

Ireland: 'Reclaim the unions' Successful activists forum held

Michael O'Brien
Socialist Party (CWI Ireland)

On 7 May, 70 activists from a range of trade unions met at a forum in Dublin organised under the title Reclaim the Unions.

The purpose of the meeting was two-fold. Firstly, it was an opportunity for trade union activists to discuss the state of Ireland's trade union movement in the wake of three years of attacks on jobs, pay and conditions from governments and employers. During this time the leadership of the trade union movement has failed to offer a fighting lead to the membership. From there we could then discuss the measures necessary to prepare for the attacks that lie ahead.

In the discussion, chaired by Eddie Conlon of the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) executive, there was a common understanding that a combination of factors has weakened the trade union movement. Institutionalised 'Social Partnership' [collaboration of the trade union leaders with the government in holding back workers' demands and struggle], from 1987 until 2008, largely robbed a generation of trade unionists of the opportunity of being trained up as militant activists through taking on their employer, locally, to advance and defend pay and conditions.

Likewise, the lack of a real radical alternative to the cuts agenda from the trade union leaders, even among those who opposed social partnership and the rotten Croke Park deal [agreed in March 2010], means that they implicitly accept the attacks and offer no strategy of sustained resistance to the membership.

Strategy

The discussion moved on to what steps were needed to rebuild the combativeness of the trade union movement. A genuine debate emerged as to whether it was a better strategy to develop activist groups within the existing unions to fight the bureaucracies along the lines of the CPSU Activist Group and the newly created ASTI Fight-

back, whose successful launch was explained by Andrew Phelan.

An alternative view was argued by some construction worker activists and Dave Cotter from the Independent Workers' Union (IWU). He said that the efforts of genuine union activists would be better spent taking people out of the existing unions and either switching to better unions or building new militant organisations from scratch like the IWU.

The prevailing view in the discussion articulated by Socialist Party member Stephen Boyd (Unite) and others, was that while there were some exceptional cases in which the movement of members from one union to another was warranted, in general it was better to stay and fight.

This is in order to avoid the danger of separating the best fighting elements in the unions from the

broad membership, who are then left in the thrall of the right wing leadership.

Terry Kelleher from the CPSU Activist Group and Owen McCormack, now in Siptu's Dublin Bus branch, led-off the second session by making proposals for where to take this initiative. It was proposed and agreed that a national network of trade union activists would be built and formally launched at a conference in September. A committee to organise the conference was elected. It was also agreed to organise a protest at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions conference in Kerry in July.

An extensive network of activists spread across all sectors and key workplaces can be a structure through which solidarity can be built for strikes and campaigns that emerge. Importantly, a trade union activists network can be a means of quickly disseminating into the

workplaces the key lines of political argument that answer the cutback consensus of the bosses and politicians, as well as the defeatist arguments of the trade union leaders.

With further attacks in sight on REA and ERO [industry pay] rates mainly affecting private sector workers; 25,000 job cuts and attacks arising from the Croke Park deal in the public sector, and privatisation of assets in the commercial semi-state sector, it is clear that the organised working class has major battles on its hands in the months and years ahead.

This first step in building a network of trade union activists can ultimately make a big difference in ensuring that the thousands of workers who want to fight can link up with the best fighters in the union movement and defeat the government and employers' austerity measures.

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The Committee for a Workers' International

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Left in Turin loses an opportunity.

From Resistenza, publication of ControCorrente by Marco Veruggio (national spokesperson ControCorrente)

Greece: Resist bosses' agenda and the far right

Xekinima (CWI Greece) reporters

Greece's second 24-hour general strike held this year, on 11 May, saw massive workers' participation and completely paralysed every aspect of economic life in Greece. It showed again the enormous power of the organised working class and its potential to defeat the Pasok government's austerity cuts.

But just days later, reaction took to the streets of Athens in the form of a murderous rampage by neo-Nazi thugs, while the police stood by. 'Golden Dawn' thugs attacked immigrants, killing a young man from Bangladesh and hospitalising many others.

Public participation, although slightly smaller than during the last general strike in February, was still very big. Many tens of thousands demonstrated in all the major cities. In the two central rallies in Athens (the communist party, KKE, organised a separate rally from the Greek trade union confederation, the

GSEE), 40,000-50,000 took part.

The lower turnout was mainly due to the complete lack of organisation and preparation, not only on the part of the trade union leaderships, but also on the part of the leaderships of the main Left parties. It was also due to the lack of any plan and any prospect for the development of the mass struggles.

Many workers understand that a 24-hour strike, every two or three months, will not force the government to back down over its severe austerity programme. There have been nine general strikes in Greece since the beginning of 2010 and the government still continues to push through its policies.

In contrast, Xekinima (CWI Greece) says: refuse to pay the debt; for the nationalisation of the banks and commanding heights of the economy, under democratic workers' control and management; for the development of the strike movement, including coordinated strikes and occupations, general strikes (24-, 48-hours and longer) to stop

the cuts.

This action must be organised by the masses themselves, through action committees in workplaces, neighbourhoods, and in colleges.

Xekinima puts forward the perspective that through the mass struggles of the working class, the conditions will develop for a strong and militant socialist opposition. Big class struggles will radicalise workers and youth, developing the forces on the Left. Class battles can see mass action committees spring up in Greece, as has happened in the past.

These types of developments can provide the basis of a viable alternative to the Pasok or NDP governments of cuts - for a government genuinely representing the material interests of working people and the poor.

The Athens demonstration on 11 May saw violence on the part of the police, who viciously attacked workers' contingents, hospitalising around 100 people.

The police violence increased the

massive hatred in Greek society towards the government and anger against state repression.

Despite the fact that there is no real alternative on the part of the main Left parties, most of the slogans chanted in the course of the demonstrations called for the downfall of the government.

Following the violent police attacks on workers' demonstrations and the fascists' murderous assaults, it is essential that workers' demonstrations are properly organised and stewarded, to protect them from provocations and attacks.

A united workers' movement must oppose all forms of racism and racist attacks, resist the neo-Nazis and the far right, and oppose the bosses' agenda of sowing 'divide and rule' policies amongst working people. This means putting forward clear socialist policies, including calling for jobs for all, a living wage, decent and affordable housing and full funding for health and welfare.

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