Ireland's United Left Alliance meets with EU-IMF-ECB "troika"

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31 January 2012

The integration of Ireland's pseudo-left groups into the political establishment was displayed this month, when representatives from the United Left Alliance (ULA) held discussions with the European Union, International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank.

The meeting with the notorious Troika, which is directing draconian austerity measures across Europe, came as the body made its latest visit to Ireland to oversee the €85 billion bailout extended to Dublin in November 2010.

The ULA's delegation to the meeting consisted of Richard Boyd-Barrett of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Clair Daly of the Socialist Party (SP). They were joined by several independent members of parliament, who are courted by the ULA in its attempt to build alliances with sections of the ruling elite.

Media commentators have been compelled to acknowledge that Ireland stands before a decade of austerity. The downgrade of leading euro zone member states, as well as the reduction of the credit rating of the EU's bailout fund, has placed a serious question mark over the hope of some that Ireland could be supported by a second bailout after the current programme expires in 2013.

All that the ULA could muster following its discussions with the representatives of the international financial elite was rhetorical bluster. Boyd Barrett asserted that he had "challenged" the Troika's insistence on austerity measures, while Daly claimed to have "pointed out that the austerity policy of the past four years and the strike of private investment has destroyed hundreds of thousands of jobs."

Catherine Murphy acts as the chief whip of the "technical group"—an alliance of the 5 ULA members and 11 independents in parliament. She stated that the meeting had been "useful", as it had created the "ground rules" for future discussions.

If that is the case, then the first ground rule established is that the Troika has nothing to fear from the ULA. They view it as a useful safety valve for popular opposition to the austerity policies of the major parties, and a potential future collaborator in government to defend the capitalist system against the working class. The Troika cynically advised the ULA members and independents to produce "evidence-based facts to back up arguments" for future discussions.

Troika representatives will have taken note of the ULA's collaboration with organisations and individuals openly hostile to working people. Both of its main campaigns—the call for a referendum on the recently agreed EU treaty, and the non-payment campaign opposing the newly introduced household tax of €100 per year—are being conducted with the aim of winning allies from Sinn Fein and Labour dissidents.

The ULA's role as a responsible opposition has won it praise within Ireland's ruling elite. Boyd-Barrett was even included in a delegation of parliamentarians who visited the Bundestag for talks with German deputies on Thursday on budgetary policy in the coming years.

He would have been in the company of the SWP's and SP's fellow thinkers, who are often leading members of Die Linke, the Left Party—an alliance of trade union bureaucrats, social democrats and Stalinists. Boyd-Barrett wants to follow in the footsteps of his German colleagues, who have been incorporated into the highest echelons of government.

Christine Buchholz, for example, sits on the Defence Committee, which the Bundestag describes as a body that "always meets in closed session" and is charged with defending "the security of the country and of Germany's allies, as well as the interests of Bundeswehr [armed forces] personnel on active service."

The value of the ULA was outlined in an *Irish Times* article. Harry McGee wrote that the alliance of the ULA

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with independents had a “cohesion that has given the two Opposition parties, Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil, a run for their money.”

McGee dismissed any claims that the group represented a radical alternative to the current set-up. The technical group is a “disparate one, comprising some deputies who would be considered hard left to those who are centre right,” he explained.

The founding of the Alliance took place in line with the need of the discredited Irish bourgeoisie for a respectable opposition, wedded above all to the trade union bureaucracy, to prevent the emergence of a revolutionary challenge to the capitalist system.

It took place as the former Fianna Fáil-Green party government ironed out the final details of the current bailout at the end of 2010. Against the backdrop of the threat of state bankruptcy and the demands of the EU and IMF for the most vicious austerity programme in Irish history, the ULA was given extensive media coverage to promote the unions as the only means through which workers can conduct their struggles.

With the arrival of the Troika, Boyd-Barrett issued a January 10 statement urging workers to “force our leaders to reverse the sequence of errors they have been making”.

The “errors” to which he is referring, include the public sector unions’ agreement to a three-year pay freeze as part of the trade unions complicity in government austerity.

The ULA has no intention of fighting for the bringing down of the Fine Gael-Labour Party coalition, let alone mounting a challenge to Irish capitalism.

In its recent pre-budget submission, the ULA made no mention of Ireland’s infamously low 12.5 percent corporation tax levels and instead called for increased investment in jobs. Its solution to the current crisis was to achieve “real economic activity”—a vague formulation that is entirely compatible with the occasional appeals by the trade union leaders and others for a more industry-based economy.

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