

30. Michael McDonald

I am in broad agreement with the document I would like to add the following. We must find a way to abolish the obscene pensions we pay former ministers and politicians. I agree there should be a pension attached to the job but it should be a reasonable pension and payable only at pension age. It is ridiculous that we pay sums annually in excess of 100,000 euros to people who have done so much damage to this country and all of them nowhere near pension age. If you have a private pension you cannot claim it until you are of pension age so treat all citizens equally and make this apply to politicians too retrospectively so we can stop these payments.

Secondly on the matter of education we are constantly lauded about our "free" education system. It is about time it was school books should be free school uniforms should be standardised as a generic badge free uniform could be mass produced significantly reducing the cost. Breakfast clubs should be standard and subsidised or free in all schools that are one way of tackling food poverty.

Attendance at all sessions of the Dail should be mandatory any other job requires you to be in attendance during working hours. Ds holiday entitlements should be the same as all other workers. The position of ceann comhaire should be one elected by the people of Ireland all candidates should be non-party and the position should be a one-time only appointment ie a new one every election. The Senate to be elected by the people no political appointments thus it would be representative of the people and valid in their eyes. Any and all ministers should have their performance rated every year and if underperforming they should be removed by referendum of the people. Government committees should have the power of law to call people to give evidence to them not merely as now request compliance.

The garda ombudsman should be augmented by an internal affairs type section that police the police giving citizens an avenue that is seen to be impartial not as we have now of the gardai investigating the gardai.

Any TDs or ministers involved in any illegal activity should be removed from office banned from ever holding office again and lose all pension rights we are at present paying pensions to convicted criminals. All expense claims must be vouched all expenses must be reasonable eg If a TD lives in Dublin why can't he make his own way to work the same as all other Dubliners? Overnight accommodation can be catered for by building a hostel for all out of town TDs. While I agree that all TDs should be breathalysed before important votes I strongly advocate the closure of the bar no other employer would tolerate a bar in the workplace why should we as the employers of the government tolerate one. It could be used as a canteen for those staying in the hostel. I do not hold to the theory that if you pay peanuts you get monkeys we pay obscene wages and we still have monkeys TDs pay must be brought to a reasonable level.

Finally discussions should begin NOW on a left wing left of centre alliance for the next election its pointless saying yes somebody should get the ball rolling R2W are somebody so get on it. I truly hope this is a beginning of a radical new movement in Irish politics that will remove the old guard and their trough and replace them with politics by the people for the people that holds all citizens to be equal and gives them back the ownership of their country and all her resources on land and at sea.

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31. Claire Casey

The provision of a guaranteed basic income to all in line with the aims of Basic Income Ireland (<http://www.basicincomeireland.com>) should be a policy priority for a progressive government.

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32. Claiming Our Future

INTRODUCTION

The Policy Principles offer a valuable foundation for a policy platform that could generate positive and necessary change in our society and that could draw a broad range of civil society and political society groupings and organisations together. The achievement of these two goals, a policy platform alongside a stronger social movement for change, provides hope for a new politics.

Claiming Our Future seeks a new politics based on values of equality, environmental sustainability, participation, accountability and solidarity. This review of the Policy Principles draws from this value base. It would be useful that the next iteration of the Policy Principles be explicit about the shared value base that underpins them.

OVERARCHING ISSUES

There are two overarching issues that need to be more strongly addressed in the Policy Principles: Climate Change and Inequality. Policy positions to combat and respond to climate change, and to combat and eliminate inequality are needed.

A commitment to Environmental Sustainability should involve a section on the rights of future generations and should include policy positions to:

- Establish the Rio Principles as a standard for all policy making including, in particular people's entitlement to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature; any current development must not undermine the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations; and environmental protection should be an integral part of the development process.
- Invest in and secure an effective assessment of the environmental impact of proposed plans, policies and activities.
- Enact effective environmental laws and, in particular, introduce climate legislation with ambitious and binding targets.
- Cooperate with other nations to reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.
- Implement, without exemptions, EU targets for reduction of emissions and for the provision of renewable energy.
- Take effective action to reverse rural decline.

A commitment to Equality and Combating Inequality should include policy positions to:

- Name economic, social and cultural rights in the Constitution and transpose our international commitments to these rights into domestic legislation.
- Invest in and secure the full and effective implementation of the duty on public bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights.
- Advance income equality by increasing low wages, reducing high wages, promoting a living wage, and reducing the gender pay gap.
- Increase basic social welfare levels to the Minimum Essential Standard of Living.
- Introduce and implement equality budgeting at national level and in the work of public sector bodies.
- Increased funding to address and respond adequately to domestic violence and sexual violence against women.
- Provide comprehensive and affordable early years and after school care infrastructure. Provide adequate training, wages and conditions for staff.
- Invest adequately in achieving independent living for people with disabilities and replace congregated settings for people with intellectual disabilities with dispersed housing in the community.
- Provide services and supports to enable people to live independently for as long as possible in their own homes.
- Recognise Travellers as an ethnic group and invest in adequate and culturally appropriate accommodation for Travellers.
- Abolish Direct Provision for asylum seekers, regularise the situation of undocumented workers, and invest in an integration plan for a culturally diverse society free from racism.
- Address the poverty and deprivation levels experienced by lone parents and reverse the changes to the One Parent Family Payment.
- Fulfill the rights of all children in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Introduce a comprehensive strategy to tackle child poverty focused on ensuring their access to adequate resources and to quality services, and promoting their right to participate.

TAXATION

The Policy Principles usefully promise a progressive taxation model. Policy proposals in this area will be key in ensuring a policy platform that is credible. A progressive taxation model will need to:

- Ensure a minimum effective corporate tax rate;
- Adopt a financial transactions tax;
- Increase the rate of income tax on higher earnings;
- Increase effective tax rates by reducing and capping income tax reliefs and exemptions;
- Introduce a wealth tax along with increased capital gains tax and capital acquisitions tax;
- Tax consumer advertising and profits;
- Reduce VAT while increasing tax on luxury goods.
- Introduce more effective environmental taxes.

COMMENTS

The Policy Principles set out valuable proposals in relation to Decent Work, Housing, Health, Debt Justice, Education and Democratic Reform.

Water

The opening section on water usefully seeks to secure investment in water and sanitation systems and to protect against any form of privatization in this area. The prominence given to this issue is understandable given the origins of this initiative, however, a rebalancing of emphasis would strengthen the overall policy agenda being promoted.

There are issues in making a commitment to ensuring a limited resource that is subject to ever increasing demand is available, in the words of the document, 'free at the point of use'. Basic needs must be met in this way but unlimited usage on these lines is not sustainable. Stronger action is needed to promote and encourage conservation of this vital natural resource than the suggested 'planning permission requirements, incentivised and subsidised water saving devices, and a public education campaign' if the environmental sustainability issues and the conservation concerns identified are to be adequately addressed.

Decent Work

The section on Decent Work could make commitments to labour market activation that involves more tailored and comprehensive approaches to activation, particularly for those distant from the labour market, and to decent work outcomes from this. Secure an active inclusion process to tackling unemployment that fosters an integrated approach combining active labour market policies, adequate minimum income and access to quality services.

Housing

The section on Housing could make a commitment to increase rent supplement levels to match market rent levels.

Democratic Reform

The section on Democratic Reform could make commitments to a wider range of participatory forms of governance; local government reform that decentralises more significant policy functions to local level; increased investment in community sector organisations including in particular their advocacy work; and increased participation of women and people from minority groups in politics.

Arts and Culture

Arts and culture should be included as a separate commitment to ensure that the Policy Principles place this field more centrally in our model of development. In particular the policy principles could make commitments to a new national culture policy that advances cultural rights, positions community arts at the heart of cultural policy, increases access to and participation in the arts for all, and enables those experiencing poverty and inequality to be both consumers and producers of arts and culture.

Global Justice

Global justice should be included as a separate commitment to ensure that the Policy Principles locate Ireland in the wider world and commits to solidarity with the so-called developing world. In particular the policy principles could make commitments to implementation of and investment in the forthcoming UN Sustainable Development Goals; a review of foreign policy to enable it to better contribute to global justice; and increased aid budgets.

Housing

The section on Housing should avoid use of term 'homeless epidemic'. It could, in identifying the need to commence a house-building programme, note the programme in place and the need for this to be more ambitious and delivered with greater urgency. It could make a commitment to:

- Implement a programme to build vibrant and sustainable communities where people have access to the full range of amenities and facilities necessary to develop their full potential, alongside the house-building programme.
- Increase rent supplement levels to match market rent levels.
- Housing policy that is tenure neutral, such that whatever way households decide to provide their home would receive equal state support through grants or tax relief. People should be offered the opportunity to own their own home but this should be at the actual value of the home and not be a drain on the provision of social housing.
- Provide adequately for Traveller accommodation needs in a culturally appropriate manner.

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33. Sean Irwin

I feel that the proposed Constitutional amendment should include 'ALL NATURAL RESOURCES' with reference to public ownership of all water, oil, gas, minerals and metals. I think this is very important as we may have to fight this fight again in the future over something else. So cover everything. Please. The citizens of this country would vote for this 100%.

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34. Catherine

I think two important issues that need to be addressed are Accountability and Transparency.

The culture of corruption in this country is out of control, and not just at national level. I was looking at a council job recently and every single person I spoke to said "ah, sure, but you know it will go to a friend". The culture of nepotism (and our nonchalance about it) has to end as it's directly feeding into equality.

An autonomous anti-corruption watchdog at national level that was actually effective would be money well spent, and set a precedent for local councils.

Also, people seems really pissed off about TD pensions. Those in a ministerial position starting to claim a pension after only two years, decades before everyone else as well as the TD retirement lump sums is grossly unfair.

The whole pensions system needs an overhaul, a simpler Australian style "superannuation" system might make sense.

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35. Ntina Tzouvala

On May Day the Irish trade unions involved in the Right2Water campaign released a document entitled Policy Principles for a Progressive Irish Government. In my view, the document is of direct interest for the readers of this blog. This is both because of the sheer magnitude of the movement, but also because of the language the policy document chose to use, which predominantly focused on human rights. Hence, I will try to briefly present the basic axes of the release, which - importantly- are not final but still under consultation. Then, I will proceed to offer some thoughts on the emancipatory potential and on the possible limits of such a tactical choice.

The Policy Principles are structured around seven basic rights that in my understanding attempt to construct a view of societal organisation alternative to neoliberalism. Hence, we have (unsurprisingly) the Right2Water, which is accompanied by the right to jobs and decent work, to housing, the right to health, to debt justice, to education and the right to democratic reform. These rights are considered the core for a fair and democratic society and given the introduction of the booklet they are also seen as necessary for realising the aspirations of the 1867 and the 1916 Proclamations of the Irish Republic.

Following relevant debates in Ireland the Policy Principles envision the adding to the Constitution of an article (28 Section 4:2:1) that reads as follows: '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.' Further, the document deploys language familiar to human rights lawyers (such as invocations of 'dignity'), but also uses the discourse of human rights in less conventional ways (for example, the question of debt management and debt restructuring is also linked to (human) rights). The silver line of the entire document is the idea that the only way to safeguard these rights is to ensure that the sectors in question (water, housing, education etc.) remain public and free, while receiving robust financial support thanks to progressive taxation.

To fully comprehend the significance of the Policy Principles it is essential to keep in mind how the deployment of a human rights discourse against neoliberalism was not a self-evident strategy. Indeed, in a recent (self-critical) article, Doutje Lettinga observed that after a 20-year period human rights are no longer the lingua franca of social movements. For example, both in Spain and in Greece human rights have not been central in anti-austerity struggles, while democracy, justice and anti-corruption appear to be much more popular in summarizing peoples' resistance to neoliberalism.

Arguably, this is a useful and justifiable strategy. To begin with, since the Policy Document is intrinsically linked to the Right2Water campaign, it is reasonable to follow the same discursive devices as the original movement. But there are other more fundamental reasons to do so. Regardless of whether the language of human rights is going through an (existential) crisis or not, it appears uncontroversial that they still bear a moral and rhetorical force capable of legitimising the political cause with which they are linked. (For an excellent example of this function see here). More

specifically, human rights could provide a powerful discursive tool against the rationality of neoliberalism. Alston has argued, while resisting claims of World Trade Organisation (WTO) law scholars that there is a close link between human rights and rights enshrined in international trade treaties, that:

‘Human rights are recognised for all on the basis of the inherent dignity of all persons. Trade-related rights are granted to individuals for instrumentalist reasons. Individuals are seen as objects rather than as holders of rights. They are empowered as economic agents for particular purposes and in order to promote a specific approach to economic policy but not as political actors in the full sense and nor as holders of a comprehensive and balanced set of individual rights.’

What is important here is that by recognising (or constituting) the intrinsic value of every human being human rights can operate as a powerful ‘counter-force’ to the narrative of ‘necessary sacrifices’ that legitimise aggressive austerity in the EU. The idea that politics and laws should protect and promote human dignity introduces a morality that is arguably strange and even hostile to the rationality of neoliberalism, which unlike classical liberalism is based on the idea of generalised competition, which in turn means that the idea of ‘losers’ is deeply entrenched in it. Thus, human rights can provide anti-austerity struggles with a strong moral argument that is essential if they want to be persuasive and effective.

It is moreover argued that this synergy between human rights and social movements could also benefit human rights. This is because the rise of human rights after the 1970s also coincided to a significant degree with the professionalisation and definitely the NGOisation of human rights advocacy. In turn, this led to dubious links between major human rights NGOs and the imperial plans of powerful Western states. The notorious ‘NATO keep the progress going’ poster about the war in Afghanistan is just one incident in a long series of events that signify this ‘unholy’ alliance. If the paradigm of human rights is to be saved, then reclaiming it from the powerful and from white-collar professionals is the only way forward.

Nonetheless, there are some tensions or blind spots that require some attention. This is to the extent that the Policy Principles rest on the presumption that a robust legal and judicialised protection of socio-economic rights is the best way of countering neoliberalism. Without necessarily rejecting this idea, it is worth reflecting on its limits. To do so, I will not engage with Irish Constitutional law, but will rather try to provide an international and comparative law perspective. This is to the extent that the mere invocation of rights -powerful as it may be- does not resolve the issue of resources, which in turn is incorporated in the way socio-economic rights have been designed in international law. This means that very few would deny the merits of full employment (indeed, neoclassical economics assume full employment in most their models), but consensus is thinner when it comes to actual measures for ensuring this full employment. Will full employment come as a result, for example, of an expansionary monetary policy (impossible in the current architecture of the Eurozone) or will free trade solve this problem? Does higher taxation result to a fairer society or does it strangle private initiatives leading to higher unemployment levels? At the end of the day is the state the actor that should ensure these rights or should we trust the markets and the idea that if left alone they will deliver prosperity for most?

Richard MacAleavey has expressed in passing similar concerns in a very interesting contribution. To rephrase, human rights might provide a powerful rhetorical device against austerity, which can be

morally convincing given its reliance on universalism. That said, it is difficult to see how their invocation will enable us to 'bypass' the actual political debate about how to realise these rights (or social goods, or aspirations, or even needs). The Policy Principles provide some glimpses to this debate (progressive taxation, establishment of co-operatives, the post-Keynesian idea of the state as the employer of last resort etc.) but they remain peripheral to the human rights discourse. After all, it is significant to keep in mind that relevant international human rights bodies have remained silent about privatisations as prima facie violations of such socio-economic rights. (See, for example, the stance of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights regarding privatisations and the right to water or the rights of persons with disabilities).

At the end of the day, it is worth keeping in mind that the rise of human rights as a (meta)political discourse and the rise of neoliberalism coincide temporarily. This does not mean that there is necessarily a causal link between the two, but the argument that human rights have been 'a powerless companion', unable to stop the neoliberal tide deserves careful consideration. Simultaneously, the 'golden age' of social-democracy cannot be said to be attributable to any kind of human rights advocacy - let alone to judicialised intervention. The International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights only came into force in 1976, when the social-democratic model was already trembling, while the UK, which constituted an exemplary case of this model, is notorious for its lack of entrenchment of such rights in domestic law.

The comments above do not intend to undermine in any way the significance of the Policy Principles. Indeed, in times when UK (and other) universities are dominated by the anxieties of the REF agenda, initiatives such as the Policy Principles enable lawyers to genuinely engage with society in a meaningful way and attempt to use our expertise to further just and fair social causes away from measurements and formalistic interactions with power.

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36. Seamus Ward

The one important submission I wish to make is .

- 1) To have Peoples Initiated referenda inserted in to the referenda .
- 2) that Ireland should leave the EU at the earliest opportunity.

No need to outline why I think these should take priority.

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37. Elaine O'Malley

I want my life back, my son in Australia back. Working to pay bills. No holiday for 10 years now. Ff, fg, labour have destroyed our beautiful country for greed. I want them all gone now . They should be all throw out now. They are not for the people .I was born here like all my family of old and we have no say or rights on our own country. If I was purple and from la la land I'd have more rights. New government for the people by the people of Ireland

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38. Kevin Keating

In any struggle it is important to identify the enemy, set out objectives that meet the interests of the working class, and work out the means of obtaining those objectives.

In our view the enemy is the Troika and the quisling government implementing the austerity programme.

The drive towards privatisation of water was set down as part of a more general programme by the Troika and is enthusiastically implemented by a gombeen government who are anxious to fill their own pockets at the expense of Irish workers.

The task of our movement, in defending the working class, is to defeat privatisation and austerity. The immediate task is to present the transformation of water into a commodity and the success of Irish water as a commercial company.

The means through which our aims can be achieved is through mass action on the streets and in communities and class action in the workplaces, co-ordinated by a central democratic national movement.

There is only one immediate demand that can be effective - close Irish water now! It only exists to commercialise water and to prepare it for privatisation. Any campaign that leaves it in operation allows it to bed in. During this process Irish water will issue bonds and run up debts of €6 billion. We will then face a fait accompli and be told that there is no alternative to charging and privatisation.

We have lobbied the government in our hundreds of thousands. The government has retreated on pricing in order to save Irish Water. We should note that, according to their own figures and claims of recovery, they could simply have agreed to continue with water in public ownership. They will not do so because they are bound to defend and impose the Troika programme.

Lobbying has reached its limits. Further mass activity would have to focus on bringing down the government and disruption of state activities, as well as preventing the normal activity of our own politicians and Troika supervisors.

It is time for the Unions to do more than lobby. They should tear up the contracts with Irish Water and instruct members to return to their local authority positions. Right now the company is still largely a fiction, staffed by local authority workers and using the council's vans and equipment.

There is a place for non-payment of water charges in the campaign, but absolutely no grounds for elevating a single tactic into the lynchpin of the campaign. On the one hand it excludes those who bitterly resent the charge but have decided to pay, young people who do not receive bills and the many layers facing loss of jobs, incomes and services through austerity but not linked directly to the issue of water.

On the other hand the movement is a one-trick pony, frozen in one position while the government can, and does, deploy a wide suite of bribes, threats, enforcement and repression to defeat the resistance.

Many elements of the Right2water campaign are now focused on the upcoming elections. It is believed that a loose enough programme, based on human and democratic rights, can put together a majority left coalition and form a government. A model held up is the Spanish group Podemos, although critics question its status as a party of the left.

We believe this "left government" view is profoundly mistaken. A mixture of wishful thinking and what Lenin called "parliamentary idiocy."

In order to build a wide enough coalition we would have to include groups that have in the past supported austerity, such as the Green Party and "left" Labour party members. Above all, we would have to set as the lynchpin of such a network Sinn Fein - a party which has implemented extensive austerity measures in the North.

Even if such an alliance can be constructed it has to confront the failure of the left government strategy with the capitulation of SYRIZA in Greece. The choice is to submit to the Troika or to undertake a root and branch confrontation with European capital and its local allies. A moderate left alliance would split apart.

The point of a programme is not to cobble together a parliamentary alliance, but to mobilize the working class and oppressed, not to use workers to build parliamentary representation, but to use parliamentary representatives to build the workers movement not to unite everyone who expresses some limited concern, but to unite workers around their interests, independently of all other interests.

It is in the interest of workers that Irish Water be closed down, that water meter installation be prevented, that payment be refused, that administrative workers are asked not to process bills, that postal workers refuse to deliver them and that resistance committees be set up in communities and workplaces to repudiate the Troika programme and all the cuts and privatisations flowing from it.

The loose informal structure of Right2water and the loose vague politics has left the way free for the various sectional groups to pursue their own local interests. We should now call an open national conference to hammer out a programme that represents the interests of all the workers and begins to assert that interest in action.