



Socialist Voice

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"The day is not far distant when three Stars and Stripes at three equidistant points will mark our territory: one at the North Pole, another at the Panama Canal, and the third at the South Pole. The whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as—by virtue of our superiority of race—it already is ours morally."—**William Howard Taft** (president of the United States), 1912.

Our demand is for decent, secure homes

Jimmy Doran on the Campaign for Public Housing P2



HOUSING CAMPAIGN

THE CAMPAIGN for Public Housing is not looking for concessions or for tweaks to the existing housing policy. The state's housing policy has been designed to fill the pockets of landlords, developers and financiers with rents, subsidies, and tax breaks, as it was designed to do. That strategy is clearly working.

This is the way the state is run in the interests of the business class—not of the people. It must be completely dismantled and changed, transformed into a system where every citizen has a right to a decent, secure home, available for rent from the state, as part of the social contract between citizen and state.

The main demands of the campaign are:

- (1) universally accessible public housing available to all citizens as a right;
- (2) a tenants' bill of rights, to protect tenants, control rents, and provide security of tenure;
- (3) a ban on economic evictions until the state can supply all citizens with a publicly owned home to rent;
- (4) a referendum to put a right to public housing in the Constitution of Ireland.

These homes could be designed, built and fitted out by a state-owned building company and the local authorities, reducing costs by up to a half and ensuring that homes are built to a decent, safe standard—unlike the shoddy, unsafe, tiny homes such as Priory Hall and Longboat Quay built by the private sector. In addition, this would help bring to an end the precarious nature of employment in the building industry and the widespread use of bogus self-employment in the industry.

State-led public house-building would break the monopoly of the private sector on the building of houses and end the artificial shortages in available properties, as the private sector manipulates the supply of available properties in order for prices and rents to rise and in turn, of course, their profits, which is their only reason for building homes.

The housing crisis, coupled with growing homelessness, despair, and death, enables speculators to increase profits and income, as the state will pay the same group of property-owners

millions in rent to house our people in hotels, B&Bs and hostels to deal with the emergency

accommodation needs required because of their artificial crisis.

What is different about the Campaign for Public Housing and previous public-housing developments is that homes are to be made universally available to all who choose to avail of them, as a right, regardless of income. Existing public housing policy has led to a concentration of low-income families occupying these developments, thereby allowing the mass media to stigmatise the families living in public housing and the ghettoisation of areas, with citizens who were abandoned by the state in huge estates with few facilities.

The CPH will be campaigning for at least 60 per cent of all families living in public housing as income restrictions are removed, which will end the stigma and the mistakes made in the past.

Reverse the policy of encouraging citizens to buy their council houses. Encourage homeowners to sell their houses to the public housing pool, which at the end of their life would be rented to another family as publicly owned property.

We need to transform housing policy from where a home is seen as a commodity on which to make a profit into a citizen's right to have a home supplied by the state.

If the profit element is removed from 60 per cent of all homes, this will have a devastating effect on the profits of property speculators, developers, and builders, as property values will fall and then stabilise. It will end the gravy train of rent subsidies for hoteliers, landlords, and developers, as no more emergency accommodation will be required, because homelessness will be a thing of the past. This would lead to an end to most private rented accommodation, ending the precarious nature of shelter as it exists today.

The biggest losers if a major public housing-building programme is undertaken would be the Golden Circle who finance the establishment political parties. Working people need to understand the interconnected relations between the state, establishment political parties, and the powerful economic forces that control their lives. Workers need to understand who really runs the Government and whose interests it serves. The answer is one and the same: Big Business, the capitalist class.

We are many; they are few. The housing crisis will never end if it's left up to the establishment. We urge people to join with us and become part of the solution, that is, the Campaign for Public Housing. ★

Sinn Féin is c

Tommy McKearney

The announcement of his retirement by Sinn Féin's long-serving president, Gerry Adams, was deemed by the media to be the most noteworthy happening at the party's recent ard-fheis.

After thirty-four often turbulent years at the helm of a movement ridiculed and lauded in almost equal parts, it could hardly have been otherwise. The Adams tenure has had a significance that goes well beyond his own organisation. No matter how one views the man, it is impossible to deny the impact he has had on Irish politics over the past decades. Under his stewardship Sinn Féin not only emerged from the shadow of the IRA but has become a formidable electoral force, both north and south.

Yet in spite of media focus it was another decision taken at the annual ard-fheis that will have greater significance in the days to come. Sinn Féin's declared willingness to participate as a minority partner in a coalition government in Dublin has ramifications that go beyond the party. Taken at a time when it might reasonably have been expected that an incoming leader would have had time to adjust, the latest brouhaha involving Frances Fitzgerald and the Department of Justice has hastened developments.

For over a decade Sinn Féin has straddled a position somewhere between radicalism and reformism. There was doubt about whether the party was vying to replace Fianna Fáil as the "republican party" or attempting to introduce discipline to that fragmented radical community inside and outside the Dáil. Revealing an intention to enter government as a junior partner in a coalition resolves this conundrum and is a clear indication of a determination to conform within establishment parameters.

Although the Fine Gael-led coalition will survive the latest upheaval, the longevity of this Government must be in doubt. The high-wire game of bluff between Varadkar and Martin has damaged confidence between Fine Gael and





Edging towards social democracy

Plagiarism in the schools—but it's not the pupils!

Johnny Gaffney

THE DEPARTMENT of Education and the media have for years hyped up the idea of schools "ditching the textbooks and going digital."

In particular, Microsoft Showcase Schools are "innovative," where "digital books" and "tablets" replace "old-fashioned" books. This apparently is the great leap forward—but is it?

For Microsoft it will ensure a jump in profits. Families are expected to fork out €800 per child for a Microsoft Surface Pro tablet (with a very limited lifespan) and to use its One Note software. But Microsoft is not supplying the e-books; instead these schools and the Department of Education, *in theory*, expect the teachers to do the impossible and write their own digital books.

Such a development would not be "ground-breaking" but a huge leap backwards. Experts, along with publishers, have spent brainpower, effort and time in devising school books that can best explain a particular subject. It is absurd to expect individual teachers in individual schools up and down the country to try to replicate this task.

The authorities recognise this fact and simply expect their teachers to break the copyright laws by copying and pasting books into these "digital books." Plagiarism is not "innovative": it is illegal. And it is the teachers who will be personally liable and could face fines or even prison.

Deputy Clare Daly submitted two Dáil questions on these serious issues, but the minister for education simply did not answer them. More questions are due to follow in relation to concerns expressed by at least one publisher over the breach by schools of the copyright laws.

Meanwhile the congress of the Teachers' Union of Ireland has never discussed these risks to its members.

There is, of course, a simple solution to this situation. Microsoft should pay for all the relevant e-books. *That* would be a great leap forward! ★



Fianna Fáil and questions the durability of the "confidence and supply" arrangement.

While opinion polls are suggesting little change in the event of an election, it is possible that the arithmetic after polling day could present the option of a Fianna Fáil-Sinn Féin government. Have no doubts either about Micheál Martin's position vis-à-vis coalition. Faced with the temptation of entering office or underwriting the inevitable mess of a hung Dáil, and the risk of yet another election, Micheál Martin will accept Mary Lou McDonald as Tánaiste.

While it is reasonable to point to the failure of other minority partners in coalition arrangements as an indication of where Sinn Féin would find itself, this is almost to miss the point. The bourgeois parliamentary system is created for self-perpetuation. In other words, it is not a question of whether those in the Government are of sterling character or unbending republican principle: in the final analysis it is down to the role of the state in capitalist society, where, as James Connolly said, governments are but committees of the rich to manage the affairs of the ruling class.

Let's be clear on this point. Connolly's observation is not some outdated piece of left-wing hyperbole. No serious political observer believes that the Government exercises absolute power in the Republic. In the first instance the Dáil gives way to the constitution guaranteeing the right to private property, and this will be upheld by the judiciary, restricting the ability of elected deputies to redistribute wealth.

Then there is the state's

subjugation to the European Union, which in effect amounts to conceding a large measure of economic sovereignty to Brussels. Moreover, huge influence is exercised covertly by other agencies, such as the privately owned media, the financial sector, speculators, and foreign transnationals. The working out of this is that a minority partner in a coalition government will have little ability to make meaningful reform; and, in reality, smaller parties change long before the state's free-market system begins to creak.

This analysis should not be taken as simply another swipe at Sinn Féin but rather as an assessment of the wider political situation in Ireland at the present time. The decision to accept a junior partnership in coalition has reverberations throughout the political spectrum. Around us there are grave issues demanding solutions as all the while we are witnessing a vacant space on the left, illustrated by the latest Sinn Féin resolution, coupled with the Labour Party's decline.

Meanwhile there is a real erosion of credibility in the state apparatus. How can it be otherwise when crucial institutions are faltering and urgent responsibilities neglected or discarded?

Look at what is happening with one of the basic elements required for the exercise of state power: control of the administration of justice and policing. Chaos reigns unchecked in both these areas. The Department of Justice is apparently unable to exercise authority and cannot manage itself or its e-mail. Running parallel with the department's woes is a series

of seemingly intractable scandals within the Garda Síochána that has eroded the force's prestige in the eyes of all but dyed-in-the-wool right-wingers.

If that's not enough, the state's two largest parties have sweated hard and long to agree a sweetheart deal for reasons of political expediency, rather than sacking the minister for justice for obvious incompetence.

Adding further to the state's ebbing authority is a raft of social problems. Housing shortages remain at crisis point, with every indication that the situation will get worse. Austerity continues to hurt many working-class families, who see little opportunity to escape its grip. Zero-hour contracts, depressed wages, a diminishing welfare safety net and reduced social wage make life increasingly difficult in a lot of households.

Moreover, addressing these social and economic problems is rendered virtually impossible by the slavish adherence of the ruling class to the European Union and its neo-liberal dictates.

Against this backdrop of damaged state credibility and widespread social disadvantage there is space, and a need, for a clearly defined left movement. The Labour Party is in disarray, while Sinn Féin is edging irreversibly towards centrist social democracy. The field is opening up, therefore, for a genuine socialist alternative, and the signs are that this is now a real possibility.

For example, left-wing trade unionists in the Right to Change movement are exploring options in this field. Positive signals are also coming from some smaller political parties and elected representatives as they combine in the Campaign for Public Housing. And the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum continues to provide an arena for political discussion, facilitating the development of an ideological consensus around a programme for progressive transformative change.

Nevertheless, nothing changes without a conscious and coherent effort; and we must not forgo this opportunity to make progress. It would be unforgivable if we fail to measure up to the requirements of the new day. We must, as civil rights activists said in the 1960s, "seize the time." ★



UNIONS

A future worth fighting for

EARLIER THIS month the Trade Union Left Forum issued its "Workers' Charter: A Future Worth Fighting for."

The charter calls for a range of legislative reforms to improve both workers' and union rights in the south and north of Ireland. Each progressive change itself is important for workers, but, if achieved *en masse*, or even a majority, it would be a significant challenge to capital in Ireland and strategically balance power to labour, from capital, contributing significantly to the struggle for socialism in Ireland.

Many trade union activists contributed to this charter, directly in writing it and indirectly through ideas, feedback, and discussion. Through meetings over the last three years, ideas have been discussed and challenges made to how we can better organise left union activists. This charter was then drawn up directly by a number of trade unionists and put to the floor at an open public meeting, where it was passed, with one addition made. This democratic process itself is important.

We are asking left union activists to sign and share this charter with like-minded trade unionists. We will support trade unionists who put motions forward to policy conferences on these demands. We will lobby for political support for our positions. We will campaign to win for workers and for the movement.

This Charter campaign is just a start. It will help us to better co-ordinate a left bloc within the

movement. Be part of this. Get involved, and support the Charter.

Below is the message we sent to all who signed up to the TULF.

Why have we launched this?

We want to show that there is widespread member support across unions for a radical programme of workers' rights in Ireland. We want to put pressure on unions and political parties to adopt this programme. While each demand itself is inherently winnable with popular support, achieved together it would result in a significant shift in the balance of power in Ireland away from big business and towards working people.

What can you do?

Sign the charter and share it. By doing this you are showing public support for the demands in the charter and for a future worth fighting for. Share it with friends and colleagues, and ask them to sign and share it too. Look out for further actions and meetings, and participate as we develop this campaign.

What are the next steps in the campaign?

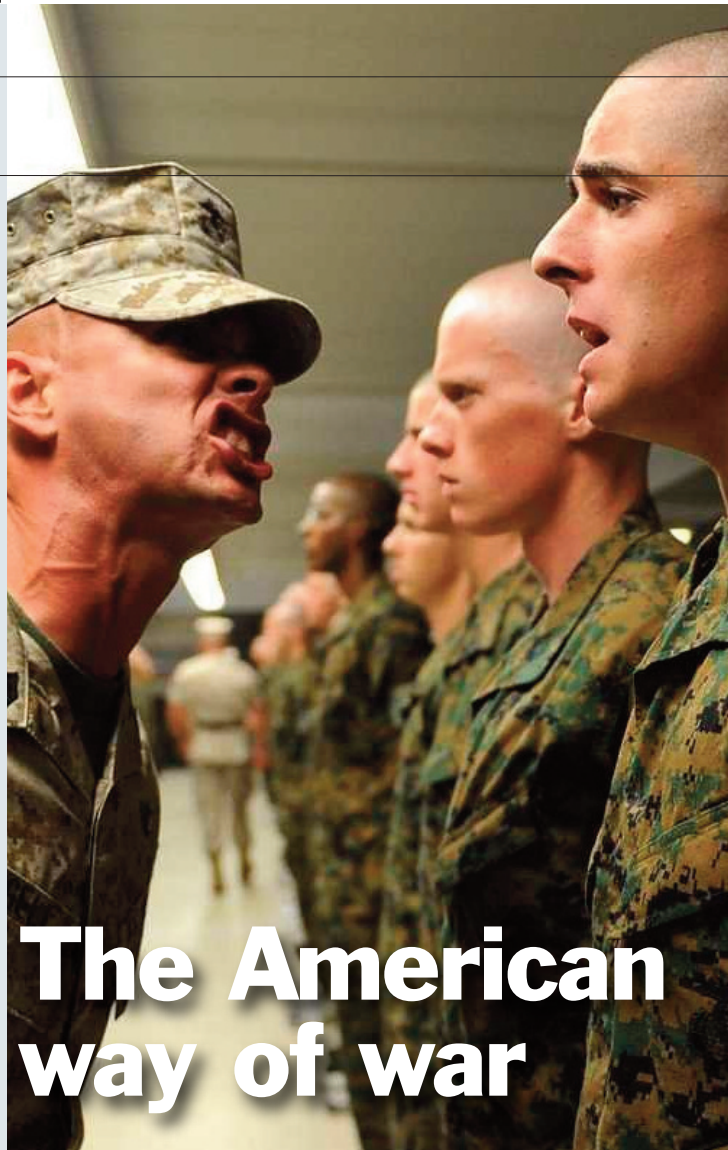
The first step is to win support for the charter from trade unionists across the country. We will then step up efforts at lobbying unions and political parties.

We hope this charter can also inspire activists to put forward motions to conferences and seek democratic support within their own unions for the whole charter or elements of it. ★



Friends and supporters of the Trade Union Left Forum

Please sign the Workers' Charter: A Future Worth Fighting for at www.tuleftforum.com/workers-charter/



The American way of war

Dan Taraghan

LENIN WROTE *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism* in 1916 to address an issue that had been raised by J. A. Hobson and Rudolf Hilferding in their works about the changing nature of capitalism towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Lenin recognised that the war then taking place was an imperialist one between the old imperialist powers of Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Russia. Britain was the leading power at the time and included vast swathes of Asia and Africa in its empire. With the exception of France and Turkey, all were monarchies.

By the end of the war Britain's status had been undermined, and it was in debt to the United States. Woodrow Wilson, an isolationist American president (like Donald Trump), had brought America into the "war to end all wars." He was also instrumental in the establishing of the League of Nations. After the war Wilson reverted to isolationism, and the US never joined the League.

The establishment of the Soviet Union and the growth of independence movements around the world meant that the old imperialism was under attack. Initially the old empires had attempted to stifle the Russian Revolution, and when that failed they spent the 1920s and 30s trying to undermine the Soviet Union and any democratic movement. The League was ineffectual in the face of the growth of fascism and gave effective support to the fascists in Spain.

Inevitably, the conflicts between the growth of democratic movements, the existence of the USSR controlled by workers, and the old imperial powers seeking to maintain their empires and fossilised way of life, together with the growth of fascism, led to war on a global scale. At the end of it the USSR had consolidated its position and had demonstrated that it could defeat fascism.

The United States was now the leading imperialist power, displacing Britain and the others, who were now to play a secondary role, despite occasional attempts at their old-style behaviour, as in Suez.

MEMORY

The United States, while declaring itself to be democratic, was in fact an old-style imperialist, every bit as bad as, if not worse than, the countries it displaced.

Imperialist culture, rhetoric, arrogance and practice is part of the DNA of the United States. When the first white settlers arrived in North America they found a land already occupied by an indigenous population with their own culture and languages. The various nations were cultivating the land, growing corn and other crops, hunting and fishing in a sustainable manner. More importantly, they did not have a philosophical outlook based on private property. This concept was completely alien. After all, the Earth was alive, so how could you own it?

In *Capital* (volume 1, chapter 31) Marx describes how the Puritans of New England “set a premium of £40 on every Indian scalp and every captured redskin.” The privatisation of land and thus the primitive accumulation of capital meant that anyone who resisted had to be characterised as lazy, stupid, or savage. Basically, the same methods were used as had been employed in Ireland: attack the social system, language and culture of the indigenous population. Exterminate and enslave if possible. Scalping and the taking of ears were all used as in Ireland, and would be used again in Viet Nam against the Vietnamese in the twentieth century.

‘Imperialist culture, rhetoric, arrogance and practice is part of the DNA of the United States’

The core group of planter colonialists in North America were the settlers known as Scots-Irish. These had a firm belief in their own righteousness. Over time they developed a method of warfare still employed by the United States: “razing and destroying enemy villages and fields; killing enemy women

and children; raiding settlements for captives; intimidating and brutalising enemy non-combatants; and assassinating enemy leaders” (John Grenier, *The First Way of War*).

They also developed two other aspects of the American way of war, both demonstrated in Viet Nam in the 1960s to 1970s and again more recently in Iraq and other theatres of war: unlimited war, and irregular war. This included the use of agent orange in Viet Nam; carpet bombing; bombing civilian areas; the use of irregular forces such as Rangers (they still use Robert’s *Rules of Ranging* from the colonial wars of the eighteenth century); and private contractors.

The indigenous population was suppressed and driven off their land. However, they have never given up their resistance. “Geronimo” was the code name used by the American SEALs (special forces) for Osama Bin Laden; anything not controlled by the military is regarded as “Indian Territory.”

The wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are deeply embedded in the culture of American imperialists. So are the legal rulings from those wars. Perhaps the most glaring is the decision made in 1873 as justification for the execution of “Modoc Jack” (Kintpuash, a leader of the Modoc people of California and Oregon). He had killed General Edward Canby, and it was decided in the attorney-general’s “Modoc Prisoners Opinion” that because the killing was deemed so uncivilised, the Modocs were savages and therefore outside the law.

This opinion is used as justification for the torture of those held in the Guantánamo concentration camp and for other crimes perpetrated by US armed forces. Lenin, when he wrote *Imperialism*, had not studied America (for obvious reasons, given the time at which he wrote the pamphlet). He does say that unless the “economic essence” of imperialism is studied “it will be impossible to understand and appraise modern war and modern politics.”

I believe the culture, rhetoric and philosophy could also be worth study. ★



Small ripples make big waves The search for Frank Conroy’s birthplace

Michael Healy

ON 13 DECEMBER 1936 Frank Conroy, a member of the Republican Congress and the Communist Party of Ireland, sailed on the Holyhead ferry, alongside Frank Ryan, determined to defend the Spanish Republic against the fascist rebellion. This Spanish Civil War hero died on 28 December 1936 fighting with the 15th International Brigade.

With no clue to when or where Frank Conroy was born or any trace of his family, and with only a few snippets of information about his involvement in the Spanish Civil War, the Frank Conroy Commemoration Committee organised its first event on 16 December 2012 at the Republican Memorial in Kildare.

The historian James Durney, who attended this first commemoration, said that, while all historical references to Conroy mention that he was from Kildare, it’s not clear if he was from the town or from Co. Kildare. It had been said that he

came from Fairgreen in Kildare, but the 1911 census has no record of a family of this name living in Fairgreen at the time.

Two years later, however, Durney wrote that he had found Conroy’s birthplace: Kilcullen, Co. Kildare. This is where Frank was born, on 25 February 1914; but new information tells us that he grew up in Irishtown, Dublin. That indicates that the Conroy family moved back to Dublin.

What’s more, in 2016 came information from the son of another International Brigader, Gerry Doran. This was to the effect that Conroy crossed into Spain with Doran on 14 December 1936, under the guidance of Frank Ryan.

Conroy and Doran fought at the Battle of Lopera, where both were wounded. Frank died from gunshot wounds to the body and shrapnel wounds to the head; Gerry Doran received similar wounds but survived.

Small ripples from 2012 continued to make big waves when contact was established with a niece of Frank Conroy who lives in America, and with news of other relatives living in Ireland. ★



POLITICS

Build workers' power! Break the connection with imperialism!

25Ú COMHDHÁIL

Communist Party of Ireland // Páirtí Cum

In late November the Communist Party of Ireland held its 25th National Congress in Belfast, the highest political authority of the CPI

THE CONGRESS brought together delegates from all over the country. It was the culmination of a long process of discussion in the branches on a number of motions, including the main political resolution as well as resolutions on women and on organisation, drafted by the National Executive Committee.

All branches were entitled, and encouraged, to submit amendments to all the motions before the congress.

The CPI has been developing and deepening its knowledge and understanding of the nature of the triple lock of imperialist domination—American, European, and British—on the Irish people, placing this domination in the context of imperialism's global strategy and the deepening structural and systemic crisis of state-monopoly capitalism.

The congress reaffirmed the party's total opposition to the European Union and to the social and economic strategy imposed through the numerous treaty obligations. The political resolution as adopted clearly

shows that no amount of tinkering with the structures of the EU will work and rejects the false belief that the EU can somehow be "democratised."

There was a strong debate, reflected in the number of amendments, on the current settlement in the form of the Belfast Agreement, on sectarianism, and on social and economic development. The political resolution states that "challenging sectarianism is a necessary part of the struggle for a democratic advance. It especially stunts the working class in its daily struggles. It needs to be challenged consistently and continually, as every weakening of sectarianism is an advance . . . Its final elimination is possible only in a wider democratic settlement through the democratic reintegration of the national territory, which would be a necessary step in freeing the Irish people from the legacy of dependence and the continued subordination to imperialist interests."

The political resolution also reinforces the long-held position of the CPI that there can be "no lasting democratic solution to the

political conflict and the differences within the political arrangements that have prevailed for nearly a century." Working-class forces need to "move forward and address the issues that go beyond the Agreement." In the North some of the areas that need to be advanced are:

- the establishment of the Civic Forum
- the enactment of a Bill of Rights
- the removal of all undemocratic practices regarding arrest and remand
- an Irish Language Act
- the full transfer of fiscal powers
- the removal of all foreign intelligence agencies
- ending the misuse of the "petition of concern" and the corrupting practices associated with SPADs (special political advisers).

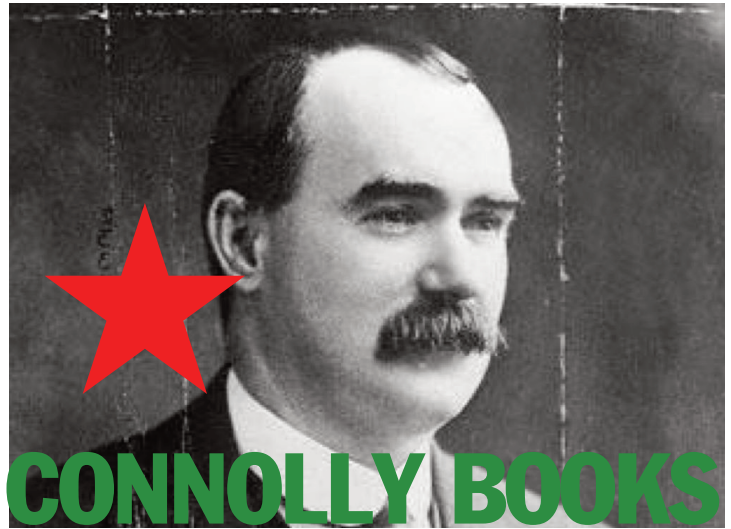
The CPI's strategy is to maximise an all-Ireland approach to economic and social development, centred on the needs and interests of working people—a transformative strategy that strengthens the political and economic position and the interests of workers and weakens the power and control



COMMUNIST PARTY

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of capital and its institutions and mechanism of control. It is the use of state power that can

- bring an end to poverty, unemployment, inequality, homelessness, hunger, and emigration;
- dramatically increase investment in research and development;
- establish all-Ireland networks to facilitate the development of manufacturing industry;
- use planning and integration to obtain optimum gains from exports from the Republic and from industrial enterprises in the North.

Also urgently required are

- public procurement, whereby any investment must be tailored to the maximum advantage of the greatest number of people, in recognition of the integral connection between economic dynamism and economic justice;
- a genuinely integrated all-Ireland transport system, with appropriate railway and road corridors, not only to facilitate economic progress but to ensure the provision of full and accessible services in such areas as health;
- all-Ireland environmental planning and regulation, with

investment in the environment and environmentally responsible projects;

- the establishment of an all-Ireland National Development Bank;
- public ownership of all natural resources and their development by a National Development Corporation;
- breaking with the euro;
- pursuing economic and social policies regardless of what the European Union may or may not allow;
- withdrawal from the European Union, because it impinges on the rights and sovereignty of the Irish people to make their own decisions;
- repudiating the debt; and
- the social control of capital.

The congress elected a new National Executive Committee, half of whom have never been members of the executive. The new NEC has been given the responsibility for developing the work and organisation based on the strategy adopted at the congress. The new NEC also marks a change in the age of the leadership, with a new generation of younger communists taking up leadership positions. ★



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The road to Damascus

Niall Farrell

IN 2007 General Wesley Clarke revealed the Pentagon's post-9/11 plan to overthrow "seven countries in five years: Iraq, and then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and, finishing off, Iran."

In the 7 October edition of the *Tory Spectator*, J. R. Bradley outlined the now failed plot against Syria: "our cynical effort [was] to install a Sunni regime in Damascus by adopting the Afghanistan playbook from the 1980s. We would train, fund and arm jihadis, foreign and domestic,

in partnership with the Gulf Arab despots." This was also confirmed recently by the former Qatari prime minister in a television interview.

Once Syria fell, weaponry from Iran to support the anti-imperialist resistance in Lebanon, primarily Hezbollah, would be stopped, leading to an Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Next would be Tehran.

President Obama threatened to attack Damascus in September 2013. Syria was to be the next Libya. That was why Margaretta D'Arcy and I blocked Shannon Airport's runway, demanding "Hands off Syria." Shannon Airport would be used to transport the weaponry destined to slaughter

Syrians.

In late October I joined international peace activists on a tour of Syria. The trip would take us to Damascus, Maaloula, Homs, and Aleppo. The group included Clare Daly TD, Mick Wallace TD, Dave Donnellan and Edward Horgan of Shannonwatch.

EU sanctions mean no direct flights to Syria. Therefore Beirut was our first destination on the biblical road to Damascus by taxi.

Encountering numerous checkpoints, it was 6 p.m. and dark when we reached our hotel in Damascus's old city. Security was tight. In the hotel we heard the distant sounds of mortar fire. A

mile away two jihadist groups still occupy the suburb of Jobar.

However, outside the hotel that Thursday evening it was like any Irish city at a weekend. The place was teeming with young people out for the night, the narrow road bumper to bumper with cars, Arab music booming.

Thursday night is the start of the Muslim weekend. The seriously secular were letting their hair down. We retired to a beer garden. Sleeping proved difficult, not because of our proximity to the jihadists but from the noise from the neighbouring nightclubs.

By daylight, armed soldiers were very visible, standing or

Graham Harrington

THE CONTINUING struggle over Catalan independence raises many questions for socialists and the left, especially those in countries, such as Ireland, where the national question still has a prime place in politics.

Events in Catalunya show that independence movements are not, as idealists would think, concerned only with such issues as flags and the like but rather are motivated by real material conditions. Of course this also means that there are different class interests at play. We shouldn't fall prey to supporting any and all independence movements, as some are reactionary and only serve capitalist and imperialist interests and not the interests of the majority of the people in that territory.

However, there is also a danger

in simplifying the struggle against capitalism and imperialism into an economic "bosses v. workers" analysis, which fails to take into account the hegemonic manifestation of capitalism as a political-economic system. Such things as language etc. are real material things that are affected by political policies adopted to suit economic interests.

Therefore, class struggle is manifested within the struggle for language rights, and cultural and national rights, as well as the issue of sovereignty. Whether or not that sovereignty takes the form of autonomy or independence is a product of the conditions. James Connolly was one of the main Marxist thinkers who contributed to this understanding of the national question, and this contribution is shown in the Connolly-Walker controversy.

Catalunya is one of the better-off regions controlled by the Spanish state, thanks to its early



Socialism and a Catalan Republic



SOVEREIGNTY

sitting at street corners nursing AK47s. It was not threatening but reassuring. Car boots were searched at permanent checkpoints and even sporadic checking of males' identity cards—all very reminiscent of life in west Belfast during the "Troubles," minus the animosity.

Everyone was extremely friendly. A simple *Salaam* ("Peace" or "Hello"), hand on heart, is gladly reciprocated. Regularly, passers-by would greet us with "welcome" or "thank you." Since the war, tourists are rare. Before 2011, tourism accounted for 14 per cent of GDP.

In the cafés, people were delighted to talk and pleased we had made the effort to visit Syria. One man explained how Damascus had nearly fallen, but "the people saved it," confirming J. R. Bradley's view: "there was no popular revolution against Assad . . . The millions-strong demonstrations in Damascus were pro-regime."

The cafés were also great for people-watching. Women, with or without hijabs, smoked water pipes along with male friends. One Syrian I met who had lived in Germany for more than fifty years would gladly return home permanently; only the idea of missing his family in Germany prevents him.

However, the war—almost

won—is never far away. In every street, in every town, there are posters and photos of the martyrs who gave their lives opposing the jihadists. Very many times, from Damascus to Aleppo, I heard how backward rural Sunnis were bribed to succumb to the poisonous sectarian messages of Saudi Wahhabis and Qatari Muslim Brothers.

A visit to the main Sunni mosque in Damascus underlines the aberration of these sects. Inside the mosque stands a huge shrine to St John the Baptist. His severed head once lay on this spot. Sunni Muslims are not an enemy of Christianity.

Whether the Catholics in Maaloula would agree is debatable. This mountainous village is two-thirds Catholic. They speak Aramaic, the presumed language of Jesus. In early September 2013 Obama's threats to bomb Syria signalled a jihadi attack on the village. The Sunni villagers did not warn their Catholic neighbours. Jihadists desecrated their church, looted their modest homes, killed three villagers and kidnapped six, all later murdered.

Kidnapping and looting were a dominant theme everywhere. Armenian towns along the Turkish border, for example, had been systematically looted by jihadists, from taking light-bulbs to dismantling an entire power

station, bringing it all to Turkey.

When Raqqa, the ISIS "capital," fell there was joy. But now we know the United States allowed the IS leadership safe passage.

It was with their victims that we had the most haunting meeting: traumatised refugees, Shia families from the pro-government towns of Foua and Kafraya. Last April a deal was struck whereby inhabitants of these two towns under siege by IS would be freed, and in return the same would happen to two jihadist-controlled towns. Instead IS and its "White Helmets" detonated a car bomb beside the buses, killing more than a hundred people, including thirty-nine children.

To add to the anguish, fifty-four children were kidnapped and are now held in Turkey. One child returned after payment of a ransom of \$100,000.

A visit to two multid denominational primary schools in Homs—the so-called cradle of the Syrian "revolution"—was equally disturbing. Suicide bombers had targeted these schools, slaughtering thirty children and many parents. In the entrance hall were photos of each child murdered.

Here, young girls greeted us, movingly singing in Arabic the "Ode to Joy" from the final movement of Beethoven's 9th

Symphony: "Alle Menschen werden Brüder / All people are joined in brotherhood." The EU has adopted the "Ode to Joy" as its anthem—inappropriate, considering its stringent sanctions against Syria, which a leaked UN memo in 2016 noted was making it more difficult for foodstuffs, fuel and medicines to reach the people. Thus the EU sides with the jihadist conspiracy.

It is impossible to relate all my Syrian experiences here: trundling along tarmacked roads, through liberated desert, to Aleppo, seeing yellow Hezbollah flags fluttering over what looked like ancient ring-forts, being struck in Aleppo and Homs by the destruction but realising that it can be rebuilt—unlike the mangled human remains—or standing on the roof of Aleppo's post office, where a "moderate" rebel had thrown public-service workers to their deaths.

Beside me on the return flight from Beirut to Frankfurt was a young Syrian chemist, working for a company in Germany. We chatted. Going home, she had observed how accustomed people had become to war. Concerning Assad, she was direct: "Outsiders talk of replacing President Assad, but over the past seven years no realistic alternative has emerged capable of taking his place. He must remain our president." ★

industrialisation. Its loss to Spain would mean a significant dent in the state. It is also home to one-fifth of co-operatives in the Spanish state, which reveals a latent radicalism and consciousness, going back to the famous struggles in Catalunya against the fascists in the 1930s. The main party in government is united with Madrid in its economic policies, which are fiercely pro-austerity and anti-worker.

Youth unemployment in the Spanish state is at 50 per cent, while in Catalunya it is about 40 per cent—slightly less, but still very significant.

Language is one of the pillars of the independence movement. Madrid has paid scant attention to the Catalan language, which was heavily suppressed in the Franco era. To give an example, twice as many university courses in Catalan are available in Germany as there are in the Spanish state.

As a result of the influx of migrants to the industrialised Catalunya, many Castilians learnt the language, and today it is seen as the language of all resident in Catalunya, regardless of origin. This has contributed to the feeling that the solution to Madrid's refusal to actively promote the language can be found only if Catalunya has its own independent state.

The demands centred around the call for sovereignty began in the wake of continued intransigence by Madrid over giving concessions to the region. It is also in the context of the imposed "austerity" measures, which have seen the average income of Catalans drop by a fifth.

The Spanish state has been even more intransigent with the Basque Country, where the state established death squads, which murdered Basque activists. Basque political movements were banned if they were seen to

support independence, which included the Basque Communist Party.

It is in this context that more and more Catalans took to the streets to call for a referendum on independence. More than a million have taken part in the annual demonstrations, which have taken place every year since 2012. Pro-independence parties have been in a majority for nearly a decade.

Clearly, the demand for Catalunya's right to decide its future is a mass movement, albeit one with a broad character. The capitalist class in Catalunya, and the main right-wing parties, adopted a pro-independence stance only after the mass movement began in the streets. The Catalan capitalists are still dependent on Madrid and are fearful of independence actually happening, preferring instead more concessions. They are begging for Madrid to agree to negotiations before the mass

movement forces them to declare a new independent state.

The demand for sovereignty, the right to decide, which was brutally repressed on the 1st of October, has been replaced with a demand for independence. The Catalan working class demonstrated its strength, and support, with a general strike. It should be noted that this independence would be in the form of a republic, as against the monarchy in Madrid.

The socialist understanding of such movements is that the energy and momentum should be pushed further and employed to bring the struggle of the people for national-democratic demands to the next stage, or, to quote Lenin, "we would be very poor revolutionaries if, in the proletariat's great war of liberation for socialism, we did not know how to utilise every popular movement against every single disaster imperialism brings in order to intensify and extend the crisis." ★





REFORMATION



Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Peasant War in Germany

Jenny Farrell

ON 31 OCTOBER 1517, Martin Luther made public his 95 Theses against the widespread practice of selling indulgences and clerical corruption. He attacked the Church's claim to be the sole interpreter of the word and intentions of God and defended ordinary human entitlement to God's grace without Church involvement.

The Roman Church was the greatest landowner and was the central force of European feudalism. Its increasing greed, the ruthless extortion of everybody, including the poor, caused discontent. The sale of indulgences, claiming to ensure clear passage to Heaven, were used to finance the upper clergy's affluent lifestyle and ever more splendid church buildings. Such plundering deprived all territories of their financial resources and became an obstacle to early capitalist development.

Throughout the late Middle Ages, opposition to feudalism took the shape of open heresy and armed rebellion from the fourteenth century. These were class wars, despite their religious guise.

One of the most effective heresies that took hold in the

Letter from Cuba

Seán J. Clancy

1 Cuba's elections are organised and conducted in two stages, on a no-party basis, as opposed to—as often suggested—a one-party basis.

The Communist Party of Cuba is not a political party in the sense in which this term is generally understood. No candidates for the Communist Party (or any other party) stand for election.

This system avoids many inequities and imbalances inherent in its party-political counterparts and ensures a fairer and more—rather than less—democratic electoral process.

Local government

candidates are selected during the first stage on personal merit by their neighbours and peers in an open and transparent community-based process and are elected by secret ballot on polling day.

2 Candidates can neither—nor do they need to—raise nor spend any funds, nor offer any favours, in election campaigns; and all—regardless of their political, social or economic status—are granted equal access to all voters and media.

3 Information about each candidate and their attributes, experience, qualifications, suitability and ability, with a corresponding passport

Ten truths about

photograph and in a uniform CV-style presentation, are posted in public buildings and spaces to which all voters have access.

4 People are encouraged to participate in the democratic process, which is very well organised, supervised, and secure. Voting is not obligatory, but more than 90 per cent of the electorate have traditionally participated voluntarily in the polls.

In a country where migration is an integral part of the social fabric, the actual turn-out is often even higher than recorded, because of the presence on the register of people not in the country on voting day.

5 Voters can vote for any one or all of the candidates on the ballot sheet. Each candidate needs to secure more than 51 per cent of the vote to be elected, even if they are “first past the post”; when no candidate in an area reaches the quota, a second round is held.

6 Participation in politics in Cuba is essentially a part-time (but nonetheless time-consuming), unpaid and voluntary act of public service, rather than a materially motivated career choice, and it involves self-sacrifice and effort. Parliamentarians seconded from their jobs to one of the full-time commissions that undertake the legislative





rising middle classes was the revival of early Christian teachings, and the demand to eliminate Church hierarchy, including the papacy. Such radical anti-feudal sentiment could only be expressed in theological terms at the time. From this time stem early translations of the Bible into the native languages of the people, empowering them significantly.

Plebeian demands went further. They called for the restoration of early Christian equality of all members of the community—to include civil equality, equity of property for all, and the abolition of ground rents, taxes, and privileges. They articulated the interests of a separate new class in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which led to the first major peasant uprisings under the leadership of preachers. John Ball, Wat Tyler and Jack Straw are examples in England, Jan Hus in

Bohemia, and Luther's contemporary Thomas Müntzer in Germany. Ball, Tyler and Straw were executed; Hus was burnt at the stake; Müntzer was decapitated.

Luther's contemporaries understood his Theses as a break with the Pope and the Church at a time when Germany was ripe for upheaval. He lit the fuse, so to speak. He became the protagonist of heresy against the Roman Church, and for a short time in history all oppositional forces rallied round him. His Theses, therefore, mark the Reformation of the Roman Church and constitute historically the first stage of the early bourgeois revolution in Germany.

Luther's translation of the New Testament from Latin into German in 1522 meant that ordinary people no longer depended on the interpretations of the clergy: now

they could read and understand the message of the Bible themselves, and reformed preachers held church services in the vernacular. This translation was one of Luther's lasting contributions. His writings on usury, his equation of usurer and merchant, even earned him the praise of Karl Marx.

Increasingly, in 1522–23 conflict arose between the interests of the German propertied patricians and the dispossessed, marking a second phase in the bourgeois revolution. Peasant and plebeian demands became the most far-reaching. The two classes that had briefly identified the same historic opportunity of breaking with feudal control polarised in the early years of the Reformation, and separated.

Each party needed a representative. Luther had to take sides. He claimed that he never intended his Reformation of the Church to ignite civil unrest. As the reformed lesser nobility and the urban middle classes gained power, they rallied around Luther. He dropped those elements of his position that were open to radical interpretation and instead emphasised Bible passages referring to God-ordained authorities and obedience and the acceptance of social inequality.

His adversary Thomas Müntzer, on the other hand, attacked all the main points of Christianity, preaching a kind of pantheism approaching atheism. He repudiated the Bible as the only and infallible revelation and stated that reason is the revelation, existing among all peoples at all times. He concluded that heaven is not of another world but is to be sought in this life, and that it is the task of believers to establish heaven on earth.

As Müntzer's religious philosophy approached atheism, so his political programme approached communism.

Müntzer became a leader of the German peasant war of 1524–25, the third stage of the bourgeois revolution. He is Germany's most outstanding leader of the people's Reformation, which went far beyond Luther's "moderate" bourgeois Reformation and aimed at the complete abolition of feudal power and exploitation.

The peasants were defeated and were slaughtered in enormous numbers, betrayed by the propertied classes, who no longer felt they needed them to achieve power. However, a bourgeois nation-state was not realised. Germany remained splintered into political fiefdoms for over three hundred years more. ★

Cuba's general election

administration of the state receive the same salary they had before their secondment, and return to their post once the relevant commission's work has been concluded.

7 Cuba's electoral and democratic model is "participatory" rather than "representative." Before the passing of significant new laws, for example, legislators often consider thousands of proposals, suggestions, and concerns, raised by literally millions of citizens at hundreds of nationwide grass-roots meetings and internal consultations within mass organisation. Informed popular opinion does not determine political decision-making but it is given a

degree of due consideration that is absent in most supposedly "superior" systems.

8 Candidates for election during the second stage of the electoral process, to the provincial and single-chamber national assembly, are carefully selected by qualified members of Cuba's representative mass organisations, including (but not only) the Cuban Congress of Trade Unions, the Federation of Cuban Women, the two Students' Unions, and the Farmers' Organisation.

Up to half these candidates, who form the foundation of the higher assemblies, will already have been elected to local

government, and these will stand again in their home constituencies. The remaining candidates are nominated and selected on merit and can stand in the constituency that would most benefit from their particular skill, experience and political proposals and where they are deemed to be most needed.

9 All deputies give an account of their endeavours on behalf of their constituents and relay information about local and national political developments and events at neighbourhood assemblies, during which constituents freely (and often vociferously) express their views about everything from refuse collection and street

lighting to national taxation policy, the scourge of bureaucracy, and world affairs.

10 Cuba's unique and sovereign electoral model ensures that no elected deputy or appointed official is in a position to offer political or administrative favours in return for monetary or material reward.

The Cuban model is probably more free of corruption than any global counterpart; and although—like every other—it is not without its imperfections and its critics, it is a democratic electoral process from which a lot can be learnt and within which there is much to be lauded. ★



POETRY

When the table came

GABRIEL ROSENSTOCK introduces and translates another poem from the Indian sub-continent, originally written in Konkani, the indigenous language of Goa.

We seem to accept “technological progress” and the McDonaldisation of the world as inevitable. Who wants to be called a Luddite? Yet on reading “When the Table Came” one is forced to ask what the price of “progress” really is, and to begin to count the losses.

If you knew nothing of the author you might say to yourself: “Here is a

simple peasant who rails against the modern world and the collapse of the fabric of traditional society. “Hey, man, move on!” Would it change your mind to know that the author obtained a doctorate in French literature from Sorbonne Université?

“Came the Table” is not a sentimental re-creation of some utopian past. Manohar Sardessai’s poem is an anthem that can be read in tandem with the writings of green anarchists and anarcho-primitivists: everyone from Thoreau to John Zerzan, Derrick Jensen and other challenging thinkers of our own era. It is a *cri de cœur* that deserves to be widely known. ★

Nuair a tháinig an bord

Manohar Sardessai

Tháinig an bord,
I dteannta an bhoird, tháinig an ghloine, tháinig an cupán
Tháinig an scian, tháinig an spúnóg, tháinig an forc
Tháinig an pláta
Deireadh le sú is éirí
Tháinig an bord, i dteannta an bhoird an chathaoir
Tháinig an chathaoir, deireadh leis an stól, áilleacht an Rangoli,
Deireadh le sú an tálíiúra, deireadh leis an seál
Deireadh leis an mbréid gabhail, leis an snáth, leis an éadach
deasghnách,
Deireadh leis an bpláta duilleoige, uisce á spraeáil timpeall,
An scaraid bhán, an cupán deasghnách, na cúig dúile
Deireadh leis an spúnóg dheasghnách, an clog, an “tikkli”
An marc dearg ar an gclár éadain, an mantra
an marc bán, an “pranayam,” an luathreach bheannaithe
Deireadh leis an taos santail.
Tháinig an bord, tháinig an chathaoir
Tháinig na bróga, leis an gculaith éadaigh
Tháinig an bruscar ó gach áit
Tháinig an léine, tháinig an carbhat
Deireadh le ní na gcos is na lámh
Deireadh leis an aghaidh a ní, na fiacla
Tar isteach, suigh, tar isteach, suigh
Sábhálann sé am agus airgead
Tháinig an bord, deireadh leis an gcanji, mangó amh
Ruainne cnó cócú
Tháinig an bord, tháinig an tae, an caife
Tháinig an t-arán, an t-im, an t-anraith
Deireadh le cumhracht túise, solas ón lampa ola,

Cad a cailleadh, cad a baineadh amach?
Cad a baineadh amach, cad a cailleadh?
Tháinig an bord, an bord, an bord . . .

When the table came

(Mez Ailem)

Came the table,
Along with it the glass, the cup
Came the knife, came the spoon, came the fork
Came the plate
No more sitting and rising
Came the table, with the table the chair
Came the chair, exit the stool, the beauty of the Rangoli
No more sitting cross-legged, no more shawl
No more loin cloth, no thread around, no ceremonial drape,
Gone is the leaf plate, the water sprinkling around,
The white cloth, the ritual cup, the five elements
Gone is the ritual spoon, the bell, the “tikkli”
The red mark on the forehead, the mantra
The white mark, the “pranayam,” the holy ash
Gone is the sandalwood paste.
Came the table, came the chair
Came the shoes, with the suit
Came the garbage from all around
Came the shirt, came the tie
No washing of feet, of hands
No washing the face, the teeth
Enter, sit, enter, eat
Saves time, profits
Came the table, exit the canji, the raw mango
The coconut bit
Came the table, came the tea, the coffee
Came the bread, the butter, the soup
Gone the fragrance of the incense stick, the light of the oil lamp

How much lost, how much gained?
How much gained, how much lost?
Came the table, the table, the table . . .

The Famine Year

Jane Francesca Wilde

JANE WILDE, a native of Wexford, mother of Oscar, and poet, wrote under the pen name “Speranza” in John Mitchel’s *United Irishman*.

The following extract (verses 1 and 6) is from her poem about the British-impelled genocide and the innocents they were exterminating.

Weary men, what reap ye?—“Golden corn for the Stranger.”
What sow ye?—“Human corpses that await for the Avenger.”
Fainting forms, all hunger-stricken, what see you in the offing?
“Stately ships to bear our food away amid the stranger’s scoffing.”
There’s a proud array of soldiers; what do they round your door?
“They guard our masters’ granaries from the thin hands of the poor.”
Pale mothers, wherefore weeping?—“Would to God that we were dead,
Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them bread!”

“We are wretches, famished, scorned, human tools to build your pride,

But God will yet take vengeance for the souls for whom Christ died.
Now is your hour of pleasure, bask ye in the world’s caress;
But our whitening bones against ye will arise as witnesses,
From the cabins and the ditches, in their charred, uncoffined masses,

For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes.
A ghastly, spectral army before God we’ll stand
And arraign ye as our murderers, O spoilers of our land!”

The poet knew that British arms controlled every Irish field. Bayonets, cannon, rifles, the lash, eviction and the gallows were used to seize Irish food (on the pretext that it was owned by some English owner-by-robbery). The identities and doings of the regiments involved are available in the Public Record Office in London to authors and academics subsidised by the Irish government, who neglect to use this knowledge. So the Big Lie continues to dominate in the general Irish perception of the Potato Famine. It is more than time for the real truth to be known. ★