

# SOLIDARITY TIMES

## FREE THE MEDIA, BE THE MEDIA



### Many Battles Won, With the War Yet to Win

We've come a long way. Against the forces of the State and global finance the anti-water charges movement has held the line, and through years of direct action, community organising and mass mobilisations we've pushed the government to the point of defeat on water charges.

In November 2016 the 'expert commission' basically recommended that water charges as we know them be scrapped and the Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil dominated Oireachtas committee - charged with reviewing this by April 14th - has been squabbling over which crippled version of the water charges they can get away with. However, we can't become complacent. For one,

the Oireachtas committee seems bent on leaving Irish Water with a foot in the door rather than abolishing water charges entirely, penalising 'excessive water usage' and stealthily continuing metering.

But even if the committee were to recommend total abolition, we all know how politics works. Talk is cheap, the only way that water charges will be eliminated is by popular power, not out of politicians seeing the light.

### We Are All Leaders

Indeed Martin Luther King said 'freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed' and we have proven this to be true. If there were one lesson to learn from this struggle, or one way to summarise

it, it would be in the phrase 'direct action'. Direct action is simply doing something yourself rather than asking or waiting for someone else to do it. In a society based on being passive, this seemingly simple act is very powerful.

The reason this movement has been so successful is because people decided 'I don't want water meters, so I'm going to stop them being installed', 'I don't want to pay water charges, I don't think anyone should pay them, so I'm not going to pay them'. That's direct action. If we had been 'well behaved' and lobbied politicians as expected, we would have failed. Even big demonstrations likely wouldn't have worked if they hadn't stood upon this bedrock of direct action.

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You can't argue with direct action. No matter what anyone says, if I stop a meter going in the ground, it can't be installed. Whatever a politician promises, if you don't pay your water bill, Irish Water can't collect that money.

If the charges are abolished, there will be a scramble among political parties and groups to claim credit. But although parties and unions have made their contributions, (the unions in particular paid huge sums of money to support the movement) they didn't start this movement nor do they own it. The so-called 'ordinary people' rebelled with no clear victory in sight, and we organised ourselves without needing to be directed from above. It is that wildfire of popular, decentralised, rebellion which has carried this movement and inspired thousands to politically re-awaken. We are all leaders, we are all architects of history.

### Why the Charges Were Imposed

The water charges were imposed for two basic and related reasons.

Firstly, as bank bailout tax. Secondly, as part of the neoliberal plan to put all natural resources on the planet into private hands. The water charges are one of many ways to take wealth from the working class and give it to the rich. As part of a worldwide trend, the wealth of the richest 300 people in Ireland has doubled from €50 to €100 billion in the last 7 years. Water is the 'petroleum of the next century' said Goldman Sachs back in 2008. Big multinational corporations have been scooping up what water resources they can in the Blue Gold Rush.

The charges were not imposed for conservation or environmental reasons. Climate change is a real and growing threat to humanity and all life, but the same suits sit on their hands waiting for us to march off an environmental cliff. Letting 40-50% of our water leak into the ground is just one part of their negligence.

### What Next?

While it's important to keep our

eyes on the prize, it's worth thinking about what comes after we eliminate the water charges. Something many of us are keen to see is securing public ownership of our water, and all natural resources. The fact is that the fundamental way this economic and political system works has not changed, and neither have the motivations of the powerful few who really run the show.

A referendum on public ownership is a good first step. But Irish Water is a symptom of the greater disease. We have seen how the Gardaí, courts, prisons, and politicians of the state collude with the capitalists and their media. The assault on our livelihoods and freedoms won't end until this whole social system is replaced by one based on common ownership, co-operative work, and personal liberty.

We cannot go home. We have felt our power and we like it. We have experienced real democracy and we like it. What will be our next victory together?

## STRIKE4REPEAL DEMANDS THE REPEAL OF THE 8TH AMENDMENT



### Strike4Repeal

The WSM supported and took part in the recent 'Strike4Repeal' on International Women's Day (March 8th). The Strike's purpose was to demand that the government stop stalling and introduce a referendum to repeal the hated 8th Amendment that denies access to abortion. The Strike was hugely successful, resulting in an enormous, energetic mobilization, which peaked at lunchtime to block off O'Connell St. bridge and shutdown Dublin city centre.

We anarchists of the WSM have been fighting Ireland's anti-abortion access laws since the 1980's, a period when books and magazines

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were being banned because they had contact details for clinics in Britain. We continue to demand that access to termination be an option to be decided on by a pregnant person as part of a free health service.

The struggle to repeal the 8th amendment continues. Here are 8 reasons why it should never have been introduced, and the referendum to repeal it should be delayed no longer:

### 1. World-Class Tyranny

Ireland has one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world more so than places like Syria and Afghanistan. Only Malta is more restrictive within the EU.

### 2. Democracy & Equality

No woman of childbearing age has been allowed to have a say in her reproductive rights. The last vote was in 1983. This country claims to be democratic yet denies women basic medical services and control of their bodies. In the Irish law a woman's life is equal to the foetus. This is not equality.

### 3. Exile

Up to 12 women a day travel abroad for an abortion but not every woman can travel. Migrant women and asylum seekers, women with disabilities, minors and predominantly working-class women are discriminated against here. The abortion ban only increases class divides

and helps to perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

### 4. Abortion Pills

The other option is to use abortion pills but it is illegal to obtain them, and increasingly pills are being seized by customs. Women who take them are at risk of being reported to the police if they have complications or need follow up care.

### 5. Trans, Non-Binary, & Intersex people

Trans men, non-binary people and some inter-sex people need access to abortion too. For some trans men, being forced to carry a pregnancy to term (or at all) is in serious conflict with their identity as men and can be traumatic as it forces them to do something with their bodies that feels alien to them. Trans people are practically invisible in Irish law and their struggle for bodily autonomy is a part of the struggle for reproductive rights.

### 6. Rape

If a woman is raped in this country and is caught having an abortion she will do more time in prison than her rapist. A woman faces a jail sentence of 14 years if she has an abortion whereas the maximum jail term for rapists is 10 years. Women who are raped are not entitled to abortions and face the trauma of being blamed for assault by a sexist police which assumes

that it's a woman's responsibility not to get raped (i.e. don't wear the wrong clothes, don't drink too much, don't go out alone, etc.)

### 7. Fatal Foetal Abnormality

A woman is not allowed to have an abortion in Ireland even in cases of Fatal Foetal Abnormality. Instead Ireland offers prenatal hospices where women can wait out their pregnancies as they wait for the foetus to slowly die inside them. Moreover, unless the pregnancy itself is a direct threat to the mother's life she may not have an abortion and can be refused treatment for other conditions if it threatens the health of the foetus. Pregnant women with cancer have been refused both abortion and chemotherapy at a doctor's prerogative.

### 8. Cruel and Unusual Punishment

Forcing a woman to carry a pregnancy against her will has been called 'cruel, inhumane and degrading' by the UN Committee on Human Rights. Abortion is legal in Ireland only if there is a high risk of death to the woman. Suicide is grounds for an abortion but the woman has to be assessed by up to 6 doctors. These doctors have the power to decide if a woman will be allowed an abortion. These doctors must be HSE approved and this panel only includes 1 psychiatrist. And the Ms.Y case has proven that the 'protection of life' provision offers no protection at all to suicidal women.





### Irish Housing Inc.

What would happen if Fine Gael had a change of heart? What if, having been visited by three ghosts the night before, Michael Noonan decided to address the misery brought on by the largest housing crisis in this nation's history? It's an interesting question, but of course it'll never be answered. Still, thinking about it forces us to consider other questions. It leads us to a view of modern capitalism and international power relations which, if more unsettling than Scrooge Fine Gael, is a more solid understanding on which to build our offensive.

The first thing we need to understand is that our dear Mick Noonan and his blue-shirted brethren are not bumbling around Leinster House, trying to assist in an issue that is simply beyond them. Equally, they are probably not 24-7 toasting with chardonnay and scorning the working classes. The Irish state, with the support of the various right wing economic 'think tanks' on its payroll, and the tacit support of the EU and its banks, is systematically pursuing an economic policy designed to inflate house prices nationally. They want house prices to increase. The thousands of families living in emergency accommodation, the tens of thousands more in mortgage arrears, and the people barely existing in penury on the streets of our towns and cities, are just an inconvenient side-effect of the plan. So, why are they doing this?

In the run up to the financial crash of 2008, cheap credit poured out of French and German banks in search of higher interest rates, which were found in the Eurozone's peripheral states, notably Portugal, Ireland, Greece, and Spain. Irish banks happily accepted the loans and lent the cash at higher interest rates to developers who purchased overvalued land and threw up cheaply built, overpriced housing. When the house of cards came crashing down, the entire financial system was embroiled in debt.

The neoliberal solution to such a problem? Call in international financial corporations to buy up the debt! Fine Gael's strategy for demonstrating to international financial markets that Ireland's banking and property crisis has been solved has been to invite 'Real Estate Investment Trusts' (REITs) - also known as Vulture Funds - to buy nationalised properties through NAMA and to relieve some of the state's debt obligations.

Fundamentally, the Irish state - shaped in the interests of its gombeen ruling class - aims to transform commonly created housing wealth into profitable revenue streams for private shareholders and their cheerleading service providers. The condition is that before they invest, Vulture Funds want increasing house prices to be sure they make profits. Therefore, clearly the state will not provide social and affordable housing to meet still growing demand. Unless we resist.

### The cure being worse than the disease (probably)

Going back to the opening question: what would happen if Fine Gael abandoned their policy of sacrificing the Irish people in the interests of the super rich? Or, more likely, if a left wing Irish government attempted a change of pace, but somehow managed not to be immediately shut down by the banker-controlled European Troika, like Syriza was? Most likely at the next hiccup of late-stage capitalism there would be 'renewed fears' about Ireland's ability to repay bondholders, interest rates would boom, and the ministers would be once again boarding planes to Brussels, cap in hand.

What this means is that neoliberal policy is locked-in through Europe and through the financial markets. So believing we can vote our problems away is a costly mistake. Grassroots-led housing struggles in Ireland and elsewhere are now a major front in anti-finance, anti-capitalist struggle - fundamentally in opposition to the underpinnings of capitalism today.

When housing campaigners occupied Apollo House in December in order to give rough sleepers a home during the bitter winter, people all across the island were inspired by the ability of the 'little people', like you or me, to defy the powerful and take charge of our futures. But Apollo House should be seen as one strike back in a long struggle which we must extend into the future.