

Ireland : Time for a new united left alliance to topple Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael

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Another five years of FF/FG rule would be disastrous for the country. Left parties and Independents must come together and stop this happening

People Before Profit members Gino Kenny, Bernard Mulvaney, Melissa Halpin, Paul Murphy, Brigid Purcell, Bríd Smith TD and Mark Kerins. Photograph : Alan Betson/The Irish Times

A general election is looming. If the local election results are repeated, it will mean a return of this Government but with the Greens replaced as the third wheel by right-wing Independents. The 100-year rule of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael will continue.

This would be a disaster.

Another five years of their rule would mean a deepening of the crises in housing and health, with more children growing up in emergency accommodation, more adults trapped in their childhood bedroom unable to move out, as well as growing hospital waiting lists. It would mean continued inaction on the climate and biodiversity crises and large numbers of workers in low-paid, precarious employment without the right to collectively bargain.

In fact, this would be one of the most right-wing governments in decades. Having ditched the Greens for right-wing Independents, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael would further ratchet up their scapegoating of asylum seekers. This would embolden the far right even more, creating a hostile environment for people of colour, migrants, trade unionists, LGBTQ+ and disabled people.

Left parties and Independents need to act now to stop this happening.

Rather than seeking coalition with the establishment parties, it's time to come together and pose a radical alternative : Ireland's first-ever left government. The "Vote Left - Transfer Left" slogan which emerged organically during the 2020 general election should now become a formal pact which parties and Independents sign up to.

I lost count of the number of times people said to me during the recent election that no matter who they vote for, nothing seems to change. I can't blame them. People have voted for change many times in the past, for Labour, Greens or Independents, only for their vote to be used to put Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael back in power.

However, when the possibility of ending the rule of the Civil War parties emerged during the general election of 2020, it drove enthusiasm and turnout among working-class and young voters. Now that energy and momentum must be recaptured.

We should take inspiration from the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) in France. At extremely short notice, parties of the left have come together in a formal alliance. It's not perfect but it has firmly

challenged the Macronists and the far right of Marine Le Pen. They have made a clear commitment not to rule with either and to offer an alternative.

After the local elections, there was a possibility of a council ruling group excluding Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in Dublin city. However, Labour chose to join with the three Government parties instead of entering a “progressive alliance”. In councils right across the country, Labour jumped at the opportunity to coalesce with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. That should give the public fair warning of what it intends to do after the next general election as well.

In contrast, both Sinn Féin and Social Democrat councillors voted for the People Before Profit nominees for mayor and deputy mayor on South Dublin County Council. Elsewhere, they correctly criticised Labour for joining with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. This is to be warmly welcomed. Will they now follow through and join a pact for a left government ?

A left pact could consist of a commitment not to join any coalition with Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, to oppose any scapegoating of asylum seekers, and instead to fight for public investment in housing, healthcare, public services and climate action that would prioritise people’s needs over corporate profits, as well as enhanced workers’ rights. Beyond that, parties and Independents could be free to put forward their own election manifestos and to run their own election candidates.

Such a pact would present a clear choice to the electorate : stick with Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael or vote for a left government. It would offer a clear route to ending the rule of these two parties. Strong transfers between left parties and left Independents would increase the prospect of a left majority being returned to the next Dáil.

Contrary to the jibes of our opponents, we in People Before Profit do want to be in government. We have given a guarantee : if there is an opportunity for a government excluding Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, we will vote for that nominee for taoiseach, as we have done before. But we won’t join a government for ministerial mercs and perks or the illusion of power. We want to be in a left government which would actually take on the corporate landlords, private health profiteers and big polluters who stand in the way of change.

The crises that people face are not accidental. They are the product of a government and economic system that work for the very rich at the expense of the rest.

The corporate landlords and private developers are enjoying soaring profits because the majority face unaffordable rents and house prices. If we had a properly functioning public health service, there would be no profits to be made from private health insurance and private hospitals. The enormous influence of big agribusiness interests as well as Big Tech explains why, even though the Government has signed up to legally binding climate targets, we are on track to miss them by a country mile.

To overcome their opposition and actually implement the ecosocialist change necessary to resolve the crises faced by people would require a left government basing itself on people-power mobilisation from below. It would require a commitment to implement measures such as public ownership of the private hospitals in order to build a National Health Service, the development of a State construction company to replace reliance on the private market and build 150,000 social and genuinely affordable homes, and an end to the use of Shannon Airport by the US military.

A government that serves the interests of the many instead of the few is desperately needed. Time is running out. The left needs to come together.

Paul Murphy

P.-S.

- The Irish Times. Thu Jul 4 2024 - 06:00 :
<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/2024/07/04/paul-murphy-time-for-a-new-united-left-alliance-to-to-people-fianna-fail-and-fine-gael/>
- Paul Murphy is a People Before Profit TD.