

Irish premier Leo Varadkar's resignation prompts demands for general election

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Opposition parties in Ireland called for an immediate general election following the resignation of Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar who heads Ireland's three party—Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Green Party—coalition.

Varadkar, who took over as Taoiseach in 2022 from Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin, in line with the coalition agreement, resigned as leader of Fine Gael on March 20.

Simon Harris, the current Fine Gael Minister for Higher Education has been enthusiastically endorsed by the party as his successor. This means that when the Dáil returns on April 9, after the Easter recess, Varadkar will formally resign and Harris will be nominated Taoiseach.

Varadkar's resignation came just two weeks after the government suffered a humiliating defeat in a two-part national referendum to amend the Irish constitution. Held on March 8, it sought to expand the definition of a family from a relationship founded on marriage to include other "durable relationships". The referendum was rejected by 67.7 percent of voters.

A second referendum on replacing language about a women's supposed duties in the home included a clause recognizing the role of family members in the provision of "care", and was rejected by 73.9 percent of voters.

The amendment proposal was fiercely opposed by disability rights activists and carers. Spokeswoman Ann Marie Flanagan from the "Equality Not Care" group summed up the government's campaign by saying, "It seeks to deny us the right to State support such as personal assistance services. What is required is constitutional obligations to provide support services to enable everyone to participate in economic, social and cultural life. This referendum is made up of smoke and

mirrors which is designed to confuse and mislead women and men, requiring support and providing support."

Varadkar, who along with all the main parties in the Dáil, including Sinn Féin, expected a clear majority in favour of the proposals, swiftly resigned, saying, "I knew that one part of leadership is knowing when the time has come to pass on the baton to someone else. And then having the courage to do it. That time is now."

There does not appear to be any hidden scandal stalking Varadkar, nor is there any sense that his recent very limited criticism of the Biden administration's genocidal policy in Gaza played a role in his departure. Varadkar, it seems, had just had enough of his efforts to package escalating attacks on workers' living standards as socially progressive.

In line with this, the corporate-controlled Irish state broadcaster RT É immediately piled in, lavishing praise on Varadkar and interviewing a succession of Fine Gael councillors and party members paying homage and insisting everything was business as usual.

Despite this, a picture later emerged of discontent and disintegration within Fine Gael. Eleven of its TDs (Members of Parliament), almost one third, had communicated that they would not contest the next general election due within the next twelve months.

Simon Harris, who takes over the office of Taoiseach from Varadkar, could be faced with more rats jumping ship. He takes over as the three-party coalition government becomes ever more widely loathed.

Far from providing "continuity and stability", as the corporate media has claimed, Varadkar presided over economic hardship for millions of Irish workers. According to Social Justice Ireland, there are now 671,183 people living in poverty in the country, in a

population of just 5 million, with 133,565 of these in employment—a working poor composed mainly of young, super-exploited workers.

There are now over 13,500 homeless, with 290,000 people living in so-called “hidden homelessness”, forced to move around or enter emergency accommodation. At the beginning of March, homelessness reached new records, with a 21 percent increase in the number of families homeless and a 17 percent increase in the number of homeless children. The average price of a house in Dublin is an astronomical €430,000.

As class and social divisions have widened, Varadkar and the coalition government have remained in office with the cooperation of the trade unions and the backing of the corporate elite. Recent figures from the Central Statistics Office show the combined wealth of the richest eight people in Ireland now stands at €35 billion. Just one percent of the Irish population owns 27 percent of wealth, with the two richest people having 50 percent more wealth than the poorest half of the population.

Varadkar, touted in the media as a socially progressive leader, Ireland’s first openly gay Taoiseach, will be remembered in the working class for introducing measures to target the poorest in society, such as his “The Welfare Cheats Cheat Us All” campaign, while the super-rich continued to siphon wealth from the rest of the population.

He hands over to Harris to continue the same anti-worker and pro-imperialist agenda, including the government’s commitment to increased military spending and cooperation with European Union military projects, using the alliance’s proxy war in Ukraine directed against Russia to push for ever-deeper Irish cooperation with NATO.

Harris, despite his supposed appeal to a younger demographic on TikTok, where he has over 1 million followers, and easy-going, self-deprecating image, has a reactionary political record. As Minister for Health in 2020, he presided over a health service which failed miserably to curb the COVID pandemic, while the coalition government put the interests of big business and profit above all.

He has signalled his intention to pull Fine Gael further to the right, outlining his committed support for more powers for An Garda Síochána (the police). He

also plans to roll back the numbers of asylum seekers claiming international protection in Ireland.

In what was described as a comprehensive account of his views last year, Harris called for a new social contract which “balances rights and responsibilities.” He continued, “If you work hard and play by the rules, the State will play its part too” and stressed that “your hard-earned money you pay in tax must be linked to the delivery of the services.”

The despised government Harris takes over may not see out its projected final year in office. None of the establishment parties, including Sinn Féin, offer a way out of the ravages of capitalism and the threat of US and European imperialist aggression and world war. Only the working class, united by a clear socialist programme, can secure the future for working people in Ireland in solidarity and cooperation with workers across Europe and internationally in the fight for a socialist United States of Europe.



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