

Editorial

Where we are at

This issue of Irish Marxist Review begins with a focus on two key events in Irish history - the 1913 Lockout and the 1916 Rising - and then moves on to consider how different legacies of that history, Loyalism and Dissident Republicanism are manifesting themselves in Northern Ireland today.

However in the South it is the fight against Fine Gael/ Labour imposed austerity that holds the centre of the political stage. It is therefore useful to introduce this issue with some brief reflections on where we are at in this struggle.

December 2012 saw the sixth austerity budget in a row. It included a number of particularly vicious cuts hitting, as so often, the most vulnerable - for example the cut to the respite grant for carers and the cuts in child benefit - combined with a multitude of small measures chipping away at the living standards of low and middle income earners, ie. the working class, and at the services available to working class communities. All of which caused great and well deserved anger.

The Property Tax - up the resistance!

It is likely, however, that the main immediate expression of this anger will be via resistance to the new Property Tax. This is because, as with the Household Tax last year, it is possible for people to refuse to pay it. But there is also a significant difference between the Household Tax and the Property Tax. It was possible to boycott the Household Tax with relative impunity and huge numbers - upwards of 750,000 - did so, whereas the Property Tax comes with much more draconian penalties attached and with the possibility that Rev-

enue will be able to deduct it from wages and benefits. The government has significantly raised the stakes. For this reason the campaign of resistance also has to up its game.

A clear call for boycott, which has been issued by the Campaign Against Home and Water Taxes, remains essential - wavering at this stage would send entirely the wrong signal both to the enemy and, more importantly, to our own side. But a passive boycott alone is not going to be enough and it is unlikely in these circumstances that there can be a long drawn out war of attrition. Rather what is needed is a campaign of militant resistance in which the boycott serves as a platform for mass civil disobedience and defiance. To put it simply we need to shut the country down.

The most effective way to do this would be a general strike called by the trade unions and this demand should be raised in every trade union branch. Unfortunately it is clear that the main union leaders - the likes of David Begg and Jack O'Connor - are closely tied to the Labour Party and thus to the government, and have absolutely no intention of calling such a strike. Consequently resistance has to be mobilised on the streets which can pressurise and shame the union leaders while encouraging and inspiring rank-and-file trade unionists who would like to see a fightback.

At the time of writing the Campaign Against Home and Water Taxes is drawing up plans for such a campaign with actions ranging from occupations of City Councils to banner drops and mass demonstrations, culminating in a day of mass action on May 1st. It is not possible to know yet what can be delivered but there is a lot at stake and the Campaign needs to reach out as widely as possible to all groups and sectors

affected by austerity including trade unionists and workers who can lead walk outs from their workplaces, in order to maximise the size and unity of the struggle.

The United Left Alliance - farewell to the Socialist Party

It is in this context that the Socialist Party has decided to withdraw from the United Left Alliance. This is highly regrettable in that it will be seen by many working people as a sign of the left's inability to get its act together.

The SP's rationale for its departure is that:

..some in the ULA, including TDs, have moved away from a principled left position and have ditched the collaborative spirit. Apart from the Socialist Party, the other groups in the ULA have accepted this situation, leaving us with no choice but to withdraw.

These developments decisively undermined the ULA, which was already in a weakened state as ordinary working class people had not joined it in any significant numbers... As a result, any potential that the ULA had of playing a role in building a new mass Left in Ireland is now gone. ¹

The reality is that if the SP, the SWP and the various independents all agreed on what constituted the 'principled left position' in every concrete instance (for example the SWP does not agree on principle with the SP's position on Israel/ Palestine or the border and the North) we would all

be members of the same party in the first place and there would be no need for an alliance. Conversely if there is going to be an alliance there has to a willingness to accept being outvoted from time to time.

The SP seems to have great difficulty with this. Throughout its membership of the ULA it consistently opposed the adoption of the democratic principle of one person - one vote and the holding of any members conference with decision making powers, preferring the undemocratic veto system.

The point made by the SP that the ULA has failed to attract significant numbers of working class members has some truth in it. However, it had a clear opportunity to do this in early 2011, following its electoral breakthrough, but let it slip. In order to attract a significant influx of working people it would have needed to demonstrate its relevance to them concretely by campaigning on the ground. But the SP opposed and blocked this course of action at the time.

Having quit the ULA the SP now proposes to focus on the campaign against the Property Tax and to make that the vehicle for its electoral aspirations. This electoral strategy has two drawbacks. First the Property Tax needs to be defeated in 2013, not in 2014 when the elections are due and right now an electoral focus is a distraction. Second, while in some instances running a candidate backed by the Campaign might make sense, in many others it might fracture the unity of the Campaign, which by its nature consists of people of various political affiliations and none.

Which brings us back to the question of where we are at now. There may be some possibility of a new realignment of the left, possibly involving wider forces, there may not - it remains to be seen.

¹<http://www.socialistparty.net/component/content/article/1-latest-news/1123-the-ula-the-fight-against-austerity-a-building-a-new-party-of-the-working-class>

In the meantime we in the SWP will continue developing the People Before Profit Alliance as a broad campaigning network, whilst also striving to build the SWP as a fully revolutionary socialist organization. However, the most important

immediate task is the mobilization on working people on the streets and in the workplaces to take on this vicious government.

John Molyneux