

There is a need to build on the successes on the Anti-Property Tax campaign rather than wallow in any sense of defeat argues Ruth Coppinger.

Any relief the Government may feel over imposing property tax payment will be short-lived. Labour is sliding into oblivion in the polls and bitter resentment is felt by the majority coerced into paying the tax. The outcome of the property tax could well be a political alternative that will challenge austerity and rout Labour, in particular from their seats.

Once the power of deduction at source was introduced by government in draconian legislation and with no alternative fightback forthcoming from the trade union leaders, a resignation developed among people that “they’ll get it from us anyway.”

There was a widespread perception that huge penalties could be imposed on those who boycotted. This was aided by a propaganda blitz in the media promoting the tax and drowning out opposition voices.

However, the tactic of boycott was necessary and fully correct to call for. Sinn Féin and other individual politicians refused to and now argue it was inevitable it would not work. It was not inevitable. Had leadership been given and a powerful national campaign built which chimed with a more confident mood among working class people, the outcome might have been different.

Of course, boycott alone was never sufficient with the power of deduction at source. Trade union action, a large level of protest and serious political pressure were also required.

The role of the union leaders on this has been disgraceful from the outset. They have lost further credibility, sitting on the fence or even reflecting the myth this was a progressive tax.

The campaign organised some excellent protests but, unfortunately, insufficient to force abolition.

We now face the spectre of Labour dipping into the pockets of workers, the unemployed and pensioners – a la Cyprus -- to take this unjust tax. This at a time



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when the country is exposed as a tax haven for corporate giants. The extent of this evasion by Apple, Google et al is astounding. Oxfam also estimate that €707 billion is stashed in Irish accounts by the world’s wealthy.

Although the property tax has been imposed, it will remain a major political issue. It will cause severe hardship when full payment falls due next year.

While the registration figures are a blow, people are looking for ways to strike back. That is why a political initiative is vital for all anti-home tax campaigns. The standing of a slate of anti property tax / anti austerity candidates was put to many public meetings during the campaign and enthusiastically endorsed. Those who fought and protested the tax should now challenge the political parties to abolish it.

There is a real yearning to see an alternative to the austerity consensus. The Campaign Against Home and Water Taxes (CAHWT) has been the only national, active anti-austerity campaign and drew many into political activity for the first time ever. What are these new activists to do now?

Some have crudely counterposed taking an electoral turn versus direct action. Of course there should be protest against TDs, Ministers and councillors. So too should the water tax be fought when it comes on the agenda.

In reality, those local campaigns standing candidates are generally the most active and best able to maintain activists by providing a way forward.

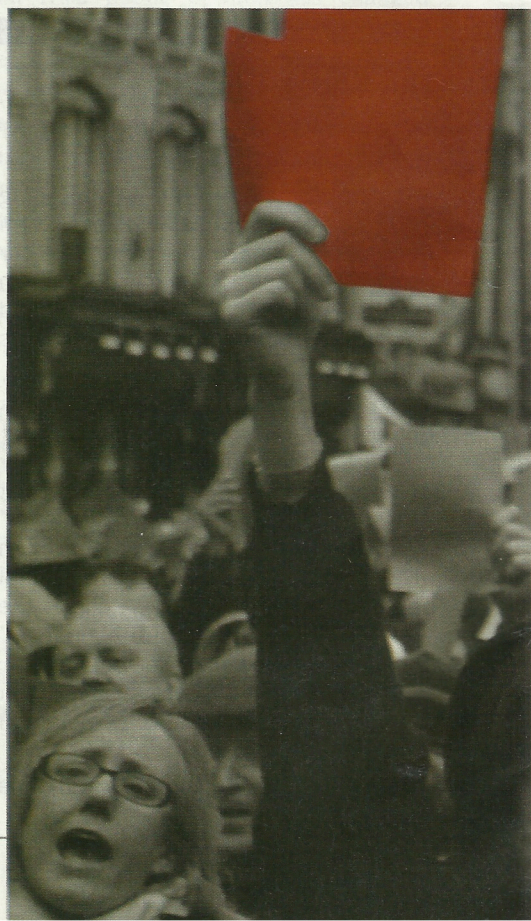
Others oppose building a broad slate of candidates, preferring to corner the market for their own particular left group and getting an endorsement from

the CAHWT. This inevitably means the alternative remains limited to the existing small left. Surely the building of an anti-austerity political alternative is a progressive and necessary task?

Others argue local elections have no relevance – an argument for leaving the establishment parties in situ. These elections are also an important step towards anti-austerity candidates in the not-too-distant General Election.

In the four Dublin local authorities, in Cork, Limerick, Galway, Kilkenny and also in Kildare, Laois, Carlow, Donegal and elsewhere, campaign groups or activists are opting to become part of this challenge. This is a historic opportunity for an anti-austerity slate to be assembled for elections next May, which could rout Labour from their seats and potentially develop into something politically significant.

The author is a Socialist Party councillor on Fingal County Council and member of the CAHWT media group.



The property tax campaign has failed and we need to move on, argues **Mark Hoskins**.

The Campaign Against Home and Water Taxes (CAHWT) had the potential to become a mass movement that could have changed the political landscape. It didn't and we need to move on. It had branches in towns all over the country, on paper it had over twenty thousand members, but only a couple of thousand at best were ever active and at the crucial moment, activity started to decline.

When non-registration levels were at their highest, the Government dithered and the expected court dates that CAHWT planned to mobilise for never materialised. What transpired was a phony war, where the Environment Minister, Phil Hogan, occasionally threatened some new means of increasing compliance, while CAHWT would respond with a protest, a press statement and a new batch of leaflets. All this time, CAHWT was racking up a debt that would later become the main focal point of its activity.

The principal reason that the campaign

was not successful was that not enough people got involved. If protests were to have an impact, tens of thousands were needed on the streets. Occupations of government buildings needed to be more than the tokenistic acts of a few dedicated activists, they had to have the ability to cause a real and sustained disruption to the business of the state.

The knee-jerk reaction by the rump CAHWT grouping around the Socialist Party, that in the absence of class struggle, an electoral alternative must be provided, is a mistake. They will be up against forces who are far more competent at fighting elections. The drudgery of canvassing and fundraising for elections that can have little or no impact on the property tax will burn out activists and the inevitable disappointment when the votes are counted will make activists feel like they've wasted a year of their lives.

We live in an era where clientelism dominates the political landscape. For many reasons, most people's sense of getting involved in politics amounts to supporting 'someone else' to do it. This is the principal subjective factor that the left needs to overcome, and the principal reason for the ultimate failure of CAHWT. The electoral path will only reinforce this and mean that we will face the same problem as we prepare for the next major battle.

Other lessons must be learned from the failure of CAHWT. There must be a move away from the *Field of Dreams* method of political organising. We built it, they didn't come. CAHWT was established by a coalition of left-wing organisations, it declared itself "the opposition" to home taxes, yet the vast majority of those who boycotted the home taxes for close to eighteen months, didn't join. The campaign went on to overstretch itself with an unsustainable level of activity and

an unsustainable debt.

The assumption that people react more favourably towards "low-end goals" should be re-evaluated. The focus on "taxation justice", didn't work. Government propaganda since the beginning of the crisis has been geared towards collective responsibility to pay the erroneously named sovereign debt. The Left's greatest success has been countering this, in arguing that the majority of us had no part to pay incurring the debt.

In the context of the coming battle against the water tax, it might be worth considering that people may react more favourably to the idea that water should be a public resource, that it should not be placed in the hands of corporations, rather than the idea that we simply should not pay. The former idea says something about how water charges will affect us collectively and demands a collective response, while the latter speaks of how they impact the individual and encourages individual action.

Throughout the country, there are local groups still active who are no longer part of CAHWT. It would be beneficial for these groups to remain in contact, for the time being as a loose network rather than to attempt to establish a rival national campaign. The deepening impact of the crisis on working class people will give us the opportunity to put forward high-end responses to austerity, to argue that not just water, but housing and even food should be public resources and to expose the current political system as a dead end for the vast majority.

The author is a member of the Workers Solidarity Movement and a former delegate to the CAHWT steering committee.

