

Socialist Worker

Another austerity budget...

LABOUR'S SHAME



THE Irish Labour Party was founded exactly one hundred years ago as a political organisation for working class people.

In less than *one hundred weeks*, Gilmore and his cronies have completely destroyed this legacy with a series of attacks that would have Larkin and Connolly turning in their graves.

Two years ago, Labour made much of the fact that they would use their mandate to blunt the reactionary edges of the blue shirts in Fine Gael.

In reality, Labour has implemented the government's right wing agenda with gusto, whilst pretending that they simply have no alternatives.

Last Wednesday saw the latest instalment in this rotten saga as minister for cuts, Brendan Howlin, informed the Dáil of a series of measures that will drive hundreds of thousands of Ireland's most vulnerable people further into poverty.

Almost every Irish worker will be forced to pay an extra €250 in a regressive increase in their PRSI contribution; the annual €300 back to education allowance will be completely axed, whilst €750 million will be cut from the nations health care services.

Even the right wing Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) has highlighted the disproportionate effects of this budget on the poor and the vulnerable, but within hours of their announcements, Labour ministers from Gilmore to Rabbitte were on the airwaves defending government choices.

Minister for Social Protection, Joan Bruton, even had the cheek to tell 170,000 struggling families that cuts to their back to school allowances would be manageable as "there is a lot of value to be had in the shops these days".

This is no doubt true for Labour backbenchers earning €92,000, and



"The government remains 100% committed to maintaining the 12.5% corporation tax rate. Even though this commitment has been stated numerous times it is worth repeating so there an be no doubt"

Minister for Finance, Micheal Noonan, leaves Irish workers in no doubt whose side he is really on in his budget day announcements.

their government ministers on almost double this amount (€170,000), but for struggling parents it is merely another sign that all of these ministers are out of touch and out of sympathy.

Hitting the vulnerable hardest

Labour has always prided itself on championing the rights of women

and children, but their actions have once again spoken louder than their words as they have slashed women's services across the board.

Maternity income, previously exempt will be brought into the tax net from July 2013, 600,000 families will also lose €10 from their children's allowance (with cuts of €18 and €20 for the third and fourth child respectively),

whilst the back to school clothing and footwear allowances will be cut by €50 per month.

Families with school going children are the group most likely to live in consistent poverty and chief executive of the Children's Alliance, Tanya Ward, has rightly denounced the cumulative nature of the governments cuts "which will devastate families across the country".

Carers attacked

Carers have also fared particularly badly with around 75,000 recipients losing €325 from an essential respite allowance that will leave many of them in dire poverty.

This is a particularly cruel move which will force families already struggling with disability to pay for vital services from their rapidly depleted incomes and it comes on the back of cuts to home care packages totalling almost one million hours over a twelve month period.

Resistance is the only option

Women and children, carers and the elderly, are all being made to suffer needless hardship with no end in sight.

Meanwhile fat cat politicians' and the bosses have gotten off Scott free as the government trots out the same old mantras about job creation and encouraging the private sector.

This sick joke has got to end.

But we can only hope to achieve this with a massive increase in civil disobedience and economic strikes.

Governments can only rule when people let them and it is time we imposed a government of the people, not the businessmen.

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HUNDREDS MEET TO DEFEND WOMEN'S RIGHTS



By MADELEINE JOHANSEN

ABOUT 200 people attended the first meeting of the new Pro-choice campaign in the Gresham Hotel in Dublin on Saturday 8 December.

Following angry protests in the past two months, the development of a large campaign is hugely positive.

The tragic death of Savita Halappanavar due to the lack of legal abortion in Ireland brought thousands of people out onto the streets and now hundreds are willing to get organised to campaign for women's rights.

The large protests have so far forced the Government to act, publishing an expert group report on abortion which strongly recommends legislation in line with the X-case.

Unless the pressure is kept up Fine Gael and Labour will be happy to prolong the process of legislating for as long as possible.

We cannot accept another Government brushing this issue under the carpet. It is necessary to continue the pressure (particularly on the Labour Party) to make sure that they legislate for X in the broadest way possible.

The Government is likely to attempt to make legislation extremely restrictive, perhaps even by removing the clause on suicide.

They want to be able to say to Fine Gael anti-choice supporters that they haven't legislated for abortion, while also being able to say to Labour Party supporters that they have legislated for X.

The only way to ensure the broadest legislation is to stay on the streets.

There was broad agreement at the meeting that we need to keep the pressure up in the coming period, as well as moving the campaign on towards repealing the 8th amendment when X case legislation is won.

The second part of the meeting was a brainstorming session where everyone could contribute ideas and suggestions for activities, actions and organisational ideas.

This was very energetic with some great discussions and suggestions.

Some of the ideas included linking up with trade unions, student unions and community groups, as well as street actions such as targeting Labour Party TD's clinics.

Over the next few months it is important that the campaign moves towards having large open meetings where concrete decisions are made, as well as a very organised centre, to be able to counter the anti-choice crowd with their big money and Catholic church support.

The campaign needs to be democratic and open to all. Members of political parties have played a huge part in building the campaign and supportive political parties should be welcomed, including having the right to distribute material.

The new campaign is a great step towards an all-Ireland co-ordinated Pro-Choice movement which can bring masses of people into the fight for abortion rights in Ireland.

This is what real trade unionism looks like

In the wake of a number of recent improvements Socialist Worker spoke to a number of Luas drivers about how they won.

How was your union organised before the most recent battle?

We were signed up to a closed shop agreement with SIPTU in 2004.

It contained a no strike clause and you had to be a member of SIPTU. At the time SIPTU was hemorrhaging members in Dublin airport and we were the guinea pigs for developing a closer relationship with employers.

We were locked into SIPTU for five years in a sweet heart deal.

So it was no surprise that the company did not take us seriously.

They paid lip service to our concerns and we got worse conditions than others in the transport industry.

In 2009, the no strike clause was removed but we were then locked into a crazy bureaucratic limbo land for dealing with disputes.

We had to go to the Labour Relations Commission and then back to an internal tribunal and then back again to the LRC and onto the Labour Court.

It took two years just to process our basic claims.



What were the main issues you were looking for?

The first was drivers' rosters. We had only a four week visibility – you did not know your shift pattern beyond that time frame, so you could not plan your life.

We wanted a better work-life balance and demanded 14 rest days.

The second was a reduction in the hours from nine hours to eight or eight and a half. The third was extra pay.

The issue of rosters is a difficult thing for non-drivers to understand. If you don't have a good roster system, it messes up your body clock.

You don't sleep properly and you suffer stress.

This was not helped by a company approach that tried to instil fear in the drivers as

a way of getting a high safety record.

What was your experience with the industrial relations procedures?

We kept coming up against ex-SIPTU cronies. At the Labour Court, the ex-SIPTU official Brendan Hayes, told us that we should not bother trying to reduce hours – but that we should work longer in order to get our rest days.

Then when we got back to the company's internal tribunal, we met another ex-SIPTU crony who was supposed to be the facilitator.

She came up with another miserable proposal which was rejected by 93% of our members in a ballot.

How did your own SIPTU officials act throughout

'The spirit, the character, the militant spirit, the fighting character of the organisation, was of the first importance. I believe that the development of the fighting spirit is of more importance than the creation of the theoretically perfect organisation.'

James Connolly on the fighting spirit

this conflict?

Terribly. All they did was spread defeatism.

Our official told us that Luas drivers were pussies who would not dare to take action.

Then he told us that if we went out the gate, we would achieve nothing.

We had to fight the official all the way.

What was the outcome of the battle?

We stuck to our guns and told the company that we would walk out the gate if they did not make concessions.

Eventually a manager from England came over and told us that there was only another €500,000 on the table to meet our claims.

But we told him we were determined to take action if

his offer was not improved. It was only then that some real concessions were made.

We got a cut in hours. We got a 40 week visibility – up to a year to plan exactly how your shift patterns would work.

We got twelve extra rest days and another day's annual leave for drivers who had been there for over ten years.

What have you learnt from this experience?

We need to get back to real trade unionism.

You had to stand up against the defeatism of SIPTU and face down company threats to withdraw our Christmas bonus – worth over €2,000.

The trade union movement as a whole needs to get back to its original traditions.

Protesting in Tralee and Cork

By KIERAN MCNULTY

OVER 100 protestors took to the streets of Tralee on Saturday 8 December.

The quick fire demo came four days after a successful People Before Profit meeting to organise the fight against austerity.

Having assembled in The Square marchers made their way to the constituency office of Arthur Spring TD (Labour) which is next door to the SIPTU office on Rock Street.

The march was initiated by People before Profit but also involved other groups including the Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes, members of the Kerry Network of People with Disabilities and members of the Kerry Carer's Association.

Siptu and Unite trade unions were also represented. Local independent Cllr. Sam Locke was also on the



protest. Arthur Spring, not surprisingly, was absent from his office but everyone on the march delivered a letter into

his office opposing the property tax. Also outside his office a number of people addressed the crowd on the issues of the thirty

percent cut in respite care, the home help service and the property tax.

Brian Finucane of People Before Profit echoed the general

consensus amongst the marchers that "only a general strike could bring about a reversal of the government's policy of cuts and charges".

NEWS IN BRIEF

Over 3,000 people marched through Cork against the property tax this weekend.

The size of the crowd is an indication of the opposition to both the household charge and the property tax.

Various speakers from the campaign addressed the crowd and the call for a General Strike was received with massive enthusiasm.

There really is the potential in the country to build up to a massive day of civil disobedience where all campaigns come together to shut the country down and take action against the cuts and charges.

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WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

Capitalism is wrecking the lives of millions and endangering the planet.

A new society can only be constructed when the workers take control of the wealth and plan its production and distribution for human need and not profit.

REVOLUTION

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed. The courts, the army and police exist to defend the interests of the wealthy.

To destroy capitalism, we need to remove the present state structures and create a workers' state based on much

greater political and economic democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

War is a constant feature of imperialism today as the imperialist powers try to dominate the earth.

The "War on Terrorism" is a crude device to attack any country which threatens US military, strategic or economic dominance.

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

We oppose all forms of oppression and racism. This divides and weakens the

working class.

We are for full social, economic and political equality for women.

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

We stand for workers unity against the Assembly politicians and Cameron government.

Like great socialist James Connolly, we believe that partition has brought about a 'carnival of reaction'

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To win socialism socialists need to organise in a revolutionary party.

This party needs to argue against right-wing ideas and for overthrowing the system.

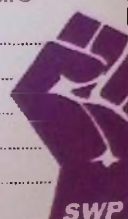
We call for co-operation between left-wing parties and the formation of a strong socialist bloc.

We stand for fighting trade unions and far independent rank and file action.

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1913-2013: Bring the spirit of struggle back to the unions

2013 is the anniversary of the great lock out when thousands of union members fought the vile employer William Martin Murphy.

It will be commemorated this year against a background of economic crisis and new questions about the role of unions today.

Union Militancy

One hundred years ago, the Irish Transport and General Workers Union was led by two revolutionary socialists, James Connolly and Jim Larkin. Their aim was the destruction of capitalism and they encouraged workers to use the most militant tactics to advance their day to day aims.

Connolly summed up their attitudes as follows: 'No consideration of a contract with a section of the capitalist class absolved any of us from the duty of taking instant action to protect other sections when said section was in danger from the capitalist enemy.'

In other words, break agreements with employers when there is a need to show solidarity with other workers. He argued that permanent victory for workers was an 'illusionary hope' until capitalism was ended. So militant trade unionism and socialist politics went hand in hand.

This marvelous revolutionary attitude enabled Connolly and Larkin to organise the most down-trodden, casual workers in Europe. Today, there are academics who debate the issue of how the 'precariat' – the temporary, casual workers of 21st century capitalism – can be organized. Yet Connolly and Larkin had the answer one hundred years ago – through solidarity and militancy.

SIPTU Pigmies

Jack O' Connor and David Begg are pygmies compared to Connolly and Larkin. But they flatter themselves with a claim that muscle and brawn was required in 1913 but 'brains' and intelligence are used today.

The record tells an entirely different story. During the two decades of social partnership, union density fell from 61 percent of the workforce in 1985 to 32 percent in 2007. Worse, participation in union meetings dropped calamitously and the activist core of the unions was severely weakened.

When the economic crisis started, the unions were dominated by a layer of mainly middle aged men who had been schooled in a philosophy of defeatism and encouraged to form 'partnerships' with their employers.

Above them was a layer of full time officials who looked to the Labour Party and worked as time servers with little passion for advancing working class struggle.

This helps to explain why Irish workers were singularly ill-equipped to deal with the assault on their wages and conditions that the employers unleashed after 2007.

Croke Park

But worse was to follow. Instead of seeking to re-build a spirit of resistance, the union leaders entered a Croke Park agreement that tore up the concessions they had won in the past. Alongside that, leaders like O' Connor advocated greater support for the Labour Party.

In 2013, we need a change of direction – and that means a massive fight to uproot the current union leadership.

They want token mobilisations to get enough leverage to enter another Croke Park agreement. Should they succeed, workers will be forced to do longer hours, accept more outsourcing and see their conditions worsened further.

We have to make sure that an alternative strategy emerges. This has to start with promoting the idea of a 24 hour general strike against austerity and payments to bond holders. There also has to be a complete break from the Labour Party by withdrawing all financial support to this party and an end to their dominance of leadership positions.

Our aim must be to re-build our unions as fighting organisation that are infused by the traditions of Connolly and Larkin.

The crisis for women in Irish society

By NICHOLA HARVEY

IT'S worth going back 30 years for a moment to remember Sheila Hodgers. In March 1983 the young Dundalk mother-of-two died in agony at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda two days after giving premature birth to a baby girl.

She had become unexpectedly pregnant while receiving treatment for a recurrent cancer. The hospital refused to allow her to continue with her treatment because of the pregnancy. Her husband Brendan asked variously for an abortion, early delivery of the baby or a Caesarean section. All were refused because she was pregnant.

The baby, at seven months gestation, died a few hours after birth. "By then Sheila had tumours everywhere – on her neck, her legs, her spine," Mr Hodgers told journalist Pdraig Yeates. She died two days after her daughter.

Three decades and numerous Labour administrations later and nothing has really changed.

The Labour Party have always prided themselves in standing up for women, but with Labour in government another year has ended with women's bodies being the subject of public discussions as to whether they have a right to life that is greater than that of a 17 week-old foetus.

Labour's Pain

Moreover, the latest Budget has been a most ruthless attack on women, much of it coming from the Department of Social Protection under Labour Minister Joan Burton.

At least €1,000 will be sucked out of the household income of an average family. Maternity benefit is to also be taxed from next year in a direct attack on working women. Up to now mothers on maternity leave did not have to pay tax on the social welfare payments they get for the 26 weeks they get to spend with their new-borns.

This will all change under a Labour administration and child benefit is also being cut by €10 a month for the first and second children, €18 for the third and €20 for the fourth and subsequent children.

Back-to-school allowances will be slashed by up to 33 per cent per child, with the rate for primary pupils down from €150 to €100 and the rate for secondary pupils down from €250 to €200. Respite care grant for carers has been savaged by 30 per cent.

Wherever we look it seems that Labour are content the continue the



policies of their right wing masters and beyond the economic issues Irish women are still being treated as objects to be controlled by the State

Controlling the Victims

A perfect example of this was the case that broke in April when four women who had pregnancies with complications leading to "foetal abnormalities incompatible with life", went public about having been forced to travel to England to have abortions.

They had been planned and wanted pregnancies and to have to travel for such a heartbreaking procedure was, said one of the women Ruth Bowie "cruel".

"The system should warp its arms around you," she said "Instead it turns its back on you."

Move forward to October and we witnessed the horrible spectacle of protests outside the Marie Stopes International clinic, which on 18 October became the first private clinic on the island to provide abortion services.

And throughout the year we have heard constant lecturing at women about what we can and can't do

while pregnant. – watching your weight while pregnant 'can be beneficial' (May); working late in pregnancy 'harms baby' (July) one glass of wine a week could damage baby's IQ (November).

Savita Halappanavar

Finally we come to 14 November, the moment when the world first laid eyes on the radiant face of Savita Halappanavar.

The picture of the 31 year-old woman, on the front page of that morning's *Irish Times*, catapulted Irish women's wombs back to the top of the political and social agenda with all the inevitable ugliness and opportunism of three decades earlier.

She had been 17 weeks pregnant when she presented at Galway University Hospital on 21 October.

Her husband Praveen tells how, having been diagnosed as miscarrying, she asked a day later for a termination.

He tells how this was refused because there was a foetal heartbeat present and this was "a Catholic country". We have heard lengthy debates about whether her cervix was fully dilated and when her

womb contents were evacuated.

The real issue comes down to who controls a woman's body. Savita asked for a termination and that is exactly what she should have been given.

After all, how can any woman truly control her own life when her body is up for the most intimate of public discussions?

Our bodies are our bodies for us to choose how, what and when anything should happen to them.

If this was a reality, such discussions would never have to take place.

Savita Halappanavar, like Sheila Hodgers, delivered a baby girl who died. Days later, like Sheila Hodgers, she died too.

As Emily O'Reilly wrote of the Hodgers case in her seminal 1992 text *Masterminds of the Right*: "The rights of both could not have been more finely balanced. Mother and baby had died."

In a socialist world where women have control over their bodies both of these tragic victims may well be alive today.

This is why the fight for emancipation must be done by all working people for the benefit of all.

BUDGET SPECIAL

On Wednesday 5 December the Labour/Fine Gael government unleashed a sixth consecutive austerity budget on the Irish people. Next year €3.5 billion will be sucked out of the Irish economy. This is on top of the €24 billion that has previously been taken and when one considers that none of the previous cuts have been reversed we are talking about a level of adjustment that has only been matched in Greece. Here Socialist Worker outlines some of the key provisions within the budget as well as looking at a number of key areas that will dominate economically over the next twelve months.

Budget drives people to resist

The budget at a glance

By SARA O' ROURKE

BUDGET 2013 was announced by the government as a budget that would grow the economy and create jobs.

However just as before, people already struggling with poverty, and in many cases, hunger, will bear the brunt of the cutbacks while the wealthy once again get away Scot free.

The Cuts

Among the most severe cuts are (1) 600,000 families losing €10 per month per child. This will mean a cut of €38 per month if you have three children and €58 if you have four as the cuts significantly increase after two children.

(2) 77,000 carer's relying on respite care will lose €325 per year (3) The back to school clothing and footwear allowance will be cut by €50 per month

(4) The exceptional needs payment - a cut for people in dire straits, telephone and electricity allowances will all be cut.

The Hikes

Among the most important hikes are (1) A tax on the family home which will cost between €325 and €585 for the average house every year.

(2) A PRSI increase: This means people will lose €20 per month from pay-packets if they earn above €18,000 whilst, anyone who earns above the minimum wage will pay an extra €264 a year.

(3) Maternity benefit: The state maternity benefits which average €217 a week will be taxed.

(4) Motor Tax: The cost of taxing a car will increase by up to 25 per cent next year, depending on the age and emissions standards of the car.

(5) The 'Drug Payment Scheme' threshold is being increased from €132 to €144 per month. This will hit the old and vulnerable especially hard.

(6) The prescription charge for Medical Card holders is being increased from 50 cent to €1.50 per item, and the monthly cap for a family is being increased from €10 to €19.50.

The alternative

The government could have avoided all the pain they inflicted on ordinary people with two simple measures - enforcing the 12.5% corporate tax rate as an effective rate on super-profitable companies and introducing a progressive sliding scale of new effective income tax rates on those earning over €100,000.

Instead they hit vulnerable people with disabilities, their carer's, and low and middle income families struggling with mortgages, debt and rising costs.



By TINA Mc VEIGH and CONOR MCKINNEY (outside the Dáil on budget night)

NUMEROUS reports have now come out confirming the social devastation that goes under the name of austerity.

According to the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC report) for example, almost 25% of Irish people are now living in some form of poverty with 200,000 children condemned to live without the resources they need to develop.

This budget is likely to drive many of these people over the edge, as Socialist Worker found on Wednesday night as the dreaded cuts were being announced.

Teresa Cummins from Limerick told SW that although she is 72 she felt she had to come to Dublin to show her "rage against the slow destruction of her son's marriage because of unemployment".

His wife has been forced to move back to Estonia with their three year old son and she despairs about

losing her grandson.

Dessie Routledge from Phibsboro in Dublin "reckons that this Government is worse than the FF/Green coalition because incompetence has been replaced by ideology."

He told SW that "Fine Gael relish the chance to hurt low income families", whilst "Gilmore and his 'lot' are only interested in power & not 'real' Labour people" he finished by saying that "workers need to find a way to replace the Trade Union leadership as they are effectively agents of the Govt."

Elaine Wall and Tricia Earl from Tipperary said it was the "household charge that brought us up today, but it's also terrible that they have increased the prescription charges.

"We were listening to the budget but had to turn it off because we were getting so angry".

Paula from Rathfarnham was also extremely angry at the property tax and the increase in PRSI, whilst Catriona Fitzgerald from Cabra argued that

"These cuts affect every citizen, we need solidarity. This budget is about undermining pay and working conditions. I have come in solidarity. I am angered by the cuts and tired of feeling despondent, we have to fight".

Kim Williams from Tallaght also argued that "people need to make a stand - we need to smash the gates of the Dáil. I would if I was unemployed.

"We are bowing down to Europe. Rabbinette even admitted it recently"

Dolores Fitzsimmons from Dunlaire told us that she "didn't agree with any of it, the household or the property tax. They are bleeding us dry", whilst Lesley Byrne also from Dunlaire captured the general mood when he said he was "against the household tax and the government... No point in reform, just smash the whole lot and bring in workers councils!

"We should be charging the Dáil. I'm on widows' pension and I haven't paid the household tax. This budget is an attack on everybody who is working class or living in poverty".

Property taxes on the family home confirmed

By BRIAN O' BOYLE

AT the start of the year activists in the CAHWI warned people that the €100 household charge would be the teaser rate to build a property registrar.

The government, prompted by the Troika, had already admitted as much, and now the dreaded home tax has been announced.

Currently there are around 160,000 mortgages in some form of distress (22%) with another 400,000 in what is known as negative equity.

Around half (85,000) of those in arrears have not been able to pay anything for more than 90 days.

But unperturbed, the government has still sought to ram through a tax on peoples homes.

The context

Between 1999 and 2008 the Irish banks were responsible for driving the cost of houses through the roof, as they pumped hundreds of billions into the property market.

This effectively forced people to bid



against each other as prices exploded and the banks cleaned up with massive profits.

Since the crash the banks have been bailed out with €65 billion of tax-payers money without any obligation to reciprocate for mortgage holders.

This means that the inflated property prices will all have to be paid back, whilst all of the negative equity

will be covered by the borrower.

The tax

In to this crazy picture the government have thrown a tax that will cost householders between €350 and €550 per annum.

All this for the privilege of living in assets they rarely own!

Labour has argued that this is a progressive tax as it charges those

with the most expensive properties proportionately more.

The reality is that the vast burden will fall on low and middle income households as 76% of Irish adults currently hold mortgages on their family homes.

According to the League of Credit Unions around 1.8 million people already have less than €100 at the end of the month.

If this tax is imposed this will leave them with no disposable income for half the year and incredibly vulnerable to any unforeseen crisis in their family finances.

The alternative

Like Labour we are all for a tax on the property of the rich, but instead of levying it on families homes. Socialist Worker calls for a tax on the billions stashed away in stocks, shares and corporate bonds.

This would be a real property tax on the assets of the wealthy.

Precisely why the 'sham progressives' in the Labour Party would never go for it.

How do we get a General Strike?

In the wake of co-ordinated strikes across Europe, Socialist Worker speaks to the Kieran Allen, National Secretary of the SWP, about the steps needed to achieve a General Strike in Ireland



Question - At the 24 November anti-austerity protest, there was a cry for a general strike. When an Irish Congress of Trade Unions representative was introduced, he was met with boos and calls for 'Strike, Strike, Strike'. What do you think this all signifies?

We are moving to a very different phase of resistance. We have arrived at a tipping point that ushers in a new dynamic.

Over the last few months, there has been a slow accumulation of protests, with about 80,000 people demonstrating in November.

Now a sudden qualitative change is occurring. November's protest was a sign that we have already reached - or are about to reach - this decisive change.

The march itself was organised by a coalition that brought together the Dublin Council of Trade Unions, the Spectacle of Defiance and community organisations who are fighting the cuts, and the Campaign against Household and Water Charges.

Unity was needed to raise the confidence of new activists and to show how there could be a 'joining of the dots' between different aspects of the resistance.

The cry for a general strike was the logical outcome of this.

Everyone knows that the government is attacking us on many fronts and using 'divide and rule' tactics to pick one off and then another.

It worked for a long period as people fell for arguments about public sector versus private sector, rural versus urban, social welfare recipients versus workers.

From a ruling class point of view, the *Irish Independent* played a blinder in both expressing the outrage of society and focussing it on the political elite and the public sector - rather than the corporate elite.

But now people are learning that we have to fight on many fronts and that we are too weak to take on this government alone.

You will not save a local hospital, for example,

by pleading a special case because the government is determined to sit out even the biggest march in local towns.

You need to escalate the action beyond marching and to link up with other struggles.

The cry for a general strike represented a growing awareness of this.

We need to make one qualification, however. The march on 24 November was mainly composed of the new networks of resistance. It brought together thousands of people from anti-household charges campaigns or local communities or union committees.

But it was still not a mass mobilisation of hundreds of thousands.

It showed that a significant minority of activists have been won to the idea of a general strike. But they can get a hearing for this idea from many, many more.

Question - Immediately after the march, Jack O'Connor denounced the hecklers as 'fascists'. But a few weeks later, the ICTU announced that they were calling a day of mobilisation on Saturday 9 February. What do you make of this?

Union leaders like O'Connor live in a cocoon. The official union structures are dominated by Labour Party hacks - even though the party is in free fall among the mass of manual workers.

They have close ties to the political establishment and they deliberately spread defeatism and demoralisation as a way of de-mobilising resistance.

O'Connor's petulant attack reflected an outrage that union leaders are being challenged for their inactivity.

But his stupid insult had a more devious purpose. He wanted to break the emerging unity between a section of the union movement and the more militant household charges campaign.

The sudden ICTU call for mobilisation on 9 February is contradictory.

Union leaders like O'Connor are terrified

that thousands see him as a Labour Party hack who puts loyalty to his party above the need to organise a real fight. So the pressure exerted on 24 November, has pushed ICTU into calling a mobilisation. They want to be seen to do something, particularly with another round of negotiations for Croke Park coming.

However, the other side to this is that the union leaders are trying to get ahead of a growing mood of anger and direct it back into safe channels. So the demonstration is on a Saturday rather than a working day. And it is framed as an opposition to EU policies, as if we must strengthen the negotiating hand of our government during its Presidency of the EU.

Question - Does that mean you do not fully support these protests?

Quite the contrary. Socialists should be the most enthusiastic builders of the protests on 9 February. But we need to raise the idea of a general strike against the Irish government as the core issue of the demonstration.

The Labour Party leadership of the union will do everything they can to stop this.

They will claim that 24 hour general strikes are illegal and can never happen.

But this is nonsense because there is nothing to stop them calling a demonstration during working hours and urging workers to join in.

They did it during the Irish Ferries dispute - and they can do it again on a larger scale.

So we have to take these debates to the thousands of workers who will participate on the 9 February demonstration.

Question - The 31st of March is the day when another €3.1 billion payment must be made to cover the debts of the former Anglo-Irish Bank. Socialist Worker has been calling for a national shut down of the country before that date. How do you think this could happen and how does it fit in with your call for a general strike?

People are furious with the fact that most of the money raised in Budget 2013 will be used to pay off the Anglo-debts and they rightly want action.

We need a People's Assembly to promote the idea of a day of mass peaceful civil disobedience before this payment is made.

There is no better time to do it than when Ireland holds the Presidency of the EU.

Such an assembly should bring together all the forces who want to fight austerity and name a specific date for mass civil disobedience.

A comparison between Spain and Ireland is interesting here.

Before 2011, there were discussions about 'why are the Spanish not like the Greeks' and a lot of demoralisation.

The log jam was broken when a coalition of anti-housing eviction groups and others called on people to join in mass sit downs on 15 May 2011.

After the police tried to move the big sit downs in Madrid, eight million people joined demonstrations and the atmosphere changed decisively.

The anger of the streets fed into a revival of grassroots militancy in the unions.

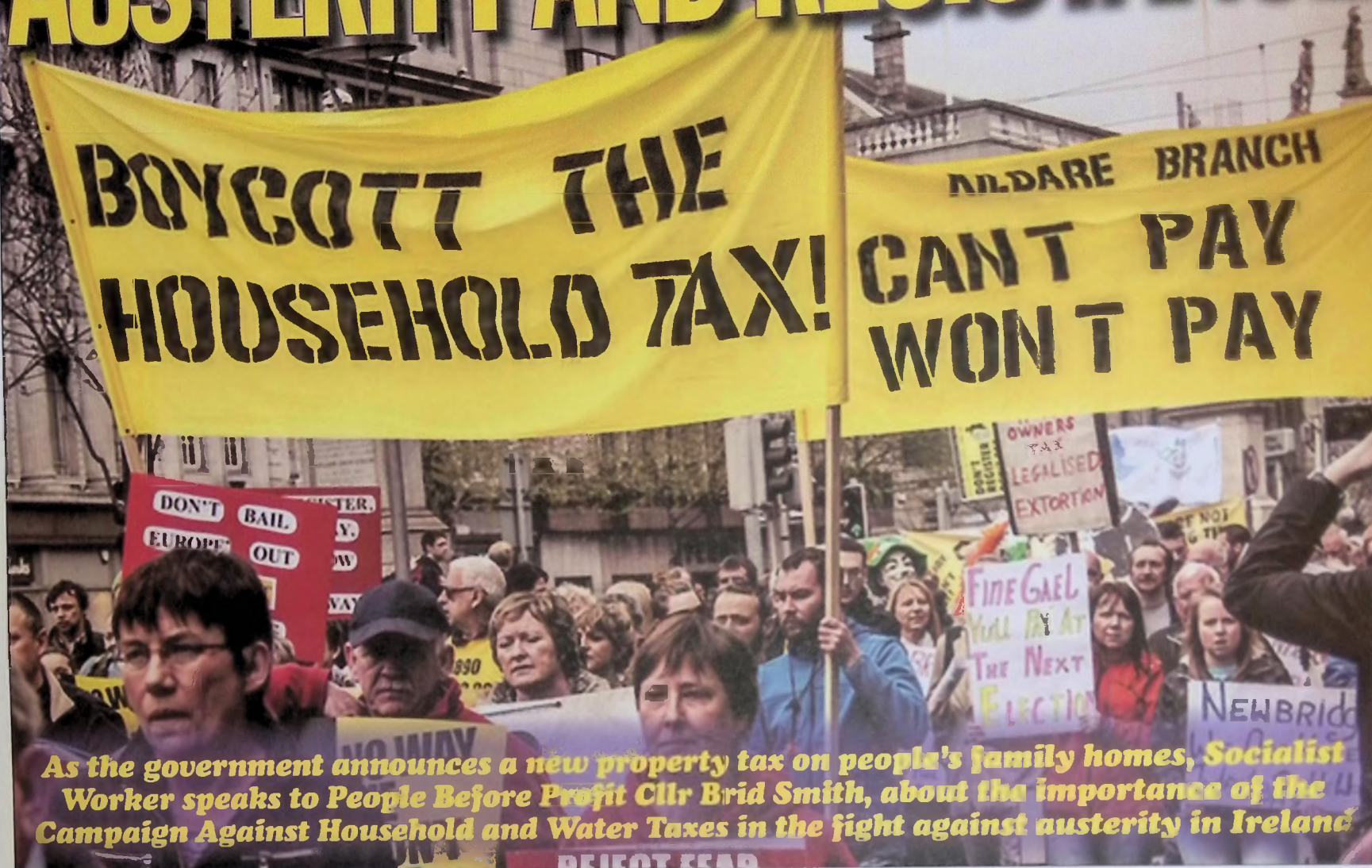
This has led to a new period of resistance, with Spanish unions being forced into calling a general strike.

We need a similar event in Ireland to become a focal point of all resistance - and the payment of the €3.1 billion promissory note provides ample justification.

If momentum for a shut down develops in the coming months and leads on to further mass protests on 1 May when the new property charge is being introduced, this can inspire workers to take strike action when the Revenue Commissioners move to rob their pay packets of money to pay the hated home tax.

The stakes are high in the coming year. Socialists should be to the fore in pressing for maximum unity to bring about a national shut down as the first step to mass strike action against the property taxes.

AUSTERITY AND RESISTANCE



As the government announces a new property tax on people's family homes, Socialist Worker speaks to People Before Profit Cllr Brid Smith, about the importance of the Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes in the fight against austerity in Ireland

Question - The achievements of the Campaign Against the Household and Water Taxes has been gained by a number of means, but are there some key political factors that have been central to its success?

Yes I think so. Firstly, the population of this country has been bitterly disappointed by the trade union leaders who have utterly failed to mount any meaningful opposition to the Great Bank Robbery (or Bail Out) and the subsequent austerity.

The ICTU leaders marched workers up the hill and down again, only to pacify resistance and guarantee industrial peace through Croke Park. And all the time giving cover to the Labour Party of which they are all members.

This has meant that when given an opportunity and a well-organised lead through CAHW, masses of people enthusiastically backed the call for a boycott of the Household Charge. This was the first real chance people had to vent their anger against the government and against austerity and the first time they could refuse to pay for the bank bail out. Hence the massive boycott that has been a major success.

Secondly, the campaign got organised in a real and serious way from early on. With nine TD's and dozens of local councillors willing to openly advocate the boycott campaign and thereby break the law, this gave confidence, focus and a framework for dozens of towns and villages to get organised, join the campaign, build local committees, organise local resistance and most importantly, link into a national apparatus and campaign that was capable of bringing tens of thousands onto the streets in the biggest demonstrations for over two years.

I think having a focus on big national events and protests has really helped to gel and grow this campaign both quantitatively and qualitatively. A new layer of working class leaders has emerged in almost every town and county, creating a grassroots campaign that is well organised and well connected.

Question - The key in this campaign seems to be the community-based activist groups that have mushroomed throughout the country. From Donegal to Dingle there have been scores of public meetings and protests in the last year. Do you think this grassroots element has been important?

Absolutely. Around the country there has been a simple recipe for success and that is to book a venue, advertise



Cllr Brid Smith

aggressively, sign people up, organise a local activist group and advertise follow up meetings.

Then get out there and get visible. Many areas have their own ways of building, but broadly speaking the most common activities are stalls on the streets, knocking door-to-door, leafleting big local events, organising local pickets and marches, protests outside Fine Gael and Labour clinics, fundraising events etc.

I think all of this local work has given people a sense of their own power, but it is also very important to link it all together nationally.

This element when linked to the local stuff has really helped to build the confidence of activists around the country. They know they are part of something bigger than just their own town or village.

They know that there is an organisation that can politically articulate their anger and hopes.

They know they have a voice and that the campaign has bottom up democratic structures. They know that this campaign can organise big, vibrant, significant events. They know that this campaign has linked in

with other anti austerity groups, that it has some influence in the unions through the activists and that many of the activists have tons of experience of organising in similar campaigns, like the water charges, in the past. We know that we are being successful since the budget announcement has forced the Revenue to collect a family home tax they originally hoped would be voluntarily paid by citizens. This is a real measure of the campaign's success.

Question - Speaking of the new tax announced on the family home, does this mean that the campaign will have to generalise into an anti austerity campaign with a focus on property?

The government is trying its best to frighten the living day-lights out of people but there is a cumulative effect of all the austerity which is creating a real sense of outrage.

I believe this will lead to even more determined opposition to the property tax as people are becoming increasingly politicised by attempts to implement austerity. I think that the activists in the property tax campaign who have learned so much about how to organise in the local communities will play a major role in building a wider and more general anti-austerity movement in Ireland.

People who have to pay property tax are also carers, parents, potential mothers, workers, students and their families who are being hit left, right and centre by the measures in this budget.

This will form the basis of a social movement linked into this campaign and built to fight the government on a range of social issues.

However we are also absolutely determined to maintain the boycott against this tax with support from at least 600,000 households.

This is a tax on the family home and not on an asset. They are still relying on self-registration and we encourage people to continue to boycott that process.

Indeed we want everyone, even if they registered for the Household Charge to get stuck into this boycott. The aim is to make it unworkable for the State.

How can they implement a self-declared tax if more than half the population is defying them? How can they implement a difficult and complex system if they are getting rid of so many workers out of the public sector?

And don't forget they will soon come up against the power of organised workers. Already the CPSU has vowed to take action if Revenue deducts this tax from any of their members so we've a long way to go

and the battle is really only starting.

Question - Finally Brid what advice can you give to any of our readers who are anxious to get involved in the struggle?

Immediately we need to get feet on the streets. This means socialists taking the lead and trying to agitate for local activity that can then become nationally focused.

For example, when the Dáil sits to vote on the legislation for this property tax we need to be outside in big numbers. Wherever there is an opportunity for protest we need to take it. In Limerick, Donegal, Tralee, Waterford and Cork there have been thousands on the streets over the past few weeks. Mass civil disobedience must escalate but this won't happen without organisation.

The national campaign has agreed to organise a major rally for activists from all over the country in Dublin on 12 January. We aim to get four to five hundred activists there.

We will hold a broad discussion on the budget and specifically on how to build resistance to wider austerity.

There are already a number of proposals to hold a Peoples Assembly that involves all anti austerity campaigns, to work towards a shut down nationally when the government attempts to pay over the next €3.1 billion of our money at the end of March.

We intend to participate in large numbers on the ICTU protests already called for all major towns and cities in February. But the ICTU demands do not go far enough so we want to push the property tax high on the agenda since the majority of trade union members will be hit very hard by this tax.

We recognise that this tax will be resisted by a boycott that is linked into mass civil disobedience and national strikes that will shut the country down, as workers did in fighting the PAYE tax in the 1980's. That is the style and scale of resistance required. Either the property tax goes or this government goes. Hopefully it will be both.

There is a proposal to make May Day a day of mass mobilisation and a marker for the boycott element of the campaign. This will give confidence to thousands of families who worry about the penalties linked to this legislation. We have time and organisation. We have determination and a population that is mad as hell.

In January we have to get our local committees revitalised, starting with pressure on local politicians particularly in the Labour Party. So I'm looking forward to a fighting New Year.

EGYPT:

The Revolution Deepens

By JOHN MOLYNEUX

OVER recent weeks the Egyptian Revolution which took place in early February 2011 has deepened and intensified.

On 22 November President Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood issued a constitutional declaration giving himself and the army massive powers—including the ability to dissolve parliament and announce martial law.

This provoked a massive explosion of protest on the streets.

People felt their revolution was being hijacked by Morsi who was trying to make himself into a new dictator.

Hundreds of thousands returned again to Tahrir Square and marched in many other cities including Alexandria.

However, the Muslim Brotherhood, unlike Mubarak, has a mass base and Morsi supporters have also mobilized on the streets.

So far the mobilisations by the Islamists have not been as large as those by the revolutionaries but there have been intense clashes.

When anti-Morsi protestors went to the Presidential Palace (outside Cairo) there was a serious battle in which lives were lost on both sides and many were injured.

At one point the police withdrew and Morsi fled the Palace.

On Friday 7 December demonstrators returned to the Palace in even greater



numbers and broke through heavy barbed wire security barriers to lay siege to it.

Meanwhile Muslim Brotherhood Party Offices in Cairo, Alexandria and elsewhere were set on fire.

Mounting economic crisis

This whole conflict takes place against a background of mounting economic crisis in which Morsi needs IMF backing and is planning cuts and austerity, while there

is also a rising tide of strikes—there were over 1000 in September alone.

However the situation is not simple. The most prominent force in the anti-Morsi revolt is the National Salvation

Front headed by Hamdeen Sabahi, a Nasserite (Arab nationalist) who polled 5 million votes in the presidential election.

Sabahi was a veteran opponent of Mubarak and leans to the left, but in the Front he is also collaborating with what the Egyptians call 'feloul', or 'remnants' of the old regime who are trying to make a comeback.

This is very dangerous. The Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists are in the forefront of the demonstrations but also striving to keep the 'feloul' out of the movement.

They are fighting to ensure that the massive polarisation of Egyptian society occurs on class lines rather than secularism versus Islam and this is having some success as religious workers, Christians and sections of the poor join the demonstrations.

As *Socialist Worker* goes to press things stand on a knife edge.

Morsi is vacillating between concessions and repression with the aid of the army.

It is not possible now to know the outcome of this phase in the revolution but the decisive factor is probably if and how the workers in the factories move.

So far many workers have joined the revolt as individuals but, apart from a magnificent march by 5000 in the textile workers town of Mahalla, not yet as a collective organised force.

This would be a crucial next step and one the Revolutionary Socialists are working to bring about.

Banks loot Greece again with bailout that hands them €26bn

by PANOS GARGANAS in Athens



THE new bailout agreement with Greece amounts to looting.

It has been made conditional on a new "haircut" on government bonds that will mean further cuts to people's pensions.

These were already cut back with the last agreement in March. One estimate says they could have dropped in value from €22 billion to just €6 billion in ten months.

And of the €40 billion that Greece has been promised, €26 billion goes to the banks. It is a straight exchange—bailing out bankers at the expense of pensioners.

This bailout is accompanied by attacks that were voted through the Greek parliament last month. There was a huge general strike on the day.

The first of the new measures was mass redundancies in local government and universities. Workers have been occupying personnel departments to make that



impossible. They are demonstrating twice a week.

And an official convention of mayors from across Greece voted to oppose the government measures and plan to demonstrate this week.

Athens protest

Rank and file workers from other cities facing cuts came to Athens to protest on Friday of last week. The health union backed the protest at the last minute. Athens health workers also joined protesters.

There's big pressure on the unions to coordinate. Public sector unions are expected to call a coordinated strike soon—and approach private sector unions to join them in a general strike.

The government is also expected to have to reshuffle after the haircut is finalised, to resolve a new political crisis.

The government is struggling to hold itself together. The Labour-type Pasok party is splitting. One of its leading MPs has set up a new group.

The coalition government is worried because Pasok is necessary to keep a government majority.

And the fascist Golden Dawn has been pushed onto the defensive in many areas. It is a small organisation that has been trying to build on the huge vote it won in elections this year.

Golden Dawn has also gone up in the polls (to around 12.5%), but it has had spectacular

BACK STORY

Economic and political crisis is sweeping Greece

- A number of bailouts have failed to stem the crisis—it has grown
- These bailouts protect the banks while imposing cuts on workers
- Workers have staged a number of general strikes against austerity
- Pressure is growing on unions to coordinate more action against the cuts

failures in recent weeks. Counter-demonstrations ruined a tour of Nazi MPs in Crete and a demonstration against immigrants in Athens.

Next Saturday well-known anti-racists from France and Italy are coming to join a silent march against Golden Dawn through Athens.

That can be a step towards a much larger demonstration and concert on 19 January that will be anything but silent.

Panos Garganas is the editor of *Workers Solidarity*, *Socialist Worker's* sister paper in Greece

NEWS IN BRIEF

Pre-trial hearing held for US army private Bradley Manning

AFTER more than 900 days in custody US army private Bradley Manning finally got to testify at his army pre-trial hearing in Maryland last week.

He is charged with leaking more than 250,000 diplomatic cables and classified documents to Julian Assange's WikiLeaks website.

Manning was tortured in detention. His lawyers argue that the charges against him should be dropped because of his treatment.

Manning says he will plead guilty to sending files to WikiLeaks, if other charges are dropped. He could face up to 16 years in prison for the leaks.

But if the additional charge of "aiding the enemy" is added he could face life. Manning's court-martial is set for March next year.

Clinton visits Dublin. Protest blocked

ON 6-7 December Dublin hosted the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe). It was attended by Hilary Clinton and many other Foreign ministers including from Britain, Russia and Israel.

The OSCE is supposed to be concerned with human rights but the Conference proved unable to come up with any agreed declaration on human rights. This is hardly surprising as many of the participants, not least Clinton, are busily engaged in violating the rights of their own people (see above) and others such as Palestinians, Afghans and so on.

Jim Roche, of the Irish Anti-War Movement, said it was "deeply ironic that Ireland, as a neutral country, should be hosting such a collection of warmongers and abusers of human rights".

To add to the irony the small protest organized by the IAWM on Thursday evening was forcibly prevented by the garda from marching up Dame St either on the road or the pavement even though notice had been given and the road was not closed. Once again shame on Eamon Gilmour!

Rifts open up over Israel

ISRAEL has said it will restart its illegal settlement building programme in the West Bank, despite being condemned by United Nations (UN) members.

Israel launched a brutal attack on Palestinians in Gaza last month.

It killed 153 Palestinians in bombing raids, including children.

Israel is now keen to assert

itself.

But criticism of Israel is growing, even among some of its oldest allies.

The UN general assembly voted overwhelmingly to compel Israel to accept nuclear inspectors on Tuesday of this week.

Only Israel, the US, Canada and three tiny island kingdoms in the Pacific voted against.

Socialist Worker

No to sectarian riots and protests...

WE NEED TO FIGHT TOGETHER

BELFAST and other parts of the North have been gripped by protests, riots and road-blocks orchestrated by Loyalists paramilitaries.

What initially began with 1000 protesters gathering outside Belfast City Hall to voice opposition at the reduction of days the Union flag is to be flown over the building quickly escalated into riots across the city with at least 20 police left injured.

Protests have spilled over into the Catholic short strand area, with homes and the local church attacked.

The Alliance Party has seen several of its offices burnt out along with attacks on councilor's homes, and a death threat against its East Belfast MP Naomi Long.

Most people in the North do not want to see a return to this kind of activity, where paramilitary organizations can bring the place to a complete halt and leave many people living in fear.

So what's causing all this?

On the face of it, the trouble seems to be about flying a flag. In reality the anger goes much deeper.

Since the peace process, Loyalism has argued that their 'community' has been left behind.

Of course working class Protestants have been left behind by Stormont and gained nothing from supporting the Unionist parties who claim to represent them.



Above: Hope; Below: Despair



But so have working class Catholics, the unemployed, students and most other people. Loyalism uses the real anger in working class areas to point the blame at Catholics, using bigotry to mobilize people on the streets.

Loyalism claims Protestants are losing out because Catholics/Republicans are doing better. This was used as a mobilizing point for the Ulster Covenant centenary commemoration and the rioting this September in North Belfast around St. Patrick's Church.

Words like "Identity" or "cultural erosion" are used to rally people out on the streets and whip up fear to defend a flag which never gave a damn about working class people.

Loyalism uses the real anger in working class areas over unemployment, poverty and an uncertain future to target the "Catholic Community".

The mainstream unionist parties are attempting to present themselves as mediators between Nationalist politicians and the Loyalist mob on the streets.

However the fact is that the DUP and UUP are directly responsible for what has happened over the past few weeks.

Not just because they are leading an Executive that is failing working class people. But also, because of their distribution of 40,000 leaflets drumming up support for the Union flag to remain outside the City Hall and sticking the boot into the Alliance party.

The DUP is deeply unpopular in areas across Belfast and is trying to claw back support in the constituency where Robinson lost his seat three years ago to the Alliance party's Naomi Long.

The way the debate exploded in the city council is a direct product of the Belfast Agreement, which at its heart is about respecting the 'two traditions'.

This has re-cemented segregation and division into life and politics in the North. It assumes that people have an interest in being divided and following whichever "tradition".

Not Green or Orange - Red

The task for Socialists over the next period is to take a principled and unequivocal stand against the sectarian protests and riots over the past period.

We should argue for the trade unions to stand up and speak out and organise a March Against Sectarianism, getting people on the streets to show their opposition to recent events.

Huge cuts are about to be implemented, having a devastating effect on the young, poor, pensioners and working people.

We need politics which unites people and fights over these issues.

If we don't we will have a greater increase in sectarianism, whilst the brutal cuts are pushed through.

Sectarianism can only be challenged when people stand up and fight together.