

## Editorial: Interesting Times

'May you live in interesting times' is a well known Chinese curse. These are certainly interesting times in Ireland at the moment. But for socialists not completely addicted to the quiet life these are also times with a lot to recommend them.

Yes it is true that with accelerating climate change and general ecological devastation, plus war, refugees and racism along with Trump and Clinton and looming global recession, the world shows every sign of going to hell in a handcart.

It is also true that the by now very familiar dysfunctional features of Irish society are if anything getting worse. The massive economic inequality with the rich getting ever richer just keeps on growing. The housing crisis intensifies, the numbers of homeless increase, and the Government's attempts to address the issue merely shovel money into the pockets of developers and landlords. The hospital waiting times and waiting lists lengthen. The stink of corruption and malpractice in high places ranging from NAMA to An Garda Síochána grows stronger. All this we know.

At the same time there is much that is very positive. In the Republic the minority Fine Gael government, dependent as it is on support from the Independent Alliance and Fianna Fáil, is clearly very weak. This is seen repeatedly in their tendency to back down (as over waste collection charges) or kick for touch, as over water charges and the 8th Amendment. And their weakness is potentially the Left's strength. For the government's weakness is not just a matter of seats in the Dáil and parliamentary arithmetic – it reflects an underlying political shift to the left in Irish society, which has been developing over years. Ideologically Enda Kenny and co are on the defensive. And, in a somewhat different way, this is also the case in the North where a new generation has emerged fed up with Sinn Féin- DUP austerity, as the spectacular rise of People Before Profit has shown.

Most importantly we see a revival in the industrial struggle as all of the estab-

lishment's talk of recovery has given rise, not surprisingly, to workers demanding their share. The LUAS workers led the way, followed by the bus workers and now, at the time of writing, ASTI teachers. Even the Gardai are getting in on the act.

The autumn has also seen major demonstrations. On September 15 about 30,000 took to the streets again over the water charges, on the strong demand for abolition not suspension, which showed that the networks built in the movement had not gone away. A week later another mass movement hit the streets with the magnificent March for Choice heralding a huge battle to repeal the 8th Amendment and for a woman's right to choose and proving once again how much Ireland has changed. On October 19 there was a very large and militant student demo over fees. There is an obvious cross-over between the student movement and the movement for choice and if this conjuncture leads to an increased engagement of students with radical politics this will be very positive indeed.

The substantially increased parliamentary representation of the radical left is another big step forward. It gives serious socialists a voice in the national political debate in a way that is currently exceptional by international standards and so far our elected representatives have done an excellent job of rising to this challenge. Particularly important in this context has been the election of Gerry Carroll and Eamonn McCann as People Before Profit MLAs in Stomont. This gives visible expression to the idea of a socialist challenge to the two reactionary states, north and south.

Another major positive is the absence in Ireland of any significant fascist or racist right organisation, any equivalent of Golden Dawn, Jobbyk, Front National or UKIP. This does not, however, mean there is not a serious problem with vicious state racism on many fronts e.g. against refugees and asylum seekers and, of course, against Travellers. And inevitably this is reflected in a good deal of 'popular' racism at street level

though again it is not as yet comparable to the situation in many European countries including England. In this context the emergence of United Against Racism as an active anti-racist united front with its campaign to end the cruel Direct Provision system is very important.

One symptom of this general radicalisation has been the growth of People Before Profit on the ground, again north and south. A recent registration drive showed that it now has over 1100 members nationwide – a significant number in a country of only 6 million – and over 45 branches. What PBP is uniquely placed to do is to ‘join the dots between the different issues and campaigns and translate them into an all-Ireland challenge to the system. There is, naturally, no room for complacency here. This is not a given but an opportunity that needs to be seized.

This issue of *Irish Marxist Review* addresses a number of these features of the Irish political scene. In ‘The Politics of Abortion’ Melisa Halpin and Peadar O’Grady offer a detailed critique of the politics of restricting abortion rights and a robust statement of the case for a ‘Woman’s right to choose’. On foot of the Apple fiasco Kieran Allen provides a forensic dissection of

tax-haven Ireland showing how this is not a series of ‘special cases’ but the essential economic strategy of the Irish ruling class and also how it is set to unravel, turning Ireland into the weak link of European capitalism.

Marnie Holborow examines the notion that the EU can be reformed by a process of ‘critical engagement’ and finds it wanting. Alan Byrne sets Fianna Fáil’s current attempts at a comeback as the A-team of Irish capitalism in their historical context. Our interview with Gerry Carroll MLA provides a picture of how this modest young man has come to play such a significant role in the politics of the North.

On different fronts John Molyneux looks at how the concept of secularism has given rise to much confusion on the international left; Dave O’Farrell analyses the relationship between Marxism and science; Ivanka Avotna revisits the issue of socialism and the politics of disability; Damian Lawlor offers a snapshot of the history of Connolly’s Starry Plough; Shaun Doherty reviews Kieran Allen’s recently reprinted *The Politics of James Connolly* and Conor Kennelly welcomes Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s *From #Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*.

- John Molyneux