

Publication of the **RIGHT2CHANGE** movement

February 2016

CHANGE

VOTE FOR CHANGE ON FRIDAY, 26TH FEBRUARY



ANOTHER IRELAND IS POSSIBLE

RIGHT ² CHANGE

CHANGE

WHAT WE SAY

POLICIES NOT PARTIES

Right2Change is not a political party. It is not running candidates in the general election and it does not support any political party or politician. It operates in reverse. Candidates in the general election will be supporting the Right2Change policies and we will be informing the public which candidate in their constituency supports a Right2Water, a Right2Education, a Right2Housing, a Right2Jobs and Decent Work and a Right2Health.

There is a very large democratic deficit that exists within Ireland, intensified by a media that says there is no alternative to the austerity agenda and the established political parties that have dominated government since independence. Those parties in government have left a legacy for all of us. We are now at the wrong end of the EU tables on all of the important areas: unemployment, underemployment, child poverty, food poverty, fuel poverty, excess winter mortality, homelessness, hospital waiting times, patients on trolleys, corruption, suicide, and the list goes on and on.

But there is always an alternative and we believe another Ireland is possible!

Right2Change is about closing the democratic deficit, upholding transparency and promoting a different vision for Ireland – one that's not based on cronyism, corruption, speculation or greed and is instead based on the principles of equality, democracy and social justice.

While the mainstream media will focus on personalities and hyperbole about political parties – in many cases dumbing down politics, confusing the electorate and holding economics aloft saying, “you cannot participate in this, it's too complicated for you,” Right2Change will focus on policies and principles and encouraging political representatives to work together for the betterment of all citizens.

The Right2Change policy platform was developed through a democratic consultation process facilitated by the Right2Water Trade Unions, involving community activists, political representatives, trade unionists and civil society groups. The policies identified and developed are published later in this newspaper but the concept is simple. It's about a new vision for Ireland. We believe the people of Ireland deserve better. They are entitled to a country that genuinely cherishes all of the children of the nation equally. A Republic that does not kowtow to multinationals and wealthy oligarchs. One that has confidence in its people and acts in their best interest – at all times. A government that prosecutes corruption and encourages democratic participation.

For too long politics in Ireland has been a choice between tweedledum and tweedledee. Now, for the first time in the history of our country, we have the opportunity to vote for real change – and the only thing that can defeat us is fear or intolerance.

No doubt you will have heard the spin about “stability.” The focus groups funded by the main political parties have figured out that repeating the words “recovery” and “stability” as many times as possible will get them re-elected. It's insulting to any of the 1,571 children who spent last Christmas in emergency accommodation that their situation is considered stability by politicians in Leinster House. Try telling the 73 families losing their homes every month or the 78 year old waiting 48 hours on a hospital trolley to enjoy the “recovery”.

The reality is this. In order for the optics of a recovery to appear, sacrifices must be made. It costs money to run a country, to pay teachers and nurses, build roads and have decent public services. If the wealthy don't contribute, somebody else must. If the corporations don't pay their fair share, then we all must carry an even larger can. When both the wealthy and the corporations don't pull their weight, it means someone, somewhere is suffering – and they are the people being sacrificed by this and previous governments. The question this election then is – will we elect candidates who are willing to sacrifice some of the most vulnerable in our society or have you the confidence to vote for change?

Exactly 100 years ago men and women on this island were preparing to battle one of the most powerful nations on earth in order to establish a sovereign Republic. They knew they would probably lose their lives, but they were prepared to make that sacrifice for all of us. We don't have to face those terrifying consequences and we don't even have to pick up arms. We simply have to write a number on a piece of paper and vote for individuals and parties that have committed to working together to achieve the egalitarian Republic we all deserve and are entitled to.

Reject fear. Vote **Right2Change.**

Stay up to date with Right2Change at www.right2change.ie

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BEWARE!!

This election is a time to remember... and so it begins. The election sales pitches where you're promised the earth, moon and stars by political parties of all hues. Most of which will be broken post-election to the sound of at least 80 shoulder shrugs in Leinster House. As Pat Rabbitte said in reference to making promises and breaking them, “but isn't that what you tend to do during an election”. So now's our chance to remember policy decisions and hold all politicians accountable. If we don't hold them accountable, they'll think you're OK with it and do it all over again.

Fianna Fail and Green Party Government

BUDGET 2009

- Medical cards means tested
- Income levy of 1% introduced on income up to €100,000 with 2% on higher
- €10 travel tax
- 20% hike in hospital bed charges
- 50c hike in packet of cigarettes
- VAT increased by 0.5%
- DIRT increased by 3% to 23%
- Excise Duty on cigarettes increased by 50c.
- Excise Duty on wine increased by 50c.
- Petrol increased by 8c.
- Betting tax doubled to 2%.
- Motor tax increased by between 4% and 5%.
- Automatic entitlement to the medical card for over 70's abolished.
- €200 levy on employer-provided parking spaces in urban centres.
- 41 state agencies to be abolished, amalgamated or privatised.
- Stamp duty on ATM cards halved, paid for by an increase in stamp duty on cheques.
- Cervical cancer vaccine withdrawal.

EMERGENCY BUDGET 2009

- Income levies doubled to 2% and 4%
- PRSI ceiling increased.
- Social Welfare Christmas Bonus abolished.
- Jobseeker's allowance reduced, under 20s cut to €100 per week.
- New 1% levy on life assurance premiums.
- Capital gains tax – up from 22% to 25%
- Early Childcare Supplement to be halved to €500 and scrapped in 2010.
- Mortgage interest relief cut to only first seven years
- Health levy doubled to 4% and 5% – entry point for the higher rate reduced to €1,443 per year.
- Excise duty on cigarettes up 25c.
- Excise duty on diesel up by 5c per litre.
- Children's allowance to be means tested or taxed.
- Rent supplement halved to reflect a fall in rental prices.
- Capital expenditure in education cut by €54m
- Higher education budget down by €24m
- €2m saved through delays in recruiting additional educational psychologists.
- Another €2m saved by lowering the level of awards from the Residential Institutions Redress Board.
- Strategic Innovation Fund cut by 50% to €2m.
- Overall education cuts of €134m
- Department of Transport budget cut by €300m.
- NAMA established.

BUDGET 2010

- Jobseekers allowance for those under 21 cut to €100.
- VAT rate cut by 0.5%
- 5%-10% pay cut for public sector workers
- Carbon tax introduced
- Ministers take a 15% pay cut; Taoiseach takes 20% pay cut
- Diesel up 4.9c and petrol up 4.2c.
- Minimum wage cut by €1 per hour.
- 4% cut in social welfare payment, excluding old age pension.
- Child benefit decreased by €16 each month, although welfare dependent

GHOSTS OF BUDGETS PAST

- families remain unchanged.
- Prescription charge levy introduced costing 50c per item.
- Arts budget decreased by 6%
- €12m cut from sports budget.
- Water charges to be introduced.
- Irish domicile levy introduced.
- Minister forecasts return to positive growth in 6–9 months.

BUDGET 2011

- Charges for private/semi-private beds up 21%
- €10 cut to child benefit for first & second child
- €20 cut in child benefit for third child
- 4c on petrol and 2c on diesel
- Third-level student charges rise by €500 to €2,000.
- Student grants cut by 4%.
- €8 cut for social welfare, jobseekers payments.
- Air travel tax of €3.
- Public service pensions over €12k cut by 4%.
- Employee PRSI/Health Levy relief gone.
- Income/health levy replaced with universal social charge (USC) at 2% up to €10,036, 4% to €16,016 and 7% above this level.
- Pension contributions subject to PRSI and USC.
- Employee PRSI ceiling removed.
- Increase in PRSI rate for the self-employed, higher earning public servants and office holders.
- 1% tax on residential transactions up to €1m and 2% over €1m.
- All stamp duty exemptions abolished.
- DIRT increased by 2%.
- Online betting to be subject to same betting duty as in bookie shops.
- Carer's allowance for those under 66 to be cut by €8 to €186 per week.
- Passport fees for over 65's introduced.

Fine Gael and Labour Party Government

BUDGET 2012

- VAT increased by 2%
- €100 household charge introduced.
- Child benefit for 3rd and subsequent child cut.
- Disability allowance for new claimants aged 18–21 cut from €188 to €100 per week.
- Drug payment scheme threshold increased from €120 to €132 — a cut of €12m from the scheme.
- JobBridge introduced.
- Minimum contribution by single tenants towards rent supplement to increase from €6 to €30 per week. Minimum contribution by couples will be €35.
- Winter fuel allowance cut by six weeks — or €120 per year.
- Post graduate students will no longer receive maintenance grants.
- Back to school allowance of €200 abolished for two and three year olds.
- Also, back to school allowance to be cut from €305 to €250 (aged 12 plus) and cut from €200 to €150 (11 and under).
- Cigarettes up 25c
- Carbon tax increased from €15 per tonne to €20 per tonne; meaning
- Petrol up 1.4c
- Diesel up 1.6c.
- €17.32 increase on Fuel Oil
- €14.46 increase on Natural gas
- Motor tax up €56 to €160 for band A
- Motor tax up €69 to €225 for band B
- Motor tax up €28 to €330 for band C
- Capital Acquisition Tax up from 25% to 30%.
- DIRT up from 27% to 30%.
- Total cuts to school funding of €24m a year.
- School Transport: Primary charge increased from €50 to €100 and the maximum primary family payment increased from €110 to €220.

- Grant of €635 paid at birth on all multiple births and further grants of €635 paid when the children are 4 years of age and 12 years of age will be abolished.
- Abolition of Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative from 2012.
- 1.3% growth forecast.

BUDGET 2013

- Child benefit cut by €10 per month
- Respite care grant cut by over €300.
- Prescription charge for medical card holders increased from 50c to €1.50 per item.
- Local Property Tax introduced.
- Maternity benefit to be taxed
- Property tax of 0.18% up to €1m; 0.25% on houses over €1m.
- 10c rise on spirits, beer and cider
- 10c on a pack of 20 cigarettes.
- €1 increase in a bottle of wine.
- Minimum PRSI level of annual contribution from self-employed will be raised from €253 to €500.
- PRSI-free allowance has been abolished meaning a loss of €264 per year for employees.
- Over 70's with an income of €600 and €700 per week will have their medical card replaced with a GP card.
- Duration of Jobseekers Benefit cut by 3 months.
- Telephone Allowance Scheme reduced.

BUDGET 2014

- Child benefit for fourth and subsequent child cut to €130 from €140.
- Pension levy increased from 0.6% to 0.75%
 - Medical cards for unemployed replaced with GP only card on return to work.
 - Prescription charges for medical card holders to increase from €1.50 to €2.50.
 - Bereavement grant of €850 scrapped.
 - Number of days for entitlement to Illness Benefit increased from three to six days.
 - Telephone allowance for household benefit recipients to be discontinued.
- Income thresholds for over 70's on medical cards to be lowered to €900 per week for couples and €500 for a single person.
- Reduced jobseeker's allowance of €144 to apply to those aged 25.
- €100 Jobseeker's Allowance to apply to people up to age 24
 - Increase of 50c on 75cl bottle of wine
 - Increase of 10c on pint of beer/cider
 - 10c increase on a pack of cigarettes.
 - One Parent Family Tax Credit replaced with Single Person Child Carer Tax Credit, available only to principal carer of the child.
 - €25m cut in funding to third level institutions to continue.

BUDGET 2015

- €405m tax cut for top 17% of earners.
 - 2% USC rate reduced to 1.5%
 - 4% USC rate reduced to 3.5%.
 - 0.6% pension levy abolished.
 - Double Irish tax loophole to be abolished and replaced with the Knowledge Development Box with a 6.25% corporation tax rate.
- Cigarettes to increase by 40c.
- Water charges introduced.
- Child benefit to increase by €5 per week
- Lone Parent's Allowance cut.
 - No changes to class sizes.
 - Household Benefits Package to allocate €100 payment towards water bill.

BUDGET 2016

- Old age pension to increase by €3 per week
- Christmas bonus for social welfare recipients restored to 75% of the recipients weekly payment.
- Child benefit to increase by €5 per month.
- Respite care grant restored to previous level.
- Fuel allowance increased by €2.50 per week to €22.50.
- Minimum wage increased by 50c.

... and during all that time — Ireland increased the number of millionaires from 16,000 to 92,000

OUR PLATFORM

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 and write-down sovereign debt throughout the Eurozone; the introduction of a Financial Transaction Tax in order to repay states for the private bank debt they assimilated; the effective repudiation of Anglo-Irish debt through retention of the Anglo-Irish bonds in public, an end to bank-driven mortgage debt resolution through a state led and democratically accountable programme of restructuring and writing down of mortgage debt with a halt to evictions on the basis of inability-to-pay; and restructuring of money-lending debt which traps people in 100 percent interest loans.

Four further 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.

- Establish a Debt Audit to determine the level of debt attributed to the private financial sector as a first step in recouping that money from those who caused this crisis, and fully participate in the UN Committee on Sovereign Debt Restructuring

- Establish a moral case for debt repudiation and compensation by means of a popular debt audit that will also be a tool for public, grass roots, education

- To acknowledge that we already have a nationalised banking system and to halt privatisation of these banks and build a public banking system. This system will be rooted in responsibility to communities in addressing mortgage arrears and provide an accountable and transparent method/source of social credit for social needs, rather than for private profit.



Picture: Images_of_Money [CC BY-SA 2.0]

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 (SNA's) — 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 or leave 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.

A Progressive Government will secularise the education system and promote an education model that develops critical thinking with an active citizenship focus.

Multi-nationals benefit from a highly educated workforce therefore a proportion of corporation tax should be ring-fenced to fund third level education following the elimination by this Government of fees.

Right2Equality

'When I was poor and I complained about inequality people said I was bitter, now I'm rich and I complain about inequality they say I'm a hypocrite. I'm beginning to think they just don't want inequality on the agenda because it is a real problem that needs to be addressed.'

— Russell Brand
actor, entertainer and author of Revolution

THE right to equality encompasses social and economic rights which are implied and un-enumerated rights in our Constitution. These rights should be protected in legislation which will address the issue of poverty.

Right2Change respect women's right to bodily autonomy and self-determination. We will campaign for repeal of the 8th Amendment and we will legislate for abortion in Ireland.

We stand for the separation of Church and State in education, health and other areas while affording due respect for those people who wish to practice their religion.

Many people still face workplace and service-related discrimination based on disability, gender, age, colour, sexual orientation, Traveller status, ethnic origin, family status, marital status and religious/other beliefs. We will run major education and mobilisation campaigns to end discrimination both in the workplace and in services generally, and we will introduce stronger sanctions for breaches of equality legislation; we will repeal Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act; we will democratise the national and secondary school systems.

We will reform the work permit system to make it easier for workers to leave exploitative employment situations without threatening their immigration status.

Improving access to work for migrants, including reforming Ireland's labour migration policy, revising the eligible categories of employment, revising the lowering of employees to change employer and lowering the salary threshold required for new employment permits for sectors where a shortage has been identified. Over 4,000 people are consigned to Direct Provision centres, including over 1,500 children. Detainment in these Centres represents a form of institutional abuse that denies adults and children basic human rights. We will end the system of Direct Provision and we will ensure that the children of asylum seekers suffer no discrimination in relation to health or education due to their parent's asylum status.

Market inequality undermines economic efficiency and social solidarity. Alongside strategies to end low-pay we will establish a High Pay Commission to propose measures to reduce income inequality.

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 inequality.'

— World Health Organisation

THE Right2Change policy platform strongly supports the principle of health care being a human right and advocate a cradle to the grave approach to healthcare provision. 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 scandalous situation that exists at the moment where hospitals are regularly asking sick people to stay away because of overcrowding is as a result of failed government policies and needs urgent change.

A properly funded and efficient public healthcare system would provide social and economic benefits for individuals and wider society in general.

Greater financial recognition should be given to carers to acknowledge the role they play in helping those less fortunate.

The commercialisation of the care of vulnerable children and adults is shameful and along with the care of our elderly should be returned to the State's responsibility with workers in the field being properly trained and compensated.



Picture: Keoni Cabral [CC BY 2.0]

FOR CHANGE...

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

WE BELIEVE that Housing is a basic human right, that this right should be enshrined in Bun-reacht na hÉireann and that the obligation on the State to adequately house people should thereby 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. Without it, a person has no security of person or identity. 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 and market based rent supplements 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.

People will be offered homes through a range of innovative models including limited equity ownership, or non-speculative housing, cooperative housing and community interest tenancies. A new planning framework will incorporate anti-speculative policies (e.g. the Kenny Report) and socialise unused and derelict sites that will support sustainable housing development. We will provide adequately for Traveller accommodation needs in a culturally appropriate manner. Housing policy should be based on need and choice, not speculation and capital accumulation.

We will ban economic evictions and keep land banks held in NAMA in state ownership to be used as a building block for a public housing programme. Further, we will legislate for the reform of the private rental sector and legislate to give security of tenure and for improved rent regulation.

'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
British Labour MP

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: 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.

A progressive government 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 (by referendum if necessary) — enabling economic and political democracy, end bogus self-employment, and legislate for overtime and unsocial hours pay. Employers who refuse to recognise their workers' right to collectively bargain should not be able to avail of any tax refunds or benefit from any State assistance.

In order to provide equitable non-discriminatory access to the workplace a progressive Government will legislate for the right to publicly available, accessible, high quality affordable

Right2Jobs & Decent Work

childcare, part-time, full-time and after-school provision. This policy will also see the abolition of compulsory or exploitative elements of Government activation schemes such as JobBridge.

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.

Exploitation of workers, particularly low-paid workers in vulnerable sectors, is exceptionally high in Ireland while inspections by the National Employment Rights Authority (NERA) and the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is limited. Legislation providing for inspections from licensed trade union officials in relation to breaches of both employment and health and safety laws — in line with "right of access" laws in other countries like Australia and New Zealand — should be implemented.

The PRSI system should be expanded to include the self-employed in order for them to avail of the same social welfare benefits as all other workers.

We will defend the right to take effective strike action and will remove the obstacles contained in the Industrial Relations Act 1990 that are designed to prevent this. We will also reform the Insolvency Acts to put workers at the top of the queue in a liquidation situation and reform the Company's Acts to make it more difficult for private companies to split their assets and avoid their liabilities to their workers.

Right2National Resources

'That's the standard technique of privatization, defund, make sure things don't work, people get angry, you hand it over to private capital.'

— Noam Chomsky
US academic and political activist

THE ASSETS of our nation were declared in the 1916 Proclamation as belonging to the citizens of Ireland, a Proclamation which also pledged to cherish all the citizens of the state equally.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is one of the biggest threats to people's ability to provide labour, social, and environmental protection and represents a proposed transfer of economic and political sovereignty from the Irish citizens to multi-national corporations.

A progressive government will oppose TTIP through whatever mechanisms possible. Should TTIP be ratified without the consent of the Irish people a progressive Government will provide for a referendum on our continued membership of the European Union.

This government will re-commit to neutrality and a non-militaristic foreign policy starting with the banning of the use of Irish airports for military purposes.

Rejecting privatisation, we will expand public enterprises into new economic activities and provide for local government enterprises and new business models based on co-determination between public, private and civil society ownership.

We will establish a new basis for supporting indigenous enterprise through job creation agencies through a programme of Companies of Excellence which can lead the modernisation of the indigenous sector; in these companies employees and employers accept co-responsibility as the fundamental principle of managing the company: commitments to R&D, investment, innovation, labour rights and participation. This will form the basis of sectoral planning frameworks to grow Irish businesses in a coordinated and focused way.

NATURAL RESOURCES: The natural resources of Ireland belong to the people of Ireland. The campaigns over our oil and gas reserves, woodlands, clean seas, archaeological and heritage sites, and community life point to the growing issue of 'resource democracy'. We will constitutionally enshrine the ownership of natural resources with the Irish people. Natural resources will be entrusted to public and transparent control providing people the right to benefit from sustainable developments.

A national programme of repatriation, and subsequent public ownership, of surrendered natural resources will be initiated with those



Picture: Metropolitan Transportation Authority / Patrick Cashin [CC BY 2.0]

OUR PLATFORM FOR CHANGE...

Right2National Resources

FROM PAGE 5

who seek, or who have been allowed to secure, access to our natural resources free or without proper re-imbursement/value to the Irish people. Where this requires negotiations these will have the objective of securing maximum value to the Irish citizens from their resources in a manner applicable in similar sized nations with potentially similar resources such as Norway. We will bring under public ownership the gas and oil resources off the Irish coast to allow revenue and profits to be used for the Irish people and the Irish economy.

PUBLIC BANKING AND INSURANCE: The fundamental lesson of the crisis is that we cannot rely on private banking based on short-term shareholder interests. We need a national public banking system for both households and enterprises – one with a mission statement that makes the bank partners in people's living standards and business success, and promotes the public interest. We will promote public interest and mutuality in banking and insurance. To this end we will set up Public Banking and Insurance Review to promote public banking and an insurance system based on mutuality and co-operation rather than profit.



Picture: Rob Hurson (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Right2Sustainable Environment

'Our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or, more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature.'

— Naomi Klein

This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate

THE DOMINANT economic model is 'at war' with the natural world. Unfettered capitalism and globalisation continues to place unsustainable burdens on the Earth's natural assets including its water, its air, its fauna and flora and threatens the very continuation of mankind.

Fighting climate change is not a 'cost' – it is a necessary strategy for human survival which simultaneously provides another means to promote a collective and democratic economy. The first steps in this struggle will be the introduction of a Green New Deal – a sustained and substantial drive to bring all buildings in the residential, commercial and industrial sector up to the highest level of conservation necessary, to expand and upgrade the quality of public transport with significant reductions in fares, the increased mobilisation of R&D to urgently progress the development of ocean/sea based renewable energy to complement other forms of green technology.

We will legislate for ambitious and binding climate change targets, including a ban on fracking, a transposition of the Rio de Janeiro Agreement into domestic law and we will use Bolivia's Law of the Rights of Mother Earth as a guide.

A Progressive Government will make protection of the rights of Mother Earth a Constitutional imperative subject to democratic control and declare that natural resources, including water, are a public good and cannot be privatised.

We further commit to encouraging and supporting local campaigns against corporate threats to the environment and to launch a major public education campaign, including in schools, on the dangers of climate change and the threats posed by corporate exploitation of the environment.

**Full policy principles
available at
www.right2change.ie**

Right2Water

'Ireland's system of paying for water – through general taxation – is the optimum method in terms of efficiency, affordability and it protects citizens against the privatisation of this essential natural resource. Other countries should be aspiring to have their water paid for through general taxation, like Ireland does.'

— Maude Barlow

author of Blue Gold, Blue Future and Blue Covenant

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 progressive Government taking over the reins of power. '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.'

Such a measure would render it unconstitutional for any Government to privatise or even contract out the provision of our Right2Water. Such a provision would prevent the next, or any future government, from pandering again to the privatisation agenda and making a commodity of our water for profit.

Such a provision would put Fine Gael and Labour's privatisation 'genie' well and truly back in the bottle!

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 billion and €7 billion to be provided through a progressive taxation model, details of which are available in our 'Fiscal Framework Document'.

Funding our water services through progressive taxation measures will ensure citizens always have access to water based on their need without the possibility of water shut-offs due to unpaid bills in the future. It will also ensure our water services will never be privatised and that Ireland remains with zero water poverty.

Water is a human right. So said the UN in 2010 when our Human 'Right2Water' was declared in a resolution that, shamefully, our then-Fianna Fail/Green Party Government abstained on.

We already pay for our water, or to put it another way, we already pay our 'water charges', by the common sense means of paying our taxes. This is the best and fairest way to pay for water and it is admired by water movements across Europe and around the world. Citizens all over the world wish they could pay for their water through tax just like we do. Why?

Well, we are the only country to have 'zero water poverty' because by paying for our public water supply and sanitation through progressive general taxation means that when you want to wash, or clean yourself, or cook for your children, you get water based on need, not based on what is in your pocket or purse at that particular moment.

Right2Change has a policy to keep it that way and it doesn't involve privatisation of the very thing we need to live – our water. It doesn't involve meters either, or even bills. Neither does it involve bullying quangos such as Irish Water wasting our money on PR spin, solicitors and barristers, as well as legal action trying to make people pay twice for something we already own.



Picture: Kate Ausburn (CC BY-SA 2.0)

BY DONAL FALLON

THE CENTENARY of the 1916 Rising has led to a renewed public interest in the history of that event, something that is certainly welcomed. Yet while we are hearing a great deal about the military events of Easter Week, the ideals of its central figures warrant greater attention.

The old cliché tells us that the Easter Rising was “a rebellion of poets and school teachers”. In reality, it was the coming together of a much more diverse collection of people, something that is clearly reflected in the 1916 Proclamation.

The Proclamation stated boldly that “the ownership of Ireland belongs to the people of Ireland.” Rarely highlighted is the fact this line reflects the 1914 constitution of the Irish Citizen Army, which itself proclaimed that “the first and last principle of the Irish Citizen Army is the avowal that the ownership of Ireland, moral and material, is vested of right in the people of Ireland.”

The participation of trade unionists in the insurrection was by no means restricted to the ranks of the ICA, and there were also many union activists in both the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan. Richard O’Carroll, a Labour Party councillor and trade union official, was shot on the first day of the rebellion, dying later of his injuries. Patrick Moran, a trade union activist and later a founding member of the Irish National Union of Vintners, Grocers and Allied Trades, was part of the Jacob’s garrison. He was later executed in March 1921.

Anti-capitalist

The 1916 Proclamation cannot be said to be the most radical proclamation penned by republicans – that honour must surely go to the Fenian proclamation of 1867. Explicitly anti-capitalist, it condemned “the aristocratic locusts, whether English or Irish, who have eaten the verdure of our fields”.

In spite of that, however, the Proclamation was progressive in many ways, not least on gender. Beginning “Irishmen and Irishwomen”, it later states the ambition of the signatories that an Irish government would be elected by “the suffrages of all her men and women.”

While the feminism of James Connolly has been widely noted, Thomas MacDonagh is deserving of praise too in this regard. He criticised the Irish Women’s Franchise League for its heavy dependence and focus on the British suffrage movement, yet his biographer Shane Kenna has detailed that he “became a strong advocate of women’s rights”, and praised the emerging suffrage movement as “a sign of the new times.”

Women participated in the Easter Rising in a variety of roles, ranging from providing first aid to volunteers to actively taking part in the fighting. Margaret Skinnider, a young Glaswegian schoolteacher, fought in the ranks of the Citizen Army and was wounded during the week.

The 1916 document is not an entirely secular document, twice invoking God, but it is resolutely anti-sectarian. P.H. Pearse was himself the son of an English Unitarian. Theobald Wolfe Tone had proclaimed his vision in 1798 of substituting the “common name of Irishman, in the place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter.” In a similar vein, the Proclamation



Poetic, certainly, but also a vision of Ireland run by and for its people

pledged “religious and civil liberty”, while its reference to “cherishing all the children of the nation equally” is also based on non-sectarian principles.

The very fact that the document proclaimed a republic cannot be overstated. In recent years, revisionists and conservative politicians have attacked the Easter Rising on the basis that Home Rule, a form of limited self-government, would have been introduced into Ireland at the end of the First World War anyway.

Vision

This misses the point that the vision of the Proclamation went above and beyond any Home Rule Bill. As the Irish Women’s Franchise League were keen to remind John Redmond at all available opportunities, the Home Rule Bill would not have provided Irishwomen with suffrage rights for example. Beyond the painting of postboxes, Home Rule would change little.

The Proclamation was followed three years later by the Democratic Programme of the First Dáil. Refusing to

take their seats in London, separatist MPs met in Dublin’s Mansion House, and endorsed a document (largely penned by labour leader Thomas Johnson) that boldly proclaimed that “it shall be our duty to promote the development of the Nation’s resources, to increase the productivity of its soil, to exploit its mineral deposits, peat bogs, and fisheries, its waterways and harbours, in the interests and for the benefit of the Irish people.”

Undoubtedly, the Irish Free State that emerged in 1922 represented a capitulation on many of the promises and hopes of both the 1916 Proclamation and the Democratic Programme. One government Minister, Kevin O’Higgins, would famously remark that the Democratic Programme was “mostly poetry.” In this of all years, let us re-examine these crucial documents, and seek to apply them to an Ireland in need of such vision.

www.comeheretome.com

Comment

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Lessons from the French... how we can pay for a new Ireland

BY BRENDAN OGLE

LAST year RTE’s Claire Byrne TV programme compared public services in France to public services in Ireland.

Many viewers were agog at the level of provision of childcare to working parents by the French state, the primary health service which functions without trolleys and chaotic A&E departments and the truly ‘free’ education services many French students enjoy. The response of the panel, however, was very much in the realms of, ‘Ah, but Irish workers would never pay the taxes needed to provide such services’. Wrong.

Irish workers already pay the same (slightly more actually) income taxes as French workers. So where is the money for our public services you may well ask?

Well, in all countries tax can only be collected from three possible pots. The first pot is the taxes collected from workers, or income taxes. Irish workers pay the European average on income taxes,

The second pot is the taxes we pay on goods and services through ‘consumption taxes’, typically excise duties on wine, beer and cigarettes or VAT which is now payable on most things. On this tax again we in Ireland pay slightly more than the European average.

The third pot is taxes on wealth, profits and capital. Here is where we fall down – spectacularly! We in Ireland pay less in these taxes than Europeans and just one-third on the big one, employers’ social insurance. The reason why French workers, and many others in Europe, enjoy much better public services than us is not because they pay more tax than their Irish equivalents. It is because their employers pay significantly more.

Or to put it another way, I am unaware of any other country that is spending scarce resources to make sure Apple, one of the biggest corporations in the world, get away without paying the €19 billion of taxes it owes to that country!

What we need is tax justice. This is not a complicated idea. It is simply the

notion that in a fair and functioning society which puts people first – the public services and supports we all rely on such as housing, health, education, roads, emergency services, law enforcement and many others – should be paid for by us all and in a manner proportionate to our means.

There should be no room for free-loaders in the form of tax avoidance in a country where people are dying for the want of affordable and effective healthcare or a roof over their heads.

Right2Change published *A New Fiscal Framework For a Progressive Government* developed by Unite’s Michael Taft. It set out how a progressive government, following the Right2Change fiscal strategy, can increase public spending by €10 billion.

For example, through asking for a fair contribution from large employers, wealth and capital we could raise €4.1 billion over the four-year period 2017-2020.

It works

Of course the large corporations will look for the advocates of small and medium business in Ireland to protect them but the reality is putting a just tax take from our largest employers into public services will release money into your pockets that you currently spend on childcare, doctors’ charges and fees as well as double taxes such as water and bins, so that you can spend it in indigenous Irish small and medium businesses. It works everywhere else. It can – and must – work here.

In addition to eliminating water bills this strategy can further stimulate growth in our economy by addressing tax measures such as VAT and providing refundable tax credits. These progressive measures would fundamentally change how our country functions and in whose interests.

Not only that, but by being more rational in how we address the structural deficit and phasing it out by 2020, even more money can be released to help rebuild our country. Simply put, our economy can serve the needs of the people should our politicians make choices that are in all of our interest, instead of the multinationals and the wealthiest at the top of our society.

The full fiscal strategy is available on www.right2change.ie and meets all necessary fiscal rules and parameters.

BY VICKY DONNELLY

COMPLAINTS and critiques of the government's handling of the debt crisis are often met with a dismissive, "Well, we voted for them..." or "People get the governments they deserve." First up, of course, not all of us voted for the coalition parties, but even if this was the case, we categorically did not get what we voted for when it comes to the debt issue. Not even close.

In the run-up to the last general election, people in Ireland were still reeling from shock at the extent of private banking losses to be borne by the public, leaving us as contenders for the most expensive bank bailout in the world, per capita. Accompanied by Varadkar's cries of, "not another cent", Noonan pledged to renegotiate the "obscene" terms of the bank bailout, while Enda promised he would hold "rogue bankers" to account. Instead the government's approach to what is arguably the biggest crisis in the history of the State has been a series of disasters.

Once in government Fine Gael and Labour treated us to a continuation of the victim blaming narratives which claimed that the debt crisis was caused by Irish people who "went mad". Instead of "not another cent", government policy was to give every cent to the banks.

Political stroke

One of Noonan's first acts on arriving at the Ministry for Finance was to make the scheduled €3.1bn promissory note payments to Anglo. And a year later, as pressure mounted to challenge the notes, he paid again, albeit by means of a convoluted political stroke.

Democracy took another beating when Irish voters were threatened with ruination if we dared to reject the Fiscal Treaty, claiming that a 'no' vote would deny us access to the new European Stability Mechanism. In reality we have now paid €1.25 billion into the ESM fund and are still waiting for any sign of a retroactive deal on the billions poured into AIB and Bank of Ireland.

Nor did our government show much respect for the democratic process, or debt justice, in Greece. When Syriza came to power (with a manifesto on debt arguably less radical than Noonan's pre-election commitments) our government immediately dismissed their call for a European Debt conference, where a collective response might have been discussed, and instead stood by the Troika as they administered a public flogging to the country for daring to say "No" to debt-driven austerity.

Likewise, on the global stage, Ireland's vote was again cast in favour of bondholders' profits over citizens' rights. Facing a motion at the United Nations to establish a Committee on Sovereign Debt Restructuring, to establish fair and transparent mechanisms for dealing with countries in debt crisis, 124 countries voted in favour of the motion, and just 11 against. Shamefully, our government voted with the creditors countries – the US, UK, Germany and Canada – rather than in solidarity with other debt-stricken nations, and when the committee held its first meeting in February last year, Ireland failed to attend.



Pictures: RollingNews.ie

One in the eye for the Irish people...



On every measure outlined in the Right2Change debt policy proposals, this government has acted against our collective interests.

Far from fighting the 'obscenity' of the bailout, this government instead decided to fight David Hall, and later TD Joan Collins, when they went to court to challenge the constitutionality of the promissory notes.

Rather than take a lead on resolving the mortgage debt issue, and the associated homelessness crisis, this government instead opted to turn homes into investment vehicles, holding a fire sale

of NAMA properties and leaving thousands of mortgage holders at the mercy of Vulture Funds, and tenants renting from corporate absentee landlords.

Selling off AIB

As opposed to building a public banking system, to act in the interest of our communities, the government is preparing to sell off AIB, the bank we were forced to rescue and resuscitate, apparently so that it can now be picked up by investors. Meanwhile, instead of supporting community-based Credit Unions, Noonan acted to limit their

development. Oh yes, and burned €15 million to €20 million of their investments, when he wound up IBRC.

Of all these betrayals, it was that emergency liquidation of IBRC, rushed through the Dáil in the early hours of 7th February, 2013, that stands out as particularly contemptuous. Giving TDs only 75 minutes to read the Bill, the legally-shaky promissory notes were turned into legally-binding sovereign bonds that will hang over us, and our children, for decades to come.

€25 billion in Anglo bonds remain in the Central Bank awaiting sale. It should be a demand of every candidate standing, that they fight for an immediate freeze on the sale of these bonds, pending their destruction.

When the canvassers call be sure to ask how they intend to address the sale of the Anglo bonds, set to cost us the equivalent of over 35 National Children's Hospitals. We must ensure that our next government gets an electorate it deserves; one that sees through the spin, resists the lies, and refuses to accept the rule and logic of debt.

Democracy took another beating when Irish voters were threatened with ruination if we dared to reject the Fiscal Treaty...

WHAT HAVE THE UNIONS EVER DONE FOR US?

**...ANNUAL LEAVE
PAY INCREASES
SICK LEAVE
LUNCH BREAKS
THE 8 HOUR DAY
PENSIONS
REDUNDANCY PAY
THE WEEKEND
HEALTH & SAFETY LAWS
UNFAIR DISMISSAL LEGISLATION
MATERNITY & PARENTAL LEAVE
AND MUCH, MUCH MORE...**

JOIN YOUR UNION



40 years on and we're still in the Wild West of gombeenism

BY KEITH GILLIGAN

FOUR decades after a report was written that would have gone a long way towards stopping the speculation and massive free-for-all in land and property development, which also was a major part of the banking mess, we still live in the wild-west of gombeenism.

It could be said, unfortunately, that the reason for successive governments ignoring the report is exactly the fact that it would have effectively brought about an end to land speculation.

The Kenny Report commissioned in January 1971 by the Fianna Fail government of Jack Lynch and Erskine Childers had as its terms of reference: "To consider, in the interests of the common good, possible measures for – (a) controlling the price of land required for housing and other forms of development, (b) ensuring that all or a substantial part of the increase in the value of land attributable to the decisions and operations of public authorities (including, in particular, decisions and operations relating to the provision of sewerage and water schemes by local authorities) shall be secured for the benefit of the community. 2. To report on the merits and demerits of any measures considered, with particular reference to their legal and administrative practicability. 3. To advise on what changes in the present law may be required to give effect to any measures recommended."

The report was published in 1974 (The same year, according to the Flood Tribunal, that former Fianna Fail TD Ray Burke received a £3 million controversial payment from two builders).

The report was given over to the Fine Gael government of Liam Cosgrave and Brendan Corish; it recommended that building land should be compulsorily acquired by local authorities for agricultural value plus 25 per cent. The recommendation was in line with

common practice in England where the government decides when development or building is needed. After that, all of the land required is taken into public ownership then a plan is prepared and parcels are released for development.

Even after the Flood-Mahon Tribunal, where we were made very aware about the corruption around land development, a solution in the form of the recommendation of the Kenny Report has not been put in place.

In an interview with the *Sunday Tribune* in 2006 Garret Fitzgerald of Fine Gael said: "I'm still not clear in recollection as to why it wasn't tackled when we were in... I remember some discussion as to the arguments but I can't recall the outcome."

But, a normal Joe or Mary Soap would say that the reason was that Fine Gael know exactly where their fundraising comes from and who their voters are – there was never any chance they would take on massive farmers, landowners, and developers.

The Green Party had the recommendations of the Kenny Report in their manifesto in 2006; the same year Bertie Ahern was in the media spotlight over developers.

Fianna Fail, with the help of an uncritical media, were returned in the next election with the Green Party. As has always been the case, absolutely nothing happened to tackle the issue of planning corruption.

The role of governments since the foundation of the state has unfortunately always been to serve the interests of the wealthy. It's time to turn away from the parties of corruption and special interests. In the year of the centenary of 1916, we can begin the process of building a republic which places the needs of the people before a greedy minority; the Right2Change policy principles are the building blocks upon which we can do that.

Pictures: Paula Geraghty



BY NIAL CROWLEY

IMAGINE a campaign for more taxes. Perfectly justified when you consider what could be done to address poverty, public services, climate change, and global justice with the money.

However, in the Irish context, it would come as a surprise after all we have been through. Imagine a Government that says no to a campaign demanding more taxes. In any context your eyebrows would be on the rise.

That's what's happening here. The Robin Hood Tax Campaign has just been launched, under the umbrella of Claiming Our Future. Over 40 national civil society groups are signed up to it. Not just Government, but most political parties, however, are failing to get behind the demand being made. People before Profit are up for it and so are the Green Party. Silence from the rest.

How come political parties are saying no to what would be a windfall of €350 million per year?

This is no ordinary tax that is being demanded. It is a tax that would seek redress for the role of the financial sector in the economic crisis, the cost of the bailouts in the sector, and the fact this sector continues to be under-taxed. This is the Financial Transactions Tax (FTT).

It is a tax being promoted by international radicals such as Angela Merkel and Bill Gates. However, our own national radical, Michael Noonan, is holding out against it.

The Financial Transactions Tax

Why doesn't Ireland join THIS Group of 10?

– just ask Michael Noonan...

Germany
France
Italy
Austria
Belgium
Greece
Portugal
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain

would be a tax of less than point one per cent on trading in bonds, shares, derivatives and credit default swaps. It is, therefore, a little tax. However, in Ireland these transactions are worth billions of euro every year.

The Nevin Economic Research Institute has estimated that a Financial Transactions Tax would raise €638 million per year. The introduction of the tax would involve abolishing stamp duty. So they estimate that the net tax increase would be between €320m and

€360m per annum. Still the Government are saying no. You can only wonder at the power of the financial services sector.

The Robin Hood Tax campaign is global at this stage. There is more information about the work in Ireland at www.robinhoodtax.ie

You can even get to sign up to support for campaign and build the demand for an Irish Financial Transactions Tax.

The campaign is making real

YOUR CANDIDATES FOR CHANGE
CENTRE PAGES





progress at a European level. Ten countries are involved in what is called an *Enhanced Cooperation Procedure* to bring forward an agreed approach to implementing a Financial Transactions Tax. These are Germany, France, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

In December, they agreed the Financial Transactions Tax would cover shares, derivatives and corporate bonds. It will not cover sovereign bonds which is important for countries, like Ireland, with large debt problems.

Ireland refused

They are aiming to agree all the final details by June 2016. After that a European Directive will be published covering the 10 countries and each of the 10 countries will then introduce its own legislation. Ireland has refused to participate in this process.

The Financial Transactions Tax will raise between €10bn and €20bn for the 10 countries involved. They know it will boost their capacity to invest in poverty, public services, climate change and global justice issues. They understand that the tax will increase transparency in the financial sector and reduce speculative trading. They see that this sector is not paying its way towards the economic recovery of the euro zone. For some reason the Irish

Government doesn't.

The Department of Finance says there is a problem with jobs. The financial services sector would migrate to London. This does not take account of the low level of the tax and the favourable tax conditions provided to foreign companies in the financial sector. It would take more than a tiny tax to get them to give up these attractions.

There is also no evidence of the financial services sector moving out of the 10 countries that are signing up for the Financial Transactions Tax and have been expressing their intention to do so for four years now. The Department of Finance makes no allowance for the jobs that would be created by an investment of €350 million.

There is an opportunity to be seized. There is a leadership coming from these 10 EU Member States that is useful. There is hostility from the Irish Government that is extraordinary.

We need to see a commitment to Ireland joining the *Enhanced Cooperation Procedure for a Financial Transactions Tax* in the next *Programme for Government*. We need to see this commitment linked to further investment in poverty, public services, climate change and global justice issues.

The FTT will raise between €10bn and €20bn for the 10 countries involved, boosting their capacity to invest in poverty, public services, climate change and global justice issues...

Comment

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Vote for what is good for working people and good for society

ICTU CHARTER

BY PATRICIA KING

IF YOU want to glimpse the future that some in this country aspire to, then look no further than Dublin's O'Connell Street and the empty shell that once was Clerys.

In this grim new world, workers have no rights and owners have no responsibilities. Nothing can interfere with the right to profiteer and the Government's only role is to smooth out the bumps and remove whatever obstacles might block the road to corporate enrichment.

Considerations for family and community, for how we value people – let alone their right to a decent life – have no role in the future that some are striving to fashion.

Hidden behind artificial legal entities they employ the best advice to contrive new ways in which to maximise profit and lay waste to peoples' lives. Loopholes are fully exploited and the taxpayers – working people – are left to pick up the bill.

But these are no small lunatic fringe, sniping from the margins of Irish life. In fact, their worldview effectively dominates public life here and is well-represented among political groupings and media commentators, hardly a surprise given the unhealthy concentration of media ownership and power in this jurisdiction.

As recently as 2014, the youth wing of the country's largest party advocated a €2 per hour cut to the Minimum Wage, on the basis that it was a "barrier to job creation."

They cited no evidence to support that claim – probably because there is none to be found, as research from the Nevin Economic Institute has conclusively shown.

You will hear similar voices denounce the Living Wage as "a burden on business" or claim that low hour contracts are necessary for worker "flexibility".

But you will never hear these voices – in political or public life – advocate for higher wages, decent work and trade union representation.

The common thread running

Payment of a Living Wage



Right to trade union representation



Fair hours of work



Right to respect & dignity at work



Fair public procurement



for the trade union movement and presents us with a clear opportunity to stop this nightmarish vision of the future becoming a reality.

A first step is to identify those within the political system that definitively do not and will never support measures to raise the living standards and improve conditions for people at work.

The *Congress Charter* campaign was initiated almost 12 months ago and asked political parties and independent TDs if they would support five key propositions:

- Payment of the Living Wage,
- The right to union representation,
- Fair hours of work,
- The right to respect and dignity at work,
- Fair public procurement.

We published the results in early February, including the full list of the parties and individual TDs who said 'Yes' and those who declined to support these basic principles.

They are available to view at: <http://www.ictu.ie/charter/politicians>

The results confirm that there is absolutely no support for these principles on the right of the political spectrum – either in political parties or with high profile independents.

In addition, every union affiliated to Congress – including those working under the *Right to Change* banner – have agreed a common platform for General Election 2016, which focuses on the creation of a fairer society.

It has four clear themes: *Fair Wages*, *Decent Jobs*, *Good Pensions* and *First Class Public Services*.

Similar to the *Congress Charter*, these are straightforward measures that few electoral candidates could fail to grasp.

In essence, the platform is about uniting around the key steps and values that will benefit working people – not the privileged and powerful minority. If candidates in General Election 2016 cannot support or commit to these very clear concepts, then they have no right to expect any support from working people. *That's democracy*.

More information on the *Platform for a Fair Society* at: www.ictu.ie/election2016

Patricia King is General Secretary of Irish Congress of Trade Unions

through this view of the world is that the needs of business will always overwhelm the rights of working people, the rights of citizens and of wider society.

From there, the leap to the Clerys shutdown is not that great – one is the logical outcome of the other. But their arguments are bogus and driven purely by self-interest. The prosperity they want is for a few.

Stronger unions and better paid workers in decent jobs are the real engine of genuinely prosperous, equal and sustainable societies. The historical and economic evidence for this is irrefutable. And if you need further proof then look no further than the European Union, mired in recession after years of wage cuts and weakened workers' rights.

The forthcoming election is critical

PLATFORM FOR A FAIR SOCIETY

1 FAIR WAGES

2 DECENT JOBS

3 GOOD PENSIONS

4 FIRST CLASS PUBLIC SERVICES

HOMELESSNESS

...out of the shadows

Picture: woodleywonderworks (CC BY 2.0)

BY Fr PETER McVERRY

IT IS a primary responsibility of government to ensure that the basic human rights of all within its jurisdiction are provided and protected. The five most basic human rights are: the right to food, the right to healthcare, the right to education, the right to work and the right to housing. They are basic rights because without any one of those, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to live a fulfilled, dignified life.

But the right to housing is the most basic. Without appropriate housing, a person may not be able to feed themselves properly, their health will deteriorate, and they will find it very difficult to access education or employment. Hence, the other basic human rights are effectively dependent on the right to housing.

National shame

It is to the shame of this nation that, although we are one of the wealthier countries in our world, and we have the highest economic growth in the EU, that the number of people who are homeless is officially over 5,000 and rising rapidly, one third of them children (1,638 according to the last published data in October 2015).

The number of families becoming homeless has soared from an average of seven or eight a month in 2012 to over 70 a month in July to October 2015.

The emotional, psychological, nutritional and educational damage which is being done to children living with parents and siblings in an hotel bedroom, with no facilities to cook proper meals, may remain with them for the rest of their lives. The problem of



Picture: Cuddly Little Owl (CC BY 2.0)

homelessness is now out of control.

In previous decades, governments ensured an adequate supply of social housing – the large local authority estates of Crumlin, Ballyfermot, Tallaght, Ballymun and others were built, even in those periods when this country was going through recession. A total of 8,800 social housing units were built in 1975 (33% of all new housing); 6,500 so-

cial housing units were built in 1985 (27% of all new housing).

Political parties competed with each other, not on how much they would reduce the tax rates, but on how many social houses they would build. Almost everyone in this country could aspire to owning their own home: having waited several years for a local authority house to be allocated to them,

they were then able, if they wished, to purchase that house from the local authority.

However, in the past two decades, successive governments effectively abandoned the building of social housing. From 1996 to 2008, an average of 1,790 net additional social housing units were created, the lowest level ever in the history of the state. Governments transferred responsibility for social housing to the private sector.

Maximum profits

Under Section V of the Planning and Development Act 2000, builders were obliged to allocate 20% of all residential output to social or affordable housing. Of course, they never did. In pursuit of maximum profits, they persuaded the then Minister for Finance to emasculate this section of the Act, so that, during the Celtic Tiger years an average of only 3.6% ended up being allocated to social or affordable housing.

In the absence of social housing, the private rented sector became the primary housing option for low income families. But as demand vastly exceeded supply, market forces pushed up the cost of rental accommodation to a level which low income families were unable to afford, given that the Government's rent supplement was reduced by 26% during the recession.

As a result, the social housing waiting list has soared. A total of 27,427 households were on the waiting list in 1996; in 2013, the number was almost 90,000 and there is some evidence that in the assessment to be undertaken this year, the number may have further increased to about 130,000.

Furthermore, with 37,000 family

homes in mortgage arrears of more than two years, many thousands of families will find their homes being repossessed in coming years.

The measures taken by government to alleviate the problems of homelessness and social housing waiting lists are clearly inadequate. Much more radical action is needed, including:

- A commitment to substantial investment in social housing;
- An immediate increase in rent supplement;
- Legislation to prevent financial institutions evicting tenants when they repossess landlords' properties;
- Expansion of the 'mortgage to rent' option to allow families to remain in their homes when repossessed by the financial institutions;
- Compulsory purchase of houses lying empty for more than 12 months, where the owner has neither the will nor the means to bring them back into use;
- Re-introduction of bedsits for a limited period of perhaps 10 years, provided they are of adequate quality and are reserved for people on the homeless list;
- As many modular units as fast as possible.

The increasing numbers of homeless people and families show that what the Government is doing to reduce homelessness is simply not working. There is little evidence to suggest that it appreciates the crisis that now exists and even less evidence to suggest that it is prepared to take the steps necessary to address it in a meaningful way.

Fr Peter McVerry SJ is a rights activist for homeless people

CHANGE | February 2016

The problem of homelessness is now out of control

Can we use this election to make a new politics?

BY EOIN Ó MURCHÚ

ELECTION 2016 is an opportunity for the Irish people to call a halt to the alternation of conservative blocs that always put the interests of the rich above the interests of the rest of us.

It is a chance to at least begin the process of building a new political system in our state, and to end the grip which backward politics and economics have had over our lives.

The choice in this election is clear: it is either more of the same (with Fine Gael/Labour or Fianna Fáil) or the chance to do something different, to end austerity and the policies that put the rich first.

The Right2Change principles agreed by trade unions and left political parties give us the context to do this.

For decades our political system was dominated by a choice between two large conservative blocs. While some were more progressive in sharing the fruits of our economy, the bottom line for every government has been the same: ensuring the prosperity of the rich, and leaving only the crumbs for the majority of the people.

In times of prosperity there were some crumbs, but in times of recession, the two big party blocs – Fine Gael/Labour and Fianna Fáil – made sure that the mass of the population carried the burden, while the rich were cosseted and everything designed to bring back their wealth.

The last five years have once again seen that pattern: workers, jobseekers, people with disabilities, pensioners, the weak and vulnerable – they have all paid a massive price for what the Government likes to call recovery.

Yet, it is the very nature of the capitalist system, that there is always a



cycle of boom and bust, of depression and recovery.

There is then nothing to boast about a recovery that has not yet touched the majority of the population, and which leaves us with the highest percentage of emigrants to people born here of any country in the world.

The real question is who paid the

costs of this part of the capitalist cycle, and who is reaping the fruits of the 'recovery' now.

Big banks, here and in Europe, were rescued at the expense of the living standards of the majority of our people and of the services we need to ensure fairness and equality for the disadvantaged, and especially the disabled.

And the spineless bowing down of

our politicians to the EU elites has meant that we paid an inordinate price not to bail ourselves out but to save the European banking and financial systems.

But in addition to squeezing working people for every penny that could be got out of us, the current government has worsened workers' employment conditions, with contracts that give no security of employment, no certainty of hours to be worked, no protection against arbitrary laying off or reassignment by the bosses.

We can change this and we can begin a real fightback to change the entire political system.

But only, if the political parties and independents who oppose austerity and the politics of conservatism, combine together to defeat our common enemy.

We can't afford the luxury of condemning those with whom we have small differences, of fighting among ourselves to the benefit only of those who want to maintain the old system.

The Right2Change principles are a context for all genuine opponents of austerity to fight for change. And in doing so, we should transfer to each other, ensuring the maximum number

of opponents of austerity in the next Dáil. Of course, there will be problem areas. The division of our country has weakened our politics in a crucial way, and the job of bringing that division to an end will be a difficult and enduring one.

But as James Connolly pointed out, the working class need national freedom in order to be able to achieve class and social freedom, and that maxim remains valid still today.

Equally, we cannot in the long term allow ourselves to be hamstrung by limitations on what we can do which are imposed by the ruling circles in Europe. We need significant state investment in our economy to overcome the crises of unemployment and peripheral development.

In Connolly's words again, just as he argued that the Citizens' Army would serve neither King nor Kaiser, nor can we tie our future to either Britain or Europe.

This is no call to glorious isolation, but a call to put the interests of the mass of the Irish people first, and to use our wealth and productive capacity to meet our needs, not to inflate the bank balances of the European or Irish rich.

For the way forward doesn't lie in getting better people to represent us. It lies in working people getting organised – in trade unions, community associations, campaign groups and political parties – to change the world we live in.



Illustration: Xoon Baltar (CC BY 2.0)

Capitalism... a cycle of boom and bust, of depression and recovery...

Resist crazy toilet policy not the call of nature...

BY DES FAGAN

MANY people may not realise it but when they call 999 in an emergency, the person taking the call may not be concentrating as much as would be expected.

The last thing you would expect is that the operator on the other end of the phone at the call centre is required to ask permission to go to the toilet.

It is yet another farcical example of what can happen when government services are sold off to private companies that care not a jot for the service but are inclined to

look at how much profit they can ring (oops!) from the business.

Yes, what was once a public service run by the Government's Post and Telegraph Department, then eircom, was provided to BT to run on a five-year contract in 2009. The actual operation was subcontracted to a company called Conduit. They are now involved in a dispute with the Communications

Workers Union who represent the staff. The union is seeking an increase in salary to a living wage of €11.50 per hour and Conduit have refused to meet them.

As the dispute deepens bosses in Conduit/BT have introduced a new 'Toilet Break Policy' which seeks to police and micro-manage how and when 999 operators go to the bath-

room. The announcement comes just hours after staff indicated their intention to ballot for industrial action in pursuit of fairness, decency and respect in the workplace.

We wish the workers in Conduit and CWU well in their struggle for fairness and decency at work.

Des Fagan is Financial Secretary at CPSU

It's time to grow a decent housing policy – here's how...

BY DR RORY HEARNE

HOUSING should be the number one issue in this election. The current housing crisis is a national emergency and scandal that affects nearly everybody – from the poorest homeless families to people paying huge rents to middle class families who are facing repossession or whose children will never be able to buy a home.

Successive governments and policy makers have caused the problem by making housing a financial product rather than what it should be: a home – shelter – a basic human need and human right.

We need to reassert that along with food and water, having proper housing is fundamental to our ability to live a life with dignity. And yet in Ireland hundreds of thousands of people are seriously affected by the lack of affordable and decent quality housing.

The younger generation can't make homes or plan families. The numbers affected by our dysfunctional and broken housing system is growing by the day.

Here is the range of the problems:

- 1,500 children and their families are homeless. At the current rate of families becoming homeless, there will be more than 6,000 children in emergency accommodation by 2017.

- No housing being built. Developers are hoarding land and not building housing in the hope to increase house prices and their profits.

- 37,000 households are in arrears on their mortgage for over two and a half years. At least 30,000 face repossession.

- 100,000 are on the social housing waiting lists – most stuck in unsuitable private rented accommodation.

- People renting in the private market have had huge increases in rents and the leases are short-term and insecure.



- Young people can't afford deposits to get a mortgage – banks aren't lending.

- International vulture funds and investor landlords are buying all the housing and from NAMA.

- Poor quality housing in public and private sector – mould, damp, pyrite is causing huge health problems.

- Huge discrimination in housing – Travellers left in substandard accommodation and asylum-seekers left in poor conditions in Direct Provision.

- There is no right to housing in our Constitution.

The current housing crisis is as a result of policies pursued by the previous Fianna Fail-led governments and the current Fine Gael/Labour Government. They prioritised the 'mortgaged home ownership' provision whereby they enabled developers, banks, land-

lords and the property industry to make massive profits from ordinary people trying to get a home.

They gave tax breaks for private landlords to purchase 'buy-to-let' housing and cut privatised social housing (local authority) provision. They handed all housing provision over to the private market.

When the crash happened, they created NAMA to bail out developers, bondholders and the banks but left ordinary people to pay for it all. So while those in mortgage arrears were left suffering and social housing was cut in austerity budget after austerity budget, NAMA (ordered by the government) has gone about selling off its land and apartments at knock-down prices to international vulture fund investors.

So due to the austerity budgets there was no social housing built (if the social housing budgets weren't cut we

would now have an additional 25,000 local authority homes, which explains the rise of homelessness).

The Government's social housing plan has hardly any building of social housing in it! Of the 110,000 'social housing' promised – 75,000 are to come from the private-rented sector (through the rent allowance and RAS).

The funding for social housing under the government plans if it is re-elected will actually fall from €580m in 2018 to €450m in 2019. And this is still a third of what was being spent on social housing in 2007. *There is no 'social housing' plan!*

And the 20,000 units the Government has outlined that NAMA will provide will not be affordable 'starter homes' but sold to international investment funds.

There is a lack of private-rented accommodation as the banks aren't lending for any new private rental building. The only new building will be done by international investors through NAMA for high-end renting. So this is a housing plan that will not work.

The core of the problem is that we need a government that will radically change housing policy away from prioritising mortgaged home ownership and housing being an asset of wealth, a commodity, a speculative piece of 'property' and away from relying on private land and development speculators to build housing.

Instead the housing market should be strongly regulated with price and profit controls and there should be a new approach to funding provision of affordable, 'not for profit', cooperative and social housing. That will mean standing up to the property development industry, landlords and all those who currently profit from the existing housing mess.

It also means Irish people changing their attitude to property and ownership and understanding that the current obsession with home ownership mainly benefits the wealthy, the banks and property industry.

Instead we should all want and agree that the Irish housing system should, in the first instance, ensure affordable, high-quality, homes are available to every citizen. By ensuring everyone has the right to housing we can become a republic of true equality.

Housing campaigns, such as Housing Action Now, the Irish Housing Forum and local housing action

groups, just like Right2Water, are playing an important role in achieving the Right2Housing in Ireland. They should get our support.

HOUSE PLANS...

The election can also help achieve a Right2Housing. Make sure you vote for the politicians who are supportive of the following policies which could achieve a right to housing for everyone in Ireland:

1. Next Government commits to hold a referendum inserting right to housing and a home in the Constitution.

1. Build social housing – triple the capital funding for social housing from €500million to €1.5bn.

2. Make rents fair: implement rent control (certainty-rent linked to inflation and/or affordability and quality indexes) and give tenants the right to long-term secure leases.

3. Create a State Homes and Housing Agency to build affordable and social housing – pooling the expertise, land and funding of the local authorities, NAMA, cooperatives and housing associations.

4. There are 2,233 hectares of undeveloped zoned land in the wider Dublin region which could provide 102,500 new housing units. Government should CPO this and build social and affordable on it.

5. Use €2bn of €4.5 billion NAMA has to invest in social and affordable housing rather than offices.

6. Instruct NAMA to stop selling its debt assets – land and housing to vulture funds – and instead use it for social and affordable housing.

7. Compulsory purchase vacant and derelict buildings and take over buy-to-lets in arrears and convert them to affordable rental housing.

8. Debt write-offs and sustainable solutions for those in mortgage arrears (such as providing the funding for local authorities to extend on a wider scale the mortgage to rent scheme).

9. Levy the banks (who are making massive profits – AIB made a profit of €1.1bn last year and Bank of Ireland looks set to make over a billion in profit this year) to pay for a social housing fund.

10. Make effective immediately the vacant and derelict buildings land tax.

Dr Rory Hearne is a senior policy analyst with TASC, Think-tank for Action on Social Change

I'm starting to question myself about Austerity...

BY ALEX HOMITS

HOW HAS AUSTERITY AFFECTED YOU?

As a result of the repressive attack on the education sector, I was forced to leave university and my pursuit of a third level degree and join the workforce. It's usually considered more difficult to get back into education once time passes by and as the tuition fees grow, my chances of obtaining an edu-

cation grow slimmer and slimmer. The increase in rent prices made the landlord of my family terminate our notice and force us to move. In our area, rent has grown by a whopping 35% despite the decline in people's income, so when we transitioned from the terminated tenancy to a new home, the rent went up €300. In a low income household, that's a massive increase.

IS THIS THE TYPE OF SOCIETY YOU WANT TO LIVE IN?

I want to live in a society where the majority of people make decisions that

benefit the majority. I want to live in a society that's not ruled by the private interests of 30 people. I want to live in a society where honesty, integrity, equality and justice are the virtues we collectively strive for. I want to live in a society that understands the concept of unity and doesn't glorify individualism to the point where it's a free for all.

WHAT IS IT THAT OUTRAGES YOU MOST ABOUT IRELAND TODAY?

Well there are many things but I feel they are all interconnected. There's a class in Ireland that is partly made up

of these career politicians which with impunity make decisions that literally kill people, drive them to leave their country or force them into suicide. There's this whole tier of individuals grouped together who are only out for themselves. I just don't understand why we let them get away with it. If somebody broke into your house and stole your television, would you stand there and watch them do it?

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING IN IRELAND, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Difficult to say, but I think Ireland

should leave the EU. Self-determination is the pinnacle of liberty and we clearly don't have self-determination if both the budget and other cornerstone items related to sovereignty can be questioned, aborted and scrutinized by another executive which is not anointed by the will of the people.

ARE YOU FEELING A RECOVERY?

I'm not a landlord, banker or TD so no, I'm not.

Alex Homits is a Communist Party of Ireland candidate for Cork North-West in the forthcoming election

CHANGE | February 2016

BY RUAIRÍ MCKIERNAN

AS gas is flared into the skies above north Mayo, it is worth reflecting on a project that has been one of modern Ireland's greatest scandals, a stunning fiasco in planning, economics, environmental protection and the abuse of civil liberties.

Far from it being just about energy supply, jobs and development, the Corrib gas project cuts to the core of this republic and asks big questions about how the country is run.

For more than 10 years now, campaigners have attempted to highlight the project's many flaws.

It has been a battle of David versus Goliath, a rural Gaeltacht community versus Shell, the fourth-largest company in the world, its partners Statoil and Vermillion, and their powerful allies in politics and the media.

In the course of an often tense campaign, many of those involved have been ridiculed, slandered, spied on, harassed, beaten and jailed – all for upholding their democratic right to peaceful dissent. Incidents included the 2005 jailing of the Rosport Five, who spent 94 days in prison at the behest of Shell.

There is also the still-unexplained sinking of fisherman Pat O'Donnell's boat in 2009.

Beaten

In the same year, local man Willie Corduff was beaten by men in balaclavas to the point where he had to be taken away on a stretcher by ambulance. A report for Frontline Defenders by barrister Brian Barrington recommending that the Garda reinvestigate this case has not been acted upon.

The list of incidents is extensive and includes a case of gardaí who were recorded joking about raping and deporting two women protesters after arresting them. Other issues concerned the controversial role of Shell's private security firm IRMS, which employed former gardaí and army personnel.

There have been repeated calls for an independent investigation into the policing of the protests. These have been supported by numerous TDs, Fr Peter McVerry, Amnesty International, Afri (Action from Ireland), former UN assistant secretary general Denis Halliday, Nobel Peace Laureate Desmond Tutu, UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders Margaret Sekaggya and Prof Phil Scruton, the criminologist who exposed the South Yorkshire police handling of the 1989 Hillsborough football stadium disaster.

The history of this all-too-politicised project merits a close look. Consider the view of Kevin Moore, a senior planning inspector with An Bord Pleanála who was clear in his 2003 rejection of planning permission for the refinery.

"From a strategic planning perspective, this is the wrong site; from the perspective of government policy which seeks to foster balanced regional development, this is the wrong site; from the perspective of minimising environmental impact, this is the wrong site; and consequently, from the perspective of sustainable development, this is the wrong site."

Not long after Moore rejected the application, then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, alongside Minister for Com-



Pictures:RollingNews.ie

munications, Marine and Natural Resources Dermot Ahern and minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government Martin Cullen, met Shell senior management in Dublin.

Months later, a revised planning application for the same site was submitted and the following year this was

approved by An Bord Pleanála.

Consider too the involvement of former minister Frank Fahey who approved the sale of State-owned forestry to Shell for an undisclosed sum. Or of former minister Ray Burke who brought in changes to the licensing regime in 1987 that in effect ensured

Royal Dutch Shell and its partners may pay little or no royalties on the Corrib gas find.

The deal ensured the consortium could write off exploration expenses against tax and benefit from one of the world's lowest rates of tax for oil and gas exploration.

Open market

In addition, the deal meant that security of supply for Ireland was not assured. The State will have to buy Corrib gas on the open market on the same terms as any other country.

It is this murky history that gave rise to comments by local priest Fr Michael Nallen when he said "politically this project has been through unsafe hands".

There are of course voices who say that the protesters failed in their aim of having the gas processed at sea, as is standard international practice, or in locating the project to the more suitable location of Glinsk, which is away from people's homes and what is designated as a European Union "special area of conservation".

The various criticisms are often based on a cursory analysis. They ignore the fact that the campaigners did what we encourage all people to do, that is to stand up for their rights and

uphold their dignity as human beings and as citizens. They did so while refusing financial pressure and being abandoned by most of the main political parties. It is a situation that would be unthinkable in Norway, home to Corrib gas partner Statoil, which is owned by the Norwegian government.

Despite their vilification, the Corrib gas campaigners have done Ireland a great service.

Far from being not-in-my-back-yards, they have secured important safety improvements to the project and helped create a much-needed national debate about the management of our natural resources, the ongoing controversial study into fracking and the type of planning, politics and policing that are acceptable in a modern republic.

They have helped us to understand the sometimes shadowy workings of Irish democracy, while highlighting the need for leadership in replacing our reliance on fossil fuels with renewable energy solutions that respect people, planet and the exchequer.

This article first appeared in the Irish Times; www.irishtimes.com

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To stake a claim for our future we must first defeat Austerity

BY GLENN FITZPATRICK

THE vast majority of young people aged 18 to 35 will attest to this era of post-democracy as being unnecessarily hard. All too easily though, our struggles can be dismissed by our elders as us simply quibbling and moaning about the realities of growing up.

In some spaces we are called 'millenials' or 'Generation Y'. When we are discussed in this light in the media, it is often done with negative connotations. We stare into our smartphones blankly and don't hold ourselves to the same high standard of something or other that our elders did, apparently.

We're not thought of very highly and when we are framed through such a lens, is it any wonder that we are constantly the first line of defence when 'sacrifices' have to be made? Youth is no longer wasted on the young.

In reality, our generation works and will continue to work harder and for longer hours than generations before us. We do so under more precarious conditions than the previous one. We get less 'bang for our buck' than the previous one. By now most of us have accepted that we are unlikely to ever own our own homes.

Outrageous

Older generations who had the privilege of being able to go to the local Council office, arrange for a peppercorn rent and eventually buy their own home now tell us from an outrageous position of privilege that we will never need to own our own.

So here we are in 2016 and the main concerns of a generation are not what should be 21st Century concerns. Rather, they are bread and butter issues. How can we rectify the above? How can we advance equality on all fronts? How can we strive to better ourselves without saddling ourselves with five-figure debt sums?

Staking some kind of a reasonable claim in our future starts with taking appropriate steps to bring the curtain down on Austerity Ireland. Intergenerational solidarity has become a one-way street. Our futures have been sacrificed to protect the cosiness of others. Evidence the world over suggests that we will bear the brunt of unimaginable water charges under a potentially private provider in years to come if we aren't prepared to get real and act.

The current trajectory of politics is here to stay unless we are prepared to force our way on to the stakeholders' table. There was outrage when Labour reneged on its promise not to increase tuition fees. Cries got louder when all bursaries were removed for postgraduate students.

Labour's legacy in higher education on leaving government sees the output of a working group pave the way for the abolition of the maintenance grant altogether, coupled with an increase in tuition fees again. This 'expert group' talks 'common sense', don't you know? It also created plausible deniability for Labour who

casting a vote for Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael. They must be avoided at the ballot box too but these parties were never on our side.

Of course, Labour will peddle the line that things would be, and will be, so much worse without them. They talk of how they provide 'balance' to the worst elements of Fine Gael. It is no longer right to call this a poverty of ambition for a party with left or even centre-left aspirations. There is such a gaping gap between Labour's interpretation of providing a 'balanced government' and the kind of equaliser that young people need that we should be consigning them to the

The Irish media is not even subtle in its attempts to propagate this. Their role in the creation and normalisation of Austerity Ireland is not up for debate.

The media failed to raise the alarm in time before the crash, then led a campaign to support austerity and where possible, even facilitated the criminalisation of dissent. So why should this generation (which in many ways will be paying for the abject failures of our representatives, elites and our media) buy into this senseless idea that this is the way things have to be for ever?

Everywhere else in the world it seems young people are pushing back a little bit. The key driver of the OXI vote in Greece was the young unemployed and students. An overwhelming majority of young people voted for Scotland to leave the United Kingdom.

Ignore the pleas of those who have burdened us with the bulk of the crisis to continue to hold us hostage. An alternative is not only immensely possible; it is much more within our grasp than we often think.

Different Ireland

Parties and candidates that have signed up to the Right2Change platform may not tick all your boxes but at the very least, they have engaged with communities and believe that a distinctly different Ireland can be achieved.

This engagement has been profoundly different in the sense that it has gone far beyond asking people for votes. Communities have been politicised and – with the aid of new technologies and their neighbours – can break through jargon once only spoken and understood by the establishment.

The parties of austerity (FF, FG and Labour) are simply unable to envision a more ambitious, egalitarian Ireland. We will get no equaliser from them. We will get no stake in our future from them.

We must also be prepared to imagine change outside the perimeters of party politics and elections. Parties are now in a permanent state of canvassing, regardless of how close we are to an election. Irish society at large, led by the youth, can wake up in 2016 and realise that these people cannot represent us.

Whatever happens in the General Election, we must immerse ourselves in our communities, network and create radical forces that can go so much further than Labour's interpretation of a 'balanced' government. We do have a Right2Change but we have to be willing to play our part. This election is a means to an end, not an end-point.

Picture: Danny Ryder (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

can simply say that a proper consultative process has followed and that they haven't actually sold out on their initial position. Niamh Breathnach's 'free fees' initiative is a distant memory.

Students and young people must punish Labour appropriately for this in the General Election – otherwise they and other parties will never learn. I won't even address notions of

dustbin of history.

Politics has shifted considerably to the right. The Labour Party, rather than being dragged kicking and screaming, looked up longingly into Enda's eyes and asked to hold his hand. He duly obliged.

The TINA mantra ('There Is No Alternative') has manifested in the Government rhetoric of this election being a choice between stability and chaos.

The parties of austerity are unable to envision a more ambitious, egalitarian Ireland

BY NIAL CROWLEY

IMAGINE a Government committed to the value of equality. We know that more equal societies do better for most people in society. So, it should not be a big ask. Claiming Our Future has identified the need for this value of equality to inform politics and political decision making.

However, all we will get is the rhetoric of fairness and equity from most on the campaign trail. We should not be fooled by fairness and equity. They are important values but they do not drive real change for people. Equality does. However, equality is espoused only by the few so far in this election.

In a more equal society the mistreatment of the people with disabilities living in Aras Attracta would not have occurred. This is not only because people are nicer in a more equal society, Aras Attracta would not exist in a more equal society. If we had a Government committed to valuing equality there would have been some response beyond political hand wringing to the RTE investigation.

We will know if we have a Government committed to equality if they implement the *Congregated Settings Report* of 2011. This recommended a seven-year timescale for deinstitutionalisation and offering community-based care to people with disabilities. This has been costed by the HSE and is ready to go. It just needs a Government interested in equality.

Budget cut

In a more equal society the tragedy of the fire and 10 deaths on the temporary halting site for Travellers in Carrickmines would not have happened. Temporary halting sites that are far from temporary, lasting years, would not be countenanced. The budget for Traveller accommodation would not have been cut by an extraordinary 85%.

We will know we have a Government committed to equality if they implement the *Task Force on the Travelling Community* report 1995. This recommended the replacement of existing temporary halting sites with permanent halting sites. It recommended the provision of 3,100 additional units of Traveller accommodation. This was 20 years ago. The need is still evident, the hard-

How should we measure a commitment to equality?



Flowers mark the entrance to the Carrickmines halting site for Travellers where 10 people died in a fire tragedy

Picture: RollingNews.ie

ship consequent on failure to implement these recommendations is well known, and action, based on equality and cultural recognition for Travellers is all that is needed.

In a more equal society we would not accept asylum seekers being confined to direct provision facilities for anything up to a decade. We would not

risk the mental health of people in this way or frustrate their potential and talents in this manner. A Government committed to equality would not have set up a working group to come up with a recommendation that this abuse is alright for five years but must cease after that. It would not have ignored implementing even this shame-

ful recommendation.

We will know we have a Government committed to equality if they abolish direct provision for asylum seekers. Steps would be taken to return to the previous status quo where asylum seekers were able to live in the community, secure social welfare payments, and participate in and con-

In a more equal society the tragedy on the temporary halting site in Carrickmines would not have happened

tribute to life in Ireland.

In a more equal society income inequality would not be growing, with over 33% of all income now concentrated in the hands of 10% of earners. Lone parents are among the poorest groups in Ireland with a deprivation rate of 63%. A Government committed to equality would not have changed the one parent family payment to leave lone parents worse off.

Women on average earn 14.4% less than men. Nothing has been done to respond to EU requirements to make pay systems more transparent so as to reduce this gap. A living wage has been calculated at €11.50 per hour and we have a Government that congratulates itself for increasing the minimum wage to €9.15 per hour for adults.

We will know we have a Government committed to equality if steps are taken to establish the living wage as a minimum, to improve the situation of lone parents, to reduce the gender pay gap, and to raise new levels of taxation on the incomes of high earners.

The current Government introduced a statutory duty on public sector bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights in carrying out their functions.

This was ground breaking and reflected some commitment to equality and human rights. However, a Government really committed to equality would have ensured this statutory duty was implemented. Nothing has happened on foot of it. No one seems to know anything about it.

We will know we have a Government committed to equality if this public sector duty is highlighted and vigorously pursued.

Real impact should be visible in improved quality of public services, a new culture within public sector bodies, and a reinvigorated leadership for equality and human rights.

We must mobilise across borders to force debt writedown

BY SEÁN BYERS

OF THE many cataclysmic decisions made by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil-led governments during their 90 years of unbroken rule, two stand out for their devastating and far-reaching consequences.

The first was the decision by Fianna Fáil and the Green Party in September 2008 to introduce a blanket guarantee of almost all of the debt of six commercial banks. The second was the decision of the Fine Gael-Labour coalition to make this debt sovereign.

This transfer of private debt wholesale onto the shoulders of the

state and its citizens was designed to underwrite the losses of a very small class of people, at the expense of everyone else.

As Conor McCabe argues in his excellent *Sins of the Father*, these decisions, unmatched in other crisis-ridden countries, go some way towards revealing where real (economic) power lies in Ireland.

Consequently, Irish citizens are paying off 42% of the total EU cost of the crisis through austerity while the financial sector returns to business as usual, fuelling an illusory recovery with increasing private debt in a global economy already saturated by private debt.

Progressive economists such as Ann Pettifor and Steve Keen assert that the issue of rising and unsus-



tainable private debt will have to be confronted if we are to avert a financial crisis of an even bigger scale than 2008, and if we are to free citizens from the shackles of austerity.

Accordingly, in line with their proposals for an orderly debt write-off on a global scale, the *Right2Change Policy Principles* commit a progressive government to a debt audit and campaign for debt repudiation, in ad-

dition to a Financial Transaction Tax "in order to repay states for the private bank they assimilated", and the creation of a public banking system that acts in the interests of society, not private profit.

As Syriza's defeat at the hands of the EU institutions demonstrates, the forces ranged against such root-and-branch transformation are immense. Along with a Plan B, one of the things Syriza needed most was allies in the other debt colonies of Europe.

Accordingly, Right2Change identifies as a priority the building of alliances with 'citizen-led movements in Europe' – Portugal's Left Bloc, Podemos and Corbyn's Labour Party, to name but a few – and a mobilisation of this international coalition of

progressive forces towards a restructuring and writedown of debt in the Eurozone.

We may still find, as the former Syriza MP Costas Lapavistas has argued consistently, that a debt writedown and reversal of austerity are fundamentally incompatible with membership of the Eurozone (and EU). Indeed the *Policy Principle on Debt Justice* suggests an inevitable confrontation with finance capital and its legal-political corollary, the unelected and undemocratic European Commission.

But in Right2Change we have the genesis of a movement that will carry the fight to these institutions and, in sharp contrast to Michael Noonan, support others in doing likewise.

YOUR CANDIDATE

Carlow-Kilkenny

Kathleen Funchion	Sinn Féin
Keith Gilligan	Independent
Adrienne Wallace	People Before Profit Alliance

Cavan-Monaghan

Caoimhghín Ó'Caoláin	Sinn Féin
Kathryn Reilly	Sinn Féin
Mick McDermott	Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)

Clare

Noeleen Moran	Sinn Féin
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Cork East

Pat Buckley	Sinn Féin
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Cork North-Central

Jonathan O'Brien	Sinn Féin
Thomas Gould	Sinn Féin

Cork North-West

Nigel Dennehy	Sinn Féin
Alex Homits	Communist Party of Ireland

Cork South-Central

Donnchadh Ó'Laoghaire	Sinn Féin
Jim O'Connell	People Before Profit Alliance

Cork South-West

Rachel McCarthy	Sinn Féin
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Donegal

Pearse Doherty	Sinn Féin
Pádraig MacLochlainn	Sinn Féin
Gary Doherty	Sinn Féin
Thomas Pringle	Independent

Dublin Central

Mary-Lou MacDonald	Sinn Féin
Cieran Perry	Independent

Dublin Mid-West

Eoin Ó'Broin	Sinn Féin
Gino Kenny	People Before Profit Alliance
Francis Timmons	Independent

Dublin Fingal

Louise O'Reilly	Sinn Féin
Barry Martin	Independent
Clare Daly	Independent

Dublin Bay North

Micheál MacDonnacha	Sinn Féin
Denise Mitchell	Sinn Féin
John Lyons	People Before Profit Alliance
Tom D'Arcy	Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)
Damien O'Neill	Independent
Tommy Broughan	Independent

Dublin North-West

Dessie Ellis	Sinn Féin
Cathleen Carney-Boud	Sinn Féin
Andrew Keegan	People Before Profit Alliance
Bernie Hughes	Independent
Cormac McKay	Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)

Dublin Rathdown

Sorcha Nic Cormaic	Sinn Féin
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Dublin South-Central

Aengus Ó'Snódaigh	Sinn Féin
Máire Devine	Sinn Féin
Brid Smith	People Before Profit Alliance
Joan Collins	Independent
Paul Hand	Independent

Dublin Bay South

Chris Andrews	Sinn Féin
Annette Mooney	People Before Profit Alliance

Dublin South-West

Sarah Holland	Sinn Féin
Seán Crowe	Sinn Féin

Dublin West

Paul Donnelly	Sinn Féin
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Dun Laoghaire

Shane O'Brien	Sinn Féin
Richard Boyd-Barrett	People Before Profit Alliance

Galway East

Annemarie Roche	Sinn Féin
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Galway West

Trevor Ó'Clochartaigh	Sinn Féin
Cllr Catherine Connolly	Independent

Kerry County

Martin Ferris	Sinn Féin
Brian Finucane	People Before Profit Alliance
Michael O'Gorman	Independent
Kevin Murphy	Independent

Kildare North

Réada Cronin	Sinn Féin
Ashling Merriman	People Before Profit Alliance
Brendan Young	Independent

Kildare South

Patricia Ryan	Sinn Féin
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Laois

Brian Stanley	Sinn Féin
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Offaly

Carol Nolan	Sinn Féin
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Limerick City

Maurice Quinlivan	Sinn Féin
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Limerick County

Séamus Browne	Sinn Féin
----------------------	-----------

Longford-Westmeath

Paul Hogan	Sinn Féin
Barbara Smyth	Independent

Louth

Gerry Adams	Sinn Féin
Imelda Munster	Sinn Féin
Gareth Weldon	People Before Profit Alliance
Anthony Connor	Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)
Pat Greene	Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)

Mayo

Rose Conway-Walsh	Sinn Féin
Tom Moran	People Before Profit Alliance

Meath East

Darren O'Rourke	Sinn Féin
Ben Gilroy	Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)

Meath West

Alan Lawes	Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)
Peadar Toibín	Sinn Féin

The above candidates have agreed to work together to implement the Right2Change policies
For a full list of candidates running in support of Right2Change

YES FOR CHANGE

Roscommon-Galway

Claire Kerrane

Sinn Féin

Eddie Conroy

People Before Profit Alliance

Sligo-Leitrim

Martin Kenny

Sinn Féin

Chris MacManus

Sinn Féin

Nigel Gallagher

People Before Profit Alliance

Declan Bree

Independent

Tipperary

Séamus Morris

Sinn Féin

Séamus Healy

Independent (WUAG)

Waterford

David Cullinane

Sinn Féin

Una Dunphy

People Before Profit Alliance

Dr. Dan Janes

Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)

Wexford

Johnny Mythen

Sinn Féin

Deirdre Wadding

People Before Profit Alliance

David Lloyd

Direct Democracy Ireland (NCM)

Mick Wallace

Independent

Wicklow

John Brady

Sinn Féin

Anna Doyle

People Before Profit Alliance

Sharon Briggs

People Before Profit Alliance

ould the numbers allow them to form a government after this election.

hange go to www.right2change.ie

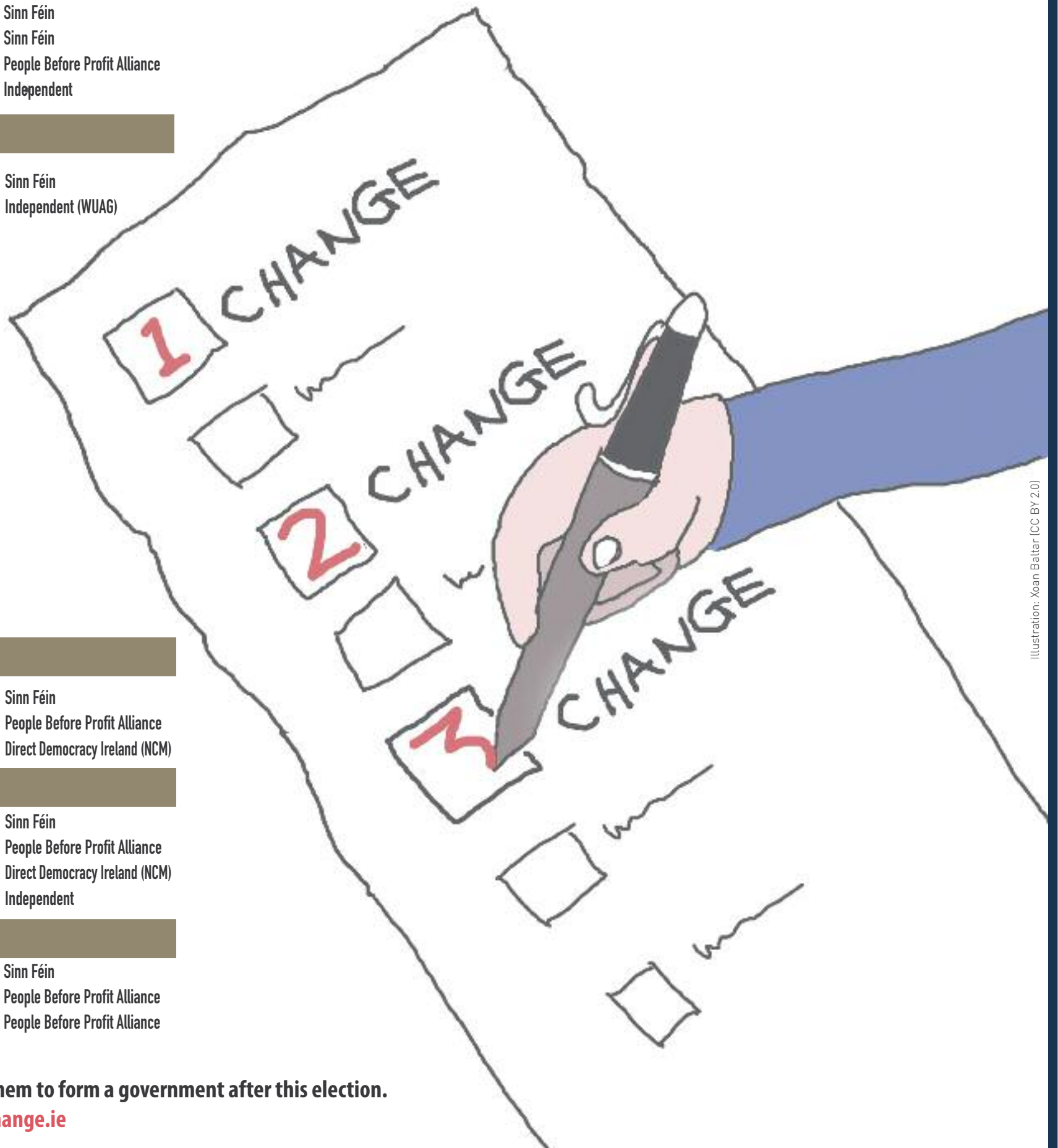


Illustration: Xoon Baltar [CC BY 2.0]

A century on... it's still greed, power and slaughter on an industrial scale

BY ANDREW MURRAY

SUMMER 2016 will see the commemoration of the centenary of the Battle of the Somme – for the British Empire the landmark battle of the First World War. The British Army sustained 60,000 casualties on the first day of the battle, while failing to advance on the German lines, epitomising the futility of the conflict.

The idea that the First World War was a conflict between rival great powers, each seeking to expand or protect their imperial interests is fairly widely accepted today, although not universally. All the main powers – the British, German, Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires and the French Republic – played their part in unleashing the conflict, and each fought for their own narrow national interests.

Does that analysis hold any relevance for the world a century on? The present “perpetual war” which has rolled from one country to another since 2001 has already gone on for longer than the two world wars of the 20th century combined. Its battlefields have, however, been in the greater Middle East region rather than Europe.

The rationalisation has been to fight a “War on Terror” against an “Axis of Evil”, in US President Bush’s cartoonish formulations. This has been a falsehood from the start. Of the five states which have been destroyed since 2001 four – Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen – had absolutely nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks or, indeed, with terrorism at all, at least at the time of their destruction.

On the other hand, the country which supplied almost all the 9/11 attackers, and which has funded and provided ideological inspiration for jihadism – Saudi Arabia – remains a valued ally of the USA and Britain.



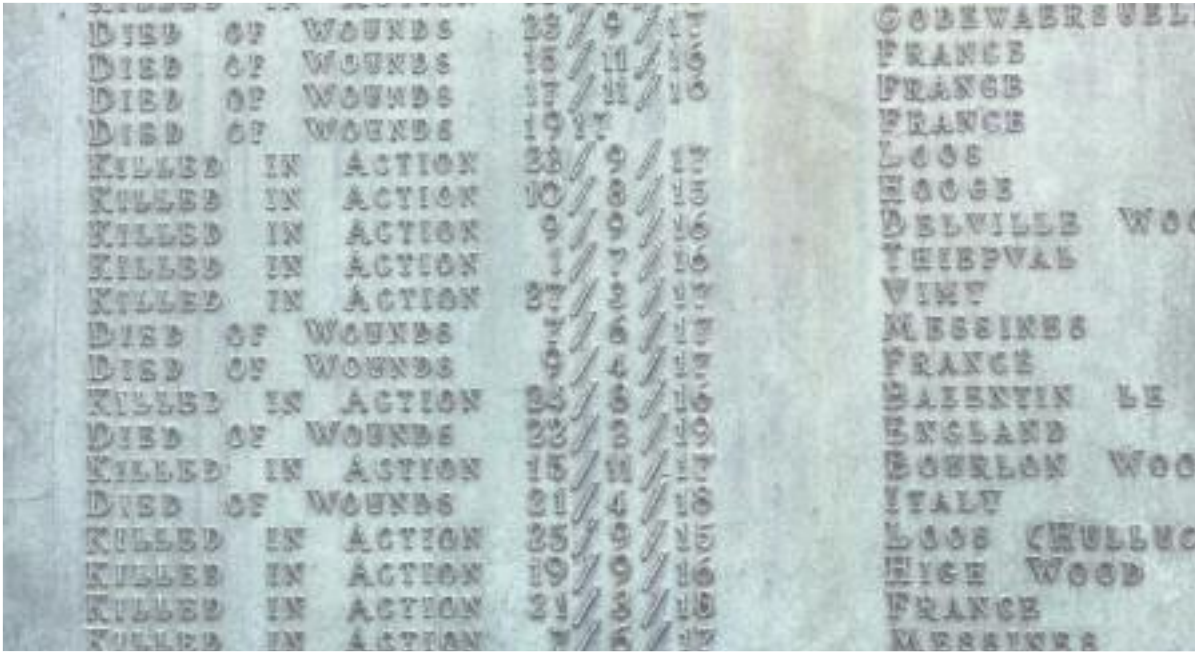
Picture: Elvert Barnes [CC BY 2.0]

Terrorism, meanwhile, has become a still greater challenge, as the rise of Islamic State and the barbaric attacks in Paris, Beirut and elsewhere show.

This huge disparity between stated objectives and the actual course of events surely indicates that another agenda is at work. Unlike one hundred years ago, when several imperial powers of roughly equivalent economic power and military strength competed for hegemony, in 2001 the USA stood alone as the sole superpower. Its military budget is as great as that of the next 10 powers in the world combined.

US policy since the end of the Cold War has been to attempt to use this “unipolar moment” to enforce a global regime of capital accumulation with its own business interests – and those of its closest allies – firmly in the driving seat. Even as the US has faced a relative economic decline, with the rise of the Chinese economy in particular, it has sought to bolt in place a world capitalist order secure against all challenges and run from Washington.

It is no surprise that it has devoted the greatest effort to trying to impose



Picture: Mark Swinhoe [CC BY 2.0]

a new order in the Middle East. It is both the source of much of the world’s oil – and a very big share of the cheapest-to-produce and most-profitable-to-sell oil – it is also a huge market for western arms companies. The region also sits astride key trade routes. For the last century or more, the big powers have devoted extraordinary efforts to keeping the Middle East “safe” for western business.

In the case of Britain, think of the vast influence companies such as BP and Shell in the oil sector, and Bae Systems in the defence sector, have had on government, both New Labour and Tory. Their pressure alone would go a long way to explaining the underlying drive to war. Still more powerful, however, is the City of London and the financial interests, often now under American ownership, which direct so much of British policy.

They are now closely entwined with the ruling elites along the Persian Gulf, recycling the vast oil wealth which has been amassed in their hands. Stability and security in the Middle East feed directly into the bottom lines of the biggest of big business.

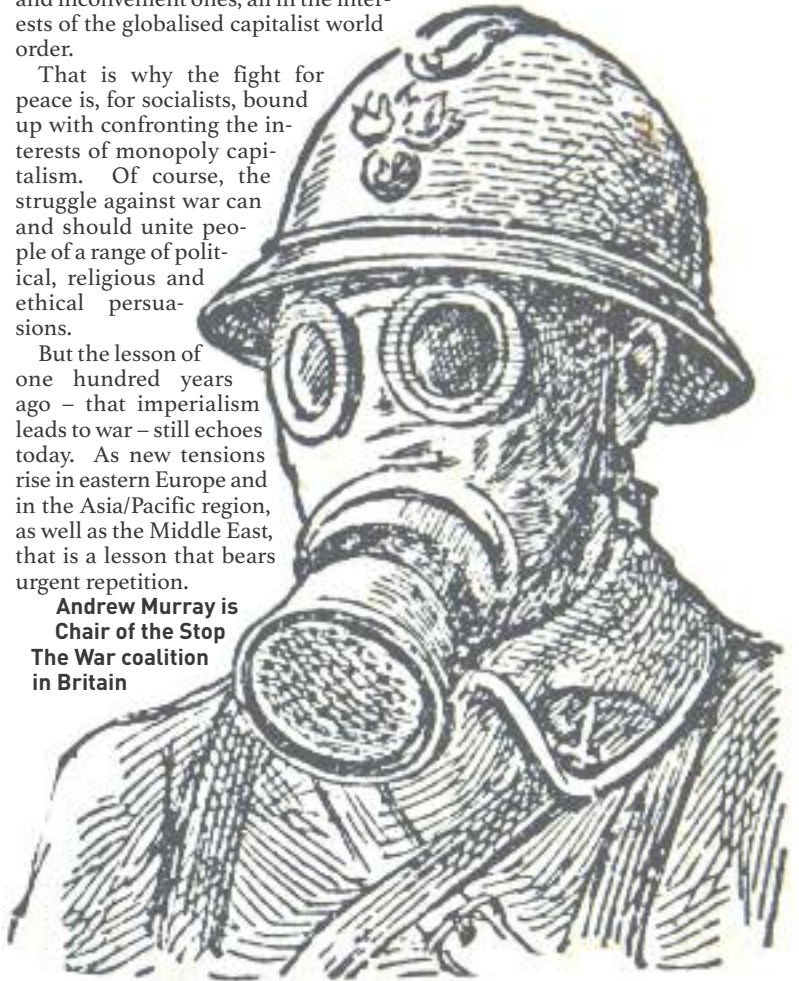
See today the whole-hearted backing given to Saudi Arabia in its murderous war on Yemen, and to the rulers of Bahrain in their brutal suppression of the democracy movement in their country, over and above the interventions in Iraq, Libya and Syria, with uniformly disastrous results. Clearly all this has little to do with fighting terrorism, and less to do with supporting democracy or the spread of human

rights. It is about supporting compliant regimes, and destroying awkward and inconvenient ones, all in the interests of the globalised capitalist world order.

That is why the fight for peace is, for socialists, bound up with confronting the interests of monopoly capitalism. Of course, the struggle against war can and should unite people of a range of political, religious and ethical persuasions.

But the lesson of one hundred years ago – that imperialism leads to war – still echoes today. As new tensions rise in eastern Europe and in the Asia/Pacific region, as well as the Middle East, that is a lesson that bears urgent repetition.

Andrew Murray is Chair of the Stop The War coalition in Britain



Minister Bruton backed ISDS provision in leaked letter

MINISTER for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Richard Bruton added his name to a joint letter calling on the EU Council of Ministers to give the Commission a mandate to include an Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) in the TTIP agreement currently under negotiation.

The call came in an October 2014 letter from a number of EU Trade Ministers to Cecilia Malmstrom, then Commissioner designate for Trade at

the Commission. The letter was later leaked to the press.

In the letter, the Ministers write: “One of the issues that has attracted criticism is investment protection... The Council mandate is clear in its inclusion of investor protection mechanisms in the TTIP negotiations; we need to work together on how best to do so.”

The ISDS clause would allow multinationals to sue sovereign governments should they implement laws that would

interfere with a corporation’s ability to make profits.

Mandate General Secretary John Douglas said: “TTIP and ISDS are a massive threat to Irish workers and Irish society. Had Ireland had an ISDS just over a decade ago, we wouldn’t have been able to implement the workplace smoking ban and thousands of bar workers would now be dying or dead from lung cancer.”

He added: “It’s shocking that an Irish

Minister would write to the EU essentially asking for a corporation to have the ability to sue any country that wants to protect the health and well-being of its citizens.”

Veolia, the French company currently installing water meters in Ireland and a shareholder in the Luas transport link in Dublin, has used the ISDS Courts to threaten Egypt for increasing its minimum wage rate. Egypt has now reversed the minimum wage change.

Further afield, Phillip Morris Tobacco is suing the Australian government for implementing plain package cigarettes as a health and safety measure. Phillip Morris moved their HQ to Hong Kong so it could make use of an ISDS arrangement. To date, the case has cost the Australian government millions of dollars.

You can find out more about TTIP and join the campaign to stop it at www.ttip.ie

PLAN FOR SURVIVAL



Picture: Christopher Craig [CC BY 2.0]

BY CHARLES STANLEY SMITH

THE right to a sustainable environment is often forgotten but is our most important right. After all, our economy resides within our society, which is entirely dependent on our environment, our one shared earth. The most pressing threat to this right is climate change. We are currently putting our future and that of the next generations at risk.

We need a Department of Climate Action to be established by the next government. Our politicians must show they understand that not all sectors are equally carbon intensive. We face tough decisions on how to divide the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, fairly across sectors.

Agriculture is responsible for one-third of our national emissions. Currently, Ireland imports far more nutritional energy than it exports, yet the sector claims to help “feed the world”. Agricultural emissions are likely to rise. We already face large financial penalties for failure to meet emission targets. Will the taxpayer have to pick up the tab for the Government’s failure to act?

We must cut the energy requirement of our buildings by increasing their efficiency and introducing a major retrofit programme that will also deliver many new jobs. We need to reduce our

... no peat, no coal, no oil, no gas by 2050

transport emissions by investing in public transport, both urban and rural. We need planning policies that deliver essential services within walkable communities.

On January 20, NASA released its latest figures showing that the Earth’s 2015 surface temperatures were the warmest in modern times. They stated that globally-averaged temperatures in 2015 shattered the previous mark set in 2014 by 0.13°C. NASA Administrator Charles Bolden said: “Today’s announcement is a key data point that should make policy makers stand up and take notice – now is the time to act on climate.”

The recent 2015 Paris Climate Conference (CoP 21) will produce a legally binding and universal agreement on

climate. This aims to keep global warming below 2°C and ideally below 1.5°C. The agreement means the end of the fossil fuel age. Decarbonisation is the only way to cut greenhouse gas emissions progressively over coming decades to meet those targets.

Renewable future

This means no peat, no coal, no oil, no gas by 2050 (or even earlier). A 2015 study revealed that we need to leave at least 80% of the world’s known remaining fossil fuel reserves in the ground. That means we must move towards a renewable energy future. We need to cease burning peat, coal, oil and gas in our power stations and rapidly decarbonise our electricity. Renewable energy must be produced, with full involvement and agreement

of communities. There are other environmental crises that a new government must also prioritise. Rampant over usage of resources by the First World, is putting the lives of everybody on the planet and future generations at severe risk. There is a man-made crisis for each of clean water, clean air, nutritious food/food security, biodiversity, soil fertility, pollinators, energy security, ocean desertification and acidification, and many more.

When people get to define their personal ‘sufficiency’, it is inevitably much more reasonable than you would expect, certainly, if you believed everything in advertising. We need to get away from the concept, promotion and advertising of ‘stuff’. People can cut their consumption. We need to move

to a ‘circular economy’, one where there is either no waste, because we have designed things not to produce waste or their output is the raw material for some other process.

We need to protect our biodiversity because everything on the planet is interlinked and if we destroy any part, we are in great danger of destroying something that is inherently required to support life on Earth.

We need another economy, one that is not based on growth. Modern economic strategies depend on growth. They do not take into account resource usage. We are already using too much of the world’s resources. In 14 years, at 5% growth, we will be using twice the amount of resources – resources we actually don’t have.

This is a matter of social justice, intergenerational equity, and stewardship of the planet. We need to get away from the arrogant stance that the world is there to provide our every whim. There are no technocratic solutions that we can or should rely on. These crises undoubtedly unfairly affect the poor and those in developing countries most. They will lead to increasing conflict over the remaining resources. Urgent action is required; the event horizon is not 2100 or 2050, it is far closer at 2020 or 2030.

The Earth continues to be the only planet capable of supporting us. We need a government that recognises this in policy and practice and we need a popular mobilisation to reflect this imperative.

We need another economy - one that is not based on growth



Michael Lowry: forced to resign

MICHAEL LOWRY, DENIS O'BRIEN AND FINE GAE

Michael Lowry was then a young Minister for what we now call 'communications'. O'Brien was then a young businessman anxious to get his hands on a government mobile phone licence. The Moriarty Tribunal ultimately got to the heart of the matter and found evidence of collusion between Lowry and O'Brien and that O'Brien gave "substantial sums of money to Fine Gael" so that O'Brien's company, ESAT Digifone, could get an "unfair advantage in getting the lucrative mobile phone licence". It was effectively awarded by Lowry as the Minister responsible.

Moriarty found that O'Brien specifically gave this substantial money to Fine Gael to "make friends" with people in the party as the lead Government party.

Lowry was a willing recruit in this and Moriarty also found Denis O'Brien, or persons close to him, subsequently sought to give large amounts of money to Michael Lowry.

Lowry was forced to resign as Minister when the scandal emerged but then-Taoiseach John Bruton got visibly emotional on national TV that night and described Lowry as his "best friend forever". No wonder. O'Brien's money had done much to wipe out the massive Fine Gael debt.

Since then Lowry has repeatedly been elected as an Independent for Tipperary and is now offering support up to Enda Kenny to help him stay on as Taoiseach after the election. As noted by the Tribunal, Denis O'Brien on the other hand has never stopped being "close" to Fine Gael, as we now see from JMC Sierra winning an Irish Water contract.



Ivor Callely: five month sentence

IVOR CALLELY – FIANNA FAIL

One of the few politicians to do jail time was Ivor Callely of Fianna Fail. Callely lived in leafy Clontarf, Dublin, but claimed Oireachtas travel expenses of €81,015 to Bantry in Cork from 2007 – 2010. He further claimed €2,907 for mobile phones he bought off a company called 'Business Communication Limited' from 2002 – 2005. The problem? 'Business Communica-

This time 100 years ago men and women were planning to take on the most powerful empire on the planet and lay down their lives for an egalitarian Republic that would cherish all of the children of the nation equally. But 100 years on their ideals and dreams have never been realised as two corrupt parties, Fianna Fail (Tweedledum) and Fine Gael (Tweedledee) and their forebears stole the revolution and abused it from 1922 onwards. Their cronyism and gombeenism has only been surpassed by their corruption. **BRENDAN OGLE** recalls some of the scandals that they have brought on the Republic dreamed of by Connolly, Pearse, McDonagh, Clarke, MacDiarmada, Plunkett and Ceannt. 100 years on can we have the courage to reclaim their Republic for us, the people, and put an end to scandals like these?

'Corruption was both endemic and systemic' and it 'affected every level of government'

– the Mahon Tribunal

tions Limited' had ceased to exist eight years earlier in 1994. Callely served a jail sentence of five months in Wheatfield Prison.



Liam Lawlor: collected money

LIAM LAWLOR – FIANNA FAIL

Liam Lawlor was a Fianna Fail Dublin TD who was involved in various planning decisions including the

building of Quarryvale shopping centre, and much besides. Lawlor routinely collected money for Fianna Fáil and himself off Frank Dunlop and building developers in advance of voting decisions and planning on Dublin City Council.

In the light of allegations of planning corruption, Fianna Fáil established an internal committee on Standards in Public Life. The committee interviewed a number of party members, including Lawlor, but eventually found that Lawlor had failed to co-operate with it by not naming an individual who had furnished him with a donation.

On the eve of publication of the committee report in June 2000, Lawlor resigned from the party. However, he continued to support and vote with the Bertie Ahern-led Government as an

'independent'. Such was the scandal that Lawlor did not stand in the 2002 General Election. He was forced to appear before the Flood Tribunal several times and was imprisoned on three occasions (in January 2001, January 2002 and February 2002, for a total of six weeks) for contempt based on his attitude and non-compliance with the Tribunal.

Lawlor was released from prison on February 7, 2002 to make a Dáil appearance during which he ignored unprecedented all-party calls for his resignation. He mounted a stout defence of his reputation without addressing any specifics during an hour-long debate. Arriving at Leinster House in a prison van, Lawlor sat alone at the rear of the Chamber while the five party leaders, in turn, called on him to step down.

RAY BURKE – FIANNA FAIL

Ray Burke TD was found by the Planning (Flood) Tribunal to be 'corrupt' after he received IR£80,000 from a property developer. This emerged while Burke was Minister for Foreign Affairs and he was forced to resign.

Burke had previously been involved in controversy when, after the 1989 election, he was heard off camera saying, "I'm going to fucking screw RTE" before being given both the Justice and Communications portfolio.

He used the Communications brief to inhibit RTE's revenue raising ability and also to award a slew of independent radio licences including one to 'Century Radio'. The Flood Tribunal found that Century had paid "large bribes" to Burke to secure the licence. Burke subsequently falsified tax returns to hide these bribes, was subsequently caught and then sentenced to six months in Arbour Hill Prison on January 24, 2005. He was released after 4.5 months with 25% remission for 'good behaviour'.



Charlie Haughey: extravagant

CHARLIE HAUGHEY – FIANNA FAIL

Haughey's personal wealth and extravagant lifestyle – he owned racehorses, a large motor sailing yacht *Celtic Mist*, an island and a Gandon mansion – had long been a point of curious speculation on which he had refused throughout his career to answer any questions. Despite his professed desire to fade from public attention, these questions followed him into retirement where the background to his lifestyle was eventually exposed.

In 1997 the McCracken Tribunal first revealed that Haughey had received substantial monetary gifts from businessmen, and that he had held secret accounts offshore on the Cayman Islands Ansbacher Bank. Haughey faced criminal charges for obstructing the work of McCracken and was put on trial on these charges.

This trial, however, was postponed after PD leader Mary Harney made comments that the High Court unfortunately interpreted as preventing Haughey getting a fair trial.

Also in 1997 allegations emerged that Haughey had embezzled taxpayers' money destined for the Fianna Fáil party and that he had spent large portions of these funds on Charvet shirts and expensive dinners in a top Dublin restaurant while preaching belt-tightening and implementing budget cuts as a national policy.

Another Tribunal, the Moriarty Tribunal, subsequently delved further into Haughey's financial dealings. In his main report on Charles Haughey released on December 19, 2006, Mr. Justice Moriarty made the following findings:

Haughey was paid more than IR£8million between 1979 and 1986 from various benefactors and businessmen, including £1.3 million from then-Dunnes Stores owner Ben



Ray Burke and a young Bertie Ahern

Pictures: RollingNews.ie

Dunne. In May 1989, one of Haughey's lifelong friends, former government minister Brian Lenihan, underwent a liver transplant which was partly paid for through fundraising by Haughey. The Moriarty tribunal found that of the £270,000 collected in donations for Brian Lenihan, no more than £70,000 ended up being spent on Lenihan's medical care. The tribunal identified one specific donation of £20,000 for Lenihan that was surreptitiously appropriated by Haughey.

The tribunal found evidence of favours performed in return for money – Saudi businessman Mahmoud Fustok sought Haughey's support for Irish citizenship and paid him £50,000.

In other evidence of favours performed, the tribunal reported that Haughey arranged meetings between Ben Dunne and Revenue Commissioners civil servant Seamus Pairceir. These discussions resulted in a capital gains tax bill of Dunne being reduced by £22.8 million. Moriarty found that this was "not coincidental", and that it was a substantial benefit conferred on Dunne by Haughey's actions.

● AIB settled a million-pound overdraft with Haughey soon after he became Taoiseach in 1979; the tribunal found that the lenience shown by the bank in this case amounted to an indirect payment by the bank to Haughey.

● The tribunal rejected Haughey's claims of ignorance of his own financial affairs and Haughey was accused by the tribunal of "devaluing democracy".

BERTIE AHERN – FIANNA FAIL

Bertie Ahern as Taoiseach and, previously, Minister for Finance was investigated by the Mahon Tribunal following an allegation by Tom Gilmartin that Ahern had been paid money by Developer Owen O'Callaghan in return for 'favours'.

The Tribunal found that Ahern's explanations for lodgements to his various accounts could not be true, and thus Gilmartin's allegation could not be disproved. One lodgement of IR£30,000, in 1994, took place in the precise weeks following the circumstances Gilmartin described, with con-

temporaneous AIB notes confirming Gilmartin's account of Ahern assuring Owen O'Callaghan that a rival property development at Blanchardstown would not get tax designation, and on the same day as a meeting with Owen O'Callaghan's bag-man, Frank Dunlop. The Tribunal also discovered that Ahern, when Taoiseach, had visited Dunlop in the weeks immediately subsequent to Dunlop's admission of corrupt payments on behalf of Owen O'Callaghan, prior to Dunlop resuming the witness stand to elaborate further on his activities.

Ahern was also criticised by another Tribunal, the Moriarty Tribunal, for signing blank cheques for the then-Taoiseach Charles Haughey, without asking what those cheques were for. Ahern told the tribunal that a policy of signing blank cheques was routinely used on the Fianna Fáil party leader's account.

In relation to other published disclosed payments of €50,000 Ahern as Taoiseach admitted that he did receive money from benefactors but said on being interviewed that: "What I got personally in my life, to be frank with you is none of your business. If I got something from somebody as a present or something like that I can use it."

Previously however in 1996, while in Opposition, Ahern had stated: "The public are entitled to have an absolute guarantee of the financial probity and integrity of their elected representatives, their officials and above all of Ministers. They need to know that they are under financial obligations to nobody." (*Dáil Éireann transcript, December 1996*)

Six days after these payments were publicised, Ahern admitted in a television interview that he had received two payments totalling IR£39,000 (€50,000) in 1993 and 1994.

Ahern regarded the money as a loan, but he conceded that no repayments had at that time (September 2006) been made and no interest has been paid. He said that he had attempted to repay it, but that his friends would not accept repayment. Ahern had no bank accounts to put the money into and had hidden some of it up a chimney, he had also previously claimed to have won it on horses.



Michael Keating: undeclared tax

MICHAEL KEATING – FINE GAEL & PROGRESSIVE DEMOCRATS

On May 17, 2002 Keating, who had been subject to the three-year Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) investigation paid €250,000 back for undeclared tax. Keating was subsequently named in a British Court as a "partner in crime" in a £20 million Sterling VAT fraud.



Hugh McElvaney: 'Pocketman'

HUGH McELVANEY – FINE GAEL

The Monaghan County Councillor was recently filmed on national television asking for €10,000 "for a start" off a fictitious company to fix planning for them so they could erect wind turbines all over Monaghan. He was dubbed "Pocketman" when secret filming showed him mimicking stuffing his pockets with invisible cash in a meeting with an agent for the made-up company. When it was exposed on national TV, McElvaney said of the RTE reporter that he had "lured her into my trap" and that he plans to run for election again. He boasted that he will still get elected.

How one victim of anti-D blood poisoning scandal had to face full force of the State...

MYVIEW BY BRENDAN OGLE

IN 1977 Bridget McCole was one of many women poisoned with Hepatitis C by the state with infected blood product. She was diagnosed in 1994 having been ill for 10 years. Michael Noonan became Minister for Health in that same year, 1994.

With Noonan in the Department of Health, the approach to deal with the women was a state strategy of refusing to admit negligence and to offer the Anti-D women an ex gratia payment of compensation where they would sign away their legal rights without knowing the full facts.

When the women led by Positive Action and Bridget McCole refused to accept this, the machinery of government set about threatening those who issued High Court writs by issuing misleading information about the likely amount of court costs should they lose their actions. The compensation scheme offered was deliberately pitched to draw the victims away from the courts where the State stood to incur heavy financial losses.

Victims were told that the State would defend any actions vigorously up to the Supreme Court. Bridget McCole and the other 900 women who had tested positive were being told by the state that their plight was "an act of God" and no-one was to blame. But the State had advice in place since July 1994 that indicated its blood bank's culpability.

When Mrs McCole chose to pursue her case, the State threatened her and opposed her attempts to preserve the dying woman's privacy by suing under an assumed name. It tried to stop her in her tracks by pleading the statute of limitations.

It even denied, for the purposes of the case, that the State ever manufactured the serum with which Mrs McCole and 900 others were poisoned.

The State placed a lodgment in court, a device which puts extra

pressure on a plaintiff. All of this was done at a time when the full extent of the scandal, as later revealed by the Finlay Tribunal report, was unknown to the public.

As more questions were being asked, Michael Noonan said Mrs McCole's case would act, in effect, as a tribunal of inquiry. Yet, at the same time, he was a party to a legal strategy aimed at ensuring the case would never come to court.

In September 1996, as Mrs McCole was dying, solicitors for the state wrote to her solicitors offering to admit liability, to settle her case and to apologise for the BSB negligence.

But the letter warned that if Mrs McCole refused to settle and continued to seek exemplary or punitive damages, they would seek "all additional costs thereby incurred". This threatening letter had been shown to Michael Noonan before it was sent to Bridget McCole and was not altered after he had seen it.

It seems that a Minister who ought to have been primarily concerned to uphold the rights of a woman who had been fatally poisoned by the State was, at least tacitly, in agreement with the issuing of a threat to that woman.

Bridget McCole subsequently died in 1996, aged 54. Four years later her broken hearted husband Briannine took his own life.

Throughout the debacle, Noonan consistently held an authoritarian line on the case of Bridget McCole and would not budge on his views.

He even threatened to take Bridget's mother Ellen to the Supreme Court when she wondered why her daughter had contracted the disease.

Noonan was subsequently forced to establish the Hepatitis C Tribunal of Inquiry and to issue several apologies for his handling of the affair.

Too late for the 900 victims of State poisoning. If only the anti-D women had been bondholders, how differently they would have been treated.

BY MAUDE BARLOW

WATER is a human right. The United Nations General Assembly said so in 2010 when it adopted a resolution stating that water and sanitation are fundamental human rights. These rights are violated when governments allow water to become a commodity and use water pricing to determine who will get water services and who will not. These are the stakes in the upcoming Irish election.

In the global South, many millions are denied water because they cannot pay for it. More recently, thousands of people in Europe have had their water cut off as a result of austerity measures and tens of thousands of Americans living in inner cities of the United States such as Baltimore and Detroit are living with no running water because they cannot pay exorbitant water rates.

A “perfect storm” of declining water sources, increased income inequality and rising water rates is a huge threat to the quest for water justice. Many governments turn to water privatisation as a way to force citizens to pay more for water. Increased water rates and a decline in service is the record of privatisation everywhere.

Future generations

Thankfully, communities are fighting back. Water is not only a human right, they assert, it is a public trust that governments hold on behalf of the people, the ecosystem and future generations. Water cannot be bought and sold and for-profit corporations have no business in the delivery of an essential public service.

Around the world, since 2000, 235 municipalities that privatised their water services changed their minds and took them back under public control. These include major cities such as Berlin and Paris, which has been able to lower water rates and save money for conservation purposes.

Irish Water was set up to act as if it were a commercial business, not a public service. The bailout agreement with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund required that the public provision of water services had to end and committed Ireland to a full-cost recovery system through water metering.

This model of water delivery is really about shifting the burden of paying for water from commercial enterprise to households and gives breaks to the wealthy while imposing water charges on everyone else. It also parallels a private system and can eas-

DON'T LET THEM PUT A PRICE ON A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT...

Picture: Janet Ramsden [CC BY 2.0]

ily be converted to a public-private partnership over time. Once privatised, water services come under corporate scrutiny through trade and investment agreements such as the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between Europe and the United States (TTIP). Private water utilities can use these deals to seek financial compensation if a country or municipality decides to go back to a public water system after having been privatised.

We Canadians have lived with these corporate “rights” called Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) for over 20 years, as they are a cornerstone of the North American Free Trade Agreement. And we can tell you that ISDS is a threat to water in many ways – oAmerican corporations have challenged our right to protect our water

Picture: William Murphy [CC BY-SA 2.0]



from harmful chemicals and fracking, as just two of many examples. Canada is currently facing over €1.75 billion worth of ISDS challenges, the majority of them for environmental protections..

We live on a planet running out of clean, accessible water. Those of us blessed to live in a country with abundant water supplies have a special responsibility to care for them for all time. Water is a sacred public trust and a human right. Future generations of Irish people have the same rights as this one to clean, safe, accessible water. This should be a cornerstone issue of the upcoming election.

Maude Barlow is a Canadian activist and author. She served as Senior Water Advisor to the 63rd President of the United Nations General Assembly. Her latest book is *Blue Future, Protecting Water for People and the Planet Forever*.

Clean, safe, accessible water... should be a cornerstone issue of the upcoming election

Greece and Ireland – costs mount in cash and lives

BY VICKY DONNELLY

FOR ALL the talk of Greek ‘bailouts’, less than 10% of the €310bn provided in 2010 actually went to the people. As in the Global South over the previous decades, this was a bailout for the private financial sector, while citizens were left to pay. The result?

When the health budget was cut by 25% for hospitals and 50% for pharmaceuticals, Greece saw a 52% rise in HIV infection rates, a 21% rise in stillbirths (2008 – 2011), and a 43% spike in infant mortality.

Infectious diseases like TB rose, and the withdrawal of funding for spraying programmes has led to the reappearance of malaria. Perhaps the most heartbreaking of indicators, death by suicide, rose by 25% from

2009-2010, and by a further 40% from 2010-2011, making it the second highest level in the EU. Ireland is in first place.

Here at home, the Troika, FF and FG, and their respective coalition partners have forced through eight successive austerity budgets, amounting to €30.5 billion of adjustments. They have slashed, burned, taxed and cut the most vulnerable in society in order to secure speedy re-

payments for debt that was never ours in the first place.

Here too, health spending has fallen by 27%, pushing the number of people stranded on trolleys by 81%, and leaving Ireland with the longest waiting lists for emergency care in Europe.

At this stage, every woman, man and child in Europe has paid €366 each to meet the cost of the banking crisis, money that should have gone

to provide public services and infrastructure. However, the figure for Ireland is close to €9,000 per person.

Breaking down the Eurostat figures, Unite economist Michael Taft shows that while Ireland makes up less than 1% of Europe’s population, we have paid 42% of the banking crisis, making us serious contenders for a place in the Guinness Book of Records for the biggest bank bailout, per capita, in the world.

On the Social Wage, how do we measure up to the French?

BY MICHAEL TAFT

HOW do other EU countries manage to provide better public services and income supports than Ireland? The answer is very simple and it has nothing to do with taxing people more.

Last year RTE ran a programme comparing public services in France and Ireland. We learned that in France:

- Children receive free full-time childcare/education from the age of three (below that childcare fees are less than half Irish levels)

- A visit to the GP costs €7 and the waiting times for medical procedures can be measured in days – not months or years

- If you become unemployed, you get 80% of your last wage in unemployment benefit for up to two years.

In France public services and income supports are much stronger than here (the French healthcare system is consistently ranked in the top three worldwide – Ireland toils in the bottom half of the EU table).

But then you will hear commentators and politicians claim that people are not willing to pay higher levels of taxes needed to provide those services. What they don't know (or are trying to conceal) is that Irish workers already pay a higher personal tax rate than French workers. [SEE TABLE 1]

It seems strange that French workers are taxed less while France spends more on public services and income supports. What's the explanation?

Business tax

How about VAT, excise taxes and other indirect taxes – are they higher in France? Slightly, but only slightly. That doesn't explain it.

Could it be that French businesses pay more corporation tax? No. It is true that French companies pay a higher tax rate – more than three times the Irish rate. But for the size of our economy we raise more revenue than France. How does this happen?

Companies transfer billions of euro in profits generated in other countries and 'book' them here (i.e. pretend that they are 'Irish' profits) in order to take advantage of low tax rates. This increases the volume of profits taxed in the country and, therefore, the revenue. So the total amount of corporate tax revenue cannot explain the disparity between France and Ireland.

Personal taxation is lower in Ireland, we pay about the same amount of indirect taxes like VAT and corporate revenue is higher here: so what is the answer? Simple: French workers receive a higher, much higher, Social Wage.

The Social Wage is the employers' social insurance, or employer's PRSI. It is not a tax as such; it is part of a worker's compensation package alongside the direct wage workers get paid. The Social Wage is not paid directly to workers but is paid into the Social Insurance Fund.



Picture: Danorbit CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

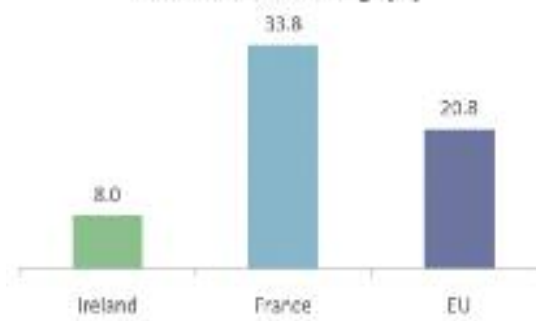
TABLE 1

Effective Tax Rates: Ireland and France (%)



TABLE 2

Effective Social Wage (%)



And it is from that Fund that French workers receive benefits like free full-time childcare and GP visits for €7.

And that explains why Irish workers don't get these same benefits. Because Irish employers pay an ultra-low Social Wage. [SEE TABLE 2]

Irish workers' social wage, or employers' PRSI, is the lowest in the entire EU (save for Denmark which doesn't have a social insurance system). It would have to quadruple to reach the French level and more than double to reach average EU levels.

Let's put euro and cents on this. In 2014 Irish employers' PRSI raised €5.5 billion. If it were at French levels, it would have raised €21 billion. That's €16 billion more than what Irish employers pay now. Imagine the public services and social protection income supports you could provide with an additional €16 billion.

France, though, is an extreme case. It is much higher than average EU levels. And because they have an older age demographic, their expenditure has to be higher than ours because they pay out more pensions.

But the Irish Social Wage is still well below EU levels. If Irish employers' PRSI were increased to just the EU average, it would raise an additional €8 billion – still a hefty sum for investment in public services and income supports.

Quality services

How do the French and other EU countries afford such high quality public services and strong income supports? It is largely due to a higher Social Wage paid to their workers. In short, employers in other countries make a much larger contribution to public services than Irish employers. Workers are already paying their fair share; employers are not.

Right2Change is proposing that the Irish Social Wage be increased – in small portions each year.

If, for instance, the Social Wage is increased by 1% each year over the lifetime of the next Government, we would have an extra €4 billion: to repair our health system, invest in a world-class education system, provide affordable childcare and lift people out of poverty.

It is not the whole solution but it plays an important role. Let's put it another way: if employers refuse to contribute at the same level as employers in other countries do, one of two things will happen:

- Either Irish workers will have to bear the full cost; or

- We won't have those services and income supports

We reject both those scenarios. People have a Right2Health, Right2Education, Right2Housing, and a Right to decent living standards.

We have the Right2Change. Now let's go out exercise that right in the polling booth.

Michael Taft is a research officer with Unite the Union

Why free education matters

and why financing education through student loans/debt is a bad idea...

BY KATHLEEN LYNCH

IN THE 19th century, when free primary education was first proposed in Europe, it was vehemently opposed by property owners on cost grounds; others claimed it might lead to social revolution as poor people would be able to read.

In the 20th century, the Council of Education Report in Ireland (1960) rejected the expansion of secondary education for different reasons but with a similar intent. Although only 16% of the population was transferring from primary to secondary education in 1960, it suggested that there was no need for any change in secondary education (Coolahan, 1981, *Irish Education, History and Structure*, 79-81). It even stated that the majority of Irish people would not be intellectually capable of benefiting from an academic education!

We are now in the 21st century and once again there is an attempt to limit access to education, in this case, higher education, not by formally excluding people but by making it increasingly expensive, through inadequate maintenance grant support, through increased fees and the removal of financial supports (grants) for those on low incomes.

The rationale for limiting access to post-secondary education is based on old and new logics; that it is too costly for the state (which begs the question, who is the state, and for whom is it too costly) and that education is a private rather than a public good. The solutions being proposed are to make higher educational colleges rely more on private and commercial funding¹, and to individualise and privatise the cost of higher education. It is suggested that Irish students should take on debt (loans) to pay for their higher education rather than receive state supports or grants.

DEBT

Debt is a payment from the better off to the less well off. It is a transfer of wealth from those who are poorer to those who are richer at a given time, very often from younger poorer people to older and richer people.

Taking on large loans (be it mort-

gages or student loans) is about storing up debt and anxiety for the future. Loans and debts limit choices: they tie people to paying back debts and have an opportunity cost. Being in debt may mean staying in jobs you dislike or even hate; debt is a form of control and needs to be seen as such (see Sanchez Bajo and Roelants, *Capital and the Debt Trap*, 2011).

The dangers of going into debt for education is best seen from the US as it has operated a loan system for a long time: student debt in the US has already surpassed the nation's credit card debt, and is well over \$1 trillion US dollars; some regard it as the new

'bubble' waiting to burst (Goodnight, Hingstman and Green 2015, *The Student Debt Bubble*, Journal of Cultural Economy, Vol. 8, 1). In Ireland, there needs to be a national recognition about the dangers of private debt not just public debt.

EDUCATION CUTS AND STUDENT DEBT

There have been a number of really pernicious cuts in further and higher education that are profoundly class-biased and minority-biased since the financial crisis. New entrants under the Back to Education Allowance (benefiting the disabled, lone parents and unemployed) no longer get maintenance support. This makes it almost impossible for those mature students on low incomes, or those with young children who need childcare, to return to third-level education.

What has been happening since the

crisis is that many students are becoming impoverished due to lack of supports. Between 2010 and 2011 alone, students were among the groups that showed a statistically significant change in their at-risk-of-poverty rate: while 22.7% of students were at-risk-of-poverty in 2010, this rose to 31.4% in 2011 (CSO, 2013: 4)². *Over one third of all students, 33.7%, were at risk of poverty in 2014*³. Yet, we have no national study of student indebtedness in Ireland. Moreover, those students who are from low-income families on grants at undergraduate level (46% of all those in College), and who need to do a further

Picture: Chris Potter (CC BY 2.0)

degree/diploma to qualify for a job (such as the PME required for second-level teaching⁴) with some minor exceptions, now receive no grant for fees. The removal of grants for postgraduate education has created a social class advantage in the labour market for those from upper-income families as others often cannot afford postgraduate qualifications.

EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD & HUMAN RIGHT

Education is a human right: it enables people to know the world, to think freely, to make choices and to overcome prior disadvantages. While further and higher education is a private good, it is also a very substantial public good: it benefits employers, businesses and industry by providing them with skilled staff; it benefits the body politic by enhancing cultural, social and public life; and it enables the country as a whole to compete internationally for investment where advanced education is a growing requirement.

Taking into account involuntary part-time work, and workers marginally attached to the labour market, the youth employment rate in Ireland is much higher than is admitted, closer to 45% , and Ireland has one of the largest rates of youth who are neither in employment nor in education (NEET) (Figure 14, *OECD Economic Surveys: Ireland 2013*: 28-29). Given this situation, it is both counter-intuitive and counter-productive to prevent students from low-income families from benefiting from further and higher education.

The solution to the funding challenges of higher education is to fund it from general social expenditure, through increased taxation if necessary. This would mean higher taxes on capital (especially financial capital that involves mere speculation), taxing businesses that benefit specifically from the human capital provided via higher education, taxing unearned wealth, and taxing those higher earners who benefit from publicly-funded higher education.

The solution is definitely not to force young Irish people into debt through a loan system.

Kathleen Lynch is Professor of Equality Studies, Dept of Social Justice, UCD

REFERENCES

¹Public funding accounted for around 80% of the higher education sector's core income in 2008; the government now only provides 65% of higher education funding. Ireland is now out of line with most of its EU partners: 79 per cent of funding in EU21 countries comes from public sources (OECD *Education at a Glance*, 2014 Table B3.2.c). In Germany, fees of €1,000 per year were introduced in seven of the sixteen Länder in 2006-07, but were abolished by 2014/15 following widespread protests. (*Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education*, Discussion Paper, October 2015). Ireland is second highest in the EU in fees terms, at €3000 per annum, among that small number of countries that charge fees. England has the highest fees in Europe (but it is the exception not the norm!); students pay £9,000

(€12,000) per annum. Scotland does not charge fees to its own students. European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015. National Student Fee and Support Systems in European Higher Education – 2015/16. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg. What the Irish government has done is to reduce higher education funding per student to such a degree that it is now lower per capital than funding for 2nd level students. The level of core funding per student has fallen from €11,750 in 2008 to €9,250 in 2015. Academic staff to student ratio fell from 15.5 in 2008 to 19.5 in 2015 (Expert Group on Future Funding for Higher Education, Discussion Paper, October 2015). To meet the deficit, it is proposed the colleges take in more full-fee-paying students, (i.e. fewer Irish or EU student); that courses be self-funding

(obviously courses that are likely to have less commercial value are devalued); and that colleges undertake more applied, commercially-led research (Department of Education and Skills (DES), (2011). National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030-Report of the Strategy Group).

²http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/silc/2011/silc_2011.pdf

³European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, <http://www.eapn.ie/eapn/training/poverty-in-ireland>

⁴The fees for the PME to qualify as a second-level teacher (after a three or four year degree) is approximately €12,000



Picture: Francisco Osorio (CC BY 2.0)

BY TOM STOKES

IN 2010 Fine Gael released a plan for democratic reform promising a new constitution, a single-chamber Oireachtas, a new Dáil, open government, and empowering the citizen.

In power since 2011 with Labour as its coalition partner, that plan now lies in tatters. What citizens got instead was some minor tinkering with the existing constitution, still a dual-chamber Oireachtas, a less democratic Dáil, an even more secretive government, a blatant contempt for the Opposition, and a further disempowering of the citizenry.

With its overwhelming majority this government, if it was serious, could have set about what Enda Kenny and others described as a 'Democratic Revolution'. Instead, Fine Gael and Labour have used that majority to jettison many of their election promises, to ram through unpopular policies – Irish Water springs to mind – and to treat the Opposition with naked contempt.

Business tax

The main reform that we can see is the thrashing of collective cabinet responsibility to make policy and to present it to parliament for ratification. Now it is a gang of four who make the decisions – the Taoiseach, the Tánaiste, the Minister of Finance and the Minister for Public Expenditure. The rest of the cabinet provides the first rubber stamp to their decisions, and whipped government backbenchers provide the second.

With this precedent set, in a single party government it might be just a gang of two that makes crucial decisions – the Taoiseach and the Minister for Finance. Who knows, one day it might be just the Taoiseach. Mussolini springs to mind. That is where untrammelled power leads, unless it is stopped.

If we are to rescue democracy, and to enhance it to ensure that the people exercise democratic control we need to go back to basics.

We are told that this is a republic although that is debatable, and so we need a constitution that is fit for a republic. The existing 1937 constitution, created for a non-republic, does not fit that bill.

A constitution of a republic would establish in the first place where power ultimately resides. In a true republic all power flows from the people. As Cicero laid down in his dictum issued 2,200 years ago, "the republic is the property of the people". All other exercise of power is subordinate to that and subject to democratic control by the people. That is the premise upon which a modern post-Enlightenment republic must be created.

A good example of a constitution



Picture: RollingNews.ie

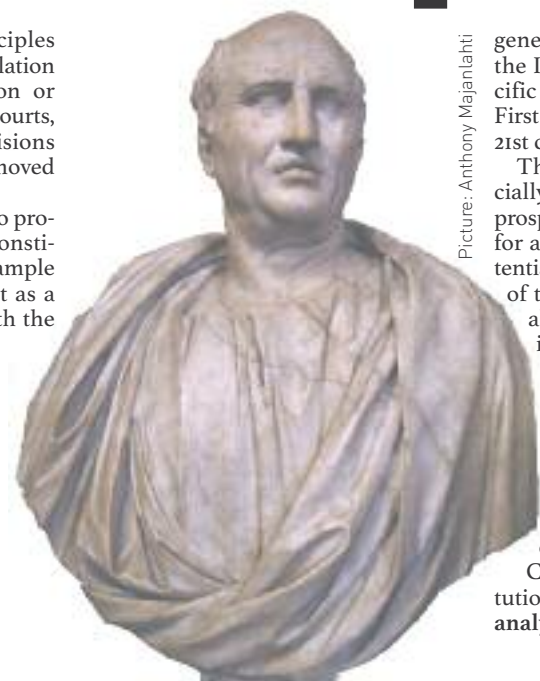
A new constitution is vital for a new republic

created for such a republic is the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela introduced by Hugo Chavez in 1999. It is divided into nine sections: Fundamental Principles; Geographical Spaces and Political Division; Duties, Human Rights and Guarantees; Public Power; Organisation of National Public Authority; Socioeconomic System; National Security; Protection of the Constitution; Constitutional Reforms.

It is in such a constitution that the

Right2Change policy principles should reside rather than in legislation which is open to interpretation or change by the executive and the courts, whereas as constitutional provisions they could only be altered or removed by the will of the people.

It would be a useful first step to promoting the adoption of a new constitution to take the Venezuelan example and where appropriate to use it as a model but to adapt it in line with the



Picture: Anthony Majanlahti

general vision of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic and the more specific Democratic Programme of the First Dáil in 1919, and with the needs of 21st century Ireland.

There is one additional and crucially important benefit of raising the prospect of creating a new constitution for a real republic, and that is the potential for engaging not just the people of the existing 26-County State, but all of the people of Ireland including unionists in imagining a new future where they, as equal citizens, exercise political control through a constitution of their own making.

And that, apart from all of the other benefits that a constitution of a republic would bring, is a change worth making.

Check out the Venezuelan Constitution online at- <http://venezuelanalysis.com/constitution>

As Cicero laid down in his dictum issued 2,200 years ago, 'the republic is the property of the people'

Austerity by another name – a look back at the 1970s

BY VICKY DONNELLY

IN THE 1970s, a global debt crisis – caused by reckless lending by American and European banks to developing countries – threatened to bring down the entire global banking system.

In the face of this catastrophe the IMF and the World Bank had two options: rescue the people, facing breaking point in their efforts to repay loans that were not theirs, or save the banks?

Yes, they opted to save the irresponsible lenders. New loans were issued so that the banks could be paid off, allowing the lenders to walk

away virtually unharmed, while people got saddled with the bill.

The IMF then imposed punishing economic Structural Adjustment programmes to 'assist' countries with debt repayments.

With no regard for the human cost, countries were forced to slash spending on health, education and welfare provisions; to cut public sec-

tor jobs and services; eliminate food and farming subsidies; focus on cash crops and exports, to open up their markets, and to privatise everything they could – forests, mines, and later, water.

A review of IMF loan conditions (2000) revealed that 30% of cases demanded water charges. Structural adjustment hit the poorest and cost

lives. If any of this sounds familiar, it's because decades later, and half a world away, the IMF and its Troika partners are still promoting the very same policy prescriptions.

Structural Adjustment is now called Austerity, but it remains the cover story for the transfer of vast amounts of private gambling losses to public shoulders.



Picture: Dustin Gaffke (CC BY 2.0)

\$19 billion... a bite and a half of lost Govt revenue

BY DAVID GIBNEY

IF YOU OR I owe the Irish government €150, they'll take us to court and spend up to €8,000 sending you to prison. If, however, you owe the Irish government – let's see – \$19,000,000,000.00, they'll spend millions fighting to ensure you don't have to pay it.

That's the obvious conclusion from the ongoing dilemma about whether Apple should have to pay their taxes or not. There is currently an investigation by the European Commission as to whether the tax avoidance by Apple in Ireland equates to the Irish state giving the business an unfair advantage. The probe could result in Apple being forced to pay back between \$9bn and \$19bn, but the Irish government have bizarrely taken the side of Apple.

As the *Washington Post* said: "The Irish government really, really doesn't want to get this money and is fighting as hard as it can to avoid receiving it." Now that does sound unusual to

you or me? With this extra income Ireland could double the spend on healthcare (€13.1bn) this year or treble the investment in education (€8bn) or even multiply our spend on water infrastructure 10 times over and still have enough left to address homelessness, asylum seekers, and many other crisis that we are currently experiencing.

The reason the Irish government is fighting so hard to avoid receiving badly needed funds is because it would damage our reputation as a tax haven. It doesn't matter that 1,500 children spent Christmas in emergency accommodation or that 73 families are losing their homes every single month. It's irrelevant that we now have 80 and 90 year olds waiting 48 hours on trolleys to be seen in a hospital. As long as we can continue to allow multinationals to avoid paying tax here, that's OK.

Both the Irish Government and Apple have said that if the EU finds that Apple owes money to Ireland, they will take action against the ruling.

Dave Gibney is Communications Officer at Mandate Trade Union

BEWARE: ELECTION BUZZWORD STABILITY

Fine Gael and Labour have made us all more insecure

BY RONAN BURTENSHAW

"STABILITY". The word we have heard more than any other from Fine Gael and Labour in this election campaign.

"After years of hardship and recession," the argument goes, "Ireland is finally recovering. Don't change it, stick with a formula that is working, what we need now is the stability of a re-elected government."

But for the majority of us, Fine Gael and Labour's government has not seen an increase in stability. In fact, if you listen to people around the country describe how their lives have changed in recent years another word comes to the fore: insecurity.

After years of economic policies that favoured a small, wealthy elite, the parts of our lives where we need security most – at home, in work and in our healthcare – are more and more uncertain.

The result is that, while the political class talk about stability, hundreds of thousands of people across Ireland feel they are walking a tightrope.

HOUSING

Few of us have enjoyed housing security under Fine Gael and Labour.

For tenants in many areas rents are spiralling out of control. In Dublin City, it costs €400 more per month to rent than it did when this government came to power. That's an increase of 40%. In Galway, prices are up €122; in Kildare, €150; in Meath, €155; in Louth €122. These amount to thousands of euro per year less in people's pockets.

The quality of housing in the private rental sector has also taken a sharp nosedive – with a number of recent surveys showing that most properties fail to meet basic standards. This is unlikely to improve with Alan Kelly's reintroduc-

stability

stə'bilɪti/

noun

the state of being stable.

"There are fears for the political stability of the area"

synonyms: firmness, solidity, steadiness, secureness, strength, fastness, stoutness, sturdiness, security, safety

tion of the shoebox apartment into the market.

Meanwhile, social housing waiting lists have exploded. In 2013, local authority figures showed the number had reached 130,000 – and there has been a 45% increase in demand since then.

The Central Bank's response to the overheating housing market facilitated by government policies was to tighten the deposit requirements for mortgages, but this has had the effect of squeezing first-time buyers. Almost 10% of those who have mortgages are more than 90 days in arrears as they struggle to afford repayments.

Maybe the most damaging part of the crisis has been homelessness, with the numbers living on our streets hitting a record high of 5,000 in January.

Most of these problems are caused by a lack of supply. But the Government has repeatedly refused to build the houses needed to improve things – the result of which is a housing market that adds huge stress to most of our lives.

WORK

Under Fine Gael and Labour many of us are working longer hours for less pay in more insecure conditions.

According to a 2014 OECD report,

Ireland has the second highest number of low-paying jobs in the developed world – with more than one in five Irish workers are classified as 'low-paid'.

Yet the Government's response to eight years of wage stagnation for those working on the minimum wage in January was to increase it by a meagre 50c per hour. This was so insufficient that its own low-pay commission split over the increase, with more progressive voices producing a minority report demanding a higher increase.

Added to the low paid we have well over 100,000 people underemployed in Ireland, unable to get the hours they need in work. The combined effect of this is that half of the population earn less than €28,500 per year.

Around the same number are working in low-hours contracts, which have become far more frequent under this government. Under these terms workers in sectors as diverse as retail, restaurants, home helps and academia find that their hours can change at a moment's notice – going from full-time employment to hardly working at all.

In addition to making it difficult to plan a life or consistently afford rent, these contracts also make workers less confident pursuing legitimate complaints for fear of losing their hours.

Underemployed, poorly-paid and precarious workers might bring stability for companies' profit rates, but they won't find much of it in their own lives. This is the future of work under a re-elected Fine Gael-Labour government.

HEALTH

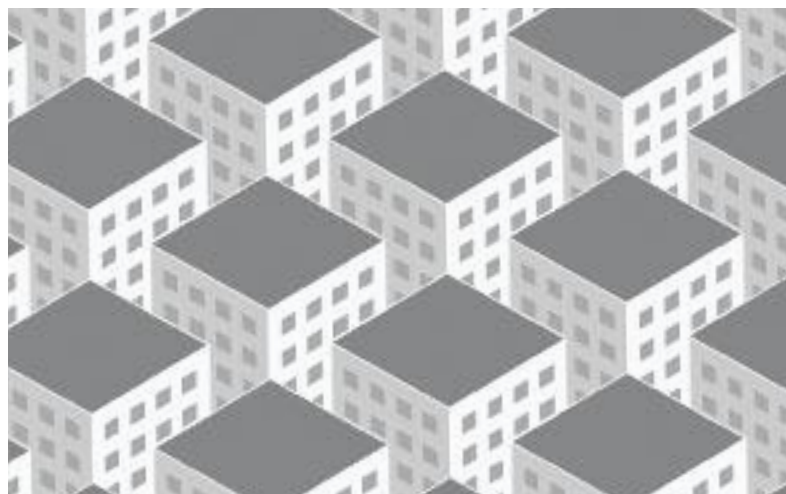
Enda Kenny was elected Taoiseach in 2011 on a promise to "end the scandal of trolleys in our hospitals". But under his watch the situation has got worse.

The number of people on trolleys in Irish hospitals in January was up 26% from this time last year. At one point last month the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation (INMO) said a record 601 people were waiting for admission in hospitals across Ireland.

The situation in Accident and Emergency departments has reached the stage where nurses have twice threatened to go on strike – not for their own



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Picture: Contando Estrelas (CC BY-SA 2.0)

pay but because the overcrowding was so dangerous for patients.

A recent survey by the Swedish Health Consumer Powerhouse found that Ireland had the longest waiting times for A&E in Europe, and only fared marginally better for surgeries and medical appointments.

It also found that Ireland had the highest rate of private health insurance in Europe, with 40% paying the ever-increasing premiums to supplement an under-resourced and poorly-managed public health system. Accordingly, we ranked in the bottom three of 35 in patient organisation feedback on

accessibility to healthcare.

To add insult to injury, we are now paying €130 per year more for healthcare than we were in 2007 – money that a lot of people struggle to afford but hasn't improved the service one bit.

For a lot of us the stress brought about by insecurity in our work and home life impacts severely on our mental health. Yet, in a country where these conditions are rife, Ireland's mental health services are woefully inadequate.

Fine Gael and Labour may have made some ground on awareness-raising but unless you can afford private

mental health services you can be waiting weeks or even months for appointments with counsellors.

Despite the rhetoric, there are now 11% fewer people working in mental health services than there were at the time of the crash and €200 million less spent on the sector. Under Fine Gael and Labour vital local services and wards have seen their opening times reduced or have been closed altogether.

THEIR STABILITY, OUR INSTABILITY

These are only some of the many ways our lives are more insecure under this government:

- Rising public transport costs and cuts to rural services mean many of us are worried about basic travel.
- Education cuts mean intensified competition for school places in many cities and long commutes in rural areas.
- Parents of special needs children find access to supports in their communities and schools more and more difficult.
- Cuts to welfare rates for young people means many more are living in poverty or reliant on their parents for support.
- Over 480,000 Irish people emigrated during the austerity years, more than 10% of the population, many effectively sacrificed by a government that refused to give them the option of remaining here.

How could a government presiding over these conditions believe they were giving people "stability"? The truth is for the people Fine Gael and Labour represent – the political class, big business and the wealthiest sections of our society – there has been stability. Government policy forced the costs of Ireland's crisis onto everyone else.

Their gain has been our loss. Their stability has been our instability. The question is, why do they think we would vote for it again?

Comment

N

The recession and its impact on workers' mental health

BY BILLY WALL

HAVING a background in construction doesn't allow me to call myself an expert on medical conditions nor does it allow me speak at length on the issue of mental health.

However, what it does allow me to do is to put pen to paper on what I – and my members – have witnessed over the past few years, as we all suffered at the hands of the recession.

Mental health has become a major issue to us all and most of us have been touched by it in some shape or form.

What is mental health? Mental health Ireland describes it as "an essential part of your overall wellbeing – being comfortable, healthy and happy".

A person in good health, both mentally and physically, can have a sense of belonging both in a family, in the community and as a member of society. The World Health Organisation states that mental health is determined by socio-economic, biological and environmental factors. In other words, our surroundings, our society have major effects on our mental health.

Let's not mix it up with someone feeling depressed or down at different stages of their lives when things don't go as you would want them to. Everyone can feel down and this can last for small periods of time. Generally people can discuss these issues with various family members, friends or doctors, if needs be.

Good relationships with family, friends, colleagues and the wider community are important for mental wellbeing. The Right2Water campaign, for example, has helped forge friendships with people from different communities from around the country – and this must be viewed as a positive development on so many different fronts.

The construction industry in Ireland is predominately serviced by men. Over the course of the recession my members have witnessed some horrific scenes on building sites through accidents and, in some instances, fatalities.

What one of our members witnessed one morning after arriving at work was to see a man crying on a balcony while holding a rope and a knife in his hand. After some time talking with this man, he was eventually convinced that this wasn't the answer to his problems.

I am not saying that our members are all trained and qualified psychotherapists, but this man needed

someone to speak to and didn't know whom he could turn to.

A report, which looked at the level of suicide in the construction industry highlighted a number of key statistics:

- Every week in Ireland 10 people die by suicide;
- Eight out of those 10 are men;
- 6,520 suicides took place in Ireland between 2000 and 2012;
- 5,263 of those suicides were by men (81%);
- 2,137 male suicides took place in Ireland between 2008 and 2012; and
- 93% of people working in the construction sector are men.

In recent years, the National Office for Suicide Prevention commissioned the National Suicide Research Foundation to undertake a study and to set up a Suicide Support and Information System (SSIS). In the second phase of that study, some 307 cases of suicide in Cork between September 2008 and June 2012 were examined (275 suicides and 32 open verdicts at inquest).

Of the 307 deaths, 246 (80%) were males. Some 120 of those had been working in the construction/production sector, a total of 49%. This was more than triple the number of deaths accounted for by next highest sector, which was agriculture.

It is clear that mental health sufferers are more likely to be men rather than women. Men working in construction have suffered hugely from the recession when construction jobs were lost overnight and men struggled with how they would pay their way in society with no job.

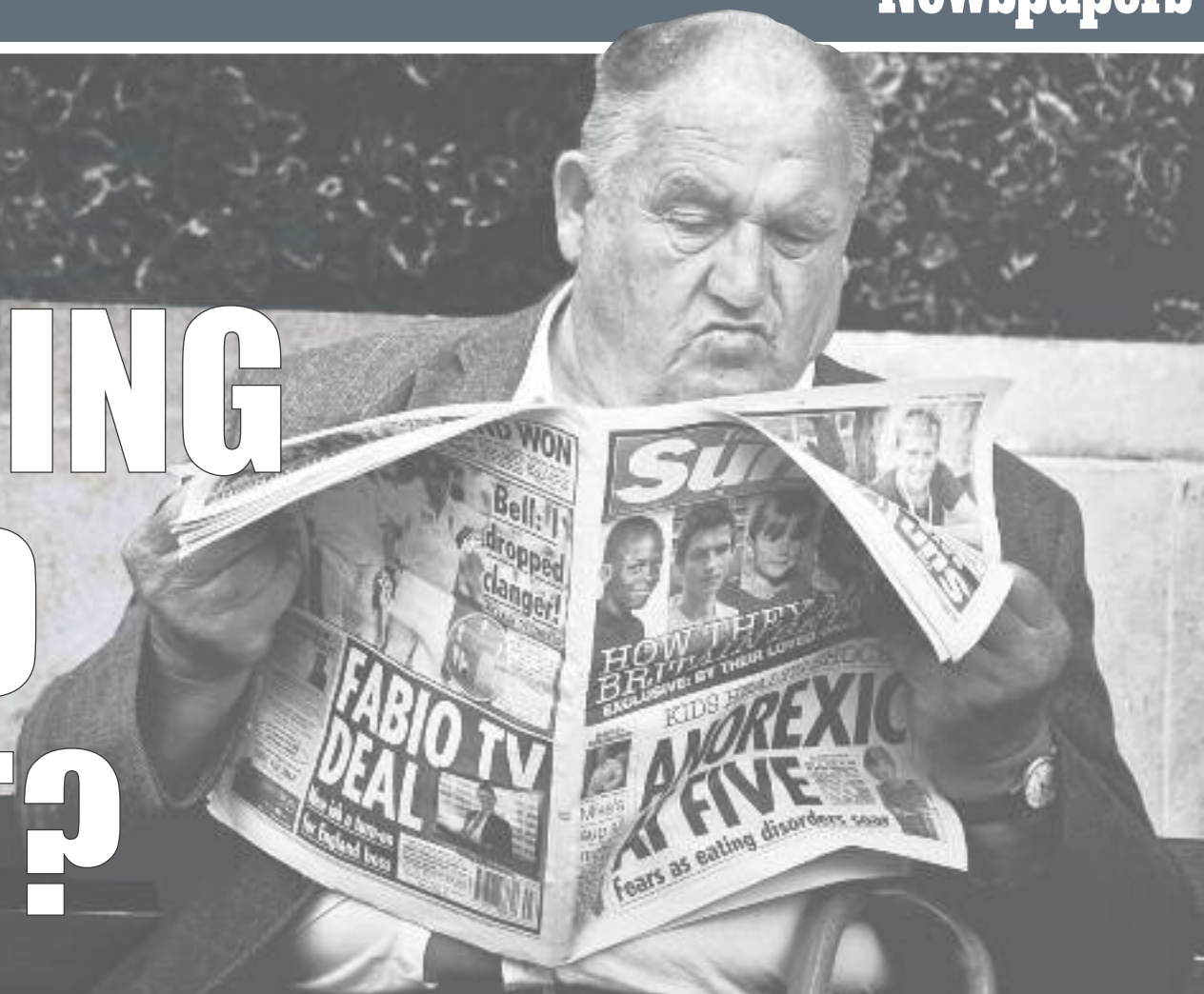
This was not a big news story, however, if the loss of jobs was experienced in the pharmaceutical sector it would be headline news. As part of the suffering that's experienced by building workers is the added bonus of being engaged as a bogus self-employed worker. This means that you're entitled to no Social Welfare benefits after working long hours and weekends for a low rates of pay.

This all contributes to low self-esteem and the feeling of total loss of power over one's own life. You can be dropped at a moment's notice.

We cannot let this pain and suffering continue. We must all look out for one another in these times as the recession continues. If you are suffering from any issue that you feel you can't talk to your loved ones about, get in touch with your GP, talk to a friend, don't hold it up inside. Life is not all about different experiences, life is the experience, don't miss out on it for any reason and play your part.

Billy Wall is General Secretary of OPATSI trade union

FANCY SOMETHING MORE TO THE LEFT?



Picture: Daniel Novta (CC BY 2.0)

BY TOM STOKES

THE Irish people, we are constantly told, are an innately conservative lot. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our history shows us to be rebellious. Far from that conservatism being part of our make-up, it is solely the consequence of cultural formation. Since 1922, that culture has been counter-revolutionary and therefore conservative. That is reflected in and by the Irish media.

Ireland is virtually unique among European countries, and many countries in the wider world, in having no significant left-wing press. The three national daily newspapers in the 'Republic' of Ireland are to all intents ideologically interchangeable.

The ideas and values they present to the readers are essentially conservative on politics, liberal on social matters, and neo-liberal on economics. The same is true about the Sunday newspapers, and about broadcast media whether privately-owned commercial stations or the State broadcaster, RTE.

Principles ridiculed

In this media environment, any ideas, values or principles that come out of left-wing ideology are routinely rubbished and ridiculed, usually with an assumed air of authority and often with a sneer. The suggestion that we could have a National Health Service is constantly dismissed as 'Utopia', as if the health systems in much of Europe, far superior to ours, could be dismissed just like that.

Demands by the Teachers' Union of Ireland and others that public funding of €100 million for private schools should be withdrawn and used instead for severely disadvantaged public schools receive an unsympathetic response in the media, much of it from privately-educated broadcasters



Picture: rollingnews.ie

and journalists. The right-wing media hegemony must be broken if there is to be any basis for Ireland's claim to be a truly democratic state. To exist, democracy requires that Fourth Pillar which is a free press that fairly and accurately presents information, analysis and opinion across the full span of political ideas, from Left to Right. Without that Fourth Pillar, democracy collapses.

The absence of fair presentation of ideas and values that offer an alternative to the political hegemony of permanent right-wing government by the ideological twins, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, denies both the notion of a 'free' press and the repetitive claim that the Irish electorate is well-informed and

well-served by its national media.

The defence of the Irish media that is routinely trotted out is that the media gives the readers what the readers want. In the first place there is no alternative offered for them to choose, secondly an audience is through repetition over time cultured into believing that what is presented is the 'norm' and is the 'common-sense' position, particularly when the same small panel of 'experts', drawn from the ranks of the political class and elevated to celebrity status by the same media, is used over and over again in print and on radio and TV shows.

The belief is fostered that there is no market for a daily newspaper with the

capacity to challenge the *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times* and *Irish Examiner*. A newspaper needs readers, not just to recoup costs through the cover price but, more importantly, to attract advertisers.

To do this it is necessary to have a readership that it is worth marketing products to, and so middle-class and wealthier readers are important, but so too are lower income readers who also consume products and services and need public service information ads.

The approximate circulation figures for the national dailies in 2015 were: *Irish Independent* – 109,524; *Irish Times* – 76,194; *Irish Examiner* – 33,198.

Could a new left-wing daily newspaper match those figures, even the lowest? And from which part of the population might it do so?

In the 2011 General Election the two conservative political parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, garnered just under 1.2 million votes. The combined vote for those other parties that are or claim to be of the Left was approximately 760,000, not counting leftist independents. Recent polls have shown that support for the Left is rising. Another figure worth considering is the total trade union membership in this state of about 600,000.

Out of either of those numbers it is difficult to see how a good quality alternative to the current trio of conservative newspapers would not be able to match at least the lowest circulation figure, that of the *Irish Examiner*.

Creative approach

But what of set-up and running costs? A creative approach would be needed, but one ally that a new newspaper has is new communications and printing technology, allowing the capacity to print simultaneously in different regions or provinces to reduce distribution costs and speed delivery.

By setting achievable circulation targets and initially using freelance journalists and interns alongside a core of seasoned professional staff under a good team of editors, it is feasible to challenge the existing Irish national dailies for readers, and to win readers away from the Irish versions of British newspapers.

The plain fact is that until an alternative to the existing conservative national daily newspapers is put in place, then the conservative media hegemony which sustains the conservative political hegemony will continue its work of distortion and propagandising, maintaining a roadblock on the journey to the day when we can legitimately say that this state is a democratic one, and not a pseudo-democratic one.

Ideas they present are essentially conservative on politics, liberal on social matters and neo-liberal on economics...



Picture: Bay Photography (CC BY 2.0)

National assets, neo-liberalism and the state of our fisheries...

BY BRENDAN OGLE

EVERY country has its national resources. Some countries have mineral wealth, or oil and gas, some have gold and diamonds.

Ireland has great resources – we have our fisheries and agriculture, and as we have learned we also have rich fields of natural gas and, possibly, oil.

One test of a nation is how it uses its own national resources for the good of its people, to maximise national wealth and well-being.

By this measure Ireland is a busted flush, busting its own citizens by surrendering their resources.

We have seen how Norway, a nation the same size as ours, uses its oil and gas resources to create a 'sovereign wealth fund' which has €130,000 in it for every man, woman and child in the state while we – gombeen Ireland – are carrying a €10,000 European banking debt for every man, woman and child in our state while we give our gas away – for nothing – to the Norwegians!

Could you get a more nation more



Picture: Fiona MacGinty-O'Neill (CC BY 2.0)

bent on harming its own citizens than that?

As I have pointed out, our key national assets include agriculture and fisheries. Ireland has some of the best agricultural land in the world and all over the island it lies fallow.

Cheap foods

What is in use is generally used to benefit the grazier large farmers of Fine Gael or, even worse, goes completely unused so we can import cheap foods from abroad to please 'the market' – neo-liberalism in action.

We also know that we export livestock – ignoring animal cruelty issues – so that the UK and others can set up

processing industries and get the consequent jobs and benefits for their nation out of our resources, as opposed to creating jobs here in Ireland.

Even our wind isn't immune as Minister for Energy Pat Rabbitte wanted to give entire Midland counties to the UK for windfarms that would provide the UK's wind energy needs – but not ours. To hell with us.

But I met an activist for Right2Change who put it all in context. We'll call him 'Andrew'. Andrew pointed out to me that Ireland had:

- approximately 10 times the fishing waters of any other EU country;
- and that those fishing waters were

the most productive in the world.

Andrew and his colleagues in our fishing ports are living in communities stripped of wealth, jobs, young people and, in many cases, even hope. Dying communities looking out at the largest and most productive fishing waters in Europe.

They are in a trap where the waters of Europe are 'common' and so can be fished by anyone – small boats, big boats, and 'super' or 'factory' trawlers.

As an industry in a small country stripped of investment, we have no super or factory boats, but the Dutch, and the Spanish have – massive ones.

Arbitrary swallow

These monsters sail around Ireland lifting everything in their wake out of our seas. Big and small fish, in season and out of season. Whack, with one large arbitrary swallow catches that would keep entire villages here thriving for months are whipped out of the ocean and gone. Just gone.

Meanwhile, once thriving small ports such as Clogherhead or Dunmore East are ceasing to exist as our bureaucrats in the Government watch our resources being swallowed up and our rural communities die.

Andrew, and hopefully many others who once earned a good living in fish-

ing and agriculture, believe they have a Right2Change that. And they do.

Andrew also told me how if a particular type of fish is caught – which is too small but dead – he is told to throw it back. If he lands it, it will be taken off him and destroyed by our fisheries 'police'. The people employed to make sure neo-liberalism wins and we all, including them, end up poor!

Andrew is not fond of this regulation. As he told me he doesn't believe in 'killing any living thing for no purpose'. So he wants to take home such matter and freeze it as feed for his crab pots. Sound 'sustainable' to you? Yeah, me too.

But he can't. It's routinely taken off him and he is told to buy his bait from a big factory, selling processed bait, which buys material off – yep, you guessed it – the Dutch super-trawlers.

Ever think our governments have been useless at this business of looking after our rural and our national assets? It has always been the case that the gombeens are screwing rural Ireland too.

Rural dwellers, and men like Andrew, have a right to take action to CHANGE that. Let us all back them when they do.

Same old parties... what have they done for you lately?

BY JULIEN MERCILLE

THE election is approaching and it may be a defining moment for Ireland, and may even make waves in Europe as well. After years of austerity, we will see if progressives have been able to establish a credible alternative to the dominant parties, especially to Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

The most important attempt to gather progressive forces together in Ireland is the Right2Change movement. It attempts to link both political parties and community groups, which is no small feat.

In my view, voters should strongly support candidates who have endorsed Right2Change.

It may all be obvious but it bears repeating that Right2Change is proposing the range of basic principles that any progressive government should enact.

A universal health care system free at the point of access that rejects commercial providers and health insurance schemes. This would be better for health but also cheaper than the two-tier system we have which is heavily driven by profit. Polls show that health care is at the top of Irish people's priorities, yet the current government has failed to deliver – or rather, it has delivered for private interests in the health care sector.

And of course there's the abolition of Irish Water and the opposition to water charges, which have energised the movement in the first place.

Right2Change also promises to enact decent policies on housing, arguably the most urgent social crisis in this country.

And there are policies targeting job creation, a sustainable environment, education, equality, and much more.

Some might say that those are too idealistic and that in practice they would never be implemented. That would be a normal reaction based on past experience with the established parties that make promise after promise but never hold them once in power.

But Right2Change is a different ani-

mal. It's rooted in communities and in political parties that care more about ordinary people than the establishment parties. And it involves unions that strive to strengthen democracy in the workplace, which is a very important aspect of progressive politics.

True, some unions have sold out to the government and have discredited the union movement. But those involved in Right2Change have a much better record and provide a strong structural basis for the movement.

Progressives have to unite despite their differences and remember that they share a lot more than whatever their disagreements might be. You don't need to agree on much more than basic progressive policies and principles as outlined above to have a strong coalition.

Basic principles

Those who seek to find perfect agreement before entering into a coalition are deluding themselves. Politics is not about putting everybody on the exact same page, it is about agreeing on basic principles and go on from that. The details can be debated later.

Of course, there should be red lines, but those are more than clear enough in the Right2Change principles. Beyond that, we fall into the realm of discussions that are too picky for the moment. There will be plenty of time to nail down the specifics once in power.

In this respect, look at the successful parties that are Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, which have controlled the government for decades. They have a unity from which the Left should learn. They have plenty of disagreements among themselves, but they stick together and emphasise basic, snappy points when they talk to the media and voters – and it works.

If progressives unite, their potential will be maximised.

Julien Mercille is a lecturer at University College Dublin. His new book, *Deepening Neoliberalism, Austerity, and Crisis: Europe's Treasure Ireland* (Palgrave) is just out. Follow him on twitter: @Julien-Mercille



Trust Yogi not the economy

BY TERENCE MCDONOUGH

MYTH has it that during the London Blitz, the British government published a poster urging the ordinary Brit to "Keep Calm and Carry On." This could very well be the electoral slogan of the current coalition. Fine Gael and Labour are taking credit for "the recovery" and Paddy is being urged to do nothing that could jeopardise "the recovery," like voting for any member of the Opposition.

The Government is hoping to get to the other side of the election without having to comment on much of anything else. It is, therefore, extremely important to subject this notion of "the recovery" to a little critical scrutiny, especially as the Irish media appears to think its role is to cheer-lead rather than raise

questions in this regard.

This kind of "recovery" is nothing to brag about. It is true that Ireland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the statistic notoriously inflated by multinational corporations' tax avoidance strategies, has now returned to pre-crisis levels. This, however, is not the number which matters most to the ordinary Irish person. What we need to know is whether the level of employment has recovered to pre-crisis levels and the answer to that is an emphatic "no."

In most past recessions the number of people in employment returns to its pre-recession level within 24 months. In Ireland it has now been fully 100 months since total employment started to fall and we have not returned the number of people at work to its previous level. Successive governments have presided over a recession which is already more than four times longer than your ordinary reces-

There are many warning signs in the global horizon today... the EU economy is completely stagnant

sion. As this is written the official unemployment rate is around 9%. This is around twice the official unemployment rate at the start of the crisis. Even this standard unemployment figure is a considerable understatement of the

Water charges – the not so hidden agenda

BY DAVE GIBNEY

THERE are three obvious agendas behind the imposition of domestic water charges. If you were to believe the government spin, you'd think it was about conservation. But the three real reasons are:

- Shifting the burden of paying for water from commercial enterprises to households;
- Giving tax breaks to the wealthy while imposing water charges on everyone else; and
- Lining up the future privatisation of our water industry.

There are a number of ways we can prove the conservation argument is a farce. The first and most obvious is through direct comparison with other countries that already have domestic water charges in place.

According to the UK water supply boards, where they have had domestic water charges in place since the 1980s, the average end user uses 68,405 litres of water per year. Yet, according to Irish Water, that figure in Ireland is 54,750 litres. So the evidence shows that water charges actually increase water consumption by up to 20%.

A SIPTU report from 2011 flagged up the results of international research into the issue. It found that installing domestic water meters was unlikely to make any real difference to the amount of water used by families.

The report stated: "In the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands it has been found that metering each home makes little difference to the amount of water used by families. Researchers have found that while consumption dropped initially following the installation of meters, after a relatively short time, this was more or less reversed with families returning to the pre-metered level of consumption."

Senior Executive Engineer for Water, Gerry Concannon, estimated that the costs of metering – involving installation, maintenance, administration and replacement – would double our spend on water in the medium term.

That figure has now trebled, and yet the professional body Engineers Ireland stated: "The proposed expenditure on water metering would mean spending more than €1 billion which we don't have on something we don't need!"

So if conservation is not the real motivation behind water charges, and we're spending so much money on a phenomenally-expensive metering programme, what is the real motivation behind water charges?

1. Shift the burden from corporations to households

The EU says that households account for only 10% of all water usage. The biggest users of water are agriculture



Graphic: Jaidi Amal (CC BY 2.0)

and commercial companies, using 90% of all water. Yet, a quick look at the breakdown of the new water billing structure shows that householders will initially be expected to pay up to 78% of all costs, and that figure will no doubt rise in the immediate future.

Commercial companies will be expected to pay 22% of the costs for using 90% of the product, yet at this point in time, evidence shows they already have a non-compliance rate of 37% and €50m in water debt has been written off for them.

2. Give tax breaks to the wealthy while imposing water charges on everyone else...

In the 2015 Budget, the Government gave a €405m tax break to the top 17% of earners. In the most recent Budget they gave further tax cuts disproportionately benefiting the highest earners. Those political decisions widened the wealth gap by €1,003 in two short years.

At the same time, Minister Alan Kelly has said he expects households to pay €271m in water charges. This is simply a transfer of wealth from the poorest in our society to the wealthiest. The unemployed, underemployed, disabled and pensioners all spend more of their time in the home than those who are lucky enough to be in full-time employment. This means they'll use more water and when the cap on charges of €260 per year ends in 2019, their water bills will spiral out of control.

3. Lining up the future privatisation of water industry

Water is one of the most profitable industries in the world. In 2013, in Britain, private water companies made profits of €2.81bn and paid €2.55bn to shareholders while paying only €101m in taxes. Seven water companies paid no corporation tax at all.

The dividends paid out to UK water companies are double that of your average non-financial company. As a result, there is almost no retained profit which is usually used to upgrade infrastructure future.

More than half of all water companies in the UK are owned by Private Equity Consortiums – a group of High Net Worth Individuals who pool their money to strip profits from any industry they can get their hands on. The impact

is that for every £100 spent on a water bill in the UK, between £20 and £30 goes directly to the companies.

Anyone who still believes that Irish Water is about conservation should ask themselves why the Irish Government is steadfastly refusing to hold a referendum which would enshrine ownership in the hands of the public. This simple referendum could save the Labour Party and many of the seats for Fine Gael and yet they still stubbornly refuse.

When the Troika visited Portugal and Greece, their bailout terms included the privatisation of water services. That was because they had already metered, meaning there was a revenue stream in place. In Ireland we hadn't put in place a revenue stream so the Troika played the long game and forced the metering programme into our Memorandum of Understanding first. Next step, full privatisation.

Without a referendum, there will be nothing a future government can do to prevent this.

Falls apart

In lining up this policy, the last two governments have cut spending on water by 65% and then have the neck to complain about the need for further investment after the infrastructure falls apart.

As Noam Chomsky said: "That's the standard technique of privatisation: defund, make sure things don't work, people get angry, you hand it over to private capital."

That's why water will continue to be the single most important issue for the upcoming general election. This one policy exposes the priorities for political parties and politicians.

Some are happy to lift the burden on employers, who already benefit from one of the lowest corporation tax rates and lowest employers' PRSI rates in Europe, and impose that burden on low and middle income households.

They are happy to transfer wealth from some of the poorest in our society to the wealthiest. And they're happy to line up our water services for future privatisation. They do this unashamedly hiding behind a bogus conservation argument. It's our job to hold them accountable, and we can do this by joining and supporting the Right2Change campaign as the election looms. Go to www.right2change.ie for more.

David Gibney is Coordinator at Right2Water/Right2Change

Enda on

extent of the problem. Many people who are out of work and available for employment are not included in this figure. If you are unemployed, but didn't actively look for work during a particular week, you are not counted as unemployed.

Similarly if another temporary commitment prevented you from looking for work in that week, you are not counted as unemployed. Most significantly, if you have part-time work, but need a full time job, you are counted as employed rather than partially unemployed.

Broader measure

A broader measure of unemployment and underemployment which takes these situations into account would put the current unemployment figure at 17.1%. This figure still does not take account of the large number of Irish, particularly young people who have emigrated. If it were not for emigration today's unemployment rate would be 3% to 4% higher. Around one in five Irish workers are today still impacted by unemployment or underemployment. In fact, Ireland leads the EU in the percentage of the population living in households with low work intensity.

The Government and the media claim we have turned the corner because the unemployment rates have dropped. However, the duration of the

crisis means this is no ordinary recession. It is more like the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the United States, the Great Depression turned the corner in 1932 when employment began to rise, but it would be 10 more years before the depression was fully over. This is because employment started to drop again in 1937.

There are many warning signs on the global horizon today. The European economy is completely stagnant. The BRICS countries, which include Brazil, Russia and China, are on a downward slide. Debt in the global economy is higher than it ever was and rising. The problems Ireland faces today are global in scale and will only be resolved on a global basis. Persistent problems elsewhere are very important to Ireland's future prospects.

The American baseball player, Yogi Berra, is famous for pithy and sometimes humorous observations like, "The future ain't what it used to be." He is also said to have coined the famous sports observation, "It ain't over till it's over."

When it comes to the Irish economic crisis, listen to Yogi Berra, not Enda Kenny.

Terrence McDonough is Professor of Economics at National University of Ireland, Galway



Gan infheistíocht ní bheidh sa nGaeiltacht ach fásach eisimirce

Pictiúr: Sludge G [CC BY 2.0]

LE EOIN Ó MURCHÚ

CÉAD bliain ó shoin bhí cás na Gaeilge go mor chun tosaigh in aigne na ndaoine a d’fhógair Phoblacht na hÉireann taobh amuigh de Ard-Oifig an Phoist i mBaile Átha Cliath.

Ach más oidhre ar an bPoblacht sin í stát reatha na hÉireann cá seasann an Ghaeilge anois, agus cén bhaint atá aici leis an toghchán atá le reachtáil anois.

Tá freagra simplí ar an gceist sin: is cuma leo siúd an rialaíonn an tír cás na Gaeilge. Cuirtear bac ar lucht labhartha na teanga í a úsáid in aon chumarsáid leis an stát, agus fágfar gaelscoileanna ag deire na scuaine arís is arís nuair tá cúrsaí oideachais le plé.

Agus ta cás na Gaeiltachta níos measa fós: i gcúrsaí oideachais tá easpa millteanach de téacsleabhair Ghaeilge, níl curuculam ar leith ann d’aos scoile na Gaeiltachta, is brúitear Bearla ar pháistí Ghaeltahct gan stad.

Tá geilleagar na Gaeilge ar an ngann-chuid freisin. Fásach na heisimirce atá i gcuid mhaith den Ghaeltacht, agus ní nach ionadh mar sin go mbíonn tuismitheoirí ag iarraidh go mbeadh Béarla fiúntach ag an gcuid páistí, mar is í an teanga sin a bhéas ag teastáil uatha nuair a théann siad thar lear.

Ghoill an culú eacnamaíochta ar an ngaeltacht mar a ghoill ar an tír ar fad, ach níos measa sa méid gur beag an tionscalú nó an infheistíocht thionscail atá ann ar an gcead dul síos.

Se bun agus barr an scéil na go bhfuil infheistíocht stait lárnach le go mbeadh todhchaí ar bith ag an teanga – sa ngaeltacht agus taobh amuigh.

Infheistíocht i scoileanna, i leabhair,

Cá seasann an Ghaeilge i dtaobh

in áiseanna foghlamtha is eile.

Agus tá infheistíocht stait ag teastáil don eacnamaíocht i gcoitinne freisin le jobannaí a chur ar fail insan ngaeltacht, le stop a chur le meath na gaeiltachta atá mar thoradh ar an eisimirce.

Da mbeahd mujínín ag daoine óga go bhfuil todhchaí dóibh sa ngaeltacht bhéadh níos mó seans ann an teanga a threisiu ann, agus tríd sin an teanga a threisiú is fhorleathnú ar fud na tíre.

Mar sin tá rogha le déanamh ag lucht labhartha na Gaeilge freisin, rogha le déanamh acu siúd a bhíonn díograiseach faoin teanga.

Má leanann muid le cúrsaí mar atá beidh muid ag leanacht le túsáit a thabhairt arís is arís do lucht saibhris is dona bainc (dhúchasacha agus Eorpacha). Fágfar na riachtanais atá ag lucht labhartha na Gaeilge ag an deire mar a bhíonn muid i gcónaí.

Polasaithe difriúla atá ag teastáil – polasaithe a chinnteoidh go mbeidh na hacmhainní ag an stát freastal ceart a dhéanamh ar riachtanais an phobail, agus riachtanais phobal na Gaeilge ina measc.



Léaráid: Xoan Baltar [CC BY 2.0]

duinne lucht labhartha na Gaeilge: duine a thoghadh a bhfuil líofacht Gaeilge aige nó aici ach a ghlacann le polasaithe a thugann túsáit don rachmas is don saibhreas; nó duine a thoghadh ata b’fhéidir ar bheagán Ghaeilge ach a ghlacann leis na prionsabail seo a thugann seans don teanga is dá lucht labhartha maireachtáil agus fás?

Ar ndóigh, sé an rud is fearr ar fad ná guth a thabhairt dóibh siúd, baill phairtí nó daoine aonaracha a abhfuil Gaeilge líofa acu, a thacaíonn leis an nGaeilge agus a ghlacann leis na prionsabail seo freisin.

Le ró-fhada bhí muintir na Gaeilge sásta fanachth ciuin is beasach ar an taobh líne. Ach tá deis againn sa toghchán seo tús a chur le polaitíocht úr – polaitíocht a thabharfaidh todhchaí dúinn.

Vótáil mar sin dona páirtithe is neamhspleáigh a thaobhaíonn le Right2Change, agus leanfar ag aistriú go dtí páirtithe is neamhspleáigh a thaobhaíonn leo freisin.

Tá cómhtheacs na bpolasaithe sin le fáil insna prionsabail Right2Change (Ceart le hAthrú).

Mar sin, sa toghchán seo ma ta tú dairire faoi cás na Gaeilge ní mor duit freisin do ghuth a thabhairt dóibh siúd

a thacaíonn leis na prionsabail seo, mar seo iad na prionsabail a thabharfadh deis athbheóchana dúinn, ó thaobh an phobail is ó thaobh na teangan dhe.

Mar seo í an cheist: cé acu is fearr

Our punishing childcare costs

BY LYNN RUANE

AS A mother of two young girls who footed the childcare bills alone, I often felt like there was a wall built around my house – with the sole purpose of imprisoning me. A wall not made of bricks but of poverty, inequality and bad policy.

As I think back, I can hear the voice I had in my own head saying something I've heard said many times over the past few years: "I want to go to college today but I owe the crèche money I haven't got, so this week I will pretend to be sick." I wanted to go to class but I just couldn't afford to sometimes. I would fall behind, but falling behind was more manageable than the embarrassment and shame I would feel if I had to admit to the crèche that I could not afford to pay my bill this week.

This was a regular occurrence for me throughout my time in both work and employment and if I had allowed it to defeat me, then I wouldn't be in the position I am in today. So many women with great potential are forced out of employment and out of education because, like me, they cannot meet the colossal cost of childcare.

In my experience, childcare is the biggest barrier for women in Ireland accessing employment and education, yet it's a barrier easily removed. Equality for women will only be achieved when we have the same access to the workplace, education and public office that our male counterparts do. I recently learned that Ireland has one of



Swedish mums enjoy childcare that Irish counterparts can only dream about

the lowest percentages of public expenditure allocated to childcare. In countries like Denmark, childcare costs an average of €6,000 a year. In Ireland, you could be expected to fork out up to €26,000.

In OECD countries, a family will contribute 12% of their income to the costs of childcare, on average. In Ireland, you can expect to pay 35% of your income. Why is this? Why has Ireland failed to create policy that supports women and parents to participate in life outside the home? The refusal to address the childcare problem in Ireland has reinforced the class divide in this country.

Providing provisions for parents to work has benefits that very clearly outweigh the current situation, where they are crippled with hefty childcare costs – costs that force women out of the workforce and increase reliance on the state, and increases the number of children and families at the risk of poverty.

Poverty in any society is unacceptable, but for it to be so high as a result of policy inaction in a developed country like Ireland is unacceptable. Swe-

den, for instance, has one of the lowest rates of poverty and one of the best records of harmonising work and family. Sweden is a far cry from Ireland's engrained history of 'women in the home' and is a leading example of promoting gender equality with family-focused policy that promotes equal rights regarding parenting and work.

So what is the hold-up, Ireland? Do you want children to thrive? Do you want to end families living in poverty? Do you want an upskilled workforce? Do you want gender equality?

I would hope the answer is 'yes' to these basic questions, which is why it baffles me that this country's decision makers introduce measures that are counterproductive when it comes to these aspirations. It is high time our Government introduced flexibility of paid leave for both parents, affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare and removed the barriers to success for our children and women.

Education and childcare produce the biggest returns on investment for a society – so let's stand together and demand that investment.

Pictures: La Citta Vita [CC BY 2.0]; Frank de Klein Colouring [CC BY 2.0]

Privatisation – real agenda behind water charges

BY STEVE FITZPATRICK & CIARA MELINN

WATER privatisation has taken place all across the world with devastating consequences. Hundreds of thousands of families have had their water turned off by private companies.

In the UK water bills have increased by 40% in real terms since privatisation took place. The myth of conservation has been exposed through the actions of water companies; when revenues fall as a result of lower consumption, there is always an increase in prices in the next price review period to maintain profits.

The real impact of privatisation

shows that since 2003, the proportion of turnover allocated to directors' remuneration increased by 56%. At the same time, the proportion of turnover for wages and salaries has decreased by 30%.

Water charges are the beginning of water poverty. In 2015, 24% of households in England and Wales were considered to live in water poverty. In Detroit, the water poverty rate is around 40% for households and, under the UK definition, the ESRI estimated that up to 10% of households in Ireland could in future suffer from water poverty, which will be much higher when privatisation occurs and water prices increase.

According to *Fortune* magazine and GWI, water is a US\$550 billion a year industry with expected growth of 3.9% to the end of 2018. Corporations are exploiting the necessity of clean drinking

water for all life; it is considered the new oil. And that's why major water companies are lobbying the EU and national governments to begin the process of privatisation through water charges and demanding this inclusion in any bailout programmes agreed by the EU, IMF and ECB.

Evidence

This is further evidence of why a referendum on water charges is needed.

The Irish government cannot introduce legislation in Ireland that conflicts with the Constitution and Right2Water is the only group that has sought legal advice on not only the wording of that referendum, but also where the insertion into the Constitution should occur.

Instead of allowing the Irish public a say on the non-privatisation of water, the government said a provision would be included in the Water Services Bill

to allow changes in ownership by a plebiscite. Essentially, this means that any government can propose legislation to privatise Irish Water which must:

1. be approved by both Houses of the Oireachtas; and
2. be submitted to a plebiscite of all persons eligible to vote in a referendum to amend the Constitution.

However, any law passed by the Oireachtas which provides for a plebiscite can still be overturned by a later law which abolishes it, without any vote of the public being taken. What the government proposes still leaves the final decision about privatisation in the hands of politicians, not the people.

This is simply not good enough. As we know, according to Pat Rabbitte, promises aren't that important: "Isn't that something you just do during an

election?" Revelations in relation to the ongoing Irish Water fiasco reveal the CSO contacted Eurostat in order to have a paragraph removed from its advice letter that stated: "Privatisation of Irish Water is ultimately envisaged".

The real agenda behind water charges for this government is very clearly privatisation. If they were serious about not privatising Irish Water, they would put the issue to a Constitutional referendum as proposed by Right2Water.

The only parties and candidates that have agreed to implement the Right2Water referendum with specific wording which would genuinely enshrine ownership of our water services in the hands of the public are listed on page 18/19 of this publication.

Steve Fitzpatrick is
CWU General Secretary

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NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

20.02.16

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