



FORWARD

ISSUE 32 - AUSTERITY

WEAPONISING COVID-19

A bitter hopelessness of incoming austerity

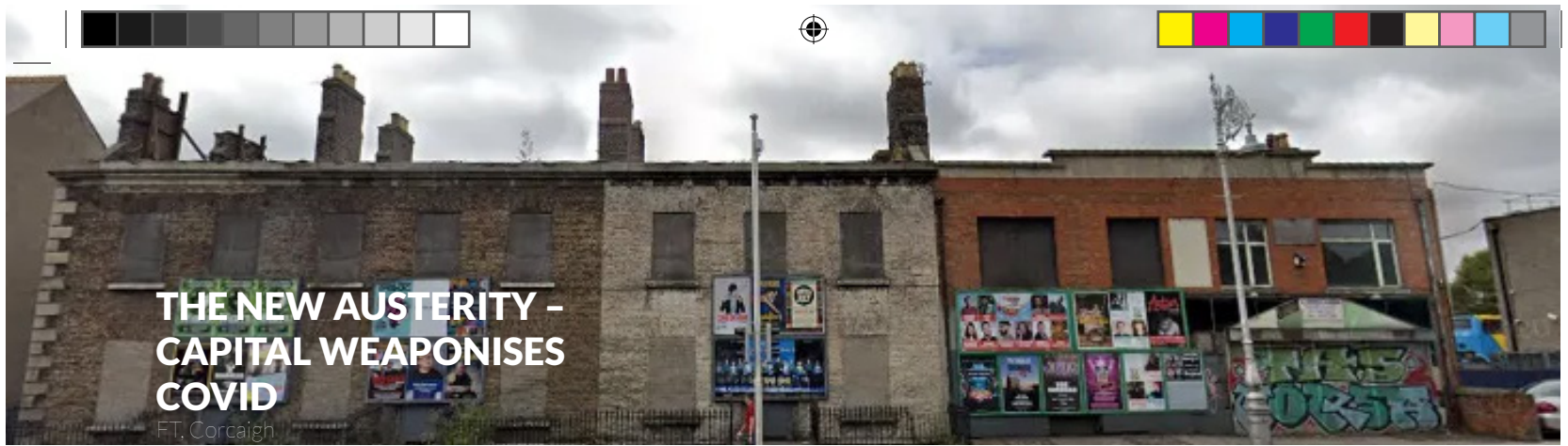
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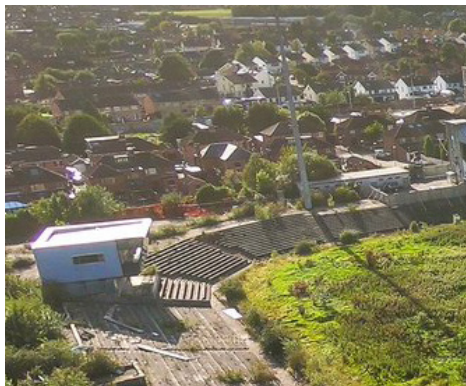




THE NEW AUSTERITY - CAPITAL WEAPONISES COVID

FT. Corcaigh

COVID-19 has served as the backdrop to a profound crisis for Capital, and its reaction has exemplified the attitude of Capital to every crisis – that it is a hidden opportunity. While the capitalist class remains organised, militant and with a total lock on political control in the country, it will continue to exert a total monopoly on the direction the economy takes in moments of potential change. Youth Unemployment, counting those on the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), now stands at over 47% in the 26 counties. Many CYM members are of a genera-



tion that came of political consciousness during the Great Recession. For some young people it will be a first experience of the bitter hopelessness for the future that this environment engenders, but for many it will be a deeply frustrating experience of a second crushing disappointment. After the Great Recession, austerity became normalised and deeply standardised into the new normal. Many spheres introduced reduced hiring practices or hiring freezes and pay cuts and reductions in the standard of conditions of unemployment were widespread and millions of young people were forced to emigrate.

Now the ruling troika of the Green Party, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, enforcing a tenuous monopoly on power for capital, are forewarning of a new recession, arguing that the widespread borrowing needed to preserve the basic necessities of life throughout society while also protecting the public health will have to be paid for. No doubt the payment will involve further privatisations and reductions in the standard of public services as the same rationale repeats itself a second

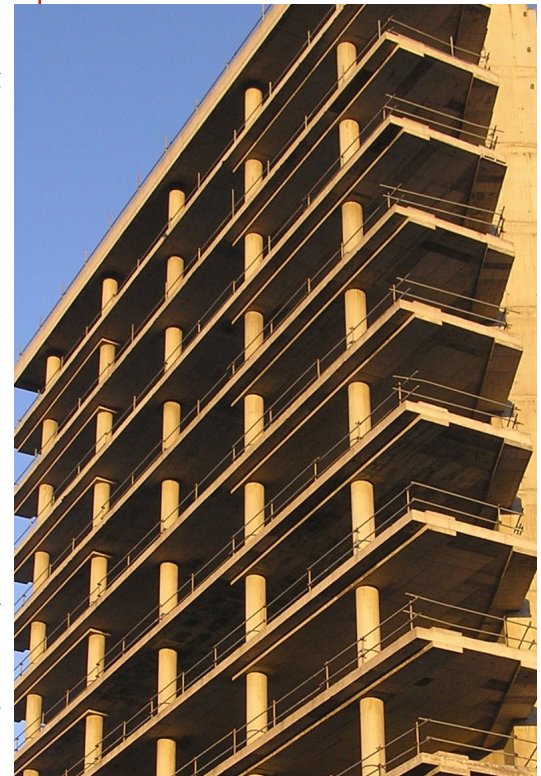
time. The articles in this issue will explore how many communities have never recovered from, and have further had their potential restricted, by previous austerity measures that have never been lifted. Two articles in this issue examine the influence of austerity in damaging opportunities for the revitalisation of the Irish language, exploring how the falsely utilitarian arguments of remodeling society to fit the needs of international finance have left our communities bereft of areas of employment where the Irish language can be used, and act as a positive influence on someone's material circumstances. Irish is not the medium of private industry in Ireland, and has been also neglected in the public sector. Until industry is reformulated to operate on the needs and desires of the Irish people to reconquer their culture and rekindle their national identity, the Irish language will continue to languish as an afterthought of the ruling class – an ornate vase that is showcased when convenient, but only accessible to those with the money to pay for it, rather than being the inalienable right of all enshrined in Irish-language medium daily life.

This issue has a particular focus on how the standardisation of austerity has affected and devastated communities and how the fresh cuts being justified through COVID-19 are lining up to worsen these pre-existing challenges. AH's article looks at the problems faced by the Fettercairn Youth Project, while Belfast and Derry's contribution critically anal-



yse how the failure of powersharing has reshaped the landscape of communities

in the six counties, rendering basic services inadequate in the midst of a mental health crisis. Another article examines how musicians and other cultural creators have suffered from capitalism's increasing commodification of our music industry.



Capitalism cannot resolve the major contradictions facing us as young people living in Ireland today, because many of the worst problems we experience are not seen as challenges, but the acceptable outcomes and side effects of capitalism. The basic ideas of healthcare and housing for all and community projects encroach on highly profitable territories. The response to COVID-19 was initially hyped as a triumph of solidarity, but the Northern and Southern states, beholden to multinationals and imperialist interference, have systematically pursued the breakup and destruction of social solidarity on a mass scale over the last two decades. Unless we band together immediately and fight for our vision of a socialist society, the next decade will continue on the same note, and slowly drain away our future.



Dónall Ó Conaill

AN TSEANBHEAN BHOCHT INNIÚ

DD, Baile Átha Cliath

Is léir go bhfuil nasc idir stair na Gaeilge agus muintir na hÉireann. De thoradh cinedhíothú cultúrtha na mBritonanaigh, tá na Gaeilgeoirí laghdaithe ón 17ú céad. Chuir na Bhriotánigh dlíthe áirithe i bhfeidhm chun bac a chur ar chultúr na nGael, cuireadh a dteanga agus a n-éadaí traidisúnta san áimhreamh. Bhain siad úsáid as na Statutes of Kilkenny, 1537 Act for the English Order, Habit and Language and the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1737 chun na nGael a cuir faoi chois, agus chun a gcultúr a chur in áit le chultúr na Breataine. Rinne siad iarracht dearcadh diúltach i leith na Gaeilge a chruthú in aigne muintir na hÉireann, mar theanga seanaimseartha agus as feidhm.

Bhí an dearcadh seo le feiceáil go láidir i bpríomhpholaiteoir an ama sin, Dónall Ó Conaill, an fuascailteoir. Labhair sé leis na sluaite trí mheán an Bhéarla (le haistri-theoirí Gaeilge i measc an lucht féachana). Tá an t-aicmeachas seo le feiceáil i measc an mheánaicme agus an aicme “oillte” an lae inniú.

Dúirt Ó Conaill é féin:

“I am sufficiently utilitarian not to regret [the] gradual abandonment [of Irish] ... Although the language is associated with many recollections that twine round the hearts of Irishmen, yet the superior utility of the English tongue, as the medium of all modern communication is so great, that I can witness, without a sigh, the gradual disuse of Irish.”

Chruthaigh na dlíthe seo (agus coilíneachas ar fad) an náire cultúrtha atá le feiceáil i sochaí na tíre seo.

Scríos sé an caidreamh atá ag daoine ar an oileán seo lena dteanga dhúchais.

Inniu, áfach, tá Dónall Ó Conaill ‘nua’ againn. I 2011, rinne ceannaire Fine Gael, Enda Kenny, (Gaeilgeoir is ea é), iarracht arís stop a chur leis an nGaeilge mar ábhar riachtanach don Ardteist. Rinne sé é seo den chéad uair i 2005.

Dúirt sé go neartódh an moladh seo an teanga ach bhí an fírinne soiléir a mhalairt a bhí fíor. Chuaigh daltaí agus Gaeilgeoirí go dtí oifig Fine Gael chun agóid a dhéanamh ina choinne. Thuig siad nach raibh ach leithscéal i gceist leis an moladh seo.

Is fuath le daltaí, muinteoirí agus an pobal curaclam na Gaeilge. Ceapann fórmhór na ndaoine gur ábhar leadránach agus seanaimseartha é, leis an iomarca béime ar phrós agus ar an bhflíocht.

Mothaíonn na daltaí gur caithfidh said siúl sular féidir leo lámhacán. Áfach, is léir go bhfuil Fine Gael ag iarraidh cac a ghlanadh.

Fine Gael is ainm don pháirtí seo ach níl aon ghrá acu don teanga. Tá siad ag iarraidh í a mharú. Ní Gaeil iad ar chor ar bith.

Ní feictear an dearcadh seo i bpolaitíocht na hÉireann amháin, áfach. Cáineadh Fianna Fáil, an “pártí poblachtach” le deanaí, mar gheall ar an Aire Stáit, Jack Chambers, a rugadh air ag tvuíteáil as Gaeilge le cabhair ó Google Translate! Mar a deir an seanfhocal, “is fearr Gaeilge bhriste ná Béarla cliste.” É sin ráite, ba chóir go mbeadh caighdeán níos airde ag na daoine atá i gceannas.

Níos measa ná Airithe Sóisearach

nach bhfuil ábalta a bpost a dhéanamh i gceart, tá fadhbanna ollmhóra eile le feiceáil sa tír seo.

Thug an rialtas seo cead do forbróirí 30 teach a thógáil i nGaeltacht Ráth Cháirn, Contae na Mí. B’fhéidir go gceapfar gur maith an smaoinimh é seo ar dtús báire – tá forbairt á dhéanamh acu ar cheantar Gaeltacht, treise leo! Ach ní mar a shíltear a bhítear.

Níl na forbróirí ag tabhairt ach 70% na dtithe nua seo do dhaoine a labhraíonn an Ghaeilge. Ina theannta sin, ní dúirt na forbróirí aon rud faoi chaighdeán na teanga nó an measúnú atá i gceist acu a chur i bhfeidhm. Chun rudaí a chur i gcomparáid, níl ach 40 teach i Rath Cháirn faoi láthair, mar sin, is méadú 133.33% é seo!

Le méadú phobail mar seo agus gan measúnú teanga is cinnte go scríosfaidh Gaeltacht Laighin, in ionad í a chosaint.

Tá an t-airgead níos tábhachtaí ná daoine is léir!

In ainneoin na drochpholasaithe teanga agus smaointe seanchaite seo, is teanga atá ag maireachtáil i an Ghaeilge, teanga atá láidir agus atá beo. Is inspioráid í An Cheathrú Gaeltachta in Iarthar Bhéal Feirste do Ghaeilgeoirí ar fud na tíre. D’éirigh le forbairt na háite seo veto an DUP i leith Acht na Gaeilge a shárú.

Tá grúpaí ceol úr nua tagtha chun cinn trí mheán na Gaeilge cosúil le KNEECAP. Tá Pop-Up Gaeltachtaí ar siúl ar fud na cruinne. Cabhraíonn na rudaí seo an dochar córasach a rinneadh don teanga a laghdú.

Is cosúil go bhfuil níos mó imní ar an rialtas agus na tíoránaigh coilíneacha faoin meánaicme agus na teangacha a bhaineann le “provoism”.

Mar a dúirt Pádraig Mac Piarais, “tír gan teanga, tír gan anam”.



Kneecap



POWERSHARING CONTINUES TO STAGNATE

DC. Doire

The political structures in place in the six counties have long since failed in their ability to serve their intended purpose of enforcing London rule in Ireland, let alone in their ability to serve the interests of the working classes of the North. Stormont has 90 MLAs ranging in ideology from far right to left of centre (at best). The issue at hand with the devolved establishment with respect to the ideological spectrum is how the British elite have twisted the views of the electorate by pitting working class catholic and protestant against one another. There has been a distinct lack of class solidarity in the six counties for decades exacerbated by the ever-growing stagnation of the power-sharing structures in existence.

We know that socialism cannot and will not be delivered through the means of any parliamentary process. However, this doesn't mean that when in place we cannot critique the institutions imposed upon us. In the 22 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the establishment of a power-sharing, mandatory coalition government in Belfast the Assembly has collapsed or been dissolved by the British state on five separate occasions ranging from a 24 hour suspension to five year periods of zero activity in the devolved government. Most recently the Assembly failed to sit for over 1,000 days from a March 2017 election until January of this year. In the time period between Sinn Féin bringing down the Assembly over Arlene Foster's "cash for ash" scheme to the resumption of devolved government, each of the 90 MLAs collected an annual pay check of £48,000. For absolutely nothing.

How and why is the stagnation of the power-sharing and political structures relevant to the struggle for communism? Are all social democratic parliaments, devolved or national, not insufficient in fulfilling the basic needs of the working class let alone furthering our prosperity? The fact is that it is exactly this stagnation of the political process that makes the case for socialism in itself. One pressing issue that sticks out in regard to the six counties is the alarming rate of suicide we have been facing for a number of years. No one is in a position to say or even speculate why anyone has taken their own life but there is a lot to be said for the link between the mental health crisis in the north and the lack of opportunity afforded the people. Over 37,000 people are on the social housing waiting list, 26,000 of which are in "hous-

ing stress" and 12,500 households are statutorily homeless. The rate of unemployment has more than doubled during the global COVID-19 pandemic even while the Job Retention Scheme has been in place. The local lockdown imposed on Derry's hospitality sector which employs a huge portion of the cities working class has the potential to put thousands out of work with the furlough scheme fast approaching its end. Nothing but silence has come from the powers that be in Stormont. Bringing this back to the point at hand, the devolved government in Belfast has done nothing to reverse or even mitigate any of the above issues despite having the power and ability to do so.

Similar to the 26 counties there is a constant and numerous flow of emigration from the failed northern statelet due to the aforementioned lack of opportunity afforded to young people leaving education and looking to enter the world of work in a meaningful position. The employment that is consistently offered involves the ever-revolving door and the ever-worsening exploitation of the call centres. Again, nothing comes from Stormont to attempt to reverse the flow of emigration or subjugation of the young workforce, in fact, the establishment is often furthering it with the enforcement of anti-trade union legislation such as the Trade Union and Labour Relations Order 1995 which is making it near impossible for workers in such sectors effectively unionising in any form.

We are fast approaching the centenary of British mandated partition on the island of Ireland, the result of which has been two sets of failed institutions which serve only their own and the British ruling class's interests. The ever-present stagnation of the devolved government in the six counties is continuing to further entrench the status quo on the working class through a variety of means being its inability to offer employment or housing, inability to resolve the mental health crisis and rising emigration or through brute force and political policing. The socialism we believe in and strive to achieve stands in stark contrast to any pseudo devolution offered to the six counties by the capitalist class in Westminster. As the centenary of partition approaches, so too does the re-unification of the island of Ireland and the opportunity to leave behind the political stagnation and break the shackles of imperialism imposed on Ireland by the British state.

SAVE THE FETTERCAIRN YOUTH PROJECT

AH. Baile Átha Cliath

Fettercairn Horse Youth Project is a community based equine facility in West Tallaght. It has a 20 stable facility and an outdoor arena. It focuses on helping disadvantaged young people to develop social, equine, and vocational skills and is beloved by the Fettercairn and wider Tallaght community. In recent times, particularly since 2019 it has come under threat of being shut down.

The primary reason for its potential closure is the departure from Ireland of its original insurance provider and the dramatic increase of the cost of insurance. In 2017, the independent.ie reported that its premium was 5,500. In 2019, the premium was recorded a whopping 42,000 euro. As a result, the project has cut the number of staff there and the number of facilities it can offer. The South Dublin City Council stepped in this time to cover the insurance cost, but this is not guaranteed, and the entire project is now under imminent threat. The project even joined a group called "Alliance for Insurance Reform" to campaign against the rising costs of insurance in Ireland.

To the outside observer, it might not constitute a direct attack on a working-class community, but the fact of the matter is that this is an obvious result of a deregulated insurance industry. The insurance industry in all fields has recorded profit after profit. In the motor industry the insurance industry continues to increase insurance all round and it usually takes a challenge or threat of changing insurance firm to get them to stop the increase.

Only a year ago, the Chief Executives of the largest insurance firms claimed that 20% of all personal injury claims were fraudulent or exaggerated. Their claim was not accompanied by any evidence. Similarly, RTE reported that motor insurance premiums rose 42% between 2008 and 2018, despite a 2.5% decrease in claims. It would certainly be my view and that of the Connolly Youth, that insurance firms operate as a cartel and collectively raise the cost of insurance. They do this for the sole reason of ensuring that their stupendous profits continue to grow year in year out and so that their CEO's can live lavish and luxurious lives. This is a pattern that repeats itself now in all aspects of society, as different industries band together to maximise the exploitation of their income base, whether through rentier capitalism or low pay, zero hour contracts.

The consequences of insurance firms operating as cartels is felt by us. In our estates, on the cost of our homes, our



cars and for our health. Insurance firms produce nothing of value to society, offer nothing new and do nothing besides take money from people in the off chance that something unfortunate might occur. There could be a more equitable way of fixing that damaged car, paying out compensation or covering your medical expenses?

It is my proposition that in a Socialist

Ireland, there would be no need for medical insurance because the health service would look based on need. It is further my proposition that popular community projects would get the funding they deserve from the State, as opposed to being abandoned to fend for themselves. While we continue building the forces necessary for the construction of socialism in Ireland, we must defend our communi-

ties and the projects that give so much in them. The social cost of caring for those who require claims should be born by society, to eliminate an industry that profits off misfortune.

If they come for the Fettercairn Horse Youth Project, there is no doubt in my mind, that this community, won't just let it get shut down just like that.

AUSTERITY AND THE GAELTACHT

PM. Gaillimh

"People may have to die in this country and may have to die of starvation" - Patrick McGilligan, Minister for Industry and Commerce (1924-1932)

In the 1920s, a so-called "independent" Ireland faced a series of brutal catastrophes that are not spoken of in any Irish history book to any real extent. Faced with alienation from international markets, the Cumann na nGaedheal government of the newly formed Free State focused on following the British economic line, in a manner eerily similar to the description of the national bourgeoisie of post-colonial countries by Frantz Fanon: "the national bourgeoisie... is completely canalised into activities of the intermediary type. Its innermost vocation... to keep in the running and be part of the racket". Cumann na nGaedheal, the predecessor of our primary antagonist, Fine Gael, focused on "balancing" the national economy in line with British standards. The extreme austerity which resulted caused a 16% decline in wages for the Irish working class and the reintroduction of a 7-day work week.

Rather than investing the national capacity of the country into the modernisation of industry and agriculture, Cumann na nGael resigned itself to what Fanon describes as the "methods of agricultural production which were characteristic of the colonial period" When the rain fell and the blight hit, the workers of Ireland suffered. The Manchester Guardian reported that 750,000 people were starving in 1925. Pravda, in its report, showed a satirical image of a fat priest next to a starving family.

Indeed, in the space of a month, my own family living on Omev Island, the Cumhalls, starved to death. My great-grandmother returned from the US to a violently different Connemara, several thousand people having died of starvation between

1923 and 1926. Throughout all of this the Irish government viewed those suffering with animosity, as lazy scroungers, as a burden on State finance. This government internalised the colonial attitudes of the British government towards the Irish proletariat and followed through on policies left by British institutions.

A feature of Irish culture that suffered continuous attack under British rule which has continued under the present establishment is that on the Irish language. While in the past the language's decline can be linked to brutal conquest and deadly exploitation, the modern decline of Irish is occurring in a less physically violent manner. While the modern Gaeltachtaí were established by the Free State, they very quickly found themselves economically isolated, with the employment that many inhabitants needed to survive only being available through English. The response of the Gaelgóirí was a dismantling of their society in an effort to survive. As an example, my grandfather left Omev because there was no future, no hope of life other than survival separated by bouts of hunger.

Now that the socio-economic structures that kept Gaeilge a part of everyday life have been stripped away, the language is declining without the need for physical coercion. While there is no clear correlation between unemployment, poverty or lack of home ownership and the Gaeltachtaí of the Free State (in fact there is higher employment in Gaeltachtaí compared to the Irish average) in Dún na nGall, Maigh Eo, An Mhí, Corcaigh agus Ciarraí, the Gaeltacht population is declining or stagnating. Only Gaillimh and Port Láirge have an increasing population of 5%.

The number of cainteoirí is declining dramatically i ngach Gaeltacht ach amháin Gaeltacht na Gaillimhe. Is iad na Gaeltachtaí saghas fo-thacar nó subset den Iarthair. Tá a gcuid daonra ag dul in aois agus tá a ndaoine ag imeacht. Beag nach 7% dá gcuid daonra i ndrochsláinte. Is iad an chuid is mó den cainteoirí daoine metropolitan, taim féin i mo ball den grúpa seo. Chuaigh mé chuig Gaelscoil, taim ábalta an teanga a labhairt agus a scríobh.

But I don't. At least I don't when I'm not engaging with fellow Gaeilgeoirí.

This metropolitan cohort of Gaeilgeoirí can speak the language because they went to a Gaelscoil, whose students (not

myself) often lie within a certain economic sphere that could be described as that of the national bourgeoisie. To this national bourgeoisie, the language is a metropolitan fancy, it serves no purpose other than to satisfy some romantic idealism regarding the language. Successive governments have thus funded Irish because it settles their conscience regarding this romantic notion. Having removed the economic base upon which Irish thrived, this national bourgeoisie comforts itself by funding a superstructure that has no foundation.

A real future for the few remaining native speakers does arise from this narrative, however.

The language is not yet dead, this is a fact. It is in decline, but it is certainly alive. British and US culture has steadily become enmeshed in Irish culture for the past 600 years as our economy has become solely dependent on these two imperial powers. Therefore, in order to reverse this process, it is necessary to dislocate one's economic base from these powers. The disassociation of Irish from civil service entry removed one of the key economic incentives encouraging attainment of the language, and the predominance of English as the lingua franca of multinationals has further eliminated the space for Irish to thrive.

A reversal of our colonial past must occur, not simply a whitewashing and continuation of it. The National capacity must be driven to restore the real economy of the West. This does not entail a mythical return to an imagined Celtic past but rather the devotion of modernity and scientific advancement to the restoration of the superstructure of Gaeilge and its economic base. In the following years, we are likely to see a novel form of austerity related to COVID-19. This austerity will decimate the economically vulnerable first, just as it has done in the past. You may retort, austerity in the modern age has not had nearly as much damage as what you described occurring in the 1920s, and this may be true, but the reality is if the economic boat starts to sink it will be those so-called 'inefficient' areas that suffer most. We only have to look across the Irish Sea to see more than 13 million people reliant on food banks after a decade of austerity. It is clear that our government, past and present, view the Gaeltacht as such.



AUSTERITY HITS WEST BELFAST

PH. Béal Feirste

It is the working-class which feels the brunt of tax cuts implemented by the ruling-class. These cuts have had a profound impact on working-class communities like West Belfast. Stormont has been complicit in implementing such cuts upon our communities, such as in 2015 when they passed the Welfare Reform Bill being implemented in the North, when the big parties grouped together to pass the bill 70-22. This is despite both Sinn Féin and the DUP claiming to be parties of the working class. Yet ever since their coming to power signing of the Good Friday agreement completely abandoned the struggles the working class face within their communities and been complicit on putting misery upon their communities and further dividing them on sectarian lines. However, austerity has no sectarian divide. The working class on the Falls and the Shankill are both feeling the brunt of both Stormont and Tory rule. No matter how parties in Stormont try to spin it, they did the dirty work of the Tories in implementing Tory policies. They voted for welfare cuts in exchange for power to reduce corporation tax to stop big business losing £400 million. This so-called "welfare reform" has forced disabled and terminally ill people to go through degrading checks every year, carried out by private companies, and being judged on their illness and disabilities. One-third of people with multiple sclerosis who applied for this PIP (Personal Independence Payment) scheme, implemented as part of the "fresh start agreement", have been denied sickness payments benefits as a result of Stormont voting for these cuts. This shows that Stormont can't deliver for the most vulnerable within our communities.

The failure of Stormont to deliver for working class communities like West Belfast has resulted in activists like our own having to deliver to those who are most in need in our communities. In 2020, the South West food bank on Stewartstown Road experienced a sevenfold increase in the number of families relying on it. It is now helping at least 100 families a week. This is the continuing impact that welfare cuts implemented by Stormont and the Tories have had upon our communities. The coronavirus also unmasked the true faces of our politicians when the DUP in Westminster abstained on a motion for the extension of free school meals until Easter, the same free school meals which are an everyday necessity for many children all across the six counties.

In the six counties, as in the South, homelessness is also a major issue. West Belfast alone has one of the highest rates

of homelessness in the North, accounting for 2,373 out of the 20,000 homeless across the six counties. Housing in the North is a broken system, but this comes as no surprise when members of the DUP and Sinn Féin profit from it, with some representatives of both parties being landlords. According to The Irish News in 2016, Pat Sheehan, a Sinn Féin MLA for West Belfast held four residential properties cloaked through the ownership of a management company. Early in December of 2020, Sinn Féin and the DUP came together once again to vote against a motion which opposed privatisation of houses owned by the Housing Executive (which is the main public authority providing social housing in the six counties). These parties know full well what privatisation does to working class people's rights within their communities. Amidst all this, it is important as ever for tenants to join together and get involved with their local tenant's union.

The impact of austerity has also been felt in the mental health department. In the six counties, average spending on mental health per person is lower than in England. This says a lot when this is one of the biggest issues facing the North the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, resulting in 4,500 people dying as a result of suicide between 1998 and 2018. In 2016 a year after Stormont voted for the welfare cuts in the space of 12 months suicide rates in West Belfast more than doubled. To put the crisis into context, more people in the North have died from suicide in the 22 years since Good Friday, than all deaths caused by the preceding 30 years of continuous conflict.

Sport in West Belfast has been impacted mostly as a result of failure to finance the rebuilding of Casement Park. The head of Ulster GAA called for Stormont to finance £32.5 million on the rebuilding of the abandoned stadium. Casement Park had brought a lot to the West Belfast community, allowing for Ireland's national sports to be played in the heart of West Belfast, and being the home of the County Antrim GAA team. It brought people from all over Ireland to West Belfast. As we enter the twelfth year without Casement Park, Belfast continues to be left without one of its biggest sporting stadiums and has left Antrim GAA without a home ground to play on it has still not been built.

Not only has the failure to finance Ireland's national sport had impacts on the community of West Belfast but also the failure to revitalise the Irish language. Ever since the outset of England's colonial policy, we have seen our Gaelic culture eroding, but nonetheless there are

those within our community keeping it alive, such as the Falls Road Cultúrlann. It should not be forgotten either that one of the factors that saw the breakdown of Stormont in 2017 was the cutting of £50,000 of funding for Irish language education. Even now, after Stormont's return in early 2020, its proposals regarding the Irish language fell short of the commitments made in the St. Andrew's agreement in 2006 which promised an Irish language act, based on the Welsh legislation, and which has failed to materialise ever since. Stormont has been – and continues to be – complicit in carrying on the attempt by England to wipe out our Irish history, language and culture, and has shown no hesitation in using austerity as a tool in accelerating this process inextricably linked to capitalism.

The coronavirus pandemic showed the true face of Stormont rule. During the pandemic Sinn Féin and the DUP were able to come together to pass a £500 million big business Tribeca deal which would further gentrify Belfast City Centre, while leaving the working-class underfunded and unable to provide their families with basic necessities. Tax cuts on top of a lack of support by Stormont during the pandemic resulted in the far-right trying to prey on those within our communities who are angry with how Stormont (predictably) abandoned the working class. It is important as Marxist-Leninists we show those within our communities who are angry with how they've been treated during the pandemic that socialism is the only way to defeat the virus. We must stand alongside the working-class in their anger at how Stormont and Capitalism have left them behind during the pandemic and smash the fascist groups wherever they try to raise their heads within our communities.

As we approach the one hundredth anniversary of the failed colonial statelet, Stormont rule and its various agreements within this time period has proven to be a repeating story of tax cuts, sectarianism, lack of public funding and impounding misery on the working-class. Constitutional nationalism has been complacent in propping up the failed partitionist system of governance which has left behind the working-class and attempted to keep us divided whilst they deprived and denied the working-class of any scrap of support. As James Connolly said, "governments in capitalist society are but committees of the rich to manage the affairs of the capitalist class", Stormont is no different.



MUSIC: ANOTHER CASUALTY OF ALIENATION

JR. Baile Átha Cliath

Marx described the commodification of labour and its ownership, not by the labourer, but rather the capitalist, as the basis of the alienation of labour we all feel. No longer are we artisans whose work becomes self-actualised in the final product of our labour; we are replaceable, coerced cogs in one of many machines, another means of producing, a commodity to be bought and sold. Once, a clockmaker would construct the whole object, agonising over its small intricacies, and then feel a sense of connection and accomplishment with the completed article. Now, the worker who might have been that clockmaker sits on an assembly line fixing the short-hand to the clock face and then passing it down the line for another worker to affix the long hand, and so on. The finished item is not something any of those workers feel connected to, it is not them or their labour that owns it, it is the boss, the CEO, the board who owns it, just like they own the labour of the workers who make it.

This assembly line doesn't just cover manufacturing work, but also the full gamut of cultural labour. For the vast majority of the history of recorded music, the recording process has been an expensive and technical endeavour. Big record labels and moneyed people would own the studios and the technicians working therein. In the last 10 to 15 years with the advent and development of computer-based recording technology, smaller, cheaper and easier to operate devices have become widespread. As such, there has been somewhat of a democratisation of the recording process. If you have a few hundred quid (easier said than done for many!), anyone now can make quality recordings from their own bedrooms.

Meanwhile, in the world of mainstream

music, we have seen the development of 'assembly line' music production. Check the credits on any high-charting record and you'll see 10 different songwriters, 15 producers, 5 mixers and a host of musicians.

The online environment has been disastrous for the revenue of the major record labels in the last 20 years. More and more labels close or get bought up by the Big Three of Sony, Universal and Warner. Where once labels and artists alike could make fortunes off record sales alone, today, because of online piracy and streaming services that pay artists infinitesimal fractions of a cent per play, there just simply isn't the kind of money and budgets in music there once was.

In response, the Big Three major record labels responded the way capitalism has always responded in times of economic hardship; further alienation for the workers, rescued profits for the owners. They have begun to adopt an "assembly line" production method for the music they release. The budgets for hiring huge studios and a single renowned producer for a record have disappeared. As such, now you see they will hire numerous workers of every stripe. Those "artisans" have been replaced by a factory-style worker model. You'll have one who will arrange the drums, one who will write the vocal melody, one who will write the verse lyrics, another who will write the chorus lyrics, and so on, and the end result, just as for those clockmakers, is a finished product owned by the record label towards to which those who produced it feel no particular connection: the alienation of the recording industry. There are obvious exceptions but a quick glance at the credits for songs on the Billboard 100 will show this assembly line method in action.

So, what does this mean for the "democratisation of the recording process" that many have commented on? Yes, it's true, it is far easier now to produce music than ever before. But here we still see the contradictory logic of capitalism. You'll often hear the phrase "bedroom

studio" or "laptop producer" to describe those who avail of the increased access to music production. There has been a large increase in "audio hobbyists", those who do not professionally make money from their craft. Often hobbies have been described as "labour free from alienation", which is a compelling description but it hides a darker capitalist logic: if you don't not seek monetary compensation for your labour, it is a hobby, you are not a professional. Any labour that does not seek to generate money is demoted to the position of hobby. The crucial means of distribution, the platforms that decide access of the public, are still in private hands and are carefully guarded to ensure that any access valorises profits.

We see the illogic of capitalism playing itself out in interesting ways in the modern music industry. On the side of "big business", we see that music production has adopted an assembly line formation that attempts to keep costs down in an era of lower profits than ever. On the other hand, the means of producing music have never been more accessible, but analysis of "home studio" culture also reveals the illogic of capitalism. There is a dialectical relationship at play here between these two antagonistic phenomena of the recording world, that of big business and home studios. It is worth mentioning that, now music production is more "democratised" than ever before, the alienation of recordists' labour within the music industry has never been higher. As more people get access to these means of production, capitalist logic within the industry fights back, cuts costs and alienates its workforce further from their labour. Even in something as apolitical as the recording process, we see the class struggle between workers and capitalists present itself. The capitalists will always fight back against moves towards democratic access to the means of production, even if it's just the means of music production!





SUCH WAS THE LACK OF CONCERN ABOUT DEVELOPING INDIGENOUS GROWTH THAT THE COUNTRY'S NATURAL RESOURCES WERE SOLD OFF WHOLESAL WITH-OUT A SECOND THOUGHT. IN IRELAND, THE HANDSHAKE DID NOT SECURE THE DEAL, THE HANDSHAKE WAS THE DEAL. THE MIDDLEMAN: HE IS THE DOMINANT FORCE IN MODERN IRISH CAPITALISM. THE TYPE OF LOCAL BUSINESS INTERESTS WHICH EXPANDED ON THE BACK OF FOREIGN FINANCE WERE ALL ABOUT MAKING THE DEAL HAPPEN.

Sins of the Father, Conor McCabe, 2011

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DESIGN - AC, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
COVER GRAPHIC - SMG, CORCAIGH
PUBLISHED FEB 2021

