

Right-wing coalition government deal reached in Ireland

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The Irish Dáil (Parliament) will meet Thursday, January 23 when Micheál Martin, leader of Fianna Fáil, will likely be nominated as Taoiseach (Prime Minister) with Fine Gael leader Simon Harris as Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister).

Martin's nomination was supposed to be confirmed Wednesday but the Dáil sitting descended into farce when opposition TDs (members of parliament), led by Sinn Féin, successfully disrupted Martin's nomination because of a dispute over speaking rights. Members of the Regional Independent Group (RIG) which is supporting the government, have also formed a "technical group" allowing speaking rights normally reserved for members of the opposition. At the time of writing, no agreement has been reached and the Dail adjourned until Thursday morning.

Assuming a resolution is found, the new administration taking office will be a coalition of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, the two main bourgeois parties in Ireland, along with nine right-wing Regional Independent Group (RIG) members.

Under the agreement worked out between the two parties Martin will hold the post of Taoiseach till 2027, which will then rotate to Harris, the current outgoing Taoiseach. The RIG, handed regional concessions for their support, will have two junior ministers sitting at cabinet (referred to as super-junior) and three junior ministers acting as ministers of state.

The general election last November resulted in the votes of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael combined falling short of an overall majority, with both parties receiving 42 percent of first preference votes, securing 86 seats, between them. Sinn Féin received 19 percent of the vote winning 39 seats, a drop of 5.5 percent nationally compared to the 2020 election. The Green Party, who were part of the outgoing coalition, plummeted, keeping just one of its 11 seats.

The fact that the two longstanding rivals of Irish politics have once again been forced into government together testifies to the growing resentment by working people of the ongoing crises in homelessness, health care, education and social provisions. A graphic released by broadcaster RTÉ

after the election showed the combined vote of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael over the past 17 years down 33 percent—from 68.9 percent in 2007, to 40.5 percent in 2024.

The Irish Labour Party and its ideological protégé the Social Democrats increased their share of the vote, winning 11 seats each. Both parties rushed to holding talks on government formation, putting forward their credentials as safe bets to govern on behalf of capitalism in Ireland. In the end, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, doubtless with an eye across the Atlantic, considered the right-wing independents would serve better as the government's third leg.

In line with this, the ruling parties have agreed a programme for government devoted to expanding corporate and private wealth at the expense of the Irish working class, while securing Ireland's place as the preferred investment hub for US tech and pharmaceutical corporations.

The programme "Securing Ireland's Future" warns, "the positive, global economic environment, which has benefited Ireland for many years, is no longer guaranteed." In response, the new government proposes a sharp shift to the right and pledges to defend "economic resilience" through a "whole of Government Action Plan for Competitiveness and Productivity" for "reform" and "reducing the cost and regulatory burden on business, investing in infrastructure, digital regulation and reform, energy reform, international trade and research and development, and innovation."

In other words, the new coalition is pledging to increase levels of exploitation and rip up what business regulation there is while pouring resources into "key economic sectors", namely semiconductors, pharma, medtech, ICT, finance and agribusiness. Particular attention is drawn to AI and data centres.

In public finance, the programme pledges to run budget surpluses while reducing public debt and maintaining a "tax system that supports innovation". The government seeks a corporatist deal with the trade unions for "a new public sector pay deal, linked to a reform agenda", i.e. increased productivity.

New measures are proposed to force welfare claimants into

work. The government proposes a new employment strategy “focused on intensive engagement and supports to help those most distant from the labour market”.

There are promises on housing, but the headline 300,000 new homes is aimed primarily at the private sector and will amount to massive handouts to housing developers, with only limited subsidies for first time buyers. New social housing will be restricted to a minimal 12,000 units annually.

Some investment will be directed towards infrastructure, particularly transport, in recognition of its necessity for retaining transnational corporation investment.

Five thousand more police and 20 more judges are to be recruited.

The previous coalition government was criticised by Israel during the election for its intervention in the International Court of Justice case against the genocide in Gaza. The new programme is a full capitulation to Tel Aviv. It pledges to give “effect to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) ‘Working Definition of Antisemitism’” which maliciously equates criticisms of Israel government policy with anti-Jewish hate.

The government intends to continue with the Occupied Territories Bill that had annoyed Israel and US investors, but subsequent statements made by Taoiseach Martin made clear that the government was looking to “rework” every section of the legislation, clearly with a mind to entirely neutralising or further delaying its already minimal impact.

The coalition will also “unequivocally support Ukraine, affirming that Russia cannot win this war and supporting Ukrainian resistance” and upholding sanctions against Russia. Ireland is not a NATO member and retains a pretence of “neutrality” while being politically supportive of NATO operations. This includes allowing Shannon airport to be used as stopover for military transport flights.

The previous government allocated €1.35 billion to military spending, a €100 million increase on the previous year. It said at the time, “This level of investment is critical in the current geopolitical situation.”

The new programme notes that it will “Progress the Naval Service Vessel Renewal and Replacement Programme, replacing secondary armament across the fleet and enhancing our subsea capabilities, and we will continue to develop our maritime support infrastructure, investing to future proof Haulbowline Naval Base, and establishing an additional East Coast Base for the Naval Service.”

The forces to which the government is turning for support include some of the most discredited figures in Irish politics.

The most prominent and wealthiest independent is Michael Lowry. Although not included in the government he was a prominent part of the negotiations and is widely seen as

leader of the RIG. A former minister in Fine Gael, Lowry, who represents Tipperary, was recently named Ireland’s richest politician with an estimated worth of €6.4 million. He has been the subject of a succession of political and financial scandals since 1996, and the focus of two government inquiries.

The McCracken Tribunal into political corruption found that the supermarket owner Ben Dunne paid for huge extensions to Lowry’s home while he was a government minister. The Moriarty Tribunal found that Lowry pocketed hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling in exchange for favourable treatment in granting mobile phone licences.

The RIG also includes Galway TD Noel Grealish, who in 2019 described African asylum seekers as “economic migrants who sponge off the system” at a public meeting in Galway. He was speaking to a crowd over speculation that a direct provision centre may be located close to the town. Later the same year Grealish claimed Nigerian migrants were repatriating €3.5 billion to Nigeria and that some of this was the proceeds of crime. He claim was debunked; a mere €17 million was sent back to Nigeria.

Part of the orientation to the RIG was the appointment of Verona Murphy as Ceann Comhairle (speaker) of the Dáil. Murphy, another former Fine Gael member, former haulage company owner and until recently head of the Irish Road Haulage Association, once claimed that migrant children as young as three or four years of age were a danger because of ISIS brainwashing. Murphy has also been accused of workplace bullying.

In Ireland as throughout the globe, bourgeois politicians openly flaunt the concept that the rule of the oligarchs and their hangers on is the natural way of things. A report published last week by the charity Oxfam showed that Ireland itself now has 11 billionaires, who saw their wealth grow by a third in 2024 to €50 billion. The top oligarchs saw their wealth grow by €35.6 million every single day in 2024.

The new government intends to accelerate that process, while scapegoating migrants for its consequences. All workers in Ireland seeking a way forward in the struggle for decent living standards are posed with developing a means to expropriate the tremendous wealth of that same oligarchy. This means taking up the struggle for socialism.



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