

Socialist Equality Group in Ireland holds first public meeting

Paul Mitchell
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The newly formed Socialist Equality Group (SEG) held its first public meeting, “The Struggle for Trotskyism in Ireland,” in Dublin on February 3.

Meeting chair, Dermot Byrne, opened by saying how important it was to understand that it “had been many years since Dublin had witnessed a group of Marxists coming together to put the independent political mobilisation of the working class” at the centre of their work. He explained how after its formation, the SEG had contacted the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to begin a discussion on building a Trotskyist party in Ireland.

National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (UK), Chris Marsden, began his report by outlining the impact of the 2008 global economic crisis on Ireland, which had earned the accolade of the Celtic Tiger and the “Wild West of European finance” because of its high growth rates.

“The crash when it came was devastating,” Marsden said, describing how the economy had contracted, unemployment risen and property prices halved. The banks were bailed out with a “staggering” €150 billion for which the working class “was bled dry by wage cuts, tax rises ... and levies including the hated water charges.” Inequality had “assumed malignant proportions”, he added.

Marsden then examined the role of the two major organisations in Ireland claiming to represent “a socialist or occasionally revolutionary, even Trotskyist alternative”—the Socialist Party (SP) and Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

He explained how they had ingratiated themselves with the trade union bureaucracy, which had negotiated successive no-strike deals, the vanishingly small group of Labour “lefts”, Sinn Feiners and so-called “Independents”.

“At the top of their tree, some, such as [the SP’s] Joe Higgins and [the SWP’s] Richard Boyd-Barrett, take their place in parliament to be endlessly quoted by the media as the official voice of protest.

“For the most part they speak of “People Power”, boycotts and “Technical Groups”, rather than socialism. They want nothing more than to emulate Syriza in Greece and take office, pledged only to ameliorate the worst impact of austerity.”

Marsden said that “the struggle for Trotskyism in Ireland”—the title of the evening’s meeting—meant the struggle for the political independence of the working class, against all the pseudo-left tendencies that base themselves on the preservation or reform of the profit system.

The SEG had understood this in what it had written in its statement of intent.

“The development of socialist consciousness means instilling in the most advanced workers and youth an understanding of the international character of the class struggle and the socialist revolution. It requires the assimilation of the strategic experiences of the working class over the 20th century, as they are contained in the history and theoretical heritage of the Trotskyist movement—above all its decades-long struggle against the domination of the working class by the petty-bourgeoisie.

“The ICFI emerged through an uncompromising struggle against such forces, which were led in the 1950s by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel internationally and by Tony Cliff and Ted Grant in the UK and Ireland.

“Today, the successor organisations of the Pabloites and state capitalists promulgate a type of pseudo-left politics aimed at paralysing the working class. Organisations like Syriza in Greece, the Socialist

Workers Party/People Before Profit and the Socialist Party here in Ireland, and the New Anti-capitalist Party in France use left-sounding rhetoric to confuse workers, but are the most determined defenders of the capitalist system ...

“Only by breaking politically with these organisations will the working class in Ireland and internationally be able to conduct a successful struggle against capitalism.”

“Whether or not this is fully understood as yet by those present here tonight,” Marsden said, “the fact that the centrality of this struggle is understood by even a small number of worker-communists means that the entire Irish working class has a way forward out of the dead end into which it has been driven by its current misleaders.”

Ireland's modern political history has been characterised by efforts to subordinate the revolutionary strivings of the working class to the national bourgeoisie, at devastating cost. “The ICFI is not the advocate of Irish nationalism. Partition and the creation of the Republic of Ireland ended for all time the pretence that the Irish bourgeoisie constituted an anti-imperialist force,” he said. Ireland’s subsequent history proves that it is class oppression that is the fundamental problem that must be overcome. The struggle against national oppression is subsumed into the struggle of the working class for socialism.

“The Irish working class has its own proud socialist traditions. But these alone are not in and of themselves the basis for the development of a new revolutionary leadership,” he said.

“This requires daily collaboration with international co-thinkers, collectively examining the strategic experiences of the world working class and the assimilation of the most advanced revolutionary theory. Socialist revolution—that most complex of tasks—cannot be carried out spontaneously. It must be consciously prepared and led by the most advanced and self-sacrificing workers and young people, trained as Marxists by their own international party. That is what the Socialist Equality Group is seeking to build.”

In reply to a question about the power of the media, Marsden explained that it was more important to understand the role of the pseudo-left. It was they, not the media, who systematically demobilised popular anger against the water charges by their promotion of

“no politics, no leaders” dressed up as “People Power”.

Prompted by a question from an SWP member that the new Syriza government in Greece represented “a certain break in the consciousness of the working class from neo-liberal ideas” and had to be supported, Marsden insisted that this was extremely dangerous. He disagreed that Syriza was “an experience the working class had to go through.” Syriza had openly declared it was pro-capitalist and immediately formed a coalition with the right-wing nationalist Independent Greeks party. “It will junk all of its election promises,” Marsden said. “The pseudo-left parties all know this and are politically responsible for everything that will happen in Greece under a Syriza government.”



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