

Socialist Worker

Boycott the Property Tax...

24 HOUR GENERAL STRIKE



NOVEMBER 24th should be a turning point in the Irish movement against cuts and austerity. For the past four years, the union movement has stayed quiet and kept a lid on protests. But now tens of thousands are saying *Enough is Enough*.

The Fine Gael/Labour government are planning another slash and burn budget, taking €3.5 billion out of the economy. But in March, they will hand over €3 billion on a 'promissory note' for Anglo Irish Bank.

It could not be clearer- nearly all the cutbacks in the budget are paying for the gambling debts of bankers.

Meanwhile many of the former directors of these banks – such as Eugene Sheehy of AIB or Brian Goggin of Bank of Ireland – are living the high life on huge pensions.

It is time to drop the myth that we are the 'good boys and girls of Europe' and that a fairy Godmother in the shape of Angela Merkel is going to cut our debts.

The reality is that the government's strategy of using diplomacy to cut Ireland's sovereign debt is a failure. Merkel has stated that there will be no back-dating of money to reward Ireland for bailing out banks.

We are on our own – and now we must fight.



Cancel the Debt

Each year the Irish state pays over €10 billion in interest payments. This money is robbed from the people through cuts and tax hikes.

The only reason this scandalous state of affairs persists is that the European Central Bank ordered us to stuff private banks full of cash so that they could pay off debts to the European banks.

The Troika never had any interest in helping the Irish people – they only wanted to shore up a dysfunctional EU financial system.

These debts should all be cancelled. They are crippling Irish society and we should no longer suffer.

Take Action

We also need to start taking real protest action.

A once off demonstration will not be enough to shake this government. They will see it only as an occasion to 'let off steam'.

As long as we just 'give out' on the Joe Duffy show and have occasional protests, the social suffering will continue.

After this march we should do four simple things:

1 We should organise assemblies to allow people to put forward their own ideas on how the struggle can be continued. These assemblies have started in Spain and they have become a major

way of re-energising the protest movement. Instead of just listening to people from top tables and platforms we need to become participants in our own decision making. So let's start calling assemblies at work and in your neighbourhoods to discuss how we will continue this fight.

2 On Budget day 5 December, we should surround the Dáil. The politicians should be told that we want real democracy and not be represented by TDs who tell lies to the electorate. Fine Gael, for example, wrote in their election manifesto that they were opposed to a tax on the family home but they are now bringing in a property tax. Let's get to the Dáil on Budget day to show our anger.

3 We also need to call for a 24 hour general strike. We should shut the country down on a day when the €3 billion bond is due to be paid over. Or we should move even sooner against tax hikes on workers.

Other countries such as Spain or Portugal have called a general strike – and we need to follow their example here.

4 Organise for a boycott of the property charge. There is nothing 'progressive' about this tax – it is only another way of robbing the majority to protect the privileges of the corporate elite. We need a mass boycott campaign and PAYE worker stoppages if they try to take it from our pay packets.

People power is the only way to confront these bullies. Let's make sure that together we start to build a country in the interests of ordinary human needs.

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Students protest local TDs

By KARL GILL

THE UNION of Students' in Ireland (USI) and local Student Unions have been organising numerous town hall meetings and demonstrations against local TDs as part of their pre-budget campaign.



This year the students' movement has taken a turn towards grassroots building. In the past student leaders were exclusively concerned with lobbying politicians at a national level and organising a 'one-off' Dublin based demo.

However this time around, the USI has de-centralised its activities into local communities and hopes to foster links with other groups affected by austerity.

This is an important leap forward for the USI and should be welcomed by everyone concerned with student welfare.

A number of TDs have been selected for targeting and local Student Unions are now on a mission to haunt these TDs, badger them and hold large scale local protests at their clinics.

However there is also a weakness in the leadership of USI's plan.

Politics in Ireland may have a local focus but the slogan 'All Politics is Local' is simply not true.

The momentum and energy that is being built up around the country has serious potential, but only if it eventually culminates in a national demonstration before the budget.

Moreover, the failure to make links with college staff and the Trade Union movement, due to right-wing uneasiness with organised labour, will amount to a lack of success for students.

The only way students and staff can fight cuts to education is by expressing solidarity with one another and fighting together.

Student leaders that fail to take this seriously due to political careerism will be remembered just as negatively as Ruairi Quinn will be.

It is time for all groups to stand together and fight together before Fine Gael and Labour destroy this country.

For more information about local USI protests and meeting visit SWP.ie.

OUT NOW:



Aer Lingus Pension Row Escalates

By EUGENE MC DONAGH

A pension's time bomb

As Socialist Worker went to press, Aer Lingus staff are locked in conflict with management over pensions. The unions involved -- Impact, SIPTU, the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union (TEEU) and Unite have belatedly decided to avert a stoppage this week as management agreed to engage in a non-binding talk's process involving the Labour Relations Commission and the Labour Court. Talks at the Labour Relations Commission originally broke down three weeks ago, however new proposals to avert the industrial action have since been put forward by IBEC and accepted by the ICTU.

The focus of the dispute centres on a hitherto defined pension pot for workers known as the Irish Aviation Superannuation Scheme (IASS) which involves Aer Lingus workers and workers at the Dublin Airport Authority.

Unions calculate that Aer Lingus would have to contribute at least €200m, with the DAA paying €130m, to ensure that members receive the pension benefits they have expected from the IASS. However, anxious at the funding shortfall, the employers want to freeze pay for four years in return for a one-off payment into the



scheme. They also want to shift from defined benefits to defined contributions by freezing the current scheme, and using the assets to buy sovereign bonds to fund benefits.

This would mark a major change as previously workers had a guaranteed income stream that was secure at the time of retirement.

Instead all they will now know is how much they put

in each week, with market vultures gambling the proceeds in order to profiteer.

Staff from the companies would belong to two separate defined contribution schemes - which inevitably carry more risks for employees.

Meanwhile defined contributions would bring considerable benefits to the bosses, by transferring risks to workers, improving the balance sheets of both companies, and by enhancing the Aer Lingus share price.

This case is extremely important as it may mark a dangerous precedent for the numerous other defined benefit schemes now massively in deficit.

Over 15,000 people take to the streets in Waterford

By NIAMH MAC DONALD



AS part of its national campaign to undermine local health care services, the HSE is to demote Waterford Regional hospital to district status. This will mean the closure of Orthopaedic, Paediatric, Oncology and Cardiac services and the loss of around 1200 jobs.

Waterford is part of a group of 5 hospitals in the Kilkenny Tipperary and Wexford regions that work interactively. This means that the cuts will not be isolated in their effects but will spill over into hospitals around the area.

Waterford regional is also a university teaching hospital with a college of nurses, and links to the Royal College of Surgeons.

Speaking to Socialist Worker one woman spoke of people's anger in the following terms

"People are very angry; lives are going to be lost. It makes no sense as Limerick and Cork are already overcrowded with no

beds. It's another huge stress for patients with longer travelling times and increased waiting times - this is madness. The job losses are also going to further depress the area. Waterford is already being reduced from a city to a town it's an excuse to just cut everything. People have had enough. All the people here today are showing that."

This mass protest follows on the heels of 10,000 people on the streets of Clonmel and it puts a lie to the idea that Irish people will not protest.

Attacks on people's health seem to act as the major lightning rod, but to win these campaigns the irony is they must generalise.

Only a mass campaign against all forms of austerity will ultimately win and so we must take the energy of the Waterford demo and make it a template for the struggles to come.

BORD NA MÓNA LAYING OFF SEASONAL WORKERS

By EUGENE MCDONAGH

STATE-OWNED Bord Na Móna is laying off more than 100 seasonal workers and putting a further 90 on short time as it struggles to cope with the worst harvest in its history.

The company, which harvests and processes peat from State's bog lands, said this year's harvest will be just 37 per cent of what it expected, making 2012 its worst year to date.

As a result, it told staff yesterday that from October it intends to lay off 105 seasonal workers. At the same time, it will put a further 90-office based staff on short

time until March.

The company employs seasonal staff to work on its harvest from May to September every year. A number of them are then hired during the winter and early spring to work on transporting peat to its power plants and other activities.

Instead of rehiring them for those tasks this year, it will redeploy permanent staff to those transport duties.

Reacting to the news, the Bord Na Móna group of unions which represents most of the State Company's staff said that it would work to minimise the impact of the cost-cutting proposals on members. Secretary of

the group and SIPTU Organiser Oliver Mc Donagh said the unions were disappointed the company had opted for lay-offs and short-time working.

"While we are willing to work with management to offset the hardships brought on by the excessively wet summer, we must also work to protect the interests of our members," he stated.

The company met unions last week to discuss the plan. In this time of high unemployment it makes no sense to send workers back to the dole queues whilst putting pressure on full time workers to take on the extra duties of the seasonal workers.

WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and endangering the planet.

A new society can only be constructed when the workers take control of the wealth and plan its production and distribution for human need and not profit.

REVOLUTION

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The courts, the army and police exist to defend the interests of the wealthy.

To destroy capitalism, we need to remove the present state structures and create a workers' state based on much

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

War is a constant feature of capitalism today as the imperialist powers try to dominate the earth.

The "War on Terrorism" is a crude device to attack any country which threatens US military, strategic or economic dominance.

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the

working class.

We are for full social, economic and political equality for women.

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Brown government.

Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To win socialism socialists need to organise in a revolutionary party.

This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system.

We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

We stand for fighting trade unions and for independent rank and file action.

Join the Socialists

Fill in the form and send to
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Name.....

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What Socialists Say



Never Again

LAST Saturday almost 20,000 people poured onto the streets of Dublin in support of the family of Savita Halappanavar.

Less than a month ago this beautiful young woman had a whole life to look forward to. Today her family is left to grieve as Ireland's disgraceful abortion laws have led to a tragedy that surpasses even that of the X-case.

Denying women the right to choose whether to have children is often presented as a necessary protection for the rights of the unborn. In reality it is part of a conscious state policy that attempts to oppress one half of the population by controlling what they can and can't do with their own bodies. Every day around 12 women are forced to undergo needless stress as they are forced out of Ireland for a legal abortion.

Many more women are unable to travel and are left with the heart breaking choice of carrying on with an unwanted pregnancy or risking their lives in a backstreet hatchet shop. This barbarity against women has to stop. Savita's death comes less than six months after the United Left Alliance brought forward legislation that could have been used to save her life. Shamefully the so-called progressives in the Irish Labour Party chose to oppose that legislation whilst voting with the government.

It has been nearly 3 years since the European Court of Human Rights instructed Ireland to legislate to protect the rights of pregnant women. Let's make sure that Savita doesn't die in vain. Legislate now or the people will bring down this rotten government.

Bank bonuses reveal the true priorities of Irish capitalism

LAST week we caught yet another glimpse into the true nature of Irish capitalism, when it emerged that bankers who had helped to crash the Irish economy are living it up on massive pensions. Bankers like Eugene Sheehy (former Chief Executive of AIB) and Brian Goggin (his counterpart at Bank of Ireland) have been central to the collapse of the banking system.

Their reckless lending has cost the Irish people upwards of €65,000 million and left almost one in four below the poverty line. Yet rather than hauling them before the courts, the Irish government has sanctioned handouts that could only be dreamed of by ordinary workers.

Goggin is estimated to have a pension of around €600,000. Sheehy's was originally €325,000, whilst many others have pension pots well in excess of a quarter of a million. To make matters worse, these funds have come directly out of working people's pockets.

But when asked whether their public representatives were going to do anything about it, Minister for Finance, Micheal Noonan, merely shrugged his shoulders and said there was nothing he could do.

According to Noonan, deals made by previous governments are sacrosanct to the point where "it is not legally possible for the current government to reverse contractual arrangements".

Strange that the government could reverse an agreement with 300,000 workers in the public services in 2009 when it refused to pay out a legally binding increase in wages of 3%. Or that a new universal social charge could be imposed on workers over night. The original bailout was itself legislated for in the blink of an eye, but when it comes to the private property of the Irish elites the government is suddenly powerless. Alongside the obvious support for some of their own, the key reason for government inaction is that it is terrified of sending negatives signals to international capital.

So long as it is imposing the costs of the crisis onto taxpayers, the Irish rich are confident that they can continue to attract foreign capital to be laundered for a fee. This means that one in five Irish kids is forced to go to school hungry whilst the rich continue to live it up. Surely it's now time to end this madness with a mass movement that puts peoples need above bankers' greed.

Never Again – the tragic story of Savita Halappanavar



By NICHOLA HARVEY

THE inevitable has happened. A woman has died because she was denied an abortion, in an Irish hospital, that would have saved her life. She was told she could not have one as "this is a Catholic country".

The fact that over 3,000 women are forced to travel to England or elsewhere in Europe every year to have their pregnancies terminated has been ignored by successive cowardly Governments for decades. But the death of Savita Halappanavar in Galway last month, finally, could not be ignored.

Savita Halappanavar, who had been in Ireland with her husband Praveen since 2008, presented at Galway University Hospital at about 9 am on Sunday 21 October. She was 17 weeks pregnant and had severe back pain. She was told she was miscarrying and that it would be over in a few hours. However, according to her husband Praveen, his wife went on to endure four days of "agony" during which time she asked repeatedly that the pregnancy be terminated.

He says that this was refused because the foetal heartbeat remained present, that the legal situation in Ireland did not permit a termination in such circumstances and that "this is a Catholic country". She protested, he continues: "I am neither Irish nor Catholic" but again was told there was nothing medical staff could do while the foetal heartbeat remained. She became clearly ill – shivering and vomiting – during the course of Tuesday 23 Oct, he says. The foetal heartbeat stopped in the afternoon of Wednesday, 24 October, the foetus was removed and Savita was taken to intensive care where she deteriorated rapidly, suffering multi-organ failure on Saturday and dying in the early hours of Sunday 28 October. She had contracted septicemia and an Ecoli infection, a pathologist found.

Needless death

Her husband brought his young wife's body home to Belgaum in the Karnataka region of south-west of India on 1 November and she was cremated on 3 November. Speaking from India he has been adamant that if Savita's pleas for a



termination had been listened to she would have survived the ordeal.

"How could they leave the womb open for days? It was all in their hands and they let her go. How can you let a young woman go to save a baby who will die anyway? Savita could have had more babies."

It is galling now to hear the pro-life brigade pontificating about whether a woman has a right to ask for a termination of a pregnancy she cannot carry to term, for whatever reason. As an editorial in the respected Times of India put it: "The ban on abortion therefore ended up taking a life that need not have been lost. How does that square with viewing the ban as pro-life?"

Ireland has among the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. It remains illegal under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, though referendums in 1983 and

1992 have seen some protections for pregnant women seeking information about abortion services abroad and wishing to travel for abortions, inserted into the Constitution. A High Court ruling in 1992 also stated that abortion was legal in cases where there was a threat to the life, as distinct from the health, of the mother.

What this amounts to for doctors and women is a legal mess, wherein it remains unclear what a threat to the mother's life is, as distinct from a threat to her health. It has meant that since 1992 doctors must make judgment calls on whether to intervene in emergency situations such as Ms Halappanavar's, where an unborn but unviable foetus remains alive, where there is a possible risk to the mother's life if they don't intervene, but where they may be prosecuted if they do.

The class dimension

There has always been a class dimension to Irish abortion, with those who can afford to travel being able to access abortion, and those who can't forced into dire circumstances. In the Halappanavar case, again, we see that a public patient presented at an understaffed hospital and died over a bank-holiday weekend when staffing resources were stretched to the limit. If this young woman had presented to a private consultant things may have been quietly much different. A woman's choice in that situation may have been listened to.

The Labour Party calls itself a pro-choice party and yet it voted against Clare Daly's bill to provide for the introduction of legal abortion in Ireland. Fine Gael has said it will not countenance the introduction of legal abortion. The all-party review group report, which we are told sets out the options for the Government in responding to the European Court of Human Rights ruling that Ireland must legislate on the issue, was submitted the night before news of Savita's death broke.

This simple fact: women's bodies are women's bodies, for women to decide how they will be used and what should happen to them, can no longer be ignored.

As we, in our tens of thousands, take to the streets to demand that this can no longer be ignored, to demand that there can never ever be another Savita Halappanavar, or another X case, or another C case, we will no longer be ignored.

SEVERAL HUNDRED ATTEND PRO-CHOICE RALLY IN BELFAST

HUNDREDS of people took part in a march to support a woman's right to choose abortion on Saturday 10 November in Belfast. Organisers said this was a first step in the pro-choice battle for more reproductive rights.

The march follows the opening of a Marie Stopes clinic in the city last month - the first private facility to offer an abortion service to women in Northern Ireland.

The demonstrators were addressed at the front of the City Hall by speakers calling for the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to NI.

Virginia Santini from Alliance for Choice Activists was one of the march organisers said "About 40 women leave NI each week to seek abortions and safe, legal alternatives need to be found closer to home".

"Criminalising abortion does not stop it from happening - rather it confines the right to terminate a pregnancy to those well off women who can afford the costly journey abroad, but it completely restricts and oppresses working class and unemployed women who are left with no options and no choice," she added.

The rally also heard calls for the Attorney General John Larkin to resign over what was described as his "elitist and sexist" intervention in the abortion debate.

How Labour Strangles Union Resistance

By KIERAN ALLEN

SIMON WILLIAMS, a young SIPTU shop steward, made a telling point at a recent conference for 150 union activists in the public and community sectors.

'You cannot be against austerity and for the Labour Party. You are either against austerity and oppose the Labour Party or else support the Labour Party and support austerity.'

One delegate shouted back that he was 'talking bollix' and the chair of the SIPTU conference rushed in to claim he was 'talking off the point'. It was a telling example of the how the Labour Party dominates Ireland's largest union.

Later, the union's General President, Jack O'Connor, spoke in hushed tones to tell the conference they were in the midst of a 'great class war between capital and labour where capital wanted to reduce wages to those of the hell holes of South East Asia'.

But far from firing up his delegates for the fight, O'Connor argued that they had to build 'fortifications' from which to prepare their retreat. These 'fortifications' included strict adherence to the Croke Park agreement and support for the Labour Party which was fighting the class war inside the cabinet.

This strange argument goes a long way to explaining why Ireland is the odd one out among European workers for its lack of resistance to IMF and EU policies. When the state raised the pension age of workers from 65 to 67, Ireland was the only country in the Eurozone where it went through without a murmur.

Labour Party activists have strangled real resistance to this government and they need to be removed from leadership positions.

Labour's hold

The Labour Party's hold over the unions does not arise from any real support amongst workers. The latest opinion poll showed that Labour is strongest among the wealthier AB voters and weakest in the poorer DE category. Moreover, only 14 percent of its supporters consider themselves 'loyal' while 86 percent say they are either disillusioned or losing faith with the party.

Labour's control of the unions arises from bureaucratic manoeuvring at a level far removed from the workplaces. It has a tight stranglehold over SIPTU because its three national officers are Labour Party members. In addition most full time officials, who have an ambition to climb up the union hierarchy, also join the Labour Party.

This control over the official machinery is used to promote Labour Party activists to positions as union delegates and to recruit 'promising' activists who are looking to a union career into the Labour Party.

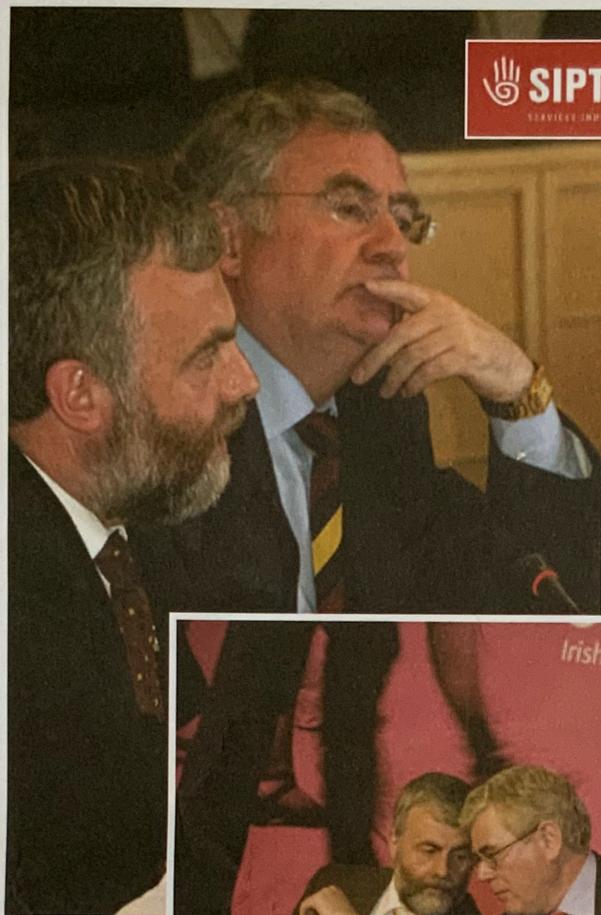
SIPTU's key role was illustrated in donations made to Labour at the last general election. The party received €40,000 in union donations but €33,500 came from SIPTU with the rest coming from teachers' unions.

SIPTU has formed an alliance with IMPACT inside the broader Irish Congress of Trade Unions. IMPACT, which mainly represents administrative staffs in the public sector, is less political but it shares SIPTU's outlook on social partnership and avoiding industrial action. Together, SIPTU and IMPACT tend to outvote more radical proposals coming from MANDATE and UNITE.

Propaganda

Union leaders like Begg and O'Connor seek to maintain Labour's influence over organised workers through three major propaganda themes.

The first suggests that Labour is fighting in cabinet to defend workers. While Gilmore or Rabbitte publicly deny there is any major disagreement with their coalition partners, their



No radical here, Jack O'Connor with Pat Rabbitte (left) and Eamon Gilmore (below).



allies in the unions try to paint a different picture.

They can only do this through a blatant distortion of the truth.

So Begg, for example, recently claimed that 'It matters hugely' to the unions that Joan Burton is Minister for Social Protection because she believes in a 'threshold of decency'.

He failed to mention that Joan Burton had launched the biggest attack on single parents in the history of the state and was moving to 'labour activation' policies which will force the unemployed to work for a little more than their dole.

Similarly, SIPTU claimed that Labour had defended the Joint Labour Committee/Registered Employment Agreement schemes which gave some protection to nearly one fifth of Irish workers. But they don't say that Labour went along with an IMF demand that employers be given a right to 'claim inability to pay' even modest increases.

The second propaganda ploy is to point to Greece as an example of where Irish workers should not go. This relies on a crude scaremongering which seeks to conjure up images of riots on the streets.

This theme neatly aligns the unions to the state's own strategy of being the 'model pupil of austerity'. As long as we keep our heads down – unlike those troublesome Greeks – fairy godmother, Angela Merkel will reward us.

The real story, however, is that the Greek Labour Party – PASOK – helped to deepen the economic crisis and, by repeatedly lying at elections, forced workers to take to the streets. PASOK's actions caused the riots – not the policies of organisations like SYRIZA which are replacing them.

The third propaganda strategy, however, is the most deadly and creates favourable conditions for acceptance of the other two. It can be termed the 'cult of defeatism'.

O'Connor's speeches typify the approach. A pseudo left rhetoric about class war is used to claim that the unions could be annihilated if they entered battle. But, thanks to his wisdom and foresight confrontation is avoided until sometime in the future when the union is better prepared.

Yet, like the proverbial figure of Godot, the battle



Breaking the cycle

Labour and the union leaders are not, however, identical. SIPTU has given some support to the mobilisation on 24 November but it is careful to limit it to a once off affair. It wants to signal to the government that it still has some muscle so that a new Croke Park (Mark 2) arrangement is concluded in 2013.

Labour's stranglehold on the unions can, however, be broken and the example of developments in Spain shows how.

There the unions suffered from the same suffocating influences, but a mass social movement brought hundreds of thousands on to the streets. After some initial hesitations, the indignado movement turned to grassroots union activists and began to popularise the idea of assemblies where they could speak out.

Soon the central slogan of the movement – a call for a general strike – was taken up by union militants and Spain is now entering its second major general strike.

In Ireland, the key lies in fusing the new anger being displayed on the streets with the workplace organisation of union activists.

While developing this wider strategy, the Left also needs to wage a counter-propaganda war against Labour inside the unions. That can start with petitions to demand a withdrawal of union subscriptions to the Labour Party and for democratic elections to replace the current sell out leadership.

Socialists want unions to have a political fund and to launch political campaigns for workers rights. But that fund should be withheld from Labour as a symbolic punishment for their pro-austerity policies. By raising that issue, the wider role of Labour in the unions can also be made subject to debate.

Similarly, there needs to be a concerted campaign to win back the right to directly elect union leaders. We can no longer leave this issue in the hands of union delegates who are open to pressure from the Labour Party machine.

The future of our movement needs to be debated openly in front of assemblies of workers and anyone purporting to lead the union should command the votes of a majority.



BRIEFING DOCUMENT: People Before Profit

Alternative Budget

By Richard Boyd Barrett T.D



This December the Fine Gael/ Labour government will impose the sixth austerity budget since the onset of the crisis. With each successive budget social suffering has increased whilst the economy has deteriorated. This means that the government's strategy is hurting without working. In this worst of all worlds, people must continue to suffer without any sense that the economic crisis will be overcome. People Before Profit believe that there is a fairer and more effective solution to the economic crisis and this briefing document sets out the main parameters of an alternative budgetary strategy.

Introduction

THE government strategy pursued since the economic collapse at the end of 2007 has been a social and economic disaster.

At a human level, the devastating impact of austerity is very clear. Unemployment remains at crisis levels with 435,200 people out of work and 87,100 forced out of the country through lack of employment opportunities.

Poverty has increased substantially with 700,000 people now living on or below the poverty line, including over 200,000 children. Ten percent of the population now experience food poverty. More than 1.8 million households have €100 or less after they pay for essentials. The Irish League of Credit Unions has recently reported the shocking fact that 40% of people are now borrowing to pay basic bills. Suicide and homelessness are also dramatically on the increase.

Hurting without working

THE growing social crisis might be considered bearable if it were linked to an economic strategy that had some chance of success. However, it is now clear that the elite economic strategy is failing spectacularly. The strategy of bailing out banks, protecting bondholders and attacking workers has been a disaster. Growth has slowed to a trickle, investment has all but



Richard Boyd Barrett TD

disappeared and the national debt has exploded to €197.5 billion (debt to GDP ratio of 120% by the end of next year). Against this background further austerity, as envisaged by the government in the form of social welfare cuts, property taxes, water charges and further cuts in public spending, can only do more economic damage and accelerate the downward economic spiral. Socially or economically, we simply can't go on like this. The predictions of those on the Left that austerity would turn recession into depression are rapidly being vindicated. We must urgently adopt a radically different approach to dealing with the crisis.

OUR ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVE

Cancel the debt

AT the outset of the crisis the Irish elites guaranteed all of the debts of six key banks. This decision has already cost Irish taxpayers €65 billion and has helped to crash the economy. Directly and indirectly the collapse of the banks has forced our national debts from €25 billion before the crisis to €197 billion by the end of 2013. This is simply unsustainable. Moreover, it is not our debt and if we are to rebuild our economy on a sustainable basis we must cancel all debt associated with the crisis.

Invest in a sustainable future

ONCE we have the banker's odious debts off our backs we can begin to plan for a more rational economy. The essence of this strategy needs to be public investment in jobs and growth financed out of taxes on the wealthy. Currently we have a primary deficit (spending on services versus tax revenue) of

around €3.1 billion. This will need to be covered alongside around €1 billion on interest payments on the national debt before the crisis. All extra revenue can be reinvested in the real economy and we believe that with the right blend of taxes on wealth, property and higher incomes there are more than enough resources in the country to bring hundreds of thousands off the live register.

To achieve this People Before Profit advocates eight key steps

1. Increasing total income tax on the top 5% of earners by around €3 billion. Currently there are 108,250 people earning €20.122 billion. This group pays total tax (incl USC & PRSI) of €7.145 billion (an effective rate of 36%). Average gross earnings among this group are €185,885 per year. If we increase their effective tax rates to 50% we can collect around €3 billion in taxation and avoid any more attacks on the most vulnerable.

2. A wealth tax on assets over €1 million excluding the family home. Based on the available figures on wealth and assets, and the available estimates on the distribution of these assets, People Before Profit proposes a 2% wealth tax directed at the wealthiest 5% of households. Taking a conservative estimate of 40% of total assets being held in the hands of this group, a 2% wealth tax, excluding the family home and working farmland and applying over a threshold of €1 million wealth/assets, would generate in the region of €3.2 billion per year.

3. Introduce a financial transaction tax (FTT). The government's refusal to introduce the EU proposal for a FTT exposes the lie behind their claim that they are managing the current economic crisis in the interests of ordinary citizens. According to the European Commission Ireland's opposition to a proposal to put a minimal 0.1% tax on transactions on bonds and shares and 0.01%

on derivatives is costing the state around €750 million per year. People Before Profit believes that this should be taken from the bankers as a small measure of the harm they are currently causing to society.

4. Increase corporation tax to 15% and ensure effective rate is 12.5%. The 12.5% corporation tax rate is the sacred cow of the Irish political establishment. They will impose brutal cuts on the incomes and services of the poor, the disabled and the vulnerable but never contemplate asking profitable corporations to make an extra contribution to the state in a time of unprecedented economic emergency. The policy of refusing to slightly increase taxes on profitable companies, while ordinary people are being driven into poverty is an obscenity. People Before Profit proposes (1) establishing a minimum effective corporation tax rate of 12.5% to raise €4 billion and (2) increasing the nominal corporation tax rate to 15% to raise €2 billion

5. Take full control of the banks - write down mortgage debt. It is widely acknowledged, that the 160,000 households now in some form of mortgage distress is acting as a major drag on the entire economy and is likely to obstruct very significantly any recovery in consumer spending and demand. People Before Profit therefore proposes (1) direct public control of the banks (2) across the board write-down of mortgages given out between 2002-2008 to current market value (3) no repossessions (4) remove the bank veto in personal insolvency legislation and enshrine in law protection of the family home

6. Strategic investment - Public works programmes. Creating jobs must be the absolute priority, if we are to have any chance of charting a way out of the current crisis. Assuming a reasonably conservative 1:1 multiplier of jobs directly created to stimulate

further employment in the economy, the state needs to establish an emergency programme of public works and investment to create 200,000 jobs in order to reverse the downward spiral and get 400,000 people to work in total. People Before Profit proposes a state investment and public works programme of €10 billion over the next 2 years to generate 200,000 jobs.

7. Major programme of direct state provision of council housing. The continuing crisis in the provision of social housing against a background where, according to the census, 340,000 houses and apartments lie empty across the state is not only a moral obscenity, it is also an enormous economic and financial scandal. People Before Profit proposes (1) the immediate identification and transfer of all suitable empty housing into local authority ownership for the provision of council housing (2) a public works programme of council housing construction to make up the balance needed to eliminate the waiting list (3) the phasing out of the rent allowance and leasing system -except on a short term basis where such is needed to make up temporary shortfalls in council housing.

8. Halt the privatisation of state companies & the give-away of natural resources. The government's current commitment to sell state assets and enterprises under the "Troika" programme is utterly indefensible at every level. It is simply incredible that companies that have been historically profitable and/or could act as vehicles for developing strategic enterprise and employment should be considered for sale. People Before Profit therefore proposes (1) the establishment of a state owned gas and oil company to manage and develop oil and gas reserves (2) the abolition of the current licensing regime and the re-nationalisation of all oil and gas reserves, potential and actual (3) the adoption of the Norwegian model for the exploration and development of gas and oil reserves.

Conclusion

One final point is important. All of this will help to break the logjam of the capitalist economic crisis, but it will not be the final solution. Helping the economy to recover cannot be on the basis of returning to the profit motive that has wrecked the economy and thrown millions of people into despair. The above demands are rational and sensible, but only an economy based on human need can finally deliver the promise of an Ireland for its people. People Before Profit look forward to building this society alongside millions of others who are sick of the lies and corruption of our current economic and political system.

FOCUS on the USA

Obama's re-election: myths and reality

Class pattern to the Obama vote

OBAMA was elected in 2008 on a tide of popular optimism and euphoria. That certainly wasn't present this time round. He has systematically failed to deliver on his supporters' hopes. But fear of the rabid Republican right meant that disillusion didn't translate into major electoral losses.

The coalition Obama pulled together four years ago—ethnic minorities, the young, working class voters and middle class liberals—by and large held together.

Turnout only fell slightly, from 62 percent to around 60 percent. Only two marginal states changed hands, with Indiana and North Carolina going back to the Republicans. Slice up the figures by class, race, or gender and you typically see the same picture of a small drift away from Obama 2008, but no major changes.

There is a clear class pattern to Obama's vote. He won a clear majority of "lower income voters" (those earning less than \$30,000 a year)—63 percent. This majority drops as you climb the income scale. Americans earning more than \$50,000 a year preferred Mitt Romney.

And there's a similar geographical pattern. Among voters in big cities, Obama won 69 percent. Romney was ahead in smaller cities, suburbs and rural areas. So Obama's base is urban and working class. And these factors cut across racial divides.

Romney's attempt to play the race card

THIS doesn't mean race had no effect on the election. Black voters still turned out overwhelmingly for Obama. His share among Hispanics rose from 67 percent in 2008 to 71 percent this time round. And it jumped sharply for Asian Americans, from 62 percent to 73 percent.

Meanwhile racism was never far from the surface in the Romney campaign. An audience member snapped at an early rally wore a T-shirt calling for the white to be put back in the White House.

This was reflected in the results. Obama's vote was 56 percent white, 24 percent black and 14 percent Hispanic. Romney's was 89 percent white, 2 percent black and 6 percent Hispanic.

This picture has led many to declare that white working class Americans flocked to the Romney camp. And it's undoubtedly true that there was a swing towards the Republicans among these voters. But the full figures show a much more nuanced picture.

Obama was still ahead among lower income white voters. According to Pew, some 45 percent of them lean towards him, compared to 43 percent for Romney. This is a smaller lead than in 2008,

but it is still a lead.

Moreover the white working class Romney vote is concentrated geographically. Romney enjoyed a huge lead in the states of the Deep South—and challenging racist traditions of the South has not been a priority for the Democratic Party.

But in the rest of the country Romney's lead among working class whites was at best marginal—and in the Midwest, the core agricultural and manufacturing states, the polls put Obama ahead among working class white voters.

So the picture is complex. A section of white workers have fallen for the idea that their interests are opposed to those of black workers and foreigners, both at home and abroad. And they fell for Romney's racist pitch to them—the idea that he would look after the whites while Obama would look after the blacks.

But the Romney voters do not represent white workers in general. And Romney's hold over them should not be overstated. Many of these workers can be broken from racist ideas if they are seriously challenged and if the unions mount the kind of action necessary to save jobs and improve wages.

The battles of the future

OBAMA used his victory speech to talk dreamily about a truly "united" America, in which the growing divisions are healed by a revived national spirit.

His speech also contained warnings for the future, including Obama looking forward to "sitting down with Governor Romney to talk about where we can work together to move this country forward". And by "move this country forward" he means implement swingeing cuts.

The Democrats know that cuts to healthcare, education and welfare will hit many of its own supporters hard, but the

party is committed to putting the interests of capital first.

Fuelling all of this is the global economic crisis, which neither the Democrats nor the Republicans can solve. One minute they bicker, the next they kiss and make up. But they will have to keep attacking workers, and that will only "divide the nation" further.

The disarray of the Republican Tea Party right will give confidence to all those that want to fight back. Our hope must be that in doing so, workers discover the power to unite and go well beyond the Democratic Party that has taken their votes for granted and delivered so little.

"WE are an American family and we rise or fall together as one nation and as one people," said Barack Obama in his victory speech after winning his second term as US president.

The truth is that the US has never been more divided. Unemployment rose sharply in the first couple of years of Obama's presidency and has remained high. Moreover as **Anindya Bhattacharyya** points out, the gap between rich and poor continues to get wider.



'Obama delivered nothing, and now he promises nothing'

Jonathan Neale writes on why he was one of the 84 million American citizens who could have voted, but didn't.

ROMNEY LOST. Good. I'm relieved. I'm American, and I could have voted for Obama. I didn't. But I'm still relieved.

Romney had an easy election to win because people's lives are harder under Obama. He lost it because he was so obviously the rich guy.

But don't forget the non-voters. There are 206 million adult American citizens who can vote. Of them, 62 million voted for Obama, 60 million voted for Romney. But 84 million eligible voters did not vote. Another 30 million could not vote because they are convicted

felons or not citizens.

The non-voters are a majority of people under 50. They are a majority of people who have not graduated from college. They are a majority of people in households making less than \$50,000 (£32,000) a year. They are a majority of Hispanics. They are a majority of the working class.

And those non-voters are to the left of voters. They are more likely to support government healthcare, government action and the welfare state. They support Obama over Romney by more than two to one. They favour withdrawal from Afghanistan now by two to one.

The reason they don't vote is not that they are stupid or apathetic. It is that they are not allowed to, or that they think none of the politicians will help them.

But when it comes to struggle, it will be voters and non-voters together.

Sandy - A Terrible Warning

By John Molyneux

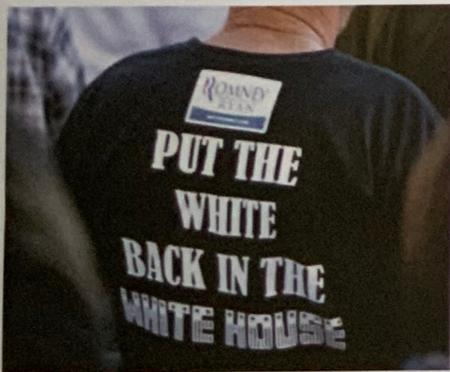
SUPERSTORM Sandy, the largest Atlantic storm on record, which killed 185 people and devastated the lives of millions in the Caribbean and Northeastern United States, was treated by media pundits as mainly a chance for Barack Obama to look 'presidential'.

Its true significance was infinitely more serious. In reality it was a sign and symptom of the rapid advance of climate change which threatens the world's population, and especially the poor, with an ever increasing rise in extreme weather events.

The science of this is straightforward. Higher sea temperatures and more moisture in the air – known consequences of climate change – increase the frequency and intensity of ocean storms. From 1925 to 1985 the frequency of North Atlantic tropical storms averaged 8-10 per year. Since then it has risen steadily to over 15 per year.

This comes on top of the fact that this year America experienced its hottest summer on record with numerous states hit by drought and a dramatic speed up in the melting of Arctic ice, well in excess of anything predicted by climate scientists.

And yet climate change was barely mentioned in mainstream reporting and didn't figure once in the US presidential debates. Such is the grip of the giant oil, gas and car corporations – the likes of Exxonmobile, Shell, General Motors and Ford – who have a vested interest in the fossil fuel carbon emissions that cause global warming. This means our rulers are literally fiddling while the planet burns.



International News

Repeated general strikes challenge the Greek cuts

By JULIE SHERRY

THE Greek parliament passed a fresh austerity budget by the skin of its teeth last week—but already it faces renewed resistance as more general strikes are planned before Christmas.

In response to last week's vote workers went on a 24-hour general strike. This latest walkout came just a week after a 48-hour general strike with workers surrounding parliament as MPs voted through the new attacks.

Greek union federations have yet to announce the exact nature of the further plans, but for workers the main slogan has become "These cuts will not be implemented".

Some sectors stayed out after last week's strike—among them admin workers in the universities and local government workers. These are the sectors that have been instructed to provide lists of workers to be sacked in the new austerity package.

Workers responded by occupying the offices where these lists are held. Some local mayors have sided with the strikers, refusing to provide lists.

On Tuesday 13 November, a three-hour solidarity strike by civil service workers was taking place. Shipyard workers and Metro workers were also out.

Panos Garganas, editor of Workers' Solidarity newspaper in Greece, spoke to Socialist Worker on the potential timeframe of further strikes. "I suspect the union federations will wait and see



whether the government survives its current crisis," he said.

"The drama has shifted in the last week from Athens to Brussels, so union leaders will want to wait and see what the troika [the European Union, the International Monetary Fund and the European Bank] comes up with."

Package

Despite the government passing the package of swinging cuts, the promised bailout of €37 billion is still subject to a further "progress report".

Panos explained, "The troika's refusal to release the funds is having a huge impact. It has exposed the government's argument that everything would be OK once they imposed cuts. The next euro group meeting is set for 20 November."

Meanwhile, a poll this week revealed that the anti-austerity Syriza has become the most popular party.

Panos continued, "There is an internal crisis inside the government. Significant numbers in junior coalition partner Dimar and even the Labour-type Pasok are now positioning themselves as

independents, preparing to align with Syriza."

Last week's general strike showed the potential that exists to defeat austerity. Workers' Solidarity journalist Nikos Loudos reported, "Hundreds of thousands of people poured into Athens city centre to surround parliament as MPs voted."

"Every time the police tried to disperse the crowd a cheer went up as the left regrouped and headed back to parliament. If it wasn't for heavy rain the police would have had to fight all night."

"The call for an indefinite general strike now has majority support in many major workplaces—despite the fact that no part of the union bureaucracy supports it."

"A previous 48-hour strike in October 2011 forced George Papandreou's Pasok government to resign. A similar strike this February led to the fall of Lucas Papademos' 'technocrat' government. The government is falling apart—and this is an opportunity to finish them off."



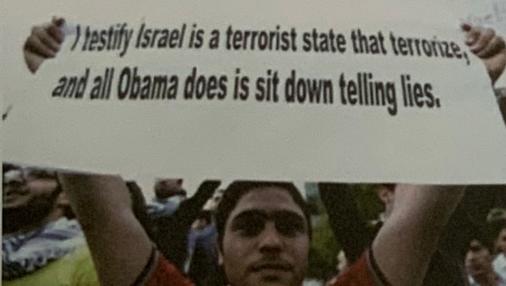
Gaza faces more terror as pressure grows on Egypt to act

AS Socialist Worker went to press, people in Gaza faced more terror as Israel amassed troops on the border and threatened a ground invasion of the Gaza Strip.

Over 100 Palestinians have been killed since Israeli air strikes on Gaza started on Wednesday, including seven children. The Israeli army has called up 16,000 reservists to prepare for possible invasion.

This is the worst aggression from Israel towards Gaza in four years. In December 2008 Israel began Operation Cast Lead, a brutal air attack into the New Year. It killed some 1,400 Palestinians and turned the already impoverished enclave to rubble.

Israel is armed to the teeth with US and British



made weapons, bought with US and British aid. Meanwhile the Western media pretends the attacks were started by Palestinian resistance.

But Israel's position has been seriously weakened by the revolution in neighbouring Egypt that ousted Hosni Mubarak, the country's pro-Israel dictator.

Egypt's new president is Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood. He has sent his Prime Minister Hisham Kandil to Gaza to broker "conflict resolution" talks between Israel and Gaza's Hamas government.

There have been protests across Egypt against Israeli aggression. These have put pressure on Morsi's government to do more to support the Palestinians.

But there is also anger at Morsi's hypocrisies and failures. The Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt said, "Today the Zionist enemy is preparing a ground attack on Gaza. But Egyptian gas still flows to Israel, the Rafah border crossing is still closed—and the Camp David agreement remains in force."

"Why are Morsi, his advisers, ministers and organisation waiting? They should put in practice what they always preached before coming to power—cutting all ties with the Zionist enemy, abolishing the Camp David agreement, deploying the Egyptian army in Sinai and permanently reopening the Rafah crossing."

■ See Swp.ie for more information on the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians.

GENERAL STRIKE BITES IN CITIES ACROSS SPAIN AND PORTUGAL



By Mark Bergfeld from Lisbon and Sam Robson from Madrid

THE general strike against austerity began in Spain and Portugal in the middle of last night, with picket lines at bin, bus and post depots.

There were around 30 pickets at one Lisbon bin depot from 10pm. Workers chanted "Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal—the struggle is international". Left wing activist groups were warmly received.

"Angela Merkel says that she will be stubborn," said refuse worker Joao Lucas. "We have to be stubborn as well, or else we lose. Working people produce everything, but the

government is taking money from our wages, the welfare state and social security."

Bin workers' strikes have been solid in other Portuguese cities too after a series of local disputes.

At the central post depot in Lisbon 50 pickets were keeping warm with bonfires, barbecues and wine. At the midnight shift change there was joy as no-one turned up to try and cross the picket line.

"It's fantastic that workers everywhere are striking today," said postal worker Paolo. "It's a wonderful struggle like I haven't seen for decades. I was three years old during the revolution, and this is just like it."

Over at the bus depot, riot police had to fight their way through hundreds of

pickets and students singing revolutionary songs.

Across the border in Spain, electricity consumption dropped 15 percent as the strike took effect. At the Alcorcon bus station near Madrid, police fired rubber bullets into the air to get past the pickets.

They eventually got a small number of buses out over an hour late, and half of these had to return within minutes with their windows smashed.

By morning unions estimated that 80 percent of workers were joining the strike. Thousands rallied for a mass picket in Madrid's Gran Via.

More demonstrations must be planned in both countries and around Europe to stop the austerity once and for all.

Socialist Worker

END THE SLAUGHTER IN GAZA

**Boycott,
Sanctions and
Divestment on
Israel NOW!**



Once again Israel has unleashed hell on the people of Gaza. In an almost *de ja vu* repetition of the 2008 operation Cast Lead the Israel air force has opened up on the people of Gaza, killing indiscriminately. Back then, just as now it was Israel who broke peace agreements by bombarding Gaza from the air with its fighter jets.

Already over 100 people have been killed with over 670 reported injured. Israel talks about 'surgical strikes' but it's more like DR. Death bombing the men, women and children of the biggest open air prison in the world, seeing everyone as a Hamas target.

Disgustingly, Barack Obama and William Hague support and excuse Israel's actions on the people of Gaza. Israel wants to keep Gaza's economy on the brink of collapse however across Britain, Ireland and the world millions have demonstrated their outrage at Israel's terror.

Israel is armed to the teeth with US and British made weapons, bought with US and British aid. Meanwhile the Western media pretends the attacks were started by Palestinian resistance.

Despite what you may

hear on the news or from politicians the fact is – Hamas was democratically elected by Palestinians in 2006, Israel has responded once again with a disregard for international law as they seek to punish the Palestinians collectively for using their vote. But it's much more than this, Israel is also deeply worried about the future of the Middle East with the revolutions taking place on its doorstep its concerned about the period ahead.

And so far we haven't heard a word from the politicians at Stormont. And we shouldn't be surprised, back in 2009 both Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness met with the Israeli Ambassador Ron Posor, with both agreeing to send a trade delegation to the country. Rather than investing in the racist Israel,

the politicians in Stormont should be joining the international calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions on the apartheid state.

But like on the many other issues there's a big gap between the politicians and most ordinary people who are disgusted by the aggressive, murderous Israeli occupation. The only thing which can put pressure on Israel to stop its slaughter is the deepening of the revolutions in the middle east and solidarity action across the world.

The trade Unions in Northern Ireland have a fantastic BDS policy in regards to Israel, this should be used to continue to mobilize action on the streets and to put demands on Stormont to suspend their special relationship with Israel.



Title: Socialist Worker, No. 354

Organisation: Socialist Workers Party

Date: 2012

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