

Ireland: Jobstown victory against state frame up

Bernie McAdam Wed, 19/07/2017 - 10:32

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The Irish state's attempt to criminalise seven water charges protesters has failed, though charges against other water protesters remain. The defendants, including the Solidarity TD (MP) Paul Murphy, and councillors Michael Murphy and Kieran Mahon, have been found not guilty of criminal charges of false imprisonment of the Labour Deputy Prime Minister, Joan Burton, and her assistant, Karen O'Connell. This 'imprisonment' was meant to have occurred at an anti-water charges protest in Jobstown, Dublin, on 15 November 2014.

Ireland at the time was in the grip of a mass revolt against the Fine Gael/Labour government's attempt to impose water charges. Protest after protest eventually forced the government to suspend the water charges, although that suspension is due to be reviewed at the end of this year. In Jobstown, a peaceful, sit down protest prevented Joan Burton's car, which was also surrounded by Gardai, from moving for around two and a half hours. This, the government claimed, constituted 'false imprisonment'!

The victory was undoubtedly helped by it being a jury trial. This in a country bedevilled by the use of non-jury trials, north and south of the border! The jury threw out the case after it became patently obvious that a succession of Gardai lied in their submissions. Video footage clearly contradicted Gardai 'evidence'. The reputation of the cops, involved in many clashes with anti-water charges protesters, has sunk even further now.

Media: hand in glove with state

The Irish Times' reaction was typical of its support for the state's orchestrated moves against the anti-water charges movement. The paper reported that 'the claim by supporters of the defendants that the charges were a politically motivated attempt to stifle protest should be treated with the derision it deserves'. Then, reeling from the acquittals, it ominously posed the headline 'jury trials under strain'. The paper then tried to blame the outcome on the use of social media in supporting the defendants!

The Irish Independent preferred to reflect on the fact that neither the Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP, nor the Gardai 'have covered themselves in glory here'. Also, it discovered the fact that 'kidnapping' was not exactly what happened and that the DPP 'had a range of lesser offences available to it under the Public Order Act rather than this 'disproportionate' charge'!

The media as whole failed to locate the conspiracy by the Irish state, in particular the DPP, the Gardai and the government, to criminalise leading campaigners against the water charges. The state was seeking to undermine elementary democratic rights by attacking the right to protest. The absurd charges could have brought sentences of life behind bars. The state was desperately resorting to repression to abort the mass revolt. In doing this it was throwing out a warning to all who might want to join any future popular rebellions.

Now, despite the combined forces of the state and the media, and also the pernicious role of the Labour

leaders, the acquittals represent a stunning defeat for the Irish ruling class. Conscious of the impending crisis opening up after Brexit, the ruling class will no doubt return to the attack having sharpened its weapons of repression, ably assisted by the present Fine Gael government. The problem that this will pose to Irish workers is the weakness, indeed the unwillingness, of their political and trade union leaders to withstand any renewed assault. The jury's decision is a legal victory to relish certainly, but a mobilised working class will need to rely on, and impose, its own justice in the battles that lie ahead.

Vacuum on the Left

Ireland, like many other European countries, has endured years of draconian austerity and, like in other countries, its major political parties have suffered from their role in forcing working class people to pay for the crisis of capitalism. This has, of course, included many social democratic parties, like the Irish Labour Party, that have colluded in the implementation of austerity.

In Ireland, the two main traditional pro-capitalist parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, have both been discredited and struggled to form governments. The smaller Labour Party, always ready to join a coalition, has slumped to around six per cent of the vote. There is a huge political vacuum on the left in Irish politics.

Sinn Fein are poised to fill that vacuum, tacking to the left with anti-austerity rhetoric but doing nothing in action to fight it. Ominously, they have also not ruled out forming a coalition with some of the above. Beyond that, while the left is hopelessly divided between Independents 4 Change, Solidarity - Left Alternative (Socialist Party) and People before Profit (Socialist Workers Party) working class anger has given all three groups a Dáil representation and an electoral base.

All three once operated under the umbrella of the United Left Alliance, ULA, which had the potential to develop into a new mass workers' party but the opportunity was squandered. An electoral non-aggression pact was never going to be a substitute for building a political organisation that democratically decided on its programme, its campaigns and, of course, building branches.

For a new mass working class party!!

The Irish economy is meant to have ?recovered? since the 2007 Great Recession. It has apparently paid for 42 per cent of Europe?s banking crisis (Eurostat). It has done so at the expense of savage hardship for its people whilst property speculators, bankers and corrupt politicians have been bailed out. The prognosis is not good. Quite apart from continuing international stagnation and uncertainty, Ireland may well face its biggest threat from the likelihood of a hard Brexit.

Come what may, Irish workers, north and south, will inevitably face more attacks on their living standards and democratic rights. It is vital that a new, mass working class party is created that can orchestrate the resistance to more austerity and repression. Electoral advances will be important but must be understood as an auxiliary to building working class direct action.

The remnants of the ULA may well incrementally grow electorally. But that is as nothing to the task of building a new party in every trade union, workplace, estate and college which can co ordinate workers' action and build a new workers' democracy in Ireland. A new initiative to draw in the various strands of the left is needed but it must be one in which there is a democratic means to address the different policies and traditions of the component groups.

Revolutionary alternative

If a new left alternative is to emerge it must address key programmatic issues facing Irish workers in their

fight against native and imperialist capital. Among those issues are:

Firstly, how does a new party counter the cowardice of the trade union leaders and aid the rank and file in wresting control of the unions. We need a strategy that not only defends workers here and now but is linked to the struggle for socialism. The rank and file must organise now within and across the unions to end the collaboration of their leaders with the Irish state.

Secondly, the need for an action programme for women's rights in the two failed states of Ireland. A working class women's movement needs to be built which has at its core the fight against criminalising abortion and fights for free abortion on demand.

Thirdly, any new socialist formation must tackle the national question and oppose the Border. The northern state is by its nature deeply sectarian and only British withdrawal can start the process by which all the people of Ireland can determine their own future, without a border. Brexit has raised the border question again, socialists must answer with a socialist alternative.

Failure to address the need for a new working class party in an open and democratic manner would let down the hopes of many militant workers. Failure to adopt a revolutionary socialist programme that fights to end capitalism and imperialism in Ireland, would inevitably lead down the road of collusion and compromise that has tarnished the likes of Labour and Sinn Fein.

We should build on the Jobstown victory, by launching a revolutionary socialist alternative in the fight for a 32 county Workers' Republic!

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