class milieu should not be ignored”.²³ This is because the layer of peasants and petty bourgeoisie could move left but they could also move right. These classes made up the core support for nationalism in the period before the war and of the fascist counter-revolution after it.

War and its aftermath

A European war promised a solution to both of these dilemmas for the German ruling class. Success in a major military campaign would allow German resources to expand, while the wave of patriotism unleashed by the conflict would discipline workers and force the SPD into line. To make sure the masses played their allotted role, the state created a wartime propaganda unit known as the Fatherland Front which aimed to produce pro-war hysteria around the values of national honour and military prestige.²⁴ Nationalism was rife in the early days of the conflict and in the face of pressure from the state, the SPD duly voted for war credits, justified

by the need to maintain unity at home and a worker's movement that was neither banned by the authorities nor smashed by external armies. The German elites had begun to break the power of their worker's representatives, but their second objective of winning the war was to prove far more difficult.

Britain, Russia and France had more than twice the population of Germany and Austria-Hungary, far greater access to natural resources and close contact with the USA which entered the war in April 1917. Germany initially had success in France but on both the Western and the Eastern fronts the war quickly got bogged down in the horrors of trench warfare. The barbarity of the war was unlike anything these men had ever experienced.

Four years of industrialised slaughter ensued, as an entire generation butchered each other at the behest of their superiors. Reflecting on the depravity of the conflict, Chris Harman writes, "the millions of men at the various fronts were undergoing experiences for which nothing in life had prepared them. They soon discovered that the war was not a pleasant jaunt to Berlin or Paris, or some great adventure. It was mud, boredom, bad food and the horror of death all around them".²⁵

The Great War also brought misery to the wider European population, forced to support a war-effort that meant only hunger, fear and social dislocation for the

vast majority. By 1917, the diet of the average German worker provided just 1,333 calories -a third less than the minimum required for long term survival. An estimated 750,000 Germans died of malnutrition for a war that was becoming increasingly unwinnable.²⁶ In Russia, meanwhile, a combination of hunger and war weariness brought thousands of women onto the streets of Petrograd for International Women's Day in 1917. Russia had experienced some of the same dynamics as the German economy, but at a much lower level of development. Like Germany, there had been intensive industrialisation in a small number of urban centres in the decades before the war.²⁷

This created a class of highly organised coal and steel workers vital to the Russian war effort, but who were also the core support for the socialists becoming increasingly influential since the 1905 Revolution.²⁸ Within days, bitterness at war and the ongoing shortages brought these workers into the struggle as the movement radicalised and won support from soldiers and sailors. By November, the Bolsheviks had been lifted into power by Russian workers who supported Lenin's calls for 'Peace, Land and Bread' but also, increasingly, the Bolshevik aspiration for a worldwide socialist revolution.²⁹ For many onlookers, the Russian example seemed the best hope to escape the horrors of war and exploitation, but the leaders of the

revolution knew they had to spread it, if they were to have any success at breaking the power of reaction at home.

Russia had even greater layers of peasants than Germany, who would need strong material incentives to move towards socialism. This meant spreading the revolution into the industrial heartlands of Europe, but first, the Bolsheviks had to get Russia out of the war. They did this through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which ceded important industrial resources to the Germans who, in turn, took the Russian withdrawal as their final chance to win the war on the Western Front. In these final days of the war, as Kenneth Barkin, points out:

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The military, agrarian, and industrial elites who ruled Germany considered themselves involved in two wars simultaneously, one against the Triple Entente and the other against the aspirations of the German people for full political emancipation. The latter conflict dictated victory at all costs on the military front. Defeat or a compromise peace on the battlefield would inevitably lead to democratisation because it would lead to a loss of legitimacy for the elite that had demanded so many sacrifices from the many millions of workers, farmers, and artisans while denying them effective political power.³⁰

By July, the German military offensive had failed and by November the army was disintegrating with workers and soldiers in revolt all over Germany.³¹ Huge demonstrations broke out as soldiers and workers took control of Hamburg, Hanover, Cologne, Leipzig, Dresden, and scores of other smaller towns.³² In Munich, industrial workers declared a 'Bavarian Free state' while in Berlin, Karl Liebknecht proclaimed a Socialist Republic and the start of a world revolution from the balcony of the imperial palace. In Austro-Hungary much the same pattern was unfolding, as the old imperial ruling class collapsed, and the army dissented.³³ In March 1919, a communist government took power in Budapest promising a Bolshevik revolution, while in April, revolutionaries led unemployed workers in a bid to storm the Austrian parliament.³⁴ For a brief moment, as Chris Harman explains, "it was not absurd to conceive of the revolution in Hungary linking with Russia to the east, and through Austria with soviet Bavaria to the west, overturning the entire set up in the former German and Austro-Hungarian empires".³⁵

There was also revolutionary activity in Finland where an Independent Workers Republic was declared in 1918 and across Northern Italy where a wave of strikes involving hundreds of thousands of industrial workers brought the state to the brink of revolution in a series of factory occupations. Industrial workers had not

been able to stop the war in 1914, but they had successfully ended it in the period between 1918 and 1920. Socialist revolution was a genuine possibility in Germany at different stages between 1918 and 1923. It was also on the cards in Hungary during 1919, while in Italy, the bosses fretted as workers took over the industrial heartlands during the two red years. The chance for a better world was becoming a reality, but it was this chance that fascism rose to smash into the ground.

Fascism emerges in Italy

Fascism was born on 23 March 1919, when around 100 people met in the Milan Industrial and Commercial Alliance to “declare war on socialism because it has opposed [Italian] nationalism”.³⁶ The leader of the new movement was Benito Mussolini, an ex-Socialist who became an ultra-nationalist in the context of the war. Mussolini broke with the left over their refusal to back Italy’s war effort and he now seethed with anger against militant workers who were weakening Italy internally and the victorious nations who refused to grant territories promised to Italy after the war. Italy had some of the same economic dynamics as Russia and Germany.

In the wealthier north, industrialisation had created the layer of workers responsible for the two red years of 1919 and 1920, but there was also a mass of peasants and petty bourgeois layers who

could be pulled left or right. Unlike Russia, however, there were no organized revolutionary party to take the industrial struggle into full revolt, and as the bosses and conservatives regrouped, they began to place their faith in Mussolini as a political adventurer who could build what the conservatives could not – a mass movement on the right that would take on the left on the streets. Mussolini would rely on the same combination of conservative army veterans and petty bourgeois layers as Hitler in Germany, but he initially stood in the 1919 election on a left-nationalist programme. This failed spectacularly and his movement was only saved when it turned to a new tactic – smashing the left through street violence and breaking the power of organised workers.

The nationalist war veterans who made up the hard-core of Mussolini’s *Squadrismo Units* hated the left for its internationalism and pacifism. The landowners of the Po Valley hated them for organising landless labourers to achieve better working conditions, while the Northern industrialists hated them for their role in the wave of strikes and occupations. Squadrismo began as a confluence of these three hatreds, as the failure of the workers to put through their revolution gave Mussolini his chance at revenge.

With financial backing from the landlords, and acquiescence from the local police, “Black shirted *Squadristi* mounted nightly expeditions to sack and burn Labour



Mussolini's Squadristi on parade.

Exchanges and local Socialist Offices and to beat and intimidate socialist organisers".³⁷

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Hardened by the brutality of the war, their aim was to smash the left politically at the same time as proving themselves useful to those conservative forces who funded and protected them. This meant building a mass movement on the ultra-nationalist right to counter the workers movement. And, as they smashed their way through the Italian countryside the movement grew in numbers and Mussolini grew in political ambition. From 120 squads in October 1920, the fascists had 2,300 by November 1921, having spent the first half of the year destroying 17 newspapers and printing works, 59 Socialist Headquarters, 119 Chambers of Labour, 151 Socialist Clubs, and 151 Cultural Organisations.³⁸ By this stage, the *Squadristi* had more than proven their worth to the Italian elites who began to offer Mussolini more serious backing.

Big business provided substantial extra funds throughout 1921, but so did the government of Giovanni Giolitti, which secretly issued a circular advising 60,000 demobilised officers that they would be paid 80 per cent of their army wages if they agreed to join the fasci.³⁹ Giolitti also offered Mussolini invaluable political legitimacy, including fascists on a coalition ticket that gave the Blackshirts 35 parliamentary seats in elections of March 1921.

Fascist propaganda depicts Mussolini as the all-conquering general who seized power in a March on Rome, but in truth the existing elites worked in lockstep with him from the start. Mussolini's fascist gangs needed police protection to build up their terror while his mass movement needed vital funds that came from members of the establishment. Robert Paxton argues that the traditional elites could have stopped Mussolini right up to his 'March on Rome' in 1922, and the fact that Mussolini sharded this assessment is revealed by the fact that he avoided marching alongside his troops – preferring to arrive on the train from Milan in case he was arrested. In the end, Mussolini took power constitutionally as the king offered him the office of prime minister and despite his early socialism and his continual use of left demagoguery, Mussolini quickly repaid his conservative partners with an all-out assault on the trade unions and an ongoing partnership with the industrialists and the Catholic Church.⁴⁰

The idea of a totalizing fascist revolution that smashed the Italian bourgeois state is also a myth, as Paxton explains below:

Long after his regime had settled into routine, Mussolini still liked to refer to the “Fascist revolution”, but he meant a revolution against socialism and flabby liberalism. A new way of organizing mass assent while leaving property intact...The anti-socialism... became central...the anti-capitalist idealism became watered down and we must not let its conspicuous presence in early texts confuse us about what Fascism later became in action.⁴¹

If Mussolini was a fascist innovator, he was not alone. Across the continent ultra-nationalists were organising to attack the left in order to avert what they viewed as a disastrous national decline. In Finland, the nascent workers republic was crushed with the help of nationalist troops, while in Hungary the short-lived communist government was drowned in blood by a combination of the Romanian Army, conservatives led by Admiral Horthy and proto-fascists led by Captain Gyula Gömbös. Gömbös later became the Hungarian Prime Minister, but he cut his teeth by organising “a mass base for a militant movement of national renovation” that was deeply anti-communist and anti-

Semitic.⁴² This was an important portent to the Nazis in Germany.

Nazi Germany

Although fascism reached its ultimate barbarity in Nazi Germany, it was a relatively marginal force in the early days of the German Revolution. Like Mussolini, Hitler established a paramilitary force (the SA) that attacked communists in the streets, but there were two essential differences between Germany and Italy at this early stage. The first was the greater importance of social democracy in the Weimar Republic which had compromised with the authorities during the war and now worked alongside them to undermine the German Revolution.⁴³

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Linked to this, was a partnership between the SPD leadership and the military command to create a paramilitary style force *within the army itself*.⁴⁴ These Freikorps officers were under the control of the state, and they allowed the traditional elites to re-establish order without the scores of micro-fascist groups, as they rampaged through Germany attacking socialists and destroying resistance to the state.

When Hitler tried to emulate Mussolini in the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 he was quickly arrested and thrown into jail. But

the authorities remained sympathetic to his worldview and conceived his movement as a patriotic counterweight to the socialists and communists. Hitler's Nazis' traded on the idea of a national disgrace perpetuated by November Criminals who had stabbed Germany in the back at the end of the war and sold her out at the Treaty of Versailles.⁴⁵ He also tapped into a deep vein of anti-Semitism in German folk ideology, blaming a combination of Jewry and Bolshevism for all of the problems besetting Germany.⁴⁶

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The Jews were responsible for corrupting the vitality of the German race while the communists were responsible for destroying the inner unity of the people. Indeed, the Nazis often equated the two, perceiving Jewish Bolshevism as the ultimate threat to national recovery.⁴⁷ On the brink of taking power in 1932, Hitler wrote that "it was solely to save Germany from the oppression of Marxism that I founded and organised a movement".⁴⁸ These ideas continued to attract supporters throughout the 1920s, with the party growing from around 2,000 to 20,000 members, but in a country the size of Germany, this was still far from a mass movement. The economy had also recovered strongly in the latter part of the 1920s, ensuring that Hitler had neither the mass movement nor the necessary conservative support to take power in the state.

As late as 1928, the Nazis got just 2.8 per cent in a national election, but by 1932

they were getting between 11 million and 13 million votes (37 per cent) and fast becoming the most popular movement in Germany. Their paramilitary wing was also growing rapidly, reaching 100,000 by 1930 and 400,000 by 1932.⁴⁹ What had changed? The most important catalyst for the Nazis' success was the Great Depression triggered by the Wall Street Crash in October 1929. Germany was ill-prepared for the turmoil that followed, as a third of the workforce lost their jobs and industrial output collapsed by 40 per cent.⁵⁰

Liberal democracy had no tradition in Germany either and as the economy collapsed so did support for the Weimar Republic established after World War One. German voters quickly polarised left and right, and it was at this stage that weaknesses in the workers movement came back to haunt the proletariat. One part of this weakness has already been referenced, as the SPD had long-since succumbed to reformist conservatism. Loyal to the Weimar Republic to the bitter end, the SPD leaders steadfastly refused to meet the growing threat of the Nazis' with mass opposition on the streets. They conceived the Nazis as little more than criminal thugs and placed their faith in the constitution to protect them, even as the Nazis took power on the streets, and then used their control of the state to outlaw the SPD.

The other weakness stemmed from the failure of the German Revolution and the subsequent degeneration of the Russian Revolution into Stalinism. At the outbreak of the First World War revolutionaries in Russia and in Serbia had remained true to the revolutionary tradition of Marx and Engels, but the pressures of war coupled with the failure of revolutions in western Europe meant that by the early 1930's Russian socialism had degenerated into a form of State Capitalism. Stalin's 'Socialism in One County' was an imperialist strategy dressed up as socialism and it meant that the Russian State was now actively operating against the interests of workers in Europe.

The German Communist Party (KPD) still had a better sense of the dangers posed by Nazism than the SPD, but under the direction of an ultra-left directive from Stalin, they defined social democrats as social fascists – as twins of the genuine fascists about to smash them into oblivion – and refused to work with the SPD in a united front.⁵¹

These tactical disasters meant that the two wings of the workers movement never came together with the unions to offer real leadership to the workers movement. Instead, they allowed Hitler to build his movement, if not completely unopposed, then in a far more favourable environment. And this, in turn, had important ramifications for the petty bourgeoisie,

who increasingly saw the Nazis as the only movement that could protect them from the proletariat below them and those Jewish bankers who squeezed them from above.⁵²

Like Mussolini, Hitler skilfully used left demagoguery to build his mass support. He promised a national movement that would go beyond the contradictions of capitalism and contested the connection of socialism with Marxist theory – declaring Marxism a distortion of the true social movement rooted in the national community.

Hitler consistently presented the Nazis as the only catch-all party in the Weimar Republic and the only national movement able to solve the economic crisis, but in reality, the party's membership was heavily skewed towards rural workers and the petty bourgeoisie and away from the industrial working classes in the major urban centres. As Paxton explains "fascist parties were largely middle class to the point where fascism was perceived as the very embodiment of lower middle class resentments".⁵³

Hitler's blend of nationalism and anti-Semitism did appeal to some German workers – particularly in smaller towns and rural areas – but the industrial working class never abandoned the SPD and the KPD in large numbers. Indeed, it was the ongoing strength of the organised labour movement that convinced sections of the German ruling class that the Nazis could

become a useful implement to smash the left and contest the international constraints imposed on them by the Treaty of Versailles.⁵⁴ Without ever having won an electoral majority they therefore invited Hitler to become German Chancellor at the end of January 1933, thus inaugurating the darkest period in the history of humanity.

The Nazis in power

Fascist states represented the most destructive political force ever created. Within a generation of coming to power, somewhere between 55 and 70 million people had been killed, including more than 18 million civilians murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust and in Operation Barbarossa.⁵⁵ Death on this scale demands an explanation. It demands an understanding of how fascist movements could prosecute wars of destruction on such a massive scale. How they could turn whole societies into killing machines and turn these machines on the peoples of the world. Mainstream analysis explains this in terms of the totalitarian argument made at the outset.⁵⁶

According to this narrative, fascism was a completely new and revolutionary movement that went beyond the control of traditional conservatives by radicalising into a totalitarian state. The Italian king handed power to Mussolini, only to watch him ban all of his political rivals, close the free press, and ban non-fascist trade unions. Hindenburg made Hitler

Chancellor, only to watch him do the very same things – banning political opposition, outlawing non-fascist trade unions, and taking control of the press after a fire at the Reichstag. There are important truths in this narrative, of course, as Hitler and Mussolini did ban party political opposition and smash organisations of the working class.

But a crucial distinction must be made between the institutions of bourgeois democracy and the institutions of the bourgeoisie itself, most importantly their control of the capitalist economy, but also their influence over the civil service and the military. Fascists hated liberal democracy as an unreliable defender of the nation. They hated the cosmopolitanism of liberal ideology and despised democracy as a levelling force that permitted individual dissent from the nationalist priorities of the state.

Attacking what they perceived as the decadence and atomising aspects of bourgeois society, fascists claimed they were in the process of creating new men and women.⁵⁷ Men who were steeled by discipline and unquestionably loyal to their superiors whether in the workplace, the army, or the state. Women who understood their contribution to the nation and therefore took their role in childbearing and home making as a sacred duty.⁵⁸

Fascism was revolutionary in its use of state control and coercion, but it was counter-

revolutionary when it came to the ruling classes in Italy and Germany. For all their claims that they were initiating a third way between capitalism and socialism, fascist regimes represented an extremist class super-structure grafted onto the existing base of the capitalist economy; one that used the full coercive force of the state to smash the workers movement while partnering with traditional elites.⁵⁹ Indeed, Hitler began his assault on organised labour within months of coming into office. The first victims of Nazi terror were communists and trade unionists sent to concentration camps to be re-educated and failing this, to be executed. Using the Reichstag fire as his pretext, Hitler banned the SPD and the KPD in the Spring of 1933, dismantling all of their party infrastructure in the process (newspapers, social clubs etc). The trade union leaders hoped to escape this fate by keeping silent, but on the second of May 1933, “the combined forces of the state and the Nazi party smashed their way into every trade union office in Germany, assaulting officials and dragging many off to concentration camps. Half a century of work wiped out in 24 hours”.⁶⁰

In their place, the Nazis created fascist labour organisations that excluded the very tools that workers had always found effective – mass strikes and genuine collective bargaining. The atmosphere created in the German labour movement was one of forced deference mixed with

fear and despondency. Fascists were careful never to attack the mass of ordinary workers directly, but they expected loyalty and productivity in return, and were always ready to deploy violence against militants who got out of line. A working class deprived of its organisational capacity and demoralised through fear and isolation was exactly what the German (and Italian) industrialists had always wanted.

The Nazis might have made sections of big business uneasy with their rhetoric, but they never sought to alter German property relations nor the sense of deference and hierarchy necessary for a class society. Instead, they partnered with conservative elites who shared their hatred of Bolshevism and supported their nationalist desire to rebuild German power. Robert Paxton captures the differences between fascist rhetoric designed to build a mass base and their action once in power:

Early fascist movements flaunted their contempt for bourgeois values and for those who only wanted to earn money, filthy money. They attacked international finance capitalism as loudly as they attacked socialists. They even promised to expropriate department store owners in favour of patriotic artisans and large landowners in favour of peasants. Whenever fascist parties acquired power, however, they did nothing to carry out their anti-

capitalist threats. By contrast they enforced with the utmost violence and thoroughness their threats against socialism...Once in power fascist regimes banned strikes dissolved independent labour unions, lowered wage earners purchasing power and showered money on armaments industries to the immense satisfaction of employers.⁶¹

The Nazis and the owners of big business needed each other. Expansionary warfare required the productive know how of the capitalist classes, while this same drive represented a form of military Keynesianism, dragging Germany out of the Great Depression and posting record profits across the chemicals, the iron and steel and the fossil fuel industries.⁶²

The same was true of the German High Command which benefitted from the major investment undertaken in the military and remained loyal to Hitler from the moment he eliminated the SA as a competitor to the army in 1934, until the war was effectively lost in the summer of 1944. The fascist drive to dominate Europe was also supported by most German captains of industry, many of whom recognised the vast opportunities that would present themselves if the Nazis succeeded where the Kaiser had failed, in reordering European capitalism in the interests of Germany.⁶³ This is not to suggest that there

was never any dissent or that there was never any coercion. Nazis leaders had significant autonomy in the pursuit of their goals and individual capitalists risked having their property confiscated if they failed to deliver. Fear cascaded down from the top of Fascist societies, but we should never forget that the plans for global conquest dreamed up by the Nazi hierarchy were actually built in the factories of German industrialists and deployed by the High Command of the German Armed Forces. Rationalised slaughter on an industrial scale was not some aberration of the bourgeois enlightenment, it was the logical outworking's of a system based on nationalist competition brought to a horrific crescendo in world war and the Holocaust.

Defining the Nazi state as totalitarian serves to eradicate the crucial differences between workers and employers within the regime, while letting the role of capitalist competition completely off the hook. It allows Western liberals to denounce Nazism as a unique evil that carried everyone in its wake, rather than what it actually was – a fusion of capital and political terror which smashed through the workers movement at home and waged war abroad in the interests of Germany's ruling classes. Equating Nazism with totalitarianism made sense for the bourgeoisie when their aim was to rehabilitate the German conservative elites as a bulwark against Stalinism in the

1940's, but it is dangerous and dishonest if one wants to understand the lessons of the past.⁶⁴ Fascism was not a unique evil dreamed up by psychopaths and imposed across society indiscriminately. It was a mass movement of utter despair that came into a world riven by capitalist war and compounded this despair many times over.

Conclusion

Fascism emerged as a nationalist mass movement against a potentially revolutionary left. Hitler and Mussolini viewed their regimes as popular movements against International Bolshevism, while Franco came to power in a counter-revolt against a left Republican government. For Hitler, Operation Barbarossa was a fight to the death for which he planned appropriately – always deploying at least 70 per cent of his forces on the Eastern Front and beginning his mass murder of civilians in the invasion of the USSR. While this aspect of the Second World War has not been airbrushed out of history, neither is it front and centre. Today, fascism is most associated with anti-Semitism for example, despite the fact that anti-Semitism was not a central characteristic of Italian fascism during the 1920's. The Holocaust has also become the defining symbol of mechanised slaughter, while the 27 million people killed in the USSR are far less prominent in official western narratives. What explains this? The most compelling explanation emerges when we remember that the hot war against the Nazis' was immediately

followed by a Cold War against the Stalinists.

During its rise, western leaders generally welcomed fascism as an effective counterweight against the threat of socialism from below. Winston Churchill famously described Mussolini as a 'Roman Genius' who had "established a centre of orientation from which countries which are engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with socialism must not hesitate to be guided."⁶⁵ Ideas such as these were common among the European ruling classes until it became clear that their own interests were at risk from Hitler's expansionary agenda.

To put this slightly differently, Churchill never went to war to defeat fascism; he fought to protect the British Empire and to preserve the rule of his own class within Britain itself. Total warfare forced Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin into an uneasy alliance, but as the hot war ended, longstanding hostilities between Stalinism and the west were quickly re-asserted, as two imperialist blocs carved up Europe and set about dominating their own spheres of influence for the next four decades.

In this context, a reminder that Hitler and Mussolini had initially taken up the fight against socialism and that they were fellow travellers in wanting to smash the workers movement were not deemed politically expedient. Much better to frame Nazism around its hatred of the Jews and to sully socialism two-times over, once by equating

it with Stalinism and again by defining Stalinism and Nazism as two sides of the same authoritarian coin. For all of their supposed differences totalitarian regimes were essentially the same thing – the antithesis of western freedom and bourgeois democracy.

This strategy bestowed legitimacy on the west as the defender of the so-called Free World at the same time as it allowed the capitalist classes in the ex-fascist regimes to rehabilitate themselves. They may have been willing partners of fascism during the 1930's and 1940's but now they were willing partners in a bid to halt the spread of Stalinism in Europe. And this was what really mattered after the war.

capitalist system facing existential crisis. That it has once again reared its head is the most compelling indication that we need to smash capitalism itself if we want to get rid of its most reactionary elements.

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The anti-communism so central to the fascist regimes thus remained central to the western regimes that emerged in Europe after the war. The official rhetoric was 'Never Again', but implicitly, important aspects of the fascist worldview were retained as the competitive state system was reconfigured for new enemies (The USSR, North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam etc) and capitalist exploitation continued unabated. If Hiram W. Johnson is correct that truth is the first casualty of war, then the truth about fascism was lost in an ideological offensive that sought to protect the western elites from their previous pro-fascist sympathies and their current working classes. Fascism was a movement that arose from the logic of a global

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- ² Hannah Arendt. 1951. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York. Schocken Books.
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- ⁴ Most famously this was the thesis put forward by Francis Fukuyama in his *The End of History and the Last Man* published by Penguin Press in 1992.
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- ¹⁷ Rudolf Hilferding. 1981. *Finance Capital. A Study in the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*. London. Routledge p.311.
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- ²⁰ Wolfgang Adendroth. 1973. *A Short History of the European Working Class*, New York. Monthly Review Press. p.43.
- ²¹ Chris Harman. 2008. *A People's History of the World*. London, Verso p.391.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Donny Gluckstein. 2012. *The Nazis, Capitalism, and the Working Class*. London, Pluto Press, pp.8-9.
- ²⁴ Robert Paxton. 2005. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Penguin Books, p.27.
- ²⁵ Chris Harman. 2008. *A People's History of the World*. London, Verso. p. 411.
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- ⁴⁷ Ibid.
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- ⁶⁰ Ibid, p.126.
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The United Front: Then & Now

Darryl Horan

Revolutionaries are famous for their divisions. Any new initiative of the left is invariably thrown the classic Monty Python joke of 'Are you the People's Front of Judea or the Judean People's Front'. This captures the lack of seriousness among some ultra-left propaganda groups, but it also trivialises serious differences in strategy, organisation, and tactics among genuine Marxists. As socialists confront capitalism, and the systems that have developed around it, they inevitably encounter challenges that can lead to strategic disagreements.

History shows the numerous competing responses by socialists to the questions of nationalism, racism, and gender-based oppression to name only a few examples. Meanwhile, the question of imperialism paralysed the workers' movement at the start of the twentieth century and caused a rupture among socialists and communists that has never been healed.

Revolutionaries have historically placed great importance on the failure of the Second International to respond appropriately to the question of imperialism. Acquiescence by its principal

elements to militarism and war forced genuine revolutionaries out of the mass parties of the Second International into smaller, more isolated groups. This isolation weakened the connection between revolutionaries and the wider working class. It also produced an existential crisis for revolutionaries in the period after the war.

While reformism had been weakened by its association with the conflict, it had not been defeated. Worker's militancy had shot up, but under the influence of reformist leaders it had not broken through into successful revolutions as it had in Russia. Instead, the revolutionary wave ebbed, leaving revolutionaries in western Europe isolated from the main workers' organisations. The United Front was initiated by revolutionaries as a response to these new circumstances.

The tactic was premised on the insistence that socialist revolution could not come about from a small conspiracy, but rather necessitated the support of the masses of ordinary people. The existence of mass social democratic parties and smaller communist parties meant the task for

revolutionaries now became how to break out of their isolation and win mass support away from reformism and increasingly from Stalinism.

Socialism before the First World War

Sectarianism as a political problem is as old as the emergence of a self-conscious worker's movement. Craft Unions excluding 'unskilled workers' or tight conspiracies designed to keep out state spies, but also more passive supporters, long predate any notion of the Leninist vanguard. From the 1870s onward, however, these tactics declined, as capitalism created the conditions for mass trade unionism and mass political parties.

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Mirroring this development, socialist parties established a Second International in 1889 with the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) at its centre. By all accounts, the SPD of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was an impressive organisation. On the eve of the First World War, it had just over a million members, four million votes were cast for it, and it boasted a network of parallel organisations in unions, social clubs, women's societies, and people's universities.¹ It was noted that one "could be born into a social-democratic household,

join an SPD youth organisation, then enter the social-democratic trade union that organised their workplace.... [and] in old age, know that the union would cover their funeral arrangements."² Among its greatest feats was the construction of a political vehicle that could house various strands of Marxism with a commonality of purpose in the advancement of working class power.

The parties of the Second International were successful in building mass organisations that could become hegemonic in shaping the ideas and actions of their members. Through this hegemony, mass parties and mass unions challenged the power of the ruling class to win victories for workers and the wider socialist movement. SPD ascendancy grew quickly with the repeal of the 'exceptional' or anti-socialist laws in 1890. These repressive laws were designed by Bismarck to crush the budding SPD, but they were ultimately repealed due to the popular support built on illegal activity throughout the 1880's.

These successes brought with them new challenges, however. As the SPD became legalised, the prospect of its co-option into the system became significantly more likely. In the years before the war the union leadership increasingly aligned with the leaders of the SPD to manage workers'

expectations rather than promoting confrontation with the bosses. This tendency was reinforced politically by Eduard Bernstein's conception of socialism coming about through peaceful means and incremental change.

But this strategy disintegrated in 1914 with the Kaiser's drive to war. As propaganda was whipped up by the Fatherland Front, the unions and SPD leadership were unwilling to challenge the resulting jingoism for fear of losing mass support. When Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in June 1914, socialists organised anti-war demonstrations across Europe, but the reaction from the leaders of the Second International, and the SPD in particular, was one of resignation.³ Despite an emergency meeting of the International's Executive on July 29 and 30, all that could be agreed was to send letters of solidarity to individual member organisations.

Decades of pronouncements against imperialist war counted for nothing, as the outbreak of hostility was met with surrender and nationalist acquiescence. When on August 5, a vote was put to the Reichstag on funding for the war, the SPD capitulated, voting through war credits, thus endorsing the war itself.

With the exception of the Serbian and Russian Social Democratic Parties, socialist parties in each of the combatant states lined up, one after the other, to endorse the war and the massacre of the wider working class that resulted from it. The war separated the parties of the Second International into warring blocs which became subservient to their nation's military interests. Several split as the war dragged on, and the death toll climbed intolerably. The SPD's support for the war led it to expel its left flank, and as war fatigue grew, they even supported the jailing of one of their own Deputies, Karl Liebknecht, and Rosa Luxemburg, for their anti-war activism.

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After four years of slaughter the war ended through two revolutions, one in Russia led by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and a second in Germany, led by sailors, soldiers and workers in Kiel, when the Kaiser's admirals attempted to send the navy on a futile last ditch attempt to win glory for the Empire. The catalyst for each, was reflected in the post-revolutionary order in both. In Russia, the Bolsheviks were able to construct a fledgling worker's state under immense attacks from counter-revolutionary forces aided and supported by the imperialist powers.

But they were also plunged into a civil war that gradually decimated the Russian working class and shifted power from worker's soviets to the upper bureaucracy of the newly re-christened Communist Party. In Germany, the revolution brought different strands of the old SPD into power and so was quickly subdued.

The provisional coalition was made up of the most conservative forces of the SPD known as the Majority Socialists (MS) and a more left-wing break-away grouping known as the Independent Socialists (IS) or the USPD. The government collapsed almost immediately in December 1918, when the MS unilaterally suppressed a group of revolutionary sailors, prompting the withdrawal of the IS from office. A month later, when a wider revolt broke out in Berlin, the Majority Socialists used the opportunity to form a compact with reactionary irregulars called the 'Freikorps'. These had been officers and right-wing soldiers during the war, and they now set out to put down the revolution through a reign of terror that would last for months and would involve the massacre of many of the newly founded Communist Party of Germany (KPD).

The road to the United Front

The KPD had been practically decapitated by the spring of 1919. Most of its leading

members, including Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches and Eugen Leviné had been murdered or exiled. What remained was a shell-shocked organisation, deeply divided over strategy. The main debate centred on the KPD's relationship to forces outside itself. The party survived a split after its second congress when its left flank walked out over ditching its boycott of elections, its abstention from the General German Trade Union Federation (ADGB) and moves to centralise the party. Despite these initial losses, the move away from sectarianism brought the KPD closer to the much larger Independent Socialists (USPD), and in October 1920 its leadership was able to convince the left of the USPD to merge with the KPD, constituting for the first time a mass party of between 350,000 to 500,000.⁴

Around this time, two broad tendencies were developing inside the KPD, one led by Paul Levi, which saw the party's growth as coming through winning an electoral base, increasing its influence among the union movement, and winning reformist workers by working with the SPD on a militant basis.⁵

But sectarianism still plagued the KPD, and a second tendency began to arise around figures like Ruth Fischer, Ernst Thälmann and Arkadi Maslow. This section

consciously placed itself in opposition to Levi. They opposed attempts by the KPD to win SPD aligned supporters through a focus on bread and butter issues, seeing it as a ploy to move the KPD away from its revolutionary roots, and at times going as far as to suspect Levi of wanting to disband the KPD into the SPD.⁶ They misunderstood the context revolutionaries were now operating in. Capitalism was not the weakened force it had been in 1918 and 1919. Communist parties had managed to solidify themselves, but revolutionary consciousness had not permeated through the masses of ordinary people. The mistaken belief that it had would cost revolutionaries dearly.

In Germany, this mistaken confidence came from the dramatic growth in the KPD itself. Because of its huge size, the radicals believed the time for revolution was ripe and when a revolt broke out in Leuna's massive chemical works in March 1921, the radicals saw this as their opportunity. With the support of the Russian dominated Comintern, they were able to force Levi from his position as party chair. They then proceeded to turn the KPD towards insurrection, calling its members out on strike and beginning to arm them.

The call did not progress far beyond the revolutionary left, however. While isolated

workers rose in the industrial heartlands of Saxony, everywhere else they remained passive. The state quickly suppressed the isolated revolts, and the Communists were driven underground. The destruction of the KPD's legal operations was compounded when Clara Zetkin was caught trying to flee Germany with confidential party documents. These revealed that the KPD had had to resort to attacking workers to force them out on strike, that most of its members had not answered the call for insurrection and that the party was in pieces after the failed uprising.⁷

The fallout forced a wider change in direction. The KPD was haemorrhaging members. When their delegation addressed the 3rd Congress of the Comintern in August 1921, it reported just over 180,000 members - a loss of between half and two-thirds of its forces. Communists had also faced setbacks in Italy and France and the leaders of the Comintern, Lenin and Trotsky, now recognised the tide had washed out, at least for the moment, on revolutionary action. In response, they argued for the need to connect communist parties with the daily struggles of working people. If they were going to become revolutionary vehicles, they would need to influence much larger layers than had been the case in 1921.

Trotsky summed up this new thinking in the following remarks “The task of the Communist Party is to lead the proletarian revolution... to achieve it, the Communist Party must base itself on the overwhelming majority of the working class.”⁸ The slogan of the congress was ‘To the Masses’ and the wider strategy became known as the United Front.

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The task was to break the majority of workers from passivity and reformism. It had become clear that communist parties had not united the working class around themselves. Reformist parties still commanded the majority support of workers in most countries. To break this support, revolutionaries needed to call for joint action between socialists and communists in support of the immediate interests of the workers. It meant defending wages against inflation, fighting to improve conditions, and calling for unified action against fascist paramilitaries. Calling for unity around concrete demands could put social democratic parties into a catch 22. If they accepted the need for unified action this would increase the goodwill between communists and socialists and take the movement in a more radical direction. If they refused, SD leaders could be shown up as acting as a barrier to the real interests of ordinary people.

The period between August 1921 and autumn 1923 represented the classic era of united front tactics in Germany. Through its action against attacks on workers' terms and conditions and by mobilising against the threat posed by fascism, the KPD was able to double in size and considerably increase its influence among ordinary workers. The party was able to make inroads that previously did not exist. This sometimes meant acting alongside the SPD, but it often meant acting against their inherent conservatism. When a national railroad strike broke out in February 1922, the SPD used the military to force workers back to work.⁹

The KPD had been the only party to support the strike, and in the process, it had gained a foothold among state employees, a previous bastion of the SPD. United fronts against the fascists also demonstrated the commitment of communist forces to defend workers' interests in the eyes of ordinary people. This was particularly the case when communists blocked fascists from marching through their towns attacking any random worker unlucky enough to be caught in their path. In addition, KPD united front work against the consequences of inflation in the spring and summer of 1923 confirmed to working people that the SPD

would rather compromise with the right than move leftward.

SPD support now haemorrhaged; their connected unions, the ADGB almost halved in membership from 8 million to 4.5 million and members left the SPD itself in droves.¹⁰ United front tactics had rebuilt the KPD, extended its influence, and created networks of support that opened the opportunity for the KPD to directly contest the SPD for the hegemony of German workers. The tactic had proven invaluable in a period of worker's defence, but its undoing came when the mood for revolution actually increased.

During the summer and autumn of 1923, Weimar Germany was in crisis. The state's attempt at reducing its war reparations by printing money caused a hyperinflation that decimated wages and provoked France and Belgium to invade the Rhineland. A nationwide strike broke out in August 1923, which toppled the Cuno government and brought a coalition of Liberal parties and the SPD into office. The KPD used its newfound support to call for the establishment of a worker's government that would exclude the forces of the right. This call was generally popular among industrial workers but only in Saxony and Thuringia did the Social Democratic leaders seriously entertain it. With the SPD

now in government, the united front tactic had to be re-conceived. It was no longer useful to call for joint action with a party that was daily doing the bidding of the ruling classes, but this didn't mean that the fundamentals of the strategy had to be abandoned. Trotsky's insistence on continual orientation to working class struggle continued to apply, but in the context of a general crisis of German capitalism this meant three things simultaneously. It meant breaking the link between the united front and the SPD. It meant increasing the orientation of the KPD towards militant workers – particularly those in the industrial heartlands - and it meant giving a decisive lead when the opportunity for revolution presented itself.

Yet having been burnt by two failed attempts at revolution in 1919 and 1921 – and being internally divided on what to do - the KPD made a number of tactical errors in the decisive months of 1923. One mistake was making abstract calls for revolution while curtailing strike action for fear of state repression. Then, when the revolutionary momentum had actually developed, they hesitated in calling a general strike and failed to lead the workers in an insurrection.¹¹ In 1919, the revolutionary left had been too eager. In 1923, they had not moved decisively

enough, and the longer term results were a degeneration of the KPD under the influence of Stalinism and the destruction of the German working class by fascism a decade later. Louis Saint-Just famously quipped that those who put through half a revolution dig their own graves and having vacillated when the time was ripe, the KPD would eventually succumb to a Nazi reaction linked to the German state. The united front had worked admirably in a period of workers' defence, but the complexity of the situation in 1923 meant that it was never applied successfully. The lesson is not that the tactic itself was defective but that it needs to be applied creatively with only its central principle remaining absolute – the need to continually orientate to the mass of workers in their daily struggles. Decisive proof of this was delivered over the next decade, moreover, as the need for a united front against fascism was recklessly squandered by both the SPD and the KPD. Under the influence of Stalin's disastrous equation of social democracy with social fascism the KPD squandered the possibility of building a united front with the biggest workers' organisation in the state.

For their part, the social democrats contemptuously dismissed the fascists as little more than street thugs and refused to build a united front with forces to their left.

Then when it was too late in Germany, Stalin did a complete 180 degree turn – arguing that communists should unite with every force in a bourgeois democracy outside the fascists. This popular front tactic proved equally disastrous in Spain and France, allowing the far right to take power in one and decisively weakening left organisation in the other. The end result was a total degeneration of the united front tactic that mirrored the degeneration of the workers' movement more generally.

United Front work outside mass parties

The post-war decades were a bleak period for revolutionaries in the west. Despite occasional spikes in strike action, the post-war era ushered in the greatest period of capitalist expansion the west has ever seen. A far cry from the depression predictions issued by orthodox Trotskyism in the immediate aftermath of the war. Mass communist parties were able to consolidate themselves in France and Italy but failed to break through in Germany and Britain.

The prospects for revolutionary socialists remained dim until the explosion of revolt during 1968. Suddenly a new generation of revolutionaries was being forged in struggles on the streets and in the workplaces. In France, students and workers rose up against the de Gaulle

government in historic numbers, with many openly calling for revolution. Italy experienced a Hot Autumn too with strike action and radical occupations all over the country. Britain saw an anti-Vietnam war movement which brought hundreds of thousands onto the streets; while in Derry and Belfast, thousands marched under the banner of the Civil Rights Movement and People's Democracy.

For the revolutionary left, which had been isolated for decades, suddenly the mood for change was present and the prospect of revolution seemed possible. But the same conservative forces that had dominated the 1930's and 1940's were once again best placed to move this revolutionary upsurge into much safer channels. In France, the Communist Party collaborated with the major trade union leaders to encourage workers back into their factories. There were important gains in terms of wages and conditions but the overall mood for radical change was blunted by the combined forces of Stalinism and social democracy. A similar pattern unfolded elsewhere, as radical action exploded on the streets only to be met with conservative forces anxious to channel it into basic reforms. The spirit of 68 was to live long in the memory of the working class but in most places the potential for radical transformation had not been taken.

That said, the best forces – those who were genuinely revolutionary - were capable of growing in their own modest ways, often by using united front tactics. In Britain the International Socialists are a good example of this, growing from around 500 members to more than 3,000 in the seven years from 1967 and 1974.¹² Unlike the Stalinists and the social democrats, the IS confidently argued for rank and file trade unionism, an anti-sectarian approach to revolutionary socialism and principled anti-imperialism, including denouncing the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Conscious of their relatively small size and their need for organic links to progressive struggles, the IS began to experiment with united front tactics through the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, a Right to Work Campaign and most successfully with the establishment of the Anti-Nazi League (ANL). The backdrop to the launch of the ANL in 1977 was an upsurge in racist and fascist activity partly in reaction to the failures of 68. In the US, the black civil rights movement was being met with murder and intimidation, while in Britain this was a period in which Enoch Powell had threatened 'racial civil war'. With capitalism once again in crisis and unemployment rising, the National Front stood candidates throughout London in

1976, attaining 5% of the vote while also preparing to stand throughout the UK.¹³ Fascists were even marching on British streets intent on terrorising workers, migrants, and socialists into submission. However, two events made it clear that the spread of fascism could be stopped - namely the battles of Wood Green and Lewisham.

Against the arguments of the Labour Party and the Communists, leaders of the IS argued that a united front of anti-fascists could be big enough and militant enough to take on the fascists and win. Victory for anti-fascists in these confrontations resonated with ordinary people and demonstrated to rank and file socialists that fascism was stoppable. These successes paved the way for the establishment of the Anti-Nazi League in November 1977.

Paul Holborow, in his interview with *International Socialism* impresses the importance of physical confrontation, but he also demonstrates that the real success of the ANL was in its ability to create a genuine united front - to bring a whole spectrum of individuals and groups together in mass actions, canvassing, leafleting, organising rock carnivals alongside a harder edge dedicated to physical confrontation. These two aspects

of the movement - mass action and physical confrontation denied the Nazis space to organise.

The Anti-Nazi League had three key achievements that revolutionary socialists can take lessons from today. The first was the construction of a non-sectarian anti-fascist vehicle capable of winning communists, socialists and ordinary people to a project opposing both racism and fascism. In this sense, while revolutionaries were the driving force behind the ANL, they weren't the only force or even the majority. The ANL through its non-sectarianism was able to draw on the energy and experience of rank and file socialists and ordinary people throughout Britain.¹⁴ Holborow shows the breadth of organisations that coordinated inside and around the ANL.

The second lesson is to be creative about how to reach ordinary people. The classic united front can teach you a lot about the dynamics of operating around mass parties, but in the absence of them, revolutionaries need to be creative. Rock against Racism and the subsequent ANL carnivals shows us that anti-racist organising can actually be cool. Revolutionaries need to be able to reach ordinary people, especially young people looking for an outlet. The last achievement was to deny the National Front the ability to preach and practice.

The ANL's mass work included leafleting, canvassing, public meetings, and confrontations, which constrained the ability of the National Front to articulate itself. Their meetings were interrupted, rallies countered, and propaganda efforts derailed. The seismic pressure of the ANL on the National Front shattered the organisation and its support quickly dwindled. The membership split into several rival sections and while they still constituted a danger, they weren't able to regain the position they had in 1976/1977.

Applying the united front in Ireland today

Irish revolutionaries have consistently applied the united front tactic to work with bigger forces for progressive outcomes. When Ronald Reagan visited Ireland in 1984 for example, the Socialist Workers Movement (today's SWN) pulled together the *Reagan Reception Campaign*. Working with the *Irish Campaign against Reagan's Foreign Policy*, which involved over 30 organisations and included prominent figures such as Dr Noel Browne, Joe Duffy and Senator Michael D. Higgins, this united front succeeded in tarnishing what was otherwise meant to be a propaganda tour for Reagan and his war mongering administration.¹⁵

When George Bush and Tony Blair invaded Iraq in 2003, the SWP helped to initiate the *Irish Anti-War Movement* (IAWM), which mobilised tens of thousands in some of the biggest demonstrations the state had ever seen. This united front arose from the combination of three pro-peace groups and parties like the Labour Party, Green Party and SWP who collectively opposed the US invasion of Iraq. This united front mirrored efforts around the world to fight US imperialism through people powered movements. The IAWM's popularity came from its emphasis on reaching ordinary people. It was able to gather a wide array of groups, famous artists, and activists to organise stunts, marches, and concerts. It is this conception of attempting to go out confidently to win ordinary people that played a role in the formation of People Before Profit a few years later.

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The most impactful united front over recent years, meanwhile, was the Right2Water campaign. This campaign brought political parties, like People before Profit and Sinn Féin, together with left trade unions like Unite, Mandate, the CWU and a host of community groups throughout the country in opposition to austerity and the implementation of water charges. Most importantly, Right2Water was able to capture the mood of ordinary people.



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On its first march, it brought out nearly 100,000 people, shattering the passive acceptance of austerity and replacing it with a vehicle for the anger that had consistently been building. As the deadline to register with Irish Water approached, a National Day of Action was held throughout the country on November 1, 2014, with almost a hundred protests attended by well over 200,000 people. The campaign wasn't just mass mobilisations either.

Local community actions formed just as crucial an element, with street meetings and pickets to stop the installation of water meters springing up across the country.¹⁶

The role of revolutionaries was to move these defuse protests and mobilisations into a more broadly political project. It's here that the campaign was able to directly challenge the state through the call for

non-payment of charges. The call was wildly popular with three quarters of people refusing to pay. The key lesson for revolutionaries was that united fronts with a resonating message can break through periods of apathy and passivity and thrust ordinary people into activity.

Revolutionaries should be the foremost fighters for democracy inside these united fronts too. For all of its strengths, a crucial deficiency of Right2Water was its inability to allow ordinary people that were involved in local actions, but not in broader organisations, to articulate themselves within the Right2Water structures.

Over the last few years, the potential for mass working class action has waned but with the growth of the far right now becoming a dangerous reality the united front tactic can once again prove indispensable. After all, most of the underlying factors remain the same; revolutionary politics is still a minority view, reformism remains hegemonic in the working class and yet, workers are still under attack - this time from inflation. But now we also face fascist forces that must be smashed through a combination of direct confrontation and wider action with likeminded forces.

As it always has, fascism represents a danger for socialists, migrants, and the wider working class. To combat it, we need solidarity and working class struggles – the kind that give our class confidence and help to strengthen the left in the process. Sectarianism is always a political dead end. It isolates revolutionaries from their key task which is to win the masses of ordinary people to a revolutionary worldview.

But what must we do to actually build the equivalent of the ANL in Ireland in the 21st century? The specifics will vary in every locality but everywhere socialists should combine three broad tactics. Firstly, they must organise the most determined anti-fascists to stop the right from taking the streets. This will involve building up a network of activists who understand the need to take on the right directly. Secondly, socialists should advocate a looser group of people to create ‘For All groups’ in the areas and include in this prominent personalities, sports people, musicians etc. who have the ear of the local community. The message here should be one of hope not hate, solidarity not scapegoating.

Cultural events that emphasise unity and solidarity are also essential. This is why Rock Against Racism was so successful, and why, in February 2023, *Ireland for All* was

able to gather 50,000 people in Dublin on an anti-racist message. Using figures like Christy Moore, Bernadette McAliskey and Dermot Kennedy and appealing to Ireland’s anti-colonial history can resonate with people, as can slogans like ‘No Blacks, No Dogs and No Irish’ which can form a link with people in the absence of a mass revolutionary party.

Ireland for All also showed that while the unions are for the most part dormant, they can still mobilise - the public service union, Fórsa, had the largest contingent on the march. Thirdly, the left should continue to build relations with working people by connecting with the issues that matter to them most. This will obviously mean attacking the government for their role in the current cost of living crisis, and it will mean attempting to relate to people as they struggle with the housing crisis and the various other attacks on their lives.

Finally, it is worth stating that, as important as it is, the united front should not be seen as a substitute for building a revolutionary party. Instead, it should be seen as an extremely important tactic that revolutionaries employ to win people from a reformist world view in order to organise them in a party dedicated to the revolutionary overthrow of the system itself.

- ¹ Pierre Broué, Ian H. Birchall, Brian Pearce. 2005. *The German Revolution 1917-1923*. Leiden, Brill. p.43
- ² Sean Larson. 2017. The Rise and Fall of the Second International. *Jacobin*. @ <https://jacobin.com/2017/07/second-international-bernstein-rosa-luxemburg-unions-world-war>.
- ³ Mike Taber 2021. *Under the Socialist Banner. Resolutions of the Second International, 1889-1912*. Chicago. Haymarket Books. p.171
- ⁴ Pierre Broué, Ian H. Birchall and Brian Pearce. 2005. *The German Revolution 1917-1923*. Leiden, Brill. p.445.
- ⁵ Daniel Gaido. 2017. Paul Levi and the Origins of the United Front Policy in the Communist International. *Historical Materialism* 25 (1) pp 131-174.
- ⁶ Norman LaPorte and Ralf Hofrogge. 2017. *Weimar Communism as Mass Movement 1918-1933*. Lawrence and Wishart. London. p.90.
- ⁷ John Riddell 1921. *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International*, p.301.
- ⁸ Duncan Hallas 1985. *The Comintern*. London. Bookmarks. p.67.
- ⁹ Norman LaPorte and Ralf Hofrogge. 2017. *Weimar Communism as Mass Movement, 1918-1933*. Lawrence and Wishart. London. pp 70-72.
- ¹⁰ Larry Peterson 1992. *German Communism, Workers' Protest, and Labor Unions: The Politics of the United Front in Rhineland-Westphalia 1920-1924* (Amsterdam, 1992), p.222.
- ¹¹ Chris Harman. 1982. *The Lost Revolution. Germany 1918 to 1923*. Bookmarks, 1982, p.288.
- ¹² Ian Birchall 2008. Seizing the Time: Tony Cliff and 1968. *International Socialism* 118, Spring 2008.
- ¹³ Paul Holborow 2019. The Anti-Nazi League, and its lessons for today. *International Socialism* 163, Summer 2019.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Many Protesting Regan's Visit 1984. @ <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1984/06/02/Many-protesting-Reagan-visit/1726454996800/>; Protest March against Regan's Foreign Policies 1984 @ <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/0526/619661-protest-march-against-president-reagans-foreign-policies>.
- ¹⁶ Dan Finn. 2015. Ireland's Water Wars. *New Left Review*. Vol.95 Autumn, 2015.

From Civil Rights to the Good Friday Agreement: A Conversation with Eamonn McCann

The 25th anniversary of the Belfast Agreement recently passed not with a bang, but with a whimper. With Stormont again collapsed, few could muster any great enthusiasm to celebrate this milestone. One of the chief critics of the Agreement, and the sectarian structures it enshrined is veteran socialist activist and journalist Eamonn McCann. Seán Mitchell sat down with Eamonn to discuss the Agreement and the conflict which preceded it. An abridged transcript of the conversation has been produced here.

SM. Thanks for sitting down with us Eamonn. There has been plenty of revisionism around both the 25th anniversary of the Agreement and the centenary of Northern Ireland before it. Given this context, it might be useful if you start by giving us a sketch of the roots of the conflict known as the “Troubles”.

EMcC. The causes of the conflict are rooted very deeply in Irish history, and certainly can be traced back to the formation of the Northern Ireland state. As we know, the treaty that ended the War of Independence was based literally upon drawing a line around the area of Ireland which could

reliably be counted on to be majority unionist—a majority in favour of retaining the link with Britain in other words. The Northern Ireland state was designed, and its boundaries were set, according to a perceived necessity to maintain a Protestant/Unionist majority. It is worth remarking in passing that there was a distinct faction of Unionism, which included its principal leader, Edward Carson, that did not initially favour partition, and instead wanted to retain the whole of Ireland within the union and the British Empire. A reminder that partition was as much the result of imperialist pragmatism as some deeply-held identity or allegiance.

The effect of partition in the North was to leave the Catholic community isolated from the rest of Ireland. As a result, Catholics were subjected to systematic discrimination within jobs, housing, and the electoral franchise. It’s remarkable how many young republicans, and some not-so-young republicans, will tell you that Catholics didn’t have a vote. This wasn’t true. In the North, the great difference was that only householders and their spouses could vote in local government elections for councils

and corporations. In order to get a vote in local government elections, you had to have a house—to give a person a house, therefore, was to give them a vote. Unionists were manipulating the boundaries and gerrymandering an artificial majority for the unionist people, including through the sectarian allocation of housing, and as a by-product of that, Catholics were disadvantaged in local government. That took a grotesque form, particularly in Derry, where two thirds of the electorate might vote for Nationalists or anti-unionist parties more generally, and yet, the artificial boundaries yielded a unionist majority on the Council. This was obviously unfair and a glaring anomaly, and when I was growing up in



Eamonn McCann, speaking at an event in the Bogside, April 1969.

Derry, it was probably the first political thing I learned: that we in the Bogside were discriminated against when it came to votes, and therefore in the distribution of public finances.

Everybody in the Bogside knew this. We lived in very poor conditions, in damp slums, with water running down the walls. And when people talked about these conditions, they would relate it to the discrimination of Catholics. As I recall it in Derry, partition and the whole system of gerrymandering was a very practical thing, experienced in access to housing and in access to jobs. There wasn't a single Catholic employed in the Guildhall—the centre of

local government in Derry—until the outbreak of the civil rights movement. Not one, in a majority Catholic city, and the leaders of the Unionist party and the local Orange Order boasted about this.

What about the situation of the Protestant working class in places like Derry at this time?

Contrary to what some Nationalists might tell you, the system whereby householders alone could vote in local elections obviously meant that Protestants who weren't householders wouldn't get a vote either. When left-wing candidates would go canvassing in Protestant areas like Irish Street or the Fountain in Derry, they would constantly be faced with people on the doorstep saying, "You're complaining down there in the Bogside about housing and jobs, aren't we in the same position?" And this was largely true. Up in the Fountain the conditions weren't all that different from conditions in the Bogside. Poor, working class Protestant people didn't benefit from discrimination.

The Orange Order and the Unionist Party offered Protestant people a sense of having a stake in the Northern Ireland state. Orangeism offered a lifestyle, and a colourful backstory, for the Protestant people. If you are living in a damp house and a dead-end job, the colour and noise and the celebratory triumphalism of

Orangeism could be very attractive to people. And it was quite common to hear Unionist leaders in the public arena tell Protestant people that "You are lucky that you have Northern Ireland," because you could get certain benefits from the British state. To some extent this was true, but it didn't answer the question of the disenfranchisement of working class people in a democracy.

The marginal advantages that Protestant working class people had in access to jobs and housing didn't mean that they were well off—they were poor by any standards. Indeed, by the standards of comparative areas in Britain, they were often worse off than their counterparts on the other side of the Irish sea. If you're poor, sometimes that's when you reach for that vigorous symbol of your community and a heroic version of your history. This is why you had this peculiar convergence of proletarian resentment at poverty combined with a pride in the loyalist and Orange tradition. Unionism and Orangeism might seem like a rather quaint outlook on the world in 2023, but in a distorted way it seemed to make sense if you were a working class person in some bleak, run-down, crumbling slum.

This powder keg exploded in the late 1960s with student protests, the civil rights movement, and the violent reaction of the state. Can you explain how this all developed?

The revolt of the 1960s cannot be understood other than in the general revolt against oppression and injustice right across the world. It is not a coincidence that the civil rights movement emerged here in the North around the time of the civil rights movement in the United States, or that the student movement here paralleled what was happening in continental Europe and many other places. Northern Ireland is not special in that regard.

It is worth remarking in passing on the role of students in the revolt here. This wasn't something that happened overnight, it wasn't a thunderclap. It was the result of trends and material changes in Northern Irish society over previous years—stretching back at least to the Education Act of 1944, which opened up a route to higher education for many working class people. This wasn't some act of benevolence on the part of the ruling class. Indeed, its architect was Rab Butler, a right-wing Tory, and the whole policy reflected capitalism's increasing need for an educated workforce. Typically, it wasn't enacted by the Unionist administration—

who didn't like the idea of free education open to all—until three years later. It wasn't just the idea of Catholics coming into education that angered them, though that was in the front of their minds as well. The idea of the dirty, unwashed, proletarian masses coming from their ugly teeming houses into further education actually insulted Unionist leaders and the assumptions that many of them had. Nevertheless, people like me were beneficiaries of this.

In a deeply divided society, students were one of the few coherent groups who were to some extent insulated from surrounding society, and who had an outlook of “doing well” in a way that those who did not have access to third level education did not have. I do not mean to exaggerate the opportunities given by third level education at the time, but it meant that if you were a Catholic working class person, or the child of a Catholic working class family, you could aspire to move higher and do better than your parents had.

The first person to go to university in Rossville Street, where I come from, was Paddy Doherty. The very fact that I can remember Paddy, and where he lived, will tell you what an unusual thing that was. It was the talk of the street: “Did you hear Paddy Doherty is going to university.”



Battle of the Bogside in Derry, August 12 1969

A year or two later it was John Hume, and then a few years later people of my age went to university.

University offered an escape, and the space and time to be able to develop a political perspective on the wider world and not just our own little parish. There was a certain breakdown of religious loyalties there, and it was from within the student milieu that radical organisations like People's Democracy emerged. This relative privilege of students at the time—free time and simple things like access to clubs and places to meet to form organisations—afforded them the opportunity to take to the streets and to be inspired by their contemporaries in many countries around the world. If you were an unemployed

person in the Bogside you couldn't do that. So, you had the rise of a layer of Catholic working people who could be more confident in society than their fathers or mothers, who had the time and space to think and organise, were more confident about making their voices heard. My father and his brothers and my mother and her siblings were very bright people, quite capable of what used to be called "book learning", and yet they couldn't make any progress in society. But I and others of my generation could, and suddenly at places like Queens University you had a hubbub of political thinking, and could be inspired by things like the Black Panthers.

To some extent, Republicanism and the IRA were a marginal current in the initial period of radicalisation you discussed above. But as the conflict developed, radical socialist forces and those who led the civil rights movement would be eclipsed by the Provisional IRA. Can you explain how they emerged?

There is a notion spread by contemporary Sinn Féin and some of their academic and journalistic outriders that the civil rights movement awakened the republican consciousness of the Catholic community that then took the organisational form of the Provisional IRA with appropriate adjustments in strategy and so on. That's simply not true. The idea that the emergence of the IRA was inevitable, that it was natural, that it was something that the mass of Catholics embraced as if it were their historical mission—none of that is true. The Provisional IRA didn't emerge until three years after the formation of the civil rights movement, and it didn't develop into a serious force until a few years after that.

The Provisional IRA emerged in some respects as a proper and honest reaction to the brutality of the state and the unionist government. The aggressive and brutal attitude of the British state towards the Catholic community—people being beaten

up, arrested, and even killed—eventually this became the major issue that dominated people's lives and thinking. In my memory of it, in Derry, the Provisional IRA emerged as the people said, "this civil rights movement is going to go nowhere, you're not going to get justice, you're not going to get democracy and equality within Northern Ireland, because of British imperialism and its role in Ireland." And therefore, the only rational response was to take on British imperialism. And this wasn't an abstract thing: British Imperialism was standing in uniform with a rifle at the end of your street.

After a number of atrocities by the British state, the practical logic of traditional republicanism—that you cannot get justice from the British state: "we will have to take them on and drive them out"—had a real validity to many people. It wasn't necessarily the ideology of republicanism that attracted them, therefore, but their day-to-day experience.

Father Denis Paul, a very conservative priest who was also chaplain to many of the young people who had been arrested for rioting and for armed actions and heard their confessions and had some insight into the thinking of republican prisoners, once told me that many of them had not joined up because of the republican vision but

because “they had witnessed their own mothers being insulted in her own kitchen.” That kind of thing was quite common during armed searches and the like, and he said that people would be quite understandably enraged by that. He said “there’s no point in protesting or raising questions in parliament about that.” If you are 16 or 17 and you see this happening, it seemed like there was no way you could deal with it other than saying “Give me a gun and I’ll shoot the fuckers.”

The other important thing about recruitment to the Provisional IRA, and it was an echo of what Father Paul had said about people joining the IRA because of the treatment of their mothers, was the defence of areas and their streets. If the British Army comes to the Bogside, and they are arresting people and “keeping the peace” as they would put it, then it’s obvious that there was going to be resistance to that and over time people got used to fighting the state.

Eddie Gallagher, who was second in command in the IRA in the 26 counties at the time, once told me that “them boys from Belfast are not real republicans. They are fighting for their streets.” Think about the internment raids, when the Brits came in, and snatched people, broke into their homes, took people off, some of whom I

knew very well, and took them off and locked them up—no charge, no trial, no nothing; the excuse simply being that “we know things about you and that means you’re a criminal.” Imagine the rage that followed that, imagine the anger that followed that. I remember in the hours after the internment raids, there was a meeting at the corner of the Brandywell Road in the Bogside, that had been called at a couple of hours’ notice, and practically the entire area was there—men, women, and children were out. This was a communal insult to the whole community. People were not going to stand for that.

After Bloody Sunday, the response became “Defend the area”—that became the slogan, “Don’t let them come in again.” And that was the context in which the Provisional IRA recruited in large numbers, rather than in ones and twos, or from people who came from traditional republican families.

It was those circumstances that laid the basis for the Provisional IRA. It’s important to keep in mind that there were other formations thrown up in these political convulsions. You had the Official IRA, for example, which in Derry was the stronger republican group for a period.

Why did the Provisional IRA surpass those other groups?

Eddie Gallagher is an interesting example. He was adjutant to the Chief of Staff of the IRA in the 26 counties, who readers might know as one of those who kidnapped Dutch businessman Tiede Herrema. I got to know Eddie, he was a lovely fella. He is from Donegal, and had come into the Provisional IRA by a curious route.

He was working for a building contractor in England and was a union man and a shop steward. He came back to Belfast, not to join the IRA, but because the company he was working for gave him a job in West Belfast. Eddie was driving to work in Andersonstown one morning, and there was a car just in front of him and its exhaust blew and backfired. This was quite a common thing in old cars, and the soldiers in Andersonstown, without a check or anything, opened fire and killed a man. Eddie resolved then and there that he wasn't going to stand for this.

Eddie being something of a militant in the Trade Union movement was not minded to join the Provisional IRA—he wanted to join the Official IRA, which was viewed as more left wing. And he told me he had gone around Donegal asking people “where do I find Official Sinn Féin?” and he could never find them! And he joined the Provos as a second-best option.

So, there was political chaos for a period. There were only half a dozen or so in the Official IRA in Derry in the late 60s. I believe they had one gun between them! And then suddenly they were in the middle of what was being called a war. Many of the people who joined the Provisionals in Derry had been in the Official IRA. But they joined the Provisionals because they believed in shooting back. And more and more, particularly after Bloody Sunday, what the Provos were saying matched the mood of the mass of the Catholic working class—far more than the quiet perspective offered by the Stickies and the Communist Party.

The Official IRA gradually settled into a reformist perspective. Of course, some people in the Official IRA came to resent their leadership who they thought were missing the pace of events and the mood of the people, and asked why they weren't giving as militant a lead as the Provisionals.

And that gave rise to another split in the Official IRA, and the formation of the Irish Republican Socialist Party, whom offered themselves as an alternative to the Provisionals, but also to the meek and mild and abstract Stalinist leadership of the Officials. So, for a while you had an ideologically chaotic situation in the North, for about 18 months, maybe two years.

As well as the Civil Rights Movement, there was an established Communist Party and a Northern Ireland Labour Party. Why did people turn to the Provisionals rather than the organisations of the left?

There were a number of categories on the left. The members of the Communist Party would have very much counted themselves as fighting the class war, but when it came to things like civil rights and the national question, they had a very abstract, reformist and straightforward perspective: first of all you had to have democracy in the North, and only then you could begin the process of fighting for a united Ireland, because a democratic system would open all sorts of things up, and then once you had a united Ireland you could fight for socialism. This was the *stages theory* and it was as simple and as basic as that. And that theory formed the basis of the politics of the Officials as well.

There were other left-wing organisations as well. There was the Northern Ireland Labour Party, which I was a member of for several years, which was the equivalent of the British Labour party, and was associated, though not affiliated, with British Labour.

It had a similar attitude to the British Labour Party to politics: keep things quiet, don't do anything to alienate people, especially don't do anything to alienate yourself from trade union officials. The credibility of the left in the North, and the credibility of the trade union movement in the North, and class politics more generally, was deeply damaged, to put it mildly, by the behaviour of the labour movement and the trade union leadership.

The trade union bureaucracy sees their job as negotiators and they see themselves running the working class movement as the guardians of the trade union movement from what they see as alien ideas. They didn't want any of those "mad Trotskyists" like People's Democracy, they didn't want any of that. And that chimed with a lot of right-wing people in the trade union movement who didn't want the trade union movement lured into the struggle in the streets, and who believed that the movement should be led by themselves with all their experience of negotiating and selling out people right, left, and centre.

To give you an example of this, on the evening of Bloody Sunday, there was a special meeting of the Derry Trades Council called to discuss what to do about the situation in Derry—13 people had just been killed. Of those 13 people killed, 7 were members of trade unions, a

remarkable statistic given the fact that you didn't have that kind of proportion of trade union members in the general population. So, whatever the reason, Bloody Sunday hit the trade union movement hard. But when Derry Trades Council met to discuss this, at the end of the long meeting they passed a resolution "regretting the events in our city this afternoon" and wishing the wounded a speedy recovery. And this kind of response to state repression was repeated over and over again. The trade union movement didn't react strongly, if at all in some cases, to the introduction of internment. Who would look to them for leadership after that? They made themselves irrelevant in their pursuit of respectability. And the left is still suffering from that to this day.

The traditional left, as you might call it, failed the test of the civil rights movement and the response of the British state. This aspect of our recent history hasn't been adequately recorded or analysed. The trade union leadership, and the Communist Party, had a considerable presence in the civil rights movement, and were driving it forward according to their stages theory—democracy first, then you took on the state, then the class struggle for socialism. If you think of that perspective, and the way they saw the future, the key task was to reform Stormont. In fairness to the Communist Party, they had helped found the civil rights

movement in 1966. But once the war started, to put it in rather crude terms, the idea of fighting to democratise Stormont did not seem to meet the needs of people—it was not urgent enough to meet the needs of the young working class people whose politics were being shaped by the struggle against repression on the streets. The semi-abstract approach of the Communist Party of creating a democratic Northern Ireland, and thereby of the leadership of the civil rights movement because of their particular influence within it, didn't match people's experience on the ground.

There were some people who were breaking from that reformism and saying "look, the situation on the streets is such that we just can't persist" with the sort of stately, patient perspective of the Communist Party and others. And that is what also underlay the split between the Provisionals and Officials. That split was not contingent on an ideological break, it had to do with strategy in the here and now, and how you dealt with the British Army on your streets.

What about the forces of revolutionary left?

Yes, you also had a revolutionary left, that thought in terms of militant class struggle, who saw themselves in line with groups like the Black Panthers. Looking back on it, this existing left was swamped by events.

This revolutionary left wasn't bound together in one organisation. In that ideologically chaotic situation, there was a radical left inside the Official IRA; there was a radical left in the trade union movement; there was the student left associated with People's Democracy. So, there were fragments of a revolutionary left, that would sometimes merge, or interpenetrate, but it was very difficult to get a coherent line.

And I have to say that the influence of student radicalism was not positive it seems to me, or it was not only positive—there were problems with it: the idea of spontaneous upsurges without a political vehicle. There is dogmatism in Stalinism, there is a dogmatism in republicanism. There began to be a new, somewhat less coherent dogmatism around the student and revolutionary left—against the idea of organisation, of party organisation in particular, and against the idea that differences on the left should be argued through.

Of course, it's easy to see in retrospect, and as the years went by, it was easy to see where it had all gone wrong, but a lot of it was a product of the time. In retrospect, the absence of a single organisation of the revolutionary left was a major weakness. There was revolutionary organisation: scattered groups that sprung up

spontaneously in different places, often hooked into the civil rights movement or the student movement, but there was no single coherent organisation.

To put it in very basic terms, there weren't even weekly or monthly meetings of people trying to work out socialist strategy—there were different groups doing it in isolation, but no single organisation. And communication was much more difficult in those days: if you wanted to talk to someone in Belfast, you had to go to Belfast. Hardly anybody had phones, and phones were quite rightly seen as insecure, and we knew this because telephone operators told us so. And there was also the crisscrossing of loyalties with the different revolutionary factions in Britain. A lot of the political differences on the left in Britain, which ultimately had nothing to do with Ireland, would set up sort of rivalries that could sometimes become quite bitter. So that made for difficulties as well.

There was plenty of opportunity for little flurries of left wing militancy right across the North. What there wasn't was the emergence of a single, viable revolutionary organisation.

How does the IRA and Sinn Féin begin to move from a position of Armed Struggle to sitting in government at Stormont?

The Northern Catholics had a long history of campaigning for equality. What they wanted more than anything was the biggest boot off their necks, the British Army. At no time in history did a majority of Catholics in Northern Ireland vote for an armed struggle for a united Ireland. That's worth repeating, because its sometimes suggested that all Catholics in the North, angered by their treatment by the British, swept over into support for republicanism and thereafter wouldn't accept anything less than a united Ireland. It was never like that.

One of the main slogans in the early days of the civil rights movement was that "we want British rights for British citizens." I heard that said again and again. I remember Gerry Pitt, republican labour MP in Belfast, speaking outside the Guildhall in front of a very enthusiastic crowd and saying, "We want the same rights for the people of Derry as are enjoyed by the people in Doncaster; we want the same rights for the people of Belfast as are enjoyed by the people in Birmingham." Loud cheer! But this was a very low bar, wasn't it? Birmingham wasn't exactly a social paradise. Saying we want the same rights for Belfast as Birmingham was a very low bar, and you could get quite respectable types in Britain to agree to this proposition. But it was very popular. It took

the response of the Unionist state to change that.

During the H-Block campaign, I remember Gerry Adams saying that only people who supported armed struggle could lead the civil rights movement or the H-Block campaign. But he had to drop that position because the vast majority of ordinary people didn't see it like that. And I think you can see the IRA's switch to a "peace strategy" and to the abandonment of armed struggle even around then. This switch is presented, particularly by Sinn Féin, as the IRA leadership pushing people along with them and away from the path of armed struggle. And they still say it today: that it was the courageous leadership of Adams and McGuinness who led people on the path of peace. This is absolute nonsense. There is no basis for this. What happened is that the IRA brought itself into alignment with where the people already were. That's the key to understanding the peace process and how people who said that "the only language the Brits understand is bombs and bullets" were later saying that we have to work within the confines of the existing constitutional arrangements.

And the Brits loved that. There's nothing an imperialist ruling class loves better than hearing their opponents proclaiming "we want peace." Under Blair, Sinn Féin very

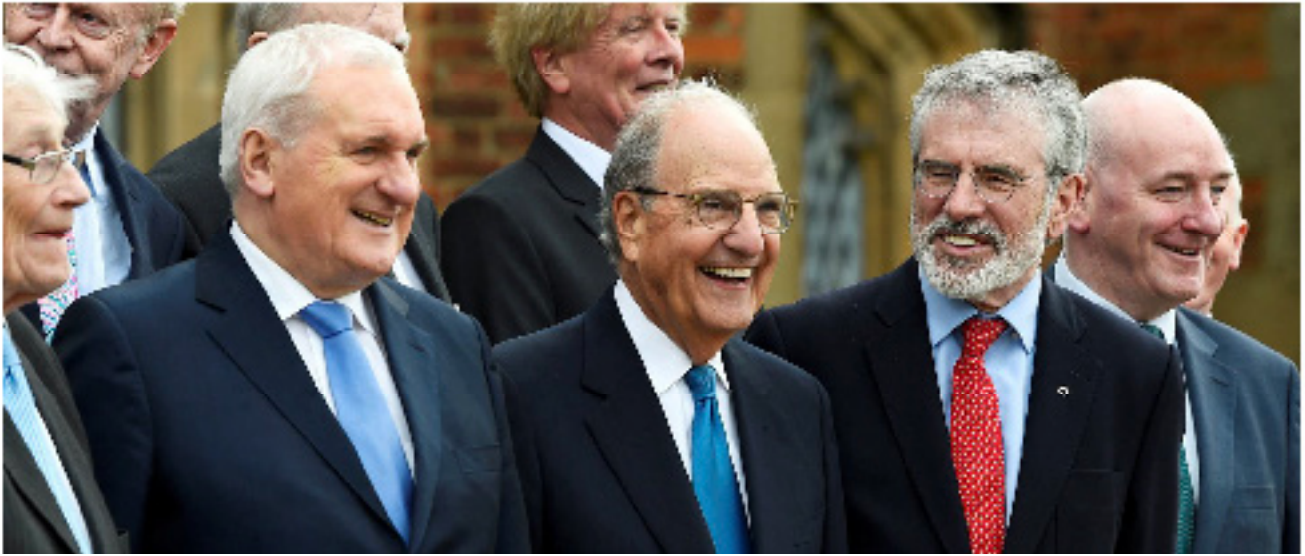
quickly became the British establishment's favourite party because they were going in the right direction as they saw it. Mark Durkan, former SDLP deputy leader at the time of John Hume, described to me how in a meeting with Tony Blair just after he was elected in 1997, he complained to Blair how disappointed he was that the British government was favouring the IRA in negotiations over the SDLP. And Mark said Blair looked up from his desk and replied, "well Mark, the thing is you don't have any guns." Blair and his people loved the whiff of cordite, they liked the sense of danger—they'd far rather be talking to Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly than boring people like Paddy Devlin and John Hume. And that helped ease the way into them accepting that they had to develop a position that helped to bring the IRA into the fold.

If you think back on it, Unionists and the British government were concerned when the Clinton government gave Gerry Adams a visa to come to the US. In reality, that was part of a process to tame the IRA and Irish republicanism and to lure it into constitutional politics. So, there were different cynical motives. The Blairites like to present it now as them all having a terribly great commitment to peace—that didn't apply in the Balkans or the Middle East, though, did it?

In 1998 the Belfast Agreement was signed. Can you explain the context?

People wanted peace. Peace was very popular. And the Belfast Agreement was popular, no question about that, because it promised peace and prosperity. And also, people were just pissed off and angered about people being killed and wounded in these pointless fucking shootings and bombings that had no obvious political goal, in this kind of grinding low-level war. Peace was preferable to that.

After the signing of the Belfast Agreement, the first big development in Derry, to symbolise this new era of peace and prosperity, was a gathering, on the steps of the Guildhall, with John Hume and David Trimble standing shoulder to shoulder, to announce that American arms manufacturer Raytheon would be opening up a factory in Derry. John Hume was particularly enthusiastic about this, and the way he saw it, this was good for the development of Derry—as it would bring jobs to an area long-blighted by mass unemployment. I remember standing with Dermie McClenaghan and looking at one another with bewilderment and saying "to cement the peace we will get an arms company?" There you had the contradictions between the narrow interests of local politics and the broader interests of the international working class.



You were a firm supporter of peace, but you were a critic of the Belfast Agreement itself. Can you explain why?

The strategy adopted by all architects of the Agreement—and this goes for George Mitchell and the Americans, Blair and the British, Bertie Ahern and the other flotsam and jetsam opportunists of bourgeois politics involved—was that peace for them simply meant peace between Catholics and Protestants. Now of course there is a way in which that makes sense. But from a socialist point of view, that was an inadequate way of looking at things. Because what it amounted to was getting all the Protestants together in a Unionist bloc, all the Catholics in a Nationalist bloc, and then getting them to negotiate, supervised by the Americans and the British. The problem with that was you in effect set up two separate electorates, to elect a champion for the Catholics/

Nationalists and to elect a champion for the Protestants/Unionists. If that is the basis for moving forward, then it follows, that any abrasion at the interface between the Catholic representatives and Protestant representatives has the capacity to spark off a new confrontation. Therein lies the instability of the Good Friday arrangements.

All of us make predictions in politics. I've made plenty of them, and many of them I got wrong. But one of the things I got right was on the eve of the Agreement I wrote that the Agreement is pre-programmed to deadlock and the "possibility of abrasion at the interfaces generating new conflagration will be a permanent feature of the system." And it turned out to be true. Of course, no one wanted to see that—including the British and American establishments and the Unionist and Nationalist parties—but it

was built on an internal contradiction from the start.

I believe you coined the phrase that the Agreement was built on “institutionalised sectarianism.” Is this correct?

Yes. And that’s not so much an analysis as a statement of fact. The whole set up at Stormont was based on the idea that you had to have a majority of Protestants and a majority of Catholics to form an Executive, and that you had to have parallel consensus or a weighted majority. And that’s why until very recently you had no room for a third force in politics. The fact that the Agreement set up politics, formally based and written down, on balancing the competing interests of Catholic/Nationalist and Protestant/Unionist, means that it’s always better that you have a militant leading your tribe. If its two tribes competing, you don’t want someone who is namby-pamby representing your community against the other, and thus, the SDLP and the UUP have been marginalised. In effect, they have been marginalised by the machine that they set in motion in the Belfast Agreement, which favoured people who stood at the extremes, or who stood for a more strident expression of the particular communal interests of one side or the other.

Now I don’t think you needed any great degree of foresight to see this. I know others, including commentators and historians who agreed with me. But to say it at the time, to say “this won’t work”, was a very difficult thing to do. So, in all sorts of ways the Belfast Agreement didn’t meet the needs of the moment. But it’s very difficult in that situation to build an alternative because people would ask you, “what’s your position on the Agreement, on improving it, or safeguarding it?” And to say, we think the Agreement is wrong, that we don’t think there is a basis for a lasting peace here, and specifically a lasting peace that will deliver for the working class—that was quite a difficult argument to make. Indeed, it’s still a difficult argument to make. As socialists, we take an independent view, based on class, and not simply on having a position between Orange and Green.

I think I have been proven right in that regard, but at the time, to say the Agreement won’t work was the least popular thing I’ve ever had to say in Derry. But then again, all these years later, here we are: where is the happy and prosperous Northern Ireland with everyone living in peace and harmony? It hasn’t arrived.

What about the DUP? They initially opposed the Agreement, but less than a decade later were in government with Sinn Féin?

Well of course, the DUP in its first iteration saw no reason for an Agreement and thought that what they were dealing with was just a gang of terrorists misrepresenting themselves as the authentic leaders of their community. The DUP opposed reform in order to maintain their position that there was no need for change and what was needed was the strengthening and reinforcement of the existing constitutional arrangements with Britain. But by saying that, the DUP put itself outside the emerging consensus.

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The DUP knew that to win and maintain a majority of the Protestant working class, and certainly to win the allegiance of the dainty Protestant middle class, that they couldn't just go along and say "kill the fenians". Just as Sinn Féin's move from armed struggle to constitutional politics can be seen as them adapting themselves to the current consciousness and ideas of the Catholic working class, you can also meaningfully see the switch of the DUP's from one of "destroy the Agreement" to sitting in government with Sinn Féin in the same way. They had to moderate their position over time.

The conventional history would have it, that after a protracted period of conflict, eventually leaders emerged—Paisley on one side, McGuinness on the other—and they sat down and chuckled together and then brought the people together.

Absolutely not. The reason why McGuinness and Paisley sat down together is that they both knew that the future of their political parties and their political philosophies depended not on fighting with one another, but peaceful competition between the two. They relied on each other in a distorted way. Paisley could claim, of course, that a peaceful way forward would involve an acceptance by nationalists that the constitutional situation would remain exactly as it was.

The Belfast Agreement was based on the freezing of differences. What it promised was war by other means—not to overcome the conflict, but to freeze it. And that didn't work out, partly because then, as now, not everyone can be fitted into the neat categories of Nationalist and Unionist.

Today the limitations of the communal structure set up by the Agreement are clear to see. What do you see as the alternative for working class people?

It seems to me, what we have to say is that the unity of working class people cannot take place within the contours and confines of the Belfast Agreement—it cannot be

done, because of the way it is established on the basis of the “two communities.” It seems to me, therefore, that if we don’t rise up together then we are in trouble. We need the whole working class to rise up together. And then we have to have a political vehicle that is going to carry that forward.

We have to ask ourselves, then, what are the conditions in which we will have people coming together and fighting together for a progressive outcome. If you look back on the history of this place since partition, and ask yourself the question: on what occasions have people come together across the sectarian barrier to fight together. Has this ever happened? When did it happen? Why did it happen when it happened?

These are the questions we must ask, and there is no difficulty in answering them. When did Catholics and Protestants come together in common array: in 1907 with Larkin, in 1911 with Connolly, in 1932 with the Outdoor Relief Riots, and in many other smaller campaigns and struggles ever since. In all of these, we have seen thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of Catholics and Protestants linking arms to seek a progressive outcome.

Every now and again there has been a vibrant unity of Catholic and Protestant workers. It is not true that we have been

forever divided. Some people say “well it’s always been like that”—that there is this hatred, handed down by history into relations between Catholics and

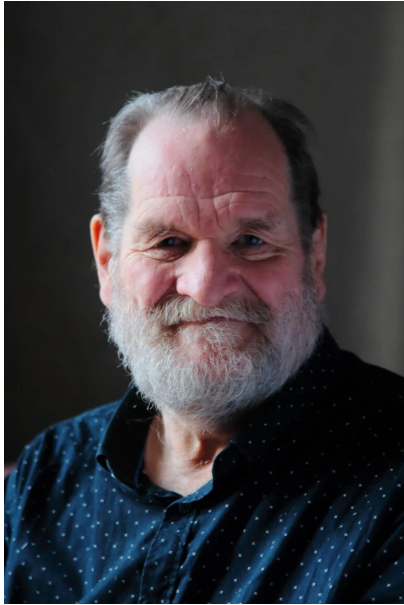
Protestants. This is not true. It has never been true. But what is true, is that without a different political pole of attraction, things will work out that way.

And if you identify the conditions and the occasions when Catholic and Protestant workers united, you can better map out a future favourable to working class people. And it’s not difficult to do. In the health service demonstrations and strikes, for example, we have seen tens of thousands of people standing together in the midst of all the worries and expressions of despair about sectarianism in the North. There is nothing new or remarkable about that.

Some people think working class unity is a distant aspiration—on the contrary, it has happened over and over again. Therein lies the key to building real, revolutionary working class politics. It’s not that it will happen automatically. It’s that unless you begin with that understanding you will find it very difficult to build a working class movement. Working class unity sounds very grand and distant—in fact it’s not grand, it’s dead simple, and it’s already happening.

A Tribute to John Molyneux

Mary Smith



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John Molyneux, founder, and editor of this journal, died suddenly on December 10, 2022. It would be hard to overstate how profound is his loss. Each generation of revolutionary Marxists throws up its own greats; he was one of the '68ers', a label he wore with pride. It was the generation radicalised by the anti-Vietnam War movement; when student protestors faced down mounted riot police in Trafalgar Square, and Paris erupted in a revolt that saw ten million workers occupy their factories. John was there, both in Paris and in London, events that were formative in his development as an activist, theoretician, and party builder.

John went on to become a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, author of a dozen books, countless pamphlets, articles, and chapters. An obituary in *Rebel News*, by Seán Mitchell, outlines some of the more colourful elements of John's early life (a 'professional' poker player at 16 years of age!!), and traces aspects of his intellectual development, his writing, and his activism.¹ John remained a proud member of the International Socialist Tendency all his life.

In 2010, John retired from his job as lecturer in the Fine Arts Department of Portsmouth University and came to live with me in Dublin. Although he had enjoyed working with his students, he embraced his newfound freedom from the time-constraints of making a living, and, revolutionary activist to his bones, got stuck in right away. It's mostly about his time in Dublin that this short piece, in memory of John, is written.

John made the most of his new opportunity to write on a whole raft of issues, theoretical and topical, in his new surroundings. He wrote in a simple, direct, yet elegant style, making complicated ideas clear and accessible to 'ordinary' people.

He was a very knowledgeable man, well read in philosophy, history, art, and literature, with a deep understanding of Marx and Marxism, its development and practice through Lenin and Luxemburg, Trotsky and Gramsci, and later Tony Cliff, whose theory of Soviet Russia as ‘state-capitalist’ grounded new generations of socialists. John’s talents were valued highly in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), shortly to become the Socialist Workers Network, and he soon became part of the leadership of the organisation. He edited the SWP newspaper and went on to establish the Irish Marxist Review (IMR) which he edited and contributed to, for over ten years.

John also used the IMR to encourage people who had never dreamed that they could, or should write, to do so. As editor, he provided a platform where emerging talent could publish alongside some of the great Marxist writers of our day – including the late, great, Mike Davis, John Bellamy Foster, and Dave Zirin. Ever the activist, John was also the IMR’s most committed and successful vendor! There were few political meetings, demos, or rallies where attendees were not accosted, in a friendly way, by John with his bag of books, inquiring “Have you got your copy of the new IMR yet?”.

John’s writing in Dublin of course went way beyond his work for the IMR. Within a short time, he had produced a series of excellent pamphlets in response to debates and events of the day: on the role of the media, on anarchism, environmentalism, racism, war, Stalinism. Published in 2012, “*An introduction to Marxist philosophy: The Point is to Change It*” was an extraordinarily concise book through which John used his vast knowledge and skill to demystify and explain challenging philosophical concepts, demonstrating hands down the supremacy of revolutionary Marxist theory, based on practice.

His book ‘*Lenin for Today*’ published in 2017, took a fresh approach to the long-running debate of ‘reform versus revolution’ relating to dashed hopes in SYRIZA, Podemos, the Occupy movement, and urging anew, the dialectical approach of Lenin to advance the struggle to change the world. He enjoyed getting time to write about art, one of his great loves. ‘*The Dialectics of Art*’, published in 2020, is a joy to read, even if you don’t fully ‘get’ art, or agree with his way of defining it, you’ll never look at Michelangelo’s David in the same way again.

But John was not just a writer and theoretician of high standard; crucially, he *intervened* at every level. He was a regular on our local campaign stalls, dropped



leaflets, put up posters, addressed meetings of as few as four or rallies of thousands. He was an exceptionally fine speaker and polemicist – evidenced in many YouTube recordings.

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He was a founder member of United Against Racism (UAR), along with his dearest friend, Memet Uludag. UAR played a seminal role in building the movement leading to the biggest demo against racism and fascism in the history of the Irish State, when on February 18 a march estimated by the Irish Times as being 50,000 strong, chanted ‘Refugees are Welcome Here’, the whole length of Dublin’s O’Connell Street. John would have been chuffed.

The emergence of People Before Profit was to John, the most significant development on the left in a long time, and he played a vital role in shaping its strategy for real change in the Irish political landscape. But as a true Marxist he never neglected his

duty as an internationalist. He saw the issue of climate change as being of supreme importance and he founded and set about building the Global Eco-socialist Network, (GEN) linking activists from all five continents in a network that sought to link the struggle for climate justice with the struggle for socialism.

The outpouring of grief at the news on John’s untimely death reverberated around the world. Tributes and obituaries were posted on social media sites and published in many languages. Memet Uludag created a website where many of these can be seen.²

John has been described as a gentle giant, and that was true, with a generosity and kindness of spirit, always ready to champion the oppressed or just help someone down on their luck. He was also an iron-hard Bolshevik in his soul, uncompromising in his principles and fully

committed to the cause of international socialism. In the class struggle it's often said that 'books are weapons', and if that's so, then John Molyneux has left us a formidable arsenal. He has also left so many of us with fond and proud memories that we will cherish.

We'll miss him, and we'll honour him by carrying on the struggle to 'cleanse the world of evil, oppression and violence' (to paraphrase Trotsky – his hero).

And we'll miss his big, gentle embrace.

Mary Smith

¹ Seán Mitchell. 2022. Marxism with Modesty. Rebel News @ <http://www.rebelnews.ie/2022/12/14/marxism-with-modesty-john-molyneux-1948-2022/>.

² These can be found @ <http://www.rememberingjohnmolyneux.info>.

Apocalypse Now!

Climate change, capitalism and revolution (November 2019)

John Molyneux

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In the year since the publication in October 2018 of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) Report warning that the world has 12 years, that is until 2030, in which to limit global warming to a 1.5 °C increase, the impending apocalypse of catastrophic climate breakdown has moved dramatically from future tense to present tense.

It is difficult to find the words adequately to express either the scale of the crisis that is upon us or its urgency. This is because we are entering a situation for which there is no historical precedent or analogy. It is not like the Black Death or similar to the First or Second World Wars. Nor is it the same as a nuclear holocaust. And it hasn't happened yet, so none of us know concretely what it will be like or exactly how it is going to unfold. Nor will the climate crisis be a single event or even a series of events with some kind of time limit. Rather it will be a multitude of interacting events and processes which may extend indefinitely over decades or even centuries.

But what we do know is that both the rapidly accumulating scientific evidence and the evidence of events around the world show that climate change is developing, and climate catastrophe is hurtling towards us at an even faster rate than the IPCC report predicted. [1] We know that July 2019 was the hottest month the world has experienced since records began. The European Union's Copernicus

Climate Change Programme, which analyses temperature data from around the planet, said that July, was around 0.56 °C warmer than the global average temperature between 1981 and 2010. That's slightly hotter than July 2016, when the world was in the throes of one of the strongest El Nino events on record. [2] We know that Canada and the far north are warming at twice or more the rate of more southerly latitudes. This is producing a much faster melting of the ice caps, glaciers and permafrost (soil, rock or sediment that is frozen for more than two consecutive years) than was expected. The following quotes give a sense of the scale and urgency of the global melt:

'Greenland's massive ice sheet may have melted by a record amount this year, scientists have warned.' [3]

'During this year alone, it lost enough ice to raise the average global sea level by more than a millimetre. Researchers say they're "astounded" by the acceleration in melting and fear for the future of cities on coasts around the world. One glacier in southern Greenland has thinned by as much as 100 metres since I last filmed on it back in 2004.' [4]

And

'Permafrost at outposts in the Canadian Arctic [4a] is thawing 70 years earlier than predicted, an expedition has discovered, in the latest sign that the global climate

crisis is accelerating even faster than scientists had feared. A team from the University of Alaska Fairbanks said they were astounded by how quickly a succession of unusually hot summers had destabilised the upper layers of giant subterranean ice blocks that had been frozen solid for millennia. “What we saw was amazing,” Vladimir Romanovsky, a professor of geophysics at the university, told Reuters. “It’s an indication that the climate is now warmer than at any time in the last 5,000 or more years.” [5]

The consequence of this is not just on polar bears and rising sea levels. It has an immediate effect in terms of intensifying the greenhouse effect. White ice reflects heat from the sun back into space. The uncovered dark ocean and land also absorb and retain this heat, so the shrinking of the ice caps further amplifies global warming. The melting of the permafrost releases into the atmosphere immense quantities of methane (a gas also produced by ruminating cattle) which is a far more deadly greenhouse gas than CO₂. Over a 20 year period it traps 84 times more heat than CO₂ and global concentrations of methane have already risen from 722 ppb (parts per billion) to 1,866 ppb; the highest ratio in 800,000 years.

Extreme Weather

Then there has been a succession of extreme weather events over the past 12 months. These include the huge fires in California; 50 °C temperatures in much of Australia; the catastrophic cyclones (Idai

and Kenneth) in Madagascar, Malawi and Tanzania (which claimed over 1,000 lives); major fires in Portugal and Northern Greece; fires across Alaska and Siberia; drought in Southern India with Chennai (Madras), a city of 7 million people, running out of water; flooding in Nepal (90 dead and 1 million displaced), Mumbai, Bihar, and Assam; flooding in Japan; a heat wave across Northern China; fires across Sweden; exceptionally high temperatures in July in Europe such as 38 °C in the UK, 41.8 °C in Belgium, 40.7 °C in the Netherlands (the first time ever over 40 °C in that country) and 42.6 °C in Paris. Even now, as I write, news is pouring in of the burning of the Amazon (along with fires in the world’s other great forest carbon sinks in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Congo) and the utter destruction of the Bahamas by Hurricane Dorian.

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What is more, there was also the extraordinary cold spell in America in January/February of this year in which semi-arctic conditions swept down into the heart of the USA in what was a ‘polar vortex’ with temperatures as low as –30 °C. The polar vortex is linked to climate change because rising temperatures in the Arctic affect the jet stream in the upper atmosphere driving cold winds south and drawing warm wind northward.

What makes these events so important is not just the dreadful immediate suffering they produce but the fact that it is in the form of extreme weather (rather than rising sea levels) that climate change is

going to have its main impact in the next five to ten to fifteen years, so they are very much the shape of things to come – this year, next year and the year after, not in 2050 or ‘by the end of the century’ as is so often said in the official discourse. Taken in the round this combination of scientific predictions and actual experience is alarming in the extreme and a number of very serious climate scientists are beginning to articulate this. James Anderson, a Harvard University professor of atmospheric chemistry best known for establishing that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) were damaging the Ozone Layer [5a], stated two years ago that: ‘The chance that there will be any permanent ice left in the Arctic after 2022 is essentially zero’, and argued that recovery from this will require ‘a World War Two type transformation of industry’ within ‘five years’. [6]

When considering the prospects we face, socialists also have to take into account not only the direct natural consequences of the heatwaves, droughts, fires, storms and floods that are on their way but also their likely social and political consequences.

First, it is absolutely unavoidable that those who will suffer most, by a long way, from all of these climate disasters will be the poor and deprived, above all the poor of the global south where temperatures are already high, housing is ramshackle, health and emergency services weakest and welfare provision almost non-existent. To experience drought or flooding in India or Bangladesh, where people are already dying on the streets in ‘normal’ times, is quite different from experiencing it in

Western Europe. But the same will also apply, if not to the same extent, to the poor and the working people of even the most advanced capitalist countries. All the soaring inequalities that characterise our neoliberal capitalist society will inevitably be reflected in circumstances of climate breakdown.

Second, we know from abundant experience in the past that the way our rulers respond to so-called ‘natural disasters’ is through a combination of crocodile tears (for a very short while), callous indifference and repression. This pattern has repeated itself through the Bush Administration’s response to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, to Superstorm Sandy in 2012 under Obama and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and Dominica in 2017. In all of these cases all sorts of pledges of aid and reconstruction were made in the immediate aftermath of disaster only for them to slip away into abandonment when it came to delivery.

Years later, people who lost their homes and everything in them were still unable to return. The case of Hurricane Maria was particularly atrocious. Initially, the death toll in Puerto Rico was officially claimed to be 64. A year later it was admitted to be 2,975 [7] and many critics argue that it was really much higher. Bitterness at the appalling response to the hurricane, by both the Trump administration and the local governor, was a significant factor in the great revolt of the Puerto Rican people earlier this year. On a lesser scale, similar scenarios were played out over the Grenfell

Fire and in relation to flood victims in Ireland.

Third, there is the dreadful fact that accelerating climate change is destroying food production, increasing desertification in the hotter regions of the earth and is going to render increasing areas of the planet virtually uninhabitable. If global warming exceeds 2 °C or heads towards 3 °C, for which it is on course at present, this will apply to southwest North America, North Africa, large parts of southern Africa and Australia while major expansions of semi-arid regions will occur over the north side of the Mediterranean, southern Africa, and North and South America. Climate model simulations also suggest that, alongside droughts, rainfall, when it does occur, will be more intense for almost the entire world (we are already seeing this in places) and this will increase soil erosion. [8] The effect of all this, as night follows day, will be a huge increase in the numbers of climate refugees.

Climate refugees already exist, of course, but the fact that this is not an ‘officially’ recognised category and that an exact definition is difficult to arrive at [9] means that estimates of numbers vary greatly and are to some extent arbitrary. Thus the *Climate Migration* website tells us: ‘For example we know that last year 24 million people were displaced by weather-related disasters like floods and hurricanes.’ [10] while the *Migration Data Portal* says: ‘In 2018, 17.2 million people in 144 countries and territories were newly displaced in the context of disasters within their own country’, and that: ‘In 2018, displacement

has been caused primarily by extreme weather events, especially storms (9.3 million) and cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons (7.9 million). Particularly devastating were the southwest monsoons in India and Typhoon Mangkhut in China and the Philippines’. [11]

Accurate prediction of future numbers of climate refugees is, therefore, inherently impossible, but it is clearly going to run, at least, into the hundreds of millions. And what we do know is how existing capitalist governments, rulers and politicians have responded to this situation. We know that one wing of the political spectrum (Trump, Orban, Salvini, Bolsonaro etc.) have responded by effectively saying: ‘Let them drown in the Mediterranean or die in the deserts!’ and by trying to legally enforce such racist inhumanity by criminalising aid to refugees and simultaneously using the crisis ideologically to grow and sustain far-right political movements.

We know that the so-called ‘centre’ and ‘mainstream’ of the spectrum (Macron, Obama, May, Varadkar etc.) and even many on the left, while using a less incendiary language, nonetheless, in practice, appease and capitulate to the far right in such a way as to strengthen the latter. In other words, we know that as the general climate crisis escalates so too will the danger of a fascist and barbarous ‘solution’ to it.

In concluding this section, I will simply say that, while all predictions about the speed of the process of climate breakdown and consequent deadlines, whether they are the IPCC’s 2030 or James Anderson’s five years, can only be best guesses: It is an unavoidable fact that this catastrophe is

hurtling towards us. It is also an unavoidable fact that neither the current global system, nor any significant component of it (for example any major government) has shown any sign of taking anything remotely close to the action necessary to avert the catastrophe. [12] Despite all the scientific reports, all the evidence of actual disasters, and all the green talk: global greenhouse emissions are still rising and in the end that is the fact that counts. In 2018 global greenhouse gas emissions reached an all-time record high of 37.1 billion tonnes with China's output up by 4.7%, the US up by 2.5% and India up by 6.3%. [13] In 2019, the UK national weather service, the Met Office, predicts there will be a further rise by 2.75 parts per million (ppm), among the highest annual rises in the 62 years since good records began. [14] Asleep or awake our rulers are walking us into the furnace.

Climate Change and Capitalism

In this article I will take for granted that 'we' – concerned citizens, activists, trade unionists, workers, young people and old, school students and college students – all of us together, should do everything we can to raise awareness about climate change and to build a movement against it. We have supported the 20 September school strike and will support future strikes; we will back Extinction Rebellion Week and every other similar resistance round the world. We will also back every piece of progressive legislation – like bans on fracking, declarations of climate emergencies or People Before Profit TD, Brid Smith's *Climate Emergency Measures*

Bill (which seeks to compel the Irish Government to cease granting licences for further fossil-fuel exploration and extraction). [15] We will fight for everything that gains us time, moves us in the right direction and pushes back the impending disaster or even sets an example to the rest of the world as to what has to be done. The only exception to this is those measures such as carbon taxes which violate the principle of just transition and, by penalising working class people, threaten to alienate them from the mass popular movement we need. We should campaign for free and expanded public transport; for retrofitting of homes; for huge afforestation programmes; for the redirection of agriculture away from cattle and beef production and for massive public investment in renewable energy (e.g. wind, solar and tidal power).

Having said all that, however, I also want to argue that in order to combat climate change, to prevent it becoming catastrophic and to deal with the effects of it that are already built into the system and will inevitably intensify in the coming years, it is essential for the anti-climate change movement to become anti-capitalist and indeed to end capitalism.

Capitalism drives and is linked to climate change at every level. There is an important historical argument that our economic dependence on fossil fuels came about not due to the availability of natural resources nor for technological reasons but because it suited the needs of capitalism. Andreas Malm in his important study *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* [16] has

shown that during the Industrial Revolution steam power based on coal was adopted in preference to waterpower because it facilitated capitalist exploitation. There is also the powerful argument, both scientific and political, that the origins of a new geological age, the Anthropocene, characterised by a total environmental crisis including climate change, corresponds to the immense global capitalist boom after the Second World War. [\[17\]](#) Hence the 'hockey stick' shaped graphs for so many natural and social phenomena ranging from CO₂ in the atmosphere to ocean acidification, urban population and international tourism. [\[18\]](#)

However, the angle from which I want to approach this issue is the simple question: why have our rulers, the world's governments and politicians left it so long to even begin seriously addressing the issue of climate change when it would have been so much easier to tackle it earlier? Here there are a number of parallels. What would happen to a doctor whose patient was diagnosed with cancer and who knowingly ignored the diagnosis, fobbing the patient off with paracetamol, until they were almost at death's door?

They would certainly be struck off and probably subject to criminal prosecution. Or what about a shipping company that had an ocean liner which they knew was not seaworthy and most likely would not make the Atlantic crossing for which it was scheduled, but nonetheless gambled on sending it out at the cost of two thousand lives? That company would be guilty at least of corporate manslaughter. These examples can be repeated for cars, planes,

bridges and so on. Yet the fact is that what our rulers have done regarding climate change has been worse than any of these in terms of its consequences for humanity and animal species. They have, already, guaranteed the death of millions of people and the extinction of thousands of species.

Let's be clear about how long they have known about the problem. The possibility of the greenhouse effect was first understood in 1896, by the Swedish scientist, Svante Arrhenius, but it was not considered practically significant. The fact that some global warming was actually occurring was first measured in the 1930s, but it was assumed to be on too minute a scale to worry about. This started to change in the 1950s with the work of Guy Stewart Callender and in the 1960s David Keeling demonstrated that human-generated greenhouse emissions were large enough to cause global warming. [\[19\]](#)

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By the late 1970s there was already a degree of scientific consensus on this. The simple fact that the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organisation and the UN Environment Programme, and issued its first report in 1990, testifies to the fact that every serious government and political leader has known about the problem for at least thirty years. In 1992 the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), at the Rio Earth Summit, committed states to reduce gas emissions 'based on the then scientific consensus'. Scientific evidence from Greenland ice cores meant by the end of the 1990s

scientists knew they were looking not just at gradual warming but the real possibility of rapid and catastrophic warming should certain thresholds or tipping points be crossed. [20] In other words, our so-called ‘world leaders’ and governments, almost without exception, have been knowingly gambling with the lives of hundreds of millions of people for decades. Their deep guilt is undeniable, but the question is why?

One answer might be that these politicians simply don’t give a damn – they care only about themselves, their careers and the pockets they can line. But even if this were true it wouldn’t explain why politicians and governments would not consider it in their own interest, politically as well as for their children, to do something serious about climate change in the same way that the British ruling class decided it was in their interest to abolish the slave trade in 1833 or the US government decided it had to abolish slavery in order to win the Civil War or, a century later, to pass civil rights legislation.

An answer to that might be that there have been no votes in tackling climate change because ‘people’ didn’t care about it. But people didn’t care because they didn’t understand it. This, of course, can be laid at the door of the media. The responsibility of the media is clear. For decades they colluded with corporate funded climate denial to treat climate change as just ‘a theory’ and invariably to ‘balance’ scientific testimony with climate scepticism. If they no longer do that (in Ireland and the UK, as opposed to the US and elsewhere) they still don’t treat climate change as a real

‘crisis’, like Brexit or an economic crash, but relegate it to the inside pages, and they still refuse to link ever-increasing extreme weather events to climate change.

However, the media is not a stand-alone independent force in this: a) the media is largely owned and controlled by people, like Rupert Murdoch and Denis O’Brien, who are an integral part of the ruling elites; b) the media, especially the news media, takes its cue to a huge extent from governments and leading politicians. All it would have required to get the media to change their agenda would have been a few concerted statements and appeals from ‘world leaders’. So, we are back to our question as to why those leaders have refused to do this.

The compelling answer is that tackling climate change consistently clashed with the interests and priorities of capitalism, the imperative of profit. At every stage, and still today, our leaders have found that even when they “sincerely” wanted to do what was necessary to avert climate breakdown this conflicted with the immediate needs of ‘the economy’ i.e. capitalism and they invariably chose the latter over the former. This applied whether it was Enda Kenny, George Bush, Bill Clinton or Barack Obama (never mind Donald Trump), Tony Blair, David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy, Emmanuel Macron, Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping.

Understanding this involves understanding not so much how climate change works as how capitalism works. [21] For capitalist businesses the profit imperative is not just a need for a reasonable ‘return’ (as they often claim) but a drive to maximise profit.

Nor is it just a matter of personal greed, an insatiable desire for more luxury cars, yachts or private jets. It is an objective pressure deriving from the very nature of the capitalist system – not just the ideology of neoliberalism – which dominates every enterprise and unit within it. This is because capitalism is based on competition in the market, ultimately the world market, and the measure of success in that competition is the amount of profit realised.

This operates at every level from the local corner shop to the giant multinational corporation. To put it concretely SPAR is competing with Centra, Volkswagen is competing with Toyota and General Motors, and ExxonMobile is competing with BP and Shell, and if they do not keep up in the race, the race for profit, they will go out of business and get taken over. Crucially – for responding to climate change – this operates not just at the level of states but also internationally between capitalist states, between the USA and China; Russia and the EU; Brazil and India and so on in an endless struggle of all against all.

At a national level this relentless competition is partially mitigated by the existence of the state (not just parliament but the civil service, judiciary, police, armed forces etc.). One of the functions of the capitalist state, along with repression, is to provide services and infrastructure (schools, hospitals, roads, transport etc.) required by the capitalist economy as a whole, which it may not be in the interests of private businesses to maintain. But no

such overarching authority exists at the international level. [22] Internationally each capitalist state acts on behalf of its own capitalist class in the global competition. Thus, not only each business but also each state is under an iron compulsion to grow its economy at a rate that matches its rivals.

The final piece in this capitalist jigsaw is the central role played by fossil-fuel and fossil fuel related corporations in the global capitalist economy. The likes of Shell, BP, ExxonMobile, Texaco, Toyota, Volkswagen and General Motors are among the biggest corporations in the world and they all exercise a huge influence on government. It should be remembered that US Vice President Dick Cheney, the brains behind George W. Bush, was an executive of the oil company, Halliburton and that Trump's first Secretary of State was Rex Tillerson, former CEO of ExxonMobile. But it should also be understood that the objective weight of these companies in the world economy gives them immense political leverage even without such direct personal influence.

As a result of these combined pressures the prioritisation of profit over the environment and over human life becomes second nature to both business executives and mainstream politicians and state officials. US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, is pleased the Arctic is melting. In May this year, with dollar-signs flashing in his eyes, he stated:

‘The Arctic is at the forefront of opportunity and abundance. It houses 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil, 30 percent of its undiscovered gas, an abundance of

uranium, rare earth minerals, gold, diamonds, and millions of square miles of untapped resources and fisheries galore. Steady reductions in sea ice are opening new passageways and new opportunities for trade. This could potentially slash the time it takes to travel between Asia and the West by as much as 20 days. Arctic sea lanes could become the 21st century Suez and Panama Canals. [23]

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The point here is not how outrageous but how normal this is. ‘They’ might not all say it so openly, but it is how the large majority of them think. It requires immense popular mobilisation, on a much greater scale than anything yet achieved by Extinction Rebellion or Fridays For Future or anybody else to force them to even contemplate any other way of operating and when that does happen their ‘change of heart’ is only temporary, to get the threat of the popular movement to go away before returning to profit-driven business-as-usual.

This is why capitalism and pro-capitalist politicians have done next to nothing to stop climate change; this is why they have been prepared to sacrifice millions of lives and millions of species and gamble with the future of the planet. [23a] That is what they have done for decades and, in many cases, for centuries, what they are still doing now and will continue to do in the future. And this doesn’t just mean they’re not doing enough; it means they are actively intervening to prevent serious action being taken, just as Leo Varadkar and Fine Gael did in Ireland by using

behind-the-scenes parliamentary manoeuvres to block Brid Smith’s *Climate Emergency Measures Bill*, and as Obama did at the Copenhagen Earth Summit in 2009 and Trump has done by pulling the US out of the 2015 Paris Accords. Trump’s statement on this summed it all up in a single sentence: ‘The Paris Accord will undermine our economy’.

This explanation of what has already happened in the immediate past provides us with the best guide as to what will happen in the immediate future. Even if, by some extraordinary and most unlikely miracle, substantial sections of the global business and political elite were to have a collective Damascene conversion to environmentalism, there would be no way, by their methods, they could turn around the immense oil tanker of the global economy in the very short time we have to avert disaster. This is why we need ‘System change not climate change’.

The Meaning of System Change

The slogan ‘System change not climate change’ is popular in the movement and that is a very good thing, but it is clear that it means different things to different people.

For some, and I would cite Irish, Green Party leader, Eamonn Ryan TD, as an example here, bringing about system change is largely about changing the collective ‘mind set’ and developing a new ‘narrative’. [24] According to this view, and I think that in a rather vague way this is quite widely shared in ‘green’ and environmentalist circles, capitalism is first

and foremost a set of attitudes and beliefs; attitudes and beliefs which can be altered by education and persuasion, even if that persuasion involves a significant amount of peaceful protest. What is involved is that the 'people' should be induced to move away from their acquisitiveness and obsession with consumption. Similarly, society should be persuaded to abandon its addiction to economic growth and its use of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as a key measure of national success.

This approach, well intentioned as it may be, gets the relationship between mindsets and social reality upside down. CEOs and business managers are not obsessed with profit maximisation because the idea arbitrarily dropped into their heads from the sky but because it is a daily necessity imposed on them by capitalist social relations. Capitalist politicians are not focused on economic growth because they were taught it at university, but because without growth capitalism goes into a downward spiral, a 'recession', and nation states that fail to grow decline and are eventually conquered or taken over.

The 'mindset' of capitalist economics which prevails from the Harvard Business School to the Economics Department at Trinity, from the Federal Reserve Bank in Washington to the ESRI, is not just a mistake; it represents a set of real material interests: the interests of the capitalist class. System change, therefore, requires not just changing attitudes but changing the material social relations which underlie them.

Another widespread view is that system change means a mix of government

initiatives from above and lifestyle changes in society so that gradually a sustainable eco-friendly form of capitalism will be arrived at. This idea should, of course, be tested in practice, in particular by demanding the necessary initiatives from governments e.g. keeping fossil fuels in the ground. It is always right to test the limits of the system. But it is very doubtful that this gradualist approach can work at all and it certainly isn't going to work quickly enough to meet the challenge we face. Moreover, it leaves the basic economic dynamic of the system – competitive production for profit – in place and that dynamic is inherently anti-ecological: it creates as Karl Marx, John Bellamy Foster and others have argued, a 'metabolic rift' between society and nature so that even if some time-gaining reforms are achieved (which is helpful but not guaranteed) all the fundamental problems will reassert themselves.

Real system change means transforming the basic way in which production is organised in our society. It means public ownership, not of every corner shop and small business, but of the main industries, services, banks and financial institutions and their operation according to democratic social planning. The democratic planning is not an afterthought or optional extra – without it public ownership gives you, as in Stalinist Russia, only state capitalism. [25] Only this breaks the competitive 'accumulation for accumulation's sake' logic of capitalism and makes possible large scale production to meet human needs which include a sustainable relationship with nature. The

word for this is socialism. Without socialism the march to ecocide and barbarism will continue.

Revolution

But how is socialism to be achieved? Unfortunately, socialism cannot be achieved by the normal methods of parliamentary democracy. I say unfortunately because it would be much simpler if it could; indeed, we would probably have many examples of socialism already since there have been many instances of the election of governments with socialist intentions. The problem is that parliament is essentially a talking shop, a facade for a fundamentally undemocratic system. The real centres of power in any capitalist society, whether it is the US, China or Ireland, lie outside parliament in the boardrooms of the banks and major industries and in the armed forces, the upper ranks of the civil service, the judiciary and the police and in the recesses of the deep state, none of which are in any way democratic.

Whenever socialist or even seriously reformist governments come to power these institutions mobilize their power to frustrate, block and eventually remove the government. [26] They would do the same with any seriously ecological government. The only way in which such a government could successfully be defended would be by mass mobilization from below, which went beyond the limits of normal parliamentary democracy to defeat the

bosses and the state; in other words, by revolutionary means.

The only way, in general, that real system change, real change to an environmentally sustainable society, can be achieved is by mass revolution. That means a combination of mass street demonstrations, mass strikes and widespread workplace occupations which breaks the power of the existing state and establishes a new form of democracy based on people's assemblies. [27] There is an obvious argument against this perspective: it runs 'There is no sign of your mass socialist revolution happening and we have no time; we need a solution to climate change NOW!' This argument was put to me when I first started to get involved in the climate issue about 18 years ago. It was a powerful argument then and remains a powerful argument today (only 18 years later and capitalism is no nearer solving the problem).

I would reply with two points. First, revolution is not, and should never be, counterposed to the immediate changes that are needed now: keep it in the ground, free public transport etc. I repeat we must fight for every immediate step forward we can get. Second, it is true that there is not an immediate prospect of national, let alone international socialist revolution, but the very fact of extreme climate crisis will generate the conditions that will make revolution possible.

First, the proliferation of extreme weather events around the world, together with accumulating scientific evidence, will make the need for system change clear to increasing numbers of people globally.

Second, the actual experience of those weather events will push people more and more in the direction of people power, collectivist responses to them in order to deal with them and prevent ordinary people being abandoned while the rich head for their gated communities in the hills. Third, the imminent prospect of climate catastrophe will increasingly provide a straightforward answer to what has long been a major objection to socialism and revolution: look how it ended in Russia! The truth is Marxists could produce endless explanations about what went wrong and how Stalinism was a result of material conditions not socialism as such, but most people who never read Trotsky or Tony Cliff or any of that were still turned against socialism by what happened in Russia (and China, and Eastern Europe and so on).

The point about extreme change is that it is likely to override all that with the proposition that at the very least socialism would be better than extinction. Fourth, the very global nature of the climate crisis will make the global spread of revolution, if a national breakthrough is achieved, more likely and more obviously necessary. Lastly, and this too will become more and more obvious as the climate crisis deepens, the alternative to socialist revolution will be fascist barbarism.

Endnotes

1. This is to be expected because the IPCC report derived its authority from the fact that it represented the consensus of many thousands of scientists worldwide and this built a certain conservatism into its conclusions.

2. El Niño events are characterized by warming of the ocean waters in the Pacific Ocean and have a pronounced warming effect on the Earth's average temperature. Though there was a weak El Niño in place during the first part of 2019, it is transitioning to a more neutral phase, making the extreme July temperatures even more alarming.

3. https://theconversation.com/climate-strikes-greta-thunberg-calls-for-system-change-not-climate-change-heres-what-that-could-look-like-112891?fbclid=IwAR0gKBwVotRv_C1l16kCO17H.

4. David Shukman, 2019, BBC Science Editor, *Climate change: Greenland's ice faces melting death sentence*; <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-49483580>.

4a. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/arctic/>.

5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/18/arctic-permafrost-canada-science-climate-crisis>.

5a. <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/full/10.1021/acs.jpca.5b11957?journalCode=jpcafh>.

6. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffmcmahon/2018/01/15/carbon-pollution-has-shoved-the-climate-backward-at-least-12-million-years-harvard-scientist-says/?fbclid=IwAR2TgKwARWsHgs6hc4>.

7. Lynch-Baldwin, Sarah; Begnaud, David (2018): [Hurricane Maria caused an estimated 2,975 deaths in Puerto Rico, new study finds](#), **CBS News**. Retrieved August 28, 2018.

8. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/explainer-desertification-and-the-role-of-climate-change/#targetText=Both%20natural%20variability%20in%20climate,become%20more%20prone%20to%20e>.

9. Is someone in Africa whose livelihood as a farmer is gradually destroyed by climate change and decides to try to reach Europe to obtain a better life a climate refugee or an 'economic migrant'? Is someone who flees a local war that broke out as a result of tensions over water shortages a climate or a war refugee or both?

10. <https://climatemigration.org.uk/climate-refugee-statistics/>.

11. <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/>

[environmental_migration_and_statistics#recent-trends](#).

12. For a critique of the Irish Government's *Climate Action Plan* see Eddie Conlon etc.

13. Damian Carrington, *Brutal news: global carbon emissions jump to all-time high in 2018*, **The Guardian**, 5/12/2018.

14. Damian Carrington, *Worrying rise in global CO2 forecast for 2019*, **The Guardian**, 25 January 2019.

15. This excellent Bill was actually passed by the Dáil (the Irish Parliament) but prevented from becoming law by backroom manoeuvring by the Fine Gael Government.

16. Andreas Malm, **Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Origins of Global Warming**, Verso, London 2016.

17. Ian Angus, **Facing the Anthropocene**, Monthly Review Press, New York 2016.

18. See above pp. 44–45.

19. Rudy M. Baum, *Future Calculations: The First Climate Change Believer*, **Distillations** 2, 2016, pp. 38–39.

20. Jonathan Neale, **Stop Global Warming- Change the World**, London 2008, pp. 17–18.

21. Many environmental activists have an excellent understanding of climate science but a poor understanding of capitalism. For

some socialists – hopefully declining in number – it is the other way round.

22. The idea that the United Nations is such an overarching international authority is a persistent liberal illusion.

23. See <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/06/politics/pompeo-sea-ice-arctic-council/index.html>.

23a. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/06/world/one-million-species-threatened-extinction-humans-scni-intl/index.html>.

24. I cite Eamonn Ryan here on the basis of having heard him speaking to this effect and using these expressions at several meetings. He clearly doesn't mean what I would argue for because he is willing, keen even, to go into coalition with Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil i.e. run capitalism.

25. As James Connolly put it 'Socialism properly implies above all things the co-operative control by the workers of the machinery of production; without this cooperative control the public ownership by the State is not Socialism – it is only State capitalism.' James Connolly, *The New Evangel – state monopoly versus socialism* in **The Workers Republic**, 1901. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/connolly/1901/evangel/stmonsoc.htm>. Many other Marxists such as Engels, C.L.R. James and Tony Cliff have argued the same point.

26. For a more thorough account of this experience see John Molyneux, *Understanding Left Reformism*, **Irish Marxist Review** 6, (2013). <http://www.irishmarxistreview.net>.

27. There is a vast literature on the nature, history and dynamics of revolution in the Marxist tradition e.g. Karl Marx, **The Civil War in France** (on the Paris Commune), V.I. Lenin, **The State and Revolution**, and L. Trotsky, **The History of the Russian Revolution**. On more recent revolutionary attempts Colin Barker (ed.), **Revolutionary Rehearsals**, London 1987, is very useful. The democratic popular assemblies referred to here are, in the Marxist tradition, usually referred to as 'soviets' (or workers' councils) after their role in the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

As well as being a dedicated revolutionary for more than 50 years, John Molyneux was a polymath. He made contributions to numerous areas of Marxist theory, including the role of the revolutionary party, an analysis of Leninism and powerful insights on religion and art. Among his many achievements, particularly when living in Ireland, was to foreground the importance of the climate crisis. In recognition of this we have decided to run *Apocalypse Now* as a tribute to our friend and comrade, John - The Editorial Board

Oil: A capitalist love story

Kieran Allen

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Crude oil is extracted from the ground or the seafloor and is the product of millions of years of ‘fossilised sunshine’. It is made up of different kinds of hydrocarbon molecules which vary in composition according to the different regions in which they are found. These differences are important in the refining process as they allow producers to segment crude oil into hydrocarbon fractions. The refined products range from petroleum gases which include propane and butane; to light-ends, which include petrol and aviation fuels; middle distillates which include kerosene and diesel; and heavy ends which include base oil and bitumen. All in all, a wide range of petroleum-based products that underpin a huge number of capitalist commodities.¹

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), about 15% of global oil is used for purposes other than energy or transport.² From the 1950s, many of the natural products that were used in production – such as wood, wool and rubber- were displaced by synthetics. The petrochemical industry arose to supply a new array of commodities based on plastics

and synthetic fibres. Think only of the clothing you wear and check the labels.

The sheer ubiquity of oil, ironically, helps to render it invisible. We barely think about it unless we are filling a car with petrol or looking for home heating oil in the winter. But alongside the living labour of the working classes, it forms the lifeblood of modern capitalism. When you hear discussions about oil, they often have a fetishistic character. Marx used this term to describe a way of thinking in which the characteristics of ‘inanimate things’ appear to have real powers to dominate our lives.

So, oil becomes something exclusively natural but also something immensely powerful – a scarce resource with powers to shape our lives and create conflicts over its control. Against this approach, Marx argued for dialectical thinking whereby any ‘thing’ is viewed from the set of social relations that actually give it, its power. The American Marxist, Matt Huber, has been to the fore in pioneering this way of analysing the role of oil in modern society. Instead of seeing it as an exclusively natural product with magical powers, he has analysed the shifting social relationships which have bestowed these powers on it overtime.³

His starting point is that oil must be extracted and refined by workers before it can be of any use to anyone. It does not arrive in cars or homes by itself but is the product of human labour harnessed by the drive for capitalist profit. This latter point is extremely important. Refineries, for example, produce carcinogens for both workers and local communities. In the infamous ‘Cancer Alley’, which stretches along the Mississippi River from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, there are over 200 petrochemical plants and refineries. The many poor people who live beside them have higher rates of cancer as a consequence, but this is deemed a price worth paying for the oil executives who live far away from the pollution they create.

One of the worst failings of some in the environmental movement is to blot these workers and communities out of the picture and to think only of how enlightened people can live without dependence on oil. In reality, oil workers and the communities which live nearby must be part of any solution which imagines a world beyond oil dependency. In one of the most celebrated books on the political economy of oil, Timothy Mitchell argues that oil workers do not play the same role in pushing for political change as

coal miners in the past.⁴ This, however, is an overly mechanical argument. It is true that refineries are sometimes automated and require fewer workers, thus diminishing the capacity of workers to organize. But where oil workers are concentrated together, they often play a hugely progressive role. Oil workers played a pivotal role in the Iranian revolution of 1978-9 which deposed the Shah for example. Oil workers in Baku in the Caucasus participated in the Russian Revolution. And one of the most militant strikes in Ireland in the late 1960s was the oil tanker drivers.

Peak oil

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A popular example of fetishistic thinking is the theory of ‘peak oil’. On March 7, 1956, geologist M. King Hubbert presented a research paper which claimed that ‘on the basis of the present estimates of the ultimate reserves of world petroleum and natural gas, it appears that the culmination of world production of these products should occur within a half a century.’⁵ Hubbert justified this claim by asserting that peak oil would occur around the year 2000, when the world would be producing 12.5 billion barrels of oil annually – thereafter it was predicted to decline. Hence peak oil would inevitably be reached. King Hubbert was the chief

consultant on general geology for Shell Oil and his 'end of oil' paper was presented to the Texas meeting of the American Petroleum Institute.⁶ That alone should have cast some suspicion on his thesis, especially as some oil companies began to use this talk of scarcity as a way of increasing prices. The problem with the theory, however, went far beyond the affiliations of its author. By viewing oil exclusively as a 'thing' divorced from the social relations which gave it power, King Hubbert had assumed that there were strictly defined limits of reserves. Yet oil discovery and production have always been driven by an endless search for profit. And what determined that profit was not simply the difficulties associated with extraction in the 1950's, but the price the commodity could command on global markets into the future. What was 'unfeasible' an 'uneconomic' in one decade, became feasible and economic when technologies improved, making vast new reserves 'economically available'. Indeed, the problem turned out not to be too little oil but too much of it – at least from the perspective of climate change and global warming. King Hubbert also abstracted from the geo-politics of oil which have always been important.

In 1973, for example, an oil embargo was launched by Arab states in opposition to Western support for Israel which triggered

a global recession. At that stage, the Middle East was producing much of America's oil and gas, but by 2018, the US had not only become energy independent, but it had also surpassed Saudi Arabia by producing 11 million barrels of crude oil per day.

What caused this change? At one level we can point to new technologies pioneered in America. New techniques meant that 30% of crude oil extraction now comes from offshore facilities. In the past, there appeared no possibility of extracting oil from shale rock, but hydraulic fracturing made this possible. Similarly, the use of steam injection techniques allowed for the extraction of bitumen from oil sands. These techniques have a very detrimental effect on the environment and on human health but in a capitalist economy, driven by a relentless pursuit of profit, this is not a factor that causes undue concern. Fracking, for example, combines the use of toxic chemicals with huge amounts of water. It releases methane, a greenhouse gas that traps 25 times more heat than carbon dioxide. But when we speak of 'new technologies' we are only skimming the surface. Technologies require investment in both research and development.

Whether or not a corporation decides to invest depends on the expected level of return. Invention does not normally result from the caprice of individual genius and even in those cases of accidental discovery

there is no guarantee that it becomes an applied technology if there is no prospect of profit. The basic technology of fracking has been around for some time. The first hydraulic fracturing experiment was conducted in 1947 in Kansas by a company called Stanolind. However, it was only when oil prices rose after the OPEC embargo of 1973, that it became commercially viable to develop the technique. In other words, when the possibility of higher profits arose, new technologies were developed, regardless of their effects on the environment.

This example should alert us to another aspect of the social relations that surround oil. As it is such a vital commodity for the functioning of modern capitalism, the corporations which produce oil and gas grow into massive oligopolies. From the 1930s to the 1970s, seven oil companies dominated oil production globally. Known as the Seven Sisters, these were the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now BP), Shell Oil, Standard Oil of California, Gulf Oil and Texaco (all three now part of Chevron), Standard Oil New Jersey and Standard Oil New York (ExxonMobil).⁷ These companies owned nearly all the oil in the Middle East. They colluded with each other to avoid price cutting and formed jointly owned companies to cement their co-operation. Crucially, they forged a close relationship with their respective states, principally

Britain and the US. When the Iranian government, led by Mohammad Mossadegh, nationalised the Iranian oil fields in 1953, the two countries worked together to help launch a coup against him. The moderate nationalist was replaced by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who negotiated the Consortium Agreement of 1954 which gave split ownership of Iranian oil production between Iran and the western companies.

Geo-political power manoeuvres

Here we see an important dynamic within capitalism that was identified by the Russian Bolshevik, Nikolai Bukharin. While capitalism may start out as a 'free market' where the state functions as a 'nightwatchman' patrolling its perimeter and protecting the rights of property, it does not remain static. Capital accumulates and as it does so, it centralises and concentrates into major corporations in oligopolistic markets. The growth of oligopolies also means that capitalist competition shifts from price competition to an interlocking of large corporations with their respective states. The states with the biggest armies and geo-political influence can also help foster the biggest corporations. These states and their respective corporations then divide the world between them, establishing spheres

of influence where they get all manner of economic advantages. As one of the biggest sectors within global capitalism, oil illustrates this tendency most clearly.

However, while Bukharin pointed to the growing dependence of big capital with the state, he could not have foreseen the degree of state regulation and state ownership of oil itself. The weakening of American imperialism after its defeat in Vietnam alongside the longer-term decline of Britain and France as imperial powers created the space for 'resource nationalism'. This refers to how countries formed state companies to take over the ownership of oil. Today multinational oil companies produce just 10% of the world's oil and gas reserves. State-owned companies now control more than 75% of all crude oil production.⁸ However state ownership does not mean that capitalist control over oil has been weakened. Capitalism is defined primarily as a system of competitive accumulation via profit and state-owned companies operate in the same context. Capitalist dynamics are evident in the state-owned oil companies in a host of ways. Firstly, they only return a small proportion of their earnings to the public purse. An IMF survey in 2015, found that the average state-owned company returned only 17% of its gross earnings to their respective states.⁹ Secondly, they are often quite secretive in their operations.

This reflects the fact that their primary purpose is not to benefit citizens but to function like any other capitalist company. Saudi Aramco, for example, is the biggest oil company in the world, but reveals very little about its internal financial arrangements. Third, the state-owned oil companies engage in extensive borrowing, and this brings them into an entanglement with the financial markets. Since the Paris agreement on climate change, 60 banks have poured \$5.5 trillion into fossil fuels.¹⁰ The banks know the difference between rhetoric and reality and show no interest in stopping climate change. Even if oil executives were socially conscious, the banks impose a logic of accumulation on these companies. Interestingly, the banks do not differentiate between state owned and private oil companies. In fact, they regard state owned as probably a safer bet for debt recovery as states can call on the public finances.

The shift to majority state owned oil companies has not lessened capitalist competition but taken it to a new level. This is evident in both price regulation and the use of military muscle to gain economic advantage. Conversely, the possession of oil has conferred greater military advantages on states which in turn enables their corporations to gain more leverage. There has, thus, been a long historical pattern of state manoeuvring over oil. Somewhat

schematically, Helen Johnson has claimed that Britain's rise as an industrial power owed much to its possession of coal reserves. However, with the shift to oil fuelled ships and submarines, the advantage fell to America as the biggest oil producer in the world in the early twentieth century.¹¹ After WW1 was over, the British Foreign secretary pronounced that the 'Allied cause had floated to victory upon a wave of oil' and that 80 percent of that oil was provided by the United States.¹² By this he meant that Germany had failed to gain control of the oil reserves of the Ottoman Empire despite the role of Deutsche Bank in funding the construction of its railways. Nevertheless, the Allied victory opened the way for the dominance of American imperialism over its allies. The first step was US insistence that British and French debt for oil should be paid in dollars. The British Ambassador to the US wrote a memo where he claimed that the US would 'look for the opportunity to treat us as a vassal state, as long as the debt was not paid'.¹³

The British and French response to this threat was to make a new push into the Middle East to gain their own control over its oil reserves. After victory in WW1, Britain received a League of Nations mandate to administer Iraq and Palestine; secured its sphere of influence in Iran and gained control of the Persian Gulf. For a

period, it looked like it had found an alternative outlet for oil that was not dependent on the US. However, the US regained its supremacy over its older imperial rivals through two key events. First, Standard Oil of California won an exclusive contract for oil exploration in Saudi Arabia, which cut out the British and the French. The alliance of oil money, guns and Wahhabism was born. Second, the final denouement came when the US rescued Britain and France from their disastrous war against Nasser's Egypt in 1956 because he had dared to nationalise the Suez Canal. As Johnson points out, these developments meant that 'The age of oil would not allow for European power or a European continental empire'.¹⁴

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American dominance, however, was not permanently secured, because the dynamics of capitalism lead to a profound unevenness that uproots past economic supremacy. It is a system built on insecurity for both large corporations and states, as the rise of China and the collapse of Lehman Brothers will easily attest. Faced with the prospect of OPEC sanctions in 1973, the US President, Jimmy Carter, took measures to secure US dominance of energy supplies over the longer term. First, he encouraged fracking as a means of making the US energy independent. Then, he proclaimed in 1980 that the US would use military power to defend its interests in

the Persian Gulf. As the years went by, this morphed into a US strategy to gain a choke hold over the oil supplies of its economic rivals, culminating most dramatically in the Gulf Wars. The Chinese leadership were more than aware of this project and defined it as their 'Malacca dilemma'. By this, they meant that the US could block Chinese oil imports through the narrow waters of the Strait of Malacca which connects the Indian and Pacific oceans. It drove them to reach an agreement with Moscow to build an Eastern Siberian-Pacific Ocean pipeline and to seek more land-based oil supplies. US efforts at creating a chokehold were thus somewhat subverted, but they are only one element of the wider US strategy.

Its other aim has been to cut European dependence on Russian oil and gas and substitute it with a dependence on US companies or at the very least, non-Russian or Iranian companies. With the breakup of the USSR, there was a race to gain control of the energy reserves in the Caspian Sea. One result today has been the eventual construction of the Trans Caspian Gas Pipeline which brings supplies from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to European Union member countries, circumventing both Russia and Iran. The Atlantic Council, which 'galvanises support for US leadership in the world', is quite

explicit about its aim, stating it is "a strategic project for the United States, Europe, and the Caspian and South Caucasus states. It will counterbalance Chinese and Russian influence in the Caspian Sea region".¹⁵

One aspect of the Ukrainian war which rarely gets public attention is how the US is using it to finally achieve its ambition to cut Europe off from Russian gas and oil supplies. This had been a long-standing bone of contention between the US and its European allies.

In 1970, Germany concluded its first major agreement with Russia to supply its energy needs. By 2020, Russia was supplying 30% of Germany's oil and half of its natural gas.¹⁶ Yet the war in Ukraine has changed all that. Under US pressure, Germany began weaning itself off Russian energy supplies. The blowing up of the Nord Stream pipeline seems to have completed a process that had been undertaken voluntarily by the Germans when they moved against Russian supplies. The promise that Germany and Europe more generally will now be supplied with US fracked gas via LNG terminals must be regarded as one of the crowning achievements of US foreign policy.

The hegemony that the US has gained over its European allies may or may not last as there are no guarantees in a highly

unstable world. Ironically, however, there is one area where it does not have a full grip: its long term 'friendship' with Saudi Arabia (SA). The US treats SA like a client state, but it is not able to fully control this sub-imperialist power. Saudi Arabia has pressed on with its invasion of Yemen and then when it ran into difficulties reached a détente with its arch enemy, Iran, in a deal brokered by the Chinese. This is by no means the first time it has failed to do the bidding of the US. Back in 2016, the Saudis' formed a new relationship with Russia by creating OPEC+, a cartel to keep oil prices high. Their motivation was their hostility to the new energy independence of the US.

All of these complex manoeuvres demonstrate two things. First, we live in a highly unstable world where the big imperialist powers seek to carve out 'spheres of influence' through the interaction of military prowess and state power more generally. They seek to intimidate, blackmail, and threaten each other's future. Yet none has complete control. The fable of a unipolar world, where there is an end to history, that was proclaimed after the fall of the USSR, is no longer repeated. Instead, we find former client states develop their own ambitions and pursue them without the agreement of

their hegemons. Far from this 'diversity' leading to a more peaceful world, it has created a highly unstable and dangerous world.

Second, there is still a struggle over oil and future oil supplies. It remains the primary natural resource that is central to the generation of profit and military power. Competition for oil is so intense that states will devise plans to re-route pipelines away from land controlled by their rivals. Moreover, the large oil multi-nationals rank among the biggest companies in global capitalism, with Exxon and Shell in the top ten and forming close relationships with their respective states. In the US, Trump nominated ExxonMobil CEO, Rex Tillerson, as Secretary of State and Biden holds regular meetings with the oil executives. Even where oil companies are state run, they function like their private counterparts, driven by an insane need to accumulate for accumulation's sake. In other words, oil remains the life blood of the global capitalist system. While the prospect, therefore, of a fossil free capitalism is a theoretical possibility, the chances of it occurring are virtually nil.

Fossil Capitalism

In 1988, James Hansen, a NASA climate scientist first gave evidence to the US Senate about climate change caused by human activity. The same year, the United Nations established the first Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It issued its first report two years later and in 1992 the earth summit in Rio agreed that humanity faced a major problem with carbon emissions. Yet despite some minor fluctuations the trend to increased emissions -and higher temperatures -has continued, as the chart below indicates.

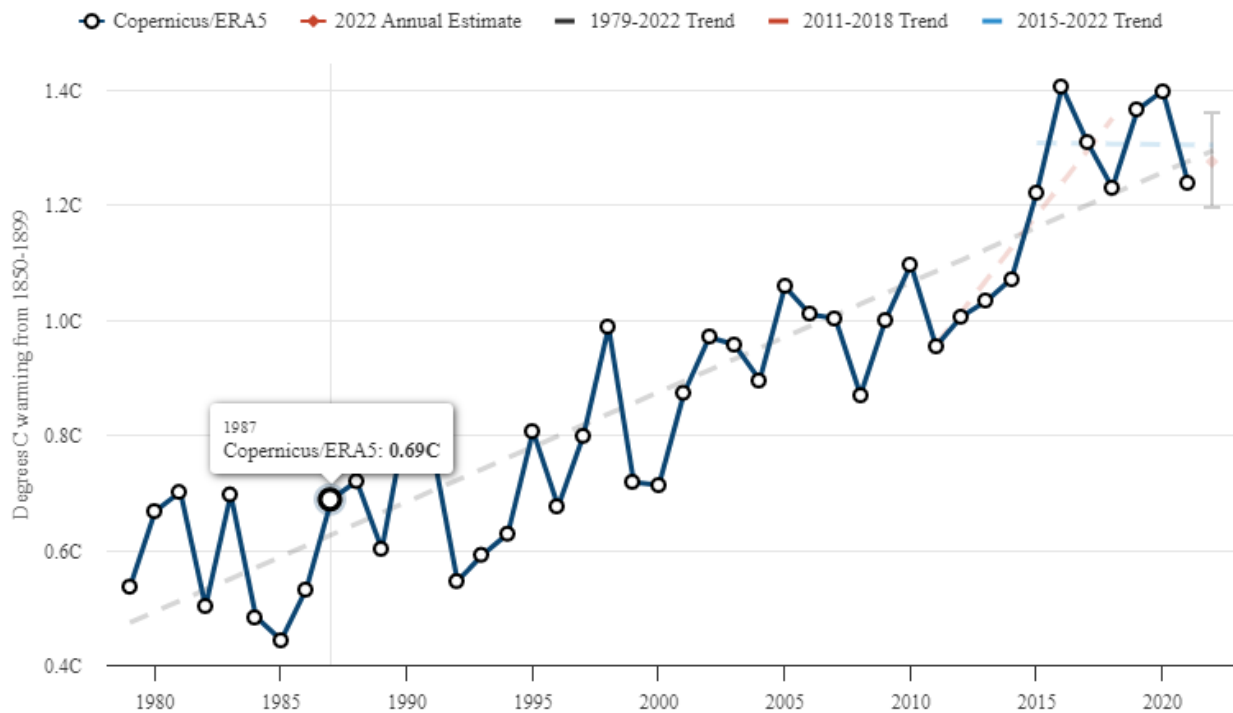


Chart 1: Global Carbon Emissions 1980-2020

If there were clear warnings about the link between fossil fuels and climate change, the question arises why have carbon emissions accelerated? An important part of the answer lies in the activities of the fossil fuel companies themselves. *Scientific American* has reported that Exxon was aware of climate change as early as 1977, eleven years before the issue was made public.¹⁷ Yet, having learnt about it through cutting edge research, they spent decades refusing to publicly acknowledge their findings.

Instead, the oil industry spent huge sums on campaigns to amplify climate change denial and on lobbying US Federal Authorities for continuing subsidies. In 2023, for example, the combined spending of the oil and gas industries on lobbying amounted to \$124 million.¹⁸ Exxon and other companies created the Global Climate Coalition to oppose mandatory reductions in carbon emissions, arguing that the science was still uncertain. The American Petroleum Institute spent \$5 million on a plan to 'Identify, recruit, and train a team of five independent scientists to participate in media outreach. These will be individuals who do not have a long history of visibility and/or participation in the climate change debate'.¹⁹ Like the tobacco companies the aim was to create doubt in the minds of the public.

However, outright denial was no longer possible when it became obvious that climate change was occurring. As a result, the tactics of the oil companies have changed. They now pretend to favour a shift to more sustainable energy, but continue as before, making big investments in oil exploration. Organised double speak has become their main modus operandi. They are spending millions to appear 'green' while acting in contradiction to their claims. An analysis by the website Influencemap of 3,421 items of communication by BP, Chevron,

ExxonMobil, Shell, and TotalEnergies found that in 60% of them there was at least one green claim.²⁰ Yet twenty of the biggest oil and gas companies are projected to spend €857 billion on new oil and gas fields by 2030. This could grow to a staggering €1.4 trillion by 2040, says research from Global Witness and Oil Change International.²¹

Moreover, this expansion is being fully supported by the very states that make official promises about shifting to renewables. Energypolicytracker.org has found that a staggering \$470.97 billion was committed to supporting fossil fuel energy by G20 governments during 2020-21.²² Behind the sheer cynicism of the oil company executives, there are important structural reasons for the continued expansion of oil – despite the rhetoric about renewables.

First, capitalism is built on profit and the oil companies are some of the most profitable. In 2022, the five Big Oil companies reported combined profits of \$196.3 billion, more than the economic output of most countries. In a system whereby capital in all its forms engages in a frantic search for higher margins, or, more precisely, profit rates, investment funds will hardly pass up an opportunity to use big oil to expand their portfolios.

Second, let's assume, as most scientists do, that 60% of oil and gas reserves will have to remain unused if we are to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. This will give rise to the problem of 'stranded assets'. This refers to the process of collapsing expectations of future profits from invested capital. Oil exploration platforms, refineries, pipelines into which billions have already been poured would need to be written down. It is estimated that global energy is currently supplied from 43,439 oil and gas production assets.²³

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As many of these would be rendered useless, there would be disruption on a scale that few capitalists or their governments, could bear. One group of researchers has estimated that the present value of future lost profits in the upstream oil and gas sector would exceed US\$1 trillion.²⁴ But that is only probable future profits. What of the capital write down that would also be required? Most of the investors in these oil facilities come from the richest OECD countries so one can only imagine how they will resist.

Third, the oil sector is part of an integrated network of investments in global capitalism. It does not stand alone but is tied by a thousand economic threads to other sectors. Banks, insurance funds,

pension funds all invest in oil companies to gain higher returns. If we take Exxon as an example, we find that 60% of its shares are owned by institutional investors. These include notorious vulture funds which scour the world for higher rates of return. Included here are Vanguard Group, Blackrock, Fidelity Management, JP Morgan, among others. If oil companies are forced to walk away from stranded assets, there will be a ripple effect throughout the system of finance. And that is a disruption they will simply not tolerate.

Saving life on the planet

We, therefore, conclude that it is not possible to stop global warming and continue with the capitalist system. All attempts to guilt-trip individuals by claiming that their by-choice habits have caused global warming has not made any difference. Many people have made real efforts to change their lifestyle but do so in a framework that prioritises private cars over public transport and global agri-food over local produce. Individual action will not be effective and nor has efforts to 'incentivise' corporations through the cap and trade system. This neoliberal measure puts a price on pollution and gives corporations a limited number of free slots. Should they require more, they purchase them from other companies who have not

used theirs. This doesn't outlaw emissions; it puts a price on them and in reality, this has become another opportunity for massive fraud and speculation. Thus, one analysis shows that carbon emissions from California's oil and gas industry rose by 3.5% since its cap and trade system began.²⁵

The largest cap and trade market of the EU has only had a marginal effect on a limited range of sectors and meanwhile total emissions keep on rising. Rather than these piecemeal efforts, we really do have to think about system change. But here we face a problem caused by decades of neoliberal propaganda. This militates against thinking carefully about system change as it encourages a deep form of fatalism summed up in Thatcher's phrase, 'There Is No Alternative'. For many the maxim of Mark Fisher that 'it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism' rings true.²⁶

However, where the 'end of the world' becomes a real possibility, it is necessary to think of alternatives to capitalism. This means that the radical left must not only fight against the many injustices of the system but be able to offer real alternatives to it. Too often this project is lost amidst immediate battles. Talk of alternative

futures is either left vague or wrapped up in utopian rhetoric, but there was a double meaning in Thomas Moore's original term 'utopia'; it signified both a 'good place' and 'no place'. In other words, a type of perfection that was unrealisable. Against this, an alternative to capitalism means starting from the foundation of today rather than designing a new blueprint from scratch. It means addressing the issue of climate change from the materials we could now possess and can control.

The first step towards a sustainable future would involve taking the energy companies into public ownership and repurposing them away from shareholder value. As long as the main motive for producing energy is profit and dividends for shareholders who have no links to the real world of production, there will always be a disregard for the environment.

Even when they speak 'green' the economic pressure to generate a higher rate of return will always trump the rhetoric. Public ownership would mean the problem of 'externalities' is eliminated. Economists use this term to refer to a pattern whereby private firms do not count as costs, damages they do to surrounding areas. Thus, an oil refinery does not factor in the cost of the increased cancer it creates in its narrow economic calculations. And oil

companies certainly do not count the real cost of global warming. By taking energy companies into public ownership a clear strategy can be developed to switch from a reliance on fossil fuels. This will mean a considerable write down of past investments, but some elements of technology can be salvaged for a transition to renewables. If the motive is not profit but the public welfare, the equation of what is economic and what is not is changed. However, even if there is public ownership of large corporations and workers' self-management, the tyranny of 'market forces' would still need to be broken.

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This God-like anonymous power, which dominates the lives of modern humanity, is a code word for the alienation of our collective labour. The very term 'the markets will decide' implies a no-confidence vote in the capacities of the human species to decide things democratically. It assumes that the coordination of economic activity must operate behind our backs, through blind laws of an 'invisible hand' over which we have no control. As an alternative, Marx and Engels advocated that 'the social anarchy of production gives way to social regulation of production upon a definite plan, according to the needs of the community and of each individual'. In other words, for a democratically planned

economy. But how can this happen? Support for the free market is instilled into every child in the Western world. The free market is supposed to bring choice, democracy and efficiency and is seen as the only way to run a modern economy. It has become the paradigm that frames our understanding of economics and of public policy more generally. Challenging this paradigm means 'thinking outside the box', but that immediately leaves one open to the charge of being utopian or 'unrealistic'. Nevertheless, if we suspend this contrived scepticism about big alternatives, then planning has a number of advantages over market forces.

First, it creates greater democratic control over investment and allows people collectively to set goals for an economy that reflects human values. With planning, information on the best technology that could cut carbon emission would be shared. Dependency on fossil fuels would be reduced in a coordinated way and investment in sustainable forms of energy developed. The treadmill system of ever-increasing throughputs of energy and raw materials to stay ahead of rivals would end.

Second, planning reduces the uncertainty that arises in economic decision-making. Two kinds of uncertainty can be distinguished: one is primary uncertainty

arising from unforeseen events such as the eruption of a volcano or a host of unknowable events; the second is market uncertainty which occurs because atomised decision-makers do not know what intermediary suppliers, rivals and people who consume their goods are doing. Planning cannot eliminate the first, but it can substantially reduce the second, by allowing coordination between different economic units that are affected by each other's decisions.

Third, planning reduces waste that is caused by defensive strategies undertaken by large corporations to override market uncertainty. The 'too big to fail ethos' of giant corporations means they spend an increasing proportion of their revenue on unproductive expenditures designed to protect their market share. Car companies pay high sums to distribution networks to stock their brand; arms manufacturers pay huge bribes to state officials to buy their lethal products; vast sums flow into derivative markets that were originally designed to 'hedge' against unforeseen market changes. Technology is designed not just for efficiency but as a mechanism to lock in customers.

Most importantly, a democratically managed economy provides us with the only sure way of reversing climate change. It de-commodifies key areas of our lives

such as transport and energy production. Instead of the hyper individualism of the car, it prioritises free public transport. Instead of retrofitting homes becoming yet another opportunity for different firms to compete for profit, it allows for mass retrofitting of whole streets and communities by non for-profit enterprises. Instead of scientific discovery being colonised by corporations, it opens research to all, regardless of a profit motive. Instead of commercial secrecy around what is the best technology to reduce green-house gases or carbon, it makes discoveries freely available to all.

And when it comes to oil, a planned economy can allow for a transition away from dependency. Plastics, which are a derivative of oil, cannot be eliminated overnight as they are so deeply embedded in manufacturing processes.

However, their use can be scaled down through a real strategy of re-cycling that is more likely in a co-ordinated economy. Alternative products such as wood can be developed in a sustainable way that can reduce reliance on plastic. As most oil is still used for heat and transportation, a democratically planned economy can help reduce our reliance. High speed train lines and integrated rail and sail routes can reduce our use of aviation. Free public

transport and greater bicycle use can reduce the need for cars in cities. Freight can be carried by a developed rail system rather than by trucks. Heat can be generated offshore and through the latest solar technologies. This will not be easy and there will be many setbacks. There will not be an overnight dramatic transition. However, by taking democratic control of our economy, we have a chance to steer it in a direction which prioritises our relationship with the rest of nature. This provides the only sure way of saving life on the planet.

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BOOK REVIEWS



***No Politics but Class Politics,*
Walter Benn Michaels
and Adolph Reed Jr.
Eris 2022.**

Sinéad Kennedy

Queen Cleopatra (2023), a recent Netflix drama-documentary, arrived on the streaming platform amid a blaze of hype and controversy. Since news emerged that the series would cast the black British actress, Adele James, as the fabled queen, academics, scholars of antiquity, the Greek and Arab media, not to mention, her online “fans”, have been debating whether the series wilfully distorts history or recovers the story of a black woman and “feminist” who “ruled with unparalleled power” and “bowed to no man”. Whatever one’s own view on the controversy, it reveals much about the nature of current debates around identity and race.

Casting a black actress some argued was historically inaccurate, others labelled the choice an “appropriation”, while some Egyptians complained the drama “erased Egyptian identity”.¹ While the historical consensus is that Cleopatra’s ancestors were most probably Greek Macedonian, who by the time of her birth had spent eight generations in Egypt, this has never prevented a slew of white, fair-skinned actresses from playing her on stage and in film without any controversy. It is also worth noting that the idea that Cleopatra

was black has a long history in African-American thought, especially within the black nationalist and Afrocentrist movements. In an Op Ed for the *New York Times*, academics Gwen Nally and Mary Hamil Gilbert write, “When we say... that Cleopatra was Black, we claim [her] as part of a culture and history that has known oppression and triumph, exploitation, and survival.”² That’s all very well, but it does ignore two key facts; Cleopatra was an absolute monarch who was also a major slave owner.

There is nothing wrong with a black actress playing Cleopatra, but it does not make her a transgressive or revolutionary figure. What this argument does reveal, however, is how “race”, “culture” and subjective identification have all become conflated in current debates. “Black” as conceived here, is both a racial signifier and a marker for all those who have known “oppression and triumph” which, includes a significant majority of the world’s people, except, of course, absolute monarchs. Reflecting on the debate around *Queen Cleopatra*, the British writer and broadcaster, Kenan Malik argues that the controversy is really about imposing “contemporary notions of race and identity, of whiteness and blackness, on an ancient world that thought very differently about such issues.”³

It is precisely the nature of this debate that is the focus of *No Politics but Class Politics*, a collection of essays written by the

prominent US academics, and socialist activists, Adolph Reed Jr. and Walter Benn Michaels. At its core, their book explores the political tension between class and identity through a variety of prisms, ranging from workers struggles to aesthetic production. Collectively, the essays offer a powerful antidote to what has become the key foundation of contemporary progressive politics, the denouncement of racism and the celebration of diversity. For Reed and Michaels, this current emphasis on the equitable distribution of wealth, power and esteem among racial groups is tragically misplaced, not only distracting from the pervasive influence of class, but actually serving to reinforce class based inequality.

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Within the US left today this is a highly controversial, indeed, incendiary argument. Reed and Michaels are accused by their many critics of insufficiently recognising and prioritising the legacies of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, leading them to be dismissed as “class reductionist”. These criticisms are not confined to liberals and left progressives; their arguments are also deeply divisive among US socialists. In May 2020 for example, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests, Reed was invited to speak to the Democratic Socialists of America’s (DSA) New York City chapter – the same chapter that gave rise to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and a new generation of leftist activists in

the US. Reed had been a frequent speaker at DSA events over many years but this particular invite at that particular conjuncture, provoked a bitter debate within the DSA. Reed’s talk was certainly provocative. He planned to argue that the left’s intense focus on the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Black people undermined multiracial organizing, which he saw as key to health and economic justice.

For DSA’s Afrosocialists and Socialists of Color Caucus, his arguments were “reactionary, class reductionist and at best, tone deaf ... We cannot be afraid to discuss race and racism because it could get mishandled by racists,” the caucus stated. They went on to suggest that, “That’s cowardly and cedes power to the racial capitalists.”⁴ Eventually DSA leaders and Reed agreed to cancel the talk, striking a moment, the *New York Times* noted, when “perhaps the nation’s most powerful Socialist organization rejected a Black Marxist professor’s talk because of his views on race.”⁵

In the US, race is increasingly understood as America’s original sin and given the history of slavery and the deeply divisive nature of US society today, race, not class holds powerful explanatory power for many. Yet, neither Reed, nor Michaels, are arguing that race, and indeed gender, are unimportant categories; instead, they contend that by focusing solely on

questions of disparity and inequality we miss seeing the wood for the trees. Instead, what they argue is that the existence of racism (and sexism) plays a role in selecting those who experience inequality, but that race itself does not, and cannot, explain the nature of that inequality.

Michaels writes: “[i]t’s importantly true that racism and sexism have played the central role in selecting the victims of American inequality, but it’s also true and just as important that they have not played the same role in creating the inequality itself. Paying workers less than the value of what they produce does that.”⁶ Certainly research shows there is a vast wealth disparity between black and white Americans.⁷ If we break down the data in more detail, however, we find that poor and working-class white people are remarkably similar to poor and working-class black people, when it comes to income and economic assets; both groups possessing very little wealth. Focusing on the question of race while avoiding issues of wealth redistribution achieves very little by way of material transformation in the lives of poor working class people, black or white.

If your aim is simply to diversify inequality, there is no problem with this approach; you can swap out workers to create a demographic profile that more closely matches the US census and avoids ‘discrimination’. However, if your goal is

ending inequality in its entirety, focusing on questions of representation presents few solutions. Whatever one’s views on the class and race debate, it is difficult not to agree with Michaels when he writes: “You definitely know you’re in a world that loves neoliberalism when the fact that some people of colour are rich and powerful is regarded as a victory for all the people of colour who aren’t (and when this, indeed, is regarded as a victory for justice itself).”⁸

Reed and Michaels advocate a different strategy, arguing that the US left needs to reorientate itself towards building a broad-based universal movement that focuses on what unites Americans not what divides them. They point towards movements like the struggle for mass jobs programs during the New Deal or the current struggles for a higher minimum wage, transformed police forces and single-payer health care. There are few issues in the US today that are not shaped by class, which is why their provocatively titled book, *No Politics but Class Politics*, resonates so urgently with the current moment. We have a world to win; we want and deserve better than diversified inequality.

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***My Fourth Time We Drowned:
Seeking Refuge on the World's
Deadliest Migration Route.***

**Sally Hayden
Harper Collins.¹**

Goretti Horgan

Most people who go to sea die, or return to Libya, and few arrive to dreamland. After the rubber boat moves in the sea, if the Coast Guard catches the boat they return people to refugee centres in Libya, and these centres are like hell. Or hell is better than these centres.

Do you want to know the answers to questions about migrants that arrive in Ireland - questions like: Why are they mainly younger men? Why do so many of them destroy their passports before they present themselves to claim international protection? What, if anything, is the EU doing to help people fleeing war and persecution? Then read Sally Hayden's: *My Fourth Time We Drowned: Seeking Refuge on the World's Deadliest Migration Route*.

This book details the experiences, often horrific, of refugees seeking sanctuary in Europe. And it exposes the EU's bankrolling of the most inhumane and corrupt system which sees migrants locked up in dreadful conditions, tortured, sold as slaves and allowed to drown to prevent them from getting into Fortress Europe.

Hayden, a journalist who is the Africa correspondent for the Irish Times, had been reporting on the conflicts in Eritrea and Sudan since 2015. In 2018, she began receiving messages online from refugees held in detention centres in Libya. She soon discovered that the people messaging her were trapped in an endless cycle of detention in unspeakable conditions, paying to escape, but being intercepted at sea and returned to detention.

From her reporting in Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan, Hayden knew about the migrant trail through the Sahara Desert to Libya taken in the hope of making it to Europe. The number of people who die in the desert before even reaching the coast, or who die in captivity after being driven back by EU-funded militias, is unknown, since no government or organisation is keeping track. The International Organisation for Migration, an agency of the United Nations, has estimated that deaths in the Sahara Desert are "at least double" those in the Mediterranean, but no one actually knows.

The EU know that Libya is the largest human market in the world, and they're still paying the Libyan coastguard to bring back migrants... Libyan coastguards just work for money. Let's say the EU stops funding the coastguards, then the coastguards would work for the smugglers...There

are some boats that make it to Italy. Do you think the coastguards don't see the boats? The smugglers and the Libyan coastguard were co-workers before. Sometimes the smugglers give them a higher percentage of money, then they let them pass through. This is business, Sally. Money. The coastguards are working with Italy now because they are giving more and more money.

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"I wanted to document the consequences of European migration policies beginning from the point at which Europe becomes ethically culpable: when refugees are forcibly turned away," Hayden writes. In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that refugees could not be returned to Libya by European boats because of the huge risk to their lives there. The EU found a way around that by equipping, training, and supporting the Libyan "Coast Guard" to do interceptions themselves. There is no real Libyan government so, of course there is no real Libyan Coast Guard, rather there are militias who take EU money to violate the basic human rights of those trying to escape to Europe.

In 2017, the EU signed a deal with Libya to close down the route from Libya to Italy and pledged two hundred million euro towards this goal. It signed the deal, despite knowing from its own reports that "conditions in detention centres are

generally inhumane: severely overcrowded, without adequate access to toilets or washing facilities, food, or clean water. In several detention centres, migrants are held in large numbers in a single room without sufficient space to lie down."

Hayden's book is a meticulously researched, disturbing piece of investigative journalism. It is based on the conversations she had via social media with people trapped in the detention centres, as well as interviews with refugees who escaped, UN and EU officials, human rights lawyers, and others. The stories in the book keep you turning the page to see what happens next, but they are horrendous stories, so hard to read that at times you have to force yourself to read on. It's so hard to read, you have to wonder how the thousands of migrants subjected to conditions of such unspeakable terror and abuse manage to survive. It will also make you question how the EU – which speaks so much about human rights, about freedom of movement, and which opened its arms to literally millions of Ukrainian refugees – came to be so viciously racist that it would prefer African people to die than to come here to seek sanctuary.

Fortress Europe

Since 2017, the Libyan “coast guard” has been an important part of the EU’s plan to deter migrants from trying to enter Fortress Europe. Often operating on aerial surveillance intelligence provided by Frontex, the Libyan coast guard intercepts, or “rescues,” migrants and returns them to Libya. Those who are not immediately handed over to smugglers or disappeared into the country’s network of secret prisons and slave markets are sent to one of dozens of official detention centres run by the EU-funded Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration, an agency of the UN-backed Government of National Accord that, like the coast guard, is controlled by militias and is notorious for torturing, raping, and killing migrants.

Frontex, which is the EU’s border protection agency is playing an active role in the interceptions conducted by the Libyans. *Der Spiegel* reported that Frontex flew over migrant boats on at least 20 occasions between January and April 2020, before the Libyan coast guard forced the migrant boats back. At times, the Libyans drove deep into the Maltese Search and Rescue Zone, an area over which the EU has jurisdiction.

"Frontex officials know that the Libyan coast guard is hauling refugees back to Libya and that people there face torture

and inhumane treatment,” Nora Markard, professor for international public law and international human rights at the University of Münster, told German news magazine *Der Spiegel*. In fact, it appears that Frontex employees are going one step further and sending the coordinates of the refugee boats directly to Libyan officers via WhatsApp. That claim has been made independently by three different members of the Libyan coast guard. *Der Spiegel* is in possession of screenshots indicating that the coast guard is regularly informed – and directly. One captain was sent a photo of a refugee boat taken by a Frontex plane.

"This form of direct contact is a clear violation of European law," says legal expert Markard. According to an internal EU document seen by *Der Spiegel*, in 2019 some 11,891 migrants were intercepted and taken back to Libya to be met with EU funded torture.

Much of Hayden’s book is devoted to documenting the corruption, waste, negligence, and often condescending attitudes of the major UN agencies and non-governmental aid organisations operating in Libya (with the notable exception of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), which Hayden describes as “often the only big organisation willing to speak out in a meaningful way.” Many of the migrants she spoke to – the very people the agency is set up to assist – accused the

UNHCR of complicity in human rights abuses in Libyan detention centres.

Hayden writes from a position of solidarity with the people about whom she is writing. She quotes them directly and at length, centres their viewpoint, their care for each other and the bravery they show. And she is not shy about joining them in laying the blame on the governments and organisations that deserve it.

Despite television news showing footage of auctions in Libya at which migrants are being sold as slaves and despite the many reports detailing the torture and abuse of detainees whose only crime is fleeing war and persecution, many official detention centres still operate in Libya. And the EU continues to collaborate with the coast guard to force people back into the hands of militias and smugglers.

*There are pains on their body, but
there are even pains on their heart,
like seeing your wife raped in front of
your eyes and seeing your little sister
raped by a Libyan; a wife watching
her husband killed in front of her. I
have seen 29 people die in front of
me.*

In April 2019, the then-EU commissioner responsible for migration, Avramopoulos, in an interview for Channel 4 News called conditions in Libya ‘a disgrace for the whole world’. He agreed that it was a

‘contradiction’ to oppose the detention centres while the EU funded the Libyan ‘coast guard’ to transport people there. A month before, Andrew Gilmour, the UN Assistant General Secretary for Human Rights told the UN Human Rights Council about interviews he had carried out with former detainees. “Every one of them – men, women, boys and girls – had been raped, many repeatedly, and tortured by electrocution. All testified about the widespread extortion technique whereby the torturers force the victims to call their families, who are then subjected to the screams of their loved ones which, they are told, will continue until they pay a ransom. I can honestly tell the members of this council that in 30 years in this line of work those were the most harrowing accounts I have ever heard.”

In October 2019 the European Parliament voted on a motion calling on the EU to end cooperation with the Libyan Coastguard if it carried out serious fundamental rights violations, to step up rescues in the Mediterranean and for more to be done to evacuate people from Libyan detention centres and move them to safe countries. The Parliament rejected the motion by 290 votes to 288. The 290 included the four Fine Gael MEP’s making the difference in a vote that will forever shame them and their party.

Exactly a year after Hayden's book was published, in March 2023, the UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Libya in its final report expressed deep concern over the country's deteriorating human rights situation. The report documented numerous cases of arbitrary detention, murder, rape, enslavement, extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearance, and said that nearly all survivors interviewed had refrained from lodging official complaints out of fear of reprisals, arrest, extortion, and a lack of confidence in the justice system. It said migrants, in particular, have been targeted and there is overwhelming evidence that they have been systematically tortured. The report said there were reasonable grounds to believe that sexual slavery, a crime against humanity, was committed against migrants.

so the men go ahead and hope to be able to fly their wives and children to safety once they have achieved refugee status. Passports and other papers are stolen by the militias and those seeking asylum don't want to endanger their application by presenting the false papers they are forced to travel under. And what, if anything, is the EU doing to help those fleeing war and persecution? If they are white and victims of the correct dictator, they open the borders and give access to jobs, benefits, and accommodation. If they are black, they let them drown in the Mediterranean or send them to the hell of the Libyan detention centres – while asking EU citizens to look the other way.

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When the report was published, two Green-Left MEPs submitted a priority written question asking if the EU Commission would now end its funding for the Libyan 'coast guard'. The answer would best be described as 'Blah, Blah, Blah' since it simply repeated all the blather we've had since 2017.

The answers to the questions posed at the start of this should now be clear: few women will set out on a journey where they know in advance they will be raped,

1 All the quotes in italics in this review are from people who were stuck in Libya and communicating with Hayden.

Mussolini's Grandchildren – Fascism in Contemporary Italy

David Broder

Pluto Press 2023

Conor Reddy

"I dream of a country where people who have had to keep their heads down for years, pretending to think one way so they aren't driven out, can say what they really think."

These were the impassioned words of Georgia Meloni as she campaigned to become Prime Minister of Italy, almost 100 years on from the insurrectionary March on Rome that brought her Grandfather, Benito Mussolini and his National Fascist Party to power. Today, as Prime Minister and head of Italy's most right wing government since Mussolini, Meloni and her Fratelli d'Italia (Fd'I; Brothers of Italy) party are forcing socialists and antifascists to contend with questions that would have been unthinkable just a decade ago.

These questions are the basis of an important new book from historian and Jacobin's Europe Editor, David Broder. *Mussolini's Grandchildren* charts the lesser-known history of post-war Italian fascism, tracing the lineage of Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia right back to the Fascist Ideologues who founded the Fd'I's forerunner, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) in the immediate aftermath of Italy's liberation by antifascist partisans. In this political genealogy, Broder casts light on those who have laid claim to Mussolini's legacy –

revealing a network of organisations that have displayed strategic adaptability and resilience over many decades, leading to Meloni who began her political life proudly proclaiming her admiration for Il Duce. Although Meloni now eschews the fascist label, Broder argues that her election marks the return of the "bearers of the Tricolour flame" to the stage of history. Regardless of Meloni's success as Prime Minister, this return, in a State founded on anti-fascist principles, is cause for serious concern – a phenomenon we all must understand and learn from. In this regard, Broder provides a valuable starting point.

Keeping the flame burning

The modern Italian Republic was declared by Partisans in 1946, one year after their victory over Mussolini and the hold-out Italian Saló Republic in the north of the country. Constitutionally, the new Republic announced itself as a democracy "founded in labour", resolutely opposing fascism and all it represented. The reality of this early period, however, was not so clear, as Broder lays out.

Just months after the foundation of the state, Palmiro Togliatti, General Secretary of the Communist Party and Minister for Justice in the CLN multi-party government, presided over a sweeping general amnesty for wartime prisoners which included those sentenced for collaboration, torture, murder and other acts of political violence.

Initially applied to partisan and fascist prisoners in an attempt to bring about “social peace”, the amnesty as applied by the Judiciary, disproportionately benefited fascists, including some of those who had served in the Saló regime (p.51). Outside prison, the atmosphere created by the amnesty allowed silent hold-outs of the old order to raise their heads. By December 1946, Giorgio Almirante, Minister for Popular Culture at the time of Saló’s defeat, and others who had been imprisoned after Italy’s liberation had regrouped, launching the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), a self-consciously fascist party operating within the renewed democratic state.

While other fascists organised themselves in clandestine armed cells, like Romualdi’s Fasci di Azione Rivoluzionaria, the MSI adopted a “double line” strategy to win an institutional footing (p.52). One side of this line was participation in electoral politics, as an anti-communist force, willing to work with the right of Christian Democracy. The other side was organisation as a “third force” in the streets and the maintenance of a more classically fascist programme. One year after the MSI was established, three newly elected party councillors in Rome cast decisive votes in support of Christian Democrat mayoral candidate, Salvatore Rebecchini, helping him see off a Communist rival. In the fervent atmosphere of the new Italian state, where Communists enjoyed immense support after leading the Partisan movement, the

MSI had found political space to “keep the flame burning”.

Inserimento

The MSI’s strategic orientation towards anti-communism in electoral politics would soon go beyond alliances with Christian Democrats in key votes towards a new strategy of *inserimento* (insertion, Ch.2). In 1951, Almirante’s successor, De Marsanich gave full endorsement to a fledgling NATO, led by the US, which he and many others in the party had fought just six years previously. Broder points out that this strategy was not without its difficulties; several key members, keen to preserve fascism’s “revolutionary function”, voiced opposition. Giorgio Fini, a junior minister in the Saló government, left the MSI for a smaller clandestine organisation of “left fascists”, while “anti-bourgeois” fascist ideologue, Pino Rauti, founded an internal (and later, external) faction, the Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo, which would exert a strong influence on the future of the party in years to come (p58.)

Despite these internal tensions, the MSI would increase its electoral presence significantly through the 1950s, becoming the fourth largest party in the Chamber of Deputies in the 1958 General Election. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, the ruling Christian Democrats were increasingly pulled towards the MSI at local and national levels. A pivotal moment came in March 1960, when Fernando Tambroni required MSI votes to

form a Christian Democrat minority government to keep the Communists and the Socialist party from power. Although MSI deputies were not integrated into Tambroni's cabinet, MSI support meant even deeper influence over a state notionally founded on anti-fascist principles.

Christian Democracy was plunged into crisis as a result. Some ministers resigned, while elements of the Catholic church and other parts of the Christian Democratic coalition urged the party to do anything to keep the Communists out. The crisis would reach its apex in the Summer of 1960, when the MSI announced it would hold its party Congress in the resolutely antifascist city of Genoa. Antifascist mobilisation across the city quickly spilled into a general strike led by the Communist controlled CGIL union and insurrection in cities across Italy against deadly police repression and fascist influence over the state. On July 19, after pressure from catholic intellectuals, Tambroni resigned, and the Christian Democrats resolved to look elsewhere for political support.

Broder argues that this episode marked the end of the MSI's strategy of insertion, as the Christian Democrats and the ruling class more generally recoiled from fascists as a viable buttress for their project, eventually erecting a cordon sanitaire around the MSI (p63). As Aldo Moro took the reigns of the Christian Democrats, a new alliance with the reformist Socialist

Party was established, casting the MSI back to the margins.

Lean years to the Years of Lead - 1960-90

While fascists were able to reorganise and recalibrate to the new democratic reality from 1946-60, the period that followed was marked by a return to more violent traditions. Not only had they been cast aside by the Christian Democrats, the "Economic Miracle" of the 1950s and 1960s, supported by Marshall Aid had unleashed a wave of modernisation that further marginalised the traditionalist, insular MSI. In this harsher climate, the MSI condemned social reforms like divorce as a "trojan horse for communism" and resolved to fight the left in a more direct, violent sense. In 1969 following the death of party leader, Michellini, Giorgio Almirante returned to the MSI and immediately convened an "Anti-Communist Front" to bring old comrades back into the fray. Reacting to the militant shop floor movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s, others on the right also coalesced around the more militant MSI as a fighting force against the radical left.

Broder argues that the militant anti-communism of the MSI at this time "combined two kinds of radicalism". One grounded in the violent fascist mythology of "revolutionary war" against the left, and the other, a more bureaucratic radicalism

that projected the party (and its networks) as a “military auxiliary to state actors” (p.67). This second face of fascist organised anti-communism became manifest in the “strategy of tension”, where groups like Ordine Nuovo (again aligned to the MSI) committed terrorist attacks in the name of the left (sometimes in collusion with state actors) to fuel polarisation and demand repression for militant workers, especially those in the new autonomist groups, Potere Operaio and Lotta Continua.

The Strategy of Tension drew inspiration from the OAS, a clandestine group of French Army officers who had carried out terrorist black operations to prevent a French withdrawal from Algeria in 1961-62 and can be seen as part of a trend across the reactionary right of the period that blurred the line between state (especially police and military) and political reaction. Perhaps the darkest example of violence in this era, was the Piazza Fontana bombing of 1969, where an Ordine Nuovo bomb killed 16 people in Milan – the state immediately blaming anarchists and communists in the city.

The “Years of Lead”, the long decade that followed the Milan bombing saw more political violence from the right and although the MSI officially condemned this terrorism, it served as a political nucleus for it and though the MSI would not grow significantly in this period, it did cohere organisationally, keeping the fascist

tradition alive after the failure of *inserimento*.

The revival of the MSI/AN.

The next big moment did not come until the early 1990s, when a combination of factors threw the field open for the MSI once more. First, the dissolution of the once massive Communist Party in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union and then the Tangentopoli (“kickbacks”) scandal in 1992, which revealed decades of corruption at the centre of Italian politics. At the peak of the scandal, half of the members of the Italian Chamber of Deputies were under formal investigation, destroying the credibility of the parties that had governed since the formation of the 1946 Republic. In turn, the Christian Democrats, Socialists, Liberals and the Social Democrats dissolved their organisations, leaving only the MSI (now rebranded as *Allianza Nazionale*, AN), the post-communist, Democratic Left Party (later, Democratic Party) and the centrist, Republican Party, standing at the national level. There was now a considerable political vacuum at the heart of Italian democracy – a vacuum that the right was quick to jump into.

Adjusting to this new reality, Gianfranco Fini, leader of the MSI/AN declared a new “fascism for the 21st Century” which would again move towards the centre, forming alliances with others on the right and placing a renewed emphasis on electoral politics. Having been on the margins since

1960, MSI-AN had not been sullied by the corruption scandal and they, and others on the right, were poised to benefit from popular outrage and the absence of a genuine left. Led by the conservative media baron, Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia Party, the AN joined the xenophobic Lega Nord and others in a right wing coalition government in 1994, having fought the election on a populist, anti-communist platform. Charting this return to the electoral fold, Broder contends that "the MSI had long sought a place for itself within the "area of government" and used this moment to emphasis its credentials as part of a broader right. Yet it also benefitted from the fact that other forces within this camp, and Berlusconi in particular, were willing to normalise the old neo-fascist party. Speaking of this government in 2019, Berlusconi said: 'In 1994 we decided to enter the field with the Right, that is, with the Lega and with the fascists ...We brought them in: it was us who legitimised them, who "constitutionalised them".

The mainstreaming of the MSI was thus not a one-sided process of it choosing to abandon its identity or change its positions; rather, it was able to find a different place for itself, in a context marked by the collapse of the previous party system" (p.86). To facilitate their return to mainstream politics, the AN had fudged their position on the wartime fascist regime, stating that the question of fascism and antifascism was "buried in the past",

refusing to condemn or commend Mussolini's party, while drawing an equivalence between the violence of antifascists and that of the fascist state.

This is the era in which Georgia Meloni made her entrance. Once a proud fascist youth leader with the MSI, Meloni was elected to Rome's City Council in 1998, quickly learning to deal with the difficult questions of the past, but not going quite as far as Fini, who by 1995 had declared himself "post-fascist". The old adage of "do not restore, do not reject" guided layers of new AN/MSI politicians who made it their mission to recast their party's history and to relativise fascism's crimes by referring to the great evil of international communism. At a national level, they were assisted in this through the 1990s and into the 2000s as Lega and others on the Italian right sought to rehabilitate the memory of "Italian patriots" on both sides of a civil war they saw as a national tragedy, driven by the external influence of Stalin and Tito.

More recently the fascists have been aided by attempts to recast Italians as the victims of history, most notably, the victims of the so-called "*Foibe Massacres*", in Yugoslav occupied Istria, after the Second World War. From the 1990s on, the far right spread a mythology of anti-Italian pogroms led by Yugoslav partisans, with the support of their Italian comrades. Here, they allege that thousands of Italians were murdered in a frenzy of ethnic cleansing, their bodies thrown into Foibe (limestone caverns that

mark the Istrian landscape). History indicates that no such massacres actually took place and that killings in the region were largely reprisals and popular prosecutions of fascist functionaries and their collaborators. Despite this, the leader of Lega, Matteo Salvini crudely stated that “there are no Serie A and Serie B victims”, comparing the fascists killed in the Foibe to the victims of the Holocaust (p.27).

These attempts to reshape what Broder refers to as “historical memory culture” around fascism and antifascism have been an important factor in the creation of a political climate that has allowed Meloni to come to power. This reshaping is present throughout the history of the MSI, but has been most acute since 1994, corresponding with the time spent by AN in and out of government through the 1990s and 2000s.

The rise of Fratelli

The vicious austerity that followed the 2008 crisis reshaped politics across Europe. With the second largest public debt burden in all of Europe, ailing traditional industries and deep regional inequalities, Italy was particularly badly hit. In the 2008 general election Berlusconi’s right coalition re-entered government after several years of Democratic Party rule. Without totally rejecting austerity, Berlusconi retained power by playing a populist strategy, refusing to implement programmes imposed by Europe and Italy’s creditors.

This allowed the coalition to retain some of the populist support it had built over the previous two decades, but it also deeply angered those loyal to neoliberalism and the EU. In 2011, Berlusconi was cast aside by a parliamentary no confidence motion, replaced by a “technocratic” government led by former banker, Mario Monti and supported by parties of the centre-left and centre-right. The austerity that followed was deeply unpopular, sullyng the Democratic Party particularly badly.

Meanwhile, on the far-right, internal tensions were beginning to emerge. As Fini moved the AN closer to the centre, recognising Italian fascism’s role in the Holocaust and placing greater distance between the AN and its past, the party began to splinter. First, the exit of Alessandra Mussolini in 2003, next the exit of the neofascist La Destra- Flamma Tricolore in the run up to the 2008 General Election, and finally, the foundation of Fratelli d’Italia by Meloni and others in 2012, when Fini proposed a total merger with Berlusconi’s Il Popolo Della Liberta (People of Freedom, PDI) (pp. 101-112). Unlike Lega and others on the far right, FdI refused to support Monti’s technocratic government – giving it credibility as an anti-systemic force in Italian electoral politics that has been amplified by the absence of an effective left party.

FdI differentiated itself from AN in other ways too. Rejecting Fini’s strategy of moderation the FdI adopted the old

tricolour flame logo of the MSI, the emblem emblazoned on Mussolini's tomb and began to emphasise pride in a "70 year long history" carrying "the hopes of a people who found themselves without a party". In her memoirs, Meloni recalls the day Fd'I took up residence in the historic offices of the MSI: *"It's as if those millions of people are still here, all those fighting with me today and those who are no longer here. As if they were looking at me, silently asking, 'are you up to the task'"* (p.48).

Outside the tent of official party politics, Meloni steadily built her new party, relying on a mix of personal charm and conspiratorial, hard right populism. As Italy shambled from one failed government to the next from 2012 to 2019, Fd'I played on popular anger, joining Lega and others on the right in creating a narrative of national decline, driven by "globalisation" and uncontrolled immigration. Anti-migrant protests and violence have skyrocketed in recent years with Fd'I and closely aligned fascist organisations like Casapound at their heart, changing the terrain of national politics and making it more favourable to their growth. This has allowed Meloni and her followers to introduce fascist-derived conspiracies like the "Great Replacement Theory", which posits that undifferentiated "elites" are working together to "replace" Italians with migrants who will undercut them in the labour market, destabilise society and dilute national identity.

Since 2012, Meloni has positioned Fd'I as defenders of a Christian Italy centred on the heteronormative nuclear family. She has found allies internationally in the US and in the New European Right. Speaking at the Vox Party conference in Spain in 2021 for example, she outlined a shared vision of their mutual defence of "civilisation" against the "LGBT lobby", abortion and "international finance" – echoing 20th century fascism in both countries (pp. 157-159).

Terrifyingly, it appears Meloni has been able to win the ascent of the Italian ruling class and respect from their European counterparts too. Without compromising the neofascist core of her worldview, she has embraced NATO, just as her MSI predecessors did in 1951. She has also largely accepted the European Union, shaping rather than abandoning it, by working closely with new demagogues in Hungary, Poland and elsewhere – as recent immigration reforms have shown.¹ Broder suggests this new embrace of Europe is perhaps best seen as a successful return to the MSI's strategy of insertion at the international level as it *"combines reactionary civilisational politics with an effort to transform the EU from within"* (p.16).

Although Meloni sits for now, at the top of a democratically elected government, Broder cogently argues that with Fratelli's ascent to power, we find ourselves in dangerous new territory. An unashamed

political grandchild of the fascist past is now head of state of a Republic founded in opposition to fascism and using her influence to aid a resurgent European right. The old certainties and societal buttresses against the rise of the far right can no longer be relied upon in the 21st Century, as multiple, intertwined crises rock the system and the capitalist democratic order. If we are to emerge from this new time of “monsters”, the left must understand and confront Meloni and the new right she inhabits, soberly assessing our own forces but confidently projecting our own revolutionary vision to remake society in the years ahead. Broder’s book is critical reading for all those committed to that task.

1 Laura Dubois. 2023. EU ministers clinch deal on migration reform – Financial Times June 8th, 2023. Accessible: <https://www.ft.com/content/89ddf6d4-1c50-4538-8da5-7d957c172edc>

***Marx in the Anthropocene:
Towards the Idea of Degrowth
Communism***

Kohei Saito

Cambridge University Press 2023.

Dave O'Farrell

The Japanese Marxist Kohei Saito's latest book, *Marx in the Anthropocene*, is an important contribution to the ongoing debate around degrowth in ecosocialist politics. Saito's work follows Marxist writers such as John Bellamy Foster, Paul Burkett, Brett Clark, Ian Angus, and others, who, over the last few decades have revived interest in Marx's ecological critique of capitalism and, in particular, his concept of a metabolic rift between capitalist society and the natural world.

Unusually for a book dealing heavily in Marxist philosophy, *Marx in the Anthropocene* has received significant attention outside the usual socialist and academic circles. His previous book, *Capital in the Anthropocene* was also a bestseller in his native Japan, being particularly popular with a younger generation. Indeed, it was so popular that even the normally conservative public broadcaster offered him four 25 minute slots on national television to expound his ideas. This popularity has transferred into

the latest publication which was being discussed in many major newspapers, including the Guardian and Financial Times, even prior to being translated into English.

The coverage and popularity of *Marx in the Anthropocene* is all the more surprising given Saito himself has described it as a more academic version of *Capital in the Anthropocene*. The book does offer useful outlines of various strands of ecosocialist thought, but it is certainly not an introductory text. It presupposes a significant knowledge of Marx's economic and philosophical ideas, drawing heavily on *Capital*, the Grundrisse and many of Marx's unpublished notebooks and manuscripts from the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe* (MEGA).

Saito's book is extremely broad in its scope. Split into three sections, it begins with a reassessment of the concept of a metabolic rift in Marx and outlines the extent of Marx's ecosocialist thought. Drawing on the unpublished notebooks and Marx's study of natural science and pre-capitalist societies, Saito then discusses changes in Marx's thought, particularly post-1868, on the productive forces of capitalism and the role of technology in their development. He then offers an explanation as to why this ecosocialist thread was largely absent from

much socialist thought in the years following Marx's death, up until very recently. This explanation is perhaps the weakest part of his argument and relies heavily on a supposed methodological break between Marx and Engels. We will return to this problematic argument later.

The second part of the book offers brief synopses and critiques of many strands of ecosocialist thought, beginning with an illuminating critique of monist approaches, such as Jason W. Moore's *World Ecology* which rejects the idea that one can analytically separate capitalist social relations from the natural world (hence the monism).¹ Challenging this, Saito defends Marx's dialectical approach, which views society as something separate from and irreducible to nature - with its own internal logic and structures - whilst remaining fundamentally a part of nature and thus influenced by it. There is also a useful discussion of the "elasticity of capital" and its ability to continue even in the face of ecological breakdown, an extremely compelling argument for an ecosocialist future beyond capitalism.

Saito then moves on to discuss the "new utopians" and "left accelerationists", thinkers (often of a left-reformist type) whose enthusiasm for the potential benefits of technology often leads them to ignore

the hard limits on consumption imposed by a finite Earth. In a fair assessment, Saito acknowledges the potential benefits of technology for automation and the challenges to capitalist markets of the zero marginal cost of many digital products, while criticising the narrow productive force determinism of thinkers like Jeremy Rifkin and Paul Mason and highlighting the incompatibility of much of this project with an ecosocialist approach – particularly in terms of the natural limits imposed by a finite world.

In many ways this is the strongest section of the book. It provides an excellent overview of the many, varied, sometimes intersecting, strands of ecosocialist thought and the discussion will benefit anyone seeking to navigate these current debates.

The final section returns to an assessment of Marx as a degrowth communist, again emphasising with reference to many of his unpublished writings, Marx's changing approach to understanding capitalism and the possibilities of a post-capitalist society. Saito here revisits *Capital*, "in order to truly go beyond it, explicating why Marx's vision of degrowth communism can increase the chances of establishing a more equal and sustainable society beyond capital's regime of infinite economic growth at the cost of our invaluable planet." His broad

prescriptions in this part offer much food for thought and serve as a timely call to action for the ecosocialist left while clearly acknowledging the difficulties posed, including the major hurdle of the “current political unpopularity of ‘degrowth communism’”.

Although it is in keeping with the general approach of the book to tackle the deeper philosophical underpinnings of ecosocialist thought it is slightly disappointing that his conclusions are somewhat lacking in concrete actions, not least in relation to the aforementioned “political unpopularity of degrowth communism”.

152 Issues of concern

While there is much to recommend in the book, there are some issues worth flagging. In particular there are two lines of argument I feel are unconvincing. In broad terms, these arguments rest on a rather strict textual analysis of Marx’s writings and here Saito’s knowledge of unpublished manuscripts from the MEGA project, which so enrich his analysis in many places, somewhat work against his arguments. The two key areas are the previously mentioned insistence on a methodological break between Marx and Engels and a repeated assertion that the late Marx breaks with, or

abandons, the concepts of historical materialism.

Taking the second criticism first, Saito builds a convincing argument that Marx changed his views of how capitalism operates over time, with particular emphasis on his research in the natural sciences and pre-capitalist society. As part of his argument, Saito refers on multiple occasions to Marx breaking with his “earlier” concept of historical materialism, particularly in relation to his reassessment of the prospects for revolution in Russia, the role of peasant communes and groups like the Narodnik’s as sites of opposition to capitalism.

One problem is that Saito never defines what either he or Marx actually means by historical materialism in this context, beyond identifying it with tendencies toward “Prometheanism”, in this case a tendency to view an increase in the productive forces of capitalism in an exclusively positive light as laying the preconditions for post-capitalist abundance, and as a tendency towards “eurocentrism”. These tendencies can certainly be identified in some of Marx’s earlier writings. The *Communist Manifesto* is certainly a eurocentric document, for example, and its sketch-like outline of historical development could be read as

crudely deterministic. However, it was written in specific circumstances with a specific aim in mind, namely as an intervention in the upsurge of revolutionary working class activity in the period of the 1848 revolutions which occurred across Europe. The social context matters, and an overly textual analysis loses something by missing this context.

Leaning on the fact that Marx's analysis of historical materialism (HM) was relatively incomplete, Saito then argues that, as Marx moved beyond his conception of how capitalism operates after the publication of *Capital* Vol One, he also moves away from his earlier conception of HM. But it is surely wrong to assume that Marx's changing understanding of the forces in a specifically capitalist economy can be used to demonstrate a break with his understanding of how societies in general develop. As a broad framework for understanding socio-historical transformations the concepts of historical materialism, such as base and superstructure, forces, and relations of production etc, surely remained central to Marx's whole project, regardless of the fact that he never gave a definitive account of HM beyond various sketches and outlines. Indeed, Saito's argument for a break with historical materialism are actually more convincing as an argument that Marx

continued to utilise the basic framework already present in his early work while building sturdier foundations through his later studies that used an increasing subtlety of argument to allow for greater contingency and variation according to local conditions in any given society and its environment – as befits a dialectical approach to understanding society.

A rift with Engels?

The most important critique that needs to be made of Saito's work is the supposed methodological break between Marx and Engels. This is by far the most problematic, and least convincing, section of the book. The argument presented, again based on

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“Saito’s whole supposed proof of a methodological break between Marx and Engels depends on the absence of a single term, the word “natural” preceding “metabolism,” in a single passage, constituting a small change of highly debatable significance, [and] points to the total absence of any substantive evidence of such a break. To rend asunder Marx and Engels on metabolism and ecology on such a basis is unwarrantable. The truth is, while

*Engels did not directly employ Marx's notion of "social metabolism," except in his 1868 Synopsis of Capital, nor develop Marx's analysis in this regard, there is no indication that his outlook contradicted that of Marx in this area."*²

Rather than blaming Engels for side-lining this important concept, the lack of a strong ecosocialist tendency in much Marxist thought in the decades following Marx's death is much better explained by the fact that the destruction of the natural world was merely one damaging aspect among many of the capitalist system they sought to overthrow – and, at that time not the most pressing or important one. While both men should be credited with having the foresight to recognise the damage caused to the natural world, its scale was not on the level it is today, the scientific understanding of many of the processes was in its infancy and the climate crisis had not entered the public consciousness in the way it has today. To put it bluntly, ecosocialist ideas, whilst important to both, were simply not their core project. That remained the overthrow of the entire capitalist system, something which would allow for the reversal of the damaging environmental policies then being pursued.

That core project of Marx and Engels remains core to revolutionary socialists today but given the fact that we face multiple intersecting climate crises with an ever vanishing window to prevent catastrophe, ecosocialist ideas must be central to all our actions today. Criticisms aside, Saito's book is an extremely welcome addition to these debates. His call to action is both timely and necessary and those of use interested in applying, and advocating, Marx's theories today will benefit from reading it, along with the inevitable further debate it will generate.

¹For an overview of the problematic nature of Moore's World Ecology see John Bellamy Foster 2016. "In Defense of Ecological Marxism: John Bellamy Foster responds to a critic". *Climate and Capitalism*. Available @ climateandcapitalism.com/2016/06/06/in-defense-of-ecological-marxism-john-bellamy-foster-responds-to-a-critic/

² John Bellamy Foster. 2023. "Engels and the Second Foundation of Marxism". *Monthly Review*, Jun 01, 2023 Available at: <https://monthlyreview.org/2023/06/01/engels-and-the-second-foundation-of-marxism/>

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