

Socialist Worker

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Election in the North:

THE TIME FOR CHANGE IS NOW

For the best part of a hundred years the politics of the North has been dominated by one issue: the division between Loyalism and Nationalism, Orange and Green.

And for the majority of ordinary people this has brought only poverty, unemployment and deprivation.

For decades the right wing bigoted Unionist bosses and politicians, with the help of the British State, kept this racket going by offering a few small crumbs and advantages to Protestant workers. Now they can't even do that.

Now both the DUP and Sinn Fein have offered only cuts and austerity. But now there is a new generation in the North that wants to see an end to the misery of sectarian politics.

The shocking RHI (Renewable Heating Initiative) scandal was not about Orange or Green; it was about the greed and corruption of the elites, about ripping off the whole society for the rich.

And the Sinn Fein leadership's initial reaction was to turn a blind eye.



■ *Out with the old and in with the new*

Only pressure from below forced them to take a stand.

Alternative

But in this election there is a real alternative. People Before Profit called for an election from the start on, with two MLAs already, they are running more

candidates than ever before, including two in West Belfast.

Gerry Carroll, People Before Profit MLA, says

"This is a once in a lifetime election—a judgement day for all those who have taken the electorate for granted. We call on everyone, irrespective of the community that they come from, to punish



the big parties for their failure to deliver anything for ordinary people. RHI was a scandal.

But RHI was not the first failure of the executive.

We need to turn the 2nd of March into a riot at the ballot box—a revolt against the status quo.

The time for change is now. We call

on people to consider voting for us, and to send a message to the establishment that they cannot ignore."

People Before Profit in the South is fully behind this effort and will be sending buses up to Belfast and Derry to canvass and help out.

This is an opportunity that has to be seized.

'Recovery' in the South:

THE TIME TO FIGHT IS NOW...

The Government says we are in recovery; they've been saying it for more than two years now. They mean profits are recovering for the rich, business is getting better for business people.

But when it comes to what matters for ordinary working people, things like housing, health and transport, the recovery is nowhere to be seen.

What sort of a recovery is it when we have, as Peter McVerry has said, the worst homelessness since the famine? What sort of recovery is it when the crisis in our hospitals gets worse by the year?

And what sort of recovery is it when instead of looking improve our inadequate transport services the Government are planning to attack Bus Eireann services, wages and conditions.

The figures are truly shocking. The Peter McVerry Trust reports 6,985 homeless in November 2016 with 2,549 of them children. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

There are 105,000 or more in mortgage arrears and hundreds of thousands suffering from soaring rents from whom the next cohort of homeless will be recruited.

All this while 198,000 dwellings stand



■ *Ceann Comhairle Séan Ó Fearghail whose casting vote defeated the Anti-Eviction Bill.*

vacant across the state.

But when it comes to the housing crisis you don't need statistics you just need to walk the streets of Dublin to see the problem staring you in the face.

Trolleys

The figures for the trolley crisis are just as bad. In 2013 67,863 people spent time on a hospital trolley.

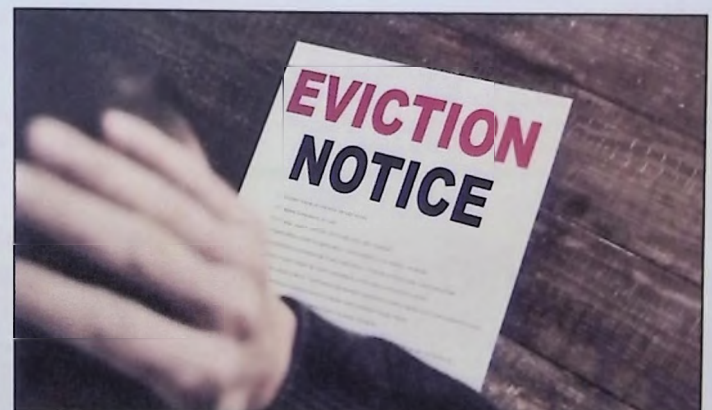
By 2015 the number was up to 92,998.

A few days into 2017 the record for the number on a trolley at any one point in time was broken with 612.

But again you don't need statistics – just go to an A&E.

And what is the response of the Government? Successive Ministers wring their hands, refer to the 'complexities of the situation' and promise to do better.

Last year Leo Varadkar said, "Anybody who makes such promises [to eliminate patients on trolleys] does not understand



the true complexity of what we face in the health service."

And this year Simon Harris says "It isn't acceptable, the health service must do better," as if he and his government were not part of the problem.

But on 19 January their real attitude to these problems was revealed.

They voted down the Anti-Eviction Bill proposed by AAA-PBP, with Fianna Fail shamefully abstaining and with Fianna Fail Ceann Comhairle, Sean O Fearghail, even

more shamefully using his casting vote to ensure its defeat.

This is why Socialist Worker says its time to fight. Only when ordinary people resist do we get change.

Whether it's fighting for the homeless like in Apollo House or nurses and doctors taking action over the catastrophe in the A&Es or it's Bus Eireann drivers defending their services or other workers demanding a pay increase, it is action from below that makes the difference.

FOR A UNITED SOCIALIST IRELAND!

DEFEND BUS EIREANN! DEFEND PUBLIC TRANSPORT!

CIE workers united can beat these attacks



Owen McCormack

The Government are trying to dismantle Bus Eireann and savage the pay and conditions of drivers as well as the services provided across the country.

The plan is to run down the state subsidised service and encourage more private operators using non-union workers on inferior terms of employment.

The latest announcement from Bus Eireann management would mean an effective cut in real pay of almost 25% for most drivers, alongside employing casual labour and running down pensions and long term job security.

The company still want to separate the Expressway Services and implement massive cuts in other services across the country but especially in the West which already has extremely poor public transport provision.

They claim the company is in crisis after a reported loss of about €7 million last year. In reality this is a manufactured crisis.

Underfunding

It stems from gross underfunding over years by the Government and the policy of the NTA (National Transport Authority) who have given licences to private operators on profitable intercity routes that have undercut the Bus Eireann service.

It has increased seat capacity on the Dublin-Limerick route by 111%, the Dublin-Cork route by 128% and the Dublin-Waterford route by 55%. The private operators employ drivers on much worse conditions than Bus Eireann with no comparable pension, sick or pay rates. Thus

they can offer cheaper services.

And private operators will not usually accept the free travel scheme passes used by many older people.

Between 2009 and 2015 the Government reduced the subsidy given to Bus Eireann by 34%. This saw many services withdrawn or reduced. Bus Eireann workers accepted a number of cost cutting plans that saw earnings fall and a wage freeze for over eight years.

The crisis is designed to give the Government and the NTA the excuse to push in a draconian attack on workers terms and conditions and pave the way for what they see as the more "efficient" private sector, by which they mean non-union labour and poorer pay.

The attack must be resisted. But this affects not just Bus Eireann drivers. The same cuts in subsidy can affect rail and Dublin Bus. The NTA still plans to tender out 10% of Dublin Bus routes and wants to bring in competitive tendering for all public transport. It is a neo liberal agency committed to pushing free market dogma and driving down workers' wages and conditions.

This is why all CIE workers should stand with their Bus Eireann colleagues. Only the prospect of a national bus and rail strike can stop Ross and Co from allowing Bus Eireann management to implement these attacks. The same solidarity between CIE workers forced past Governments to back down from similar plans.

Attacking free travel scheme a big mistake.

In the meantime Bus Eireann workers should campaign for public support and make the link between need for decent public transport and

for decent jobs and conditions.

Bus Eireann provide a vital social service to many isolated and rural towns and villages. They also provide the only free transport service for many older and retired people.

While the unions are correct to say that the Government do not provide enough subsidy to cover these services, this should not be mistaken for an attack on the idea of free transport for the old and others.

Some workers have gone on national media such as the Joe Duffy Show to decry free transport, and others have suggested charging older people. This is mistaken on two counts. The use by older people of transport is not the cause of the funding crisis; it is the underfunding by Governments over years that has caused this crisis.

Older people are absolutely entitled to use state transport and should be encouraged to use it MORE not less. It can be the only way for them link up with other towns and people and we want to see more people use public transport. Do not make it exclusive for those who can afford to pay.

Secondly, the users of public transport can we won't defend the jobs and conditions of drivers if workers put the argument to them that it is in their interest that we have a good, well-funded service that is run not for profit but as a social and environmental good.

The fares on all public transport services have rocketed over the years of austerity as the Government cut its funding. This is not in the interests of either workers or the travelling public. We should campaign for cheaper and freer transport for all as well as decent jobs and security for workers.

BULLOCH HARBOUR: RICHARD BARRETT STRIKES AGAIN!



Councillor Melisa Halpin

Mega-developer, Richard Barrett, of Treasury Holdings fame is back with a vengeance. He and his friend, Johnny Ronan were bailed out to the tune of €2.6 billion by the Irish Tax Payer in 2008.

Now, Mr Barrett has reinvented himself as Barrtra Capital and they have put in a proposal for a major development of the historic harbour of Bulloch near Dalkey.

This proposal has really annoyed the people of the area and the many users of the harbour.

Nearly 500 people turned up to a public meeting in Killiney to voice their objections.

The proposal is for 6 x 3 storey maisonettes on the quay front where all development has been single storey until now.

It also includes three enormous three storey villas with roof top gardens and parking spaces for their boats!

These villas look out over the sea – a view that used to be enjoyed by any member of the public who wanted to sit, walk or play on the rocks behind the harbour.

The villas will block the view and the developers, who claim they own the rocks, are sure to block this area off from the public.

This crazy proposal raises the question as to how this could possibly be even contemplated.

But if you look at the planning history of the site you see that in 2004

all but two councillors in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown rezoned the site, at the behest, it seems, of the then owner, from a zoning that would have protected the area as a public amenity to one that allows for pretty much any kind of development.

In 2009 when Richard Boyd Barrett was first elected to the Council he attempted to change the zoning back but only got the support of three other councillors.

Access

Clearly the old brown envelop politics and developer led planning was alive and well in Dun Laoghaire in the early 2000s. And now it is the people of the area who are going to have to pay for it with the loss of their access to this wonderful public amenity.

The people of Dun Laoghaire, Dalkey, Killiney have seen this movie before as developers have got their greedy paws on sections of the coastline.

In 2007 Save Our Seafront won a major victory over this plan to privatise the coast by stopping a 10 story apartment block on the Baths site.

It was People Power that put paid to that madcap plan – we will need the same kind of movement if we want to protect Bulloch Harbour into the future.

Save Our Seafront are campaigning on this issue. If you would like to get involved check out FB or e mail saveourseafront@gmail.com

Northern teachers fight back

Becca Bor

Teachers across the North are standing up for fair pay. Thousands of teachers have participated in strike action since November – closing hundreds of schools and disrupting hundreds of others.

Teachers have every right to be furious as consecutive education ministers, first Sinn Fein's John O'Dowd and now the DUP's Peter Weir, have treated them with a lack of respect, dignity and fairness.

Education minister, Peter Weir, claims there is no money for teachers and their schools, while his own party has been overseeing the greatest financial scandal in the history of Northern Ireland, with upwards of £600 million wasted through blatant profiteering in Renewable Heating Incentive

scheme.

The NI Executive has overseen a regime of austerity with severe cuts to education, healthcare and other vital public services.

Meanwhile we have a long litany of scandals from NAMA, to Red Sky, to the Social Investment Fund to RHI.

The SF/DUP Executive signed off on a 0% wage increase for teachers in 2015/16 and a 1% wage increase for 2016/2017, and has threatened redundancies if teachers don't take the deal.

If the minister were to agree to their demand of a 1% wage increase, it would cost around £6 million – a drop in the bucket in comparison to the RHI scandal.

Action

All of the teachers' unions walked out of talks in October



People Before Profit Candidates Gerry Carroll and Mick Collins join teachers' picket lines

and are engaging in various forms of industrial action. The two largest teachers' unions, INTO and NASUWT, have taken strike action.

Unfortunately, the smaller NAHT, UTU and ATL unions

voted not take strike, opting for action short of a strike. This weakens the solidarity across the schools, yet the fight is not over and they can continue to ramp up their industrial action as talks continue to stall.

NASUWT has organised rolling strikes with a strike on 30 November in Belfast and Newtownabbey and a strike planned for 31 January in Derry City, Strabane, Mid Ulster, Fermanagh and

Omagh. INTO staged a half-day strike on 18 January across the North, impacting over 800 schools.

Additionally, INTO have begun non-cooperation with the school inspectors, the ETI

(Education and Training Inspectors), which has highlighted the extreme increase of teacher workload that has very little to do with student learning.

The media and the employers are trying to guilt trip teachers into staying silent, "for the good of the children." But, the type of education students deserve is one that is fully funded, with teachers getting the dignity and pay they deserve. A demoralised workforce is a horrendous learning environment.

Parents, students, other unions and the general public should build solidarity for these teachers to help give them confidence to escalate their struggle. Solidarity will be key both amongst the five teachers' unions in the North, but also across the labour movement.

Apollo House occupation – Inspiration for further action

Brian O' Boyle

Housing has become the defining crisis of our time. Since the property collapse of 2008, hundreds of thousands of people have had their lives turned upside down by problems relating to where they live.

There are currently 130,000 families on the social housing waiting list – some for periods of twenty years or more. At the present rate of public building, this list will not be cleared for more than 100 years. On top of this, 80,000 mortgages are in arrears with 56,000 unpaid for more than 90 days.

This risks a wave of private evictions, particularly now that the market is recovering. The presence of vulture funds in the Irish market is yet more cause for concern, with 90,000 families facing the prospect of having their homes flipped to the highest bidder. At the sharpest end of the spectrum, 6985 people are officially homeless of whom 2,500 are children.

Across the country people are being forced into couch surfing or worse still, onto the streets. Bodies are strewn in the doorways of all of our major cities with no solution in sight.

Apollo Occupation

This is what made Apollo House so inspirational. On December 16 a group of activists, trade unionists, homeless people and well known celebrities took over the building in a bid to give shelter to rough sleepers around Dublin.

The operation took place in the dead of night and was planned with military style precision. Within 24 hours, they had thirty beds, running water and electricity. They also had a compelling story for the media.

The aim of *Home Sweet Home* was to look after the most vulnerable people at Christmas, capture the imagination of the Irish public and shame the government into action.

The occupation took place at the end of a centenary year that had publicly celebrated the occupation of the General Post Office. What better way to commemorate the men and women of 1916, than to occupy a building in the name of social justice.



Added to this, was the 'Christmas factor' and the bitter cold sweeping the city. People Before Profit have been agitating on housing issues for many years, but the audacious nature of the Apollo House Occupation proved to be the vehicle that finally delivered.

In just twenty seven days, the occupation raised €175,000 with 500 people donating supplies.

Four thousand people volunteered their time, with 6,000 hours of free labour put into making the initiative a success. Because of Apollo House, 205 people have moved off the streets into more secure, long term accommodation. Like the Irish Housing Network and Home Sweet Home, we celebrate this as a major achievement. Indeed, many of our members were involved on the ground.

Tom Ryan, the PBP convenor for Clondalkin spent many days and nights in the occupation. Reflecting on his ex-

perience, he had this to say,

Apollo House shone a light on the homelessness situation in Ireland like nothing before it. It forced the government to accept that there was a national emergency not just a housing shortage. In less than a month people power achieved more in this country than the last two governments have in nearly a decade.

When people came into Apollo House they were able to take off their coat of hopelessness, loneliness and despair and replace it with a coat of love, hope and solidarity. We got 90 six months beds when the government said there were none – this shows people power works when we push in the right direction.

Next Steps

As inspiring as Apollo House was, it would be wrong to assume that we should merely replicate it.

Taking on the physical and care needs of some of them most vulnerable people

in the state is extremely onerous and is not a model that can easily be generalised. Instead, it is best to see Apollo as a major first step in a longer campaign.

Like Right2Water, the Apollo Occupation can be a lightning rod that helps us to generalise in two important directions.

On the one hand, we should seek to bring as many people as possible into grassroots self-activity.

R2W was so successful precisely because it mobilised hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets. If we are to capture the full potential of Apollo House then it should act as part of a wider movement for housing justice in the state.

The end goal here should be a mass movement with democratic structures and the maximum input of all of the stakeholders.

To achieve this we should also generalise out from the issue of homelessness.

Without forgetting our obligation to eradicate homelessness this means looking at the wider issues of rising rents, endless waiting lists and mortgage arrears.

Direct action has proved an effective method that can now be spread. This means assessing the potential to stop evictions and/or to occupy NAMA buildings.

One practical step in this direction would be to draw up an inventory of NAMA owned property in your local area and work with likeminded people to take them over.

Alongside this we should be relating to tenants being gouged by their landlords, people stuck on the housing list and anyone else being hammered by the states policy on housing.

Politically, the most important legacy of Apollo will be the movement that it helps to deliver. Apollo was an inspirational act of civil disobedience that we should look to generalise as soon as possible.

The Vultures have landed

Kieran Allen

Vulture funds have swooped on Ireland with a ruthless determination that has hardly ever been seen in other parts of the world.

They are buying up vast swathes of Irish property – and the Fine Gael led government is encouraging them.

A vulture fund brings together wealthy investors who pool their money to search for quick profits. Typically they move in two ways.

Either they buy up distressed property – houses, apartments or commercial units – whose prices have collapsed after the crash of 2008. Or they buy up the debts.

They approach institutions like Bank of Scotland, which fled Ireland after the crash, and buy their loan book for a fraction of its face value.

They only pay about 20 or 30 cent for every €1 of debt and they then get the right to pursue the full debt.

Five or six main vulture funds have bought up €200 billion (!) of Irish property. The funds involved include Cerberus, Apollo, Lone Star, Blackstone and Kennedy Wilson.

They typically operate with an Irish front man who knows the local scene and can point them to where there is

real value.

The most scandalous case is that of Apollo.

Goggin

Here Brian Goggin, a former CEO of Bank of Ireland, has joined with a fund controlled by Leon Black, one of the richest men in Wall Street. Goggin helped trigger the Irish crash by pushing up property prices with a vast increase in loans.

But now he is gaining from the very crash he helped to bring about.

To add insult to injury, he retired on a pension of over €500,000 a year from the bank and is now creaming in more money while he helps a US controlled fund buy up Irish property.

The vast sell off has been made possible as a direct result of government policy. After 2012, Fine Gael pushed through a number of changes in the tax code to ensure these funds paid virtually no tax.

The sheer scale of the rip off is astounding.

Fifteen vulture funds have paid just €250 a year in tax!

This is despite the fact they control €10.3 billion worth of loans and debt in Ireland.

The tax dodge is estimated to have cost the Irish Exchequer up to €500 million in lost taxes.

Fine Gael pretend that this just happened because clever people found some 'loopholes'.

This is simply a lie. The 'loopholes' were deliberately written for them by a government that wanted to convey an impression that a quick recovery was underway.

Officials in the Department of Finance met with vulture fund firms on sixty five different occasions in 2013 - 2014.

Even more astounding, the Finance Minister Mr Noonan attended eight of these meetings. Three of these meetings were with one of the nastiest funds, Lone Star.

Cerberus

In the North, virtually all of NAMA property was sold off to Cerberus at a knock down price. A tight arrangement emerged between DUP politicians like Sammy Wilson and Peter Robinson to push through the deal.

The DUP politicians did a deal with Cerberus to write off the personal guarantees given by Northern builders to secure loans. These often included claims on their personal houses.

Once Cerberus gave that commitment, the DUP contacted Michael Noonan, who turned a blind eye to the loss of money on NAMA.

What emerges from all of this is one



simple fact – the Irish political elite on both sides of the border have never had the interest of the majority at heart. They are plugged into the global networks of the rich – and will give them a dig out when asked.

All of this will bring tremendous suffering. Housing campaigner, Peter McVerry, has predicted that about

25,000 people will face evictions as the vultures move in.

The Dail had a chance to stop these eviction this month when an AAA-PBP bill was presented to the house. But Fine Gael and Fianna Fail colluded to vote it down.

The reason? They know exactly whose interests they must serve.

#socialism 1.01

John Molyneux

The Rise of People Power

There is now widespread understanding among ordinary people in Ireland that if you want anything done in this country the way to go is People Power.

If you don't want to pay unjust water charges no amount of letter writing and debate in the Dáil or on RTE will do the trick. You have to block the installation of meters, put hundreds of thousands on the streets and refuse to pay.

If you want something done about homelessness don't wait for the politicians or the government – you'll be waiting for ever. Take action, occupy a NAMA building; then they may take some notice.

If you are a LUAS worker or a bus driver and you need a pay increase, don't just wait for union officials to negotiate it for you, take action – stop the trams or buses! You'll get lots of abuse but you will also get a pay rise.

Unlikely

Even that most unlikely advocate of people power, Fine Gael Chief Whip,

They see it as the entry into politics of people who don't belong there: the 'rabble', 'the mob' etc'; people who are unruly and uncouth and who should know their place, which is sitting at home watching Fair City and voting every five years for the parties they are supposed to vote for, Fine Gael, Fianna Fail or Labour. Meanwhile, they think, politics should be left to the professionals, the politicians, who are responsible and understand that 'hard' decisions have to be taken like cutting single parents allowance or SNAs in Schools.

And any 'politician' who thinks differently they dismiss as 'populist' as if Richard Boyd Barrett and Paul Murphy were the same as Donald Trump and Nigel Farage.

They also believe that people power is a threat to democracy. This is because they identify democracy only with parliament.

Socialists disagree with this completely. We welcome the rise of people power because we think that so-called parliamentary democracy is not democracy at all but

swept the stocks, the thumbscrew, the wheel, the boots of burning oil, the torturer's vice and the stake into the oblivion of history... there is not in history a record of any movement for abolishing torture, preventing war, establishing popular suffrage, or shortening the hours of labour led by the hierarchy... All hail, then, to the mob, the incarnation of progress!

And we would remind the establishment Ministers and journalists that even the very limited and weak democracy we have in Ireland today, even the very existence of this state as an independent entity, was won by people power both in 1916 and in the War of Independence when 100,000 people joined the IRA and workers' went on strike and formed workers' councils like the Limerick Soviet.

Moreover we see in the rise of people power not just away of achieving things in the here and now and winning important reforms and not a threat to democracy but also the embryo of a much fuller and more



People Power, O'Connell Street, Dublin

Regina Doherty, seems to have grasped this point – at least when the issue is in her backyard and 'the people' concerned are landowners and farmers.

Faced with the decision to go ahead with the erection of electricity pylons through her Meath constituency she said, "We are about to enter into a phase of civil disobedience to hamper the decision made by An Bord Pleanála and I fully support the landowners and farmers in that action."

In general the establishment – the rich, the bosses, the main politicians and their hangers on in the media – hate this.

just a talking-shop masking the rule of the rich.

We are delighted to see ordinary people 'interfering' in the business-as-usual of politicians and the Dáil and have far more faith in them than in Government Ministers, newspaper editors or hired columnists.

Mob rule

We would agree with James Connolly when, in 1910, he replied to a priest who denounced 'mob rule':

In the course of [its] upward march the mob has transformed and humanised the world... The mob, "the most blind and ruthless tyrant of all", with one sweep of its grimy, toil-worn hand,

genuine democracy than we have at the moment.

Precisely by involving the mass of ordinary people in decision making in their communities and, crucially, their workplaces we can create forms of political representation that really embody 'people's rule'.

This is because such people's assemblies will bring in the principle of recall and accountability of all representatives and combine it with control over what happens in production and the economy.

This is the very essence of real democracy and real socialism.

The world ago

John Molyneux

There has never been a US Presidential inauguration like it. In 670 cities across the world – from Melbourne to Copenhagen – people took the streets to protest in the biggest global demonstration since the great anti-Iraq War marches of 2003.

The turnout was largest in America, of course. There the numbers were astounding – at least 500,000 in Washington, an amazing 750,000 in Los Angeles and huge numbers in Boston, Chicago and elsewhere. Even in Austin Texas there was a rally of 50,000. Millions across the country.

In London there were 100,000 and here in Ireland there were 5000 on the Women's March in Dublin on the Saturday plus 300 on the Friday evening and other rallies in Galway, Sligo and Cork.

Everywhere it was the Women's Marches that captured the public's imagination and attracted mass support. This was in response to Trump's repeated vile and open misogyny and the clear threat his administration poses to a woman's right to choose.

But the demonstrations were not restricted to women or women's issues. Every group threatened by Trumpism joined in: people of colour, Black Lives activists, Moslems, Palestinians, LGBT+ people, trade unionists, environmentalists.

They seem everywhere to have been magnificent festivals of unity and solidarity and are a beacon of hope in a darkening world.

Right wing tide

Trump's victory in November was part of a rising tide of racist and far right forces internationally and it encouraged every fascist and reactionary from Marine Le Pen and Nigel Farage to the Ku Klux Klan and the Alt-Right.

But the scale of these protests reminds us that actually Donald Trump does NOT represent the majority of the American people. He actually LOST the popular vote and was only delivered the presidency by the anti-democratic Electoral College system. And that he would have lost by more if he had faced a better candidate than Hillary Clinton.

Following on the wave of demonstrations that came immediately after Trump's election and the huge movement for avowed socialist, Bernie Sanders, together with Black Lives Matter and Standing Rock it is clear that there is a new left and a new generation of resistance in America and that



there is a massive audience and potential for this elsewhere as well.

Resistance

And resistance will be needed! Nobody can be sure right now just what Trump will do or what he will be able to do, but we know what he wants to do. His appointments leave no room for doubt.

Steve Bannon, formerly of Breitbart and the fascist Alt-Right, an avowed racist, is his Senior Counsellor; Steven Mnuchin, Treasury Secretary, formerly of Goldman Sachs and a hedge-fund manager renowned for aggressively foreclosing on home owners;

General James 'Mad Dog' Mattis, Defence Secretary, a US Marine Commander in Afghanistan and Iraq; Jeff Sessions, Attorney General, from Alabama, with a record of opposing immigration, banning same-sex marriage and gay rights in the military.

The list goes on: Ben Carson, Housing Secretary, a Seventh Day Adventist Christian fundamentalist who denies evolution and climate change and opposes abortion even in cases of rape and incest; Wilbur Ross, Commerce Secretary, banker and billionaire known as 'the king of bankruptcy' for buying up bankrupt companies and selling them on for a fortune; Rick Perry,

End state denial of T

Lorraine McMahon

Is the continued denial of Traveller Ethnicity a failure of the state or a strategy of State Racism?

Travellers are an indigenous minority who have been part of Irish society for centuries. There are just over 36,000 Travellers in Ireland, less than 1% of the population. Yet successive governments have denied formal recognition of Traveller Ethnicity. This has denied Travellers their rights and resulted in detrimental impacts on their lives.

In 1999 the Dáil passed the Equal Status Bill with an amendment that defined Travellers for the purpose of the Traveller ground. The Dáil agreed to capitalize the "T" in Traveller and incorporated what is an ethnic definition of the Traveller community into the Bill.

The community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including historically a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.

However, the equal status legislation gave no real protections to Travellers nor provided recognition of Traveller Ethnicity within the policies of the state. State policies for Travellers continue

to be "mainstream" policies with no recognition of the need for specific targeted and culturally appropriate policies to meet the specific needs of Travellers. This manifests in the following stark realities.

State policies

Health: life expectancy for Traveller men is 15.1 years less than the general population and for Traveller women it is 11.5 years less. Infant mortality is 3.9% higher and the suicide rate is 6.6 times higher accounting for 1 in every 11 deaths among young Traveller men.

Education: educational attainment among the Traveller community is disproportionately lower with 69% of Travellers having ceased education at primary level, only 3.1% continue education past the age of 18 years compared to 41.2% of total population, and less than 1% have a college degree compared to 30% of general population. The 2010 'Our Geels' the All Ireland Traveller Health Study, indicated only 115 Travellers (0.3% of the Traveller population) had completed third level education.

This stands as a testament to failed structures but as the outcome of segregation, alienation and institutional



racism. Alongside this Traveller specific educational supports have been decimated by 86% since 2008.

Employment: the unemployment rate among Travellers is over 82% overall. The employment rate of Travellers aged 25-64 is 11% compared to 66% of general population. Successive government policies have systematically shut down Travellers ways of organising their independent employment and economic activity.

Accommodation: the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act

Against Trump



Energy Secretary, Texas Governor, declared homophobic and supporter of the death penalty who vetoed a ban on executing the mentally retarded.

Above all there is Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, CEO of ExxonMobile, the world's biggest oil company and leading sponsor of climate change denial. This is the most extreme right wing government in US history, dedicated to rolling back progress on all fronts.

Trump's inauguration speech, co-written by Steve Bannon, also signalled his intentions: crude and mean spirited, it contained only one idea - aggressive

American nationalism.

Those who blindly hope that shouting 'America first!' will benefit the working people who have been left behind by neo-liberal globalisation are in for a bitter disappointment. They will discover that loud-mouthed patriotism will serve only as cover for more attacks on their rights and living standards, even if they are 'white'.

This is why resistance will be so essential. Without it Trump and his gang will ride roughshod over every gain that women have made since the sixties, every small step forward for African-Americans since the Civil Rights Movement, and every

notion of even limiting climate change. At the same time they will deepen, not lessen, the poverty and inequality that is already such a feature of US capitalism.

And we must never forget that what happens in America affects everywhere in the world, economically, politically and culturally.

But that is precisely what makes the great US and global anti-Trump demonstrations so inspiring. They show not only the possibility of stopping Trump in his tracks but also of building a movement for a better world altogether.

Traveller Ethnicity



1998 makes it mandatory for all local authorities to implement Traveller Accommodation Programmes providing culturally appropriate accommodation through group housing, halting sites and transient sites.

State racism

But the reality is very different with almost 600 Traveller families living on temporary halting sites and just under 1000 families, accounting for 4000 members of the Traveller community, living in intolerable and unsafe

conditions often without access to water, sanitation or electricity.

This reality for Travellers in Ireland is *not just a failure of the state it is State racism at its worse.*

Racism is often seen as individual prejudice rather than in political terms. Racism is political, it is fed from the top down with an inextricable link between racism and capitalism where racism is a key tool of the capitalist system to divide and rule.

The complex nature of the capitalist state makes the racism against Travellers often difficult to see and expose. However, policies in relation to Traveller accommodation, education, employment and health have evidently eroded Traveller culture, denied Traveller Ethnicity and are tantamount to an explicit pursuit of a cultural genocide having striking parallels to policies and practices against other ethnic minorities such as Roma in Austria and the Aboriginal population under the rule of white colonialists in Australia.

In the face of long existing and ever growing proofs and declarations from the Traveller Community, investigations, reviews, commissions, genetic and anthropological studies, committees, international hearings, the State has

continued to deny Traveller Ethnicity.

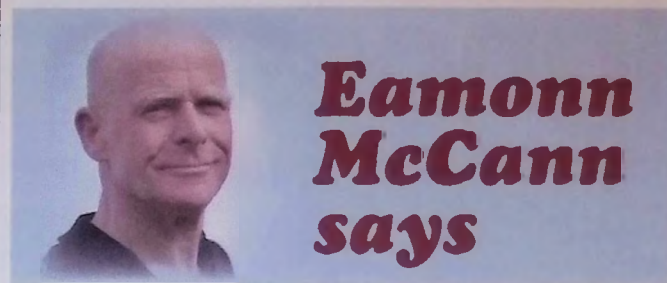
The most recent defence is "the need to win over the hearts and minds of settled people" (David Staunton 2016 Minister of State for Equality); a plan for recognition by popularity and permission rather than by human rights.

But, as with the Roma in Europe, the Aborigines in Australia, the Maori in New Zealand and the Sami in Finland, the formal recognition of Travellers in Ireland will come.

Of course formal recognition will not in itself end racism against Travellers or repair the damage done by generations of discrimination and oppression but it is a crucial and achievable first step towards the emancipation of the Traveller in Ireland.

Socialists recognise the denial of Traveller Ethnicity for what it is, STATE RACISM. We must unite against all forms of racism and fight in solidarity with the Traveller community to demand the recognition of Traveller Ethnicity NOW.

■ *Recognition of Traveller Ethnicity will, along with ending Direct Provision, be the central theme of the United Against Racism National Demonstration on UN International Anti-Racism Day on 18 March in Dublin.*



Eamonn McCann says

Protestant workers are key

Almost without exception, commentators in the North believe that the Assembly election will be a brutal contest between Unionism and Nationalism, each side choosing a champion to take on the representatives of "the other side."

Thus, Sinn Fein and the SDLP fight for the right to represent the Green voters, while the DUP and the Ulster Unionists clash over who's to lead the charge for Orangeism - and People Before Profit is told that we are "not living in the real world" when we pitch our message to people in the bottom half of society irrespective of the community they come from.

It's suggested that Protestant workers in particular have crude communal politics in their DNA. There's no point talking to them, runs the mantra. They are automatic Orange voters and won't ever change.

This is, for a start, ahistorical. There have always been trades unionists, socialists, liberals and secularists from a Protestant background who wanted no truck with Unionism. The majority of others have been, and are, far from uncritical adherents of Unionist parties

public and private sector pay barriers, to defend services have all sparked anger and brought people together.

This reflects the fact that there is no solution to problems of poverty in one community which would not also be a solution to problems of poverty in the other community. You can't win a raise in the minimum wage on the Shankill if you don't win it also on the Falls.

This has underlain the experience of People Before Profit in the last couple of elections. In Belfast, we have knocked on the doors of the Shankill as well as the Falls. In Derry, we have canvassed Nelson Drive and the Fountain, and also the Bogside and Creggan. We are realistic about the extent of a breakthrough. But we have won a hearing, and won votes.

Protestant votes were crucial in taking a seat in Foyle - and will be again on March 2nd if we are to keep it in a constituency reduced from six seats to five.

Equality

People Before Profit's leading role in campaigns on a range of equality issues has also helped draw support



Public sector workers unite, Belfast 2011

or organisations. There are many more Protestants in trades unions than in the Orange Order.

No protection

Being a Protestant doesn't protect you from the ravages of capitalism. And the phoney "protection" once promised by a sectarian State hasn't been on offer in the living memory of most of us.

A loyalist leader from the early 1970s, Andy Tyrre, remarked in later years that Protestant workers feeling they had a better deal than Catholics was like "Tuppence ha'penny looking down on tuppence."

True, when you are ground down and living on the edge, that ha'penny difference might loom large. But in the perspective of the big-wigs and the boss-class, it was a small price to pay for keeping the working class divided.

Even in the darkest days, workers repeatedly came together to fight for common interests. Struggle on the economic front has been the sole constant factor in people from "both sides" linking arms in common cause. The major occasions in the last century can be rhymed off - 1907, 1919, 1932. More recently, the fight against austerity, to defend the NHS, to break

from across the divide. There is little difference between the communities in levels of support for equal marriage or for abortion law reform, for example. The myth of Protestants being somehow "naturally" reactionary on such issues would not survive an analysis of attendance at right to choose rallies, for example.

More broadly, every survey of how people in the North identify themselves shows that up to 30 percent do not see themselves as Unionist or Nationalist.

More than half of Catholics would be content for the North to remain within the UK it they could be certain of equal rights and entitlements. More than half of Protestants regard a united Ireland as liveable, as long as their rights are respected.

This falls far short of a plan for a political settlement. But it shows that the old idea of separate communities with mutually exclusive aspirations and forever at loggerheads, has less substance now than ever before.

The time is now for unity in pursuit of a better, fairer society at ease with itself. Which is to say that the Protestant section of the working class is the key component for shaping a socialist future.

Ignorance is (Panti) Bliss

Emma Hendrick replies to Panti Bliss's call for moderation

Rory O'Neill (aka Panti Bliss) is a nationally recognised figure who has campaigned on LGBTQ issues for many years.

In 2014 he gripped the hearts of the nation with his *Nobel Call* from the Abbey theatre.

To date, his speech, which offered a deeply personal account of homophobia in Ireland, has been viewed over 800,000 times.

Perhaps the most poignant moment came when O'Neill made a plea for others to empathise with his lived experience. Living with oppression gives victims a unique lens to speak on their own behalf.

It is also extremely important that others don't speak for you, a point that O'Neill made with great power and dignity,

"Have any of you ever come home in the evening and turned on the television and there is a panel of people - nice people, respectable people, smart people, the kind of people who make good neighbourly neighbours and write for newspapers.

And they are having a reasoned debate about you. And even the nice TV presenter lady who you feel like you know thinks it's perfectly ok that they are all having this reasonable debate about who you are and what rights you "deserve". And that

feels oppressive".

Just as important was O'Neill's insistence that the fight to end homophobia and oppression is a political one.

This means there is a need for unity and support from those who suffer the given oppression and those who do not.

It also meant being militant.

When debating the issue of Yes Equality, O'Neill was adamant that nothing less than full equality would be acceptable.

He was not for civil partnership or second class citizenship, he was for full marriage rights and total equality. In many ways Yes Equality was a victory for those of us who never accepted the need to be cautious.

The fight was one for social justice alongside those who were suffering oppression.

Unfortunately O'Neill is not nearly so progressive when it comes to the issue of Repealing the 8th.

When interviewed in the *Irish Independent* he stated that the referendum would hinge on the middle ground whose minds were open to change.

"Those two sides (pro and anti) will never reach a consensus," he said.

"What I would like to see in the public sphere is a grey-area view.



Panti's noble call at the Abbey Theatre.

"That view should be given a platform to work out the issues.

"The vast majority are somewhere in between and we need to make a concerted effort to hear those middle-ground voices."

Lived Experience

Surely O'Neill can see the hypocrisy in these words.

Just like the 'nice commentators' who assumed to speak on his behalf, he is now offering opinions about women's bodies from a male

perspective. O'Neill will never be pregnant or receive medical treatment without informed consent.

Neither will he ever feel the need to end a pregnancy when faced with 14 years in prison or leaving the country for a termination.

In other words, he lacks the lived experience of a form of oppression perpetuated against thousands of women annually.

This makes it all the more objectionable that he wants the Irish

people to seek the so-called middle ground.

The reality is that the vast majority of Irish people want action immediately.

In a series of polls taken over the last 12 months around 80% want to Repeal the 8th - meaning that the 'middle ground argument' has largely been constructed by the right wing media.

Anti-choicers constantly talk about term limits, replacement and abortion on demand as a tactic

designed to muddy the waters.

O'Neill is clearly far from this camp, but his recent interview has given legitimacy to right wingers on the issue.

Far from having to leave our so-called "metropolitan, elitist safety bubble", groups like the Abortion Rights Campaign, PBP Pro-Choice and the Coalition to Repeal the 8th have been building grassroots support for women's bodily autonomy across the country.

Our main argument is that women won't wait any longer and this is proving immensely popular with a new generation of Irish women.

Most people have been won to a more liberal abortion regime.

The only minds that have to change are those of the right wing politicians who continually insist on a "national conversation" to stop the people from having their say.

Now is not the time for passivity or conservatism, it is time to seize the moment like Yes Equality in 2015.

Like the LGBTQ community we want full equality with the rest of society.

This means full bodily autonomy and nothing less, not the spineless middle-ground of compromise and retreat.

Ballaghaderreen: Bring people, bring jobs, bring the buzz back

Memet Uludag

Eighty two refugees, mostly Syrians will be housed in the small town of Ballaghaderreen in County Roscommon.

Thirty seven of the refugees arriving are children.

As the news was announced by the Department of Justice there was some mixed reaction in the town of 2000, but despite the unease and anger towards the government for its handling of the issue and its failure to consult, people were mostly sympathetic and wanted to welcome the refugees to their town.

A well attended public meeting organised by local residents and activists decided to take local initiatives to welcome the refugees.

As in many places, the arrival of refugees brings to the surface concerns about the lack of housing, jobs and public

services.

Many of the Ballaghaderreen residents speaking to the media raised similar concerns and expressed their doubts that the government will provide the necessary services or create the needed jobs.

In recent years Ballaghaderreen has suffered from the closure of small shops, reduced health and other public services and cuts to the County Council budget.

Cutbacks

In 2008 Roscommon County Council was receiving €23 million from the Local Government Fund.

This figure has been reduced every year and in 2016 it was down to only €9 million.

In the same period the budget for housing has also been reduced by €1million.

Once a 'busy' town, Ballaghaderreen has lost many of the local shops and as one

resident has put it, "it has lost its buzz.

Create jobs, get people back into the town and bring life back".

Maybe the refugees will help with that!

But as the concerns on housing the refugees in the long term are raised there are 282 empty houses in the town.

According to the Local Area Development Plan there are enough homes to sustain the projected population growth until 2040.

The two schools in the town can easily serve the newly arriving children if the necessary funds are allocated.

There is already a multi-cultural community in Ballaghaderreen.

If the support is given and services provided, refugees can make the town their new home and settle in the community.

What Ballaghaderreen needs is support and language

teachers, better medical services and a reversal of the cuts.

But everywhere in Ireland needs that and refugees don't just bring their needs, they also bring a pair of capable hands and new skills.

What is more, an increase in education, health and other local services won't be just good for the refugees but also for the entire population, locals and migrants.

This is the time to fight for

those services, not give into fear and racism.

Warm response

As Mary Gallagher, a resident of the town shop owner said, "How could you say no? You'd be betraying every single thing that we ourselves came from.

You think of the people fleeing, drowning, all the different things that happened these refugees and you have to sort of make the right decision."

There have been a few attempts to respond to the arrival of the refugees by whipping up anti-Moslem hatred but these have been ignored.

The people of Ballaghaderreen are to be congratulated on their warm and generous response.



Shopkeeper, Mary Gallagher, who has impressed locals with her warm welcome.



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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 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 action.

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What's the problem with car insurance?

Dave O'Farrell

Car insurance costs in Ireland are out of control. Almost everyone has seen their insurance costs increase dramatically – even if they have never made a claim, or they know someone who has had this experience.

This is a very serious issue for a large number of people for whom a car is an absolute essential for simply living their daily lives – particularly given the states ever decreasing funding for public transport.

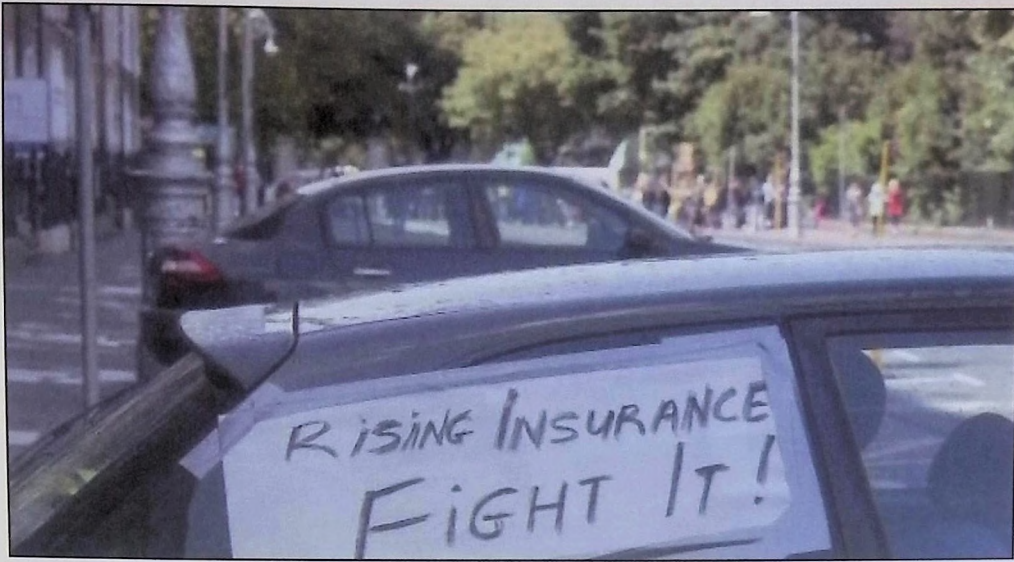
Many excuses have been offered for these spiralling costs but they don't stand up.

Insurance companies claim it is due to the rising cost of claims yet Garda statistics show a drop in accidents and there was a reduction of 44% in the costs of claims between 2007 and 2012.

The Government claim we need a more competitive insurance market yet there are already twelve insurance companies operating in Ireland and all are engaged in pushing up premium costs.

The only argument offered by either the Government or the companies that holds any water at all is the legal costs associated with claims but the Government refuses to attempt any significant reduction in legal fees.

The real cause of the increase in pre-



miums lies with the insurance companies attempting to increase their profits.

Prior to the financial crash many invested heavily in financial speculation, this was a massive profit driver during the "good times" but resulted in serious losses during the crash and negligible profit growth since.

Now in an effort to increase profits they are fleeing drivers.

A lack of decent public transport means many have no alternative but to drive and car insurance is a legal requirement not an optional extra.

This leaves people at the mercy of an insurance industry whose only interest is

their bottom line.

Solutions

Solutions to these problems do exist – and they are straight forward.

■ A public insurance company, run on a not-for-profit basis to provide cheap third party insurance for all drivers. A system

like this has run in Manitoba in Canada for many years.

■ A state run not-for-profit legal service – with a clear cost structure – to deal with the cost of court cases.

■ Legislation to make discrimination against younger drivers or those with older cars (or indeed many of the other spurious reasons sometimes given for higher costs) illegal.

■ Investing in public transport to offer people alternatives to car use.

How do we get these solutions?

It seems quite clear that the Government and the companies completely opposed to the measures described above.

This means that we will have to force their hand; thankfully recent years have reminded people just what we need to do to make them act.

We have to rely on people power.

From the water charges campaign to the inspiring occupation of Apollo House it is movements of ordinary people getting organised and challenging the status quo that have been most effective at forcing change in the political system.

A movement of drivers across the state – including professional drivers like taxi drivers and hauliers – willing to take mass action including demonstrations and civil disobedience can exert exactly the type of pressure needed to get action on this issue.

WHEN WORKERS FELLED THE TSAR

2017 marks the centenary of the Russian Revolution. The revolution began in February 1917 with the overthrow of the Tsar and climaxed in October of the same year in a socialist revolution that overthrew capitalism. Socialist Worker will run a series of articles dealing with the dramatic events of that year. Here

Sean Carroll describes the February Revolution that began the process.

On the 23 February 1917, International Women's Day, a group of women textile workers in the Vyborg district of Petrograd went on strike in protest at bread shortages brought on by three years of imperialist war. Although political strikes were not unusual in Petrograd, this strike was to prove to be of historical significance as the spark that started the greatest revolution of the 20th century.

Over the course of the 23rd the textile workers began to 'call out' workers in other factories and the strike spread to other districts of Petrograd and by the end of the first day nearly 90,000 workers were out on strike.

The next day workers returned to the factories not to work but to hold short assemblies where they agreed to strike again. This time the strikes almost doubled in size spreading to new districts of the city and the cry of we want bread began to be drowned out by cries of "Down with the war!" and "Down with the Tsar!"

By the 25th the strike had grown to 240,000 workers and tens of thousands had assembled in demonstrations around the city. Street meetings were organised and at one meeting mounted police opened fire and wounded a speaker; shots from the crowd killed a police inspector and wounded the chief of police. Reports from the Tsarist secret police and from Bolshevik workers noted the inactivity of the Cossack cavalry in dispersing the demonstrations.

Suppress

Up until the 26 February the use of firearms had been avoided by the military, but a telegram received by General Khabalov, then in charge of the district, from the



International Women's Day: the Revolution begins

Tsar commanded him to "suppress from tomorrow all disorders on the streets of the capital". Khabalov passed down orders to open fire on any crowds that refused to disperse.

On the night of the 26th police arrested around 100 revolutionaries including members of the Bolshevik Petrograd Committee; a mutiny among soldiers in the Pavlosk Guard regiment was put down and at least 40 demonstrators were killed.

The army was now crucial to the fate of the revolution; the workers were by and large unarmed and although resolute under volleys of shots they could not hold out under sustained armed attacks. While detailed plans had been drawn up by the Tsarist regime to deal with an insurrection, military plans and garrisons of soldiers are only effective weapons for the ruling class for as long as those soldiers obey orders.

February 27 was to become the decisive day. That morning a Tsarist captain arrived at the barracks of

the Volinskii regiment to a chorus of "we will not shoot" and was himself killed by a rifle shot. Soldiers plundered rifles and ammunition from the barracks and convinced some of the Preobrazhenskii regiment stationed in the same barracks to mutiny.

Soon soldiers spread out across the city to gather weapons from arsenals and to 'call out' soldiers stationed in other barracks. Regiment by regiment the military forces at the disposal of the Tsarist regime dwindled and police stations were destroyed.

A last ditch attempt by General Khabalov to send in another regiment ended, in his words, with 'no results'; attempts to bring in reserves were thwarted as there was no access to ammunition.

On February 28 the last remaining troops who had not mutinied surrendered; the ministers of the Tsarist government were either arrested or surrendered voluntarily.

The Russian ruling class decided to sacrifice the Tsar to save their

own skins. Tsar Nicholas was forced to abdicate.

After just five days four hundred years of Tsarist autocracy had been swept away and consigned to history. The fall of the Tsarist regime represented just the start of the most incredible eight months of revolutionary history. The fight for a workers state would continue.

Suggested reading on the Russian Revolution

There are vast numbers of books on the Russian Revolution. The best by far is Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* – the only trouble is it is very long, over 1000 pages, but well worth it.

Much shorter and very good is John Reed, *Ten Days the Shook the World*, an eye-witness account by a revolutionary American journalist. There is also Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, Leon Trotsky, *Lessons of October*, and just published, 1917: *Russia's Red Year*, a new graphic novel by Tim Sanders and John Newsinger. In March there will be a Special Edition of the Irish Marxist Review on the Revolution.

Another sad loss in a bad year

Linda Kehoe on the passing of George Michael

The relentlessly-positive Wham! duo of George Michael and Andrew Ridgeley burst onto the British stage in the early 1980s.

While Ridgeley faded from the celebrity stage George Michael's solo career, good humour and drug-fuelled antics kept him a household name until his death on Christmas Day.

George was the embodiment of 1990's pop, but there were hints throughout his career, and in revelations since his death that he wasn't simply the rich playboy the media often portrayed him as.

The seemingly apolitical Wham! released "Wham! Rap!" with the lyric "I ain't never gonna work" advocating the dole life as a good life in Thatcherite Britain where cash success meant life success.

In London in 1984 they played at a miners' strike benefit at the Royal Festival Hall and although the media at the time treated their participation as a farcical mistake it was Wham! taking a stand against a horrible, oppressive government.

The famous "Choose Life" t-shirts Wham! wore were "a comment against war, death and destruction" rather than the conservative statement some people made it out to be, and t-shirt designer Hammett to this day denounces the use of her design in anti-abortion campaigns.

Michael's Another music called for liberation, pride and sex without shame.

Fear

George hid his homosexuality for years.

There was fear of negative reactions from family, friends and fans; the terror of the AIDS epidemic; and the pressure to be the straight boy that teenage girls could fall in love with and, importantly, buy records from.

In hindsight his 1990 hit song *Freedom* clearly tells the story of him being straight for pay. He sang about hiding "something deep inside of me" for the good of his career "knowing what side my bread is buttered on" despite the cost to



his mental health "I guess it was enough for me".

In 1998 his arrest in a New York park bathroom led to his public outing, and he met the media-frenzy and condemnation which followed with dignity, honesty and candour and in doing so became an icon for the Gay Rights Movement.

He was a charitable man, volunteering time and donating millions to charities – the Elton John AIDS Foundation, Childline and to strangers who just needed a helping hand for IVF or to get out of debt.

He didn't air his political viewpoints often, so when he vehemently spoke out against against the Iraq War people were taken aback.

In a short but worth-a-watch BBC interview he condemns Blair for "ignoring all the debates" and going to war "despite 90% of voters saying that without the UN they were against it".

He invites the public to be suspicious that now, after "years of Saddam in power, we decide to do something about him now when Sharon is bombing the West Bank" (of Palestine).

The video for his 2002 song "Shoot the Dog" characterizes Tony Blair as the puppy of an imbecilic George W.

Bush, and missies landing back in the bed of Tony and Cherie in Downing St.

George said that he always wanted to become famous but not if the cost of the success was making immoral choices or stepping on other people.

2016 robbed the world of much musical genius, and 53 year old George Michael deserves to be remembered along with Prince, Bowie and Cohen.

Socialist Worker

Fiddling while the North burns - the great 'cash for ash' robbery

By Gavin Campbell

In November 2012, Arlene Foster, then Minister for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), initiated the 'Renewable Heat Incentive' (RHI) scheme.

The Department for the Economy estimates RHI will cost the public purse a staggering £490 million while the Northern Ireland Audit Office has issued a statement saying it could eventually cost over £1 billion. The scale of the debacle has triggered fresh elections in the North and plunged Northern politics into crisis.

The RHI scheme was supposedly established to encourage businesses to move from using fossil fuels to biomass-burning heating systems.

However, in the North the scheme, through a combination of corruption, incompetence and criminality, was thrown wide open to abuse by 'those in the know'. For every £1.00 of wood pellets burned, a participating RHI business would make £1.60 in return! Stunningly, contracts were signed for 20 years - empty sheds, barns and factories were being heated 24/7 in order to profit!

Details

Though we don't yet know the details of every business participating, it has transpired through the slow drip feed of announcements that many of 'those in the know' were close associates, family members of DUP MLAs and party members.

As early as 2013 a whistleblower contacted Arlene Foster, to express concern regarding the potential abuse of the scheme. Foster failed to act on this information even though the whistleblower followed up her concerns in 2014.



■ Arlene Foster and Jonathan Bell - thieves fall out

In 2015 RHI experienced a sudden massive spike in applications, as firms got inside information from the office of DETI regarding their intention to rein in 'cash for ash'. It was only in February 2016 that the Minister, Jonathan Bell, announced his intention to close the scheme to new applicants.

In July 2016, following an investigation, the Northern Ireland Audit office reported "serious systemic failings" would cost hundreds of millions of pounds. The scandal grabbed public attention when BBC Spotlight investigated it, revealing the ignored whistleblower email sent in 2013.

In December 2016, with pressure mounting on Arlene Foster she responded, with the full support of her Executive partners Sinn Fein, by saying she would write to

each applicant seeking permission to publish their names. This was too little, too late.

Revelation followed revelation. Foster's DUP colleague, Jonathan Bell, publicly claimed he was blocked from shutting down the scheme by others in the DUP linked with the First Minister's office.

Pressure increased for Foster to step down and for the Executive to initiate an independent public inquiry. However, Foster refused to budge and Sinn Fein refused to back a 'no confidence' motion or the call for a public inquiry brought forward by opposition parties.

Public anger

Public anger intensified in response to Foster's arrogant dismissal of criticism and the obvious scale of corruption and incom-



petence. The debacle had now engulfed the entire Executive, its ruling parties, Sinn Fein and the DUP, and undermined the whole credibility of Stormont.

Widespread discontent led Sinn Fein supporters to demand the party leadership end its complicity in Foster's and the DUP's impunity.

Public outrage eventually forced Martin McGuinness to call time and step down from his position as Deputy First Minister thus precipitating the election.

Stormont is known for weathering scandals and continuing with 'business as usual' whether it's Red Sky, NAMA, Research Services Ireland or paramilitaries receiving funding through the Social Investment Fund.

However, the DUP/SF has implemented

severe cuts to public services in recent years on the basis 'times are tough' and funding doesn't exist. For many, the RHI debacle proves this to be nonsense with the DUP/SF running Stormont as a racket.

People Before Profit MLAs Eamonn McCann and Gerry Carroll were relentless in demanding full political accountability and making sure this scandal didn't disappear, as others have, in committee rooms out of public sight.

This pressure has forced Sinn Fein into yet another U-turn with their agreement to call for a public inquiry.

2 March gives people the right to voice their opinion about RHI, austerity, establishment parties and Stormont as an institution. It's time for an alternative putting people before profit.

WHY STORMONT FAILS

By Shaun Harkin

Northern Ireland's devolved government, the Stormont Assembly, has entered into another crisis. The RHI debacle is the largest in a series of financial scandals - Red Sky, NAMA and the Social Investment Fund, to name only the most prominent - that have rocked the institution in recent years.

The impact of RHI has been particularly severe because of its scale, and because it occurred in the midst of an austerity programme implemented by the ruling DUP/SF Executive. Cuts have made life more difficult and insecure for people across the North, especially in areas blighted with long-term deprivation.

The DUP/SF Executive has justified cuts to vital public services on the basis that funding is scarce or non-existent. The wastage, corruption and profiteering involved in RHI blows a hole in this excuse and makes Stormont look no better than a racket where the spoils are divided up by the most powerful Nationalist and Unionist parties. As a result, cynicism and anger abound.

Crisis

The ongoing and persistent nature of crisis at Stormont is rooted in its origins. It's not designed to resolve issues but simply to manage them. This means it often appears

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fragile or on the verge of potential chaos and collapse.

The Stormont Assembly came into existence in 1998 following the Good Friday Agreement designed to end the 'Troubles'. Since then it has been suspended four times, the longest suspension lasting from 2002-7 when 'Direct Rule' from Westminster was reintroduced.

Power-sharing between parties representing 'Orange' and 'Green' is at the core of the agreement. Unionist parties supposedly represent one community and Nationalist or Republican parties represent the other.

Because this logic is wired into the GFA, it produces an acceptance that scandals committed by the dominant parties must be tolerated and swept under the carpet for the sake of holding together power-sharing and avoiding a return to armed conflict. It is said, 'if Stormont collapses what is the alternative?'

The very design of the power-sharing institution encourages parties to act with impunity. This explains why the DUP can risk involvement in one embarrassing financial scandal after another. T

They do not expect to be held to account because they know they can hold hostage the so-called institutions of power-sharing and peace.

Not only that, whenever the DUP is implicated in robbing the public purse they consistently attempt to deflect from their own culpability through sectarian appeals. This is exactly what the DUP Minister for Communities Paul Givan was at when he cut the meagre £50,000 in funding for Irish language scholarships in the middle of the RHI meltdown.

His DUP colleagues claimed criticism of Arlene Foster was a Sinn Fein/IRA plot to destroy Unionism. Additionally, the DUP

have used what's called a 'Petition of Concern' more than 80 times to veto Equal Marriage and other progressive reforms even when a majority of Stormont MLAs vote in favour.

Otherwise known as playing 'the Orange card', the point is to rile-up the Protestant people against their perceived enemies. When Sinn Fein come under pressure, the same logic applies and they appeal to their 'community'.

Sectarian logic

This means a sectarian logic is hardwired into power-sharing at Stormont. This is why Stormont is a failure and will keep failing. Stormont, power-sharing and the GFA all exist supposedly to bring about peace and stability in the North by overcoming sectarian division but, in fact, they do the opposite. Sectarianism is encouraged and used by the ruling parties to stay in power.

The 2015 'Fresh Start Agreement' represented a commitment by both the DUP and Sinn Fein to function as a real governing coalition.

The two parties, led by Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness, attempted to present themselves with one coherent voice, despite ongoing disagreements.

Agreement on reducing the size of the public sector and encouraging the development of the private sector stood at the centre of the new partnership. This required cuts, privatisation of assets, the reduction of the

Corporate Tax rate, and, the acceptance of Welfare Reform.

Sinn Fein were forced into a u-turn on Welfare Reform by an all-out one day public sector union strike across the North on 13 March 2015. As a result, instead of Stormont introducing unpopular benefits cuts it will be implemented over time by Westminster.

The point is that, the continual deadlocks and sectarian flare-ups emanating from Stormont and flowing from the power-sharing framework allow the Northern economy to be consistently pushed in a neoliberal direction.

Northern Ireland's partners in the peace process, the US government, the European Union, the British and Irish governments, influenced the framework of the agreement to make sure it encouraged privatisation at the expense of the public sector.

Neoliberal austerity doesn't benefit the vast majority of people in the North but sectarian division can be used to push it through. Sectarianism from Stormont pollutes the potential for developing united working class resistance in Creggan, the Fountain, the Falls and Shankill.

Stormont's crises aren't by accident but are necessary for implementing austerity and maintaining the status quo in the North. This makes building an alternative based on challenging austerity and austerity all the more necessary and urgent. That is what People Before Profit is all about.

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