

Election fever

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HERE IT COMES, there it goes. Another doling out of our share of “democracy”. Where will we put our ‘X’. Who do we want to rule us for another five years? The answer for anarchists to this question is easy, nobody.

The right to the vote was part of the hard won struggles of workers (and suffragettes!) over the last couple of hundred years. Even the most flawed democracies are forced to concede rights that dictatorships do not, such as relative independence for trade unions, the right to limited demonstrations and a certain amount of free speech.

However it is clear that none of these are absolutes, as anti-trade union legislation like the Industrial Relations Act, Section 31 of the Broadcasting Act, and the refusal to allow nationalist marches into Belfast city centre adequately demonstrate.

The real purpose of Leinster House is not to ensure the country is run according to the wishes of all the people, cherishing all their views equally. Parliament instead provides a democratic facade beyond which the real business of managing capitalism goes on.

Organisations like the Irish and British Labour Parties spend most of their time trying to prove they can manage capitalism just as well as the Tories or Fianna Fáil. They argue their policies are a way of avoiding strikes and any other form of class strife. They say their politics of class collaboration are more efficient to capitalism than a hard headed class strife approach of lock-outs and union busting.

P.E.S.P. LOGIC

This sort of logic has nothing to do with socialism. Indeed the current Fianna Fáil/PD government has been successfully pursuing the same logic through the Programme for Economic and Social Progress, and before that the PNR. These deals mean the union bureaucrats actively stopping and sabotaging strikes in return for pay increases below the rate of inflation. So in a comparative ‘boom’ period of the Irish economy when company profits doubled Irish workers made real losses with regards to wages and employment and lost ground as regards the social wage (health care, education, local authority housing, welfare entitlements).

The Labour and Workers Parties may have objected to parts of the PESP but they supported the idea of ‘social partnership’ as it is part of their strategy for government as well.

GOOD LEADERS?

These arguments are common to most revolutionary socialists, but anarchists have another and more fundamental reason for opposing the parliamentary process. Parliament means the mass of the working class relying on a few representatives to enter parliament and do battle on their behalf.

Anarchists do not believe any real socialist/anarchist society can come about through the good actions of a few individuals. From the time of the ‘First International’ over a century ago, anarchists have argued that the liberation of the working class can only be achieved through the action of the working class.

MAKING THE ARGUMENTS

This brings us to the question of how should anarchists tackle the parliamentary system. How do we convince everyone not to vote? Will the Workers Solidarity Movement be putting all its energy into an anti-election campaign?

This is not seen as a major activity by us. Our aim is not to have elections where only 10% vote, for such a thing would be meaningless in itself. Our aim is to change society by winning the working class to the ideas and tactics of anarchism. This will involve the overthrow of the economic system (capitalism) we live under and its replacement with socialism under workers' self-management.

We will gain support for anarchist ideas not just through abstract propaganda but also by our involvement as anarchists in struggles and demonstrating how anarchism provides the best tools for winning day to day reforms. This election we will be concentrating our energy on getting a 'No, Yes, Yes' vote in the referenda.

FOOLISH ABSTENTION?

But is it not foolish to refuse to support parties which may be slightly better than Fianna Fail or Fine Gael?

Real decision making takes place in industry and not in parliament. Any party, even in majority government, can only do what capitalism allows them. The sight of a "socialist government" implementing cuts and breaking strikes damages the credibility of socialism.

It is also a question of energy. The sort of effort that is spent supporting (critically or otherwise) reformist organisation is energy taken away from the struggles for improved working conditions, abortion rights, etc. The "X" march demonstrated how building campaigns can effect more real change than 20 Labour or Workers party TD's. It forced the courts to allow "X" to go to England for an abortion.

Even more importantly, if we do not wish to see society divided into order-givers and order-takers we should not take part in choosing the order-givers. Our goal is efficient grassroots democracy, which will be co-ordinated nationally and internationally. We hold that everyone affected by a decision should be able to have a direct say in making that decision. Electing 166 TDs to make all the decisions "for us" is merely choosing rulers, not doing away with rulers.

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