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Budget 2013 & the dark times to come

Andrew Flood

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Roughly 1,000 people protested at the Dail (parliament building) in Dublin Wednesday night as yet another austerity budget was debated. As with previous budgets the new flat rate taxes, PRSI & excise hikes will mean workers & those on low income will be hit hard while the richest 1% will hardly notice any difference.

Particularly nasty headline cuts included the 10 euro a month cut of the children's allowance, on top of all the other cuts this will have a major impact on poor families in particular. But there were also lots of less visible ones like the cut in the respite care grant down from €1,700 to €1,375, a huge extra burden for families with disabilities. The flat rate PRSI increase of €264 means a worker earning just over the minimum wage will have to pay the same extra PRSI every week as a banker earning 500,000. Student fees will go up every year by €250 for the next three years, making a nonsense of the pretence we have free education except for a registration fee. Even the flat rate increases on beer, wine, tobacco and spirits will have the same regressive effect of hitting those with little disposable income far harder than the rich.

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Money was however found for some things. There was €17.4 million for a new youth detention centre, needed no doubt to 'deal with' the surge in anti-social crime that these cuts are likely lead to. And the massive subsidy to the bosses that are the work for nothing schemes got funding for 10,000 more places — this despite the fact that an ICTU study calculates that the money taken out of 'the economy' by the budget will result in the loss of 40,000 jobs. Both these being demonstrations of the class nature of the budget where the speculative mistakes of they rich during the Celtic Tiger are to be paid for in full by the working class.

WSM members took part in the anti-austerity march called by the Household tax campaign which went up to the Dail from the central bank. There were brief scuffles as a section of the crowd tried to push to the Dail gates and Garda horses were used to push them back leading to chants of 'Whose Cops — NAMA's cops' and 'The people united will never be defeated.' Around the same time the EU Office on Molesworth street had "No borders No Nations Against a Europe of Capital" sprayed on its windows. 2013 is also the year Ireland has the EU presidency and although we can't be sure the unknown artist was aware of this the lead banner of the huge banned march that was attacked with water cannon during the previous 2004 Summit carried the same slogan.

We were posting photos & video from the march live to our Facebook page and one US commentator there reacted to the top image for this article with "*We really need to work together to fight this Austerity attack on the working families of the world! This is not an Irish problem, or a Greek problem or an American problem..this is a coordinated attack on working class people around the world by monopolies. Our response must be a coordinated and united response by hundreds of millions of us!*" Similar comments and likes indicated that a fair few people around Europe and the rest of the world were following the protests here, a welcome reminder that this is not an Irish struggle or a struggle that can be won in Ireland alone.

This graffiti appeared to be one of a number of pieces around the city reacting against attempts to deflect anger against austerity into anti-migrant racism. A reminder that there are costs to these cuts beyond financial ones, in particular if we fail to build movements of resistance. We need only look at the rise of fascism in Greece and the way that is directly related to the imposition of even harsher austerity on Greek workers to understand this.

This budget will mean that for most of us 2013 will be a good deal tougher than 2012. A family on an average workers income in an average house with three kids will be down about 1,000 euro in income alone. That will probably be most, if not all, of their current disposable income in the 5th year of cumulative cuts. 40,000 more of us will be pushed onto the dole as 'the economy' shrinks further and an additional 10,000 of those on the dole will be forced to subsidise the wealthy through the work for free schemes. Youth unemployment which is already huge will be pushed higher but rest assured that any who decide that rather than emigrate they will 'stay and fight' will discover places prepared for them in the new youth detention centre.

For the wealthy elite in Ireland, many of whom pay no tax on earnings because they take such long holidays, the system is working all too well. The last five years have seen a huge wealth transfer from almost all of us to that wealthy elite at home and abroad as the capitalist class ensured they were bailed out as the banks crashed. The elephant in the room here was raised by folk singer Christy Moore when he said "We seem to have become a nation of obedient shit-takers" in a newspaper interview that linked the passivity of most in the face of these cuts to the way "Savita Halappanavar and her family also paid the price for our silence." There is some mass resistance, 50% refused to pay the household charge & tens of thousands took to the streets for Savita. But unless it is sustained and built on those at the top will keep hitting us, and drive us back towards very dark times indeed.