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Determination to beat the cuts

DAVID CAMERON'S announcement that private companies and charities will be able to bid to run schools, hospitals and council services was a further declaration of no-holds-barred war on the public sector. His agenda was spelt out when he wrote in the Times: "We are in the process of opening up billions of pounds' worth of government contracts so charities and social enterprises can compete for the first time. The scale of this opportunity dwarfs anything they've ever had before".

Working class people are being hit from all sides, losing jobs, pay increases, services and chunks of their pensions, while paying more for all the basic costs of living. Reports have revealed that high street prices rose at the fastest rate for 20 years last month, while families suffered a record fall in their disposable incomes. Half of UK households have less than £5,000 of net wealth, so have almost nothing to fall back on.

Meanwhile, top bankers continue to receive multi-million pound bonuses and many major companies have more cash than they know what to do with – for example, it was

reported that pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmithKline may resort to spending £1-2 billion this year just in buying back its own shares!

It is therefore no surprise that anti-cuts protests are increasing in number and size throughout the country. It is one thing to make sacrifices if there is the prospect afterwards of improvements to living standards and services but quite another thing when there is no such prospect – when young people face a far worse future than their parents had.

The government is well aware that this movement of opposition has the potential to develop massively so it is trying to make its savagery a rapid 'fait accompli', hoping this will demoralise and deter the movement. It is helped in this by the right-wing trade union leaders who condemn the cuts but adopt a stance that little can be done to counter them. If they have their way, the national Trade Union Congress demonstration on 26 March will simply be to let off steam, rather than being a vital initial step in building a mass movement that can halt the government's onslaught.

The Socialist, however, will be calling for and suggesting concrete steps to build an almighty, powerful movement capable of forcing the government headlong into retreat. This includes putting pressure on Labour-led councils to set needs-based budgets using their reserves and borrowing powers, so that local authority jobs and services are fully maintained while mass opposition to the government is being developed and organised.

Strike action

AS WELL as helping to build the many lobbies and demonstrations around the country, Socialist Party members will be fully supporting all moves towards public sector coordinated strike action, both at local authority level and nationally, including building for a one-day public sector strike.

The Socialist Party is also urging anti-cuts candidates to stand in the 5 May council elections taking place in most areas of England. Nominations for candidates have to be submitted during the week beginning Monday 28

March, which is only three weeks away, so anti-cuts alliances, trade union activists, community campaigns etc need to quickly discuss who will be standing.

As many as possible should stand as part of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), in opposition to all cuts in council jobs, services, pay and conditions (see www.tusc.org.uk/policy.php for TUSC's election policy platform).

Last month Kirklees council's cabinet was forced to retreat from seeking to turn Fartown high school in Huddersfield into an Academy, not least because angry parents warned councillors they would lose their council seats if they went ahead. Also last month, a huge campaign in Renfrewshire in Scotland forced the council to abandon a plan to axe 60 teachers' posts. The campaign included a 97% 'yes' vote in an indicative ballot of teachers for industrial action.

These victories indicate the route ahead to stopping council and government cuts; ie making it crystal clear, through mass action and standing candidates, that ordinary people are determined to defeat them.

Irish election: collapse of Fianna Fáil, the traditional establishment party

THE IRISH election was historic. It saw the collapse of Fianna Fáil, the dominant party of the capitalist establishment in Ireland since the foundation of the state.

Kevin McLoughlin

The crumbling of Fianna Fáil's vote mirrors the collapse of the Irish economy and shows how much the authority and base of the capitalist establishment is being undermined.

Counts are still to be concluded but it looks like Fianna Fáil will have dropped from 78 seats in 2007 to 20, with only one in Dublin! Among working class people, hatred of Fianna Fáil could be felt on the doorsteps by canvassers. The Greens, coalition partners in the previous government, weren't spared either and went from six TDs to zero.

The main beneficiaries were Fine Gael, Labour and Sinn Féin. Fine Gael will probably end up with 76 seats, Labour will have around 37 TDs and Sinn Féin 14 or so.

There are 166 TDs in total, with 84 being a basic majority. Fine Gael and Labour, likely coalition partners, have been partners on many occasions but have been out of office for the last 14 years.

While its vote increased, this election demonstrated Labour's inability to seize opportunities because of its support for the capitalist market. Its main poster at the start of the campaign said: "Gillmore for Taoiseach [prime minister]". By the end of the campaign, after Labour accepted the basic terms and parameters for the austerity outlined by the EU/IMF bailout, these posters were a reminder of its failure. Fears of an overall Fine Gael majority may have led Labour to recover marginally.

13 independents were elected, including a number who are right-wing. While there was some talk that Fine Gael could form a minority government with some of these independents, such an administration would be unacceptably unstable from the point of view of the capitalist class who demand cuts.



Workers are angry at being made to pay for the crisis. photo SP Ireland

A Fine Gael/Labour coalition will be an administration of austerity. The continuing crisis is likely to put in tatters the base of support for both Fine Gael and Labour over the next months and years, just as it did to Fianna Fáil and the Greens.

The new government will have to immediately go to the EU/IMF to try to deliver a renegotiation of the terms and conditions of the finance deal. That is possible but certainly not guaranteed and any changes will not be able to overcome the economic crisis.

Investment in the Irish economy dropped by 31% last year. This, combined with the draconian austerity programme due over the next four years, is likely to create a deflationary spiral that will puncture any chance of paying back the enormous debts that have been placed around people's necks. Bankruptcy beckons! As do further huge cuts in living standards.

Because of the severity of the economic crisis a Fine Gael/Labour government, despite a huge majority, will not be stable.

Within the ULA there is some debate over the approach to Labour, mainly between the Socialist Party

and the SWP. Socialist Party leaflets explained that like Fine Gael, Labour accepts IMF austerity and cuts that will destroy living standards and jobs.

It was reported by an Irish Independent journalist, who was out on the hustings with SWP member Richard Boyd Barrett, that the candidate responded to some voters who said they were voting Labour by indicating that he himself was giving his second preference to Labour. Such an approach only serves to legitimise people voting Labour and re-enforces illusions that may exist instead of cutting across them.

Sinn Féin

SINN FÉIN'S vote grew by 3% but their number of seats went from four in 2007 to 14. On the back of a by-election victory Sinn Féin's TDs opposed the EU/IMF intervention and austerity deal and used the Dáil to skilfully oppose the Budget in early December.

Sinn Féin is set to increase its support but the superficiality of its opposition to austerity will have an impact. In the north Sinn Féin has accepted the cuts and is implement-



Clare Daly and Joe Higgins.

photo Paul Mattsson

ing them as opposed to fighting the attacks from the Tory/Liberal government. In the south, Sinn Féin supported cuts in local councils. Such an approach will be a drag on Sinn Féin's potential.

The Socialist Party/ULA said that if people elected us we would be a fighting opposition. We argued for a real alternative, that there was no solution based on the capitalist market and outlined the need for democratic public ownership of the economy and socialist policies and planning.

Launching the ULA in advance of the election was crucial. The profile it developed and now its election of five TDs means that the opposition that will develop to the new government's austerity can get a genuine left and working class reflection.

Crucially if the ULA fights on the issues and if it advocates a distinct left and socialist programme it can offer a clearer way forward and could become the key force to represent the anger and radicalisation that will grip Irish society in the months and years ahead.

Explosive potential is built into the situation for the ULA but particularly for the Socialist Party as a fighting socialist alternative to this unprecedented crisis of Irish capitalism.

AS WELL as the election of Joe and Clare, Socialist Party candidate Mick Barry had an outstanding campaign in Cork North Central, polling 4,803 (9.2%) first preference votes, nearly three times his 2007 vote.

The ULA is comprised of the Socialist Party, the People Before Profit Alliance (PBPA), which includes the Socialist Workers Party, the Workers and Unemployed Action Group (Tipperary) and the independent socialist group in Sligo.

The Socialist Party stood more candidates than ever before, receiving a combined 6,369 first preference votes in a further six areas. In many areas we were standing general election candidates for the first time. The party has really been strengthened in all of these areas as a result.

The other three ULA TDs are Joan Collins (PBPA) in Dublin South Central; Richard Boyd Barrett (PBPA/SWP) in Dun Laoghaire and Seamus Healy (WUAG). The ULA stood in eleven of the twelve Dublin constituencies and got 7.6% of the total vote in those constituencies.