

Ireland's Socialist Workers Party promotes strikebreaker David Norris

Jordan Shilton
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Shortly before Christmas, the Irish Senate discussed a bill banning public sector workers in “essential utilities” from striking. The bill included the threat of criminal prosecution, massive fines and lengthy prison terms.

The proposal in Ireland's upper house of parliament came from one of the country's richest men, Feargal Quinn. It was a response to plans by energy workers at the state-owned Energy Supply Board (ESB) to take strike action in opposition to attacks on their pension entitlements. Quinn pointed to Greece, Spain and Portugal, where repressive anti-strike legislation has been imposed to enforce the dictates of the financial elite.

In the event, the energy workers unions sold out the dispute before a single day of strike action was taken, and the proposed bill was adjourned for future discussion.

Of great significance, however, is the fact that Quinn's bill was seconded in the Senate by David Norris.

Norris is an established bourgeois politician who ran for president as an independent in 2011. He has represented the University of Dublin constituency continuously since 1987. During the presidential election in 2011, he was assisted in gaining ballot access by the major political parties, with the eventual winner, Labour's Michael D Higgins, urging his parliamentary party to back Norris's nomination for the sake of democracy.

Just three weeks before his intervention in the senate in favour of criminalising strike action, Norris was featured as one of the main speakers at the Socialist Workers Party's (SWP's) annual event, *Marxism 2013*. He was described as a “political activist.”

Norris was invited by the SWP to participate in a

discussion under the headline “LGBT rights: towards equality.”

During his failed presidential bid in 2011, Norris was temporarily forced out of the race due to accusations that he supported underage sex. In the weeks before his decision to re-enter the race, the SWP held public meetings under the title “David Norris—Too Gay for President?,” in which they focused exclusively on Norris's homosexuality as a supposed sign of his progressive character.

Relying on Norris's history as an advocate of gay rights and critic of some of the most reactionary positions of the Catholic Church, the SWP portrayed him as an opponent of the status quo.

The SWP's leading deputy in parliament, Richard Boyd-Barrett, commented just days before Norris re-entered the campaign that he was prepared to back Norris “in the absence of any credible left wing candidate emerging, which now appears very unlikely. The attack on him has been outrageous, and he is certainly the best of the current candidates.”

Norris also received backing from the Socialist Party, with SP official Joe Higgins and then SP member Clare Daly speaking out in his favour. Writing in support of his candidacy, Higgins said on August 6, 2011, that “the Socialist Party told Senator Norris on Monday that in the almost certain situation that it would not be possible to have a serious candidate advocating a principled and comprehensive Left policy and programme being able to contest the presidency, the two Oireachtas signatures we commanded would facilitate his nomination. I believe that the same would have been the case with two People Before Profit [SWP] deputies.”

The promotion of identity politics is part of a sharp shift to the right of all the pseudo-left groups.

The United Left Alliance (ULA), founded at the end of 2010 by the SWP, SP and various campaign groups, was a vehicle for the Irish pseudo-left to build alliances with sections of the political establishment. One aim was to assist in the implementation of austerity measures under the bailout programme that Dublin entered in November 2010. The new organisation was welcomed by the political establishment as a vital mechanism to maintain control over mounting opposition to the government's austerity programme.

Based on an explicit rejection of socialism, the ULA promoted the illusion that capitalism could be reformed and that the Irish economy could be kick-started through a reformist programme carried out by the state. Representatives of the SWP and SP met repeatedly with officials from the European Union, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank to discuss the progress of the bailout programme.

This perspective guided their orientation to bourgeois politicians who were portrayed as progressive or dissidents.

Only a few months before backing Norris's presidential bid, the ULA formed a so-called *technical group* in parliament with a series of "independent" MPs—virtually all of whom were former members of Labour or Fiana Fail—the party that led the government when the banks were provided with a multibillion bailout. While the ULA asserted that this manoeuvre was purely a technical arrangement to secure greater parliamentary representation and speaking rights, it became the means through which joint campaigns between the ULA and the "independents" were organised. This included the anti-household charge campaign, a non-payment initiative against the introduction of a €100 property charge, which has since been transformed in to a fully fledged property tax.

The new relations developed by the pseudo-left were thoroughly exposed in the course of the Mick Wallace affair. An owner of a building company who defrauded the state of more than €1 million in taxes and avoided paying workers' pensions, Wallace was hailed by the SP and SWP following his election to parliament in 2011 as a left-wing, radical politician. When the scandal broke over his dealings in 2012, no one from either party called for his resignation.

Clare Daly split from the SP in support of Wallace and subsequently set up a new political vehicle, United

Left, alongside Joan Collins, a former supporter of the SWP's People Before Profit grouping who was also a prominent backer of David Norris's presidential bid. For its part, the SP abandoned the ULA, citing its failure to attract new members. It has cobbled together the Anti-Austerity Alliance with a collection of local campaign groups to contest upcoming local elections.

The political significance of the connections between the pseudo-left and a section of the ruling class has become even clearer following Norris's intervention to back anti-strike legislation.

Not a word has been uttered by either the SWP or SP to explain why someone they have hailed for years as a progressive figure could lead the charge to build up the powers of the state to deal with mounting working class opposition to devastating austerity measures. Neither is there any public indication that anyone in their ranks has been troubled by Norris's actions.

The parties' publications have maintained a silence on the affair. Indeed, nothing has been written on the threatened anti-strike legislation. The only comment referring to the new law under discussion came from the SP's Paul Murphy, who sits in the European parliament. After four years in which the trade unions have enforced brutal austerity measures in collaboration with the ruling elite through the imposition of a strike ban on the public sector, Murphy remarked, "The Irish Congress of Trade Unions should organise a protest in opposition to this bill to defend the right of workers to strike."

The SWP and SP have demonstrated their loyalty to the capitalist state, which is the source of their privileged positions, and their absolute hostility to the working class. Workers should have no illusions as to where these organisations will stand as the struggles to defend their jobs and living conditions intensifies.



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