

Editorial

The Great People's Revolt

The radicalisation of the Irish working class is developing apace. As we have argued in previous editorials it was already evident in the 2011 General Election which saw the decimation of Fianna Fáil and the beginnings of inroads for the United Left Alliance. It developed further at the so-called 'revolution at the ballot box' in this year's local and European elections with the collapse of the Labour vote, the rise of Sinn Féin, the election of 15 People Before Profit councillors and 14 for the Anti-Austerity Alliance plus a strong vote for the hard left in the Euros and a win for Ruth Coppinger of the Socialist Party in the Dublin West by-election. This has been confirmed by the result of the recent by-election (to replace Brian Hayes) in Dublin South West where Paul Murphy of the Anti-Austerity Alliance scored an upset victory over Sinn Féin and by an opinion poll a few weeks ago which shows Sinn Féin drawing level with Fine Gael - a trend further reinforced by a poll published in the Sunday Independent on 2 November which shows Sinn Féin in the lead with 26 percent, Independents and others on 23 percent, and only 22 percent for Fine Gael, 20 percent for Fianna Fáil, and Labour down to just 7 percent.

Most importantly the radicalisation has now turned into what we have always argued for: a mass movement of people power on the streets in opposition to the water charges. The first signs that the things were changing, that the mood of demoralisation that followed the defeat over the property tax had turned into a mood of resistance, came with big street meetings and community meetings on working class estates in Clondalkin and on the Dublin North Side with people coming out in con-

siderable numbers, and with great determination, to block the installation of water meters. From there the momentum built till it culminated in the giant Right2Water demonstration of over 100,000 on October 11th.

That magnificent demonstration transformed the political landscape. It threw the Government and their supporters into panic and retreat. They fell over themselves trying to offer minor concessions and blame the Irish Water messenger rather than the water charges message. Whenever ruling class politicians face mass public rejection of their policies they always claim it is due to a failure of 'communication'. This reflects their underlying view that ordinary people are just putty to be moulded and manipulated by the political elite.

But on our side of the class divide the effect of the demo was even more dramatic. It gave people a huge sense of their own potential strength. It made it very clear that the government could be defeated on the water charges issue and it gave the whole movement an immense impetus. It was not just the massive size of the demonstration - equivalent to over a million on the streets of London - but also its character. This was an overwhelmingly working class march and, although there was a platform with strong speeches by Richard Boyd Barrett, Clare Daly and others, it had a bottom-up spontaneous 'carnival' atmosphere as people revelled in their new found power. Of course there is an objection on principle to paying for water charges through a regressive tax (instead of out of progressive income tax) and 'Water is a Human Right' is a key slogan of the campaign but it is also the case that a major driver of the revolt is that for hundreds

of thousands water charges are the final straw after six years of austerity, charges and cutbacks which have left them struggling to survive; which is why the movement has such a pronounced class character.

The upward trajectory of the movement continued and deepened with the local demonstrations on 1 November, which brought an estimated 200,000 on to the streets right across Ireland.

In the run up to the 1 November there was a fairly intense debate in the movement about the merits of one demo in Central Dublin versus a multitude of local marches, with the main national campaign, Right2Water, arguing for the locals and Dublin Says No for the City Centre. This debate was resolved in practice. While there was a substantial turnout on the two marches to O'Connell St - maybe 25-30,000 between them - it was the marches in the local communities that really took off, whether it was the 8000 in Drogheda, the 10,000 in Letterkenny, the 5000 in Bray, the 1500 in Greystones or the 4000 or so at the Walkinstown roundabout. Clearly if there had been only one big march in the centre of Dublin hundreds might have gone from Drimnagh or Ballyfermot but you would not have got the thousands who marched on that day in Dundrum, Clondalkin or Swords.

The sheer scale of the mobilization is not easy to grasp. Places such as Letterkenny, Drogheda, Swords and Wexford, which are small towns with populations of 20 to 40 thousand were seeing marches of 5 to 10 thousand. Even smaller towns such as Fermoy (pop.5,800) and Gorey (9,000) had 1-2000 out. By any standards this is extraordinary.

The emergence of such a movement constitutes a huge problem for the government. If they retreat by abandoning the water charges - and nothing less will sat-

isfy the movement at the moment- they set a massive precedent for the effectiveness of people power and lose what has long been a central weapon for them, the sense of fatalism - the belief that there's nothing you can do. If they stand firm they risk the movement escalating and radicalising even further.

The movement also poses a challenge to the left. First we have to do everything we can to actually win the campaign over water charges, understanding that defeat after such massive mobilization could be very demoralising. That means developing a strategy for solidifying the campaign in the localities and intensifying the pressure on the government by actions of increasing militancy. The call for a Stay Away and siege of the Dail on the working day of Wednesday 10 December will be a central focus in the month ahead but we will need other initiatives as well.

Second the left has to think about how it can relate to and respond to the movement politically. Obviously there is a strong strand of 'anti-politics' and hostility to political parties in the movement, and this is very understandable given the behaviour of the 'mainstream' parties and politicians. Nevertheless politics remains necessary. It is possible for a short while to be 'non-political' in one local campaign (although there is always a certain politics hidden beneath the no-politics label) but this is not sustainable at the level of society or the state as a whole. If there is not a credible political alternative from the socialist left then one will emerge from elsewhere to fill the vacuum. People Before Profit, which more than any other political tendency has consistently championed the strategy of mass protest and people power, vindicated on 11 October and 1 November, clearly has a major role to play in shaping this future.

In this Issue

As we have noted above one expression of the move to the left of the Irish working class has been the rise of Sinn Féin, along with a certain shift to the left in that party's message. But what sort of alternative does Sinn Féin really represent and how does its practice - whether in government in the North or in the movement in the South - match its rhetoric? Kieran Allen's critical assessment of these questions in our lead article is therefore very timely.

Equally timely is UNITE economist, Michael Taft's forensic dissection of the government/media narrative of 'recovery'. One of the most striking features of the movement in recent months has been the disconnect between the message coming down from above and feeling of people on the ground. This article helps us to understand this disconnect.

On the question of LGBT rights IMR interviews Ailbhe Smyth who has long been at the heart of this struggle and who offers us her reflections on how it has developed in Ireland. The issue of mental

health can sometimes be seen as a peripheral matter, perhaps of interest mainly to specialists. In reality it touches the lives of millions of people, often with devastating effect. Moreover it is something about which Marxists and socialists have much to say, with Marx's theory of alienation, as Peadar O'Grady argues here, being a particularly useful concept.

Continuing our interest in matters historical and cultural Paul O'Brien revisits the figure of John Redmond, recently resuscitated by John Bruton in an attempt to undermine the legacy of 1916, and John Molyneux examines Walter Benjamin's observation on the relationship between cultural treasures and inhuman barbarism.

In this issue we also present substantial book reviews which tackle the highly relevant topics of the roots of women's oppression and the relationship between climate change and capitalism, along with an assessment of Alex Callinicos' important study of Marx's *Capital* and reviews of interesting historical works on the Irish Revolution in Tyrone and the visit to Ireland of American black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass.