

# Socialist Worker

Break from the politics of fear and intimidation...

# NO

## Household and Water Charges Fiscal Treaty



If you are opposed to household and water charges, you should vote NO to the Fiscal Treaty. If you are sick of bank bail outs and continual cutbacks, you should also vote NO.

The Fiscal Treaty will bring twenty more years of hardship. There will be cuts of between €4 billion and €5 billion a year for the next two decades.

This is the real meaning of a demand for a 'balanced budget'. These cuts are the equivalent of shutting down spending on second level education for a whole year.

Voting for the Fiscal Treaty would be like turkeys voting for Christmas.

Ireland currently has a debt that is 120% the size of its economy. But if the Fiscal Treaty were passed that would have to be halved over the next twenty years.

But why should we ruin our society just to please the bondholders who gambled on Irish government debt?

Britain did not pay off its debt from the Second World War until 2006. German national debt from WW1 was only paid off in 2010.

So why should we cut spending on hospitals and schools just to please the EU bureaucrats?

Ireland's debt is high because we were forced to bail out banks by the ECB and the EU. They were terrified that if Irish banks defaulted, it would bring the big British and German banks crashing down. So they forced us to carry the cost of recapitalising the banks.

Every single cent that was put into Anglo-Irish bank was 'approved' by the

EU Commission. Each time a few billion was handed over, the Irish government wrote to the EU Commission for permission. And each time it was granted with enthusiasm.

The EU Commission is also responsible for imposing a household charge on us.

The Memorandum of Understanding signed between the government and the Troika of the IMF, ECB and EU Commission demanded that Ireland introduce a property tax. It also insisted that this must increase next year.

So there is a direct link between the fight against household charges and the Fiscal Treaty.

If Ireland were to miss any of its targets for debt reduction, the Fiscal Treaty states

that the unelected EU Commission can lay down guidelines which will determine 'the nature, size and time frame of the corrective action to be undertaken'. In other words, they take even more control over the economy.

They will insist on higher water charges, more privatisation and they will try to deny pensioners the right to free travel on trains and buses.

But if we vote NO, it will give huge confidence to all those across Europe who have had enough of cutbacks and bank bail outs. It will be a signal that the Irish rebellion is spreading and deepening.

If you would like any more information on the Fiscal Treaty or you would like to put on a public meeting in your area text 0863074060.

### Inside

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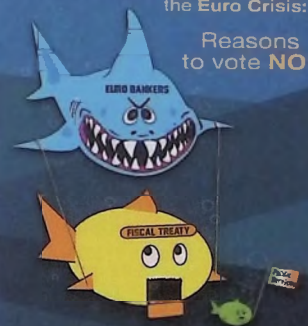
**The Fiscal Treaty demystified**

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### OUT NOW!

The Fiscal Treaty and the Euro Crisis:

Reasons to vote NO



Fiscal Treaty and Euro Crisis - Reasons to Vote No. by Kieran Allen is available from voteno.ie

**Join the Socialists—Text JOIN to 086-3074060  
Visit our website—www.swp.ie**



**Bord na Móna strike vote**



By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

WORKERS at Bord na Mona have voted by over 80% for strike action if their demand that the company honours a 3.5% pay increase, due under the 'Towards 2016' transitional agreement, is not met.

Nearly 2000 workers, members of SIPTU, TEEU and UNITE took part in the ballot last month. The company is trying to use the economic crisis as an excuse not to pay the increase.

However Bord na Mona revealed pre-tax profits of €72.7 million for the year ending March 2011 - an increase of 12.6% on 2010. Figures for this year aren't available yet, however

Group CEO, Gabriel D'Arcy, said: "Bord na Mona recorded increased earnings growth last year for the fifth year in a row." D'Arcy takes home a tidy sum of €392,000 in salary and benefits.

The company can well afford the pay increase however the union negotiators are trying to sell a lesser deal of a €1,000 lump-sum for each worker alongside an immediate pay increase of 1.7% and a further 1.7% performance based increase payable in two years time.

This falls far short of the original agreement and is in fact a pay cut when you factor in inflation at 2.2%. Workers should reject this deal and insist that the company pay the original increase.

# Irish Cement workers strike



By KIERAN ALLEN

IRISH Cement workers began strike action on 3 April in a bid to secure money owed to them by the highly profitable firm. Irish Cement Ltd is part of the Cement Roadstone or CRH Group, one of the world's largest building materials companies.

Last year CRH made €711 million - a staggering rise of 33%. Its chief executive, Myles Lee, was paid €2.4 million in benefits and bonuses.

More than 100 workers have joined the strike. There is a well organised picket line and a makeshift shelter at the Castlemungret plant with a big sign for passing motorists to see: CRH GREED. The workers are fighting a company demand for a pay cut and point to the earnings of the CEO.

"If €700,000 of Myles Lee's salary was paid to the workers, it would settle the matter", explained one of the shop stewards.

Irish Cement Group of Unions Secretary, Karan O' Loughlin, said: "Earlier this year the Labour Court made a recommendation that the company must pay monies which are outstanding to its employees and which amount to between €5,500 and €9,500 per worker.

"The Labour Court recommended that Irish Cement Ltd immediately pay the monies it owes, but the company is insisting that a pay cut

of between 15% and 18% is implemented first.

"Workers are particularly annoyed at the hypocrisy of Irish Cement's parent company, CRH, which at the same time as it is refusing to pay its employees, is sanctioning massive pay rises for senior executives."

"Three years ago when the recession hit, we agreed to make sacrifices. We embarked on a rationalisation programme to help save the company. Staff numbers were cut by 33% and productivity grew by 40%.

"But the company kept coming after us. They want to use the recession to lower our living standards," explained the shop steward.

CRH is Ireland's biggest company and its vindictive attitude says a lot about the nature of Irish capitalism.

The company has always had strong links to Fianna Fail and used its links with that party to make huge profits.

In 1992, it took over state lands at Glen Ding, which contained valuable deposits of sand and gravel, for a mere €2 million.

The Blessington Heritage Trust estimated that the lands were worth at least €60 million.

Naturally it asked why these valuable lands had been sold by private tender.

It subsequently emerged that CRH had made payments of €20,000 to a

legal entity controlled by the children of Charles Haughey.

The company was also at the centre of the Ansbacher operation. This was a fund run by rich business people both to avoid paying tax and also to make donations to support the lavish lifestyle of Charles Haughey.

Each week, Haughey drew down over €6,000 from this fund for his 'expenses'. The accounts of the fund were organised from the head office of CRH and most of the company's directors were participants in the fund.

Despite this clear example of systematic corruption, neither CRH nor any of its company directors suffered the slightest punishment for their activities.

Instead, they were allowed to grow and expand to become a global multinational.

The battle at Irish Cement should be a matter of concern for all trade unionists. We have put up with wage cuts and a bosses' offensive for too long - and it has only led to a continuing recession.

The more we roll over and offer concessions, the more it whets the appetite of the greedy for even more.

A line is now being drawn in the sand. Just as we stood up against household charges, it is now time to stand up against employers who are using the recession to lower our living standards.

NEWS IN BRIEF

**Musgraves Strike Action**

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

SIPTU members in the Musgrave Group started a strike at the company's warehouse in Cork on Wednesday, 18 April.

The strike is over changes to their conditions of employment.

Nearly 135 workers have joined the strike at the Cork Chill warehouse.

The Musgrave Group is the country's largest retailer supplying a number of supermarket chains including Supervalu and Centra.

NEWS IN BRIEF

**Building workers' charter launched**

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

A Building Workers' Charter to defend terms and conditions was launched on Wednesday 18 April.

Fergus Whelan, who is leading the Building Workers' Charter campaign, said: "When workers commit to the Charter they're not only making clear what they oppose but also what they want.

"We're saying we are against the slashing of wages, robbing of pension rights and a decline in safety standards.

What we are for is Irish worker's pension funds being used for job creation in Ireland, the prospect of worthwhile apprenticeships and the maintenance of Registered Employment Agreements which guard against exploitation."

To view the Charter visit: [www.ictu.ie/constructioncharter](http://www.ictu.ie/constructioncharter).

**Vita Cortex Occupation: Shut Ronan down completely**

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

JACK Ronan, owner of Vita Cortex, gave the workers another slap in the face when he walked away from talks in the Labour Relations Commission on Saturday 21 April. The talks were aimed at finding a compromise but this proved too much for Ronan.

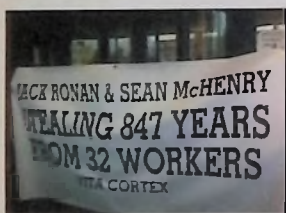
The recommendations were accepted by the workers following a SIPTU ballot in Cork.

Vita Cortex workers said they were shocked at the failure to achieve a mediated settlement.

"We're devastated -- we just cannot believe it. Everyone had hoped and prayed the end was in sight," one worker said.

The 32 workers have been engaged in a sit-in protest since December 16 - 18 weeks.

They received their statutory redundancy entitlements of two weeks



per year of service from the Department of Social Protection in February.

The workers briefly expanded their protest to the neighbouring factory Vita Clean also owned by Ronan.

This forced Ronan to the negotiating table. It shows he only responds when his profits are hit.

He has thrown the compromise offer back in the workers faces and they should respond in kind.

The Vita Cortex workers should close down all Ronan's factories and any other boss that still does business with him.

Messages of support can be sent to: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Support-the-Vita-Cortex-Workers>

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 capitalism 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 for independent rank and file

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## What Socialists Say



## EDITORIAL

# Resistance to Household Charges grows

FIVE thousand people travelled to Galway to protest outside the Labour Party conference. In a significant escalation of militancy, 1,000 people broke through police lines to get nearer the conference hall.

The protest had a huge impact because in its immediate aftermath, opinion polls showed a drop in Labour support by 6 percent.

The corporate media tried to demonise these protestors claiming that they were violent. It was part of a time worn strategy of seeking to drive a division between the militants and the more moderate sections of the campaign.

Yet the push through police lines has received overwhelming support from anti-household charge groups. Nobody is taking seriously claims by Labour Party TDs that there was an 'attack on democracy'.

The TDs who lied their way into Dáil seats are the real enemies of democracy. Brendan Howlin, for example, explicitly told people that the Labour Party was entirely opposed to water charges – but now sits in a cabinet which is introducing them.

No attempt was made to close down the Labour Party conference – only to take the voice of protest nearer to their doorsteps.

The main violence that occurred came from the private security firm hired by the Labour Party and some Gardai who resorted to pepper spray.

The new confidence of the anti-household campaign is also evident in the way that committees and action groups are continuing a lively existence in many parts of the country. These are rapidly generalising into anti-austerity networks as they move seamlessly over into campaigning against the Fiscal Treaty.

This network of resistance provides an important focal point that helps to make up for the terrible betrayals of the union leaders. Currently Ireland stands out among the PIG countries in Europe for a relatively low level of opposition to austerity. There have been no general strikes, for example, as there have been in Greece, Spain and Portugal.

The anti-household charges campaign will still need to win the support of organised labour if it is to advance further. A key part of forging this alliance must be conducting a struggle inside the ranks of the unions against the domination of the Labour Party.

Virtually all union officials in SIPTU are members of the Labour Party while the ICTU leader, David Begg, even did a warm up speech for Eamonn Gilmore at the recent Labour conference. Loyalty to the Labour Party explains why the union leaders are doing their best to dampen resistance.

Despite the fact that every union in Europe is opposed to the Fiscal Treaty, many of the Irish union leaders are advocating a Yes vote. Loyalty to the Labour Party comes before workers' interests.

We need to challenge this by demanding the withdrawal of the union's political fund from Labour. No one party should enjoy automatic political affiliation from the unions. And a party that is attacking workers does not deserve a cent of our union dues.

That is why we must now campaign actively to break the link between Labour and the unions.

## MAY DAY MAY DAY

MAY Day is once again becoming a global day of resistance. In the US, the Occupy movement has joined up with the unions in order to revitalise this day of protest.

In Ireland a new alliance is being forged between Trades Councils, the Anti-Household Charges campaign and community organisations who have been hit badly by the cuts. These are calling on people to come out for May Day protests right around the country.

The future lies in alliances between mass social movements and organised workers.

May Day 2012 will represent a major start in forging this new movement of resistance.

## Industrial News

Industrial Correspondent - Donal Mac Fhearraigh

### Lagan brick

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

THE owners of Lagan Brick got a big surprise on Wednesday 4 April, when a bus load of workers turned up at their Belfast HQ to demand management accept workers grievances at the firm's manufacturing plant in Kingscourt, county Cavan.

When managers refused to accept a letter calling for negotiations to begin, dozens of workers and their supporters entered the entrance area of the company offices and refused to leave.

The peaceful occupation ended after about 20 minutes when company representatives agreed to accept the letter from a four-person delegation.

The workers have been in dispute with the company for more than 100 days. Workers at the Kingscourt plant were informed it was closing only hours before it ceased operation on 15 December. Since then, 25 SIPTU members at the plant have been in dispute over the company's failure to pay established redundancy terms.

The owners of this company are among the richest people in Ireland. The Lagan Group comprises five companies, Lagan Holdings, Lagan Cement Group, Lagan Brick, Lagan Developments and Lagan Homes.

The Group has grown out of the company formed by the Lagan family more than 40 years ago and it remains in private hands, controlled by brothers, Kevin and Michael Lagan.

Speaking to Socialist Worker, Laurence Shekleton said, "I worked at Lagan Brick for 23 years in various jobs. For the first 20 years I was there, it was a good employer. It was only in the last two years that things changed.



We gave a pay cut of 8% and we gave up all our pay rises from 2007. Everything taken together, it works out at about an overall pay cut of 16%.

Other men retired or took voluntary redundancy. They were not replaced but the same amount of

work was still done. We appreciated that times were tough but thought that last year things were improving because there was worked lined up.

The last few months have been tough maintaining the protest at the gate every day but we have to

do something."

Another worker Emmet Mullen said, "I started work at Lagan Brick in June 1988. I work in production making specials. It was really cut – cut all the time in the lead up to this dispute.

"They were using tactics which were aimed at pushing the working man down and down – that is it in a nutshell.

"On 15 December we were left with no alternative but to take action. I was one of a delegation who met with Jude Lagan [a company director] in the Ardboyne Hotel, Navan, in March and basically his message was he would just do as he wishes. It was pointless talking to him.

"I was at the protest outside the plant on Christmas Day, New Year's Day and I'll be there as long as it takes."

### Direct action by Game workers is vindicated

By BRIAN O' BOYLE

ON 26 March workers at video game retailer 'Game' became the latest victims of a Blitzkrieg by their bosses.

The company had suddenly gone into administration and within an hour of hearing the news, staff were told to cease all trading.

Previously workers may have accepted this dictate.

However the experience of workers in La Senza and Vita Cortex has begun to filter into the consciousness of workers across the retail sector.

Instead of merely packing up, the workers decided to enquire about their redundancy payments before leaving the premises.

Upon hearing that they were to wait up to 18 months for the minimum statutory redundancy, they decided to take matters into their own hands.

A conference call across all fourteen stores was arranged and 121 workers began a month long occupation to fight for their rights.

In the event the workers demands were extremely reasonable.

Faced with long delays and mounting bills, all they wanted was some support with claiming what was rightfully theirs and the 2/3 of a week 'notice payment' for every year of service.

Predictably this was too much for the owners, who outright refused.

Weeks of standoff were



eventually broken when the administrator Price Waterhouse Cooper agreed to employee demands in return for co-operation.

Speaking about his experience in the Game store in Tallaght, Danny Sheridan stated that he wished to thank all his fellow workers in the Square who offered vital moral and material support.

He also had some extremely important advice for other

workers who find themselves in similar situations, stating that "If your boss tries to throw you on the scrap heap the first thing you need to do is make sure you know what you are entitled to.

"The second thing is don't be afraid to stand up to the big companies.

"The only way to win is to be determined and show them that you won't budge until you get what you deserve".



## BRIEFING DOCUMENT

# Which way for the United Left Alliance?

By KIERAN ALLEN

THE most recent opinion poll shows that Sinn Fein has become the second largest party in the state, and that its support comes overwhelmingly from the poorest sections of society.

Meanwhile, the polling companies refuse to name the left wing parties, but everyone knows that much of the 18% poll rating for 'independents' is really going to the United Left Alliance.

The key challenge for the ULA is to build on that support. That will involve winning the allegiance of those who formerly voted Labour and also taking some of Sinn Fein's support as they move to the centre.

Sinn Fein's electoral support has been won through the use of a rhetoric that promotes a left social democratic position. But the party has already started to operate within the confines of a capitalist democracy.

It has refused to call for a boycott on the household charges and does not rule out entering coalition with Fianna Fail after the next election.

It is also imposing horrible cutbacks in the North – and so the transition from a left rhetoric to implementing austerity can occur very quickly. All of this means that the ULA needs to be built as the genuine alternative.

The ULA is composed of three main components: People Before Profit, of which the SWP is a major grouping; the Socialist Party; and the Workers and Unemployed Action Group which is primarily based in Tipperary. Up to now it has functioned primarily as a Dáil and electoral alliance. It produces some common policy positions and engages in joint publicity work.

The leadership for Dáil questions rotates among the alliance components and the current position is held by Richard Boyd Barrett, a member of the SWP.

The structure of the alliance means there are difficulties in simply declaring itself a party.

After its initial establishment when hundreds of people came to meetings, there was a possibility of rapid advance to a loose party structure but it was decided not to take this option.

Advancing the project of a radical left at this stage requires a number of



strategic changes of direction.

These may be summarised as follows.

*The ULA needs to shift from a purely electoralist alliance to an organisation of struggle.*

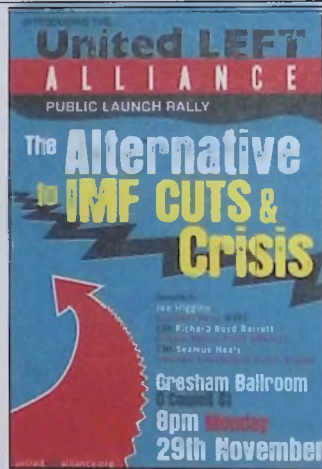
The ULA has a strong public profile but currently it does not function as a campaigning organisation that both initiates struggles and intervenes collectively in mass movements.

Although members from all three component groups play a key role in the struggle against household charges, for example, there has been no meeting of ULA activists to discuss a common strategy within the movement.

Political activity runs alongside campaigning activity rather than being intimately linked to it.

Even if there is not always full agreement on tactics, it is possible to advocate some common positions and agree to conduct discussions on differences in a friendly manner.

*The ULA should be characterised as*



*a non-dogmatic, non-sectarian, open organisation.*

The component parts of the ULA draw their theoretical underpinnings from a Marxist tradition. The best ver-

sion of Marxism is non-dogmatic and sees itself as being in a dialogue with the most militant workers.

It does not claim exclusive possession of a 'correct programme' but argues for a firm anti-capitalist stance within the workers movement, while also learning from those who fight.

At this stage of its development, the ULA is not an explicitly revolutionary organisation but occupies a space that provides a link between those who are revolutionaries and those who still want to fight for 'old Labour' values.

To expand that space, the ULA needs to work with others in joint struggles – even where it disagrees with their wider politics.

The recent co-operation between the ULA and left independents during the anti-household charges campaign was a welcome step forward and should be repeated in the opposition to the Fiscal Treaty.

*The ULA needs more democratic structures to involve its wider*

*membership.*

Currently each component part of the ULA can exercise a veto on policy development and this has sometimes led to hesitancy in advancing more radical positions.

If the ULA is to expand its membership, there should be a one member-one vote arrangement. As an interim measure, there needs to be a branch delegate structure that can take decisions on the organisation's policies.

The ULA should also break from the Labour Party tradition of allowing TDs to have an effective veto. It should be driven by the grassroots membership and all elected representatives should be subject to the internal democracy of the organisation.

The ULA needs to organise on a 32 county basis.

Our rulers operate on an all-island basis, co-ordinating strategies to attack living standards. So it makes little sense for the left not to do the same. There is also a strong, progressive anti-partitionist and anti-colonial sentiment among Irish workers. The ULA needs to relate to this by promoting Connolly's vision of a 32 county socialist Ireland as its solution to the poison of sectarianism which the British Empire bequeathed to Irish politics.

If the ULA can make these changes, it can capitalise on the growing left sentiment that is sweeping Ireland. If it simply sits on its laurels, however, it can miss key opportunities.

The experience of the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France offers a salutary lesson. This was a radical left organisation whose leader Olivier Besancenot was once seen as the most popular left figure in France.

But its failure to develop an outward and non-sectarian style of left politics contributed to its demise.

The ULA can make major strides and can grasp an historic opportunity that is presented to the Irish left.

But to advance, it needs major internal debate and a shift to the next stage of its development.

THE ULA will have a national conference on 28 April 2012 at the Gresham Hotel in Dublin. For more information contact 00353 858585292 or go to [www.UnitedLeftAlliance.org](http://www.UnitedLeftAlliance.org).

## Abbeyleix march to defend hospital nursing unit

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

A protest march has been organised by the Abbeyleix Hospital and District Action Group for Sunday, 29 April.

The HSE announced last November that it intended to close the Abbeyleix hospital nursing unit.

The closure will result in the moving of 28 long-stay residents as well as the redeployment of more than 70 nurses and care staff.

In the same month the HSE also announced

its intention to close St Brigid's Hospital, a 28-bed community nursing unit in Shaen, with its 28 long-term residents and three respite clients being relocated to other facilities.

More than 5,000 people attended a protest march organised by the Abbeyleix Hospital and District Action Group on 20 November last.

The march by nursing unit residents, their families and supporters will begin at 2.00 p.m. at the Manor Hotel in

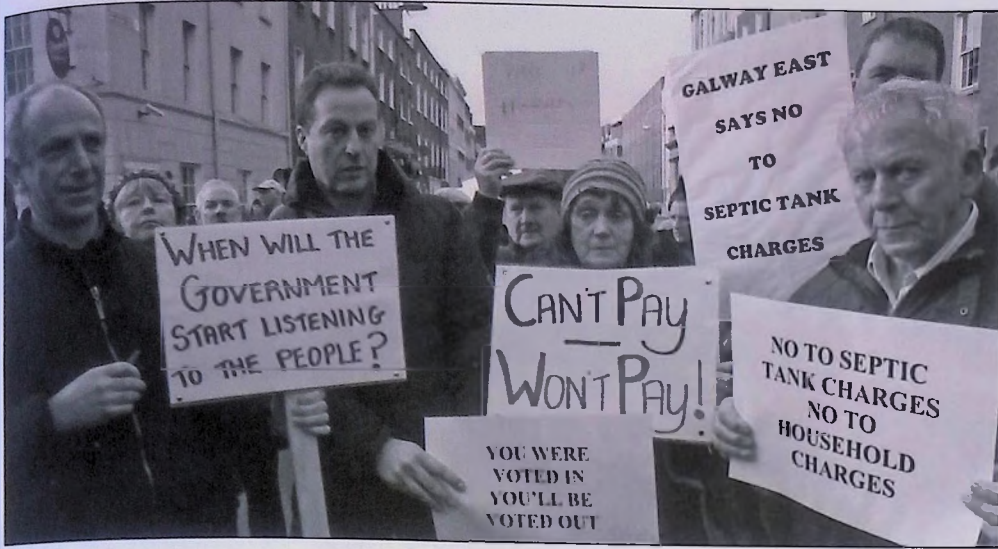


Abbeyleix, county Laois, and end at the hospital. The march is also being supported by SIPTU.

One of the march organisers said, "A clear message will be sent to the HSE on Sunday 29 April, that communities will no longer accept continued attacks on vital local health services.

"Community care must be the basis of health provision not a service to be outsourced to private companies whose main objective is the creation of profit".





# NEXT UP: WATER CHARGES

By MICHAEL WALLACE

THE FG/Labour government has just suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of a mass movement of popular resistance to the household charge.

But they clearly haven't got the message yet.

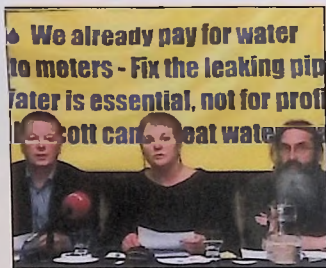
They are now trying to ram through water metering and charges by January 2014, as part of their subversive deal with the 'troika' (EU/ECB/IMF).

After four years of austerity, more than 1.6 million households are to be intimidated into paying a 'standing charge' of €40 per year over the next 20 years for the installation of the meters alone.

After that, households will be charged hundreds of euro each year just to receive their water supply.

Each household, large or small, rich or poor would be given a 'free water allowance' above which they will be charged on how much water is used. A derisory 40 litres, suggested in 2010 by then Minister for the Environment John Gormley, has resurfaced as a possible daily allowance.

This is the equivalent of one spin cycle of a washing machine or about 28% of average daily use - which is around 150 litres per person.



Operated by Bord Gais, a new state company, 'Irish Water', is to be given the task of metering and charging.

This supposedly keeps water under state control.

However, the introduction of water charges would quickly lead to privatisation.

Under the demands of EU law the creation of a 'revenue generating monopoly' such as Irish Water 'distorts' market competition, and must be broken up and sold off to multinational companies.

As with other services, costs will rapidly rise and waivers such as the possible 'free water allowance' will be abolished.

While Eamon Gilmore and Labour continue to lie about privatisation, his allies in Fine Gael are trying to use bully-boy tactics to get their way, refusing to rule out cutting off water supply to households unable to pay.

These threats are shameful given that water is a basic human necessity and vital for the right to exist.

Instead of wasting a year and a half installing useless and expensive water meters, a major public works programme repairing the decrepit and contaminated water supply should be started.

Currently over 42% of treated water never reaches Irish taps and repairing the network would put thousands of workers back to work at the same time as conserving an important resource.

The prospect of water charges and privatisation must be resisted.

Only a mass campaign of popular protest can flush this policy down the toilet for once and for all.

## Poverty increases sharply over the last two years



By BRIAN O'BOYLE

ORDINARY people hardly need to be told that times are tough. Irish living standards have been absolutely decimated over the last four years and now we have the statistical evidence to prove it.

According to the Central Statistics Office Survey on Incomes and Living Conditions (SILC), around 250,000 Irish people are now living in consistent poverty.

This is up by over 50% from the 160,000 deemed to be in absolute poverty in 2009 as a combination of welfare cuts and service reductions take their toll on the most vulnerable.

Alongside absolute poverty, around 1 million Irish people (23%) now experience some form of deprivation.

Deprivation occurs when someone has a lack of basic necessities at least once during the course of a year.

This can happen

across the board, but children are particularly vulnerable with one in five kids going to school hungry on a consistent basis.

Perhaps the most shocking statistic to come out of the SILC report concerns the growing gap between rich and poor.

The elites in this country have been very good at pleading poverty.

But the SILC report tells a very different story, with the top 10%



of Irish households actually increasing their disposable income by 8% since 2009 at the same time as the poorest 10% lost 26% of their disposable income.

This truly is a case of the rich getting rich at the expense of the poor and a second

study carried out by Social Justice Ireland has found similar results.

The headline figure in the Social Justice report found that there are over 700,000 Irish people in poverty.

This is defined as having less than €10,000 for a single person or €24,000 for a family of four, and it comes in the same month as the *Sunday Times Rich List* revealed that Ireland's richest 300 people increased their wealth by €12,000 million over the course of two years.

From an average of around €165 million per person each of these people now has around €210 million.

Every cut to schools, hospitals and welfare could have been avoided if these incredibly rich people had been forced to contribute to the welfare of society.

Instead our children's futures are daily being sacrificed so that the mega rich can continue to accumulate.

## The rotten world of Irish 'Lobbying'

The corruption exposed by the Mahon Tribunal is characteristic of a rotten system writes Michael Wallace.

AFTER 15 years and an estimated €300 million, the long awaited release of the Mahon Tribunal Report is a damning indictment of the corrupt alliances between developers, establishment politicians and the Irish ruling class.

The collusion between developers, major financiers and lobbyists has now been well documented.

People are all too aware

of the grubby backroom deals made by the Irish elites.

But the levels of corruption are simply staggering.

The particular role of lobbyist's in all of this first emerged with the dealings of Frank Dunlop.

Dunlop, a former government press secretary turned 'public relations consultant', made corrupt payments of up to £170,000 to politicians in return for their votes on land rezoning motions.

Once lands were rezoned for housing, developers made fortunes

as land prices skyrocketed.

The elites made millions whilst leaving an appalling legacy of bad planning, ghost estates and inadequate services.

But what is the role of lobbyists today?

Who are they and how much influence do they have?

Currently there are over 30 'public relations consultancies' in Ireland.

According to Jim Glennon, a former minister in the FF/PD government of 1997-2002 and now chairman of PR consultant firm Edelman Ireland, these firms "advise clients on how they can best interact with



Jim Glennon

the state.... sometimes meeting ministers and developing ongoing relationships facilitating information flows."

In other words, lobbyists act as a go-between for their 'clients' (usually corporate vested interests) and political representatives.

This ensures that the public are often sidelined and ignored in deals that are constructed out of 'old boy's networks'.

Access is what counts and this helps to explain why former PD minister Tom Parland is now head of the Construction Federation of Ireland, and why Charlie McCreavey was co-opted onto the board of NBNK investments after he had worked as an EU commissioner (although



Charlie McCreavey

he was eventually forced to resign due to a conflict of interest).

There is essentially a revolving door policy in the halls of power as ministers leave government office only to be paid lucrative sums by corporate clients anxious to gain influence, weaken regulations and secure

government contracts.

Labour minister Brendan Howlin has promised to introduce a statutory register of lobbyists 'after a period of public consultation'.

However, even if this legislation comes in, the lobbyist's clients and their dealings will likely remain hidden.



# The Fiscal Treaty demystified

By BRIAN O' BOYLE

ONE of the tricks that the rich play on ordinary people is to exclude them from real decision making processes.

Typically, this is done by monopolising the airwaves and speaking in a technical language that is almost impossible to understand.

So-called 'experts' replace real democratic discussion and the elite consensus is then reinforced by being trotted out endlessly.

Along with stoking up fear and intimidation this tactic helps to persuade people to vote against their better judgement.

So the aim of this article is to combat elite spin with some key information about the up-coming Fiscal Treaty.

Once this is done it should be crystal clear that there are at least three reasons why ordinary people should say NO.

## (1) Saying yes means austerity forever

Despite all of the technical mumbo jumbo the issues are actually surprisingly simple.

At its core the austerity treaty is about forcing governments into a straightjacket which emphasises reducing the national debt through savage cuts in public spending.

Ireland currently has a debt of around 120% of GDP and a budget deficit (taxes minus spending) of around 13.4%. If we sign up to the new rules we will have to reduce the overall debt by half over the next 20 years and get our deficit down to 3% of GDP by 2015.

This will mean savage cuts of around €4 to €5 billion every year on top of the interest payments and adjustments that the government has already committed to.

This will make the household charge look like 'loose change' as people are squeezed for decades to come.



Flashback: The ICTU mass protest against austerity two years ago

**The austerity treaty will mean additional savage cuts of around €4 to €5 billion every year**

Not only is this barbaric, it will never work as all of the economic demand will simply evaporate.

So why should we vote for decades of misery that will never succeed in bringing recovery?

## (2) Saying yes undermines democracy

In capitalism most of the key decisions about how to use society's resources are currently made by unelected corporations.

This means that capitalism already has a problem in accommodating real democracy.

But at least elected governments traditionally retained some level of control over their

national economies.

If we sign up to these rules almost all of this control will be lost to a bunch of unelected bureaucrats who continuously defend the interests of the bankers and the speculators.

Under the terms of the treaty all governments must make their current austerity policies legally binding.

This locks austerity into national law and leaves even less room to get out of the crisis.

## (3) Saying yes is extremely risky

The elites are currently engaged in a campaign that is full of contradictions.

On the one hand we are told that the new rules are 'no big deal' as they already apply under the terms of the Maastricht Treaty.

On the other hand we are told that if we fail to accept the treaty the 'sky will fall in' and there will be no money in the hole in the wall.

This is blatant scare-mongering.

Indeed, it is far more risky to accept the fiscal treaty than to reject it as the European elites are attempting to head into very dangerous territory.

Throughout the long history of capitalism, governments have never met a serious crisis by in-

sisting on cut backs.

During the Great Depression, for example, capitalism only recovered when governments pumped money into the economy.

And the current crisis has already seen China and the USA throwing trillions of dollars into stabilising the system.

Capitalism is incredibly unstable and governments have always realised that they need some 'wiggle room' to stimulate the economy when it gets into trouble.

This treaty throws out 70 years of economic thinking in order to tie our hands and copper fasten austerity.

This is sheer madness.

And the idea that if we say No we will lose access to another so-called 'bailout' is patently untrue.

Over the last four years, European rulers have bent over backwards to protect their precious financial system.

This is their only real concern, and if Ireland ever struggled to pay off its debts, not only would the Eurocrats fail to exclude the State from a second bailout - they would actively insist on one like they did with the Greeks.

Over the next six weeks we will be told many lies by the elites across Europe.

But for ordinary people the reality is that this treaty represents nothing but hardship.

**■ If you value public services Vote NO.**

**■ If you value democracy Vote NO.**

**■ If you believe in a fairer solution to the economic crisis Vote NO.**

For more information about how you can get involved in the campaign, phone 0876574100 or visit [VoteNo.ie](http://VoteNo.ie).

# French elections: Polarisation and the new resistance to austerity

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

THE first round in the French Presidential election was a major upset in European politics.

The most likely candidate to ultimately win is Francois Hollande from the Socialist Party (France's Labour Party).

He has been dragged to the left throughout the campaign and is now calling for a re-negotiation of the Fiscal Treaty focusing on investment rather than cuts. He has also called for a 75% tax on millionaires.

This suggests that the Merkel-Sarkozy axis that has been central to driving through cuts and austerity is now facing stiffer resistance.

The election also saw a powerful revival of France's radical left led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon's (a former Trotskyist) Left Front.

It also saw a breakthrough for France's fascists, the National Front - who won 20%.

The strong vote for the fascist candidate, Marine Le Pen, was helped by Sarkozy.

Shamefully, he ran a rightwing campaign from the outset, chasing voters on the extreme right by focusing on immigration, saying that there were too many foreigners in France and following Le Pen's lead in claiming unlabelled halal meat was a key concern of French voters.

He had recently stressed



Radical Left: Jean-Luc Mélenchon

conservative family values and the Christian heritage of France.

Rather than undermine the fascists he simply made them sound more mainstream.

All of this means that the centre ground has crumbled as one third of voters polarised to the radical left and the fascists.



Fascist: Marine Le Pen

The vote for the fascists is undoubtedly worrying.

But the French election result is part of a new wave of resistance to cuts across Europe.

Indeed, resistance to cutbacks has effectively forced the collapse of governments in Holland and Austria over the same weekend.

Mélenchon declared that Sarkozy's defeat would echo like a "thunderclap" through Europe, striking at the heart of the European austerity project.

He drew hundreds of thousands to rallies across France with over 100,000 in Paris and Marseille alone. He won 11% of the vote and when the votes of

the revolutionary left are added, this total rises to 15%.

Where Mélenchon and the Left Party end up remains to be seen but his rhetoric suggests a very clear agenda — "We are writing a page in the history of the left."

"We are the renaissance of the left," he declared to roars from crowds, chanting "Resistance! Resistance!"

He also stressed that a major aim of the left was to resist the fascists.

The election reminds us that the forces of the far-right will also seek to build out of the misery of the crisis.

We need to ensure the left gets there first.



# Size does matter if Spain has a Greek Tragedy



By PANOS GARGANAS

THE Eurozone crisis has ratcheted up again as Spain's problems have begun growing to "Greek-like" proportions.

Interest rates for Spanish bonds rose to 6 percent in the week after Easter.

This was fuelled by fears that Spain's government was about to ask the European Union (EU), European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund for financial support.

Spain's Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy vigorously denied these rumours.

But other EU leaders were angry that Spanish problems had upset European bond markets.

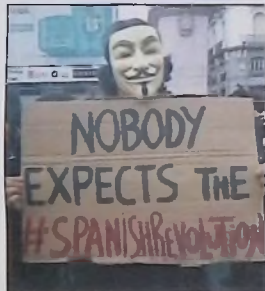
A European Commission delegation is now heading to Spain's capital Madrid to examine the Spanish budget.

All this sounds very familiar to those who have followed Greece's recent economic difficulties.

The Greek government issued umpteen reassurances that it would not need any "help" from the EU. We all know what happened in the end.

But if Spain goes the way of Greece, the crisis will be on a far larger scale to anything we have seen previously.

The vicious circle of austerity and recession that threatens to drag down Spain is far more



advanced now.

When the "Greek tragedy" started it was easier to imagine that the problems would remain confined to Greece. Some argued that the rest of Europe would pull Greece through its crisis after a brief spell of pain.

This turned out not to be the case. And the Spanish economy is much larger—twice the size of Greece, Ireland and Portugal put together.

## Deteriorate

There is also the problem that Spanish banks were the first to make extensive use of the cheap loans from the ECB. The so-called "Long Term Refinancing Operation" saw the ECB handing European banks one trillion Euros since January.

That was the reason behind the surface appearance of calm in the crisis. But below the surface

the "zombie banks" continued to deteriorate.

Nobody has a clear picture of the toxic assets these banks are still holding. But we do know that loans made by banks are becoming increasingly "non-performing" as the effects of austerity and recession bite.

If people lose their jobs or have their wages cut they cannot meet their mortgage or credit card payments.

If firms' turnovers go down they cannot repay their loans. If states' tax revenues fall they have trouble refinancing their deficits.

But it isn't just the economics of the crisis that are being repeated on a bigger scale in Spain—it's the politics too.

Rajoy's right wing government has been in office for just a few months. And yet it has already been hit by a clear swing to the left in recent regional elections in Andalusia.

On election night Spanish finance minister Cristóbal Montoro looked mortified by the results.

EU officials are worried that the Madrid government will soon find itself unable to impose the austerity package it has agreed with them.

There is radicalisation going on—and not just in electoral terms. Spain's general strike three weeks ago was the clearest evi-



dence that the "Greek dynamic" is at work at this level too.

And nor is the dynamic confined to Spain.

Hundreds of thousands of workers struck against new labour reforms in Italy on Friday of last week.

Three unions joined together for the strike—the CGIL, ISL and UIL.

The reforms aim to make it easier for bosses to fire workers. But the government has already been forced to make concessions.

A powerful strike movement spreading to Spain—the country that initiated the Occupy movement—is the last thing that European rulers want to see.

But for workers it would be the most exciting development. The crisis is far from over—and our side is far from having said its last word.

BAHRAIN:

## Heroic protests despite Western complicity



By DAVE SEWELL

THE Formula One grand prix is due to take place in Bahrain this week despite the continuing government crackdown on protesters.

The regime has used brutal force to crush the revolt since it broke out in February of last year.

Just as in Syria, the protest movement started by demanding the delivery of promised reforms—only to be met by brutal repression.

But there is a crucial difference as the West actively backs the Bahraini dictatorship.

Indeed, John Yates, the disgraced former assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, is now working as a security advisor to the regime.

Protests have continued even as many activists have been imprisoned and tortured.

Maryam Alkhawaja, an activist with the Bahrain Centre for Human Rights told *Socialist Worker* that

"People are angry as they see right through the empty promises the King keeps making about reform".

She added that "Formula 1 is salt in our wounds."

"They're sending a message of business as usual in a situation where people are being killed and beaten on the streets every day.

"We've had more than a hundred protesters arrested in just the last few days."

Maryam's father Abdulhadi, a longstanding democracy activist and thorn in the side of the Bahraini regime has been on hunger strike for more than 10 weeks.

Despite everything Maryam remains inspired by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.

"I don't think people are going to stop demanding justice," she said. "Change will come in Bahrain. But it's going to be a long and bloody path before we get there."

## The Breivik Massacre: The issue is fascism

THOMAS KVILHAUG from the *International Socialists* in Norway on the trial of a mass murderer

ANDERS Behring Breivik appeared in court in Oslo on Monday.

He pled not guilty and showed no regret—but burst into tears while watching his own pathetic propaganda video.

We refuse to care about his sanity. This question

has pulled attention away from the need to fight fascism—and the dangerous influence of racism and Islamophobia.

Breivik is a fascist. His violent nature shows exactly why we fight racism and fascism.

He is using the trial to try and promote his vile views.

Because of this, well known anti-fascist Stein Lillevolden has refused to

testify. He said he would not "be dragged around the circus tent like some clown in [Breivik's] bizarre delusions".

The media has paid a great deal of attention to Breivik's monstrous character—but also played up his "tragic" side. This is agonising for surviving victims and relatives.

A report for the court by expert psychiatrists suggested that Breivik is

a paranoid schizophrenic, mainly because of his skewed use of terminology. It ignores the fact that such usage is common on the far right.

Away from the court many people know the real answer to Breivik's terror is anti-racism and solidarity.

Anti-racists have confronted and outnumbered mobilisations by the Norwegian Defence League and other racists.





# Socialist Worker

## Strikes are back on the agenda...



# Make 10 May the next date to defend pensions and fight the cuts

THE tenth of May has been announced as the next date for public sector strike action against the government's pension assault.

Already hundreds of thousands of health workers in Unite are to strike alongside NIPSA PCS and various teaching unions based in the UK.

After the fantastic display of workers strength on 30 November, there was a big gap before any further action was announced.

This left many workers disappointed as strikes planned for 28 March were called off at the last minute.

This is madness as the Con-Dem pension offer - first put on the table last December - still forces people to pay more, work longer hours and receive less when they retire.

Why should we accept this from a cabinet of millionaires who've never had a financial



worry in their lives?

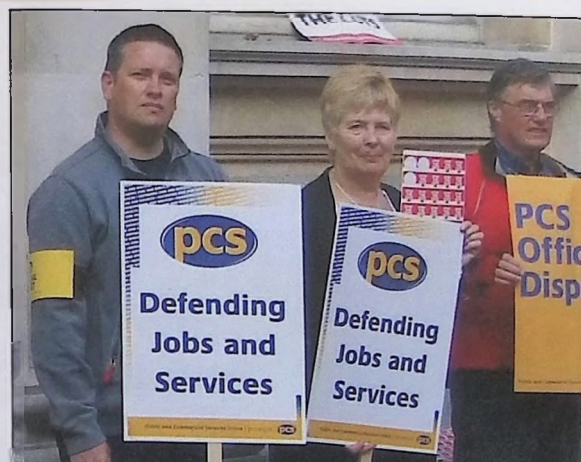
Pressure from grassroots members of Unite and the PCS has forced these unions to announce their strike action for next month.

This is fantastic news and we should turn 10 May into a day of resistance against all of the

government's austerity.

Whilst we are being asked to pay more, Stormont MLAs have awarded themselves an 11% pay increase.

This is outrageous in a county in the depths of depression and we need to send a strong signal that we won't



accept the agenda of cuts that they want to force on us.

### Mandate

The government in Westminster and their buddies in Stormont don't have any mandate to cut our pensions or to bring our health service to its knees.

But we do have a mandate for coordinated strike action, passed by all the major unions in the North. This means that there is no reason why UNISON, INTO, GMB & SIPTU cannot join the action next month. Millions struck on 30 November so let's all strike

together again and put a nail in the coffin of their attacks.

Ordinary people have to be clear who is on our side and who is against us. We all know the Tories hate working class families and want to make us pay.

But so do the Stormont parties who have voted consistently for austerity whilst hiding behind their paymasters.

To make the strikes a reality we need Union members to put pressure on their union leaderships to announce 10 May as the next round for action.

### What you can do

**1 Get together with other workers and encourage your Union to join the strike action**

**2. Organise your own picket and visit other picket lines on 10 May.**

## SWP Day School Saturday 12 May Jury's Inn Belfast 11.30 am.