

Irish pseudo-left form electoral pact

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On January 23, between 5,000 and 6,000 people marched in Dublin city against the continuing imposition of water charges, with up to 30 smaller demonstrations taking place in towns and cities throughout the country.

Up to 1,500 people took part in a demonstration against water charges in Cork. There was also a demonstration of around 1,000 people outside the conference of the Fine Gael party, which along with the Labour Party in government introduced the hated water charges in January 2015. This was part of a savage austerity programme that has seen a massive transfer of wealth from working people to the super-rich.

The number of those attending the demonstrations was significantly down from the 30,000 who marched against the introduction of water charges. This is the end result of the way the main pseudo-left tendencies that, along with Sinn Fein, dominate the campaign and have channelled opposition to austerity away from any independent working class fight against capitalism and towards working within the Dail Eireann (Irish Parliament) and the array of inter-party committees in which they operate.

The emphasis on a non-payment campaign since water charges were introduced last April has allowed individual workers to be intimidated with threats of fines and penalties, so that the government now claims two thirds of people have paid. An identical approach by trade union leaders and the pseudo-left in 2012 for a campaign of non-payment of a property tax of €100 on households was eventually defeated by the government, which later introduced payments of €1,000 for some households.

This counts for little for the speakers that addressed the crowd in O'Connell Street, whose main concern was to seek popular backing for their plans for a joint slate in the upcoming general election, including Sinn Féin deputy leader Mary Lou McDonald, Brendan Ogle

of the Unite trade union, Richard Boyd Barrett of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP)/People Before Profit Alliance (PBPA), Joan Collins of the Anti-Austerity Alliance, and Ruth Coppinger of the Socialist Party (SP).

The SWP/PBPA and the SP-dominated Anti-Austerity Alliance have now come together as one grouping and published a joint platform and manifesto to contest the general election due at the end of February. The Anti-Austerity Alliance-People Before Profit (AAA-PBPA) will be running 30 candidates. The aim of the alliance, according to Paul Murphy, a parliamentarian for the SP, is to offer the electorate a “real alternative in order for fundamental change to take place and a left government that doesn't represent the interests of the one percent and represents the interests of the 99 per cent.”

Richard Boyd Barrett and Brid Smyth of the SWP/PBPA stated at the press conference launch that the AAA-PBPA would be supporting the formation of a “left government” against the “establishment parties,” which they identified as Fine Gael, Fine Fail, and the Labour Party.

Some months ago, Barrett's PBPA newsletter stated, “We need to join with anti-austerity forces like Syriza in Greece and other similar movements in Spain and Portugal to demand a cancellation of the debts and an end to austerity”—a reference to Podemos and the Left Bloc.

Syriza is now directly imposing austerity. The Left Bloc has joined a government with the Socialist Party and the Portuguese Communist Party that will do so, and Podemos is presently negotiating for the opportunity to do the same alongside the Socialist Party in Spain. This is the role that would be played by the SWP and SP.

Just how anti-austerity the joint manifesto is can be judged by its references to the low level of corporation

tax paid to the state by multinational industries functioning in Ireland, which now stands at 12.5 percent.

The ruling coalition's tax policies have been criticised by other European governments, which have argued that its ultra-low rates are luring businesses away from high-tax jurisdictions. Last October, Finance Minister Michael Noonan slashed the present official rate of 12.5 percent to 6.2 percent for firms that demonstrated their profits are tied to patents and copyrighted software that were created by research and development carried out in Ireland. The joint manifesto now pathetically states, "We will be fighting to transform the taxation policies of this state. To make the superrich and corporations pay their taxes we will be proposing the enforcement of 12.5 percent corporation tax rate."

The SWP and SP differ on whether it would support a Sinn Fein-led government. The SWP/PBPA insisted it would support a Sinn Fein government as well as asking people for transfers from Sinn Fein and giving Sinn Fein second-preference votes under the proportional representation electoral system. Ruth Coppinger of the SP said she would have "reservations" about allying with Sinn Fein because "that party was based on only one section of the community in Northern Ireland, and had supported and implemented cuts in that jurisdiction."

Neither party had anything to say on the fact that Sinn Fein is a bourgeois, pro-capitalist formation. Both insisted that these differences would not affect the electoral pact.

The record of the pseudo-left groups over the past five years of the current coalition has shown that their trajectory is based firmly on propping up capitalism and offering economic solutions that pose no threat to the power and privilege of Ireland's ruling elite.

The super-rich are far wealthier today than before the 2008 economic crash and the €85 billion bailout of the banks. Over the lifetime of the present government, they have increased their wealth by €75 billion. The top 250 individual capitalists have now amassed wealth equivalent to 30 percent of Ireland's GDP, according to the recent *Sunday Times Rich List*. In a country where there are now 272,000 fewer full-time jobs compared to before the financial crash, there are now 13 billionaires. The Dail's 166 TDs (members) have raked in almost

€80 million in salary and expenses over a three-year period, with the Dail's Ceann Comhairle (chairperson) taking home €658,000. Other figures compiled by RTE television show that Socialist Party TD Joe Higgins earned more than €410,000 over a three-year period, while Richard Boyd Barrett of the SWP/PBPA was paid €450,000. Senators accounted for a further €20 million in expenses.

From the moment the present government took power in 2011, both the SP and SWP/PBPA held regular talks with the "troika" "of the European Union (EU), European Central Bank ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), to offer advice on where the vicious austerity measures should fall. Higgins has just completed a 14-month term on the inter-party Banking Inquiry Committee cover-up, along with members of Fine Gael, Fine Fail and Sinn Fein.

The findings of the inquiry into "the cause" of the Irish banking crash in 2008, published this week, criticised the lack of regulation of the major banks and found that the ECB put major pressure on Ireland to accept a bailout in 2010. The chairperson of the inquiry, Ciarán Lynch of the Labour Party, stated, "No one thing led to the banking crisis." When quizzed by journalists to name individuals responsible, he replied that when the coalition government set the inquiry up last year, part of its mandate was that no individuals could be prosecuted or held to account.

The inquiry served as a political smokescreen, to gloss over the fact that the capitalist state and the rule of capital itself were responsible for the banking crash. The participation of Higgins and the SP acted as a cover by giving the inquiry a fake radical face.



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