

Policy Principles for a Progressive Irish Government

"It shall be the first duty of the Government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children, to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing, or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as Citizens of a Free and Gaelic Ireland.

Likewise it shall be the duty of the Republic to take such measures as will safeguard the health of the people and ensure the physical as well as the moral well-being of the Nation.

It shall be the duty of the Republic to adopt all measures necessary for the recreation and invigoration of our Industries, and to ensure their being developed on the most beneficial and progressive co-operative and industrial lines."

Democratic Programme for the first Dáil, 1919



All men [and women] are born with equal rights, and in associating to protect one another and share public burdens, justice demands that such associations should rest upon a basis which maintains equality instead of destroying it.

**1867 PROCLAMATION
OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC**

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally...

**1916 PROCLAMATION
OF THE IRISH REPUBLIC**

Right2Water

Water is a human right, essential for life and for all our human needs. As such, water provision and sanitation should not be subject to the profit motive or the free market and should be made available to all, free at the point of use, and on the basis of need, not means.

'Irish Water PLC' and domestic water charges will be abolished within the first 100 days of a Government endorsing this policy.

'Irish Water PLC' will be replaced with a single national water and sanitation board which will be solely responsible for the provision, transmission, sanitation, management and operation of the public water and sanitation supply in the public interest.

This policy will see a full referendum to enshrine a new Article in Bunreacht Na h'Eireann. The date of this referendum would coincide with the establishment of the new national water board.

Article 28 Section 4:2:1:

"The Government shall be collectively responsible for the protection, management and maintenance of the public water system. The Government shall ensure in the public interest that this resource remains in public ownership and management."

This policy will provide for an end to water meter installation and ensuing costs.

This policy will see conservation measures legislated for including mandatory planning permission requirements, incentivised and subsidised water saving devices, and a public education campaign.

Our water infrastructure is in desperate need of investment in order to upgrade the system and repair leaks. This policy provides for an investment of between €6 and €7 billion to be provided through a progressive taxation model, details of which will be published on June 13th 2015.

Funding our water services through progressive taxation measures will ensure citizens always have access to water based on their needs without the possibility of water shut-offs due to unpaid bills in the future. This policy will ensure Ireland remains with zero water poverty.

*** Acknowledgement** – The Right2Water Unions acknowledge the support and advice in framing the above referendum position of Seamus O'Tuathail S.C. and Treasa Brannick O'Cillin, candidate Barrister at Law Degree, The Honourable Society of Kings Inns.

Right2Jobs & Decent Work

"After the war people said, 'If you can plan for war, why can't you plan for peace?' When I was 17, I had a letter from the government saying, 'Dear Mr. Benn, will you turn up when you're 17 1/2? We'll give you free food, free clothes, free training, free accommodation, and two shillings, ten pence a day to just kill Germans.' People said, well, if you can have full employment to kill people, why in God's name couldn't you have full employment and good schools, good hospitals, good houses?"

Tony Benn, Member of the British Labour Party

Everyone has a right to gainful and decent employment which would provide dignity, respect and a living wage. A full employment economy requires several layers: a socially responsible private sector; an expanding public sector including public enterprise; a growing cooperative sector, non-profit and labour-managed sector; and a growing public enterprise. At the very least, where people cannot find work, the state must act as an employer of last resort, directly employing people in socially productive activity.

We will vindicate people's right to decent work through a revolution in the workplace embodied in a far-reaching Decent Work Act. This will eliminate precarious employment, provide under-employed workers with the right to seek additional hours in their workplace when they become available, introduce the right to collective bargaining – enabling economic and political democracy, end bogus self-employment, and legislate for overtime and unsocial hours pay.

The future is wage-led – in particular, the ending of low pay. The medium term goal should be to make the Living Wage the statutory floor.

To further support workers' living standards, a reform of our social protection system to bring it into European norms – in particular, the introduction of pay-related benefits and stronger family supports (e.g. childcare). This will be paid from a higher social wage; that is, employers' PRSI levied at average European levels. This constitutes a major drive against poverty and deprivation in society.

Right2Housing

“Housing is a human right. There can be no fairness or justice in a society in which some live in homelessness, or in the shadow of that risk, while others cannot even imagine it.”

Jordan Flaherty, award-winning journalist, producer and author

We believe that Housing is a basic human right, that this right should be enshrined in Bunreacht na hÉireann and that the obligation on the State to adequately house people should be enforceable by the courts.

As a direct result of the State’s failure to deal with this issue our country is now living through a homelessness epidemic.

Having a home is a social and economic right. A progressive policy will develop a range of housing models to vindicate this right, starting with the ending of homelessness and the clearing of social housing waiting lists. The current crisis in rents should be addressed through rent controls in the short-term but in the long-term the state needs to intervene in the market to mobilise the investment required to modernise the sector, including the provision of income-related rental accommodation to low and average income earners. The State also needs to commence a national home building project. People should also be offered the opportunity to own their homes through limited equity ownership or non-speculative housing. Housing policy should be based on need and choice, not speculation.

Right2Health

"The social conditions in which people live and work can help create or destroy their health. Lack of income, inappropriate housing, unsafe workplaces and lack of access to health care systems are some of the social determinants of health leading to inequalities."

World Health Organization [WHO], 2004

Healthcare is a human right and access to quality healthcare should not be dependent on income. The long-standing policy whereby successive governments promote and incentivise the private healthcare industry is inefficient and discriminatory against those on low incomes. The role of government should be to create a universal healthcare system free at the point of entry which provides the highest possible level of care for all citizens, irrespective of social or economic factors.

The current healthcare crisis in Ireland, where hundreds lie on hospital trolleys and tens of thousands wait more than 12 months for appointments must be addressed. Any future government must acknowledge errors in past policies and invest in the mental and physical wellbeing of the nation, instead of a private industry. A well-funded and efficient public healthcare system would provide economic and social benefits for individuals and wider society in general.

Right2Debt Justice

"Blessed are the young for they shall inherit the national debt."

Herbert Hoover, 31st President of the United States

The past recklessness of financial speculation is imposing an intolerable burden on people's future. Debt justice requires a European Debt Conference to restructure sovereign debt throughout the Eurozone; the introduction of a Financial Transaction Tax in order to repay states for the private bank debt they assimilated; an end to bank-driven mortgage debt resolution through a state led and democratically accountable programme of restructuring and writing down of mortgage debt; and restructuring of money-lending debt which traps people in 100 percent interest loans.

Three steps to address the debt crisis, in Ireland, Europe and Globally:

- Build alliances with progressive citizen-led movements in Europe to develop and promote alternative proposals for realistic and responsible debt reduction strategies for people across Europe.
- End the Irish government's inexplicable boycott of the UN Committee on Sovereign Debt Restructuring, and begin to work, led by partners in the Global South, to develop legal mechanisms to protect citizens from the impact of financial speculation and vulture funds.

Right2Education

"I speak – not for myself, but for all... I raise up my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard. Those who have fought for their rights: Their right to live in peace. Their right to be treated with dignity. Their right to equality of opportunity. Their right to be educated."

Malala Yousafzai, youngest ever Nobel Prize Laureate

Everyone has the right to education. The provision of education should be truly free – without the necessity for 'voluntary contributions' – up to at least primary degree level. The provision of professional and technical education should be affordable and available to all and should be equally accessible.

Three basic priorities for any new government should be:

- 1 To reduce the ratio of students to teachers from among the highest levels in the EU to the lowest.
- 2 The restoration of and increased provision of Special Needs Assistants – which should be seen as an investment in the most vulnerable of our children.

- 3 Investment in early childhood education should be provided in line with a progressive childcare policy which would facilitate the option for parents to enter the workforce.

Education is an investment in the future of the nation whereby we can develop a productive and cohesive society. More funding for the apprenticeship programme and a coordinated jobs policy promoting labour intensive industries should form part of any future government education programme. A modern dynamic economy is dependent on well-educated citizens, increasing employment opportunities and providing the opportunities to create new services and technologies.

Right2Democratic Reform

“A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess.”

Asa Philip Randolph, leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement

We need to undertake a programme of substantial democratic reform that is about more than tweaking time slots for questions or tokenistic measures. There must be real and meaningful reform of our local and national democratic processes which would put citizens at the heart of decision making. Hosting one general election every five years provides too large a gap for real democratic representation – particularly as there is no accountability for broken political promises subsequent to an election.

Citizens should have the capacity to recall elected members of parliament before the end of term. They should have the ability to propose changes to the constitution or call a referendum in relation to legislation introduced by the Oireachtas. Elections should be held at the most convenient time for all citizens and with encouragement for full participation in the voting process.

The introduction of breathalysers ahead of votes in the Oireachtas should also be introduced.

Other proposals include:

- 1 Separation between Government & Oireachtas – this is provided for in the Constitution but in reality it does not exist.
- 2 A relaxing of the Whip system.
- 3 Strengthen the committee system to significantly increase their powers of scrutiny and ensure the committee system operates independent of party patronage.
- 4 Reform of institutions in such a way as to redistribute power and decision making that includes local and regional Government.
- 5 Within all our institutions we have got to engage both the provider and the end user and provide both with the means to redesign systems, for eg. The HSE.

We want your input

The intention of this document is to begin a discussion about what type of society we want to live in. For too long now the people of Ireland have served the needs of the economy instead of the economy serving the needs of the people.

We want to develop this discussion further and so we are seeking your input.

On Saturday, June 13th, the Right2Water Unions will host a second conference to determine a policy platform ahead of the next General Election.

Go to **www.right2water.ie** and let us know what your priorities are for the future of our country. You can also email **right2waterirl@gmail.com**

Alternatively, send your submission to:

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