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Massive National rally of community campaign against new Household tax in Ireland

Workers Solidarity Movement

March 27, 2012

Saturday's National Rally against the Household Tax in the National Stadium was literally filled to overflowing. As well as nearly 3,000 people crammed into every possible space in the Stadium another 4 to 500 were in the car park at the side, unable to fit into the building. And the thousands who attended were angry, energized and expectant of victory. The National Stadium normally hosts boxing matches but the atmosphere on Saturday topped that of watching a home fighter coming out on top in a close fought bout.

From an hour before the event it became clear rally of the grassroots activists that make up the campaign was going to be huge. Stewards were hearing of additional buses coming from places around the country and the expected buses were starting to arrive, slowing traffic on the North Circular Road to a halt. As people started to stream through the doors a 600 strong march arrived from the nearby districts west of the conference from Rialto, Inchicore & beyond. All 2200 seats were rapidly filled with

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Retrieved on 13th August 2021 from www.anarkismo.net

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hundreds more standing in every available remaining space and hundreds more in the car park.

Although a lot of the speaking time was dominated by the politicians supportive of the campaign this was really a day that gave a voice to the thousands of ordinary people whose day by day organizing over the last months is what will give us victory. In the time given over to speakers from the floor many of them expressed both their anger at the government and their belief in victory. There were also several speakers from trade unions and both the Dublin Council of Trade Unions spokesperson and the UNITE speaker said workers who refused to implement the charge should be supported by their unions. It was notable that there was some heckling of a couple of the unions speakers, arising it appears from the sense of many that after the public sector strike and the massive demonstrations the unions failed to act to stop the austerity drive.

After the rally we talked to one of the Workers Solidarity Movement members active in the Wicklow campaign about what they thought needed to be done next to ensure victory.

Q: Joe what can people do in their local campaign groups to make the campaign more effective?

Joe: Where you are involved with your local campaign group, ensure that it meets up regularly and that decisions are made democratically and through discussion, so that people really have a sense of ownership of the campaign. This method of organising actually encourages participation, as people being sent tasks to carry out such as leafleting through an email or text message is disempowering and feels much like orders being given as opposed to a group of people working towards a common goal to benefit themselves.

Q: How do you think things like co-ordination and democracy can work in a campaign of this size and geographic spread?

Joe: Where there is a case in your area where several local groups are looking to work together (probably a county-wide area), and in regards to having representation on the national

committee, try to encourage a democratic structure based on recallable and mandated delegate meetings in your county area, and delegates from this grouping to the national committee. The local campaign groups should be open to and made up of all the members of the campaign in a given area, and the membership of the campaign should have the final say on how their local campaign is run.

A delegate is a person who is given a mandate by the local campaign group to convey the local group's opinions and decisions, and to meet up with other delegates to co-ordinate activities. Delegates should be rotated around the members of the group, and should be instantly recallable if they go against their mandate given to them by the group.

This has been put into effect in the Cork Campaign Against the Household Tax, a report of which can be found at this web address: tinyurl.com

Q: The WSM has put a lot of emphasis on people needing to see themselves as campaign Organisers rather than just activists who turn up to events. What do you see this meaning in real terms?

Joe: Talking face-to-face with your neighbours and co-workers is absolutely key for the ideas of the campaign and boycott movement to spread; often an anonymous leaflet put through a letterbox isn't enough. To this end, calling around to your neighbours doors with a leaflet to ask them to join the boycott should be a priority activity. However, a small group of activists slowly canvassing a whole town or area will not succeed in time, nor will it grow the campaign or empower people to get involved. Rather, when a neighbour or co-worker is supportive of the campaign, they should be asked to talk to their immediate neighbours and encourage them to get on board, join the campaign and put the "Not Paying" window posters in their windows. This encourages a "chain-reaction" of local organisers who work in their own communities, and encourages self-organisation.

For more information on this method of organising, the “organiser model”, please see the article at the following web address: tinyurl.com

Q: There are loads more protests coming up including the march on the Fine Gael conference, how important are these for winning?

Protests and public meetings are fantastic and should be part of any protest movement, but the main tactic that will win this struggle is encouraging a massive boycott of the household tax. This is the only way the tax will be beaten. Also, encourage direct action within your local campaign group, and don't be afraid to protest inside your local TD's office!

As anarchists, we think the mass direct action is absolutely brilliant. This campaign has shown so far that people really are capable of organising themselves and their communities, and are taking power back into their own hands from our elected “representatives” and the government who sit in the Dáil. We think that society should be run by those who live and work in it, and that ordinary people are perfectly capable of running society themselves.