

# Take Back The Power!

As we march today, we do so with our trade unions hamstrung and weakened. We have suffered the effects of 6 austerity budgets in 4 years. Our incomes and standards of living have been slashed and our public services decimated. Young workers, in particular, have had their wages and working conditions savaged.

Workers in both public and private sector have suffered pay cuts and job losses. In the public sector, following a 12 - 15% pay cut in 2010, the Croke Park Agreement (CPA) was sold to us as the only way in which pay and conditions could be protected. It has, instead, provided the cover for a €3.1 billion cut in the public sector pay bill and the loss of 28,000 jobs. Newly qualified teachers, for example, now start on a net salary which is 27% lower than the 2008 starting salary.



## **'Extending' the suffering.**

And in January, with no consultation with the membership, the union leaders went into talks on a so-called 'extension' of the CPA. This time the government are saying they want another €1 billion in cuts over the next 3 years. Their list of demands was described by the general secretary of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors as being akin to being given "a choice of whether we wanted to be shot with a handgun or a shotgun".

It should be clear that there is nothing to talk about. Union leaders should have politely told the government what to do with their invitation to talks and should have

set about organising resistance to the coming attacks. But they didn't and the question for each of us is - What are we willing to do about it? Because while it is easy to blame the leadership, a more difficult and searching problem is - What are the alternatives?

## **Blame.**

How has it come to this? We can blame the union 'leaders' and there's no doubt that the fact that politically many of them are tied to Labour (and Fianna Fáil) is relevant. We can blame their lack of ambition, their constant repetition of the mantra of 'There Is No Alternative'. We can blame the fact that most of the union leaders see their role as being to mediate between the members and government/employers rather than to wholeheartedly represent the members.

All of that is true. But blaming the leaders is not enough. Yes they have negotiated our defeat. Yes they have presided over a complete loss of solidarity among workers. But many union members have gone along with it. Whether through fear, through apathy or through hopelessness many union members have kept their heads down, accepted the pain and gone along with the idea that 'There Is No Alternative'.



**www.wsm.ie**



Others have become totally disillusioned with 'the union' and their anger at the leadership has made them walk away from seeing the union as a collective organ of struggle. Many members have literally voted with their feet and no longer take any active part in union meetings or structures.

Others have been content to continue to blame 'the leaders', the implication being that if we could replace the current leadership with a stronger or more left-wing one things would be different. But many have failed to engage with their fellow-workers and union members and attempt to break that sense of fear, apathy, hopelessness or anger.

### **Take Responsibility.**

It is time for every one of us to take responsibility for trying to turn things around. We have to stop referring to 'the union' as something outside of ourselves and begin to see that our unions are OURS. We have to stop seeing 'head office' and 'the officials' as anything other than employees of the union - our employees who should be taking their instruction from us. And we have to convince our fellow-workers that there is a benefit to engaging with the union structures and organising to resist.

In your workplace and in your union, that means you have to take on that responsibility - there's nobody else to do it for you. By booing Jack O'Connor or any of the rest of the leaders who have stolen our movement from us, we can let off steam. Shouting for a 'general strike now' might make us feel more militant. But the reality is that right now the majority (maybe even a large majority) of union members are unlikely to join a general strike. There is a huge job of work to be done to convince the fearful, the apathetic, the hopeless and the angry that their future lies in standing together in solidarity and that things don't have to be as they are.

For an effective general strike to be possible we need to take control of union structures, dump the current leadership and replace them not with an alternative leadership but with a new type of union which will take control back into the members' hands. We need to re-create a union movement whose primary function is to resist and obstruct attacks on our wages and conditions.

### **Alternative.**

In Spain, Greece and Italy they've had general strikes. But the austerity attacks continue. So a general strike in and of itself is not the panacea. It will not bring about an end to austerity. But it will at least register resistance. It will show solidarity with all those who are subjected to the savage cuts and cast into a life of poverty due to this doomed tactic. It will register a knowledge that the rich are getting a free ride through this depression. It will show Unity. But it will not be enough without an alternative being put forth. That alternative will come from action, not from negotiations about further cuts. As we participate in actions, we will get a sense of our own power, we will begin to realise that things don't have to be as they are.

That's where you come in as a Union member. So if you wish to boo the leadership, go for it. If you want to shout for a general strike now, go for it. But you know that more is needed. Go back to your branch and look at ways of taking steps that register your resistance at ground level. Support those who are resisting cuts. Build opposition to the Croke Park Agreement 'extension'.

Let's begin to show practical pragmatic solidarity with those in struggle. Let's say No more cuts - anywhere or to any service. Let's collectively have the confidence to say we're not taking any more of this. Let's encourage non-cooperation and support other groups of workers so that they are not victimised for refusing to co-operate with the austerity agenda.



## Property Tax.

We are immediately presented with an obvious practical example of how this can be put into action. A massive campaign of boycott last year forced the government to re-think its strategy on the household tax. Now they have come after us again with another home tax - this time calling it a property tax.

The legislation introducing the property tax is extremely draconian and the tax cannot be defeated by a boycott alone. The most obvious way in which government plans can be scuppered would be for workers in the Revenue Commissioners, members of the CPSU and the PSEU, to refuse to co-operate with implementation of the tax.

Union members in those two unions should raise this as a possibility and should begin to campaign within their unions to convince the relevant groups of workers to take such a stance. But the rest of us cannot just leave it to them. Left on their own they would be crushed and some of those doing the kicking would be the current leadership of our unions.

But let's imagine a situation where over the next couple of months - within the unions and in wider society - we win people to the idea of a militant fightback against the property tax. Let's imagine that we build a campaign of protest in our communities, at council meetings, TDs' offices - indeed everywhere we are - that makes opposition to the property tax the central political issue of the day. Let's imagine that that opposition is militant and forceful and stating very clearly that while attempts are being made to foist this tax on us we will not allow 'normal business' to continue.

In the context of having built such an atmosphere of militant protest, the likelihood that union members in the Revenue Commissioners would take action would be greatly increased. And if on top of that we can win other groups of workers to agree that in the event of any worker being disciplined for their refusal to implement this austerity tax, they too will be ready to take action, we will have transformed the political situation.

This is the type of movement we need to build - and we need to do it now. It won't be easy but anything worthwhile never is. The question is - are you willing to do your bit? Let's do it, let's get stuck in and see what's possible.



# nohouseholdtax.org

**Dublin Anarchist Bookfair 2013.**  
**1913-2013 – Rebuilding a Movement**  
**from below.**  
**6th & 7th April 2013.**  
**Liberty Hall.**

Planning is well underway for the 8th annual Dublin Anarchist Bookfair which takes place on the weekend of 6th & 7th April. Workshops will take place on - workplace organising; pro-choice organising; organising to fight deportations; building the fight against the property tax.



*(above)* Last year's poster.

Meetings are being planned on - Feminism and sex-work; anarchism in Barcelona in the lead up to the 1936 revolution; how social history is recorded. There will be panel discussions on - the legacy of 1913 and its lessons for today; the battles against austerity in the PIIGS countries.

On the Sunday afternoon we will hold a walking tour focussed on the history of banking in Ireland and on the tax shelter that is the IFSC. There will be bookstalls from a wide variety of anarchist, libertarian and radical organisations and information stalls from a host of campaigning groups.

This is just a small flavour of what is planned for what promises to be a fabulous weekend. So keep the dates free: Saturday 6th & Sunday 7th April 2013. Hope to see you there. Further details will be posted on [www.wsm.ie/bookfair](http://www.wsm.ie/bookfair) and on the Bookfair facebook page as they become available.

**This leaflet is produced by Workers Solidarity Movement. We are an anarchist organisation which has been active in Ireland since the 1980s. We have branches in Dublin and Cork, and members and supporters in many other areas around the country.**

**Our members are active in their trade unions at local, branch and district level. We are also involved in many campaigns such as the Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes, Abortion Rights Campaign, Free Education for Everyone, and many others. Find out more about Workers Solidarity Movement and what we stand for at [www.wsm.ie](http://www.wsm.ie) or on our facebook page: [www.facebook.com/WorkersSolidarityMovement](https://www.facebook.com/WorkersSolidarityMovement)**



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