

Irish working class in huge show of defiance

fastnews

DESPITE THE atrocious weather between 50,000 to 100,000 people braved the arctic conditions and marched through Dublin on Saturday 27 November in a massive display of anger against the Irish coalition government's latest austerity budget.

The protest hinted at the collective strength of the working class and how - given a fighting leadership - the workers' movement could stop the government cuts in its tracks.

Thousands of home-made placards denounced the banks, the EU, and the politicians in very colourful language. Socialist Party stalls sold over 500 papers as workers and youth looked for ideas on how to fight back.

An alternative platform organised by the Socialist Party and other left parties and groups was held at the end of the main ICTU demonstration. Approximately 5,000 people who had already braved the freezing conditions for three hours stayed to hear Joe Higgins (Socialist Party MEP for Dublin), and others put forward a political alternative (see the video on www.socialistworld.net).

Despite this opposition to the capitalist speculators, banks and international finance capitalists - whose greed has looted and wrecked the Irish economy - the Fianna Fáil-led government has gone cap in hand to the same European Union/International Monetary Fund/European Central Bank gangsters who have demanded yet more cuts in workers' living standards as part of an €85 billion bailout.

Under a deal, which Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) Brian Cowen



The Irish trade unions should name the date for a one-day general strike.

laughably described as the "very best that is achievable for our country", the bailout calls for a further €15 billion in cuts and tax increases.

Such a financial programme will only deepen the recession in which the economy has contracted by 17% and where unemployment officially stands at over 13.6%.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) says the 'national recovery programme' will cause another 90,000 job losses. A deflationary programme of nearly €30 billion cuts/tax hikes over six years will guarantee mass unemployment and mass emigration for years to come.

The multinationals and their bil-

lion euro profits will not be touched as corporation tax remains at 12.5%. Yet the lowest paid will pay more tax and have their pay cut by a whopping 11.5%.

The Irish Socialist Party commented on the way forward:

"THE PEOPLE of this country have the collective ability to stand up to and stop the austerity attacks. The trade unions are potentially the most powerful social force in this society. Today's demonstration is just a glimpse of what can be achieved. But one demonstration is not enough. The most powerful weapon the working class has is the ability to withdraw its labour - to strike.

The ICTU should name the date for a one-day general strike as the first step in a determined campaign of national strikes and mass demonstrations with the goal of bringing down the government and stopping the four-year austerity plan.

A mass movement of working class people could get rid of this lame duck government and send a powerful message to Labour and Fine Gael [pro-capitalist opposition parties] that another version of the same austerity plan will not be tolerated."

●The Socialist Party is standing candidates in the general election as part of the new left slate, the United Left Alliance (see www.socialistparty.net).

How can an anti-cuts movement be built? Coalition of Resistance conference report

EIGHT HUNDRED people came to London to fill the main hall of the Camden Centre, and a smaller overflow meeting room, for the inaugural gathering of the Coalition of Resistance (CoR) on Saturday 27 November.

Clive Heemskerck

CoR arose after an initial founding statement calling for 'co-ordinated resistance to cuts and privatisation' was published earlier this year in *The Guardian*, over the signatures of a number of high-profile individuals including Tony Benn.

Many of these individuals spoke at Saturday's meeting - there were 21 platform speakers at the two plenary sessions, with no discussion from the floor, and each of the hour-long workshops had a three or four person speakers' panel.

Unfortunately, this top-heavy format meant there was no time for any genuine debate on how to create a national anti-cuts movement. 22 amendments to a 'conference declaration' were submitted by participating organisations but all were 'remitted for further discussion', without the meeting even being told what they referred to!

The Socialist Party will work with other organisations fighting the cuts but we cannot accept a 'top-down' approach. CoR has the support of some high-profile figures but this does not give it the authority to claim to be the leadership of the anti-cuts movement. Such a leadership will only be created by bringing together representatives of militant trade un-

ionists and the anti-cuts unions that have sprung up across the country in open and democratic debate.

The main question facing the anti-cuts movement is not whether there will be mass opposition but whether it will be inchoate or organised around a fighting programme and clear strategy that can defeat the government.

If it is the latter, we can win, as the anti-poll tax movement was victorious when an 18 million strong non-payment movement led by the Socialist Party (then called Militant) brought down Thatcher.

But this means key issues have to be addressed, which were not resolved at the CoR event.

Vitaly, the movement must oppose all cuts in jobs and services or it will open itself up to attempts to divide workers against service users, defenders of one service against defenders of another, benefit claimants against non-claimants etc.

PCS general secretary, Mark Serwotka, correctly said that "it is not our job to choose who to sack, or what service to cut... this movement must defend every job and every service".

But this wasn't a uniform message at the CoR event. Some speakers argued that the movement should include Labour Party representatives who speak against the cuts, even where they carry them out.

The final plenary was chaired by a former Green Party councillor in Lewisham who, in two of the four budget-setting meetings she attended as a councillor, voted for or abstained on cuts budgets!

The broadest possible movement



photo Paul Mattsson

Opposition to cuts must be demonstrated in action, not only in words.

is needed against the cuts. This can include Labour and Green Party councillors but only provided they are prepared to fight the cuts.

Nationally, New Labour is opposing some of the coalition cuts, but it fully accepts the dictates of the market, and therefore the need for savage cuts in public spending and workers living standards. However, where Labour councillors locally reject the cuts we welcome this and pledge to mobilise in their support.

But we will oppose those councillors who are against the cuts in words and then vote for them in the council chamber. To take the oppo-

site approach and to only oppose central government cuts while tacitly supporting the 'reluctant' cuts of Labour councils, is a recipe for division and defeat.

The 'conference declaration', however, made no reference to locally implemented cuts - an important battleground in the coming months - and the need to resist them.

The CoR meeting showed that opposition to the cuts is growing and that many anti-cuts initiatives of all hues can emerge. But CoR has yet to earn credentials in actual struggle, and what role it can play in the future is still not decided.

Breeding ignoramus

DID THE newly appointed Tory peer, Howard Flight, confuse EU farm subsidies with child benefit when he said such payments will encourage "breeding"? If not, then the millionaire banker, recently elevated to the House of Lords by prime minister David Cameron, is yet another ermine-clad, state subsidised, Tory bigot. Flight - who has long advocated slashing spending on public services - ignoring the plight of 3.9 million children living in poverty, attacked child benefits with the following reactionary nonsense: "We're going to have a system where the middle classes are discouraged from breeding because it's jolly expensive, but for those on benefit there is every incentive."

Colemanballs

SPEAKING OF Tory bigots, London fire boss Brian Coleman continues to spew political bile on the capital's firefighters.

His latest outburst against the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), whose members were threatened with mass sackings unless they agreed to unacceptable changes in working practices, hypocritically accused the FBU of 'thuggish' behaviour.

Coleman, a Tory councillor and London Assembly member for Barnet who was appointed fire boss by Mayor Boris Johnson, said: "Most of the union officials... are thick, can't string a sentence together and frankly are incoherent. We have to break the FBU... They will fail in the end because neither I nor the fire authority, nor the Mayor of London nor this government is going to give way to this kind of intimidation."

Beyond the Palin

WHO DO Republicans in the USA back in the conflict on the Korean peninsula? That's right, North Korea! Well, at least if failed presidential candidate and Tea Party favourite Sarah Palin has anything to do with US foreign policy.

When asked about the escalating tensions by Glenn Beck, the right-wing Fox News presenter, the 'pit bull in lipstick' told listeners: "Obviously we gotta stand with our North Korean allies."

Can we expect Kim Jong-il to be her running mate in the 2012 US presidential elections?

NHS vultures circle

THE PRIVATE hospital company, Circle, has been given a ten-year contract to run the 389-bed Hitchingbrooke Hospital in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire.

This is the first time that an entire NHS hospital has been privatised. Under the deal the NHS will retain the hospital's assets but the workers will be transferred to the new owners.

The CBI bosses' organisation described the deal as "trailblazing", with private operators licking their lips at the prospect of tucking into the NHS's multi-billion pound annual budget.

Within the NHS's 'internal market' the hospital, which has a £90 million turnover, has accumulated a £38.8 million 'debt'. How a private company can make a profit given the hospital's size of debt, raises the nightmare prospect of large-scale cuts in jobs and services being made.