



**BUILD THE PEOPLE'S
RESISTANCE**

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ALTERNATIVE



**Documents of the 24th National Congress
of the Communist Party of Ireland (2010)**

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INTRODUCTION

Opening speech by Eugene McCartan, General Secretary

THIS 24th Congress of the Communist Party of Ireland is taking place amidst one of the greatest economic crises since the 1930s in the imperialist system of state monopoly capitalism. This great crisis that we are experiencing is part of the systemic crisis of the capitalist system itself, the constant and permanent feature of slump and boom.

Many illusions carefully constructed by the ideologues of imperialism—that it had overcome the tendency to slump and boom—lie shattered. The illusion that globalisation had ended the role or the importance of the nation-state has also been exposed as untrue. From the very outset of this crisis, and as it continues to deepen, the first port of call for monopoly capitalism was national governments, to bail them out. They demanded and secured the socialisation of their debts, so that working people should carry the debt burden.

All around us we can see the fall-out from this deep crisis and the growing offensive by ruling classes and monopoly capitalism. Workers are experiencing a generalised attack on their terms and conditions, not just here in Ireland but right across the developed capitalist world, which is also having a profound and devastating impact on the lives of tens of millions of small farmers and peasants across the globe.

We are facing not alone a deepening economic crisis but also a deepening environmental crisis, a crisis that, if not stopped and reversed, will see the end of hundreds of millions of people.

Millions of jobs have been lost. Millions of workers are now facing long-term unemployment. Tens of millions have been thrown deeper into poverty and hunger. Growing numbers of working people in the developed capitalist world have lost or will lose their homes in the coming years. Here in this city and throughout the country we can see the growing numbers of homeless people, with tens of thousands of working people unable to pay their mortgage, the electricity or gas bill or even to put sufficient food on the table.

Social advances that many believed were permanent features of life, such as being able to retire at sixty-five or earlier and having a pension at the end of their working life—a pension considered by many workers as deferred wages—are now under attack. The strategy of forcing people to take out private pensions is a strategy for handing over

additional surplus labour for further speculation by financial speculators. The once-accepted right to overtime payments is also under growing attack. Public-sector workers' belief that they had secure, permanent employment now looks increasingly vulnerable as the assault on the public sector grows in intensity.

This Irish Government, and the dominant economic and political forces within our country, under orders from the European Union, are using state power to drive forward their economic and social policies in the interests of the EU and the American Chamber of Commerce in Ireland as well as in their own specific class interests.

The advances made over many decades by working people, the social services they have struggled to develop and that they rely upon, are under renewed attack. Those policies will increasingly be replicated throughout the North of Ireland as the British coalition Government attempts to make working people pay for the crisis in British finance capital.

The economic and social policies not just of the current Irish Government but of any possible combination of political parties at present represented in the Dáil are based on accepting that the crippling corporate debts now transformed into Irish sovereign debt by the present coalition Government are the only way forward. They all accept and support the budget strategy and the debt ratios being imposed by the EU.

These debts, accumulated by adventurous property speculation by Irish builders and developers, were part of a global feeding frenzy, a global speculative property bubble. The Irish "Golden Circle" not only engaged in speculative property development here in Ireland but invested in similar speculative activities around the world. Vast and quick profits could be acquired not just by the builders and developers but, most importantly, by finance capital as it pumped trillions of dollars and euros into a speculative bubble as it drove for greater profits in yet another bubble, as the rate of return in the manufacturing economy was and is stagnant.

Irish banks and finance houses, like their Greek, Portuguese and Spanish counterparts, borrowed heavily from willing German and French banks. German banks in particular, unable to reinvest profits in German manufacturing, as profits have been stagnating for some time in that economy, were only too eager to fuel the boom in speculative investment by their domination and control of the European Central Bank and its policy of low interest rates on borrowing.

We gather here in Dublin on the eve of the first anniversary of the second vote on the Lisbon Treaty—a treaty rejected by the Irish people, then forced through by an alliance of the EU Commission, the Irish state, IBEC, ISME, the American Chamber of Commerce in Ireland, and a motley crew of house-trained trade union leaders, poets, artists, and film directors.

Many of the concerns and objections raised by our party and by our allies in the People’s Movement have tragically been borne out by events. As a party we stood almost alone within the labour movement in arguing for the rejection of this and previous treaties. The EU Commission has used the crisis to consolidate and extend its control over member-states and to further undermine and hollow out bourgeois democracy.

Even some of those who have in the past been supporters of EU integration have begun to question what is happening. What is also clear is that the EU Commission is now micro-managing the Irish economy. It controls and determines the budgetary strategy and priorities of member-states. This applies not just to small member-states, such as Ireland, but also to larger states, such as Britain. This growing and deepening concentration of power in the EU Commission is a deepening of the control and power of monopoly capitalism and in particular of finance capitalism.

It is important that we continue to build the resistance to this undermining of national democracy and to defend the limited sovereignty achieved by the Irish people. The strategic approach of imperialism is to restrict the ability of working people throughout the European Union to change or even to influence the policies of the national governments that they elect.

We must continue to challenge those elements within the trade union movement that have sown the illusion that the EU is good for workers. The struggle to build the forces of resistance against the EU must be a priority for our party.

We challenge those parties and organisations that tell us that we are unrealistic in resisting European monopoly capitalism. We challenge them to tell us what their strategy is for empowering Irish workers. Is it by giving more power to monopoly capitalism at the EU level? How will they confront monopoly capitalism? We know from experience that they will neither resist the EU nor resist this Government or any future Governments. Nor will they confront monopoly capitalism.

We know that leading forces within the trade union movement, the

Labour Party and social democracy in general wish to manage workers' expectations within the system, rather than to develop the independent economic and political struggles of workers. We know from long experience that they want to "manage capitalism"; they want a "better capitalism": they do not want to end it. They do not want to end exploitation.

At this time, workers in the Republic are experiencing this deep crisis in the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs, growing emigration, poverty, and homelessness, with the number of home repossessions growing daily. This Government's strategy of cutting the budget deficit from 12 per cent of GDP to less than 3 per cent by 2014, under orders from Brussels, will be implemented at huge cost to working people and can only deepen the crisis. Jean-Claude Trichet, the president of the European Central Bank, has hailed this strategy as the best way forward and an example to be followed by everyone else—just as the "Celtic Tiger" was an example that all should follow.

The impact of the decision by the British Government to cut the subvention to the Northern Ireland Executive and all future budgetary transfers from the British exchequer will have a major impact on the lives of working people in the North, a region that already experiences growth in poverty and growing inequality and unemployment.

Here we need to acknowledge that the trade union movement in the North has shown greater signs of resistance to the cuts and attacks on working people and has reached out beyond its own ranks to the wider community in its efforts to mobilise the broadest resistance to any future cuts to be introduced by the Executive—a strategy that our party has played an important and central role in developing.

This reaching out and the constant efforts to mobilise working people stands in stark contrast to the retreat into the barren military strategy by certain republican paramilitary organisations. This strategy, as has been shown by recent history, can and will only lead to further division, will result in more people in jail, will provide the excuse for increased repression—not that the state needs much excuse—and will provide greater openings for elements within the British state to manipulate the situation for their own strategic political goals.

Trade unions in the North have shown a preparedness to mobilise working people and communities in defence of public services. This experience must be used by the party in the Republic to help build confidence among working people to resist but also to highlight the abysmal lack of leadership and the absence of any clear ideas or

alternative strategy that would mobilise working people by key sectors of the trade union movement in the Republic.

Leading individuals within the ICTU have deliberately blocked, resisted, delayed and opposed any possible mobilisation of workers to oppose Government policies. They continue to hanker after a moribund strategy of “social partnership” in the vain hope that the Government and the bosses won’t notice them sitting meekly in the corner and won’t come and attack them. This illusion that non-resistance will save them is in fact leading to further undermining of the trade union movement within the minds of the majority of workers who remain unorganised.

The pervasive view among sections of the trade union leadership is that it is their role to manage workers’ expectations, that the state is economically and politically neutral, that the Government’s role is to mediate between workers and the employers. These petty-bourgeois social-democratic ideas have left a legacy of “neutrality” on economic matters and the nature of the system.

Just as the first McCarthy Report provided the ruse for launching an outright assault on public-sector workers and on public services, it is clear that under the guise of the forthcoming second McCarthy Report on semi-state companies there is to be a fire sale of public assets. Venture capitalists are waiting in the wings, ready to snap up public assets at bargain-basement prices, while the labour movement, like previous utopians, sits on its hands, believing that by its righteousness and by strength of argument alone it can prevent the sale of these important public assets. They have abandoned the only real weapon that workers have: that of industrial action.

Now is the time for us to be daring, but not adventurous. The crisis is too deep for appeals for some economic reforms or a few more crumbs from the table or the reversal of this or that cut. As the crisis has presented an opportunity for imperialism, for monopoly capitalism, to launch its offensive against workers, we also must attempt to take advantage of the crisis to press forward our own strategic anti-imperialist approach.

The problems that face Irish workers, north and south, cannot be solved by tinkering with or looking for reversals in cuts, important though they may be. As revolutionaries it is not our job to make capitalism work better but rather to exploit its contradictions in the interests of our class, to open up fronts of struggle that can put our class, the working class, in a position to push forward for state power.

That is why our demands must be of a transformative nature, which undermine the power of capital and weaken the grip of imperialism. Our demands must challenge and develop the level of consciousness of working people. Now is not the time to be sidetracked into left-sectarian workerism, nor to tail-end and curtail our strategic demand to what is possible within the trade union movement at this time. That can only allow our class enemies to determine the degree and the line of struggle. We need to keep to the fore the realisation that the consciousness of the class is shaped by the class that controls state power.

It is my belief that we are at the stage of a national-democratic struggle. There are growing contradictions within our country, north and south. Imperialism will solve its contradictions in the interests of its goals: that is, working people will pay the price. This presents us with the opportunity to challenge unionist ideology within the working class.

There are few if any lasting solutions to be found in London, in Dublin, or in Brussels to the massive cuts, growing poverty, and mass unemployment. Today's ideological, political, economic and social struggles are the building-blocks of a new Irish national democracy, the best conditions for the working class to guide our nation, for our class to determine the political and economic direction of our country—in effect, to take state power.

We must exploit the weak links in the imperialist chain. Here in the South we need to continue to challenge and to take initiatives, given our size and limited resources, to build the people's resistance. It is here we need to look to see if we can make clear the links between the policies being imposed by the EU and the closure of the local hospital or school or the imposition of service charges, the hollowing out of democracy at the national level and the lack of democracy and influence at the local level.

We also witness the heroic struggle of the people of Rosspoint and Erris in their long struggle against the Shell Oil Corporation. They have stood firm and remain unbroken, despite violence from the state, jailing, and intimidation. They are an example of a people mobilised and of the will to resist.

Within the political resolution I have presented the idea of our party developing and bringing into every trade union branch and committee, to every women's group, to every community group, to organisations concerned about the environment, culture, and language, a "Demo-

cratic Programme”—a programme that can become the property of the many and not just the idea of a few.

The idea of a Democratic Programme has deep roots in our history. It was an essential programme that won the allegiance of our people and galvanised them into struggle against British imperialism.

The struggle for democracy—not as it is understood in bourgeois terms—has the revolutionary impetus to create real and meaningful change. The demand for the democratic control of capital, for social control of natural resources, for democratic economic and social planning, for a democratic, humane culture, for democracy between women and men, for democratic accountability and national sovereignty, are prerequisites for social advance.

We need a new Democratic Programme, a programme that has the potential to mobilise working people, small business people, the self-employed, family farmers, professional workers, and the growing mass of unemployed, of women and youth—the democratic majority; but at its heart must be the working class. We must hoist imperialism on its own petard.

I firmly believe that our party has a central role to play over the coming period. It is our anti-imperialism, our understanding of the nature and substance of the enemy that our people face, that provide the opportunity for us to engage and give leadership where none now exists.

This society is economically bankrupt, is morally degenerate, and is incapable of providing or promoting a decent socially cohesive and culturally and spiritually enriched society.

The communist tradition within the working-class movement was born from the struggle against imperialism and for socialism based on class struggle. That is still our strength, and it is still our duty to resist imperialism.



POLITICAL RESOLUTION

“The supremacy of finance capital over all other forms of capital means the predominance of the rentier and of the financial oligarchy.” (Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism.*)

The crisis in the global imperialist system

THE world remains politically, economically and militarily dominated by the imperial power of the United States, and to a lesser extent of the European Union, its ally and rival. Nevertheless there are increasing challenges to its hegemony, as groups of countries and regional blocs emerge and gather momentum in opposition to the two big imperialist blocs, while Japan’s dominance in the Far East has been eclipsed by China. The current global economic crisis of monopoly capitalism is accentuating this growing tendency towards a multi-polar world as the political and economic landscape undergoes significant changes. The absolute hegemony of the United States, as proclaimed by the authors of the “Project for a New American Century,” is now seen to be unattainable.

The most progressive of these regional blocks is ALBA, a group of countries in Latin America that is attempting to bring unity and integration in a progressive, anti-imperialist direction. Other countries—such as China, Russia, and Iran—while showing resistance to imperialist bullying, and attempting to co-ordinate their international position in their own immediate short-term national or regional self-interest, in the long term remain inconsistent and unprincipled in their opposition to the imperialist interests of the United States and the European Union.

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States, while a welcome change from the Bush regime, nevertheless reflects the needs and interests of US imperialism at this time. His election does not reflect some qualitative change in the structure or nature of US imperialism. His forced withdrawal from Iraq marks a major defeat for imperialist interests in the region, while his expansion of the war in Afghanistan into Pakistan, coupled with his continued support for the client state of Israel, exposes his imperialist credentials.

Across the globe, in all the developed capitalist countries, working people are being forced to pay a heavy price for the current crisis, a

price paid in millions of jobs lost and the growing masses of long-term unemployed and under-employed, increased taxes, both direct and indirect, on working people, home repossessions, growing poverty, and attacks on their health and educational services. There is clearly a generalised offensive against working people across the globe and most intensely within the developed capitalist countries, with monopoly capital attempting to take full advantage of the crisis to further drive down wages, terms, and conditions. The ruling class are very clearly imposing a massive transfer of wealth from working people to the wealthy and their institutions in a bid to save their class domination.

The policies that aggravated the already difficult contradictions within the system itself and that have contributed greatly to the global extent of the crisis are being applied to get the system out of its present mess and to ensure the interests of the rich and powerful individuals and corporate interests, both in Ireland and in other developed countries. These policies can and will only accentuate the growing contradictions. These policies are dictated by global corporate interests and by international imperialism.

The current crisis of the global imperialist system can be understood only as part of a general crisis of capitalism and is part of the inherent slumps and booms that capitalism experiences on a regular basis. The periods between booms and slumps continue to decrease, with the boom getting shorter and the slumps growing and deepening. The current crisis is deep and profound: monopoly capitalism, or imperialism, is attempting to shift the burden of the crisis onto the backs of working people and their communities as well as the poor of the developing countries.

The economic crisis now shaking the world economy has its origins in the intrinsic nature of the capitalist system. It was not caused by a few greedy bankers, nor by fraudulent financial dealings. These interpretations are ruses and mystifications; these are the symptoms, not the cause, of the financial crisis. They are ruses in order to cover up and avoid exposing the real nature of the system itself.

The world system of monopoly capitalism is now in the midst of one of the deepest global crises since the 1930s. Capitalism has always experienced crisis, as this is part of its inherent contradiction. It is caused by overproduction relative to market demand, or what can be profitably sold; under-consumption of the goods available creates a crisis of over-accumulation. There have been many crises and slumps: 1974/75, 1980/82, 1991/93, 2001/02. In the last number of decades

regions or specific countries have experienced crises, such as Mexico in 1982, Japan in 1990, Sweden in 1992, the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the “dot-com” bust in 2000, the telecoms crisis in 2001, and the Argentine collapse in 2001.

The current crisis is different, in that it is centred on the most advanced countries in the heartland of capitalist economies: in the United States, the European Union, and Japan. The current crisis goes to the very heart of the financial system itself, and its impact has been felt globally, with immediate and profound global consequences. It is different because it is exposing the general crisis in the so-called “real economy” that monopoly capitalism has been suffering for decades but that has been covered up by bubbles in finance, insurance, and real estate. The cracks that have been there for decades are now fully exposed.

The extent of this current crisis is due to what is called globalisation and the interconnectedness of the global economy resulting in part from the scientific and technological revolution but mainly from the absolute dominance of finance. This is a distinct feature of the current crisis and marks it out as different from the 1930s, with the loss of tens of millions of jobs, the collapse of banks and finance house, the repossession of homes, and the liquidation of businesses, both large and small. It is also leading to the further concentration, monopolisation and control of capital in the hands of fewer and fewer corporations or individuals. This current crisis is born of the growing financialisation of the developed capitalist economies.

This financialisation of the economy is the product of the vast amounts of capital having insufficient investment opportunities in the productive economy. This is due to the constant monopolisation of production and the growing power and dominance of finance capital, as greater profits were to be made in speculative investment than in re-investing profits in manufacturing. It was a case of diminishing returns. This process has been ongoing for a number of decades, as the main economies have in many cases stagnated and the rate of profit has been falling.

This then created the necessary conditions for the growth in speculative investment products, like derivatives, hedge funds, and other short-term financial products where the profit yields were immense—far greater than could be gained from pure manufacturing, given the constant potential of over-production and market saturation that exists in manufacturing.

Another feature marks this current crisis as different from the 1930s. Then the main centres of monopoly capitalism—the United States, Britain, and Europe—still retained a significant manufacturing base. Now China and increasingly India have become the workshops of the world, with major global manufactures shifting significant primary as well as high-end production to these and other low-wage economies, with poor working conditions and few if any workers' rights. This process is part of the constant drive by monopoly corporations to maximise profits.

Keynesianism has outlived its usefulness

The “Bretton Woods system” agreed after the Second World War, apart from marking the dominance of the United States in global economic affairs, was inspired by the attachment of Keynesian economics to a degree of national economic regulation. After growth and reconstruction during the 1950s and 60s this “regulated capitalism” gradually became an obstacle to the free movement of capital seeking profit globally.

Investing in production in the saturated markets of the United States and Western Europe was not sufficiently profitable. Continually conceding greater pay to organised workers in the West, in order that they could continue to purchase the goods they produced, was not a long-term option: it ate into long-term corporate profits.

By the mid-1970s the interests of global business were best served by a removal of governmental restrictions on its activity, a weakening of trade unions throughout the developed world, and a return to completely deregulated global markets. Milton Friedman, the architect of this strategy, defeated Keynesianism academically, and the policies he advocated were implemented with gusto by the likes of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and by the fascist dictatorship in Chile after 1973.

This abandoning of Keynesianism by monopoly capitalism was coupled with a major assault on the social and economic gains of the working class and the eventual collapse of social democracy. The social-democratic parties, led by such as Blair, Mitterrand, and Schröder, implemented these policies even more effectively, proving themselves once again more loyal to imperialism than to the working class, on whose votes they depend.

This policy became known as neo-liberalism, which essentially

sought as free a hand as possible for capital throughout the global economy. The market would determine everything, with the state relegated to policing and to waging wars, ensuring the dominance of important markets by the West. State industry and services were privatised, opening up another source of profit. Rich profits, guaranteed by the state, were available in providing services. These policies are now being pursued with even more vigour as the state seeks to avoid impending bankruptcy by pursuing capital and investment at any and all costs, with a particular disregard for working people and the services they rely upon.

Militarisation and state-monopoly capitalism

The social retreat of the state was accompanied by a growth in military expenditure, especially in the United States, whose military budget dwarfed all others, constituting an enormous economic burden. The financing of global military expenditure paralleled the growth of global finance. Because of the political influence of the military-industrial lobby, governmental expenditure has been continuously cranked up.

The arms industry stokes the belligerence of the United States and shores up aggressive states, such as Israel. The profits from military contracts, especially in connection with recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, are phenomenal. The European Union, succumbing to the pressure from the arms industry, is following the same path.

The media monopolies, such as the Murdoch empire, have been powerful protagonists of these policies. They reinforce the ideological foundations of capitalism on a daily basis, shaping and moulding public opinion to the needs and interests of monopoly capitalism. Capitalism needs to reproduce itself not just economically but socially and culturally in order to maintain its political hegemony. President Dwight Eisenhower famously referred to the existence of the military-industrial complex; now it is an axis of the military, industry, finance, and the media.

Monopoly capitalism needs to constantly expand and intensify its exploitation of labour power in order to expand the reproduction of capital itself. This is carried on in a number of ways:

- forcing workers to work longer hours for lower wages
- increased productivity by the introduction of new technology
- the privatisation of public assets and services

- moving production to lower-wage economies, such as China and India.

All these factors are driven by the pursuit of higher profits and lowering the costs to capital. This contributes to the spiralling contradictions that we are witnessing with the constant driving down of wages—lowering the cost of labour—which reduces the capacity of workers to consume what they produce. Workers are forced to avail of credit to consume these products that they are constantly urged to aspire to. At the same time it also reduces the opportunities for capital to be invested in productive activities. Speculative investment becomes the only way to use the accumulated profit.

This crisis of over-accumulation drives the need to destroy the means of production, with factory closures, liquidations, takeovers, and the closing down of competitors. This in turn leads to greater concentration of capital in the hands of fewer and even larger manufacturing, financial and banking monopolies and wealthy individuals.

Global environmental crisis

Not alone are we facing a prolonged economic crisis but we are also facing a global environmental crisis. We are clearly reaching the biological and physical limits of capitalism itself.

Capitalism is predicated on ever-expanding growth and the mistaken belief that natural resources are limitless, and therefore their exploitation is limitless. This is an illusion. There are clearly limits to production and therefore to reproduction because of the very nature of the finite resources available. Capitalism itself is dependent upon and is addicted to carbons.

Our planet is heading towards catastrophe, with the rapid depletion of non-renewable resources—peak oil—combined with the threat posed by global warming, which can only lead to the destruction of the physical environment that sustains life itself. Endless and limitless growth in capitalist terms is, simply, neither possible nor sustainable. Humanity is facing a stark choice: saving itself or saving monopoly capitalism.

Because of the impact of destructive agricultural policies, many of which have been imposed upon the developing countries by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the EU, coupled with the impact of climate change, the world is facing a serious shortage of water, food, and energy. If there is no real change in these destructive industrial and agricultural practices, and if a more rational use and

organisation of the world's resources does not emerge that would halt the catastrophic changes that are now imminent, the lives of billions of people will be gravely affected.

The needs of monopoly capitalism—imperialism and its global and regional institutions—are driving us onto the rocks of destruction. The policies and the constant demand for more and greater profits by the monopolies can also lead to an escalation of resource wars on a far greater scale than we are already witnessing. There are clearly growing dangers of the possible use of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction as nations and peoples are forced to defend their interests against the predatory nature of imperialism.

Unless we move from the production of goods and services based upon exchange value to one based upon use value, the possibility of reversing the environmental crisis will be very limited, if not impossible.

New forms of neo-colonialism

There are currently new attempts by imperialist forces to ideologically rehabilitate the history, role and impact of colonialism. This is being pursued by Western academia and by establishment politicians. The goal is to ensure the acquiescence of the populace in the developed world in the renewed plunder and wars being pursued in the developing countries. Imperialism constantly reshapes and re-forms its relationships with national ruling classes. It constantly re-shapes the dependence and interdependence of national ruling classes to serve the needs and interests of imperialism.

These inherent tendencies are still characteristic of modern capitalism. In spite of the ending of direct colonial rule, the economic grip of the great capitalist powers has been maintained by the imposition of neo-colonial relations, through such international institutions as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation. This constantly changing approach leads to new forms of colonialism by states and corporations in the dominant developed countries.

The world's poorer countries were forced to open up to foreign investment, enabling transnational corporations to establish operations in countries with low wages. Industry in the United States and western Europe moved to India, Bangladesh, and China, facilitating a "race to the bottom," seeking ever-lower labour costs in a boom driven by an

intensive exploitation of workers, where workers' rights are minimal in those emerging economies.

One current expression of this approach is the buying of land in Africa, Asia, and South America, either directly through transnational companies or by bilateral agreements with corrupt and unprincipled governments, whose class position and interests are determined by their interdependence with the needs and interests that they share with monopoly capitalism.

They are constantly forced to choose between the interests of imperialism and the needs and interests of their own people. This new land grab, which is driven not to promote development but rather to grow food crops for export to the developed capitalist countries, is leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples and peasant farmers.

The European Union uses its "economic partnership agreements" to secure its economic, social, cultural and military interests in its dealings with countries of the majority world. The banks and the huge transnational corporations dispose of far greater wealth and wield greater power than the bankers and businessmen of Lenin's day, but the nature of the domination, the exploitation and the drive to war, remain very much as he described them.

The European Union: Its strategy of centralised power and decision-making

The forcing on the Irish people of a second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty by a supine Irish ruling class at the behest of the European Commission and the governments representative of European monopoly interests exposed once again the subservient and dependent relationship between the Irish ruling class and the European Union. The Irish state has lost all potential for independent action and has become a compliant tool of both European and American imperialism. There is little if any progressive potential left in the Irish ruling class.

The struggle against the Lisbon Treaty exposed a number of important facts:

- (a) that the state is not neutral in the political, economic, social or cultural life of society;
- (b) that it is an illusion that governments do not represent the dominant class interests;
- (c) that the mass media are the principal means of ensuring that

the interests of the ruling class are secured and that its ideology is reproduced daily;

- (d) that government under the conditions of private ownership of the means of production is purely a committee to look after the affairs of the ruling elite, the owners of wealth and power.

As the CPI has pointed out over many decades, a view reinforced daily by experience, the integration strategy of the European Union is the emasculation of the national democracy and sovereignty of the member-states, making them subservient to the interests of European monopoly capitalism and the emerging EU superstate.

The interests and influence of the peoples of the member-states are constantly marginalised and removed from the process, and we increasingly experience rule by diktat. In a process that has been described as “political engineering,” the people of the EU member-states are presented with a *fait accompli*, reinforced by the necessary propaganda and the manipulation of their fears and worries in order to engineer the required result, as was so evident here in Ireland during the imposed re-run vote on the Lisbon Treaty.

In Ireland we experience this process constantly, with the endless repetition of the assertion that we have no alternative. We are compelled to go along with the political engineering that is central to the EU integration process and with the consolidation of power in the hands of the big states, in the interests of transnational capital.

The current economic crisis is being used to further integrate and consolidate the power of the EU Commission and the European Central Bank with the decision that all national budgets must be pre-approved and cleared by the ECOFIN and the Commission before they can be presented to the people of the member-states. The threat of fines and the withholding of regional support grants are used to bully the people as the compliant governments of the member-states push ahead in their own self-interest to closer integration. Member-state governments, in alliance with the EU Commission, conspire to undermine democracy and accountability.

The Irish people are being forced to pay back the debts incurred by the Irish banks that borrowed heavily from German and French finance houses. EU policy towards Ireland, Greece, Spain, Portugal and other member-states is to ensure that all these debts are paid in full and will be paid for in massive cuts in public spending. Also exposed is the central role of German finance capital in the whole process. The subservience of the Government to the EU means that they cannot

always look after their friends. Seán Quinn of Quinn Insurance, for example, matters not at all to the European Central Bank.

Neo-liberalism inherent within the process

Neo-liberalism is woven into the very fabric of all the treaties, from the Treaty of Rome to the Lisbon Treaty, foisted on the member-states of the original EEC and subsequently the European Union. The process has been designed to prevent any alternative economic policies being pursued by the member-states; it is to remove the democratic right of people to decide their own economic and social policies and priorities and, most importantly, to remove these areas from influence by national class struggles.

This is most starkly seen when we examine the role of the European Central Bank. It is above any possible democratic accountability. Its central mandate is price stability. It is run by and for the banks; and the present financial crisis shows most clearly the consequences of giving a free hand to bankers. This fiscal freedom is to ensure that fiscal policies are free from mass political pressure but open to the power and lobbying of finance capital. Its role and purpose is to subvert class struggle at the regional and the national level. Given the uneven development and the unequal balance within and between member-states, the European Central Bank invariably takes its lead from the dominant economic and politically powerful countries and especially Germany.

In addition we have experienced the policy of the dominant powers exploiting the weaknesses and inequalities between countries that are less developed so as to create a culture of dependence and interdependence. This strategy of undermining national sovereignty and democracy is also imposed on countries in the global south and is reflected in the negotiations for the EU “economic partnership agreements,” also pursued in the past at WTO talks; and there are clear signs that these policies will continue for the foreseeable future. The strategy is to break down the capacity of nations and in particular of national working-class formations to resist the power of transnational capital.

Workers’ rights versus the market

Over the past few years workers throughout the European Union have seen their rights and social gains come under growing pressure from

the consequences of the adoption of EU treaties in regard to the establishment of the “internal market.” Workers from Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Germany and Luxembourg have seen their terms and conditions and hard-won social provisions being undermined. Workers posted from other EU member-states have been denied the same wages, terms and conditions as workers in the host member-state.

The European Court of Justice has used the provisions of the treaties to make judgements that have had and will continue to have a profound impact on the rights of workers throughout the European Union. The most recent judgement against the government of Luxembourg was a full assault on such social provision and entitlements as sickness pay, control of the length of the working week, holiday pay, and overtime payments. Posted workers who are employed on a contract in Luxembourg will not be able to avail of those provisions as local workers can.

Much of the trade union establishment in the member-states, including the ICTU, dominated in the main by social democrats, continues to peddle the unfounded belief that the European Union is the main guarantor of workers’ rights and interests. They dress up directives such as the Working Time Directive and Flexicurity Directive as protecting and enhancing workers’ rights when in fact they are direct attacks on the gains made by workers over many decades.

These directives have been imposed without any democratic discussion or debate. There is no opportunity to amend or change them. It is estimated that 80 per cent of all laws that affect our lives are now made by the European Union; and 60 per cent of these are merely rubber-stamped, without ever being discussed or debated by any democratic body.

It is only the European Commission that can propose laws: the European Parliament has limited powers to make suggestions and proposals. Its present structures and the deliberate move away from the notion of a “union of equals,” where all the countries would have an equal say and vote, to “weighted majority” means that power is heavily weighted in favour of the bigger states or, to put it another way, against the smaller states.

The big states, particularly Germany and France acting together, decide fundamental policy. While there has been increased provision for national parliamentary supervision of directives coming from the European Commission, it remains the fact that national parliaments and governments in their present form represent the interests of each

ruling class. Workers' rights are doubly circumscribed. The bar in securing and advancing workers' rights has been raised very high, as these rights will be benchmarked against the needs and interests of the market, both national and European.

There is a pan-European assault on the working class of the member-states, which requires a pan-European resistance. This will not come from the heavily compromised European Trade Union Confederation or any of the institutions of the European Union but must be built from the ground up. The question facing working people and other economic and social groupings is resisting the assimilation process being imposed. There can be no "democratic European Union," no alternative EU built from within the structure and strictures of the European Union. There can be no "socialist" European Union. It can and will only lead to reaction.

The central fault line at the heart of the EU process is the assault on and undermining of sovereignty and democracy. It is along this fault line that the workers' movement must apply the maximum pressure to break the power of the big monopoly banks and corporations as the only way that their needs and interests can be defended and advanced.

The process of European integration now under way, dominated as it is by the interests of monopoly capitalism, is fraught with danger. The construction of a federal superstate in which political, economic and social rights are reduced and are secondary to the interests and needs of the market has within it the seeds for the construction of a totalitarian corporate state. It poses grave dangers to the rights of working people, a grave danger to democracy and sovereignty. These anti-democratic and pro-big-business values are embodied in the constitutional law of the European Union itself.

*The two political and economic entities
have failed our people*

The two political entities within Ireland have failed to meet the economic, social and political needs of our people. Partition laid the basis for what we experience today. The two areas share similar features of heavy penetration by transnational capital. All economic and political decisions are geared to meeting the needs of those corporations. This relationship of dependence has had an impact on working people's

understanding and has shaped how many see any possible alternative way forward.

The adoption of neo-liberal policies and the ideology underpinning them over the last number of decades in the Republic flows from the needs of international capital, imposed by the state itself and championed by all the establishment political parties—Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party, and the Green Party—as well as the establishment’s mass media.

This strategy laid the emphasis on deregulation, boasting of being the most open economy in the world, the privatisation of publicly owned companies, such as Irish Sugar, Telecom Éireann, and Aer Lingus, the imposition of service charges for refuse collection, water supply, and other public services, and support for private medical and health care over that of the public health service. The emphasis became one of appointing regulators rather than of public ownership and control.

The Irish ruling class, small though it is, is now tightly integrated in and dependent upon its relationship with the dominant forces within the European Union and the United States. It is a parasitic class, consisting of builders, speculators, banking and financial elites—some of whom live outside the state—and those dependent upon transnational capital. This ruling clique has abandoned the aim of the development of a national manufacturing base or a national integrated economy.

The material base of unionism in Northern Ireland was once centred on and reliant upon the needs of the British empire, in such areas as shipbuilding, aircraft manufacture, engineering, rope, and the linen industry, which have now all but disappeared or been taken over by transnational capital. This leaves it economically much weaker and even more dependent on the political interests of British imperialism in the first place but also on the European Union, in spite of its show of opposition to it. It has little if any independent political or economic manoeuvrability.

The unionist bourgeoisie in Northern Ireland, with its complete subservience to the policies and interests of British imperialism, has used and fostered discrimination and sectarian division to maintain control and has constructed political solutions that reinforce the marginalisation of working people. Their ability to follow through with such policies is severely restricted today.

With the deep crisis and the prioritisation of bailing out British finance capital and the banking system, the socialisation of the banking

debt onto the backs of British workers has left the British state deeply in debt. This was clearly a massive transfer of wealth from working people to financial corporations. This indebtedness can only be resolved by massive cuts in public spending. The impact on Northern Ireland will be a massive reduction in the subvention from the British exchequer to Northern Ireland. This is a dramatic shift of social wealth from the people in Northern Ireland to British finance capital.

Equally, the politics and economic development of the South over the last five decades have been shaped by this growing dependence on foreign direct investment. The economy of the South is now in a very precarious state, with unemployment running at 14 per cent, which may well rise to 17 per cent within a short period, with mass emigration once again becoming a reality for tens of thousands of people.

The collapse of the “Celtic Tiger” and its aftermath

The Irish ruling class feasted greedily on the backs of working people, including hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, during the economic boom of the last decade or more. A report by Bank of Ireland in 2008 revealed that 1 per cent of the population hold a third of the wealth, with assets of €100 billion in 2006 (excluding the value of housing). Including house property, the richest 1 per cent hold 20 per cent of the wealth, the richest 2 per cent hold 30 per cent, and the richest 5 per cent hold 40 per cent. There were 33,000 Irish millionaires in 2006, of whom 3,000 had between €5 and €30 million and 330 had more than €30 million. In the last three years of the boom (2004–07) alone, the richest 400 people in Ireland added €41 billion to their combined personal wealth.

The small number of interconnected business people control most of Ireland’s leading companies and banks. A network of only thirty-nine people held directorships in 33 of the 40 top private companies and state-owned bodies between 2005 and 2007. Between them these thirty-nine held a total of 93 directorships. The 40 companies employed 310,000 people and had a combined turnover of nearly €80 billion between 2005 and 2007. They comprised both private companies and state-owned bodies, including AIB, Smurfit, Anglo-Irish Bank, Ryanair, and Aer Lingus.

The total number of directors involved in managing these companies was 572. On average their pay rose by more than 40 per

cent between 2005 and 2007, while combined inflation for these two years ran at just over 9 per cent.

Bank lending grew to 200 per cent of national income by 2008 (twice the level of other industrialised countries), lending 40 per cent more in real terms solely to property developers than to everyone in 2000. Where did this availability of credit come from? Irish banks were able to borrow at low rates, substantially from German and French banks and other international sources. Up to 1997 the banks were almost wholly funded by deposits, but by 2008 more than half bank lending came from international sources and inter-bank lending.

The tiger was unsustainable from its inception

During the “boom” period we witnessed a growth in inequality. Poverty, both real and relative, has grown faster, resulting from the economic crisis. The proportion of households at risk of poverty (below 60 per cent of national median income) is $18\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, or 17 in rankings for EU member-states (July 2010).

Poverty, inequality, poor access to third-level education, poor school buildings, overcrowded classrooms and waiting times to get a hospital bed did not disappear during the period of the “Tiger” boom. In fact statistics show that inequality grew significantly during that period. The wealthy minority grew even more wealthy, and vast sums of money left the country to be invested abroad in speculative property dealings.

Reports by the Revenue Commissioners show most clearly the burden carried by working people in regard to taxation and the extent of manipulation of the tax system by the wealthy. In 2008, according to Bank of Ireland, about 40,000 people in Ireland shared personal assets of €100 billion, yet there are fewer than 8,000 households with a declared taxable income of more than €275,000—clearly tax avoidance on a massive scale.

Over the “Celtic Tiger” years, from 1995 to 2007, the personal wealth of the richest 1 per cent of the population grew by €75 billion. In 2006 alone Irish people invested €8 billion in overseas property; in 2007 the figure was €11 billion. €41 billion was invested in commercial property in the period 2001–06; much of that money was invested in commercial property outside Ireland.

The strategy of increasing reliance on transnational corporations to bring development and jobs is now being exposed as too narrow a base on which to build a balanced, evenly spread and sustainable economy.

It has led to the neglect of the small and medium-sized indigenous companies that are central to the building of an indigenous broad industrial base.

The International Financial Services Centre became nothing more than a conduit for money-laundering, tax avoidance, and tax evasion. In 2002 Ireland was the largest location for declared pre-tax profits for American firms, and in 2005 the IFSC accounted for 75 per cent of all foreign investment in Ireland. By 2008 the IFSC was dealing with €1 trillion per year. It had 25,000 employees and contributed €1.2 billion in taxes to the Irish state. For this small contribution the Government ensured that regulators operated what the IDA called “a flexible and business-focused tax and regulatory system.” Even with the present turmoil in financial markets, Ireland is still one of the leading global fund jurisdictions, with in excess of \$2 trillion in assets under administration in more than ten thousand funds, creating huge paper assets with almost no substance.

In the late 1990s the Government allowed the financial arms of transnational corporations—an example of greater profits accruing from financial speculation than from re-investing in manufacturing—to set themselves up as banks. By 2007 four hundred of these banks operated from the Financial Services Centre, their sole purpose to ensure that the parent corporation paid as little tax as it could get away with. These declared “profits” gave a huge false bump to the revenue of the state. This allowed the state to cut taxes in lieu of real increases in workers’ wages, which in turn boosted the profits of transnational corporations with manufacturing facilities in Ireland.

The consequences of this were not just to retard the building of a more rounded industrial base, best suited to harnessing the natural and human resources of Ireland, north and south: it also affected the nature of the dominant economic forces that control the state itself. This has resulted in the control of economic, political and thereby state power by the most parasitic elements of the Irish bourgeoisie, the financial and property speculators, who have used state power in their own interests to align themselves with the European Union and the United States simultaneously.

Many working families, denied access to the possibility of securing public housing, were forced into the private market and obliged to take out mortgages over forty years, which their grandchildren may well end up paying for. Social development was shaped not by what was socially necessary and in the best interests of a more socially cohesive society

but by property speculators and builders, by the drive to maximise profits, through their grip on Government policy and the endemic corruption of the political system.

Many companies, including those doing well, are using the crash as an opportunity to attack trade unions and to cut workers' wages. As in the past, emigration and mass unemployment are the means of disciplining workers into accepting low wages and poor terms and conditions. As in all periods of crisis within capitalism, no matter how long or how short the crisis may be, many businesses will go under; those that remain will dominate the market, and the trend to monopolisation will be intensified, not diminished.

The present Government, made up of Fianna Fáil and the Green Party with the support of independents, is attempting to place the burden of solving the crisis on the backs of working people. The imposition of levies and new taxes is a clear attempt to make working people pay.

The Irish shock doctrine

The publication of the McCarthy Report (2009) outlined clearly the strategy that the Irish ruling class needed to follow. This was another in a long line of reports from groups of "experts" that the Government and the main opposition parties set up and then proceed to hide behind, proclaiming, "It is these committees of experts that propose this strategy; this is the only way forward." This approach is an attempt to remove economic and social policy from the national political debate, to present them as objective and above contending class interests, having no self-interest in the outcome of their proposals.

Under the guise of the McCarthy Report the Government has mounted a major assault on public services, with cuts in health, education, and social welfare, the potential loss of thousands of public-sector jobs, and the removal of billions from the economy. McCarthy has now been engaged to do an inventory of the value of the public and state-sponsored sector, as a prelude to wholesale privatisation.

Unemployment will continue to grow as the economy continues to contract, with the likelihood of 600,000 unemployed by the end of 2010. At the height of the boom, in 2007, the construction industry was worth €38 billion, or 24 per cent of GNP. At the height of the construction bubble, employment directly in the industry was approximately 255,000; in late 2008 it had fallen to a little over 100,000,

coupled with a massive surplus of houses and apartments built in inappropriate locations, such as small provincial towns.

Taking the years 2000–08, national capital stock increased by 157 per cent in real terms, from €222 billion to €477 billion. While this was one of the highest in the EU area, it was housing that accounted for the bulk of the increase: €184 billion, or 72 per cent of the total.

Housing is of course socially necessary; but from the point of view of a country's national wealth it is an unproductive asset, in that once built a house does nothing in the way of contributing anything further to the national stock. Once housing is excluded from the figures the actual productive capital stock (which in contrast has the potential to, and in fact does, contribute to the national wealth) rose by only €70 billion, to €174 billion.

A significant portion of that—€20 billion—went into retail, transport, and storage. As the Davy Report identifies, these are principally foreign-owned. Furthermore, they are of little long-term consequence for the development of the economy to justify such a significant channelling of the national income.

Of the remaining €50 billion, the state and public enterprise investment made up €33½ billion, principally in such areas as roads. Most notable, however, was the fact that the productive stock of the private sector rose by a mere 26 per cent in the same eight years, to €17 billion. So the state itself has been the backbone of investment and in sustaining the system itself.

*Socialisation of debt:
making working people pay the price*

The National Asset Management Agency is the vehicle that the Government has put in place to take the bad debts of the banks, thereby socialising the debts of the ruling class. It has taken or will take control of up to €90 billion of bad loans, shifting corporate debt onto the backs of workers, coupled with billions of public money being poured into those same banks to recapitalise them.

This is in fact allowing the private capital interests to walk away from all debts and start with a clean sheet. This is a transfer of wealth on an unprecedented scale in the history of the Irish state. The Government is sacrificing the future of the country and lumbering future generations of workers and their children with massive debts in order to maintain the political and economic status quo.

As the total figure for all participating banks may be close to €90 billion, the combined figure for the two main banks, Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks, is in the region of €60 billion. Most has been borrowed from German and French banks and other international finance houses.

NAMA is now taking charge not alone of worthless land banks around our towns and cities but property from Dublin to Shanghai. There is also no guarantee that, even after the removal of these bad debts and the recapitalisation of the banks, small firms will have access to new loans to keep their businesses afloat. This is all designed primarily to keep international finance houses on side.

Clearly the contradiction between a state body owning a vast network of properties whose real value they hope to recoup over a ten-year period is predicated on a rise in the property market, which was one of the factors that contributed to the current crisis. The Government's solution can only contribute to sowing further seeds of speculation and may in fact possibly undermine its own banking strategy.

This is simply throwing good money after bad, with banks still tottering on the brink and all the taxpayers' money flowing out to meet the banks' and financial institutions' international debtors—once again German and French banks. After the billions of euros have been pumped into these banks they will be sold off to venture capitalists, which will cause even greater destabilisation of the financial strategy of the state itself.

This is a strategy designed and proposed by the European Central Bank and the European Commission. When Joaquín Almunia, the EU Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, came to Dublin after the second referendum on the Lisbon Treaty he publicly demanded that the Government hurry up with the NAMA legislation, clearly demonstrating who is in charge.

*The Government's strategy is
to make workers pay for the crisis*

The Government's strategy is centred around massive cuts in public spending, reducing it by €15 billion over the next five years. The Government is borrowing nearly €50 million a week to fill in the hole in revenue to meet current spending targets. This strategy is driven by the narrow neo-liberal mindset of the Department of Finance, the

European Commission, and the European Central Bank. The ECB has given the Government a derogation from the criteria of the Growth and Stability Pact up to 2013. It is within these narrow strictures that we must understand the strategy of cutting public spending and sacking thousands of public-sector workers.

The consequences for workers will be catastrophic, with a massive shift of wealth from workers to very wealthy individuals and corporations, both nationally and internationally. Workers lose every way.

- The state will have to pay higher interest on its borrowings internationally, as its credit rating is going down.
- More and more state revenue will be spent trying to service these borrowings.
- More and more public services will be cut.
- Thousands more jobs will be lost, in both the public and the private sector.

This is a case of Irish working people taking all the pain. The much-talked-about “sharing the pain” is nothing more than a ruse to cover a major attack on workers and their families, while the rich and powerful minority class remains firmly entrenched and retains control over the reins of economic priorities and thereby political power, using the state to impose its economic and social priorities.

There is a determined and well-orchestrated campaign in the establishment media, in the newspapers and on radio and television, to insist that there is no other way forward. All the establishment parties—Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Labour Party, and the Green Party—support the general line as laid down by the Department of Finance and the European Central Bank.

The class struggle is very intense, if one-sided, and is taking place both on an ideological level and in the sustained attacks by the state on workers’ wages, terms and conditions and against those on welfare, pensioners, children, and the sick. The leadership of the ICTU has been exposed as never before to be hopelessly lost and confused. In promoting the Croke Park Agreement between the ICTU public-sector unions and the state it was argued that any prolonged industrial action would damage the Government’s economic strategy and its ability to sell government bonds.

The people and institutions that bear a heavy responsibility for the present financial crisis—as distinct from the general crisis of global capitalism—will be the net beneficiaries of this strategy. The establishment wants to reduce the living standards of workers.

The Government and the employers' organisations, using the mass media, are using the crisis to achieve a number of strategic goals:

- to undermine existing wage levels,
- to radically reverse the terms and conditions of workers in both the public and the private sector,
- to undermine and if possible to break and divide the trade union movement, using public-sector against private-sector workers,
- to reduce and reverse the advances made in relation to the provision of public services,
- to manipulate public opinion to accept that an assault on state benefits is necessary,
- to reduce the national minimum wage, and
- to make savage cuts in social welfare.

What is clear is that we have to resist each and every attempt by this Government and the rich cabal of the Golden Circle in their efforts to make workers pay for the present and growing crisis. The defence of the public sector is the defence of gains hard fought for by generations of workers.

In spite of the weaknesses displayed by the leadership of the trade union movement, with class collaboration exemplified by "social partnership," the membership of the trade union movement as well as pensioners and community organisations have shown strength and solidarity through demonstrations and strikes in opposition to cuts in social services and jobs.

A similar story is repeated in the North as job losses are announced daily. While the collapse is not so far on the same scale as that facing the South, the Northern economy has not escaped the crisis of capitalism that is having such a heavy impact on the South.

The Northern economy has also been affected by the collapse of the "Celtic Tiger," as the flows of capital south to north and vice versa reached record heights, particularly in relation to speculative investment in property and construction. While the standard mantra in relation to the North's economy was that the public sector is too large, now, amid global crisis, the same commentators are consoling themselves with the assertion that the North will be less affected by world events because of its larger public sector.

What both parts of our country and what our people experience in common is that economic development was not geared to the development of a sustainable economy but rather, in the case of the North, has been tailored to meet the needs of the imperial centre during the height

of the British Empire; and the decline of the Northern economy equally mirrors the decline of the British Empire. North and south, the dominant political forces threw open economic development to the interests of transnational capital in the late 1950s and early 60s, both parts becoming over-dependent on foreign direct investment.

As the crisis develops and deepens in Britain, the policies being pursued by the present coalition government will have an immediate impact here, as the British exchequer subvention is cut and the Northern economy will not be immune from the general crisis.

This dependent relationship reflects how, in the political, economic and social spheres, the people of Northern Ireland are marginalised in three ways: the potential to change or influence the economic and social policies of the British government remains negligible; they cannot change or influence the policies imposed by Brussels; and they cannot influence the policies of the Irish Government.

General observations

- The Irish ruling class is using state power to defend its interests.
- The Irish state is an active proponent of class struggle in the interest of the elite.
- The openness of the economy is one of its strategic weaknesses.
- The Government and the establishment political parties have abandoned the idea of building an independent, sustainable economy.
- We are heavily exposed to the strategies of global finance capital, in the form of the International Financial Services Centre.
- Present and future generations of working people will be made to pay for the massive debt now incurred by the state to bail out the ruling class.
- The native bourgeoisie in both parts of the country is materially very weak. It is this weakness that obliges it to attach itself to the imperial powers.

Developing an all-Ireland perspective in the interests of the people

The Irish political establishment is happy to park the national demand for unity. It wants to manage the political, economic and social arrangements of the whole island in partnership with the British state

and to guide future developments in a direction that secures the interests of a weakened but still strategically important British imperialism and the increasingly dominant European Union throughout the entire country.

While the institutions set up under the Belfast Agreement remain in place, both the Executive and the Assembly have withstood much criticism and pressure from within Unionism, which accepted them with extreme reluctance in the first place. Clearly there are political and democratic limitations inherent in the nature of these political structures, which can create difficulties for progressive forces; nevertheless they can provide an opportunity, which was not there before, to present alternatives to the people. We need a strategy for overcoming these difficulties and for advancing democracy beyond the existing structures.

Recognising the inadequacies of the Belfast Agreement, we nevertheless demand its full implementation, especially in regard to a Bill of Rights and full commitment to equality laws. We also call for the re-establishment of a Civic Forum. The “security” proposals in the Belfast Agreement call for a “return to normal security arrangements, the removal of security installations and the reductions in numbers and role of the armed forces.” This will lead the way to our demand for full demilitarisation, including the closure of British army barracks. The CPI believes that the return to “normal security” should also mean the closing down of all British army military intelligence units, and we are particularly concerned that new units have been built. However, the reforming of the RUC as the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the setting up of the Community Policing Partnerships go some way to meet the demands that the CPI made when we called for the “security forces” to be fundamentally democratised, to be made answerable to the people, and to be representative of the whole community.

Given the current conditions in the North, we once again state that we reject paramilitary violence, from whatever quarter it comes. There is a clear need to remove the threat of the gun and bombs from the political scene and to develop class action and political dialogue. The peace process is an ongoing situation that demands critical support and active participation to make the most of the opportunities it provides to oppose sectarianism and create unity of the working class.

Elements within loyalist paramilitaries continue to threaten society with the use of violence and intimidation—not only against the Catholic community but against minority ethnic communities, immigrants,

and the Protestant community. While much of this is the side product of the gangsterism that these organisations have degenerated into, communists also recognise these organisations and their actions as an expression of a vicious and reactionary unionism that provides potential for the development of fascist ideology and organisation and oppose them as such.

There is also continuing violence by some republican paramilitary organisations. Such displays of paramilitary force do not advance the political goals that these various strands of republicanism claim to champion, any more than they did the Provisional IRA before the peace process. Their actions give the British Government continuing cover for the maintenance and use of repressive and undemocratic measures. They fan the flames of sectarianism and narrow the concept of republicanism, rejecting the class basis of the national question.

The crisis facing our people, north and south, is grave and requires vigilance against a descent into political or revolutionary adventurism of the right or the left. It is a time for clear thinking, for the development of clear strategies that can win the confidence of the people and that will bring unity and strength. What is needed is maximum unity of the working class and progressive forces in pursuing an agenda that will strengthen and deepen democracy as a counterweight to sectarianism, to develop demands that challenge the limitations of the existing institutions, and to push for greater all-Ireland economic and social development and community reconciliation.

The impact on our people of the deep systemic crisis of capitalism requires us to examine it more deeply so as to shape our strategic political and economic approach. The over-reliance on transnational corporations in the Republic, the control that the London exchequer has on economic and social decision-making in Northern Ireland and the straitjacket of the EU underline the need for a more strategic all-Ireland approach to political, economic and social development. The solutions being imposed by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, constrained as it is by British Government policy, are at the expense of working people. None of the neo-liberal economic models or the mentality behind them can offer anything to our people, north or south.

Clearly there is a need for more democratically controlled cross-border bodies. Planning by government bodies, north and south, should be on an all-Ireland basis in scope and nature. Regional structures without regard to the border are needed. If we are to look at

potential areas for development, therefore, the models would have to be on an all-Ireland scale. Among the features of such a strategy would be

- (a) the need to dramatically increase investment in research and development;
- (b) exploring all-Ireland networks to facilitate the development of manufacturing industry;
- (c) greater planning and integration to obtain optimum gains from the scale of exports from the Republic and from industrial enterprises in the North;
- (d) public procurement, whereby any investment package 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;
- (e) a genuinely integrated all-Ireland transport system, with appropriate rail and road corridors, not only to facilitate economic progress but to ensure the provision of full and accessible services in such areas as health;
- (f) investment in the environment and environmentally responsible projects;
- (g) the maximum democratic control over capital and its targeted use for sustainable economic and social development;
- (h) public democratic control over all natural resources for their development in a sustainable way; and
- (i) the state to play a central developmental role in economic and social policies.

The clear emergence of an all-Ireland politics and economy is a necessary condition for secular democracy throughout the country. In the North we need to set about drawing together all progressive, anti-imperialist and working-class forces—

- (a) to advocate and build a united Ireland,
- (b) to struggle for maximum all-Ireland economic and social development and political co-operation,
- (c) to pursue a vigorous and continuous anti-sectarian campaign,
- (d) to actively work for community reconciliation,
- (e) for full demilitarisation, including the closure of British army barracks,
- (f) for the establishment of the Civic Forum, and
- (g) for the implementation of the Bill of Rights.

The implementation of these demands would greatly help the fight

against sectarianism, a necessary condition for further social advance. The continued cultivation and use of religious sectarianism is a blight on society and has no other purpose than to divide the working class and prolong the union with Britain. The defeat of sectarianism requires not just appropriate economic and social policies but also democratic space. It can only be completely overcome and eradicated as a political weapon in a national-democratic state and a secular society. There is clearly also a need to combat racism and to strengthen and support organisations and campaigns campaigning against it.

A strategy for advance

While the achievement of a united Irish socialist republic is the central goal of the CPI, we recognise that if we are to move beyond slogans and the repetitive chanting that “socialism is the answer” we need to develop a strategy that builds the forces for change that will become the building blocks, the foundation stones of a future socialist Ireland. People’s consciousness is developed and enriched by struggle and thereby becoming aware of the potential for an alternative way forward when the old order is not capable of delivering what they require.

As an anti-imperialist and Marxist-Leninist party we see the strategic importance of weakening the influence and control of imperialism over the whole country. In the Republic it is in the first place the European Union, as well as the United States, while in the North the British state still has great reserves of influence through its local allies within the various strands of unionism.

Of the key political allies of imperialism in Ireland, the Southern bourgeoisie has been severely weakened by the economic crisis, and the once-dominant political and economic hegemony of unionism in Northern Ireland is no longer the central factor, while both are reduced to a dependence on British and EU imperialism. While the ruling class and the establishments north and south may be weaker economically, it is clear that ideologically their ideas, values and world view are under little if any pressure at this current stage.

The working class also remains politically weak and poorly organised and still to a large extent unaware of its own interests as a class. It is still greatly influenced by social democracy, and important sections of the trade union movement are deeply mired in the ideological swamp of social partnership.

If the defeat of imperialist influence and control is an absolute

necessity for economic and social advance, then this necessitates working-class forces taking an all-Ireland approach. A national-democratic transformative strategy is one that unites both the national and social goals of the working class and its potential allies.

The defence of working people's interests

The immediate tasks of the CPI are the defence of working people's interests and the promotion and defence of national-democratic objectives, while its ultimate objective remains the achievement of a united socialist Irish republic. The working class is central to securing and achieving social emancipation and for the completion of the national-democratic phase of the struggle. We wish to see state power and sovereignty rest with and for working people.

As an internationalist party we have a special responsibility to promote solidarity with peoples throughout the world who are struggling against imperialism, for national independence and socialism, and to oppose warmongering and militarism wherever they appear. We welcome the initiatives by communist parties to rebuild the international communist movement as a bulwark against imperialism and for peace and socialism.

What are the potential forces for change?

We need to set about drawing together all anti-imperialist and progressive forces—

- (a) to struggle for maximum all-Ireland economic and social development and political co-operation,
- (b) to be anti-sectarian, and anti-racist,
- (c) to be actively working for community reconciliation.

Through this work we will be establishing a base from which to advocate and build a united Ireland.

In the South the deep cuts in public spending and attacks on working people, pensioners and the sick can only spread further disillusionment and anger. This requires us to work with and continue to build broadly based local resistance. It also requires us to step up our work within the trade union movement to bring to it our alternative political-economic strategy, rather than just a collection of economic demands, which in many cases reinforces the deep reformism that is inherent within the trade unions.

The experience of these coalitions either in relation to campaigning against the impact of the policies being imposed by the EU or those built around the referendums on the Lisbon Treaty has proved to be politically effective, but they require the investment of personnel and resources. They raised important national-democratic demands and exposed the duplicity of the political establishment and key sectors of the trade union movement. They refuted the arguments in relation to the supposed benefits that Irish workers have derived from the country's alignment with the interests of European monopoly corporations and from abandoning key areas of national sovereignty. This campaign found an audience within the trade union movement.

The trade union movement is the major instrument that the working class has with which to defend its interests against the onslaught that has been launched against it by employers, governments, and the European Union. In spite of the weaknesses displayed by some of the leadership of the trade union movement, with class collaboration exemplified by "social partnership," the membership of the trade union movement has continued to show strength and solidarity through demonstrations, occupations and strikes in opposition to cuts in social services and jobs.

Also, the mobilisation of local communities to resist cuts in local hospitals or school services shows that a broad popular basis can be built. A key force in many areas was the community development organisations. They were the first to be hit with the massive cuts in government funding. Clearly, the weakness was that the state used its funding in an attempt to neutralise their campaigning potential and to disarm any potential resistance. That experience cannot be unlearned but can provide the possible basis for building a wide coalition around their demands.

Some of these coalitions also show the extent of the disillusionment that exists among various social groupings and individuals who once supported and to some degree benefited from the relationships they had with the establishment parties and the political system. Increasingly, sectors both north and south that believed up to now that they had a "stake in the system" find themselves, their business, jobs and pensions being sacrificed to bail out banks, to serve the wheeling and dealing of a wealthy minority, to sustain the system.

There are two radical currents with long and deep historical roots in Irish history and culture: the labour and the republican. These are the two traditions that the CPI is rooted in and draws its inspiration and

experience from. Both are necessary to us; neither on its own can point the way forward.

The coming period will throw up new demands and open up new contradictions that communists and other radical and progressive forces need to understand in order to push forward important strategic demands. The forthcoming savage cuts in Northern Ireland will have a major impact on the support base among working people of the two main coalition parties and present an opportunity to open up a debate across the political divide. The demand for it will create greater political space to raise our central strategic political-economic demand, that of building a more sustainable all-Ireland economy. This is linking the social and the national.

It will be difficult but absolutely necessary to fight for such an alternative strategy. It is part of the battle of ideas within society that we have to engage in and to win. We may find a more sympathetic hearing among certain forces and hostility among others, but that is the challenge that we as communists must rise to. Our belief in a socialist future is not widely accepted; that does not make us abandon it or tone it down.

What the crisis has exposed is the class role of the state, and the class nature of politics. The aim of national political and economic sovereignty is a key element in the struggle for a more socially just Ireland and a necessary step towards building socialism. A profound democratic transformation has the potential to weaken the ruling-class structures and their methods of control.

We need to build upon our alternative political-economic strategy contained in *An Economy for the Common Good*. The nature of the system is increasingly being exposed by itself, as is the limited nature of democracy in our society. What is clear is that the Irish people, north and south, need to be offered an alternative vision for our country, that a different Ireland is possible, that mass emigration, poverty, inequality and discrimination can be ended and consigned to history along with the economic and political system that produces them.

We need, as an urgent contribution to building the forces for change, to present to the Irish people a People's Democratic Programme for the 21st century—a 21st-century vision of a new Ireland, putting aside past division, a programme that will inspire, to give working people hope; a new Ireland where the aspirations and dreams of working people for economic and social justice determine government priorities, a new Ireland where the people are sovereign. We need to propose a strategy that will bring working people into state power.

RESOLUTION ON WOMEN

Women's emancipation and liberation from class exploitation

THIS year, the 100th anniversary of the declaration of 8 March as the International Working Women's Day, the Communist Party of Ireland is reaffirming its commitment to the liberation of women from class exploitation and double oppression as workers and as women. As a party we have supported and led the political struggles for women's rights in the work-place, trade unions, and the community movement, and we will continue to do so.

We believe that only a socialist system will create the conditions for solving the women's question, because working people will have control of the resources that eliminate wealth and power, which will allow people to share this wealth equitably and will have the power to eliminate the cultural and social conditions that historically have perpetuated it. The determining factor in the oppression of women is the oppression of working people, both urban and rural, by the ruling class.

Women's emancipation, the EU and imperialism

In the struggle for women's emancipation and for socialism, communists understand the reactionary role played by the European Union. The EU is the driving force behind the anti-people and anti-worker policies imposed to secure the interests of monopoly capitalism. It has to be acknowledged, however, that women suffer disproportionately from EU policies and that any analysis should not focus solely on equality of opportunity, on which the European Union claims to place such emphasis. Women, whilst not separate from the class struggle, have specific needs that have to be addressed in the struggle for equality of outcome and emancipation.

In order to meet the needs of a flexible labour market, the majority of new jobs created in the EU are mainly low-paid and within the service and caring sectors. These are often part-time, with the majority of these posts filled by women. Because so many women work outside the formal economy in precarious and exploitative conditions they do not appear in unemployment statistics, and there is no way of measur-

ing the numbers that have lost these jobs in the recession. This low-waged, casualised labour force serves the interests of transnational corporations, bankers and big business. This feminisation of the work force means that women are at greater risk of poverty than men.

Despite EU legislation, according to their own latest statistics, even in the formal economy the wage gap persists. The latest figures on the average hourly pay gap between women and men in the EU are 17.6 per cent. Women in seven European countries, namely Germany, the Netherlands, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Greece, and Britain, earn 20 per cent less than their male counterparts and 25 per cent less in Estonia and Austria. Belgian female employees earn 15 per cent less than their male colleagues. In Ireland the wage gap, according to the CSO, is 15 per cent.

It is argued that part-time work and flexible working hours meet the needs of women in the work-place, enabling a work-life balance—difficult to realise, however, when women remain primary carers and reliant upon inadequate and increasingly privatised child care. This unresolved problem of publicly funded child care and caring services means that 77 per cent of part-time EU workers are women, who are often excluded from full-time, better-paid employment opportunities.

Communist women continue to work within broad-based progressive women's movements and trade unions, both at home and internationally, in the fight against inequality and the exploitation of women. Poverty, insecurity, poor working conditions, lack of public child care, access to health and education and exclusion from government persist.

Whilst the level of discrimination and disadvantage varies between countries, the disadvantaged status of women continues. Worldwide, 70 per cent of those living in poverty are women, as are two-thirds of illiterate adults. Female infanticide is still widely practised, and forced marriage is still a major problem in forty-nine countries according to the latest report from CEDAW (Conference on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women). Inheritance rights and freedom to live independently are denied to women in many countries by custom, religion, and poverty, which cause women to be sold to gain money or food for the family, while girls are denied the right to education. One in four women is beaten by her husband or partner. Every day 1,300 still die unnecessarily in childbirth or during pregnancy. Inequality and discrimination cannot be tackled by simply replacing right-wing men with right-wing women in power. Parity and emancipation of women

will only come about when we have a political and economic system that is able to support the needs of all the people.

Community

There are greater demands on the community to provide much-needed services, which in effect means the responsibility being pushed back onto women. Community and voluntary associations the world over have become key providers of human services, especially health and welfare. The good will and support within civil society means privatisation by stealth, signifying the use of the community and voluntary sector as a smokescreen for state retrenchment and corporate interests.

We have witnessed EU-funded projects and training schemes multiplying, EU directives on mainstreaming, frameworks and road maps have been implemented, yet unemployment and poverty continue to rise as the gap between those who have and those who have not widens. The real cost of EU-funded projects and initiatives has been a far weaker radical women's movement, locally and internationally. Progressive women's groups and community organisations have been constrained in their fight against inequality and injustice, as they are forced to jump through hoops to access much-needed funding. These groups that were born out of radical feminist politics now are less likely to criticise the funding hand that feeds them, and indeed in some cases have become agents of the state, as opposed to agents of change.

The result has been sticking plasters over gaping wounds as more and more projects addressing poverty and social exclusion are constrained by EU demands, forced to become funding-led, steeped in bureaucracy and focused on holding on to the few jobs created instead of meeting real needs of people in working-class communities.

Trade unions

Women constitute half the working population, and women's membership of trade unions is rising. However, they remain under-represented in proportion to their numbers, and the tendency to subsume women's issues within the general class struggle or to relegate them to a secondary position continues. There is therefore a need to revitalise the fight for parity and women's emancipation by focusing on the key demands of progressive women in relation to social policy, the labour market, and the labour movement.

Women in the work-place need to be organised around key issues that are relevant to them, specifically the insecurity of casualisation and zero-hours contracts, low pay, long hours and poor working conditions, job segregation and limited training opportunities, lack of state-funded child care provision, bullying, and sexual harassment.

The gender pay gap shamefully continues, and women remain under-represented in senior and better-paid positions. Increased work loads, maternity-related discrimination and work-life balance have a disproportionate effect on women, but improvements in these areas will lead to improvements for all. Tackling inequality and discrimination is central and needs to be adequately resourced.

In society, cuts in welfare state and public services have a disproportionate impact on women, and there must be a collective, democratic and progressive left response to reverse these cuts and to highlight the feminisation of poverty. The right-wing ideology used to perpetuate women's inequality must be replaced by a powerful international women's movement, on a clear theoretical basis.

The notion of "family values" and the "family wage" must be challenged, alongside the role of the media in the objectification of the female form, the sexualisation of young women and girls, and the reinforcement of unequal gender relations between men and women. As Lenin contended, "There is no good practice without Marxist theory."

Migrant women

Ireland has become an increasingly diverse society, and migrant women contribute economically, socially and culturally as active participants in the labour market and through family life and community activity. However, migrant women are over-represented in low-skilled, low-paid jobs, often without trade union representation.

The result is that many face some of the most serious problems of social exclusion and marginalisation and are further discriminated against in the work-place as they face a range of gender-specific issues and in the community as many working-class women face exploitation, disadvantage and racism.

These key issues require a collective response, and therefore organising migrant women workers into trade unions is crucial to challenging inequality, particularly in non-unionised areas of employment, where the potential for exploitation is greater. Communists need to work within progressive movements and lead the fight for equal work-

ing conditions, working hours and pay for work of equal value for migrant and non-migrant workers and for an effective system of recourse against exploitative employers.

Protection and support, however, need to go much further than just within the work-place: this must extend to the wider community, society, and globally. This will require us to challenge a wide range of issues, from the need for greater access to information to an end to the trafficking of women, the powerful multi-billion sex industry, and the promotion of prostitution. This is clearly the ultimate form of the commercialisation and abuse of women because of poverty.

The right to choose

Between 2008 and 2009 surveys in both the North and South of Ireland have indicated that the population believe that abortion should be legalised. The fact that 4,000 Irish women go to Britain each year also show the need for abortion law reform. As communists who are trade union activists we know how important control over reproduction has been in terms of advancing education, employment and civic and trade union opportunities for women.

Abortion in Ireland is and remains a class issue, an issue that also involves the need for improved sex education, health facilities, and so on. We will continue to fight for the reproductive rights of working-class women, through progressive movements and campaigns, and continue to give a voice to those who are silenced through marginalisation, stigma and social exclusion on this Island.

The CPI gives its support to the “Alliance for Choice” campaign and those Irish women who are taking their cases to the European Court of Human Rights. The CPI reaffirms its commitment to a change in the law on women’s right to choose in both parts of the country. The Executive and Assembly in Belfast have a responsibility to open up the widest democratic debate among the people in relation to this important issue. It is time to change the law in the Republic, away from the cowardly “Irish solution to an Irish problem,” which attempts to ignore the reality of Irish women who choose abortions abroad and fails to provide them with the necessary support. The CPI supports those organisations and campaigns that wish to see legislative changes as well as greater social and cultural understanding and support for those women who make that choice. We also support those Irish women who are taking their case to the European Court of Human Rights.”

Domestic violence

The impact of the recession with increasing unemployment has resulted in increasing financial pressures within the home, giving rise to an increase in the severity of domestic violence. In this current crisis in capitalism, domestic violence figures are soaring as advice line calls, shelter visits and domestic violence-related crimes rise significantly. However, this current recession must not be used as another reason to justify why men abuse women: to exercise power and control over them.

In 2006/07 there were more domestic violence related crimes than the combined total of sexual offences against children, indecent exposure, robbery, armed robbery, hijacking, fraud and counterfeiting, shoplifting, dangerous driving, offences under anti-terrorism legislation and firearms offences. As communists we must understand that the impact of the recession is not only the increasing severity of violence that has always been existed as a result of power relationships within society but also that additional barriers are created for women in terms of seeking support or trying to leave. For example, NGOs such as Women's Aid are having their funding cut and may have to cut services and reduce service hours because the demand for social welfare increases and leads to long delays in accessing payments.

Habitual residence is now a major issue, with women being unable to access even emergency payments due to lack of official status. A most recent initiative that we welcome is the development of policy by trade unions to help women whose work is affected by acts of domestic violence.



INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY STATEMENT

THE CPI reaffirms its commitment to acting in solidarity with the peoples struggling against imperialism, for peace and social progress, with those fighters for peace who continue to challenge the imperialist war machine of the USA and the European Union and NATO, with all those victims of the aggressive wars now being waged by the USA and its allies, including both the British and Irish governments. While this is a general commitment, there are particular issues and campaigns which especially demand our active participation.

There is an urgent need to revive the international peace movement, to end the wars in progress and to put a brake on the drive to further wars. The continuing military aggression by the USA and its allies, acting openly or through their proxies, even openly threatening to use nuclear armaments, poses a grave threat to world peace. The imperialist drive to control finite global resources, especially in the context of the current economic crisis, can only lead to further aggression. The US is currently threatening war against Iran and North Korea, which it sees as a threat to its global hegemony.

We reaffirm our solidarity with Revolutionary Cuba, which has for fifty years raised the banner of socialism and national independence in conditions of the US-imposed blockade and constant subversion and threats. The ending of the illegal blockade of Cuba is the challenge that faces all those forces that claim to stand for social justice and national sovereignty. The continuing interference in Cuba's internal affairs by the USA and the EU exposes the true intent of these forces. The unconditional release of the five Cuban patriots unjustly held and maltreated in US prisons is an urgent demand.

The Obama administration has continued and intensified the drive by the USA to contain and reverse the democratic political and social changes now under way in some countries in Latin America. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has asserted its independence and proclaimed its aim of building a socialist society in defiance of imperialism. The Bolivarian Revolution provides inspiration and support to other progressive regimes, such as in Bolivia and Ecuador, and has rallied the continent to assert its unity and independence. There is a constant propaganda war against it, while US government agencies

finance the opposition. Venezuela, and all of Latin America, is also militarily threatened by the US Fourth Fleet and the seven US military bases in Colombia. On the spurious excuse of a “war on drugs” the USA has prolonged the conflict in Colombia, giving support to state and paramilitary terror against the population there. Their propaganda demonises the popular resistance movements as “terrorist” and the peace movement as “terrorist sympathisers.” Solidarity with the peoples of Venezuela and Colombia is an obligation of our party, as with the struggling peoples of Latin America. In particular, we must oppose any recognition of the regime in Honduras, which seized power in a coup d’état with the connivance of the USA.

We support the campaign of solidarity with Palestine and for boycott, divestment and sanctions against the bandit state of Israel, which, under the protection of the US and the EU, treats international law and humanitarian considerations with contempt, constantly grabbing more land for colonial settlers, imposing apartheid conditions on the people of the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank, and constantly threatening war against its neighbours.

Once again the ruling classes across the European Union are attempting to raise to new levels their anti-communist hysteria with a growing body of anti communist laws being enacted in some states of the EU. The restriction on the rights of communist parties and of individual communists is not just an attack on communism but also an attack on all the left and an assault on democracy. We express our solidarity with those parties that are now victims of these anti-democratic laws.



We need to develop a strategy that builds the forces for change that will become the building blocks, the foundation stones of a future socialist Ireland. People's consciousness is developed and enriched by struggle and thereby becoming aware of the potential for an alternative way forward when the old order is not capable of delivering what they require.



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