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Housing and Homelessness

FINE GAEL'S MASK SLIPS

Leo Varadkar is meant to be the 'cool' and 'modern' Taoiseach, the master of spin and PR. Fine Gael pride themselves on being the 'liberal' and 'enlightened' wing of the Irish establishment.

Now over housing and homelessness this liberal mask has slipped.

In a series of tweets and comments their old Blueshirt class prejudice and snobbery has been revealed.

Faced with relentless evidence of the growing crisis Varadkar claimed repeatedly that Ireland has 'a low level of homelessness compared to our peer countries'.

This was followed by Eileen Gleeson, the Head of the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, complaining about volunteers feeding the homeless and saying

'When somebody becomes homeless it doesn't happen overnight, it takes years of bad behaviour probably, or behaviour that isn't the behaviour of you and me.'

And then Junior Minister, Damian English even went so far as to complain that talk about homelessness was damaging Ireland's 'international reputation'.

In a situation where the numbers in emergency accommodation have reached an all time high and where all



the Government's so-called 'housing plans' have failed to deliver any sort of a solution, the Government have decided to go on the attack by blaming the homeless themselves.

Their blame game is disgusting. They are like the rich in the 19th century who

blamed poverty on the 'idleness' of the poor and brought in the cruel regime of the workhouses to deter the poor from their 'bad behaviour'.

It is the mentality of blaming the victims and the poor that brought us TUAM and the Magdalene Laundries;

the mentality of Margaret Thatcher and the Tories, who blamed the mass unemployment in Britain in the 1980s on the laziness of the unemployed.

The complete absurdity of these claims is shown by the simple fact that the figures keep rising. Are the Irish people suddenly

having a fit of 'chaotic behaviour'?

But these comments also have a purpose.

They are designed to divert from the Government's repeated failures and to silence protest by shaming the homeless.

Particularly obnoxious is Minister English's claim that focus on this issue is damaging Ireland's reputation.

Note that in English's thinking it is not actual homelessness that is the problem, just making a fuss about it.

In reality the housing crisis affects not only the hundreds on the streets and the 8000 plus in emergency accommodation but hundreds of thousands of others threatened by soaring rents, unscrupulous landlords and the robber bankers' evictions.

And there is only one serious solution: an emergency programme to build affordable public housing.

And there is only one real answer to the vicious rhetoric of the Blueshirt snobs; that is people power.

We need to build now for a mass mobilisation over housing and homelessness in the New Year.

We beat them on water charges. Now we must beat them on housing.

And they hate women too!



'Fringe member' Barry Walsh with Enda Kenny

Not only do they look down on the homeless but many of these Blueshirts also despise women.

Barry Walsh, vice chair of Fine Gael's Executive Council, has been forced to resign from his position following the exposure of a long series of abusive and misogynistic tweets.

Probably the most appalling of these was what he wrote about comedian and actor, Tare Flynn.

"From what Tara Flynn says, she was pregnant and just couldn't be bothered having a

baby.

"So she had it killed. Why is she a feminist hero?"

But this was only one of many.

In particular Walsh engaged in the relentless and repetitive use of the b-word to describe women.

Cronies

Of course once this came to light Varadkar and his cronies rushed to say this was 'unacceptable' and to claim that Walsh was a 'fringe figure' in the party.

But the truth is these attitudes are prevalent in the establishment and have long been all too 'acceptable' and accepted.

The homeless, the poor, the working class, women, immigrants – they despise us all and believe their own wealth, power and privilege derives from their innate personal superiority.

Socialist Worker says to them all 'Your power is based on class privilege – nothing else.'

AND IT IS TIME FOR YOU ALL TO GO!

Behind the Ryanair cancellations

Brid Smith, People Before Profit TD.

The political establishment are trying to gag pilots from giving evidence to a Dail Committee over the relationship that exists between the Irish Aviation Authority (IAA) and Ryanair. But the pilots are back soon and will give evidence then.

Evan Cullen, President of the Irish Airline Pilots Association (IALPA) was to address the Transport Committee on October 4 on the underlying reasons why Ryanair had cancelled 50 flights a day.

The day before he was due to speak, a solicitor's letter arrived from Ryanair. But, the committee decided that, despite the letter, they would hear from IALPA.

However after Captain Cullen started speaking there was an immediate kerfuffle about what he was saying and the chairperson decided that the IAA must be there to answer the charges.

Captain Cullen was to re-appear before the Transport Committee a week later.

But 24 hours before he was due to speak the meeting was cancelled. The question is: what are they trying to hide?

Are they nervous that the pilots' evidence will shine a light on Ireland's dysfunctional aviation regulatory system? Or might it help explain why Ryanair cancelled flights that affected up to 700,000 bookings.

IAA

The IAA is a state agency with two mandates which are in conflict with each other.

1. It is charged with the regulation of safety and security.

2. It has a for-profit mandate based on charges for inspecting airlines.

As part of its commercial mandate, the IAA oversees 14 air operators, the largest of which is Ryanair. It also holds a register for aircraft which are operated by airlines in countries other than Ireland. This is closely related to Ireland's role as a tax haven for the aircraft leasing industry.

The IAA charges for these activities and in 2016 recorded a profit of €39,490,000 and paid its CEO, Eamonn Brennan, a salary of €344,000.

However at the same time as developing a partnership-for-profit relationship with airline operators, the IAA is also supposed to monitor their activities for safety and security.

With one airline in particular, it appears to have an uncritical relationship.

Ryanair

Ryanair operates a most peculiar model for hiring pilots.

Pilots are asked to join into companies which are registered in Ireland. These companies then contract out their 'services' to pilot employment agencies, Brookfield International Aviation and McGinley Aviation.

The pilots are required to choose a firm of particular Irish accountants who set up the service companies of which



Michael O'Leary

the pilots become directors but minority shareholders.

After being contracted to Brookfield International Aviation or McGinley Aviation, the pilots are contracted to Ryanair. About half of Ryanair's 4,200 pilots come through these agencies.

The airline pays the agencies based on block (flying) hours scheduled by Ryanair. The agencies offer to pay the pilots in any bank account outside the UK. The pilots' contract also means that they are responsible for tax and social charges.

This system allowed Ryanair to pay pilots only for hours scheduled by Ryanair. Ryanair does not have to pay welfare payments, holiday pay, maternity pay or sick pay for these pilots.

A court case in Britain in 2013 heard that this was an elaborate mechanism to allow Ryanair to avoid giving pilots some of the protections of employment law.

The pilots' contract designated them specifically as 'self employed' and they are in breach of their contract if they reveal any confidential information about Ryanair.

This form of bogus self-employment is illegal in many EU countries.

The use of Irish limited companies to employ pilots based in the UK and elsewhere has led to pilots with limited experience of the tax obligations of a company falling foul of different jurisdictions' fraud investigators.

In Germany and the UK there were raids on the offices of Brookfield and McGinley in an effort to find evidence of tax evasion.

After these raids, Ryanair changed tack and began to use a new firm, BlueSky

Resources Ltd, to hire German pilots. They will employ Ryanair pilots on five-year contracts, deducting income tax at source. The pilots who are based in Germany will pay German social welfare contributions. The status of pilots in other countries remains to be seen.

The result is that a considerable proportion of Ryanair pilots are in a precarious position where there is uncertainty about their current tax and social insurance compliance, and their future careers – particularly if they join a union or seek better pay.

The Pressure Zone

Ryanair have used this situation to subject many of these pilots to pressure – and the IAA has turned a blind eye. Here are some of its practices.

Fuel Loads: Ryanair set up a system to benchmark pilots against each other on their use of fuel. A table was produced with the pilots' names, base, fuel burn, fuel target and percentage of use above or below the target.

The effect was like reading out school scores of children to pressurise them into competing with each other.

Pilots who were on precarious self-employed contracts felt the most pressure.

At a later stage Ryanair modified its system but pilots are informed when they burn more fuel than their targets and whether or not they are in the group that is considered to be burning too much.

Pilot Hours: Pilots are only supposed to fly 900 hours in any one year due to safety concerns that might result from fatigue. But Ryanair and Aer Lingus calculated

these hours from the year as starting April 1st rather than from January 1st.

This allowed them to get the maximum number of hours out of pilots during the busy summer season rather than spread evenly across the year. This created dangers of pilot fatigue and caused difficulties when pilots transferred to another airline – as they had used up their legal quota of hours with Ryanair.

Sickness record meetings: Brookfield International Aviation International convenes regular meetings with pilots to discuss their sick leave record. These meetings are attended by Ryanair managers. Pilots reported feeling intimidated. So there is a danger of pilots not declaring themselves unfit to fly from the fear induced by these meetings.

Collusion by IAA

All these things have implications for aircraft safety.

Despite this the IAA, the supposed safety regulator, has systematically avoided addressing these issues.

In the words of the Ryanair Pilot Group, their interactions with the IAA have been described as 'aggressive, dismissive, unprofessional' and bizarre.

They have not properly dealt with repeated compliance failures on Flight Time Limitations.

They have not dealt with complaints that crews experienced 15.5 hour working days.

■ The IAA was the only regulator in Europe to allow Ryanair and Aer Lingus to calculate their 900 hour limit from

April 1st. The EU regulation that it should be calculated from Jan to Dec was meant to be enforced in July 2008. This was confirmed in Flight Time Limitations' legislation (Reg. 83/2014), which entered into force on 18 Feb. 2014 and applies since 18 Feb. 2016.

■ The IAA has known that Ryanair used a benchmark system on fuel usage that could pressurise pilots but did not stop them.

■ The IAA has not intervened to deal with possible issues on the mental well being of pilots that arise from raids by German police and tax authorities on four Ryanair bases

■ Unlike the British safety regulator, the IAA has not given clear answers to a query on carrying undocumented bags which arose because a Captain was disciplined for refusing to carry such bags.

■ The IAA has not dealt with the implications of paying pilots for 'scheduled block hours'. They have not examined the consequences of pilots reporting for work when unfit from fear of punishment or insufficient funds at the end of the month.

■ The IAA has not addressed the implications of a London School of Economics report on Airline Safety Culture. This found that:

1) Pilots of self-employed, temporary contracts report significantly lower safety scores than those on direct contracts.

2) Only 57% of pilots on low cost airlines considered that safety related reports are treated in a fair manner

3) 76% of pilots on low cost airlines are often tired at work but that only 42% would make a fatigue report.

Neither the Minister of Transport nor Revenue have done anything about this scandal. Pilots who question the practice of being contracted to work on a self employed/sole trader basis have been informed that this practice is approved by Irish Revenue.

Irish law is being used by Ryanair to set up a precarious system of 'self employment' which has led to investigations by other countries.

There is 'light touch' regulation in the Irish aviation industry, which works to the detriment of workers in that industry. It even showed up in how passengers were treated after Ryanair cancelled flights.

The Irish body that is meant to regulate for passengers rights, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAR) actually supported the actions that Ryanair took. It was only when the British equivalent threatened the company with court action that Ryanair agreed they would reroute passengers on other airlines.

The chickens are now coming home to roost as some pilots either desert Ryanair or do not sign up for their precarious model of employment.

This is the real story behind Ryanair flight cancellations. It is one that the establishment and media want to hide AND IT PUTS PUBLIC SAFETY AT RISK for the sake of profit.

Rail workers voting on offer

Owen McCormack

Irish Rail workers are balloting on a proposed pay deal as Socialist Worker goes to print. This follows two one-day strikes that closed rail and DART services.

Despite tough talk from management and the government the strikes were hugely effective and had major impacts on traffic and the economy.

The deal on offer is short of the worker's demand, itself a modest 3.75% a year, and is likely to come with huge productivity measures. The strike is the fourth in public transport in just over a year.

All these disputes stem from the chronic underfunding of public transport and the determination of the government to keep wage rises low.

Irish rail has seen an effective 45%



Rail workers picket

cut in subvention between 2008 and 2015. If the company funding

was even at the European average it would be getting 120 million euro

more each year; more than enough to pay the modest pay rise asked by

workers after 10 years of cuts and pay freezes.

In the meantime, other threats are stacking up against the workers.

The company are trying to undermine the pension scheme and want to radically worsen it for workers, while the National Transport Authority is continuing with tender competitions designed to encourage private operators and hand over bus routes to the private sector.

The deal forced on Bus Eireann workers earlier this year has had a huge impact on conditions and the unworkable rosters are resulting in a large number of services being cancelled.

However the last year has also shown that transport workers have the capacity to resist attacks and, if united, remain one of the country's most powerful groups of workers.

Bankers, Trackers and Crooks



Paschal Donohue admonishes the bankers



Bank of Ireland execs receive 2017 Deal of the Year award from Finance Dublin

James O'Toole

Back in 2008 while we were being told we had to bail out the banks to prevent financial armageddon complaints were made to the Financial Ombudsman that the banks had moved people off their tracker mortgage rates or were refusing to move those who had taken on a fixed rate back onto the tracker rate. But nothing was done. Neither the Ombudsman nor Fianna Fáil wanted to hear any more bad news about the banks- they also understood how unpalatable it would be for most people to swallow the bailout of banks that were engaged in wholesale white collar criminality. So the rip off continued. The banks bullied and threatened up to 30,000 people off their cheaper mortgages. The total cost of this criminality could be between €500 million to €1 billion. €120m has been paid to around 3,300 customers already as a result of the Central

Bank's examination. This is in addition to €36.8m in redress and compensation provided by Permanent TSB and €6.2m by Springboard Mortgages to customers. But this doesn't even begin to compensate the families who lost their homes due to this criminality by the banks. Tragically, 23 people have lost their homes after being illegally refused access to their tracker mortgage. A further 79 Buy-To-Let properties have also been seized. The Irish Central Bank knew about this for well over two years. The banks were told to offer compensation back in 2015, but they have dragged their heels and refused to budge despite the fact that most of these banks only exist because Irish taxes bailed them out. So how did Fine Gael respond when this hit the headlines? Pascal Donohue called the banks (AIB, Bank of Ireland, KBC, Permanent TSB, and Ulster Bank)

in to 'admonish' them. Now compare this to the millions spent on pursuing the water activists from Jobstown. The banks get 'told off' and promised not to do it again. But we can't trust them. The Irish banks are repeat criminal offenders. Back in the 1980's, the banks helped thousands of wealthy customers to avoid their taxes in what became known as the DIRT scandal. This involved bank managers telling staff to pretend their customers were living overseas. AIB were particularly guilty of this offence eventually paying €90 million back to the Revenue Commissioners. Even when they were caught the banks illegally moved tens of millions of pounds to the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. During the 1970's a branch of Guinness and Mahon Bank was used to help 179 people to avoid their taxes using fake Cayman Island accounts.

Charles Haughey was one of the clients, as was the father of the current Minister for Foreign Affairs – Hugh Coveney. The Central Bank knew about his scam but chose to do nothing about it. The whole affair only came to light when the Moriarty Tribunal started considering corruption payments to Charles Haughey and Michael Lowry. No one went to jail, however. There is a tight network, a Golden Circle, of bankers, developers and their political supporters in Ireland. As long as this establishment Golden Circle remains in power the banks will engage in criminality with an attitude of impunity. They feel they are protected. **One Solution** The fundamental reason the Banks behave in the way they do is that their goal is to maximise their profits at all costs. But they say the banking provides a vital service to society. Indeed they do – just as schools, hospi-

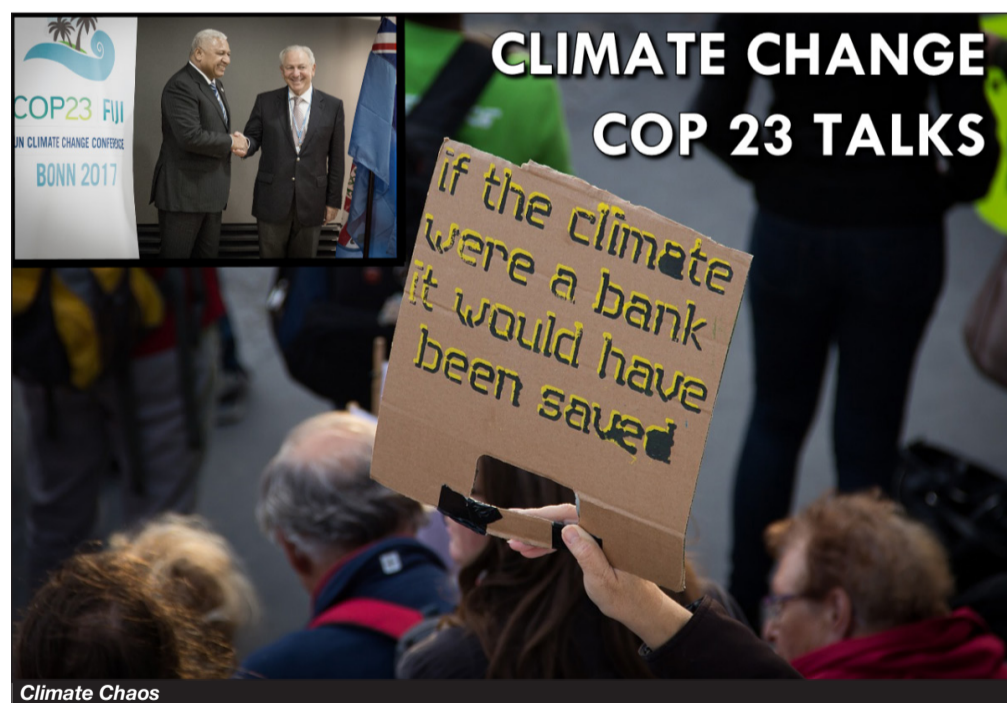
tals, buses, trains and trams provide vital services – but the moment you run these things as private businesses the service is subordinated to profit. Indeed the fact that the service is vital is exploited to increase and protect the profits, including by dodgy and illegal means. That is why the only solution to take the banks into public ownership and have one State Banks run to serve the people, not make profits. We need to put the banks under real democratic control- to nationalise them but not in the hands of the establishment who nationalised the banks and then, once they are back on their feet, want to sell them back to private hands. Instead we need a real nationalisation where the banks are in the hands of democratic bodies run by ordinary people, and where the books are open to public inspection. To get that will take a people power rebellion by ordinary people.

Climate Chaos: No solutions at Bonn Conference

Owen McCormack

The Bonn Cop23 conference held over two weeks in November is not going to provide any real solutions to climate change. The elaborate conference was supposed to force national governments to live up to and improve on pledges made in Paris two year ago. The problem for international capitalism and for all of us is that even these pledges would see the Earth warm up by over 3 degrees celsius in the coming decades. Nothing at Paris or Bonn confronts the causes of climate change and the dangerous upward trajectory of Co2 emissions.

Trump The fossil fuel corporations at the heart of capitalism continue to pursue their profits regardless of the consequences for humanity and the earth.



Climate Chaos

The Trump presidency has been the focus of much of the coverage of Bonn. While Trump is elevating

climate deniers to positions of real power in various government agencies, the problem is much wider than

Trump or simply climate change denial. This year is likely to be the warmest on record and also see

a sharp rise in Co2 emissions from industry globally and in the levels of Co2 in the atmosphere (already above 400ppm; a level not seen in a million years).

Scientists

Scientists are now agreed that this means catastrophic climate change and massive weather disasters affecting the lives of billions of people. but this has been known for several decades. The system's response has been "market mechanisms" such as carbon trading and off-sets. None of these have worked but have allowed fossil fuel corporations – especially the giant oil and gas companies like ExxonMobile, BP and Shell to continue using oil, coal and gas. A radical alternative is needed that challenges the power of those corporations. People before Profit TD Brid Smith attended the

conference.

She says, "There was little talk about the elephant in the room, the giant oil and gas companies profiting from climate change.

Debated

"We need to stop them and the vast subsidies they get. A start would be to stop them exploring for new sources of oil and gas, given that we know 80% of proved reserves need to remain in the ground". Brid has proposed a new law that will be debated in January in the Dail that would ban the issuing of any new licences for exploration of oil and gas in Ireland and Irish waters. But we can probably guess how Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil will vote on this. The Irish political establishment and the global ruling class are literally fiddling while the planet burns.

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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 May 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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#socialism 1.01

John Moynaux

Catalonia and the National Question

The struggle for Catalan independence which has been raging all this autumn has proved controversial on the left.

There have been those like the present writer, and People Before Profit, who have given full support to this struggle. There have been others who have said socialists and the left should be wary of supporting any form of nationalism.

nationalism, actually end up supporting British nationalism which is far more reactionary.

Secondly socialists support self-determination because they understand that the struggles of smaller nations for independence tend to weaken the capitalist ruling classes of the major imperialist nations and thus assist the cause of the working class internationally.

it is a question of the democratic rights of the mass of the people.

Socialists do indeed criticize Puigdemont and the bourgeois nationalist leadership of Catalonia, but we criticise from the left for their failure to mobilise the masses and really put up a fight for independence, for their willingness to compromise and even sell out the struggle, not for their daring to defy Rajoy and the



Catalan Firefighters defend Voters on 1 October

It has also been argued that the left should not support Catalan independence because: a) Carles Puigdemont and the Catalan government are rightwing neo-liberals so this is just a quarrel between rival factions in the ruling class; b) Catalonia is one of the richest areas in Spain, not an oppressed nation, and this is just a revolt of the privileged.

In answering these arguments I want first to say something about the general principle of national self-determination and then look at how it applies to Catalonia.

Socialists

In general socialists should support the right of nations to self-determination, including their right to separate from larger states and establish themselves as independent. This is not because socialists support nationalism but precisely because they are internationalists and want to work towards the international unity of all working people.

They understand that to achieve that international unity it is necessary to oppose all forms of national oppression. International unity must be completely voluntary. It cannot be based on coercion.

Failure to support a nation's right to self-determination almost always involves actually supporting the much worse nationalism of the oppressor state. Thus those who oppose Scottish independence on the basis, supposedly, of opposing

For example, the struggle for Irish independence from 1916-22, weakened British imperialism and aided the cause of international revolution at that time. It was the same with Indian independence in 1947 and later with the movements for African independence. It was therefore the duty of every British socialist to support Irish, Indian and African independence.

Only on this basis could there be real unity between British socialists and British workers and Irish socialists and Irish workers or Indian and African workers.

The most committed internationalists in the history of socialism such as Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all understood and adhered to this principle. 'A nation that oppresses another', wrote Marx, 'cannot itself be free'.

Exception

Is Catalonia an exception to this general rule? No it is not.

It is true that Carles Puigdemont and his government are right wing but that does not alter the right to self-determination of the Catalan people. Michael Collins and Eamon De Valera were also right wing – that did not change the right of the Irish people to be free from the British empire.

Defence of the right to self-determination in no way depends on approval of the government or the political character of the leadership of the national movement:

Spanish State who are much bigger and more reactionary nationalists with a long history as imperialist oppressors.

Is the Catalan struggle a 'revolt of the privileged'? No, it is not. It is true that Catalonia is one of the more affluent parts of the Spanish State, as is the Basque country, but the difference in living standards with say Madrid and Castille is marginal. Moreover the Catalan big bourgeoisie, the really rich, are firmly opposed to independence.

This is a revolt, driven from below, by the mass of ordinary people in Catalonia. This is clear from the nature of the movement with its mass demonstrations and general strikes.

Moreover, the very denial of the right of the Catalan people to separate and their right to a referendum, including by force as on 1 October when the Spanish police attacked voters, turns Catalonia into an oppressed nation.

Therefore it is quite right for socialists to back the independence struggle of the Catalan people.

Also this issue is of wider significance. With the general decay of capitalism and the crisis of the EU we are likely to see more and more attempts to by smaller nations to breakaway. This is just what the European ruling class and the EU bureaucrats fear, but socialists should welcome this phenomenon and know how to relate to it and channel it in a radical and revolutionary direction.

Abortion Rights Fight

Becca Bor and Adrienne Wallace

North and South of the border there is a growing movement for a woman's right to choose. Abortion reform is back in the mainstream media because tens of thousands of people have rallied across Ireland within the past year to demand changes in the law.

In the South, the movement for abortion rights is organising to repeal the 8th amendment in the upcoming referendum; and in the North, the discussion around liberalisation of the anti-abortion laws has coincided with political volatility and impasse in the North.

Ireland, on both sides of the border, remains one of the most reactionary and anti-woman countries in Europe. Abortion is illegal, child and family benefits are being cut, over 3,000 children are homeless in Ireland and childcare remains extremely expensive.

Across Ireland, abortion was outlawed by an 1861 Act that threatened any woman or doctor carrying out an abortion with life imprisonment.

The introduction of the 1967 Abortion Act in Britain, which permitted abortion to save a woman's life, or if continuing with the pregnancy would leave the woman 'a physical or mental wreck', propelled the conservatives in Ireland to stop any attempt to liberalise abortion legislation.

In 1983 ultra-conservative Catholics like Opus Dei kick-started a campaign to introduce the 8th amendment into the Irish constitution.

A year later the Northern Ireland Assembly voted against the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act into Northern Ireland, backed by the unholy alliance of the Catholic Nationalist SDLP and the Presbyterian Unionist UUP.

However, the power and dominance of the church has waned.

The political establishment – North



and South – have stumbled from crisis to crisis with successful people power movements knocking back its austerity agenda.

A new generation of women, workers and students have mobilized to demand the right to choose, beginning with a referendum to repeal the 8th amendment, and an immediate decriminalisation of taking abortion pills.

A recent poll by Amnesty shows that in the South 60% of people believe women should have abortion on request, either outright or within gestational limits; and over 80% of people in the North think there should be some reform to abortion law.

What is clear, is that with none of the major parties supporting Repeal in the South, and none of the major parties in the North supporting pro-choice legislation, politicians are completely out

of step with the population.

Partition

The conservatism of Ireland was not inevitable, but an outcome of partition and reactionary governments forming both sides of the border.

The Southern conservative capitalist state was formed by quashing a movement that sought not just national liberation, but social liberation.

Whilst, most history books portray the Irish War of Independence as solely about driving out the British, in reality, Ireland was caught up in the wave of social revolution and rebellion that swept through Europe during the First World War.

Across Ireland, over 100 soviets or workers councils were established and in 1919, Limerick was run as a soviet with workers taking over factories with

Why I campaign

Sean Egan interviews repeal activist Aislinn Shanahan Daly

How did you get involved with pro-choice activism?

The first social movement I ever engaged with was the abortion rights movement. I attended the march for choice in 2014, and it played a huge role in my politicization.

I felt like those affected by a lack of access to abortion deserved justice, and as a young woman the issue stuck a chord with me.

As a 19 year old I experienced my first pregnancy scare, and I realised how messed up everything was.

I was in the middle of a depressive episode, couldn't afford an abortion, and on the other hand couldn't face the perceived shame and judgement from my family if I had a child.

I never wanted children, and I still don't. If I it turned out I was pregnant 4 years ago, I don't know if I would be alive right now. It's uncomfortable

to say, and I'm sure it's uncomfortable to read, but that's the reality. This is a life threatening issue.

Why do you think fighting for free safe and legal abortion is essential rather than the conditional access to abortion other mainstream parties advocate?

Abortion should be free as part of maternity care through the public health service. It should be provided legally to ensure the safety of those accessing it, and so that people needing abortion do not have to resort to dangerous measures in order to terminate their pregnancy.

Any party or group that advocates anything less than free safe and legal abortion at the discretion of the pregnant person is living in a dream world.

In my opinion, making irresponsible and dangerous decisions in regards to women's healthcare in order to placate a conservative voter



North and South



the slogan, 'We make bread, not profits' for two weeks.

When partition became a looming prospect, James Connolly warned it would produce a "carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured."

Two conservative states were created each with its own leadership who tried to unite their own populations against their enemies on the other side of the border. Connolly explained that partition would "help the Home Rule and Orange capitalists and clerics to keep their rallying cries before the public as the political watchwords of the day. In short, it would make division more intense and confusion of ideas and parties more confounded."

The many women who fought and organised for women's rights, workers' rights and national liberation were written out of history and pushed back into the home with De Valera's constitution. This 'carnival of reaction' paved the way for the insidious relationship between the Irish state and the Catholic Church to prevail. Women, and in particular working-class women, were to be the worst affected.

Legislation

After independence, Catholic morality was enshrined in legislation and the Church was given control over welfare programmes thereby giving it complete power over some of the most vulnerable in society.

The legacy of rampant abuse in mother and baby homes is still being uncovered today. Schools and hospitals continue to be controlled by the Church to this day.

The fight for abortion rights North and South of the border is people's response to the carnival of reaction.

Women and those who can get pregnant are sick and tired of the state dictating what we can do with our bodies. The hypocrisy of a state that has overseen murder, abuse and corruption is lost on no one.

The Paradise Papers expose the ways in which the 1% evade taxes, it shows that there is one set of laws for the wealthy and one for the poor.

This has always been the case for access to abortion. Wealthy women have always been able to travel and have abortions and poor women are the ones who suffer. In the South, the law allows for women to travel to have abortions, and in the North, women can have abortions on the NHS in England, Scotland and Wales.

However, on the 50th anniversary of the 1967 abortion act, the movement for abortion rights is growing.

The fight for the right to choose is also the fight for economic justice. Families need to be able to raise their children without the threat of further austerity.

The Sinn Fein/DUP government implemented Welfare cuts in the North and the Tories and the DUP continue to slash benefits and public services. The fight for the right to choose is also the fight to separate church and state, both sides of the border.

Pro-choice activists from the North joined the protests in Dublin and from the South came up to Belfast. The fight for reproductive rights has united the working class across Ireland in the struggle for economic and social equality.

Together, people power has the power to drive the reactionaries in both governments into the dustbin of history. The movement for bodily autonomy and the right to choose should inspire other movements to organise across the island.

Through people power the right to choose will be won and the movement has the potential to forge, not two rotting states, but a socialist Ireland built on equality for all.

Sign for choice



base is unforgivable. Women's rights will never be safe in the hands of right wingers in the Dáil. That is why I fight for socialism and for women's rights; I believe they are inextricably connected struggles.

How does partition relate to your ideas about abortion rights and the pro-choice movement?

People need free, safe and legal access to abortion and the right to choose above and below the border.

I hope that the solidarity between activists in the north and south is cultivated more and continues to grow after the 8th amendment is repealed.

We have countless more battles to fight in society against poverty, austerity, homelessness, racism, misogyny, queer oppression and colonialism.

These issues do not cease at borders. Fighting together, we are stronger.

Gerry Carroll says



Now it's the PSNI – Corruption rules OK!



The PSNI Chief Constable George Hamilton has been the focus of some media attention recently over allegations that alongside others in the top brass of the PSNI, he has been involved in corruption and a cover up, relating to an investigation in 2014 about bribery and misconduct. The Police ombudsman is leading an inquiry into the matter.

The allegations centre around the idea that Hamilton and others played a prominent role in altering police Journals and diaries in order to point the finger at other former high ranking members of the PSNI, thus blaming them for involvement in malpractice and exonerating themselves in the process.

Hamilton is pleading his innocence and maintaining that he is "absolutely confident that there will not be misconduct established". However what is really shocking - with an investigation and allegations on such a big scale - is that the Chief Constable is still in his position of power and influence. How can a truly independent inquiry, that in theory is supposed to establish all the facts and evidence, be able to carry out this role when one of the accused is still in a top position of influence?

No doubt it will be people who are working with Hamilton every day who are called in for questioning. There cannot be a fair inquiry while he remains in office. I firmly believe that Hamilton and all those other top rank in the PSNI should step aside, whilst the investigation is ongoing. If they don't voluntarily step aside they should be removed from their positions.

This latest scandal shows how corruption goes right to the core of the political establishment in the North. First Arlene Foster and now George Hamilton. The political establishment in the North are surrounded by corruption, wrong doing and operations to protect their own interests. They are up to their necks in it. Many are asking what if anything has changed in the police force in the North.

It also says something about the fundamental nature of the Police in our society when we see the PSNI inquiry and recent events around disgraced Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan who was forced to step down after it was revealed that Guards were involved in systematic fake breathalyser tests and a culture of bullying around whistleblower Maurice McCabe. The very organisations that are supposed to "uphold the law" are having

increasing lights shone on them for failing to do what they expect of everyone else.

North and South the police are mired in scandals that run right to the top of the organisations. Not to mention that they fail to investigate or arrest wealthy individuals or chief executives of corporations who are dodging their responsibility to pay their way, by stashing their money in off shore bank accounts and refusing to pay taxes.

Contrast the coverage that the RHI Scandal in the North (which rightly received a high level of coverage) with the coverage of the PSNI scandal. It really is night and day, with an attitude of nothing to be seen here prevailing. It appears that big sections of the establishment in the North do not want a lot of attention on the actions of the PSNI. Is it any wonder? When it comes to any movement for change in the North the PSNI are always used to crackdown and crack heads.

Status Quo

Those who want the status quo to remain have a vested interest in doing everything they can to protect and fall behind the PSNI. So allegations of corruption are swept under the carpet and not given the focus they should be.

Be it the protest against students fees in 2010 where students faced police repression and activists were dragged of the streets and thrown in police wagons; or, more recently, when abortion rights activists faced raids on their houses for having supported women getting access to the abortion pill.

Alarming we also saw a young woman, Ellie Evans, have the PSNI call to her door unannounced after holding a "Fuck the DUP" sign at gay pride in Belfast this year. Responding to a complaint made by arch DUP homophobic MLA Jim Wells, the police called to Ellie's door in order to investigate complaints around a hate crime. Mad stuff indeed. Though there has not been a single visit to any DUP MLAs door, a bunch of whom have come out with deeply homophobic comments in the past.

So a lot of questions remain unanswered. Will the investigation lead to any conclusive findings? Will there be any charges brought against those who are facing very serious questions about their conduct? Time will tell but there certainly needs to be more attention paid to this unfolding story. The establishment cannot once again be allowed off the hook.

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT:

Open Letter to Sinn Féin

The headline news from Sinn Féin's recent Ard Fheis was, of course, Gerry Adams' announcement of his plan to stand down. But more important in reality was the passing of a motion in favour of Sinn Féin being able to enter government, in the Republic, as a junior partner i.e. with Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. This is a change from the party's previous position which was only to go into coalition as the majority partner. It is therefore an important shift rightwards.

People Before Profit responded to this development by issuing an Open Letter to Sinn Féin members urging resistance to the rightward drift and calling for dialogue on the major issues facing the Irish people North and South. We reproduce it here:

Sinn Féin and People Before Profit have been on the same side many times. We have fought against water charges; we both oppose the partition of Ireland; we want regime across the whole of this island.

We also disagree on key issues – and there is no hiding that.

But in this open letter, we want to make an appeal to Sinn Féin on the three key issues. We welcome dialogue with you and it is in that spirit this letter is written.

The Equality Agenda:

Sinn Féin is under huge pressure from the political establishment to rejoin the DUP in government – even if they do not agree to equality and respect.

In our view, you are right to demand an Irish Language Act that respects the rights of Irish speakers. There should be no concessions to the DUP on LGBT rights. Gay people have a right to marry and the dinosaurs of the DUP should not be able to veto this.

We go further, however, and suggest that full decriminalisation of abortion should be implemented in the North. Why should a woman have to travel to Britain – just to protect the hypocrisy that there



are no abortions here?

It is only by standing for full equality for all, including economic equality, that we can win both Catholic and Protestant workers to a vision of a radically new

Ireland.

Stay out of Coalition with Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael:

The political establishment is up to

its neck in corruption – and the muck sticks. No matter the good intentions the reality is that a Fianna Fáil or a Fine Gael led government will implement right wing policies. If you join with

them you will have to take responsibility for the attacks they mount on working people. We urge you not to go down this road.

The political establishment will demand an entry price before they let you near the apparatus of the state. They will demand that you 'moderate' your positions and start to appear 'respectable'.

At a time when large numbers of Irish workers are breaking with the mainstream, it would be totally wrong to prop them up.

Women should not have to be victims

You can never have full equality until women have the right to control their bodies.

You should not have to be a VICTIM of rape or be suicidal to have a basic right to determine whether or not you will be pregnant.

We urge Sinn Féin to move beyond the current compromise position which will only force women to prove they are victims before getting a right to abortion.

It is time to stand up and say openly – women have a right to choose.

We wish you well in your conference and make these points solely as part of a dialogue between our parties.

Catalonia – the Struggle Continues

Dublin City People Before Profit Cllr **Tina MacVeigh** has twice recently visited Catalonia. Here she interviews **Aina Tela**, a activist with the left wing anti-capitalist party, CUP on the the situation in Catalonia.

Q. On October 1st, the day of the Independence Referendum in Catalonia, we witnessed terrible scenes as the Spanish police attacked unarmed citizens who had come out peacefully to vote. The Spanish state justified this by saying that the referendum was illegal, that Catalans wanted all the wealth of Catalonia for themselves, that this was a middle class rebellion. Is there any truth in this?

In 2015 the Catalan elections resulted in a pro-independence majority in the Parliament who then passed laws legitimising the Referendum. 72 MPs from the total 135 voted in favour of this procedure.

They have acted democratically within the scope of the Catalan Institutions. The Spanish State has consistently rejected the many attempts made by the Catalan parliament to negotiate more autonomy.

This is not just a debate about legalities but about legitimacy. The Moncloa Pact made in 1978, just after the death of Franco, was made between elites to allow them remain in power and to silence crimes committed during the dictatorship. The result was a Constitution that protected the idea of the indivisibility of the Spanish State but didn't resolve the question of how to deal with different identities within the territory of the Spanish State.

The political system that emerged created differences between communities, divided people with fake boundaries and centralised power.

Nothing will change in the Spanish



CUP activist, Anna Gabriel, speaking in Catalan parliament.

State if the Constitutional Court (made up of Franco era judges) doesn't want it to as it is in fascist, reactionary hands. This applies not only to independence movements but to social and progressive movements too. All the laws approved in the Catalan Parliament to create better conditions for the working class on energy poverty, gender equality, LGTBI+ rights, taxes on banks, were considered anti-constitutional and therefore illegal by the Spanish State.

So this is not just a Catalan affair but something that affects all working class and progressive people under the Spanish State.

Q. Why would socialists support Catalan independence?

Independence is a way (maybe the only

way) to change this political system and to build a democratic and equal Republic.

It has the potential to create the opportunity to challenge the Spanish State not just in Catalonia but also in the Basque Country and Galicia, in Madrid itself with the huge social movements there, in order to end the fake democratic system that hides the authoritarianism of the State.

We have never believed in the European Union. We consider it a reactionary project that doesn't allow social progress. A project made by capitalism to protect the economic interest of the elite.

This process in Catalonia is also a challenge for the EU. The response of the European Institutions has shown people the real face of the EU and

its real objectives, aims and interests. If we win, it opens the potential to challenge the idea of strong States as the main actors in the region. We are proposing not just a Catalan Republic but to build the Europe of the People. We are not an isolated case. People in Europe can rise up against the capitalist oppression of the international financial and political institutions.

Since the referendum we have seen huge mobilisations of people including two general strikes, civil society leaders and parliamentarians have been imprisoned, the parliament has been dissolved by the Spanish state and the President Puigdemont fled to Europe. Elections have been called for December 21st. What is the mood like in communities now?

Endorsing elections is a mistake. We

are not in a normal situation: half of the legitimate government is in jail, the other half exiled in Brussels. The two main leaders of the civil society movements (ANC and Omnium) are also in jail. So in that context, we should not accept any kind of elections that are normalising the situation. We should boycott them. But the right wing, centre and unionist Catalan parties accepted the proposed elections and we had no alternative if we want to continue defending the Catalan Republic.

We are afraid that these elections could demobilise people who might wait to see what the new Parliament will be like. But we should trust in the self-organisation of people as they have demonstrated a strong will to defend the Republic. People are all we have and are the backbone of this political project.

Q. What do you think are the possible outcomes of the election and the likely reaction of Spain and the EU to those outcomes?

We don't think the make up of the current Parliament will change much. We already have an independence majority. The risk is that some political forces could use the liberation of the political prisoners as leverage to negotiate a better budget for the region rather than independence. CUP will be defending the Catalan Republic.

We don't want to go back – the era of autonomy is over. Now we need to push forward for independence.

The response of the Spanish State in the case that the independence forces continue to defend the Republic is clear: they will proceed with the implementation of Article 155 (criminalising the independence movement) and repression. The response of EU? To back the Spanish State. We really don't expect either of these actors to change their position.

Hundreds march in Dublin for an end to Direct Provision

Memet Uludag, Convenor United Against Racism

Hundreds of people from across the country, including the North, marched in Dublin on Saturday 18 November to protest against the Direct Provision system.

The national demonstration was organised by United Against Racism and supported by more than 30 campaign groups, trade unions, NGOs and political parties, including People Before Profit, Solidarity, the Green Party, Irish Refugee Council, Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland, European Network Against Racism, Galway Anti-Racism Network, Unite, Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Rosa and others.

It was attended by large groups of asylum seekers currently in Direct Provision centres in Dublin, Galway, Sligo, Cork, Kerry and Limerick.

The demands of the demonstration were, ending of the direct provision system, the right to work, access to third level education and social protection for asylum seekers.

The march from Garden of Remembrance to City Hall was very lively and protestors chanted, "One Race Human Race", "No hate no fear, refugees are welcome here", "End direct provision-No deportations".

Direct Provision was introduced in 2000 to accommodate asylum seekers while their refugee applications were processed. Currently there are 5000 asylum seekers, including 1600 children in 35, mostly privately operated, centres. Direct



Provision centres are run for profit by more than 15 private operators and over the years companies like Aramark, Fazyard, and Mosney Holiday have made millions of Euro profits from government contracts. These operators are compared to US prison

business run by private companies.

Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers in Direct Provision have no right to work, they cannot avail of free third level education and don't receive any social welfare payments. Instead the

government pays a miserable €21.60 per week allowance. Direct Provision centres are restricted areas with strict access control and management practices.

Many asylum seekers speaking at the demo, some more than 7 years in the sys-

tem, told their stories of Direct Provision and the serious issues they are facing in this segregated, prison like living environment. Many are facing physical and mental health issues and feel trapped in DP without an end in sight.

Cruel

Among the speakers were also anti-racism activists and TDs. People Before Profit TD Brid Smith said, "It was my privilege to speak at yesterday's march and rally to end Direct Provision.

"This cruel system punishes people fleeing war, poverty and injustice while at the same time our government pampers the rich tax dodgers and robber-bankers. We must challenge these priorities and embrace humanity."

Activists pointed out that the recent plans by the government to give asylum seekers a very limited right to work would not help 90% of the people in direct provision due to restrictive conditions attached to this proposed change.

Speakers also condemned deportations and demanded the government stop the deportations of asylum seekers.

Organisers have called for further actions and protests until the entire system is ended and asylum seekers are given the chance to re-build their lives in Ireland.

For many years United Against Racism has been actively campaigning against Direct Provision. It has organised many events and demonstrations with more people joining the campaign.

If you like to take part in the end direct provision campaign join United Against Racism here <http://www.united-against-racism.net/join-uar/>

The Death of Stalin – Comedy of Terror



Armando Iannucci's new feature *The Death of Stalin* plays Soviet terror for laughs while laying bare the cowardice, self-interest and vanity that characterises every ruling class.

Eliciting audience laughter from inside a secret police torture chamber is no easy task but Iannucci manages to find moments of dark humour in otherwise stomach-churning circumstances.

The veteran political satirist who skewered the shallow spectacle of modern politics in his tv gems: *Veep* and *The Thick of It* portrays the frantic struggle for power following Stalin's death in 1953. The plot is driven by the increasingly slap-dash machinations of jittery Nikita Krushchev (Steve Buscemi) and the sinister secret police boss Lavrentiy Beria (Simon Russell Beale).

The Central Committee is also made up of Molotov, ably portrayed by Michael Palin as a doddering relic whose mind is warped by incomprehensible doctrine and

rhetoric, unable to parse reality from the official party line. Jeffrey Tambor excels as Stalin's deputy Malenkov whose ineptitude and vanity provide some of the film's most reliable laughs.

This wealth of experienced actors provides the framework for Iannucci's signature rapid fire comic dialogue and the film maintains an at times breathless pace allowing the audience to feel drawn into hair brained coup attempts and Central Committee scheming.

Slapstick moments, like the Central Committee's attempt to carry a urine soaked Stalin's not quite corpse through his country estate while screaming at errant servants, never quite undermine the dread that permeates the film. In fact, it's among the blackest comedies I've seen in quite some time, with scenes in which Beria struts through the concrete bunkers used to hold prisoners being legitimately bone chilling.

Iannucci does an excellent job illustrating the level of ever present dread felt by ordinary Soviet citizens. When we see a fleet of secret police cars

and trucks fan out over the city to pull people from their beds never to be seen again we understand how this horror has become a part of everyday life for millions.

The film's art direction should also be recognised. Stalin's protracted funeral is an obscene pageant of maximalist red banners, absurd floral displays and outsized, choreographed grief. Malenkov's increasingly bizarre outfits and Khrushchev's brown mottled apartment fixtures also highlight the contradictions of Soviet life.

This historically accurate world populated by actors speaking in their own American and British accents could seem jarring, but it only enhances the comic absurdity that drives the film.

The Death of Stalin is a madcap comedy with a plot that hurtles along aided by a keen sense of pacing. But despite the heroic efforts of its cast and its sharp, incisive script it never rises above its darker moments. It manages to be a harrowing kind of comedy, but one well worth your time.

Käthe Kollwitz: Life, Death, and War



6 September - 10 December 2017, National Gallery of Ireland I, Free admission

John Molyneux

Käthe Kollwitz, one of the 20th century's greatest socialist artists, has an exhibition of 40 prints and drawings at the National Gallery until 10 December.

It is a wonderful show but be prepared to be moved almost to the point of hurt.

Kollwitz was born in Königsberg in Prussia in 1867 into a Social Democratic family.

In 1891 she married Karl Kollwitz, a doctor who tended to the poor in Berlin, and this brought her into regular contact with working class people, especially women, who became her main subjects throughout her life.

At the beginning of the First World War in 1914 she, under the influence of the German Social Democratic Party, supported the War.

But later, following the loss of her son, she turned against the War, supported the main anti-war campaigner Karl Liebknecht, and became a Communist

which she remained to her death in 1945.

Her work deals almost always with poverty, suffering and grief.

She expresses the horror of war not through pictures of the fighting itself but mainly through showing the grief of those who lose loved ones, above all the grief of mothers with which she was closely personally identified.

Atmosphere

She also produced series of prints and woodcuts depicting the Silesian Weavers Revolt of 1844 which influenced Marx and the barbarities of the Peasant War of the 16th century when tens of thousands of rebelling peasants were slaughtered.

Kollwitz's dark work – dark in colour and in atmosphere – makes you feel the hardships, and the heroism, of working people through the ages, like a kick in the guts.

Strong stuff indeed which still stands as an indictment of the system we live under.

Socialist Worker

PEOPLE POWER CAN WIN EQUALITY

Shaun Harkin

The North appears to be moving closer to direct rule from London. No official reports of the talks between the DUP and Sinn Fein on restoring the Assembly are publicly available but it should be assumed the DUP are refusing to budge on an Irish Language Act and other equality issues.

In the absence of a functioning Stormont Executive, James Brokenshire, the Tory Northern Ireland Secretary of State, legislated for a financial budget. Since the Assembly collapsed over the RHI 'cash for ash' scandal last January civil servants have been running government departments.

Though unelected, they have implemented hundreds of millions in across the board cuts to the health service, education, the fire service, the Community Sector and elsewhere.

Accountable

May's Tory government should be held fully accountable for the vicious cuts putting people's lives at risk and driving up impoverishment across the North. Civil servant enacted cuts have been cynically used by Brokenshire to pressure Sinn Fein and the DUP to create a new Stormont Executive.

However, the Tories want a deal that let's the DUP continue to block demands for Irish Language equality and for same-sex marriage.

This is not a deal we should be prepared to accept. Instead, pressure for equality should increase.

That said, Sinn Fein's equality demands don't go anywhere near far enough.



Michelle O'Neill and Arlene Foster

A deal to restore Stormont that doesn't include the right to choose and an end to austerity won't be one based on championing genuine equality.

Secondly, Brokenshire's new budget for the North is lifted from the draft budget framework created by the previous SF/DUP Executive for which Sinn Fein's Máirtín Ó Muilleoir was the finance minister.

In 2015, the SF/DUP Executive legislated for austerity in the Stormont House

and Fresh Start Agreements. Parties who opposed austerity said this was necessary because there was simply no more money available.

However, this notion was shattered when the Tories awarded the DUP £1 billion for propping up May's government following the disastrous showing in the Westminster election.

The new budget for the North legislated by Brokenshire is a continuation of Tory

austerity here.

Brokenshire's claim that there is to be a 3.2% daily increase in expenditure, and that the budget somehow represents a good deal for working class people; is nonsense.

With rising inflation taken into consideration this so-called 'increase' amounts, in real terms, to a spending cut.

In the allocation for Health, for example, Brokenshire presents the 5.4% increase as a major spending investment.

The reality is, with health inflation sitting at 6%; this allocation is not enough to cover the rising costs of running the health service.

As a result we'll see cuts in this sector, with less money to spend on hospitals, nurses and improving the NHS.

Massive cuts to public services combined with the absence of a functioning government and DUP intransigence on equality has led to growing political frustration and anger.

Resistance

Whether there's direct rule or a return to Stormont or a continued period of political uncertainty, building resistance to the attack on public services, poverty wages and the slashing of benefits is urgent.

The recent protests against health cuts demonstrated the potential to build such a movement.

When it comes to the Irish Language, the Right to Choose, Marriage Equality, dealing with environmental scandals and ending austerity, we will make more progress by building and relying on a people power movement putting feet on the streets and willing to take direct action, including industrial action.

While the RHI investigation goes on, the Paradise Papers scandal has once again demonstrated there is plenty of wealth available to fund decent public services, good paying jobs and to deal with injustice and inequality.

A people power movement is the key to winning our demands now, taxing the super-rich and bringing down the Tory/DUP coalition of chaos.

Stop Benefit Cuts – Oppose Universal Credit

Shaun Harkin

The latest raft of Tory benefit cuts is hitting the most vulnerable very hard across the North. The role-out of 'Universal Credit' is being geographically staggered but has already begun in Limavady and Ballymoney.

Universal Credit replaces different benefits but will mean a reduction in what many people can receive.

People moving onto Universal Credit are being left without benefits or any form of income for six weeks.

As a result, already overwhelmed food banks are preparing for a surge in requests.

The so-called 'benefit cap' will push working class families into greater deprivation.

Cuts in benefits include what's being referred to as the 'two-child policy', whereby families on benefits won't receive any additional financial help for a third or fourth child because they're already deemed to have reached the 'benefit cap'.

There's no doubt this will lead to more poverty and is clearcut social engineering by the Tories. Outrageously, the Tories have created an exemption to the child tax credit limit known as the 'rape clause'.

A third or fourth child resulting from 'non-consensual sex' can be exempted from the child tax credit limit. No woman should have to prove she was raped in order to access benefits for their child.

Thousands

Thousands of people in receipt of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) have had their application for Personal Independence Payments (PIP) rejected by medical assessors from privately run and hugely profitable companies such as Capita.

People living with disabilities will be among the hardest hit by welfare



Benefit cuts protest

reforms.

In 2015, the Stormont Assembly was almost collapsed over the implementation of Tory welfare reforms in the North.

Power

Instead, the DUP/SF Executive handed the power to legislate on welfare back to Westminster.

With widespread opposition to the Tory attack on benefits cuts across all

communities, by handing welfare powers back to London both the DUP and Sinn Fein could claim the cuts had nothing to do with them.

Sinn Fein promised financial mitigations from the block grant would protect the most vulnerable but that simply isn't happening.

Despite all the promises and pledges from Stormont, the Bedroom Tax is also being implemented in the North.

Sinn Fein described anti-cuts cam-

paigners as 'scaremongering' when they warned Bedroom Tax mitigations, set to run out in 2020, would not cover everyone.

It's now clear they don't cover everyone.

Harsh

When the financial mitigation runs out the number of people who can be hit with the Bedroom Tax will rocket to 30,000.

The harsh consequences of the decision by the SF/DUP Executive to allow the Tories to implement welfare reform here are now becoming clear. Tory welfare reform should and could have been stopped.

Now it's crucial we build a people power campaign to resist its implementation, to defend those on the receiving end of brutal cuts and to push for the complete abolition of policies hurting working class communities.