

Dublin Spartacist Group statement



Socialist Party/Socialist Workers Party: no alternative to class betrayal of Labour/Democratic Left

For a revolutionary workers party!

For an Irish workers republic, part of a socialist federation of the British Isles!

This general election takes place amidst the hype about the booming "Celtic Tiger" economy, in the context of New Labour's victory in the British election, which has aroused expectations of restarting the imperialist "peace" fraud in Northern Ireland. Since the last election in November 1992 southern Ireland has been ruled by coalition governments, the first dominated by Fianna Fáil and the second by Fine Gael, but both including Dick Spring's Labour Party, ever willing to assist the capitalist class. Between the competing electoral alliances, Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats versus Fine Gael, the Labour Party and Democratic Left (DL), there is barely a glimmer of policy difference.

We say: the parties standing in this election offer no solution to any of the burning questions in Irish society — from the oppression of Catholics in the North, to the denial of abortion rights to women, and chronic unemployment and poverty in the South. No vote to Labour and Democratic Left! Both the Labour Party and Democratic Left as part of the "Rainbow Coalition" government have pushed attacks on the working class and the oppressed in the South and look to the imperialists to broker a "deal" in the North, which would necessarily be at the expense of the Catholic minority. The so-called "socialist" organisations running in the elections, Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party (SP — formerly Militant) both supported Labour and DL in the last election. Their campaigns feature nothing more than pleas for tax reform, and echo the reactionary "law and order" outcry from the major parties. We say no vote to the reformists of the SWP or SP. The Socialist Party are notorious for their refusal to fight for British troops out of Northern Ireland, while the British SWP, in a craven capitulation to imperialism, supported the Labour government's deployment of the army in 1969, and argued against calling for withdrawal, with the outrageous claim that the army's presence would provide a "breathing space" for the Catholics. Today, you will not find the call for withdrawal of their own bourgeoisie's troops from Northern Ireland anywhere in the pages of their British paper, while this demand is relegated to the fine print of the "where we stand" column in the Irish paper. In a capitulation to the forces of clerical reaction, neither the SWP nor the

SP is campaigning for the elementary right to free, legal abortion in Ireland.

Marxists understand that the source of exploitation and oppression is the capitalist system. Therefore fundamental change in the interests of the oppressed and working people cannot come through parliamentary elections. What is necessary is revolutionary internationalist class struggle which, pursued to the end, must shatter the framework of capitalism worldwide. This task requires the creation of a Trotskyist party, which understands that for the working class to fight for its historic interests it is necessary to break politically from the reformist misleaders and betrayers of the Labour Party and Democratic Left and the pernicious influence of Irish nationalism, which seeks to unite the working class with its "own" capitalist class.

The bosses and the reformists push Partnership 2000 and wage-restraint in order to increase the rate of exploitation of the working class and compete with other capitalists internationally. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the capitalists no longer see the need to maintain the modicum of welfare measures which were granted to mollify the working class to head off class struggle. At the same time inter-imperialist rivalries have greatly increased. The Maastricht Treaty codifies harsh austerity measures deemed necessary by the imperialists against the working class within Europe, as well as racist anti-immigrant legislation. In several European countries, workers have engaged in major class battles to defend their living standards against these savage attacks. What is necessary to lead these struggles to victory is a revolutionary leadership. Whatever funding and benefits are commonly attributed to EU membership in Ireland, these are marginal, reversible and, in the case of jobs, have been created because of a literate, *low-wage* workforce. As with the so-called Asian "Tigers", the touted development of the Irish capitalist economy benefits only the rich and a layer of their middle-class hangers-on, in areas such as "Dublin 4", while working-class slums face dire poverty, and chronic unemployment is used to keep wages down.

Marxists oppose the Maastricht Treaty and the European Union. The EU is an imperialist trade bloc, a vehicle for capitalist co-operation against the working class of Europe. Its

Public meeting

For an Irish workers republic, part of a socialist federation of the British Isles!

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precursor, the Common Market, was established as an economic adjunct of NATO, as US imperialism sought to strengthen Western Europe against the Soviet Union, and French imperialism sought to check the growth of German imperialism. Since counterrevolution in the USSR and Eastern Europe, German imperialism has become more dominant within the EU.

The nationalist protectionism pushed by the Irish trade union bureaucracy is no answer to the harsh realities of the international capitalist market but rather divides workers against each other, lines them up behind their capitalist rulers in trade wars, and prepares them to be used as cannon fodder in the imperialist shooting wars that follow. "Neutral" Irish troops have always been involved in imperialism's bloody UN policing operations and today are taking part in the NATO-run carve-up of former Yugoslavia. The fight for a Socialist United States of Europe is a fight for working class revolution in each and every European country, and requires complete opposition to all forms of reformism and social chauvinism.

British troops out of Northern Ireland now!

Among the parties in Ireland who welcomed the victory of Blair's New Labour was Sinn Féin (SF) who editorialised, "Let's hope that Mo Mowlam senses that she has a chance to make history. Her party's victory in Britain leaves her able to set a path for decisive change in Britain's relations with Ireland. She must seize it—and quickly" (*An Phoblacht*, 8 May). What New Labour "seized quickly" was the chance to give Sinn Féin and the Catholic electorate in Northern Ireland a kick in the teeth. When Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness refused to swear "allegiance" to the English Queen, Labour and Tory alike cheered as the facilities of the Palace of Westminster were denied to the newly elected MPs. This fawning loyalty to Queen and country has long been intrinsic to British Labourism. Labour MPs applauded when parliament announced that James Connolly, fatally wounded in the 1916 rising, had been executed by the British butchers. As part of the struggle for a voluntary federation of workers republics in the British Isles, our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain fight intransigently for the abolition of the survivals of feudalism, such as the monarchy and the House of Lords, and as a matter of principle would refuse to affirm allegiance to the Crown. Down with the monarchy!

It was the last Labour government that sent British troops into Northern Ireland, introduced the Prevention of Terrorism Act and, as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition under Thatcher, joined with her in denouncing the H-Block hunger strikers on their death beds. Blair's New Labour will be no better. On his recent visit to Northern Ireland Blair insisted that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom for at least another fifty years.

Both the Socialist Party and SWP, on both sides of the Irish Sea, pushed for the election of New Labour, not least because, as they saw it, Blair had a better chance of a "peace" deal than the Tories, knowing that any such deal will be premised on keeping the troops in the North. To speak of "working class unity" across sectarian lines, as these two groups are fond of doing, without fighting for British troops out, serves to prettify the role of the imperialist army, who reinforce the viciously sectarian RUC and the Loyalist paramilitaries in anti-Catholic terror.

The Socialist Party bolsters illusions in all manner of imperialist machinations in the North—they even ran in elections for the Stormont talks last May. They have also organised public "discussions" in Dublin and Belfast with Billy Hutchinson, who was convicted of the murder of two Catholics, Michael Loughran and Edward Morgan, and whom the SP try to pass off as a "representative" of the Protestant working class.

For Marxists, it was clear from the beginning that any deal

imposed by the imperialists on Northern Ireland would be necessarily unjust and brutal, continuing the oppression of the Catholic minority and offering nothing for the Protestant working class either. The grim truth of this can be seen plainly today, from Loyalist pogroms following last summer's "siege of Drumcree", which were carried out under the protection of the British Army and RUC, to the burning of both Protestant and Catholic churches and the Loyalist murders of Robert Hamill and Sean Brown.

We demand the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of British troops, as a necessary precondition for any just solution. To achieve genuine unity of the Protestant and Catholic working class requires a party committed to overthrowing all the variants of capitalist exploitation and oppression which exists on these islands. We recognise that in Northern Ireland, as in other cases of interpenetrated peoples, there can be no just solution to national oppression within the framework of capitalism. At present, the Catholics in the North are an oppressed minority, but we oppose the forcible reunification of Ireland which would reverse the terms of oppression against the Protestant community, which they would undoubtedly resist. A proletarian perspective is necessarily internationalist and requires the mobilisation of the working class, on both sides of the Irish border and both sides of the Irish Sea, for the revolutionary overthrow of British imperialism, smashing the Orange statelet in the North as well as the Catholic clericalist state in the South. We say: not Orange against Green, but class against class, and fight for an Irish workers republic as part of a socialist federation of the British Isles.

No to class collaboration!

As revolutionary advocates of the independent mobilisation of the working class we never advocate a vote for bourgeois parties like Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, or for Sinn Féin, a petty-bourgeois nationalist party which stands for a united capitalist Ireland. While it is legitimate to consider critical support in elections to reformist parties such as the Labour Party and Democratic Left, a necessary precondition for applying such a tactic is that they are standing independently of capitalist parties, not in coalition. This is manifestly not true of these parties today, who are running on their track record of coalition with Fine Gael. The Rainbow Coalition is a popular front, an alliance of "workers" parties with bourgeois parties. A vote for Labour and Democratic Left is thus a vote for class collaboration, expressed in "Partnership 2000", an agreement between the bosses and the workers' misleaders to keep down wages in the face of booming profits. Mass reformist parties, described by Comrade Lenin as "bourgeois workers parties", have their base in the working class and the trade unions, but espouse a capitalist programme.

In the British elections, the SL/B said clearly: no vote to Blair's New Labour, whose programme was unambiguously anti-working class, anti-immigrant and anti-Irish. We extended critical support to Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, noting that in standing candidates in opposition to New Labour and refusing to call for a Labour government, they were in breach of the "eleventh commandment" of the British left—including the SWP and SP—that "thou shalt vote Labour" come hell or high water. However, the programme of the SLP is simply "old Labour" reformism, to which we clearly counterposed our Trotskyist perspective for genuine working class power.

This programme *for revolution* is what fundamentally distinguishes us Spartacists from the rest of the "socialist" left. Here, the election campaigns of the SWP and SP simply do not challenge the framework of capitalism. Significantly, the SWP's statement that "in all cases, we also urge a vote for the left

before the naked right wing policies of the PDs, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil" is a nudge and a wink to vote Labour or Democratic Left, and indeed for "progressive" bourgeois candidates.

The Workers Solidarity Movement, while not calling for votes in the election, offers the same sub-reformist drivel as the SWP and SP, in posters which moan about "corruption" among politicians. For all their pretence of opposition to the capitalist system, the WSM's politics are restricted to what they think can be obtained within the capitalist system. At the height of the struggles for abortion rights, the WSM was in a prominent position but restricted their demands to legalisation of abortion information, and steered clear of fighting for free abortion *in Ireland*. They also gave backhanded support to British imperialism in the North, when they whined that the breakdown of the "peace" process was a "tragedy".

For free abortion on demand! For women's liberation through socialist revolution!

The "liberal agenda" has been generally deemed completed with the introduction of legal but expensive divorce. But the influence of clericalist reaction remains deep and pervasive in Irish society. Neither Labour nor DL, which both oppose abortion, are going to touch the question of abortion rights in the election through fear of rousing a hornet's nest. The SWP, SP and WSM maintain a scandalous silence about Youth Defence blueshirts, who have besieged the Marie Stopes Reproductive Choices Clinic in Dublin since January, threatening the minuscule family planning services and abortion information that are legally available. We say: Hands off the Marie Stopes clinic! Sweep Youth Defence off the streets! For free abortion on demand!

The Youth Defence anti-abortion bigots contain a hard core of clerical fascists. On a number of occasions, Youth Defence thugs have launched murderous attacks on leftists. Stopping Youth Defence is not only an essential part of the fight for women's rights, it is an elementary act of self-defence by the working class as a whole. While women, gays and Travellers may be among the first targets of fascists in Ireland, the ultimate aim of fascism is the destruction of all organisations of the working class. The struggle to mobilise the working class against Youth Defence means fighting tooth and nail against the sell-out trade union bureaucrats and combatting the pro-capitalist policies of Labour and Democratic Left. *For trade union mobilisations to stop Youth Defence/SPUC reaction!*

Internationally, the bourgeoisie is intent on breaking the unions in order to drive down the living standards of the entire working class. Directed first and foremost at organised labour, which represents a minority of the working class, these attacks will hit women, youth and minorities especially hard. One of the sharpest manifestations of this is seen in the generalised attacks on abortion rights. Abortion is an explosive *political* issue because, at bottom, it raises the question of the equality of women. Engaging deep fears and prejudices which the capitalists stoke in their attacks on health care and other social services, abortion rights are subject to the ebbs and flows of the class struggle.

We seek to initiate exemplary united front actions to stop the fascists. In Berlin in February our comrades of the Spartacist Workers Party of Germany led a united-front mobilisation which stopped the Nazis from staging a race-hate march for the chauvinist slogan "Jobs for Germans first". The successful mobilisation sent the fascists scurrying back into their sewers, despite the fact that they had heavy police protection. This success did not drop from the sky but was fought for and implemented by the Spartacists in the face of stiff opposition

from the leadership of reformist organisations such as the SPD, the PDS, and also the anarchists and Autonomes, who were prepared to demonstrate and protest against but not to stop the Nazis, since at bottom they rely on the capitalist state to deal with them. The Spartacists were able to lead workers, youth, leftists, trade unionists, immigrants, Jewish students and others who wanted to stop the fascists. We were able to demonstrate in action the power of our programme for revolutionary struggle.

Down with the government's "law and order" campaign!

All the major parties are pushing "law and order" as a key part of their election campaigns, ostensibly to fight crime and drugs. This reactionary crusade is whipping up vigilante terror, and strengthening the repressive powers of the capitalist state, which will necessarily be used against workers, women's rights activists, Republicans, and the oppressed Traveller population.

The Socialist Party are promoting their very own pro-cop, pro-vigilante campaign. Joe Higgins, the Socialist Party's candidate for Dublin West, has egged on evictions of "drug pushers" by cops and vigilantes. Another leading SP member, Mick Murphy, speaking as a committee member of his particular "anti-drug" campaign, states: "It is the policy with all the campaigns in Tallaght to work with the housing authorities and Gardai to have those who refuse to stop pushing either convicted or moved out of the area" (*Militant* no 246, September 1996). As we have noted, "The Traveller population, who are hideously oppressed in every aspect of life, know exactly what it means to get 'moved out' of an area. They are regularly subjected to murderous night-riding attacks on their homes, in the form of both *legal* and *illegal* 'removals'. *We say: Smash anti-Traveller terror! Trade unionists must defend halting sites against vigilante scum!*" (*Workers Hammer* no 155, May/June). Ireland's growing number of refugees and immigrants — including from Eastern Europe — will be targets of state and vigilante terror, now meted out to the Travellers.

Forge a Trotskyist party!

With the bourgeoisie crowing about the "death of communism", the "socialism" proffered by the reformist left consists of pleading for modifications to the capitalist system. We believe that it is possible and necessary to bring an end to exploitation and oppression, through overthrowing the capitalist system. Those who create the wealth — the working class — must rule. Our comrades in the SL/B distributed a statement prior to the British elections, titled: "For a revolutionary workers party! For a federation of workers republics in the British Isles!" which outlined the perspective of Trotskyists today:

"The Soviet Union politically degenerated under hideous Stalinist bureaucratism; Stalinism criminally undermined the gains of the October Revolution, and sold it out to counterrevolution in 1991, which saw the final undoing of those gains, which were severely attenuated by then. The ruling class which today talks about the 'end of history' agree on one thing: there must never again be a repeat of the Russian Revolution. But a new October Revolution is precisely what's needed, and for that we require a party modelled on the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky."

Building that party to provide revolutionary leadership is the task of the Dublin Spartacist Group, part of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist).

27 May 1997

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