

Socialist Worker

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REPEAL THE 8TH

SEPARATE CHURCH AND STATE

After the Magdalene Laundries, after Tuam and the other Mother and Baby Homes, after the Christian Brothers, after the child abusing priests, after Savita Halappanavar, after the National Maternity Hospital fiasco, and 25 years after the X-Case enough is enough. **IT IS TIME TO SEPARATE CHURCH AND STATE.**

Separation of church and state is a basic democratic principle. It derives from Thomas Jefferson and the American Constitution and is practised in many countries as diverse as France, India and Singapore.

What it means is that every citizen has the right to believe in and practice the religion of their choice without any discrimination.

This includes the right to places of worship – churches, mosques, temples etc - at their own expense.



But no religion has a privileged position in the State and none has the right to control education

or health care i.e. run schools and hospitals.

Clearly this also means the

State and the Government assuming its responsibility to provide proper education and

health care, and housing etc for its people - a responsibility successive establishment governments have repeatedly failed to do.

Separation of church and state also involves Repealing the 8th Amendment which wrongly inserts a principle regarding women's health care in the constitution on the basis of one church's teachings and imposes it on everyone.

The Citizens' Assembly [see article p. 3] has reflected the change that has taken place in Ireland, among the young but not only among the young.

Many older people who suffered in silence are now able to speak out. Now we urgently need a referendum on the 8th Amendment. The time for delay and prevarication is over – now is the time for change.

If it takes more people power on the streets to force the hands of our backward and recalcitrant establishment **THEN SO BE IT.**

DEFEND JOBSTOWN:

PROTEST IS NOT A CRIME

The prosecution of water charges protestors from Jobstown, including Solidarity TD Paul Murphy, on the charge of 'false imprisonment' is an attack on all our democratic rights.

The notion that sitting down around Joan Burton's car is 'kidnapping' or false imprisonment is so obviously ludicrous that it must have been the result of a deliberate plan concocted by the Department of Public Prosecutions, the State and the Government.

What is that plan? It is first to take revenge for the defeat that the Government and the establishment as a whole have suffered at the hands of the great water movement (See Brid Smith says p.5) and to leave a sour taste in the mouth of activists and protestors.

It is, second, to set a precedent for



future struggles – especially for workers and pickets – who may obstruct scabs, block gates and so on.

It is sending a message to unions and workers that the state can find and invent all sorts of absurd laws and charges to criminalise protestors and strikers.

It is, third, to create a climate of fear amongst the tens and hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who came out against the water charges that they should think twice about taking to the streets again.

Lastly, it is an attempt to take out a radical socialist TD who has been a thorn in the establishment's side. If Paul Murphy receives a six month sentence he will lose his seat in the Dáil.

The Fine Gaelers, Fianna Fáilers, and Noirín O'Sullivan would doubtless be

delighted with that.

None of this must be allowed to happen.

The Jobstown Not Guilty campaign has already scored an important victory in that the attempt by the DPP to rig the jury by barring anyone from Tallaght and anyone with an opinion on water charges has largely been rebuffed.

Now we must build on this to maintain the campaign and ensure acquittal for all the Jobstown defendants and the dropping of charges against all other water charges protestors.

The trade unions, in particular, need to see that they have a serious stake in this struggle and use some of their considerable resources to support the people of Jobstown and demand AMNESTY NOW for all water charges protestors.

HOUSING EMERGENCY: BUILD PUBLIC HOUSING NOW! See p.3

Bus Eireann: The struggle is not over

Owen MacCormack

After three weeks, the Bus Eireann strike was called off to allow for a ballot to take place on Labour Court proposals. The proposed deal was announced at the same time that a separate ballot of Dublin Bus workers in Siptu showed a large majority (67%) had voted to take solidarity action with their Bus Eireann colleagues.

The Labour Court deal was timed to stop the dispute spreading to other CIE companies such as Dublin Bus.

Management, backed by the Government and Minister Shane Ross, had originally wanted pay cuts of around 30% and widespread new flexible working conditions. They had talked up the scale of crisis and openly threatened to have the company declared bankrupt if workers resisted the cuts.

Fine Gael had brought a new CEO (Ray Hemon) to act as a hatchet man. Hemon came with a strong anti-union, anti-worker background. Workers faced weeks of attacks in the media and widespread misreporting of the causes of the dispute.

Magnificent

Following magnificent wildcat action at rail and Dublin Bus depots, the media went into overdrive with CIE threatening to fine and take legal action against unions and workers for illegal secondary picketing. Unofficial Bus Eireann pickets were respected by an overwhelming majority of Dublin Bus and Irish Rail workers. This caused huge disruption across the country. The Siptu ballot showed that



People Before Profit and Solidarity TDs donate pay increase to Bus Eireann workers

workers in other CIE companies were also willing to support more solidarity action.

The attempt to railroad the changes failed in the face of workers' resistance. The goal of Ross and co was to drive down wages and conditions at the semi-state

company to the levels of those in the private non-union sector. That is why they licensed private operators on busy intercity routes while reducing the state subvention to the company. The so called crisis was manufactured to create the opportunity to enforce lower wages across the public transport system and allow for further privatisation and tendering out of routes by the NTA.

The resolve of the Bus Eireann workers is to be celebrated. However there was

widespread anger on the pickets at the calling off of the dispute by union officials before any deal was seen by workers. The details of the deal are also worrying for many workers. Whilst the proposed pay cuts have largely gone, there will be workers who may lose out.

The consolidated hourly rate is higher than the company wanted but may still mean an effective cut for some drivers for example. More worrying are clauses on flexibility and the use of sub-contractors and casual drivers. It appears that the actual detail of the deal is still been finalised as we go to print.

Deal

The deal will not resolve the key causes of the dispute. It remains Government and NTA policy to tender out Bus Eireann and Dublin Bus routes to private operators under the guise that competition is good for public transport. It's not! It is only good for the profits of a few (largely multinational controlled) private operators. Wages are so low at some private companies that drivers can qualify for social welfare payments. There are no pension schemes and little sick pay provisions in the private sector. This is why the private sector is often cheaper.

In the meantime, Ireland continues to have one of the lowest subsidised transport networks in Europe. Bus Eireann workers may yet reject this deal, if so the solidarity of other Rail and bus workers will be key to winning any further dispute. The resolve of Bus Eireann workers may have stopped the worst of the Government's attack and the attempt to force a race to the bottom on workers' wages and conditions for now. But that fight is not over.

Teachers' Conferences: pay equality is key issue



Gerry Carroll, PBP MLA with Teachers in Belfast

The demand for equal pay for equal work has dominated all three teachers' unions' conferences, teachers' unions' conferences.

The education minister Richard Bruton was met with a protest of hundreds of newly qualified teachers demanding pay parity at the INTO conference while the TUI union has voted for industrial action by autumn if pay equality for new teachers is not delivered.

The INTO election for President saw a radical candidate poll over 40% of the vote in what is traditionally a conservative union amidst a campaign where the discrimination suffered by newly qualified workers was a key issue.

In many cases new teachers are still between €5-7000 worse off each year compared to their colleagues doing the same

work

It is likely union officials will try to do a deal to replace the current Lansdowne Road agreement without fully achieving pay equality or the end of the draconian Fempil legislation. But the conferences have made clear that many teachers will not wait indefinitely for these issues to be addressed.

New generation

A new generation of teachers are growing impatient with union officials who passively allowed huge cuts to their wages and conditions during the austerity years. A broad campaign across all three unions that involves rank and file grassroots members can force the Government to reverse the cuts.

The Government has attempted to isolate the ASTI union and target their

members for standing up to the cuts. If they faced concerted action the divide and rule policy would collapse. The leadership of INTO and the TUI had allowed the disgraceful attacks on the ASTI to continue in favour of accepting piecemeal gains for staying within the present pay deals.

Another key issue will be the attempt in June by the Government to renew the so called Fempil legislation, this is an act brought in in 2009 that allowed the Government to cut pensions and pay in the public sector.

It is still used under the guise that there is still a financial emergency. Bruton is using the legislation to isolate and target the ASTI for daring to stand up for equal pay. The grassroots revolt among newer teachers will have to take up these issues if real equality is to be won.

ASTI STANDS FIRM FOR LESSER PAID TEACHERS

Mark Walshe

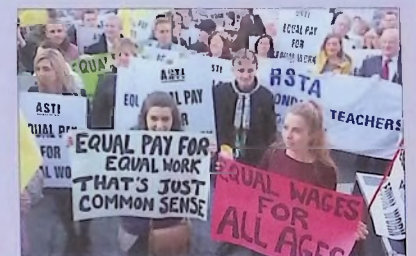
At the ASTI Convention in Killarney, delegates voted to continue the union's campaign of industrial action in support of the principle of "equal pay for equal work" and acceptable reform of the Junior Cycle.

Although they stopped short of backing strike action, delegates overwhelmingly backed a protest at the Dail on the first day of the upcoming public sector talks on a successor to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. TUI and INTO members will be invited to the protest.

Delegates also backed a motion to ballot for strike action in the new school year if the talks fail to deliver equal pay for equal work.

The ASTI has been under severe pressure, both externally and internally, since members voted No by 52.5-47.5 per cent in a joint Lansdowne Road-Junior Cycle ballot in January 2017.

Externally, the Government has continued to use the so-called Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act (Fempil) to punish the ASTI by threatening members with compulsory redundancy; withholding limited pay restoration; maintaining an increment freeze; and refusing to



grant two-year Contracts of Indefinite Duration (CIDs) to ASTI members, making permanency more difficult to achieve.

Right

The Right within the union have made numerous attempts to overturn the 52.5 per cent No vote in the ballot. The main tactic has been to try to get the union to stand down industrial action and thereby 'un-repudiate' the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The tactic failed at executive and central executive level but was attempted a third and fourth time at Convention.

The result was the same: the majority of members were not in favour of standing down industrial action at this time, especially in the run-up to the talks. In fact, they voted for limited further action in May and more industrial action in the new school year.

The convention witnessed genuine trade unionism and democracy in action. It shows what can be achieved when members reclaim the union. It is an urgent lesson for all trade unions within ICTU. This is what can break ICTU's ongoing collaboration with government and offer the prospect of real trade unionism in the public sector in Ireland.

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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 May 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.

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HOUSING – MORE LIES, MORE CRISIS

New figures dragged out of the government under the Freedom of Information Act prove it.

Despite all the promises from the government and the talk from Minister Simon Coveney NOTHING is being done to solve the housing crisis.

Last year the number of new homes built in the State was just 2076, compared to the Government's lying claim of 15,000.

And out of that 2076 total there were only 848 estate houses and apartments compared to an official Department of Housing estimate of 8,729.

There is a word for 'estimates' that are that wrong – it is 'lie'.

In Dublin where the population is most concentrated only 68 scheme homes and apartments were completed last year, and in three local authorities, Longford, Leitrim and Roscommon there were no housing completions at all in 2016, while a further eight counties recorded fewer than 10 completions.

Ireland's housing stock has been failing to keep pace with the population throughout this century but the last five years - 2011- 16, the years of the Fine



Gael/Labour Government - were the most appalling.

A Census 2016 special profile on housing in Ireland found that the country increased its housing supply by just 0.4% in the five-year period of 2011 to

2016 (from 1,994,845 million units to 2,003,645 million units – an increase of 8.800).

Meanwhile, Ireland's population was recorded at 4,761,865 in 2016 compared to 4,588,252 in 2011 – an increase of

173.613.

Consequences

What are the consequences of this dreadful state of affairs? They are things we all know and, given the Government's

record, they are inevitable:

Soaring rents – up 30% in Dublin. Very nice for the nearly 30% of TDs who are landlords.

More and more families in emergency accommodation – over 7,100 including 2400 children in January of this year.

More evictions and threats of evictions

More and more people on the streets – a 56% increase in rough sleepers between 2015 and 2016.

And what are the Government doing about it? Well Minister Simon Coveney says he is 'hoping'. Last week he said he 'hoped' to be building 25,000 units a year by the end of next year. Some hope!

The bitter truth is that there will no real change in this situation till we kick out the landlord parties (Fine Gael and Fianna Fail); stop relying on the 'free' market for solutions; do something drastic about the 180,000 vacant properties in the State; impose rent controls and launch a major project of public house building.

A good start as Socialist Worker has always argued would be to declare a National Housing Emergency, because that is actually what we have got.

Pro-choice Citizens Assembly topples conservative consensus

Marnie Holborow

To the surprise of the politicians who set it up the Citizens' Assembly made a clear call to overturn our out-dated and anti-women ban on abortion.

An overwhelming 87% of the Citizens' Assembly voted against retaining the 8th Amendment as it currently exists.

It expressed the view that socio-economic reasons were grounds for terminations up to the 22nd week of pregnancy.

It recommended that terminations should be allowed without restriction up to the 12th week of pregnancy.

The assembly took the view that the decision about whether to have an abortion or not must lie with the woman and recognised that she alone can make it. For example, in the tragic instances of fatal fetal abnormality, it recommended that abortion be permitted during any period of the pregnancy.

The Citizens' Assembly's recommendations have caused yet another huge political upset for the government.

They had hoped to contain the mood for choice but the people at the Citizens Assembly considering all the options expressed the desire for full choice for women. 90 brave people calmly took on the monopoly of church and state.



The citizens deliberating

Their recommendation to widen the grounds on which an abortion may be permitted - beyond risk to life and health, and as a result of rape - is a reflection of how much opinion on these issues have changed.

Not only did the citizens squarely put women at the centre of their recommendations, they also went well beyond the so-called 'middle ground' position on abortion.

Their verdict outs Fine Gael and Fianna Fail as woefully unrepresentative.

The Labour Party, which favours a good deal more restrictions than the Citizens' Assembly recommended, needs to catch up. Sinn Fein is not even at the starting post on this issue.

Message

Only People Before Profit and Solidarity hold a clear women's right to choose position.

The Citizens Assembly has sent a strong message to the Oireachtas Committee to take the issue of

abortion head-on. It must legislate for abortion on the basis not of any one religion's teaching, nor on the basis that the problem must be exported but realistically on what Irish women want and need.

Our People before Profit representative, Brid Smith TD, along with others, will be putting the pro-choice position on that committee.

Since the same sex marriage referendum and the growing numbers of young people for choice as shown by large mobilisations last Autumn and on International Women's Day this year, the Citizens' Assembly have resoundingly proved that the forces of Irish conservatism no longer hold sway.

In the same week of the Citizens Assembly bombshell, the sweetheart deal over the National Maternity Hospital between the Irish State and the Sisters of Charity came to light.

The idea that women's reproductive rights should be left in the hands of the discredited Catholic Church was a step too far.

Many of those opposed to a Catholic maternity hospital have also been active in the Repeal campaign.

Some pro-choice activists may be disappointed that the assembly recommended to replace, not repeal, the 8th Amendment. The recommendation was that Article 40.3.3 should be replaced with a constitutional provision

which would authorize the Oireachtas to legislate 'to address the termination of pregnancy, any rights of the unborn and any rights of the pregnant woman'.

Certainly 'unborn' is a loaded and misleading term. It is the word the Catholic Church uses and which they managed to get introduced into the constitution in article 40.3.3, back in 1983. It is not a medical term and has no place in our constitution.

Some at the Assembly said that this replacement clause had caused some confusion amongst the citizens. And its inclusion may not be without difficulties for legislation in the future.

However the main message from the Assembly is that it managed to give voice to what has been hidden for far too long.

We need to pressurize the Oireachtas Committee not to back-track or give in to pressure from the anti-choicers.

Never have we had such an opportunity to overturn the barbaric ban on abortion in Ireland. We have support from the Trade Union movement which we have not had before. Women in working class communities have supported the call for Repeal.

Students were one of the largest contingents on International Women's Day this year. We need to channel this mood for change into a movement which can take to streets and make our voices heard. We can win this.

The Sisters of Uncharitable Actions

Linda Kehoe

Simon Harris shamelessly announced that the Sisters of Charity were to be the sole owners of the new National Maternity Hospital (NMH) in Dublin. Within five days of this announcement nearly 100,000 people had signed a petition against it.

Yet despite the public, medical and political uproar he has continued to defend his position, saying that the new NMH will "have clinical and operational independence in the provision of maternity, gynaecology and neonatal services, without religious, ethnic or other distinction, as well as financial and budgetary independence".

How can he say this when medical staff in Ireland are already working under untenable conditions?

They are unsure what medical treatments they are allowed to provide to pregnant women, because of the Irish constitution and because different hospital boards (for religious reasons rather than medical) take different stances on certain treatments.

There is a profound and urgent need for a new NewMaternity Hospital. The Holles St building is aged and not fit-for-purpose, but any connection to a religious organisation will make



the planned €300 million state-of-the-art brand new maternity hospital also unfit-for-purpose.

The people of Ireland need an independent, not-for-profit hospital where best medical practice is the base of every decision.

It is terrifying that in 2017 something other than this could be proposed.

The Citizens' Assembly has recommended that the 8th Amendment be repealed and abortion allowed in Ireland.

This will change maternal medicine in Ireland, this goes against Catholic religious teaching. Abortion is just one of many medical treatments that religion and medical fact disagree upon.

Tarnished

Harris says the Sisters gave the land for free; if they "gave" the land why is ownership of a hospital built by taxpayers money going to be handed back to them?

Even if the Sisters of Charity had an

unblemished record, this would seem dodgy. In fact their record as care-givers and educators is tarnished beyond repair or forgiveness.

The Sisters of Charity is 1 of the 18 religious organisations complicit in the systematic abuse of children for decades in Ireland; abuse which cost the state €1.5 billion in redress. To date they have only paid €2 million of the paltry €5 million share they "agreed" to pay.

It is 1 of the 4 institutions which ran the horrendous Magdalene Laundries

within which 30,000 women were abused and an estimated 1600 died; and not a penny was given by the Sisters of Charity to their victims.

The HSE has moved against them twice over the past 18 months due to severely critical HIQA reports into the conditions of the facilities and the treatment of the patients (one facility in Kilkenny and in the other in Cork).

They have also failed to hand over ownership of Waterford's Sacred Heart hospital to the HSE despite this forming part of the indemnity agreement in 2002.

Financially they owe the state (the taxpayer) millions and cost the state (the taxpayer) many millions more; yet they have a property portfolio worth millions and have even gambled shares of our public hospitals on the stock market.

They have no moral high ground to stand on, or any record of compassion and medical professionalism that could somewhat validate Harris' decision.

The State should remove the Sisters of Charity from the equation completely. They should take the land from the Sisters of Charity and build the new hospital without delay. The women of Ireland deserve this.

The Sisters of Charity deserve nothing in redress.

#socialism 1.01

John Molyneux

State, Law and the Guards



The Supreme Court Judges: Whose side are they on?

One of the key ideas, tenaciously defended by the entire political establishment and ALL the mainstream media is that the law courts, the judges and the police are neutral. By 'neutral' they mean above or independent of politics, above or independent of social classes and above or independent of all interest groups. They simply enforce the law and serve the state and people as a whole. This idea is extremely important for the preservation of the present economic and political system and for maintaining its legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of working people. In reality it is a myth or rather a series of myths.

Myth number one is the notion of 'the people as a whole' who all have one common national interest. In fact within 'the people as a whole' there are different social classes who have different, indeed opposed, interests.

Employers, for example, have an interest in paying their workers as little and getting them to work for as long as they can get away with, while workers have an interest in increasing their wages and reducing their hours as much as possible.

The very rich and the corporations have an interest in paying as little tax as possible while getting ordinary people to pay more through VAT, bin charges, household charges, water charges etc.

For working class people it is the opposite; resist the charges and tax the rich.

The second myth is

that the law is separate from this clash of class interests. In fact the laws of the country have been and are made by and large by the richer classes in the interests of the richer classes. Above all the law defends, indeed sanctifies, the rights of private property and in so doing systematically favours the interests of those who own most of it, the rich and the capitalists.

The third myth is that the judges and the police operate independently from political and economic power in society. On the contrary the law favours the rich and therefore those that enforce the law – the judges, courts and guards – also enforce the interests of the rich.

Since this is their role in society the ruling classes always make sure the judges and top police are on their side. This is not difficult because the judges and senior police are generally drawn from the same upper social classes and they don't get appointed to leading positions unless they share the 'right' attitudes and opinions i.e. that the current order of things must be preserved.

Protection

On top of this they are bound to the ruling class, to the big capitalists and top politicians by numerous formal and informal ties – a combination of government committees and social mixing at golf clubs, charity dos, private dinner parties and the like.

Finally, the use of the gardai to protect private property and enforce the system's rules – against both criminals and protestors – means they repeatedly come into conflict with

various sections of the working class, especially working class youth, workers' pickets, and the most disadvantaged such as Travellers etc. As a result they tend to develop very hostile and reactionary views seeing young people as 'feral' and the poor as 'scum' and so on.

Jobstown This why the establishment knows it can rely on the judiciary and the police in a case like Jobstown. They also know they can't rely on the jury which is why they tried, unsuccessfully it turned out, to fix that by excluding anyone from Tallaght and anyone who has ever opposed water charges.

All of this operates regularly and systematically – and not just in Ireland but in every capitalist society – before we even get to questions of corruption and particular brutality.

But the ruling class's and the political establishment's dependence on the police to defend their interests and their social order means that when corruption appears, as it has done so often in Ireland, their first instinct is to cover it up. They 'look after their own' as the saying goes.

Of course they try not to be too blatant about this – they need to preserve the myth of the police as neutral, so they set up numerous 'inquiries' that do little except line the pockets of lawyers. But when push comes to shove the establishment, especially Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil unite, as they have done round Garda Commissioner Noírin O'Sullivan, to defend the state forces who they rely on to hold us, the working classes, down..

Towards a So

Shaun Harkin

The great socialist James Connolly argued "The day has passed for patching up the capitalist system; it must go." Growing numbers of people in Ireland and across the world would agree.

Capitalism doesn't benefit the vast majority and is generating political crises that demand an alternative.

The UK vote to leave the European Union came as a massive shock to the global political and corporate establishment.

In a chorus they spelled out the dire consequences of going against an institutional pillar of the world order.

Similarly, the election of the billionaire bigot Donald Trump to the US White House stunned elites everywhere.

Establishment politics and parties are being challenged everywhere.

In the recent French Presidential election neither of the two main parties, the Socialist Party and The Republicans, the centre-left and the centre-right, made it through to the second round of voting.

Eroded

In Ireland, the dominance of Fine Gael and Fianna Fail has been eroded.

It is not only right-wingers like Trump and the French menace Marine Le Pen who are making breakthroughs.

Progressives and radical socialists are winning mass support also.

Millions voted for Bernie Sanders in the US because of him of his socialism.

The same is true of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK. In Ireland, north and south, there have been historic breakthroughs for socialists and the radical left.

A pattern has developed where large numbers of people are rejecting the traditional parties of government in favour of what they view as radical alternatives.

Across Europe many people see the EU as the cause of many of the problems they face.

Most people think something has to give, there must be change.



People Before Profit election launch Belfast

Underpinning the crisis faced by establishment parties and institutions is the global economic order. Neoliberal capitalism is relentlessly generating inequality.

Brexit

Theresa May, the former Remainer, is using Brexit to set the stage for further running down public services, driving down wages and deepening inequality.

They insisted on austerity before Brexit and would have continued to insist on it if the decision had been to stay in the EU. Indeed, the EU has insisted on painful austerity across Europe.

Brexit has caused tremendous uncer-

tainty over the future of the Irish border.

The overwhelming majority of people do not want to see a return to any kind of 'hard border' in Ireland.

If it was return, it would appear to be a leap backwards into the past. Whatever the Tories say in Westminster or the EU in Brussels about the future of the border, they can't be trusted.

Ireland was partitioned in the early 1920s as part of a counter-revolution that pushed back the struggle for an independent and different kind of Ireland.

The British government and military were pushed out of the 26 counties but reactionary pro-capitalist and religiously conservative regimes took control of both

Lannigan's Ball:

How Long will FF and FG

Kieran Allen

One long year I spent up in Dublin,
One long year to learn nothing at all,
One long year I spent up in Dublin,
Learning new steps for Lannigan's Ball.
She stepped out and I stepped in again,
I stepped out and she stepped in again,
She stepped out and I stepped in again,
Learning new steps for Lannigan's Ball.

The Irish political establishment have a major problem. The corruption at the heart of their state is being exposed through numerous 'commissions of inquiry'. And on the streets, the protest movement is growing by the day. Instead of the large scale mobilisations seen at the height of the water charges movement, there are a host of smaller protests on a variety of issues. The message that 'people power' gets results has spread like wildfire.

Traditionally, in these situations even right wing opposition parties seek to give expression to discontent. They put on a show of 'concern' and then do exactly the opposite when their turn to assume govern-



Enda Kenny and Michael Martin

ment office arrives. This is how the buffers of parliamentary democracy are supposed to work.

But in Ireland, conventional arrangements have broken down. The Irish political system was based on a two and a half party model. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael swapped turns in being in government and the pathetic Labour Party propped one or the other up.

And nothing ever changed.

Today, however, the combined vote of the two main right parties now hovers around 50-55% and they need each other

to form a 'stable' government. Hence the 'confidence and supply arrangement' with Fianna Fail.

Results

The results are that FF pretend to oppose their traditional enemy but on all major issues they support them. Take three examples:

■ **Water Charges:** FF and FG know that they are beaten but want a back door to re-visit the issue in the future. After a pretence of backing the anti-water charges movement, FF did a deal with FG to keep

Socialist Ireland



of the newly formed states. North and south of the border bosses were in charge and religion was used to keep the vast majority in place.

Almost one hundred years later, many people view the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland as failed states.

Public Services

Wealth is increasingly concentrated at the top of society and public services are being rundown on either side of the border.

Austerity has taken hold north and south. Women are still denied the right to choose whether they're in the north or south.

As with the discussion of a second independence referendum in Scotland, Brexit has opened up a discussion about the future of the Irish border. Not just the border but the future of Ireland.

United Ireland

Sinn Fein argue Brexit will make a united Ireland inevitable. But what kind of united Ireland?

And how can a majority of people in the North's divided society be won to supporting it. It is daydreaming to think sectarian divisions in the North would ever simply melt away.

But nor should it be viewed as an impossibility for a majority to agree to

end partition.

In his day, Connolly advocated a socialist Workers Republic to win working class unity and overcome sectarianism.

He understood the depth of communitarian division but believed the appeal to class was the only means to challenge it.

Many people are open to the idea of a new Ireland but will want to know what kind of Ireland?

A socialist Ireland today would be based on the redistribution of wealth and control of the economy by the vast majority.

Full Equality

But it would also guarantee the rights of ethnic and religious minorities and full equality and justice for women and the LGBT community, for example.

That's the kind of Ireland that would be truly equal.

A Socialist Ireland can't be won without a struggle.

In that struggle you can be sure the Dail and Stormont establishments will have allies in the White House, Brussels, Westminster and their corporate counterparts.

In contrast to unity from above, Connolly presented an inspiring vision of how working class people could fight for a socialist alternative to capitalism.

He wrote "in the work of abolishing it the Catholic and the Protestant, the Catholic and the Jew, the Catholic and the Freethinker, the Catholic and the Buddhist, the Catholic and the Mahometan will cooperate together, knowing no rivalry but the rivalry of endeavour toward an end beneficial to all.

"For, as we have said elsewhere, Socialism is neither Protestant nor Catholic, Christian nor Freethinker, Buddhist, Mahometan, nor Jew; it is only HUMAN.

"We of the Socialist working class realise that as we suffer together we must work together that we may enjoy together."

"We reject the firebrand of capitalist warfare and offer you the olive leaf of brotherhood and justice to and for all."

Partnership Survive?



open the back door.

■ **Emergency legislation to attack public sector workers:** Despite constant talk of recovery both FF and FG want to keep the FEMPI emergency legislation which gives government draconian powers to change earnings at the stroke of a pen.

■ **Police Corruption:** Both FF and FG are backing Noirín O' Sullivan as Commissioner.

The reason why - even in the face of popular outrage - FF sticks with FG is that both want a long term deal to prop up each other. If FF pulls the plug now, they

know that FG will return the favour later when their turn for government comes. Their current arrangement, they think, is the best way to defend privilege and wealth. However, it is inherently unstable and produces a weak government.

One way out of this would be for Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein to come together in a future coalition.

There are already some signs that this is what Sinn Fein want. Sinn Fein is currently trying to re-galvanise its Northern base by facing down the DUP. But the small print of its wider strategy has not changed.

It believes that the road to Irish unity will only open up when Sinn Fein is in government on both sides of the border.

Recent signals from the SF leadership suggest that they wish to move towards a possible coalition with FF in the future.

The demand that SF would have to have a majority over its more right wing rival has been dropped.

SF have also embraced low corporation taxes for multi-nationals on either side of the border.

Despite their gradual shift rightwards, the entry of SF into a coalition government in the South would still enrage the right wing elements of Irish society. The Irish Independent, for example, would enter a state of permanent apoplexy.

This is the main reason why Micheál Martin is sticking to the 'confidence and supply' arrangement for the moment. But it will not last forever because there is a rumbling discontent throughout Irish society that will disrupt all calculations.

The best hope in this shifting terrain is that the genuine left in People Before Profit and Solidarity make substantial gains.

These, it should be repeated, must include total abolition of water charges; the immediate end of FEMPI, the sacking of Noirín O' Sullivan; the repeal of the 8th Amendment and the granting of full freedom to women to control their own bodies.

Moreover, PBP and Solidarity will never enter a coalition with Fianna Fail and Fine Gael.

Brid Smith says



Water charges – a victory for the people.

The establishment politicians are raging about it and so are many of the commentators and pundits in the media, but they can't do anything about it. The fact is that on water charges the people have won.

Remember 'Big' Phil Hogan, the Fine Gael bully. He was going to charge us all five or six hundred a year and reduce our water 'to a trickle' if we didn't pay. Well we didn't pay and Hogan is long gone and now so are the water charges.

It is true it is not a total and absolute victory.

It would have been better if there were no charges for 'excessive usage' and no water meters in new builds, because water should be a basic human right.

It's also true that we could have had that total victory but for the double dealing and last minute sell out by Fianna Fáil who went back on their word at the election and

State, from Letterkenny to Cork, from Dundalk to Gorey.

It was ordinary people, right across Ireland, who simply refused to pay. And the ministers, and government politicians and overpaid media RTE presenters could huff-and-puff all they liked but a tax that most people won't pay is not a viable tax and there was nothing they could do about it.

And it was ordinary working class who elected TDs who were pledged to oppose the water charges. In my constituency of Dublin South Central that meant three out of four Right2Water TDS.

People Before Profit is very proud to have played its part in every stage of this movement from the first conference on Water Charges which we organised together with Unite the Union and others in early 2014.

For that conference we brought over activists who had defeated water privatisation in Cochabamba, Bolivia and from the beginning we said people power on the streets and



their commitments on the Dail Water Charges Committee to, in the end, vote with Fine Gael.

Remember

But we should remember that it was Fianna Fail who introduced water charges in the first place and they were only dragged, kicking and screaming, to say they were opposed to the charges by the pressure of the people.

And this is the great lesson of the whole struggle – it was people power that won it! It was ordinary people, overwhelmingly working class people it has to be said, who blocked the installation of water meters in their communities by defending their shores. To this day hardly any water meters have been installed in Ballyfermot, Drimnagh, Crumlin, and many other areas of the country.

It was ordinary people who took to the streets in their hundreds of thousands in the autumn of 2014: first in the town centre on October 11, then in even larger numbers in the localities on November 4. Not only right across Dublin but in every town, large and small, across the

in the communities was the way to win. And we have been part of the movement ever since.

Now we can celebrate our victory but we can't sit back and say it's all over. First there is the crucial question of the Jobstown defendants and other water charges activists. Doubtless Joan Burton and the government would like to take revenge for their humiliating defeat through the ridiculous charge of 'false imprisonment' and if possible get Paul Murphy sent to jail. We musn't let that happen.

Then, there is little doubt that in years to come the establishment and their corporate cronies will try again to get their hands on our water. We musn't let that happen either.

Finally there is the fact, as even Enda Kenny understood, that it was never just about water. It was always about the whole rotten system that sacrificed the people for the bankers and the 1%. And that system continues - with the same rotten priorities - as we see every day. And the basic lesson of the great water charges movement is that people power can change that too.

Polarisation in France



Marine Le Pen: the fascist candidate

Report from Catherine Curran Vigier, of the New Anti-Capitalist Party

Fascist Marine Le Pen and banker Emmanuel Macron go through to the second round of the French Presidential election.

After an incredible election campaign, dominated by revelations about the corruption of the right wing candidate François Fillon and the fascist Front National leader Marine Le Pen, the Nazi candidate finally made it through to the second round where she will face the banker and former Economy minister Emmanuel Macron.

But the election was closely fought, and the outcome by no means a foregone conclusion: Macron got 23.85%, Le Pen 21.53%, followed by Conservative party Les Républicains candidate François Fillon at 19.94% and the radical Left leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, at 19.62%. Together, Mélenchon and Socialist Party (PS) candidate Benoit Hamon, got around 25% of the vote.

Hamon won the PS candidature in

a rejection of the PS's austerity politics, but his radical impetus was quickly stifled by PS bosses, who then abandoned him to throw their weight behind Macron.

Former Prime Minister Manuel Valls came out openly in support of Macron, while Hollande launched a series of attacks on Mélenchon in the final days of the campaign and did all he could to boost his former minister, Macron. Like the Blairites with Corbyn in Britain over 200 PS deputies openly supported Macron. He is the candidate of the political establishment and austerity politics.

Fascist

Le Pen's result, 7,680,000 votes, is a big increase for her, and shows how dangerous the fascist threat is becoming in France. She got 6,421,000 in the first round of 2012, and her party got 6.8m votes in the regional elections in 2015, its highest score ever. With a General Election coming up in June, the far right will be looking to turn her gain into seats in Parliament.

But Le Pen faced serious resistance during the campaign. Her status as anti-system

'outsider' was seriously challenged by the radical left led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Le Pen was initially seen as favourite, with some polls predicting she would get 27% of the vote, but she soon ran into difficulty.

Her corruption and her claim to represent ordinary working class people were strongly challenged by the New Anti-Capitalist Party's (NPA) Philippe Poutou in the national TV debate at the beginning of April.

And in a fantastic campaign, Mélenchon rose from around 10% to take 19.6% of the final vote.

Thousands of people turned out for rallies to hear Mélenchon denounce austerity and corruption.

He promised to restore and improve health services and social security benefits, increase minimum wages, and shorten the working week.

Intensified

Le Pen responded with intensified race hatred and chauvinism, claiming France was not responsible for deporting the Jews

in the infamous Vel d'Hiv roundup. She increased anti-immigrant rhetoric after a policeman was shot on the Champs-Élysées. But, in fact her vote declined and she lost out to Mélenchon in a number of big cities.

In Paris, he topped the poll in the working-class 18th and 19th arrondissements. Le Pen barely got 5% of the vote in Paris as a whole.

Mélenchon also beat Le Pen into second place in her party's stronghold, Marseille, and topped the poll in big cities like Toulouse, Lille and Montpellier.

With the two main parties, the Conservative Les Républicains and François Hollande's PS in a shambles after the election, the 'centre ground' of French politics has clearly exploded and everything is up for grabs.

Mélenchon's campaign gave people hope. This hope that a better society can be won is an important part of defeating Le Pen.

Wrapping ourselves in the French national flag, as Mélenchon has been tempted to do, is not going to help fight Le Pen's 'patriotism'.

Now the partisans of austerity from François Fillon to François Hollande, are calling for a vote for Macron, supposedly to defeat Le Pen.

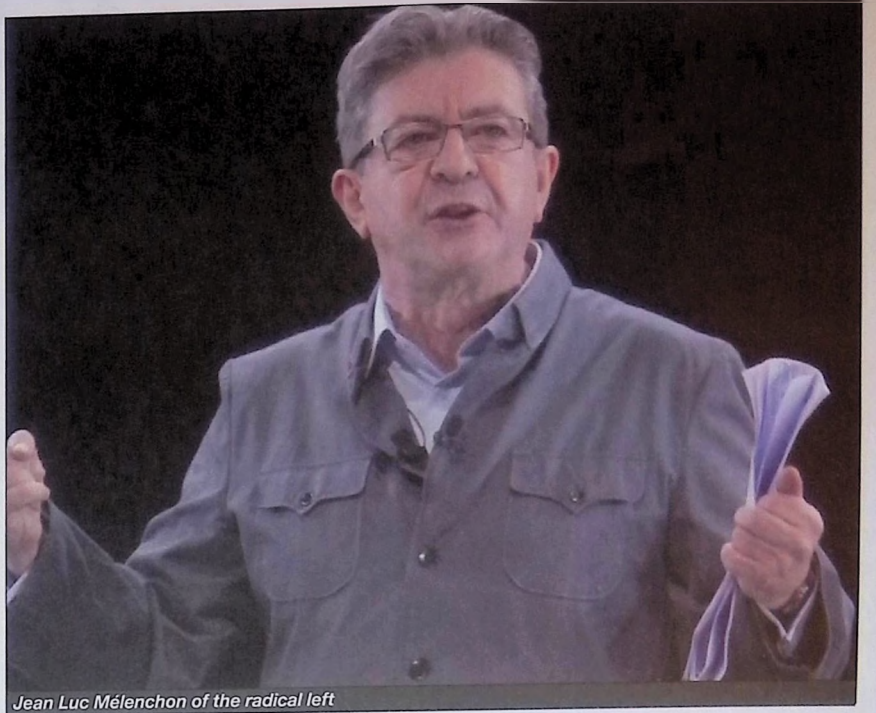
But austerity will not defeat Le Pen, and Mélenchon has so far not repeated the call, nor has the NPA's Philippe Poutou.

If Mélenchon had faced Le Pen in the second round, we can be sure the Right would not be calling for any such Republican Front.

Instead of just voting Macron, we need to carry the anger forward with a movement on the streets. Hundreds of young antifascists and anticapitalists fought with police last night in Paris.

There are also calls to build May 1 into a big antifascist demonstration.

We must make sure that the anger against austerity, but also against racism and police violence – expressed in the Mélenchon campaign and those of the revolutionary left parties like LO and the NPA – is not wasted. Rather than just voting Macron, we need to contest both Le Pen's fascism and Macron's austerity policies on the streets and in our workplaces.



Jean Luc Mélenchon of the radical left

Direct Provision: A lucrative business

Memet Uludag

The economic mentality of the government behind the Direct Provision System in Ireland is no different to its response to housing or health crisis in this country:

While ordinary people are left to suffer from lack of public provisions and duty of care, private companies enjoy millions of profits from this suffering.

Direct Provision as a business has turned the state's duty of care to victims fleeing war and oppression into profits for private companies.

The Direct Provision System was established in 2000 as a 6 month temporary measure to deal with asylum seekers coming to Ireland. It forces asylum seekers to live on €19.10 weekly state allowance in terrible accommodation conditions without the right to work or access to third level education.

There are more than 4,500 people in Direct Provision centres, including around 1,000 children. 17 years on this inhumane system has become a permanent entrapment for asylum seekers and has turned into a profit making business for the private companies running the centres.

Eight companies

In 2016, eight companies running more than thirty centres received the massive revenue of €43.5 million in state contracts.

According to the Department of Justice figures, in 2016 **Mosney Holidays** and **East Coast Catering** received more than €7 million each from the state



contracts. Between 2002-16 **Mosney Holidays** received a total of €119.4 million and **East Coast Catering** €115 million. Like many other contractors in the business of Direct Provision, these companies, thanks to their foreign held accounts, don't have to declare their profits.

Fazyard Ltd and **Old George Ltd** received payments totalling €6 million in 2016.

Three other private contractors received payments in excess of €5 million, including **Avoca** owner and international food and services giant **Aramark**, which received €5.2 million. **Bridgestock** received €5.8 million bringing its earning

since 2000 to €86 million. **Barrow Group** received €5.1 million last year.

Millstreet Equestrian Services received €4.1 million. Since 2000, Millstreet has received a total of €73 million from the State.

Another firm, **Onsite Field Management** received payments of €2

million to provide services for asylum seekers at State-owned centres.

Following the policies of the previous Fianna Fáil/Green and Fine Gael / Labour governments, the current Fine Gael government of austerity refuses to recognise the well documented conditions of asylum seekers in Direct Provision and continues to dismiss calls to end it.

Campaign

United Against Racism is running a major "End Direct Provision" campaign. Recently a motion supported by 37 TDs triggered a Dail debate in which the government defended the continuation of the system. According to latest CSO

figures, there are more than 180,000 vacant homes in Ireland and the number of houses built is at a record low. House prices have risen by 11% last year. Rents are rising fast. We have a massive housing and homelessness crisis. The government refuses to recognise the crisis and lets the profit driven private sector to manipulate the housing needs. There are enough money and homes to provide housing for all.

As in everything else there are huge public funds available for private companies to do the 'dirty' work of Direct Provision. These sums are wasted money that could be used to provide housing and other social services for asylum seekers. But this is a price Irish governments are willing to pay to keep the system in place.

Despite the State's claims that the Direct Provision System provides the best value for money, all international and national research available is consistent in showing that the system violates asylum seekers' basic rights to housing, family life, food, health, work and education and is also economic madness.

Direct Provision provided the best cover for Irish governments over the past 17 years not only to continue with their unwelcoming asylum policies, but also to get away with unforgivable inhumanity.

In fact the entire asylum system is based on one main principle: keeping the asylum seekers out. If possible, out of Ireland altogether, but, if that fails, out of sight and out of public and social life, in other words, out of minds. It is designed to ensure asylum seekers don't sink roots in this country. It must end now!

United Against Racism
fund raiser
TRAD AGAINST RACISM I
LOVE MUSIC HATE RACISM
Thursday 18 May, 8PM, The
Cobblestone, Smithfield, Dublin

Corbyn's challenge to Tory May

Rob Winkel

In coverage of the impending UK general election, many in the media are discussing not whether Labour will lose, but rather what the scale of the loss will be.

The mainstream commentary in Ireland as well as in Britain has been overwhelmingly hostile to and dismissive of Jeremy Corbyn.

But as events develop, it is becoming increasingly clear that the game is not over. Corbyn and Labour can mount a real challenge.

This will see the mobilising of the mass membership of the Labour Party as well as the wider working class against attacks on the NHS, public services, and the welfare state.

Theresa May's hope is that the mud thrown at Jeremy Corbyn over the last two years will stick.

The Labour leadership has, after all, been subject to an unprecedented campaign of abuse since being elected.

The British establishment, shocked by a leader who resonates with the wider political movement, have been determined to crush a politician who doesn't play by traditional Westminster rules.

But the Tories' plan may not materialise as they hope. The rise of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France during recent weeks has shown just how quickly things can change during election time.

The British electorate have an opportunity to oust the Tories from power.

In 2015, David Cameron, opposed by Ed Miliband's weak and timid Labour Party who refused to rule out opposition to austerity, was able to strengthen his majority.

Destructive

Seven years of destructive cuts and privatising public services have wrecked the living standards of millions.

While the wealthy have had huge tax cuts, thousands of people living with disabilities have been declared 'fit for work', and workers have fewer rights as the world of low-wage precarious work has swelled.



After all the damage that these right-wing policies have done, it is little surprise that the last two years have seen a surge of support for Jeremy Corbyn.

His leadership victories have resulted in no small part from the efforts of years of political campaigning on the streets.

The movements against war and nuclear weapons, and the campaigns against NHS privatisation and austerity have built the climate which led to today's Labour Party leadership. Corbyn's opposition to foreign wars and invasions is welcomed by many after almost sixteen years of the 'war on terror'.

Obvious challenges lie ahead. The

Labour Party is a vehicle to manage capitalism rather than overthrow it, and their strategy inevitably leads to compromise.

While the fight is on for gains in Westminster, the struggle will have to continue on the streets regardless of the outcome.

Additionally, the party's machinery remains very much in the hands of the right wing, who will at any opportunity continue to try to wrestle control back from the membership.

Relentless

The right wing of the Labour Party has waged a relentless campaign against Corbyn since his 2015 election.

There will be more internal battles

ahead, and a strong show of support for Corbyn at this election is necessary to preserve the gains made and fight for a future of improved living standards for the majority in the UK.

This election is pitted as being about the nature of the Brexit that will take place. In reality, it is about much more as well.

The UK faces a number of crises – not unlike those faced in Ireland – which are putting basic needs such as housing, healthcare and education increasingly out of reach for many.

If the Labour Party are defeated, and Theresa May holds on to power, it may signal the end of what is left of UK public services and the welfare state.

Labour has a programme to improve

public services, which may seem radical in today's political climate but would have been at the centre of British politics a few decades ago.

There is much at stake in this election, and Corbyn's Labour campaigns for those who wish to fight to improve standards of living for the majority in Britain.

Socialist groups all over Britain are uniting behind Corbyn and arguing for a strong Labour vote.

The ideological battle that will take place during this election is of huge importance in the struggle for socialism in Europe.

If left-wing arguments win in this election, this will have a huge impact internationally.

Defence force families protest dreadful pay and conditions

Wayne Boston

Since the Banking Crash of 2009 there has been a serious lack of investment in the Irish Permanent Defence Forces.

The equipment is as antiquated as a shabby sofa, and shabbier still are the pay and conditions that service personnel have to endure.

This is especially true in the investment in its servicemen and women who, since 2009 have seen cuts to pay, allowances and even pensions.

A qualified 3 star private can expect to come out with around €370 per week, rising to €524 after nine years service.

There is no overtime. Weekends are treated like any other day, except personnel earn around €20 for a 24 hour duty. Less than €1 an hour.

Not Fair

As a result, there has been a marked increase in the number of enlisted men and women relying on Family Income Supplement to make ends meet.

This is simply not good enough, nor fair, to our rank and file soldiers, sailors, and airmen and women, who risk their lives whether it's as an aid to the civil powers in times of floods and other disasters, or off the coast of southern Europe rescuing refugees from North Africa.

As reported in 'The Examiner' in 2015, many of the Naval personnel serving in the humanitarian missions in the Mediterranean Sea work, "...20 hours a day non-stop.



Kildare military families protest at Curragh

And a number are paid so poorly, they earn just €100 more a week than some dole recipients."

Conditions are worse than imagined with stories now doing the rounds of soldiers having to barter and exchange for basic items such as boots, socks and

other items of essential kit.

Quite often this kit is required for Guards of Honour for some junior minister, for which soldiers have to get up at ridiculous hours to get Number One uniforms ready.

Worse still is the depressions and

memory loss as a result of taking mofloquine, branded as Larium, the Army's prescribed anti-Malaria drug. Many of these affected soldiers and sailors feel unable to report these side affects for fear of being medically discharged.

This is also true for soldiers reporting with injuries. In no other job would you have a proven work related injury and be fired for the same.

The Army, Navy and Air Corps do not have, nor allow unions.

Represented

However, enlisted men are represented by the Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association, usually called PDFORRA, while commissioned officers are represented by the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers, or RACO.

These organisations are like dogs with no teeth. Unable to effect change, these groups are barred under legislation from engaging in protest or strike action.

We are for the right for soldiers themselves to protest against bad pay and conditions.

These representative bodies should be given the same legal status as other unions before morale deteriorates further.

The truth is the government want the soldiers to follow orders without question and accept bad pay and conditions without kicking up a fuss.

This is why the 'Wives and Partners of the Defence Forces' have had to come onto the streets: to be the voice of the gagged men and women of the armed services.

And this is why People Before Profit support these wives and partners and will use our platform in the Dáil to voice soldiers' and sailors' concerns and demands.

Socialist Worker

No to a 'Tory Brexit' – Yes to a Socialist Ireland

Fiona Ferguson

Theresa May has called a snap Westminster election, despite consistently saying she would not. It is an opportunistic move. Everything she and the Tories do is cynically thought out.

They have no core principles, except supporting the elites and the wealthy. Her attempts to use Brexit are no different.

Theresa May supported remain and the EU in the referendum, not because she gave a damn about Europe, but because she saw it was a means to strengthen the hand of the British elites.

She has now flipped her position because she wants to shape Brexit in the interests of the British elites.

People Before Profit will throw ourselves into this campaign to the best of our means.

There has been a lot of airtime given to the notion of an anti-Brexit pact comprised of Sinn Fein and the SDLP, both of whom seem desperate for such a pact and for the Green Party to be the third wheel in the relationship, to provide them cover since the Alliance Party ruled out any involvement. Another pact, between unionist parties, seems imminent with the UUP already ceding three electoral areas to the DUP.

What all of this means is that we're



facing down the barrel of a very polarising election, with Brexit at the heart of the debate.

It is vital to have a strong socialist voice in this election. People Before Profit will use the platform of the election to continue to highlight our position; No to a Tory Brexit, Yes to a Socialist Ireland.

BPP are as opposed to Theresa May's 'Tory Brexit' as we were to her 'Tory Remain' position in the referendum.

Protected

We are also for cooperation between all progressive voices to ensure the interests of working class people are

protected in the years ahead.

We want to see migrants defended, labour reform to strengthen the ability of unions to organise, and resistance to any moves to a low tax economy.

We will cooperate with others to ensure the North is treated as a special case without any return to a hard border, and that the devolved

regions have a veto over any deal the British government agrees with the EU.

And should any of our candidates be elected, we will vote against May's Tory Brexit alongside Corbyn and others.

People Before Profit have no truck with the rotten austerity agenda of the EU.

We have consistently highlighted this, North and South. However, we are equally opposed to a Tory vision of Brexit, and will use any electoral position afforded to us to block one.

We will also continue to highlight the failures of the Stormont parties, including their disastrous support for austerity in the last decade.

But to be clear, this election won't solve the underlying crisis of the elites. Britain is fast becoming a failed state. And any progressive should welcome its demise.

This election, therefore, is a chance not only to oust the Tories, but also an opportunity to advance a vision of a new Ireland, a different Ireland, a socialist Ireland.

The kind of Ireland that James Connolly stood for; that is not ravaged by inequality and bigotry, but is based instead on unity, anti-sectarianism and an equitable distribution of our resources by and for the people.

To paraphrase Connolly himself; we serve neither London nor Brussels, but a Socialist Ireland

Stormont's Steps to Success

Ruairi Gallagher

The Derry Trades Union Council recently organised a well-attended protest outside the premises of People Plus NI. Protests outside People Plus NI premises have been ongoing since last year.

The company, formerly known as Action for Employment, was established in north-west England during the early 1990's when unemployment proliferated as a result of successive Tory governments deliberately destroying the country's industrial-base and privatising its economy in order to weaken the trade unions and working class solidarity.

People Plus has a discredited history; it has been at the centre of various fraud scandals and has often been publicly criticised for its poor results and the massive salaries which its executives are receiving.

The involvement of People Plus NI can be traced back to October 2014 when Stormont first launched its draconian 'Steps to Success' (an obvious misnomer) programme to replace 'Steps to Work'.

It is a compulsory scheme for claimants who have been on Job Seekers for 12 months if aged 25 or above or 9 months if under.

Three private contractors were tasked to spearhead the scheme across Northern Ireland; Ingicus UK in Belfast, People Plus NI in the north-



west and Reed in Partnership in the southern region.

Claimants on the Steps to Success scheme have often indignantly explained they are 'ordered to look for jobs that do not exist' and 'it has caused endless stress and anxiety because of benefit sanctions'.

After a period of time of being on the scheme, claimants are then 'forced to work for their benefits, which often results in working full time (over 30 hours per-week) for an extra £10 or £15' on top of the meagre weekly jobseekers allowance of £55 for under 25's.

Derry is one of the most vulnerable regions across Britain and Ireland, continuing to have high unemployment and a low-wage economy.

The increasing commodification of the unemployed for profit under the capitalist system is wholly unacceptable.

It is a indisputable that people want

to work, but they rightly want to work for a living wage. The right to a living wage is a fundamental human right that has been exploited by Stormont's Steps to Success programme.

Steps to Success, like its precursor Steps to Work, has been a failure. Less than 1 in 5 initial participants have found permanent employment. 31,556 have registered for the scheme since 2014 and only 6,773 have found work. The number of those still in permanent employment after six months has fallen to less than 10% for every month since May 2015.

More than 5,333 benefit sanctions have been enforced on welfare claimants registered for the scheme in Derry. It is estimated 21,386 benefit sanctions have been enforced on the sick and unemployed in 2015, amounting to approximately 1800 sanctions per-month.

Cuts are hitting people hard across the North. Private contractors have been handed somewhere between £50-80 million to run this failed scheme. Available money should instead be provided to already existing support groups and advice centres with a genuine interest in helping the most vulnerable in society.

People Before Profit will continue to call for an end to the Steps to Success scheme and hold Stormont to account for its capitulation to the Tories austerity programme and its demonising of the unemployed.

End Abortion Pill Raids

Goretti Horgan

In early March, two Belfast pro-choice activists were raided by police with search warrants for abortion pills. Both were raided at times when the police knew they would not be at home. Helen Crickard's workshop was raided while she was at an International Women's Day rally.

It then emerged that 15-20 women had been contacted by the police who had got their addresses from Customs because their pills had been seized.

At least one person had the police turn up at their workplace and it is likely that some were living with their parents. It is hard to imagine what it would be like to have your parents find out from a cop that you are pregnant and seeking an abortion.

Thanks to the sterling work of solicitors who know the pills are not necessarily illegal, the police seem to have quickly regretted their actions and received orders from "high up" to stop questioning those whose pills were seized and not to charge anyone.

Helen Crickard was told that she would not be charged. Further, police now seem to accept that there is no "offence of possession or attempted possession (of abortion medication) with the intent to procure an abortion".

This is because the law against abortion, which goes back to 1861, before Trade Unions were legal or



the light bulb was invented, forbids anyone to "unlawfully supply or procure any poison or other noxious thing" to procure a miscarriage. But the pills obtained from WomenHelp.org or Women on Web are not noxious or poisonous.

They are very safe, on the World Health Organisation's list of essential medicines and have been shown to be five times safer to take than Viagra. The effect of the pills is to cause an early miscarriage and the risks associated with them are the same as the risks of a spontaneous miscarriage – the main problem with illegality is if women are worried that they are bleeding too much.

Prosecutions mean that some are afraid to go to the hospital as they would with a spontaneous miscarriage. There should be greater clarity soon

about whether women in the North can legally get and/or take abortion pills. The mother who was charged with getting pills for her 15-year old daughter is asking for a judicial review of the decision to prosecute her – asking the Courts to rule on whether she should have been charged at all.

The only parties in the Assembly to support abortion rights are People Before Profit and the Greens.

The Assembly voted against allowing abortion even in the case of Fatal Foetal Abnormalities.

Yet there has not been the kind of angry reaction on the streets here as we see in the South when women's rights are messed with.

Hopefully, that will change over the coming months as activists see the way people power has transformed the situation there.