

The Sinn Féin shift and the Fascist threat

It is a great pleasure to be producing this issue of Irish Marxist Review in the aftermath of the stunning Yes vote in the referendum. To have been doing the opposite, to be attempting to ‘draw lessons’ from a defeat, does not bear thinking about – there was so much at stake, and it was such a watershed moment. But most of what needs to be said on the result and the campaign is covered in our lead articles by Kieran Allen and Bríd Smith. It doesn’t need repeating here.

However, there are two recent political developments which I would like to comment on: Sinn Féin’s opening of the door to coalition with Fine Gael and the alarming fascist marches in Belfast and London.

That Sinn Féin should even contemplate entering into a coalition with Fine Gael is a significant shift. Only a couple of years ago their declared position, as represented by Eoin Ó Broin, was that Sinn Féin would only go into coalition if it were the majority/lead party in the government which meant they were effectively ruling out coalition in the immediate future. Even if many of us on the left never believed this was their real position, the assumption tended to be they would go with Fianna Fail, supposedly the more ‘republican’ of Ireland’s two main bourgeois parties.

Fine Gael and Fianna Fail are both completely capitalist parties, both committed to neo-liberalism, both mired in corruption and

simply alternating as the bosses’ A and B teams, with only marginal differences between them: Fine Gael economically slightly more to the right and more aggressively neo-liberal and slightly more socially liberal; Fianna Fail slightly more populist on economic issues and slightly more conservative on social issues (as seen over Repeal). But in terms of the nationalist/republican historical narrative there always seemed more affinity with Fianna Fail, the party of Eamonn De Valera, than with Fine Gael, the Blue Shirt descendants of Michael Collins and Eoin O’Duffy. Moreover, in terms of Sinn Féin’s electoral base in the manual working class Fine Gael were always the most hated enemy. So this matters and it is a substantial move rightwards.

Naturally Mary Lou McDonald and the Sinn Féin leadership can give the move a positive, semi-radical, spin. ‘We stand ready to go into government to change this country! We are going to bring about real change for the Irish people, North and South! We will end austerity and inequality! And to those who would exclude us, like Leo Varadkar and Michael Martin, we say it’s not up to you, it’s up to the Irish people!’ So it can be made to sound ‘bold’ and ‘assertive’. But in reality this is never how capitalist politics, capitalist parties and coalitions with them, work. There is an abundance of experience of this from Ireland, with Labour and the Greens, and from numerous countries and governments round

the world.

Mainstream capitalist parties – the Tories, the Christian Democrats, the US Democrats and Republicans – exist to defend the interests of the capitalist class and capitalist system. That is their nature, their whole *raison d’être*. They can be induced, by mass revolt and mass pressure, to retreat or compromise in the interests of their class, as they did over water charges, but they cannot be ‘persuaded’ by rational argument, or by Sinn Féin, or by any other coalition partner, to go against the interests of their class, the class on which they depend for funding, leaders, cadres, and influence. This is especially the true in that the real centres of power do not lie in parliament or even in the cabinet but outside in the unelected boardrooms and hierarchies of the state apparatus.

Consequently, were Sinn Féin actually to go into coalition with Fine Gael the effect would not be to pull the Blueshirts to the left but, as happened to Labour in 2011-16, to be themselves captured and dragged to the right. All aspirations of moving towards a socialist Ireland, on which they have fed their rank-and-file for decades, would have to go out the window. If, as is possible, Sinn Féin were to assume office in times of economic crisis, as the Greens and Labour did, they would be forced, as a condition of remaining in government, to implement the austerity and vicious cuts demanded by their coalition partners, backed by the ruling class.

In the process they, like Labour, might well shatter themselves as a party based in the working class.

For all these reasons we urge all those in Sinn Féin who want to stand up for the interests of working people to raise their voices against this turn. The truth is that any real left party actually achieves far more with, and for working people, as a party of resistance from below, of people power on the streets, than it can as a party trapped in a capitalist government.

On Saturday 10 June far right racist and fascist mobilisations by the Democratic Football Lads Alliance and others in support of Tommy Robinson in Belfast and London, attracted approximately 250 and 15,000 people respectively. There are many reasons why we should take this very seriously.

The first is the character of the demonstrations. It can be argued that not all the marchers were fascists, some were just 'ordinary people'. This, of course, is true and will be true of any demonstration- it applies equally to demonstrations on our side of the class struggle. Nevertheless these marches were in support of a known fascist – Tommy Robinson, real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, is a long standing Nazi going back to the days of the EDL and the old BNP; were led by fascists and were dominated by fascist and racist slogans with large amounts of Seig Heiling and ugly violent behaviour. Any person of colour, any Moslem, any woman and any identifiable leftist in the vicinity of these demonstrations was under immediate threat.

Second there is the size. 250 in Belfast is more than they achieved before and 15,000 in London is quite simply the biggest street mobilization of the extreme right in

over forty years.

Third, the fact that this occurs in the context of international political polarisation with rising fascist and far right movements in a number of countries including the US, Germany (the AfD – Alternative for Deutschland), Hungary (Jobbik and parts of Fidesz) , Italy and others. Moreover the far right know this and are consciously building on it. From Steve Bannon of the Alt-Right, to Geert Wilders from the Netherlands, Gerard Brennan of the rump UKIP and even Pauline Hanson from Australia, the far right united in support of Tommy Robinson.

Fourth, there is a misogynistic cultural backlash against the global rising of women which, through the likes of Jordan Peterson, has gained widespread traction, particularly amongst a layer of young men online, and which can serve as a transmission belt to fascist ideas.

Lastly there was the smallness of the counterdemonstrations on 10 June – only 30 or so in Belfast and less than 800 in London; in other words our side was massively outnumbered. Doubtless a number of factors contributed to this. There is a wide layer of genuinely anti-racist people – the kind of people who marched in their thousands to commemorate Grenfell in London or packed Liberty Hall for a meeting demanding the Right to Work for asylum seekers – for whom the Democratic Football Lads Alliance and the threat they represent simply hasn't yet crossed their radar. Then there is the largely tokenistic response of the trade union movement and the current inability to mobilise, for anything other than elections and intra- Labour Party disputes, of Momentum and the Corbynista left of the Labour Party. Confusion in relation to the Zion-

ist-Blairite offensive over anti-semitism may also have been a factor, along with the general weakness of the far left in Britain.

But, however we explain things, certain conclusions are inescapable. These demonstrations must serve as a wake-up call. Anti-fascist, anti-racist resistance can and must be built. as quickly and widely as possible. In Ireland in the South we must be vigilant to try to ensure that the contagion does not spread southwards or over the water and we must be ready to respond if racist or fascist agitation rears its head in our communities. The next 'Tommy Robinson' march in London is scheduled for 14 July. As an immediate step United Against Racism has called a Solidarity against Racism and Fascism Rally for the same day, Saturday 14 July, 2pm at the GPO. Irish Marxist Review urges its readers to be there.

Finally this issue of IMR contains a wealth of interesting material. I would draw particular attention to articles on Catalonia and France – we are fortunate to have 'foreign correspondents' i.e. comrades, engaged in the struggle in these countries and willing to write for us; and to two pieces on aspects of the environmental crisis – the anthropocene and species extinction – by Dave O'Farell and Linda Kehoe and to Marnie Holborow's review of Tithi Battacharya on Social Reproduction Theory . These are ideas we all need to get our heads around.

Also I want to acknowledge the considerable help, in the form of highly efficient proof reading, given by Eva Richardson McCrea.

John Molyneux