



**TASC**



TOWARDS A  
**FLOURISHING**  
SOCIETY

**Edited by Fergus O’Ferrall**







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## Authors

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## Introduction

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*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*

George Santayana's famous epigram is particularly apposite to Ireland today when all sides of the political spectrum are competing to put forward policies aimed at returning to economic growth. While this is a laudable and necessary objective with the unemployment rate so high, emigration making an unwelcome return and so many suffering reduced incomes and higher taxes, it is unfortunate that these policies are not accompanied by a view of what kind of society we want to aspire to if and when we do return to growth.

Any discussion on this subject is brushed aside as irrelevant to the real task of re-building the shattered economy, while all debate is silenced by the two favourite mantras: *'It's the economy stupid'* and *'A rising tide lifts all boats'*. But even the most cursory survey of the past will show that there's much more to life than the economy, and that a rising tide leaves far too many boats trailing in its wake. The absence of a debate on the type of society we want means that, by default, economic growth becomes the sole societal objective. Embedded in this way of thinking is the assumption that economic growth is inherently neutral, which it clearly is not. The result is that society becomes a slave to growth – and we have seen during the last two decades that this produces a number of undesirable outcomes:

- increasing inequality: without an active commitment to reduce inequality the rich tend to become richer and the poor poorer; precisely what happened in Ireland.
- endangered environment: unfettered economic growth is becoming unsustainable.
- societal pressures: the single-minded emphasis on economic growth weakens a sense of community, civic responsibility and a willingness to participate in society
- personal fulfilment: there is increasing evidence that the more unequal a society, the greater the status competition. *'The problems in rich countries are not caused by society not being rich enough but by the*

2 *scale of material differences between people within each society being too big.*'  
(Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009, p.25).

Of course there is an urgent need for economic recovery at a time when so many people are being hit with tax increases, social welfare cuts and the fact of, or imminent threat, of unemployment. But if there is no progressive vision of the kind of society we want to achieve, we are condemned to repeat the mistakes of the last boom.

TASC argues that we must therefore begin the process of recovery with a vision of the type of society we want to achieve and then, and only then, consider which economic policies are best suited to attaining that vision. The economy must be subordinate to the society of which it is but one constituent part. Our age is preoccupied with continually improving means, rather than saving ourselves the trouble by reflecting on ends. We need to compare visions in order to articulate them more clearly and think them through. The US philosopher Susan Neiman has argued recently that, for the last three decades, progressives have abandoned a moral world view:

*With consequences too unhappy to be ironic most of the voices willing to speak in universal moral terms at all now consider themselves to be conservative – they offer a public conception of goodness the left no longer knows how to defend- what the left lacks isn't values but a standpoint from which their values make sense.*

This publication aims to begin the process of providing that standpoint based on a belief that the world can be moved closer to what it could be through the concerted actions of men and women working together.

**John Fanning**

## The Flourishing Society – An Overview

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Fergus O’Ferrall

Human flourishing is the end of all political, social, economic and political activity. If any activity is known to be harmful to the overall well-being of human beings, or any one person or group in society, then it should be opposed and ended. It is, therefore, crucial to ensure that the vision of human flourishing is articulated and kept clearly in view at all times. Likewise, all our public activity – political, social, economic and cultural – ought to be measured regularly to assess what progress is being made towards the fulfilment of the vision. The contributions in this publication are written to assist in the articulation of such a vision and to outline what achieving a ‘flourishing society’ might involve in the Irish context. The focus is upon articulating a new vision and indicating strategic and practical steps towards achieving such a vision. There have been a number of analyses of the causes and consequences of the collapse of the ‘neo-liberal’ economic model. This publication is intended to help develop a sustainable alternative.

### THE FLOURISHING SOCIETY – VISION AND COMPONENTS

Irish society, embedded as it is in a globalising world, is undergoing a deep-seated and prolonged multi-dimensional crisis. This has provoked widespread debate and a search for solutions to a range of problems thrown up by the crisis. *The Flourishing Society* joins a select number of recent books articulating a new civic republican vision for Irish society: these include President Michael D. Higgins’ collection of writings and speeches entitled *Renewing the Republic* (Liberties Press, Dublin, 2011) which may be read in conjunction with a number of his seminal addresses seeking to confront our intellectual crisis – a deeper crisis than even the economic crisis we now face. Peadar Kirby and Mary P. Murphy have written a compelling argument for a ‘second republic’, which surgically probes the failures of the prevailing model of development in Ireland, in their *Towards a Second Republic Irish Politics after the Celtic Tiger* (Pluto Press, London, 2011). There remains, however, much work to be done to develop and disseminate an inspiring vision capable of providing the essential guideposts for reform and change across the many crisis-laden aspects of our society. In the end, citizens individually and collectively

4 have to embrace and pursue a vision of a ‘flourishing society’. Broadly speaking, the essayists in this publication contend that the aim of all our activity should be to enable each person to function and flourish within a society that has the common good of all as its lodestar.

Political philosophy and the social sciences enable us to identify the main elements required by the pursuit of ‘public happiness’ in terms of practical public policies. Healthy societies are those that share an inspiring narrative about the meaning of the good life; there ought to be a more equal distribution of national income and wealth to facilitate equal citizenship; the market economy should be subject to strong social and political institutions; provision should be made for universal education and health systems; as far as possible full employment opportunities should be created so that all may contribute. *The Flourishing Society* essayists explore aspects of these elements in richer detail. My own essay seeks to delineate a vision of a civic republic and the elements required to build a truly republican society and state. Philip Orr’s essay is a significant contribution, drawing out from our past the possibility of a more inspiring narrative about how we understand our human motivations and the central relevance of this to the challenges we now face in the context of the current crisis of capitalism. Moral philosophy and, in particular that of Francis Hutcheson, assumes seminal importance in our efforts to construct a more accurate and inspiring narrative concerning human flourishing. Sinéad Pentony discusses the key issue of how we develop an Irish economy which will service and support a flourishing society. Sli Éile, the *nom de plume* of an experienced public servant, details the necessary changes required in our political, institutional and legal frameworks if we are to build a new civic republic. Robin Wilson examines what we may learn from the Nordic countries in the wake of the collapse of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy. We conclude with a composite statement, ‘*Towards a Flourishing Society*’, as a contribution to the vital debate about renewal in the Irish State and economy. This statement illustrates how the themes and threads in the separate essays might be drawn together to produce both a coherent vision of a flourishing society and an approach to public policy-making that would help realise such a vision.



**VALUES ARE AT THE HEART OF THE MATTER**

At the centre of a flourishing society must be certain values embraced and expressed by citizens. It is important, in the current Irish crisis, not to rush to hand-me-down ‘solutions’ or ‘reforms’, based upon a broken economic model. To do so would be to neglect the slow but vital process of articulating values and building norms of behaviour which are essential to a flourishing society. It might indeed be argued that what has been lacking in the Irish context has been a widespread public understanding of, and commitment to, the values and norms discussed in this set of essays. The Final Report of the Planning Tribunal in March 2012 (the Mahon Report) illustrates the central need for a value system in our civic and political culture with its shocking finding that *‘corruption in Irish political life was both endemic and systemic’*. Elaine A. Byrne’s ***Political Corruption in Ireland 1922-2010 A Crooked Harp?*** (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2012) demonstrates the durability of Irish corruption. Together with the Mahon Report, this should sound as a clarion call to reimagine Irish society with an emphasis on the moral duties of citizenship. Indeed, Michael Keyes’s study ***Funding The Nation: Money and Nationalist Politics in Nineteenth-century Ireland*** (Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 2011) reminds us of the blurring of the relationships between fund-raising and politicians, to say the least, that is embedded in popular Irish political movements. We need to dig very deep into our political consciousness if we are to avoid the pervasive corrupting tendencies that appear to be acceptable to so many of our citizens.

Many initiatives, indeed, might be taken to ‘consult’ the people on what needs to be done. We applaud initiatives such as ***We, The Citizens*** which have demonstrated the value and methodology of deliberative democracy (see [www.wethecitizens.ie](http://www.wethecitizens.ie)) and the valuable work undertaken to propose ***A Citizens’ Assembly on Political Reform*** produced in October 2011 by the Second Republic movement (see [www.2nd-republic.ie](http://www.2nd-republic.ie)). However, if the well of the public mind has run dry or lacks a moral compass or has been shaped by exhausted ideas, then surely it is valuable to drill deeper to find new streams flowing underground deep in our past, as demonstrated so valuably in Philip Orr’s essay. We may very profitably seek fresh channels in the thinking of those beyond our shores, as Robin Wilson’s essay does so informatively in relation to the Nordic countries. Take, for example, the national approach to wealth: hitherto, we have calibrated our ‘success’ mainly in terms of growth as measured by gross national product.

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However, political wisdom from classical times teaches us first to decide what kind of political, social and cultural living we desire to pursue before simply opting for wealth creation as the main, or indeed the only, measure of national development. As Aristotle argued concerning the framework of a flourishing society, it is necessary to discuss first *'what the most choiceworthy way of life is. As long as this is unclear, the best regime must necessarily be unclear as well.'* The recovery of the wisdom embedded in moral and political philosophy concerning what is supportive of human flourishing proves to be a vital resource in seeking to develop a new paradigm for societal development in the face of the literal, as well as the moral bankruptcy, of the 'neo-liberal' paradigm. Wealth creation has been the pivot around which our society has revolved, and we urgently need Aristotle's reminder that *'clearly wealth is not the good we are seeking, since it is [merely] useful, [choiceworthy only] for some other end.'* Resources such as wealth are good only insofar as they promote human development. In order for resources to be so utilised, society must be centred upon the unique value of the human person and what is required for each person to function as fully as possible and so to live a flourishing life. Sinéad Pentony's essay convincingly argues that we need a radical new political economy to underpin the challenges ahead if all public policies are to create and support the conditions for a flourishing society.

### THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND CAPABILITY APPROACH

Each society is a work in progress: the key question concerns the direction of that progress. Societies decay and decline while others develop and grow. It has become apparent that the essential ingredients of positive development and growth are the individuals who comprise society. The emergence of the human development and capability approach in recent decades as an alternative to the broken 'neo-liberal' model is a decisive shift and one that Ireland needs to embrace.<sup>1</sup> This involves a wide range of measures of aspects of human development being employed to assess and develop public policy. It requires a radical change in public governance based upon developing the capabilities of all citizens to engage in public deliberation and the design of public services as well as in the 'co-production' of the optimum outcomes of policy and services. Amartya Sen has formulated a capability approach that links closely to the Aristotelian conception of the vision of human flourishing.

The capability approach is a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual wellbeing and social arrangements, as well as for the design of policies and proposals to effect social change. It is interdisciplinary in character, and focuses on the multi-dimensional aspects of wellbeing. The approach highlights the difference between means and ends, and between substantive freedoms (capabilities) and outcomes (achieved functionings).

Sen emphasises the importance of freedom, attaching value to choice and opportunities for individuals to live the life they choose and have reason to value given their personal and social circumstances. Building upon these insights we come to appreciate that resources such as wealth, income and, say, health care are not the key variable on which to focus when evaluating societal development. Rather, the focal variable is that of individual and group capability. This approach has radical and fundamental implications. If adopted it would mean that we would assess all our public policies and services through this totally new lens: asking the radical questions as to how they are developing better human functionings and improved capabilities in those they serve. We would accept as a societal obligation the provision of the essential resources and supports required to improve our people’s capability to function.<sup>2</sup>

If we make this ‘paradigm shift’ then a positive virtuous circle begins to develop: by utilising a capability approach, as we learn together how to optimise outcomes in relation to public services, new capabilities are evoked while outcomes are improved. In the longer term, society itself develops positively with a greater human capacity to grow and evolve into a flourishing society.

### **THE FLOURISHING SOCIETY – EMERGING FROM A NEW DISCOURSE**

As the reference to Amartya Sen indicates, the concept of a flourishing society and a new development paradigm has emerged from the seminal discourse in political philosophy and economic thought which began well before the collapse of the western world’s financial and economic systems in 2007-2008. Pointers to the emerging crisis were indeed evident for some decades before the crash. The Stiglitz Report for the UN observed that *‘the crisis is man-made: it was the result of mistakes by the private sector and misguided and failed policies of the public.’*<sup>3</sup> This Report set out how the

neo-liberal economic philosophies which prevailed for the past quarter century distorted decisions in both the private and public sectors, and how flawed institutions and institutional arrangements at both national and international levels contributed to the crisis. Other and sounder political and economic philosophies were overlooked. The Stiglitz Report states that it is essential that we now work *‘for a robust and sustainable recovery and for reforms that ensure long-term, democratic, equitable, stable, and sustainable growth’* and that we do this *‘with a broader respect for a wide range of ideas and perspectives’*.<sup>4</sup> A particular and pernicious concept of the market – that markets are a self-correcting mechanism which will assure economic development and that regulation is accordingly either unnecessary or ought to be ‘light-touch’ – pervaded the ideologies of the ruling elites in our society. This concept was based upon the economic illiteracy promulgated by so many in the profession of economics who simplistically, and with devastating consequences, produced economic analyses which ignored the moral and philosophical bases necessary to the discipline of economics, as it was to the work of Adam Smith, the founder of classical economics.<sup>5</sup> Philip Orr’s essay reminds us of the fundamental importance of that great Irish moral philosopher, Francis Hutcheson, the father of the Scottish Enlightenment and teacher of Adam Smith. Human motivations are deeper and more plural than simply the pursuit of self-interest – we have a profound capacity for sympathy with other human beings and the ability to act altruistically. We can, and must if we are to flourish, develop and live according to a moral code that is to the long-term benefit of everyone. We need to recover our confidence in this regard in order to challenge the still influential ‘neo-liberals’ who are either unwilling or unable to learn the lessons of failure – even a failure so massive as the Great Recession of 2008. The collapse of the moral authority associated with the Roman Catholic Church in the Irish State emphasises the need to articulate and find a new consensus around a moral code without which no society can flourish.

#### **A NEW POLITICS OF THE COMMON GOOD?**

It is important that progressives do not abandon the field of moral and religious discourse to other less benign forces in society: warning must be taken from the gross misuse of Christianity by fundamentalist and right-wing reactionary elements now so dominant in the Republican Party in the USA. The solution to certain problems does require moral

transformation: issues of justice and equality, for example, rely upon norms and values which flow from the Jewish and Christian heritage in the western world. Social democratic and progressive thinking in the past drew from religiously expressed social values. In the Irish context, the resources of Christian social teaching remain fundamental to the struggle for justice, equality and solidarity, given the religious heritage of many Irish people. The essential separation of churches from the State ought not to mean that we shut off the potential of faith-based progressive thinking in relation to the flourishing society. To do so would be fatal to the need for motivational and meaningful narratives for so many citizens. It would also be, perhaps, a betrayal of so many Christian witnesses in the battles for justice and equality such as Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Desmond Tutu, as well as others active in Ireland such as Dr Kathleen Lynn, the pioneer of children’s healthcare. In the pursuit of justice and equality we cannot set aside our personal moral and religious convictions. Of course, we should not expect to impose particular moral standpoints which have not been subjected to the scrutiny of public deliberation and received democratic endorsement.<sup>6</sup> Michael Sandel, the influential political philosopher, has argued persuasively that justice involves cultivating virtue and reasoning about the common good:

*‘A just society can’t be achieved simply by maximising utility or by securing freedom of choice. To achieve a just society we have to reason together about the meaning of the good life, and to create a public culture hospitable to the disagreements that will inevitably arise...The challenge is to imagine a politics that takes moral and spiritual questions seriously, but brings them to bear on broad economic and civic concerns, not only on sex and abortion.’<sup>7</sup>*

Sandel’s framework of key themes for ‘a new politics of the common good’ deserve deep and widespread public deliberation: *citizenship, sacrifice and service; the moral limits of markets; inequality, solidarity, and civic virtue; and a politics of moral engagement.*<sup>8</sup>

### THINKING BIG IN DARK TIMES

Our concepts of human nature and capacity are fundamental to the kind of society we envision. The *Flourishing Society* essayists believe in a view of the human person that is not static or one-dimensional but is rather plural and active – we flourish best when we have autonomy and when

we exercise this autonomy in positive relationships with others. We flourish best when we have scope to use our imaginative and creative potential – knowing that our needs and interests change and evolve over time. We have actual and potential capabilities that naturally seek outlets for expression in the service of others. We are social beings who flourish best when we can help meet each other's needs. By so doing so we develop good habits which become the social virtues underpinning a successful and flourishing society. This more accurate and rounded concept of the human person contrasts sharply with the merely self-interested maximiser of commodities propounded in neo-liberal ideology. It also generates a richer conceptualisation of what society as a whole can achieve. Thinking anew and thinking big, as the essays that follow invite us to do, is now imperative in the face of the Irish crisis. As we learn from the work of Hannah Arendt, the political philosopher whose seminal work reflects so profoundly on the human awfulness of the twentieth century, there is a fundamental relationship between thinking and right-doing and, conversely, between thoughtlessness and wrong-doing. The capacity to think is inherent in the human person but must be nurtured: we need to develop opportunities for such fresh thinking by all citizens who wish to be free of received, unexamined beliefs. In *'dark times, thinking brings much needed light and clarity'*.<sup>9</sup> Thinking becomes crucial in freeing ourselves from the scripts and standards that we too often take for granted, or that may be regarded as immutable, even when they bring crisis and disaster in their wake. Thinking is not only vital in moments of crisis, but will remain essential in times to come when we have brighter possibilities before us. We are challenged, at this historical juncture, to think afresh in a very fundamental way, and to think big for Ireland in these 'dark times'.

## REFERENCES

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2. See a more detailed description in Fergus O'Ferrall, 'Public Participation: Involving Citizens in Designing Public Services', in *Working Notes Facts and Analysis of Social and Economic Issues*, Issue No:67, September, 2011, pp.3-9.

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4. Ibid, p.194.
5. See Adam Smith *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Introduced by Amartya Sen and edited with notes by Ryan Patrick Hanley (Penguin Books, London, 2009) and *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, edited by Knud Haakonson (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006).
6. See the very valuable contribution by Gerry O’Hanlon SJ., *Theology in the Irish Public Square*, (The Columba Press, 2010).and Fergus O’Ferrall ‘*Deus caritas est and Active Citizenship*’ in *Who is My Neighbour? Deus Caritas Est: An Encyclical for Our Times?*, edited by Eoin G. Cassidy (Veritas,2009), pp109-118 for brief discussion of possibility of a consensus building by the mainline Irish churches concerning the common good; see also *From Crisis To Hope Working To Achieve The Common Good*, by The Council for Justice and Peace of the Irish Episcopal Conference (Veritas, Dublin, 2011)
7. See Michael Sandel, *Justice What’s The Right Thing To Do?*, (Penguin Books, London, 2009) p.261-262.
8. Ibid pp.261-269
9. See *Thinking in Dark Times*, Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics, edited by Roger Berkowitz, Jeffrey Katz and Thomas Keenan (Fordham University Press, New York, 2010) especially introduction by Roger Berkowitz and ‘*What does it mean to think about politics*’, by Mark Antaki in this important collection of essays.

## Visioning a New Civic Republic and Building a Republican Society and State

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Fergus O’Ferrall

### INTRODUCTION

The set of profound crises that the Irish state and society are currently undergoing has led to a number of works of commentary or analysis.<sup>1</sup> Many commentators are critical of the public thinking which led to the deep economic recession in Ireland, and indeed endangered the very viability and independence of the Irish State. As a people we must address or adjust to the harsh implications of a unique set of political, economic, social and cultural crises. We have already experienced four years of retrenchment since 2008. If we continue on our present pathway in Ireland, the decade ahead will become a ‘lost decade’ with all that this means for emigration, economic under-performance, and erosion of confidence in the efficacy of the political system. *To avoid this fate we require a new vision.* We need to develop clear and effective steps to build a genuinely republican society and state. We, the people, are confronted with an historic opportunity to reconstitute, restructure and rethink our failed political and economic systems.<sup>2</sup> The extent to which we are able to do this successfully will be the measure of our ability to transcend the crises and to provide for the long term welfare of the Irish people: *the challenge is to place Irish society on an entirely new path of development.*

As a people we need a renewal of political consciousness embracing a new understanding of politics, economics and our social and cultural life. Let there be no doubt about it: we are engaged in a defining ‘battle of ideas’. The ‘battle’ is about how the crises may be understood and, more importantly, how they may be resolved. We need an alternative vision and a new narrative if we are to address our future together. That vision must be imbued with democratic and republican ideals that would herald a renaissance of Irish society, expanding the freedom, equality and fulfilment of every person and ensuring the common good of all. We need to envision the development of a communal and humane culture in contrast to the individualistic, consumerist culture which has predominated in Ireland: a vision where citizens see themselves primarily as interdependent within communities, where bonds of family



and community life are strengthened, where the values underpinning an egalitarian society are honoured and expressed at all levels of society. We need to build a public understanding that egalitarianism facilitates the best outcomes with regard to economic and social well-being. Such a vision is a *civic republican vision*. We need to set out on the national journey to build a fully republican society. We need to redesign our public institutions appropriately to serve citizens and to develop active citizenship in this society. The major steps on the journey towards a new Irish Civic Republic are emerging in the public debates which have followed the massive policy failures of the current Irish State. The first step – which is still where we are in 2012 – is to develop a consensus around an appropriate vision. Then we must mobilise citizen power and action to take the necessary, if difficult, steps over the coming years as we approach the centenary of Irish independence. Citizens are fundamentally responsible for the collective values and choices which result in the ‘way things are’, and for taking steps towards the ‘way things ought to be’. If, in the public sphere, we continue as before we will reap the same outcomes: systemic failure and endemic corruption. The civic republican vision for a better future is inspired by the inherent human potential to learn and exercise a collective power to build the world anew.

#### **WITHOUT VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH**

*Building a public consensus for a new vision of our future is vital:* a vision which commands widespread agreement is necessary to provide a beacon for our collective endeavour. An inspiring vision will provide the necessary motivation for citizens as they confront the extremely grave challenges now and in future years. A vision, if articulated constantly in the public sphere, will communicate to people where, as a political community, we are going – a sense of purpose and destiny is a key component of a healthy society. A vision will frame the agreed norms and values which are essential to govern our political and social behaviour as we move towards its realisation. A vision will provide a basis for better public understanding of the kind of Irish state we need to develop as we pursue urgent reform of our public institutions. Without such a vision we simply cannot flourish as a society. However, although vision is essential, we also need to be realistic and aware of the difficulties of scripting a comprehensive vision for Irish society at the present time when so many people are disillusioned, disheartened and disengaged from the public sphere. Centralisation, corporatism, clientilism, and corruption have

14 greatly eroded citizenship in Ireland. Yet we should never underestimate the power of an exciting and alternative public narrative, or the potential power of an inspiring vision of an expansive future to kindle a ‘new citizenship’ in Ireland.

#### THE NEW CIVIC REPUBLIC: A VISION FOR THE ‘FLOURISHING SOCIETY’

The key question we need to ask is ‘*what would Irish politics look like if promoting every person’s well-being was the main aim of our society and of our public institutions?*’ The short answer is that such a politics would look like *civic republicanism*.<sup>3</sup> This political philosophy is based upon political wisdom about human flourishing, compellingly expressed in classical political thought as well as in the more recent and remarkable revival of civic republican theory. It is based, in addition, upon a growing volume of empirical evidence regarding the conditions which promote human well-being.<sup>4</sup> *We need the rigour of a coherent and systematic political philosophy to govern our vision.* We need to base our actions upon empirical evidence concerning what makes for ‘flourishing’ societies, rather than upon an eclectic mix of consumerist aspirations which will result in confusion and failure.

The key concepts in civic republicanism are *freedom, equality and solidarity*. Each of these concepts needs to be expressed clearly and to be widely understood by citizens. Civic republican freedom is understood as *freedom from domination* in a society which places the common good at the centre of all public life. This definition contrasts sharply with the liberal idea of freedom, defined as freedom from interference by the State or by others. Crucial policy and practical implications arise from whichever definition of freedom we adopt. To take just one pertinent example, freedom from interference is perfectly compatible with our ‘two-tier’ health system, whereas freedom as non-domination is not: a single tier universal health system is a prerequisite in a genuinely republican society as it positively eliminates the dominance of wealth in determining access by citizens to medical care.

The civic republican definition of freedom would radically transform our approaches to the well-being of every citizen and would seek to eliminate the oppressive elements which dominate so many lives at present. Other examples of fundamental policy shifts might easily be given in respect of

gender or children, as we think through the implications of whichever definition of freedom we choose to adopt. Civic republicans down the centuries have designed public institutions to empower citizens to exercise collective direction over their lives and destiny – institutions which prevent domination by external or internal forces and which are equipped to counter corrupt interests which undermine the common good. Resting upon the sovereign power of citizens, the civic republic establishes public and accountable processes to ensure abuse of power by vested interests is identified and punished. The ‘common good’ is a crucial concept in civic republican thought: *it consists primarily of having the social systems, institutions, and environments on which we all depend operate in a manner that benefits all people*. The ‘common good’ does not just happen – it requires the co-operative efforts of citizens to create and sustain it. The ‘common good’ involves the sum total of social and economic conditions which facilitate people, both as communities and as individuals, to attain human fulfilment and human flourishing more fully and more easily. Collectively, citizens have to combat tendencies such as greed and selfishness, which undermine a sustained and widespread commitment to the ‘common good’. Specific republican understandings of equality and solidarity will be specified in the analysis which follows. The clarity of our vision of a new Civic Republic requires clarity about the specifically civic republican definitions of freedom, equality, and solidarity.

### **THE CIVIC REPUBLIC – KEY REQUIREMENTS**

The new civic republic in Ireland will require both institutional ‘hardware’ and intellectual ‘software’ to succeed. In brief, the key requirements are:

- well-designed central and local political and judicial institutions, with sufficient checks and balances to ensure accountable and effective public governance serving the common good.
- laws enacted by such institutions to prevent the exercise of arbitrary rule or will by any person or group with the potential to dominate others, and to prevent corruption in our State: freedom under the law and accountability to lawful authority.
- active citizens exercising civic virtues, based upon lifelong citizen education and participation at all levels, to ensure effective public

deliberation and governance committed to the common good at all levels – local and national.

- commitment to equality by taking effective action to ensure that the accumulation of wealth does not give rise to socio-economic inequalities which in turn undermines political equality: the growing income inequality in Irish society is incompatible with a ‘flourishing society’ [see *CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions in Ireland*, published in March, 2012, showing that the gap between the richest and poorest grew by more than 25% during 2010].

These fundamental requirements are centred on a profound respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each person, and an equal regard for the rights and responsibilities of each person within the political community. A civic republic so constituted evolves *over time* into a fully civic republican society and way of life. As the Task Force on Active Citizenship stated:

*‘..... [without] the practice of civic virtue and without active participation by citizens in the life of the community, the institutions of democracy, the market, the State- civil society as a whole- cannot operate in a sustainable way’*

The challenge for Irish citizens involves *a re-moralisation of the public sphere* based on core values such as solidarity, social justice, public service and the common good, as well as the values of inclusiveness, community-building and sustainability. The equal moral worth of every person needs to be asserted in the context of the distribution of resources and in the context of how power is distributed and used in Irish society and, in particular, in our political and economic arrangements. Irish citizens will find their security and fulfilment from living out these values rather than in the ‘rat race’ of selfish individualistic material pursuits.

It needs to be emphasised that a key dimension of a ‘flourishing society’ will be the sense of agency citizens acquire and develop – the sense of empowerment which they will experience in economic and social relationships and in the public sphere. Our State ultimately stands or falls on the nature and quality of the citizenship which it nurtures and evokes. We have to re-imagine Irish citizenship and what it ought to mean, not only for our politics but for all the key domains of living: community and neighbourhoods, education, healthcare and cultural life. This involves

recovering these domains from the 'market mindset', and instead understanding them as public areas where we *co-produce* public goods and where we need to act in an inter-dependent way in such *co-production* of goods which contribute to the 'common good'. Civic republicans may easily embrace the concept of '*development as freedom*' as described by Amartya Sen.<sup>5</sup> The inherent human agency (our capacity to act), which we share, is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is, as Sen has stressed, a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. Development consists of the removal of the various types of '*unfreedoms*' that leave people with little scope to exercise reasoned agency. Our *political* constructs may either limit or expand human capabilities. A civic republican society will be dedicated to ending domination and dependency, and will focus on fostering human capabilities and the substantive freedoms of citizens – political, economic and social. The current Irish State suffers from massive citizen 'capability deprivation', and as a result we have widespread dysfunction and failures on a massive scale across most areas of public life.<sup>6</sup> Devolution of power is a critical element in building the new civic republic; this must be accompanied by widespread public deliberative fora in all areas of public life. We face the challenge of reviving a moribund political system and the challenge of inculcating a new civic and public morality in our citizenry.

#### **HUMAN WELL-BEING – THE GOAL OF THE CIVIC REPUBLIC**

The civic republic when fully constituted and made effective is the optimum answer to the age old question: *how should people live together so that all may flourish?* The civic republic seeks to promote 'the flourishing society': a society where citizens are happy, healthy, capacitated and engaged together upon the human enterprise of developing the good life. This requires a key focus upon 'public happiness' and maximum levels of well-being for all. The goals of the civic republic are rooted in what has been described as '*civic humanism*' – a tradition rooted in classical and Renaissance thought which is opposed to acquisitive individualism, and is associated with the broad republican stream of thought from the seventeenth century. Civic humanism embraces patterns of society, economy and politics which cohere in a culture which is liberating, civilising and progressive. In brief, civic humanism represents the pattern of cultural consciousness that informs civic republicanism. It is manifested particularly in the theory and practice of participatory

citizenship. It is a way of everyday living which refuses to see life as the pursuit of individual, selfish and, for the most part, acquisitive private undertakings: civic humanism views fulfilment as deriving from a full realisation of the potentiality intrinsic to human beings in the context of our participation, with others, in the public sphere and for the common good. It is notable that civic humanism, as experienced for example in Renaissance Florence or the early American Republic, often emerged as a response to major crises, when historical moments of disorder have created scope for the formative activity of a new beginning. *Now surely is such a time in Ireland.*

A recent NESC Report sets out a clear understanding of well-being which is consistent with a civic republican perspective:

*‘... a person’s well-being relates to their physical, social and mental state. It requires that basic needs are met, that people have a sense of purpose, and that they feel able to achieve important goals, to participate in society and to live lives they value and have reason to value.*

*People’s well-being is enhanced by conditions that include financial and personal security, meaningful and rewarding work, supportive personal relationships, strong and inclusive communities, good health, and a healthy and attractive environment, and values of democracy and social justice.’<sup>7</sup>*

### **SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES PUT EQUALITY AND WELL-BEING AT THEIR HEART**

The great contemporary political and economic debate in Western societies is between those who are rooted in neo-liberal ideology and see the primary goals of politics and public policy as maximising the *quantity of things* (gross domestic product, corporate profits, competitive profits, and quantitative targets), as against those who are rooted in civic republican ideology and view the core political enterprise as the achievement of a certain *quality of human life for every citizen* (sustainable growth, corporate social responsibility, flourishing and rounded human lives, and safe, vibrant local communities).

The key political struggle in Ireland is that between conservative defenders of the status quo who are committed to the ‘old quantitative economics’ – they just want to get back to where we were before the

crash – and various radical reformers seeking qualitative goals in an entirely new model of development. The ideology underpinning the hitherto predominant economic model, based upon a view of human beings as mainly selfish maximizers of their individual interests, has led us into a massive political, economic and social crisis. *We urgently need a more rounded and accurate concept of what it is to be human in our economic thinking – we need a different political economy for a ‘civic republic’.* Civic republicanism, rearticulated for the twenty-first century, enables us to envision and build a framework for creating a more equal and socially just Ireland. Although dominant political elements and many ‘thought leaders’ in Ireland still measure success using the old paradigm of ‘quantity’ and economic growth *per se* (as understood by classical or neo-liberal economists), our people yearn for a better quality of life and the opportunity to lead fulfilling and meaningful lives for themselves and for coming generations. As Professor Kathleen Lynch has put it:

*‘We have a choice: we can either create a highly unequal and polarised society with a minority of very wealthy people, a sizeable body of secure middle class people and a rising number of poor and vulnerable people. Or we can create an egalitarian society, where no one will be destitute, where there will be high quality health care and excellent education for all age groups; where each will have a safe and secure home, where there is a well resourced welfare system based upon a concept of rights rather than discretion and charity; where there is an accessible and affordable public transport system and proper supports for both the care of children, and of older and other vulnerable people. We can create a society where women and men are equal to each other in all walks of life, not just in the economy but in sharing the responsibility for caring, in participating in politics and in defining what is of value in the cultural sphere.’<sup>8</sup>*

Empirical evidence clearly shows that societies which put human well-being and equality at the centre of their public policies are most successful across economic, political and social outcomes: conversely, the most unequal EU countries are the most economically insecure. If Ireland is to develop a successful and sustainable society in the twenty-first century then a new political consciousness must be evoked based upon freedom, equality and solidarity. The mindset fixated narrowly upon ‘the market’ has led to massive economic, political and policy failures. Civic republicanism sees the social market economy within *the prior delineation*

*of the public realm; indeed the sustainability of a successful economy depends upon the moral framework in the political order.*

Professor Kathleen Lynch and her colleagues in the Equality Studies Centre at University College, Dublin have outlined a persuasive framework for understanding how the concepts of equality, and related concepts such as freedom and solidarity, imply radical challenges to existing structures in a predominantly capitalist economy.<sup>9</sup> Their impressive analysis is aided by a civic republican public philosophy as the underpinning of the participatory democracy which they advocate as crucial to an egalitarian society.

Ensuring that *equality of condition* is central to our political objectives will fundamentally challenge the current social structures in Ireland, and particularly structures of domination and oppression which transmit inequalities through successive generations. The Irish middle classes – at least those powerful and entrenched elements in the professional and rentier classes who have benefited greatly from the dismal populist politics of the Irish State – will not easily be persuaded that their real interests will be served in a civic republican dispensation.<sup>10</sup>

#### **DRINKING FROM OUR OWN WELLS TO CREATE NEW NARRATIVE**

The ‘battle of ideas’ about Ireland’s future is a struggle for political power, and requires people power to be wielded in such a way that we create an emancipatory politics and society. Those who desire a new civic republican politics are not without significant resources for the struggle: indeed the norms and values of civic republicanism are embedded in the foundation liberation experiences of the Irish people since the eighteenth century.

The Irish State is democratic but has not developed as a civic republic.

Detailed expositions as to the social and economic order that is implied by republicanism were largely absent from past Irish nationalist and liberation struggles. However, since the eighteenth century authentically *civic republican* ideas were never totally eclipsed in Ireland. There is, indeed, a very rich civic republican heritage on the island of Ireland which will prove a vital resource in the task of reconstituting, restructuring and



rethinking our state and society.<sup>11</sup> The challenge is to freshly articulate civic republicanism as the most relevant and apposite public philosophy as our State approaches the centenary of independence. Indeed it might be an appropriate centennial goal to build from our existing democratic framework a new civic republic by 2022. The coming decade has the potential to take us on an exciting developmental journey of citizen engagement and public deliberation. In other words, let us use what might otherwise be a 'lost decade' to ensure we never face such a profound existential set of crises again. As we undertake major reform processes aimed at creating the 'flourishing society', the lessons learnt on this journey may help create and sustain the new political culture which is needed to underpin the civic republic in the longer term.

#### **CIVIC REPUBLICANISM AND PUBLIC POLICIES**

Public policies will not of themselves effect the revolution in our political culture required to move from a managerial, centralised, controlling State (one which has long been pervaded by a defective neo-liberal orthodoxy) towards a new participative, empowering and enabling civic republican State. However, the choices we make about which policies to pursue, and especially how they are formulated and implemented, will be formative in shaping an emerging culture and developing political and social relationships over time. We need to be able to identify the key strategic 'battlegrounds' where public opinion may be informed and developed with regard to the civic republican norms and values involved in the issues at stake. Therefore, for example, we need to immediately examine the research and evidence available concerning putting *well-being* at the centre of public policies, and highlight the resultant implications for national and local government. The following five areas of public policy will provide such 'battlegrounds' for civic republicans:

- 1. Measuring what matters** – we need to agree a detailed set of annual national and local well-being accounts and have them placed at the heart of all policy-making and evaluation. What gets measured gets done. We need a 'balanced scorecard' which measures the following key areas: wealth creation capacity, infrastructure, quality of life and social justice, and public services, including the degree to which our institutions are ethical, competent and accountable.

2. **Developing a convincing new sustainable economic model** – we need to build on the emerging re-invention of the discipline of *political economy* to spell out how a new civic economy will be developed (starting from where we are now) into a new model which allows every person to have a fulfilling and purposeful life and have their needs met.
3. **Creating an education system that promotes human flourishing** – we need a democratic system (which is experienced by learners as formative of their citizenship) that promotes lifelong educational opportunities from early childhood to old age, and which seeks to develop citizen capabilities and competences as well as creativity and social entrepreneurship.
4. **Focussing on the promotion of health for all our citizens across the whole range of public policy** – we need to develop a ‘health in all policies’ approach to public policy-making in order to address the social determinants of health and end the stark health inequalities in Irish society.
5. **Strengthening civil society and active citizenship** – a strong, vibrant and independent civil society is essential to a civic republic, and is the principal vehicle for maximising human well-being and public happiness. The vital link between well-being and democratic involvement has implications for public services – people must be involved in the design and delivery of the services required. In this regard, the concept of ‘co-production’ of desired outcomes is crucial.<sup>12</sup> Civil society organisations must be encouraged to contest public policies, to undertake their own policy analysis and to have the opportunities to advocate for policy change. This must include the opportunity to engage in Oireachtas hearings. The public service and Government must be constantly challenged in regard to the evidence-base underpinning all policies.

#### **BUILDING THE CIVIC REPUBLIC – ADOPTING A FRAMEWORK FOR EQUALITY**

The complex agenda of transformation which is required to build the new civic republic includes political, economic and social headings. However, it must be remembered that there are major interconnections between all public policies, and that the very structure of our traditional governmental departments militates against effective outcomes when judged against the coherence required by a public philosophy such as

civic republicanism. Professor Kathleen Lynch and her colleagues have developed a framework for promoting 'equality of condition' across our key social systems: *economic, political, cultural and affective*. This is vital for thinking through how all major institutions and structures impact on individuals and on particular groups. This framework also underlines how interwoven these social systems are.<sup>13</sup> The key dimensions of resources, respect and recognition, power and love, care and solidarity apply across all our social systems. For example, our cultural system plays a key role in generating equality and inequality. This system is concerned with the production, transmission and legitimation of cultural practices and products, including various forms of symbolic representation and communication. The vital importance for civic republican society of an independent public service and not-for-profit media is apparent: who controls our media and whose interests are served by our media pose stark challenges for our future well-being. The cultural system is especially important in generating differences in social standing and status, and hence is a crucial domain for civic republicanism. Likewise, inequality in the affective domain is particularly detrimental for women and children – and others also – and it undercuts drastically our prospects of an egalitarian society.

**POLITICAL REFORM:**

The late Peter Mair's expert analysis of Ireland's political system demonstrates that Ireland compares very poorly as an effective democracy with other countries in Europe.<sup>14</sup> We have a citizenry which is disengaged and passive and a passive 'political class'; there is a lack of innovation and little room for new ideas and new political styles. We have a '*moribund politics and a moribund political culture*'. The political system has largely ceded control over policy-making and policy design to the civil service: unusually in Ireland, we have allocated to '*the bureaucracy the role of principal initiator and designer of policy rather than simply the executor of policy*'. Historically, much was delegated to the institutions of the Catholic Church in regard to social policy, social welfare, health and education. Political parties absolved themselves of responsibility for governing or policy-making: Government representatives often speak as if they were in opposition to any given policy situation or outcome for which they have formal responsibility. It is therefore no surprise that the State in recent

years ‘effectively passed responsibility for policy making in the financial sector to the banks and the big business lobbies.’

This analysis has profound implications. There has been developed in Ireland ‘a political world which has ceded much of its control to other organisations and groups, and which has become autonomous and self-contained, rarely connecting in any meaningful sense to a life outside itself. Politics in these circumstances becomes an end in itself, and becomes a contest that is played for its own benefit and that of its players. It is not something that requires engagement with or mobilisation of the citizenry at large- that happens at a much more personalistic and local level by the parish pump – and hence it encourages passivity’.<sup>15</sup> In other words, politics is not something whose success or failure is measured in terms of policy performance or output. We have a polity which, in Peter Mair’s words, is ‘demobilised as well as demoralized’. We have had ‘pork-barrel politics’ and ‘showtime’ election campaigns.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to draft a new Constitution for Ireland. This need is evident because of the ambiguity about the nature of State in relation to civic republicanism and because of the radical changes which have taken place in Irish society over the last century. We need a **Constitution for a Civic Republic** which will be short and provide the underpinning for the norms, values and public institutions of a twenty-first century republic. A Constitutional Convention is necessary to prepare for the new Constitution, and it ought to comprise legal, political and civil society representatives and avail of the best international expertise on constitutional and republican theory. It should be convened under an international chair (we do need external facilitation such as Senator George Mitchell provided in Northern Ireland). It should be requested to furnish a new draft Constitution over a period of two years.

The first year should involve a major public deliberative process throughout Ireland, building perhaps upon the consultative methodology of the Forum on Europe. This will provide an important element in the process of engaging the Irish people in a renewal of politics. Some of the key areas the Constitutional Convention will have to examine include

- Oireachtas Reform – Dail and Seanad: composition and role of Government and restoration of Parliament’s ability to hold the Executive to account and to undertake effective enquiries

- The European Union and the Irish State
- The role of political parties
- The 'common good' versus the role of private property
- The courts and judiciary
- Local government and local taxation: the chronic centralisation of the Irish State must be changed to ensure devolution of power to local government
- Public service – constitutional basis for independence from politics and to protect values
- The new relationship with Northern Ireland, and North/South co-operation and convergence upon agreed areas

#### **ECONOMIC POLICY:**

The development of a sustainable new economic model requires a radical approach based upon the concept of *res publica*: the task of the State ought to be to organise economic, social and cultural activities so that *all our citizens* have opportunities to contribute to developing 'the flourishing society' – the concept of 'unemployment' for hundreds of thousands of our citizens must become redundant. There are constructive roles for every citizen to play in society, and it is a failure of both imagination and organisation that imposes 'unemployment' on so many of our citizens. In facing up to the challenge of creating a more equal society, seeking to ensure more equal incomes is as important as seeking to have effective redistribution of income and wealth through taxation policies. It has to be recognised that building a new and viable economy from the present very difficult situation will take a generation or more. It is important, however, to begin this historic task based upon the right principles, and not upon false hopes of 'restoration' or 'recovery' of the failed neo-liberal model. We must seek to learn from the work of notable international economists, such as Joseph Stiglitz and others, who are seeking to restore the civic humanist and moral basis to the analyses and practice of the discipline of *political economy*. Since the 1970s, economics as a discipline effectively became captive to a failed ideology of unfettered and unrestrained market forces. A reading of Rachel S. Turner's *Neo-Liberal Ideology: History, Concepts and Policies* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008, paperback edition, 2011) should be mandatory for the vocal but untutored economists who almost daily propound their nostrums to the Irish public.

The new economic model will need to be built upon a tax-driven fiscal consolidation strategy combined with an effective strategy of public investment so that over the next decade Ireland achieves more balanced budgets. The strategy must be based on fairness in burden-sharing, with those with the greatest resources bearing the greatest share of the adjustment. It will need to identify the ‘pillars of growth’ for the new civic economy using our indigenous resources in such areas as new tourism products, new green food products, services and new technology, as well as new commercial opportunities in domains like education, and health and well-being. The new model for the Irish economy of the future will need to be much more diversified than the failed model of the past. In many of these areas Ireland has competitive advantages, but they are currently very underdeveloped. The challenge facing Ireland is how to create sustainable competitive advantages to ensure success in the future by realising the potential of resources that are truly unique to Ireland. One stimulating analysis points to our social and cultural capital, sense of place and identity when combined with science and research as key resources.<sup>16</sup> It is the creative capacities of Irish citizens in a learning society that will be fundamental to the new economic paradigm:

*‘A society is more than an economy. The contemporary obsession with achieving maximum GNP growth as the overriding policy target is likely to be counterproductive. A learning society is one where shared meaning, a sustainable culture, a common sense of purpose, a service ethic and social relationships intertwine. The health of a society depends on how (or if) people feel about each other, care about the world and believe in some kind of common purpose. Real progress can only come from shared prosperity, so large disparities in income or perceived inequalities in opportunity for advancement do not foster an innovative culture.....In reality, a complex relationship exists between national well-being, a successful society, research, innovation, productivity and competitiveness. The ‘qualities’ of the country, exemplified in its unique cultural, social and natural environments, constitute the crucial elements in Ireland’s economic base, innovation strategy and international competitiveness.’<sup>17</sup>*

There is an imperative to develop our environment in accordance with the highest standards of planning and protection. Our environment is key to an innovative strategy to build economic success upon a ‘green’ and sustainable foundation. It is the basis for energy policy for the future, and for sustainable tourism.

### **SOCIAL POLICY:**

In a civic republic the principles of solidarity, equity and universal provision must underpin social policies. In this context, the civic republican value of solidarity is crucial. Solidarity is about recognising the bonds of interdependence between human beings. When practised, it is a key moral and civic virtue but it evolves from a recognition of the social reality that human beings are mutually dependent on each other for their well-being and care. There is an intimate connection between solidarity and the common good, solidarity and the fair distribution of resources, and between solidarity and equality between citizens. As a civic virtue, it is expressed as a firm and unswerving determination to commit oneself to the common good. In the key domains of life, solidarity will be the essential hall-mark of a civic republic. Therefore, for example, in education and healthcare universal access based upon ability to benefit or on need ought to be provided throughout life, without access being means-tested. Social protection and welfare policies ought to have social solidarity as their central concern. This civic republican approach is essential to living the 'flourishing life', and provides the indispensable basis for facilitating each citizen's participation, upon equal terms, in the social and political life of the state. The rights of minorities, such as ethnic minorities, must be guaranteed on an equal basis with those of other citizens. An absolute commitment to gender equality in every sphere of life will be a distinctive mark of a civic republic.

### **CONCLUSION**

We face a major ideological struggle to engage the Irish people and to enable citizens to embrace a new public philosophy. The barriers include the predominance of a neo-liberal discourse in the mindsets of those who shape public policies, and the weaknesses so apparent in our State institutions. The fact that the European Union has incorporated so much of neo-liberal thought into its model, even as it undermines citizen support for the Union itself, makes it very difficult to confront it domestically. Following the loss of our economic sovereignty, and in the wake of the Mahon Report, we face stark choices.

We now have a State bereft of meaningful sovereignty and a rotten governing culture: do we continue to accept the predominant discourse

that led us to this pass? As citizens, we forfeit our collective future if we do. **We must combat this discourse by thinking differently.**

There is a marked anti-intellectualism in our political culture, combined with an absence of discussion and understanding of political ideas amongst the general public. Often, indeed, the rule of fear and dependency eliminates the possibilities of contestation or dissent. This enables those with a vested interest in the status quo to impose upon, and to dominate, the majority. We need to name the sicknesses at the heart of our polity. We need the moral courage *‘to call people out’* in respect of their ideological stances – stances which are often cleverly disguised using populist mantras such *‘there is no alternative’*. Freedom to say what we think is not sufficient in the present circumstances; *we need to use that freedom to think through for ourselves about what is now being said by defenders of the failed status quo on our behalf*. This requires ensuring that we have the words to critique our world and to articulate new aspirations. People need public deliberative forums for this to develop, and civil society organisations play a vital role in empowering citizens in this regard. If given inspirational leadership, many people will come to share the civic republican vision. We must have the courage to give such leadership, and we must be prepared to answer the questions which inevitably arise, offering realistic and achievable goals and policies.

The new Civic Republic of Ireland will, I believe, stand for a great and generous experiment in human well-being and happiness. It will be founded upon an educated and intellectually vibrant citizenry, imbued with the civic virtues and dedicated to the common good. It will develop a society where every person will be enabled to exercise the whole range of their human capacities and live rewarding and fulfilling lives as part of an energetic and humane political community.

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## The Secret Chain: Francis Hutcheson and Irish Dissent – A Political Legacy

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Philip Orr

Francis Hutcheson is associated with the Scottish Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, due to his professorial role at Glasgow University. During his period as an academic in Scotland, from 1729 until 1746, he taught the philosopher David Hume and the economist Adam Smith, as well as enacting the roles of teacher and father–figure to the sons of Irish dissenting families who had travelled to Glasgow to engage in the higher education that they were denied under the Williamite settlement.

However, Hutcheson can be considered an Irish intellectual of considerable distinction. This essay will consider whether his writings have had any influence on subsequent Irish history, as well as contributing to political developments beyond these islands. It will ask whether his philosophy speaks into the social and economic dilemmas faced in contemporary Ireland and whether Hutcheson possesses a vision of human nature and of society that poses pertinent questions about the prevailing verities and contemporary ethos of Irish capitalism.

Francis Hutcheson was born in 1694 in Saintfield, County Down and he attended an academy for the education of dissenters in the nearby town of Killyleagh. He crossed to Glasgow and attended the university where he would later become such an influential teacher. He returned to Ireland as a young clergyman, but before long he had accepted the job of running a dissenting academy in Dublin's Drumcondra Lane, a post that he held throughout most of the 1720s. Such academies provided young Presbyterians and members of other minority Protestant groups with an education that could reach the academic levels expected during the early years of a contemporary degree in a Scottish university. During his time in Dublin, Hutcheson joined a circle of thinkers and writers who were encouraged in their work by Viscount Molesworth of Brackenstown, near Swords. Molesworth was an influential figure in the Irish Establishment. He was the owner of a beautiful and innovatively designed country estate and he was a friend of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury.

Shaftesbury was opposed to the theories of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville, in which human nature is seen as intrinsically self-centred, requiring strict contractual governance in order to stem the tide of anarchic egoism. He was an articulate opponent of Mandeville's argument that all social and altruistic behaviour is the result of '*the secret stratagems of self-love*.'<sup>1</sup> For Shaftesbury, human beings were sociable and benevolent beings, who desired the network of what we now call 'the community' in order to thrive. As part and parcel of this optimistic, open vision of humanity, Shaftesbury argued for the appropriateness and the benefits of tolerance in matters of religious belief and in the expression of heterodox political opinions.

As Francis Hutcheson was establishing himself in Molesworth's Dublin circle, he would have found himself in a somewhat difficult position. As a leading Presbyterian he possessed a marginal status within a society in which the Established Church was dominant. Yet the intellectual group within which the young philosopher was nurturing new friendships included, the literary Church of Ireland cleric, Dean Swift, and a range of establishment politicians and clerics, all of whom endorsed the preservation of a Protestant Ascendancy which kept both Dissenters and Catholics firmly 'in their place'. This was despite the fact that Molesworth himself possessed an interest in the new religious viewpoints thrown up by the Enlightenment, such as deism.

Hutcheson established a secure reputation as a writer of substance and quality, in short articles published in a Dublin journal and more extensively within two books of philosophy published during the 1720s – his *Enquiry into the Original of Beauty and Virtue*, first published in 1725, and his *Essays on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, which followed in 1728.

## II

Hutcheson's philosophy, as enunciated in the Dublin texts and expanded in later writings, was a creative extension of the view expressed by Lord Shaftesbury – that human nature is inherently prone to sympathy and kindness. The young author stressed that acts of human goodness bring much pleasure both to those who practice them and those who behold them. Hutcheson argued that human beings *do* care passionately about

others and that there is a distinct, inner faculty called the ‘moral sense’ which is possessed by all of us, and which is capable of discerning good and evil and can guide us into all kinds of ethical behaviour, in which we bring to bear our ‘*natural disposition*’ to ‘*desire the happiness of any known sensitive creature*’ – that is, so long as we are perceive ‘*no oppositions of interest*.’<sup>2</sup>

Mandeville’s pessimistic verdict on human nature is well summed up in his theologically coloured statement that ‘*...it is impossible that Man, mere fallen Man, should act with any other view but to please himself*.’ Such statements brought disapproval from Hutcheson, who was at pains to find evidence that we are far more often ‘*employed about the state of others*’ than seeking our own ‘*private good*’, noting that most of us like to think we are making a positive contribution to the world around us and that we often ‘*measure our own self-esteem by the benefits we bestow on those closest to us*.’<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that the writer of *An Enquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* also aimed to establish human happiness and personal well-being as the objective of moral law and the aim of all enlightened policy-making. To read this early 18<sup>th</sup> century book today is to notice a number of judgments which helped create the intellectual basis for later policies delivered by social reformers within the British body politic. One particular statement by Hutcheson became a famous watchword for 19<sup>th</sup> century reform, when adopted as a utilitarian maxim by Jeremy Bentham. Hutcheson had written with luminous concision in the *Enquiry* that:

*‘that action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers; and that is worst, which, in like manner, occasions misery.’*<sup>4</sup>

It may be argued that Hutcheson’s emphasis on ‘*happiness*’ as the ultimate goal of morality, and also of social and economic policy, continues to have great resonance far beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, in a contemporary world where the maximisation of material wealth and the pursuit of year-on-year economic growth have been established as the paradigms of 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism, guiding the approaches adopted by so many political leaders, in Ireland and elsewhere. Hutcheson’s advocacy of the widespread dissemination of happiness amongst the ‘*greatest numbers*’ of people is also starkly significant, given the huge gap in present-day Ireland (as well as many other western nations and all across the world) between the

physical comfort and educational prospects of a secure minority and the much more vulnerable and potentially perilous fate of the rest of society.

So Hutcheson's moral discourse, as evidenced in this and other maxims, speaks to our disappointing world of human inequality and cupidity, with a vision of an often-thwarted human instinct to care for one another and to seek each other's welfare – as summed up in a delightful phrase, where he describes humanity's capacity for sympathetic kindness as

*'this secret chain between each person and mankind'*<sup>5</sup>

For Hutcheson, too many moralists simply *'twist self-love into a thousand shapes'* in order to argue for a politics of constraint, justified by the *'need'* to govern a supposedly ineradicable human tendency towards individual self-aggrandisement. Hutcheson argued that there is, at the deepest level within human conduct, *'an entirely different principle of action from interest or self-love'*, and he proposed that no misguided thinker should disparage or ignore this *'secret sense'* which *'influences us to the love of others.'* Hutcheson believed his argument was strengthened by the fact that – as well as enjoying our own acts of benevolence towards others – we relish seeing complete strangers acting with generosity towards one another. Indeed, *'we feel joy within us, admire the lovely action and praise its author.'*<sup>6</sup>

Hutcheson was particularly keen to assert, throughout the *Enquiry*, that *'there is a universal determination to benevolence in mankind, even towards the most distant of the species'* and that it is this instinctive *'moral sense'* that stimulates and guides men and women to acts of charity that go beyond mere, self-serving affiliation with kith and kin. Arguably, if transferred by time travel into the modern era, in which there is often an instant awareness of far-off famine and natural disaster, Hutcheson would have been unsurprised that human beings often give very generously to those who are suffering dire mishap and tragedy on the other side of the world.<sup>7</sup>

One obvious consequence of belief in a web of instinctive human benevolence is support for a politics that acknowledges such benign proclivities and puts them to good use. Thus, for Hutcheson, a wise politician – perceiving that each individual is *'a part of a great whole or system'* – would devise constant opportunities for the individual to *'concern himself with the public good.'* Because humans have a nature that is *'designed*

*for the good of others*’, a healthy society would be one where the capacity for ‘*public love*’, dedicated to the ‘*public good*’, is allowed free reign, with general benefit.<sup>8</sup>

A crucial corollary of such an exalted vision of collective interaction is a strong disapproval of despotism, which may be seen as a political ploy which is ‘*solely intended for the good of the governors*’. A government that rules its subjects selfishly and without their consent is preventing the free exercise of the moral sense amongst its citizens – a moral sense that can be flawed, just as our other senses may be flawed, but which nonetheless guides most people, most of the time, towards everyday acts of quiet virtue. There cannot be any place then, for a ‘*government so absolute*’ that it has an unchecked right to ‘*do or command everything*’ because, quite simply, ‘*the right of private judgment, or of our inward sentiments, is inalienable.*’ The moral sense of individual men and women must be allowed to function if the virtuous society that flows from the free exercise of this sense is to be given a chance to flourish.<sup>9</sup>

Hutcheson went on to argue that ‘*whenever any invasion is made upon inalienable rights*’, and wherever government takes place without ‘*the universal consent of the people*’ there arises a ‘*right to resistance*’. Indeed – as he argued in the latter sections of the *Enquiry* – ‘*the only remedy*’ may be ‘*a universal insurrection against*’ those ‘*perfidious trustees*’ who have misused government for their own ends.

Clearly, if the arguments about humanity’s innate moral sense which were proposed by Francis Hutcheson possess any modern validity – even in an age when we have witnessed so much war and violence – then the political philosophy underlying much of 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism has questions to answer, given the dominance within that economic philosophy of a model of human beings as consumers and competitors who are motivated by self-interest, and a rigid model of the state as a gigantic and all-pervasive marketplace. Hutcheson’s view of political leaders as trustees whose rule must be briskly terminated, should they prove self-serving and unjust, is also of relevance in countries where systemic cronyism and corruption have been exposed.

One other aspect of Hutcheson’s argument for ubiquitous human virtue was his re-evaluation of the rich poignancy of numerous small acts of

everyday kindness. In his attempt to ‘recover the ordinary affections of men’ and acknowledge the spirit of emotional ‘bounty’ which leads to acts of love, he pointed out that it is ‘not only the prince, the statesman, the general’ who is ‘capable of true heroism.’ He explained to his readers that moral heroism was something they could find every day ‘in an honest trade, the faithful, prudent advisor, the charitable and hospitable neighbour, the tender husband and affectionate parent, the sedate yet cheerful companion, the generous assistant of merit, the cautious allayer of contention and debate, the promoter of love and good understanding.’<sup>10</sup>

Hutcheson was at pains to indicate that in any truly mature polity, ordinary people – engaging in their daily lives – should be regarded as more significant than those erstwhile heroes who are accorded an inappropriate degree of fame and whose ‘external splendour dazzles an injudicious world.’ Three centuries after it was written, Hutcheson’s text helps substantiate the case for undercutting the cult of celebrity which has been mediated to the contemporary consumer of wall-to-wall mass-entertainment.<sup>11</sup>

It is important to realise that for Hutcheson, morality was not to be understood as a painful shackle on human desire and aggrandisement, but rather as a guide to the highly pleasurable exercise of humanity’s capacity for altruism. The vision of human pleasure that emerges throughout the *Enquiry* is one which looks coldly on satisfaction as a mere exercise in personal gratification or the mere fulfilment of a personal appetite. Hutcheson asked his readers – ‘should we not think the state low, mean and sordid, if there were no society, no love, or friendship, no good offices? What then must that state be wherein there are no pleasures but those of the external senses ... do these short fits of pleasure make the luxurious happy?’ It is clear that, for Hutcheson, a society which discounts the deeper pleasure of mutual affection and everyday benevolence ends up being focused on mere ‘wealth and external pleasures’, on ‘transient sensation’ and on ‘nauseous satiety.’ The mature society is one which turns its back on such shallow hedonism and instead valorises ‘moral enjoyments’, emphasising ‘something of love, of friendship, of esteem, of gratitude.’<sup>12</sup>

Missing out on the satisfying reality that ‘human nature is formed for universal love and ... gratitude’, the citizens of an inferior society that does not prize benevolence and reciprocity are in danger of experiencing



only *'the misery of excessive selfishness'*. This philosophical warning goes to the very heart of the experience in too many capitalist countries of transient 'boom' years which, although they bring many material benefits, also suffuse a society with the values of conspicuous acquisition and consumption, leaving an aching sense of precious things that have been lost – such as community, decency, reciprocity and simple trust.<sup>13</sup>

It is also apparent that, in the course of the *Enquiry*, Hutcheson founded his positive estimate of human nature on his perceptions of the behaviour of children. Countering the emphasis on inborn perversity and inherited sin within the deeply Calvinist theology that had hitherto dominated his own Presbyterian denomination, he expressed delight at the way in which most children possess an early sense of right and wrong, wishing for fair treatment and hating to see cruelty being practised. All such observations seemed to him to constitute good evidence for a *'moral sense'* that is already deeply present within the mind of infants –

*'Observing the sentiments of children'*, he wrote that it can be seen that *'they always passionately interest themselves on that side where kindness and humanity are found; and detest the cruel, the covetous, the selfish, or the treacherous. How strongly do we see their passions of joy, sorrow, love, and indignation, even though there has been no pains taken to give them ideas of deity, of laws, or a future state.'*<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere in his opus, Hutcheson observed that children are *'ever in motion while they are awake'* and that *'they observe whatever occurs ... remember and enquire about it ...'* He noted that amongst children *'kind affections soon break out towards those who are kind to them'* and that they show *'strong gratitude and an ardour to excel in anything that is praised ... they are prone to sincerity and truth and openness of mind.'*<sup>15</sup>

There are considerable implications for the development of a modern 'child-centred' pedagogy in Hutcheson's positive endorsement of the natural behaviour of children and his psychologically perceptive vision of the early years of life. Hutcheson's musings on childhood can be seen as one of many contributions to the growth of new educational ideals during the Enlightenment period.

At a time when Irish people have been forced to look back with shame and horror at the harm done to many children since the establishment of the modern Irish state, within soulless educational and social care environments, in a range of brutal ‘corrective’ establishments and under the abusive tutelage of some members of religious orders who were entirely unfitted for the task, it is refreshing and challenging to encounter Hutcheson’s advocacy of the innate worth and dignity of the child, and to consider whether the writings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century moralist of Drumcondra Lane should have been on the curriculum of all Irish teacher-training colleges and Christian seminaries, rather than languishing on a shelf in Ireland’s philosophy departments, as irrelevant, dust-covered texts.

### III

The social and political implications of the discourse which we have discussed in this article did not escape those citizens of the American colonies who by the mid-to-late 18<sup>th</sup> century were convinced, despite a considerable degree of prosperity, that they had become victims of British despotism. Hutcheson’s teachings chime with the words of the Virginia Bill of Rights, signed in June 1776. That bill – in arguing for a government which is ‘*for the common benefit*’ and aimed at ‘*the greatest degree of happiness and safety*’ for the people – was adopting principles that can be heard in the texts of the Scots-Irish philosopher of Drumcondra Lane. The author of the *Enquiry* would go on to argue in later work – much read and discussed in America – that when the public good is neglected by a ‘*mother country*’, then ‘*colonies may justly constitute themselves into an independent state.*’<sup>16</sup>

Amongst those who read and admired Hutcheson were American intellectuals and politicians such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin – Franklin saluted him as the ‘ingenious Mr. Hutcheson.’ When Samuel Johnston of Yale published the first philosophy manual to originate within the colonies, he drew heavily on Hutcheson’s teachings and when the Reverend Francis Alison taught at the College of Philadelphia in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, numbering future signatories of the Declaration of Independence amongst his students, he quoted extensively and approvingly from Hutcheson. Such quotations, extolling the virtues of resistance to despotism, were not hard to find throughout his works:

*'No endowment, natural or acquired, can give a perfect right to assume power over others without their consent .... civil power can scarcely be constituted any other way than by consent of the people...the people have the right of defending themselves against the abuse of power...if any citizens, with permission of the government, leave their country and at their own expense, find new habitations, they may justifiably constitute themselves into an independent state...if the mother country attempts anything oppressive towards a colony...the colony is not bound to remain subject any longer.'*<sup>17</sup>

However, Francis Hutcheson's tenure as professor at Glasgow University during the 1730s and 1740s meant that he was also an influential figure in the intellectual flowering within Scotland during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Scottish economist Adam Smith – tutored by Hutcheson – is well known for his book *The Wealth of Nations*, but his earlier text – *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* – was considered by its author to be the superior document. In this study of morality, Smith argues that although we do often pursue self-interest, we also have a profound capacity for sympathy with other beings and that this ability to use our imagination and '*stand in their shoes*' enables us to act altruistically.

So, for Smith, out of the consequences of sympathy, we think to construct a moral code that is to the long-term benefit of everyone. Although he did not argue that human beings possessed an innate 'moral faculty' as Hutcheson had done, and although self-interest plays a key role in his economic vision, Smith clearly inherited from his teacher a strong sense of the centrality of moral behaviour to the life of the individual and to society – and the importance of the emotions in sustaining that behaviour.

Contrary to the belief that Adam Smith's writings simply provide a justification for the growth of a free-market capitalism where everyone merely pursues their own 'enlightened' self-interest, there is plenty of evidence that Smith thought human beings were disposed to social concern just as much as they were given to personal acquisition.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* he argued that:

*'howsoever selfish man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortunes of others and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.'*

Smith suggested that the desire to see the redistribution of wealth is often present in those who have accumulated it –

*‘They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life which would have been made had the earth been divided with equal portions among all of its inhabitants.’<sup>18</sup>*

It is arguable that Smith did indeed share with his mentor a sense that society can and should be structured so as to capitalise on the human desire to offer, receive and witness benevolence – something which the more bold proponents of free market economics have tended to ignore, many assuming that Adam Smith may be invoked as the godfather of a strenuous über-capitalism, in which economic profit trumps all other criteria and motivations when devising the logistics for the provision of help to those in need.

By focusing intensely on both the motivational and the relational life of the individual human being, and placing his or her moral and emotional development within the context of ‘community’, Hutcheson and Smith were in fact laying down the ground for a further development of the venerable concept of ‘civil society’ elaborated by several other Scottish thinkers, who in so doing formed one of the Scottish Enlightenment’s significant bequests to the modern world.

But Hutcheson was also one of a band of progressive thinkers who bequeathed an intriguing heritage to a generation of young Irishmen who were being educated at Glasgow University. In this prestigious academic institution, as the 18<sup>th</sup> century progressed, there was on-going debate about humanity’s moral and political potential, conducted in a spirit of free enquiry – an ambience that owed much to Enlightenment texts such as the *Enquiry*. Glasgow University in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was very far from being a wild hotbed of political revolution, but the young men who were training there for the Presbyterian ministry in Ireland picked up sufficient political literacy and a habit of free intellectual self-fashioning that make them amenable to revolution during the tempestuous Irish decade of the 1790s. By the time of the 1798 Rebellion, over fifty ordained and trainee Presbyterian clerics had decided on an insurrectionary remedy for a country in which the public good was being denied by an Anglo-Irish elite, backed by an exploitative and oppressive British government.

Hutcheson himself cannot be seen as an explicit advocate of armed insurgency in Ireland. Nonetheless, the young Ulster scholars attending the university where he was such a presiding figure were introduced to moral arguments against the practice of slavery – described by Hutcheson as a reason for ‘*abhorrence and indignation.*’ They would have been aware of the argument that ‘*the people have the right of defending themselves*’ against enslavement, and been acquainted with the great professor’s belief that ‘*the people’s right of resistance is unquestionable.*’ What is more, he would have seen recent evidence that his teachings had helped fire the American colonies into revolt – and many Presbyterian families possessed relatives on the other side of the Atlantic and would thus have been informed of the logic and ethos of that revolution.<sup>19</sup>

Clergymen such as James Porter, Thomas Ledlie Birch, Archibald Warwick and William Steele Dickson became key figures in the United Irishmen after its formation in 1791 in Belfast. The United Irish movement argued for the lessening of England’s influence on Irish affairs, a cordial brotherhood of all religions and the practice of universal suffrage – allowing individual citizens the opportunity to exercise their private judgment in search of the ‘good’ of the social whole. In due course, all these clerics paid for their ideals with imprisonment, exile or execution.

The early leaders of the United Irishmen certainly believed, in true Hutchesonian manner, that a ‘*secret chain*’ linked the welfare of the individual human being and that of the society of which he was a part. This is apparent in documents such as the one drafted by a newly formed Dublin branch of the United Irish movement in December 1791. This document stated enthusiastically that its members were all agreed:

*‘in thinking that there is not an individual whose happiness can be established on any other foundation so rational and so solid as the happiness of the whole community.’*

The writer of this document went on to declare his desire to ‘*make all Irishmen citizens – all citizens Irishmen ...*’ He argued that, without truly representative parliaments and the introduction of universal suffrage, the recent achievement of legislative independence by Ireland in 1782 would be quite inadequate, leaving Ireland with a mere ‘*servile majesty and ragged independence.*’<sup>20</sup>

The United Irish objective of de-Anglicisation was certainly in keeping with Hutcheson's advocacy of the rights of a 'colony' to throw off despotism, while the United Irish belief in the political value of a more cordial religious life was in keeping with Hutcheson's estimate of the significance of generous and un-sectarian '*public love*.' The United Irish desire for universal suffrage was consonant with the philosopher's teachings that we are all '*formed with a view to the general good*' and that the '*secret chain*' of human mutuality should be allowed to perform its God-given task of binding individuals to the larger polity, in order to establish a truly healthy and fair society.

#### IV

Other significant United Irishmen, although not coming directly under the influence of Glasgow University, nonetheless grew up in a political atmosphere owing much to the culture of 18<sup>th</sup> century Irish and British dissent in which Hutcheson was such a seminal figure. It was a culture which possessed innumerable and often incompatible variants on the reformation themes of freedom of conscience and unmediated access to the Scriptures. Amongst those variants was a Unitarian project which perceived the Trinity as a polytheistic corruption. This project focused on a Christian faith that stressed moral endeavour and believed deeply in human goodness and radical social reform. It was a project with advocates who held Hutcheson's ethics in high respect, and who often aligned themselves with the cause of insurrection against perceived despotism.

This essay has already noted the dissenting academy in Killyleagh, which the young Francis Hutcheson attended and which had been founded by the wealthy Hamilton family during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Archibald Hamilton Rowan, born in 1751 just five years after Hutcheson's death, was a descendant of that academy's founder. Rowan would go on to act upon the political values he encountered as a boy in his father's London residence, where the English reformer John Wilkes and the Dublin radical Charles Lucas were frequent guests.

Rowan was tutored at Cambridge by the political reformer and dissenting clergyman John Jebb and then, on his return to Ireland, became a founding member and outspoken leader of the Dublin branch of the United Irishmen, before his imprisonment on a charge of sedition.

Amongst Rowan's closest friends and confidantes were several pupils and teachers in the network of dissenting academies, including key members of the revolutionary body known as the United Scotsmen, as well as the egalitarian political thinker and innovative scientist Joseph Priestley.

Following a 'gaol-break' and several years of exile in France and America, Rowan returned to Ireland and again committed himself to progressive social causes, including support for Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Catholic Emancipation. Rowan had also maintained close links with the early feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft, and continued throughout the early years of the 19th century to support her former partner, the theorist of democracy, William Godwin.<sup>21</sup>

Godwin had also been educated in a dissenting academy, albeit under the influence of a strictly Calvinist father. Rowan gave Godwin financial help at a time when he was setting up what amounted to the world's first ever 'educational shop', selling satchels, pens, jotters and schoolbooks written specifically for children. In his famous and influential text *Political Justice*, Godwin criticised those philosophers whose system had taught them to look upon their fellow men as selfish, arguing that the urge towards goodness is a natural 'passion' in the human heart and hoping for a future society where '*man shall be acknowledged for what he really is, a being capable of rectitude, virtue and benevolence.*'<sup>22</sup>

Godwin's writings often echoed the teachings of Hutcheson, as when he claimed that:

*'justice is the principle which proposes to itself the production of the greatest sum of pleasure or happiness'*<sup>23</sup>

Godwin built on the fundamental premise of the human capacity for virtue in order to construct a much more adventurous – and anarchic – vision of a just society than the one delineated by Hutcheson. Godwin held that there should be little government interference, widespread economic equality, minimal personal property and no pervasive hierarchy or dogma. Nonetheless, his stress on social freedom, rooted in his belief that the universal exercise of private judgment is a crucial right, is arguably a logical extension of the Hutchesonian belief in the naturally benign characteristics of humanity.

In turn, Godwin's writings had a significant influence on the young Daniel O'Connell, whose peaceful mass campaigns for Repeal of the Union were founded not on insurrectionary violence, but on the conviction that change could be effected by enlisting public opinion behind a schedule of reform, binding vast groups of citizens together with ties of mutual affection and common purpose. During his early formative years in London, O'Connell was greatly inspired by reading *Political Justice*, with its proposal that '*all Government is founded in opinion*' and its stirring injunction – '*Make men wise and ... you make them free.*'<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, though he does not indicate any knowledge of its true authorship, O'Connell was re-working a famously Hutchesonian principle when writing to Jeremy Bentham in order to say:

*"My device is yours; 'The greatest possible good to the greatest possible number.'"*<sup>25</sup>

Arguably, the politics of O'Connell were based on a profound Enlightenment notion of the good political state, where liberty and justice prevailed and were constantly reviewed and if possible maximised – a vision that Hutcheson would have recognised and endorsed, with its belief in a network of human relationships, guarded by rights and rich with opportunities for benevolence. O'Connell's politics may be contrasted with the romantic vision of a territorial, racial and linguistic nationality that emerged with the Young Ireland movement, the Fenians, the Gaelic Revival and all their political and cultural progeny.

'The Great Liberator', in demonstrating the capacity of individual Irish men and women to unite peacefully and calling for their 'freedoms' and their 'rights', based his practice on an optimism about humanity's civic potential that was consonant with the views of many thinkers within that part of the Irish dissenting tradition that had so often emphasised that: '*civil power can scarcely be constituted any other way than by consent of the people*', that '*the people have the right of defending themselves against the abuse of power*' and that there is a '*moral sense*' which unerringly discerns rank injustice and which gains enjoyment from seeing the rule of injustice overthrown.

As is very well known, O'Connell's mass meetings formed a template for subsequent public campaigns for civil rights around the world.



It is therefore possible to detect in world history the fingerprint of the Dublin-based philosopher who had declared in 1725 that moral concern and affection link us all to one another – and that as a result of that ‘*secret chain*’, human beings can indeed join together with total strangers in order to fight for justice.

V

Amongst the golden circle of thinkers and writers who met around Viscount Molesworth’s table, Dean Swift is most fondly remembered in Ireland – for his mordant scepticism, his blazing, articulate anger and his own intense, Anglo-Irish form of patriotism. Francis Hutcheson is still unknown, along with his dissenting, enlightenment philosophy of affection and benevolence.

Arguably, this is not merely because of Swift’s remarkable satirical gifts but because in Ireland, for many years, there has been a national self-understanding that valorises the Irish capacity to perceive the follies of humankind – a tradition that exults in the work of the great Irish comic dramatists and prose satirists, relishing the charming, ludicrous follies of Oscar Wilde’s most memorable characters and the bleak, hilarious portrayals of perverse wrong-headedness by Jonathan Swift or, more recently, the dark work of Samuel Beckett, in which the grand ‘western’ projects of cosmic purpose and self-identity, based on confident cognition, are so often portrayed as hapless, tragicomic folly.

Hutcheson’s writings are found within a less biting, vivid tradition that risks being seen as naive but which has always sought to ‘*recover the ordinary affections of men*’, to argue that we are all ‘*born with a view to the general good*’ and to offer the hope that there is great delight yet to be experienced when citizens contribute to ‘*public love*’ and justice.

In the painful place where Ireland now stands, in the aftermath of an unchecked economic ‘boom’, Irish satire and scorn are once again understandable responses to human folly. These are instinctive and necessary reactions to the abuse of power. However, another set of human resources in Ireland’s political and intellectual heritage needs to be tapped if this country is to experience fresh self-belief, radical internal reform, renewed national cohesion and, above all, a sense of buoyant hope.

Sadly, in the aftermath of the recent banking collapse, the exposure of corrupt elites and the evidence of vice and complacency within a privileged Church, hope is a scarce commodity. No sustained mass rallies have taken place to protest against those *'perfidious trustees'* who led a promising, modern Irish society towards disaster – emulating the great mass-rallies of the O'Connell era in their call for change. Some commentators have surmised that the capacity of the Irish people to loathe economic, spiritual and political despotism, and to relish a concerted fight against its depredations, has long since been excised from the national psyche. I would argue that a re-appropriation of the rich moral optimism often found within the much-neglected Irish and British dissenting traditions is certainly needed if the people are to discover an Irish Spring.

The psychologist Marie Murray has referred to what she calls *'magical narratives'* which might enable Irish people to invoke a better, more wholesome future. The philosophy of Frances Hutcheson constitutes one such *'magic narrative.'*

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10. Hutcheson, p 106, 107, 134, 135
11. Hutcheson, p 106, 107, 134, 135
12. Hutcheson, p 164, 166

13. Hutcheson, p 149, 179
14. Hutcheson, p 146, 147
15. Tom Paulin, New York States of Mind, in Smyth, p 21
16. The quotations from Hutcheson's are found in David Fate Norton, *Salus populi suprema lex*, in Smyth, p 16. The words of the Virginia Declaration are quoted by Wolfgang Leidhold in the introduction to Hutcheson, p ix
17. Quoted in Norton, p 14-17
18. Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London, 1790) pp 1, 350
19. The quotations from Hutcheson are found in Norton, p 15,16
20. Quoted in Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution* (New Haven, 1988) p 23
21. Details of Rowan's career are found in Philip Orr, Doing History – a re-interpretation of the life of the United Irishman Archibald Hamilton Rowan (1751-1834), in Myrtle Hill, Brian Turner and Kenneth Dawson (eds) *1798 – Rebellion in County Down* (Newtownards, 1998)
22. William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (London, 1798) p 436
23. William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (London, 1798) p xxv
24. Quoted in McDonagh, *The Life of Daniel O'Connell* (London, 1991) p 41
25. Quoted in Fergus O'Ferrall, 'A Prophet of a Coming Time': Daniel O'Connell, Civic Republicanism and Twenty-First Century Ireland in *An Dragún Dian. Dónall Ó Conaill, Éigse na Brideoige* 2005 in Seán Mac an tSíthigh (Coiscéin, Baile Átha Cliath, 2005) pp. 43-62

## Changing the Political, Institutional and Legal Framework for a New Civic Republic

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### Slí Eile

*‘And it ought to be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new. This coolness arises partly from fear of the opponents, who have the laws on their side, and partly from the incredulity of men, who do not readily believe in new things until they have had a long experience of them. Thus it happens that whenever those who are hostile have the opportunity to attack they do it like partisans, whilst the others defend lukewarmly, in such wise that the prince is endangered along with them.’*

From *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli (Chapter VI: Concerning New Principalities which are Acquired by One’s Own Arms and Ability)

#### INTRODUCTION

The key argument of this essay is that our inherited political, institutional and legal framework is no longer ‘fit for the purpose’ (if it ever was) of facilitating Irish society to re-create itself on the basis of full social, economic and cultural equality.

For our society to flourish we need a new political framework. Radical change needs to happen within a short period of time. Five years is suggested as a realistic maximum time period in which the process of transformation *needs to begin*. Such a change must involve the beginnings of a fundamental shift and change of:

- A. heart and mindset among those who govern and are governed
- B. ethos in communities, organisations and political institutions
- C. structures, rules and form of all political institutions.

This essay only deals with (C) above. However, we need to be conscious that for comprehensive and meaningful change to take place in terms of

(C) we also need to see change at levels (A) and (B). This is crucial to any project of fundamental social transformation and explains why various projects to achieve social, economic and political reform during the 20th century failed so abysmally. When using shorthand references to ‘Ireland’ and ‘Irish society’ throughout this essay, we are dealing specifically with the Republic. However, many of the principles and issues are similar on both sides of the border. A more comprehensive analysis of the need for political change in both parts of this island would necessitate a much longer paper.

The essay is divided into five sections, beginning with a short assessment of the main features of Irish society and politics in the first decade of this century. There follows a discussion of the political and institutional culture and framework that we have inherited (section 2). Section 3 proposes a number of high-level principles rooted in a civic republican perspective and consonant with the First Democratic Programme of Dáil Éireann in 1919. The implications of these principles are teased out in Section 4 under the headings of (i) constitutional change, (ii) reform of the Oireachtas, (iii) a renewal of local democracy and (iv) the role of civil society in governance. Section 5 proposes a number of steps to begin a dialogue and programme of action to bring about change.

Although the focus of this essay is on reforming institutions and civic life south of the border, many of the general principles have application in the North even if the context is very different. There is much to be learned and gained from linking debates on political reform on a ‘North-South’ level as well as an ‘East-West’ level given the interweaving of politics in these islands.

### **1. IRISH SOCIETY AND POLITICS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

The crisis in global capitalism has had a profound impact on society and politics in Ireland. Possibly the first and major casualty of the 2008-09 Great Recession has been trust – trust between different social groups and trust in various institutions and authorities. That the bond of trust and allegiance to various institutions has been broken, and broken so suddenly, should not come as a surprise. Relative social peace, consensus and drift characterised the boom years when it seemed that there was something for everyone (or almost everyone) in the political audience. The politics of clientelism, short-termism and mutual protection

50 seemed to work well enough and was perceived by the majority to have been better than any alternative. ‘Pragmatism’ ruled the day and the institutions of government, the law and political culture were not seriously challenged. There was much talk of transformation and reform, but the extent of any real measurable change was minimal. Witness, for example, the proposal to reform the upper house of the Oireachtas supported by a constitutional referendum in 1979 and the lack of any movement to reform.

When the political-economic-social crisis broke in 2008, some voices were raised in support of abolishing the Seanad – both on grounds of cost and because it was seen as ‘not doing its job’. These calls ignored the historical context reaching back to a debate on reforming, not abolishing, the upper house. Echoes can be found in the intention of the Fine Gael/Labour Party coalition to hold a referendum on abolishing the Seanad.

All through the Great Boom which lasted from the early 1990s to 2007, inequality, discrimination and lack of community empowerment characterised the context in which institutions operated. A certain level of inequality was deemed to be acceptable so long as social peace was maintained. Much of this mindset was based on the fallacy of the ‘rising tide lifts all boats’. Hence, it was accepted wisdom to reduce tax, to facilitate a global race to the bottom in terms of corporate taxes (to woo international investment), to lighten up on market regulation, and to privatise (as much as possible) key areas of social infrastructure (including health, education, social housing and leisure among others).

Tony Brown (2010:134) has remarked that:

*The 2007 General Election campaign was fought as if the boom, and increased government spending, would never end and the parties were judged by many voters on the single issue of the promised levels of stamp duty.*

The terrible historical irony and legacy of that election is that the people got that for which they undeservedly voted. There were plenty of resources, it would seem, but never enough to eradicate poverty, hospital waiting lists and waiting lists for school psychologists. Ireland had the resources but lacked the vision.

Now, the absence of vision and public-spirited ambition during the Tiger years has left us with far fewer resources than we thought we had, even if our stock of human-skill capacity is at an all-time high. Which political party and politician would have the courage, either then or now, to truly afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted? The impression, widely shared, is that afflicting anyone, especially the comfortable, is not a vote winner. Hence, taxes are seen as a burden to be minimised and not a civic duty to be prudently allocated to share the goods of the nation for the children of the nation. This way of looking at politics and society has been a marked feature in the run-up to most general elections since 1977.

The crisis in politics, as evidenced through widespread apathy, distrust, cynicism and lack of hope, is the fruit of a crisis in values at the core of a global economic system that puts profits and markets before people. Those with power and economic wealth dominate the world of media and public discourse. Values, choices and alternative ways of responding are not openly and honestly debated. Instead, the world of soundbite, shallow 'expert views' and uncontested assertion reigns. Proposals for an alternative social, political and moral order and a different culture of politics are dismissed as impractical or as pale reflections of some failed ideology or past social experiment.

One is left with shallow clichés and half-truths and downright untruths, such as *'there is no alternative'*, *'we have all taken the pain'*, *'the money isn't there'* and *'political and social reform must wait because sorting our current economic crisis comes first'*. In the public service, instead of vision we have business planning and the semblance (but not the reality) of accountability. In parliament we have competition of parties jostling to score points and defend themselves at all costs, but no real open debate where people are ready to listen and accept the truth of what others are saying. In the media we have shallow analysis and vignettes of reality TV but no real engagement. In civic life we have most people tuning out and minding their own affairs and worries: a disengaged citizenry evidenced by little active participation.

## **2. THE INHERITED TRADITION**

Why have institutions remained so static? In many respects, a native middle class developed late in Ireland. There was a lack of an appropriate

civic culture. This was compounded by a relatively unique theocracy in which Church and State understood each other only too well. A remarkable feature of development since the foundation of the State is the degree to which the founding ideals of the founding mothers and fathers of the Republic were honoured more in the breach than otherwise. The Democratic Programme agreed at the first meeting of Dáil Éireann on 21 January 1919 enunciated in lofty terms:

*‘It shall be the first duty of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children of the State. Likewise it shall be the duty of the Republic to take such measures as will safeguard the health of the people and ensure the physical as well as the moral well-being of the Nation’.*

It is abundantly clear that the State, now known as the Republic of Ireland, neither made provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of its children, nor safeguarded the health of its people by creating a universal system of healthcare available to all regardless of income, wealth, sex or age. But, why did the State fail? It would be too easy to blame the inherited colonial structures and norms, as it would be too easy to blame various institutions including the Church. The fact that one Church was allowed to operate as an all-powerful authority within the body politic, monopolising provision of key social services and exerting undue influence on many areas of social (and economic) policy reflects a collective decision by those who assumed the governance of the State from 1922 onwards. It didn’t just happen – it was consciously embedded in the entire political culture, structures, norms and rules and institutions which were perpetuated, established and adapted to the needs of a 20th century ruling elite.

Over time, the elite transformed itself into a network of powerful economic and political interests that was able to maintain relative control over political, economic and social life up to the present decade. The debacle of ‘crony capitalism’, and the Bermuda triangle of the Property-Banking-Party Complex, reflects the underlying reality that the Republic was still-born at birth because, as argued here, many of the leaders of the movement for independence had no interest in really establishing a Republic founded on equality, liberty and fraternity. Debates about lines on a map, oaths of allegiance and constitutional arrangements with the British Commonwealth were distractions from the real issue – who controls and



owns the natural and physical resources of the new State and who gets to control and own the machinery of State and the oversight of market/voluntary activities? James Connolly had warned about these matters.

The 1937 Constitution served an Ireland of the 1930s: emerging from colonial status and in transition but not, yet, able to declare itself a Republic in name; over-awed by the thinking, power and influence of one religious organisation to which 95% of the population in this territory belonged; caught up in the international turmoil of totalitarian regimes and concerned to defend, at all costs, particular principles of parliamentary democracy, freedom of religion, family and property.

Considering that most of Europe was sunk or about to be sunk in dictatorship, the new Free State did well to establish itself in the 1920s, preserve parliamentary democracy, move on from a bitter civil war and avoid being over-run in the world conflagration that was to emerge in 1939-45. But the 1937 Constitution, amended along the way, remains very much a document of its time. It reflects largely conservative mores and neglects important areas of human rights – not least those of children and newly visible minorities, whether sexual, ethnic or other. Moreover, the culture of localism, nepotism, clientelism and gombeenism was well established before the 1937 Constitution and remains a feature of politics at national and local level to this day (witness the failed attempt to ‘de-centralise’ central government employees to locations chosen on the basis of Ministers’ constituencies as they were in 2003, rather than on the basis of a sensible, sustainable and workable arrangement combining central and local government). One of the consequences of localism and clientelism is a lack of parliamentary oversight and scrutiny, as well as the undermining of a more strategic and national level perspective.

### **3. PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW CIVIC REPUBLIC**

An important dimension of this crisis is the nature and character of the Irish State, including various public institutions. Addressing the crisis requires a return to first principles and an assessment of the Constitution, the capacity of the State’s institutions and the relationship of the State with its citizens. This historic moment of crisis provides an opportunity to rethink, reconstitute and restructure our political and economic systems: it has become manifestly clear that these are not ‘fit for purpose’ and have

54 failed to serve Irish people either well or competently. Failed systems cannot secure the future well-being of our people. Michael D. Higgins, in a speech to the 2010 Annual Conference of the Labour Party, spoke about the need for a new responsibility in the following terms:

*‘Those responsible for holding on to the failed paradigm, to the economics of misery, are not only to be found in the ranks of politics. There were many privileged by access to the media or who enjoyed academic freedom who, by choosing to remain silent and not question the fundamental assumptions and consequences of what was being imposed, also bear a heavy responsibility.’*

He went to say that:

*‘The coming decades must be made the decades of the achievement of this real republican citizenship.’*

We need to shift the debate towards a new understanding of ‘citizenship’ – one that is not limited to a narrow legal or political definition of status, and that goes beyond notions of volunteering and good individual civic behaviour to embrace citizenship as a moral covenant in which the ‘goods’ necessary for a full and flourishing life are no longer seen as marketable products but as the shared goods of a society that values people before markets, State and ideology. It is not possible to talk about inclusive citizenship without considering people’s access to jobs, income, housing, health, education, political and organisational power, information, media, arts and culture.

In two of his books (O’Toole, 2009 and 2010), writer and journalist Fintan O’Toole provides a critique of a society that is deficient in some of the basic norms of civic virtue and solidarity and posits fifty areas for action, many of which relate to reform of political institutions and regulation as well as reform of corporate governance in all sectors of the economy.

Iseult Honohan has referred to two complementary dimensions of active citizenship – *‘the sense of wider social concern and the capacity to participate deliberately in self-government’* (Honohan, 2005:179). She observes (Honohan, 2005: 180):

*‘We should be wary of exhortations to be more active or civic spirited, or to join voluntary associations in order to strengthen social capital, unless ordinary citizens are given a larger voice in decision-making, opportunities for meaningful participation and the material conditions necessary for active citizenship in the two senses outlined here.’*

#### 4. REFORMING INSTITUTIONS

There is a clear need for a new contract between the citizens and the Irish State involving a new explicit Republican constitution and a range of reforms. Areas requiring reform include the electoral system and the Oireachtas, which needs to be rendered more effective. Other essential reforms involve the development of new and innovative means for public participation and deliberation. This section explores areas of change under the following headings: (i) constitutional change, (ii) reform of the Oireachtas, (iii) a renewal of local democracy and (iv) the role of civil society in governance.

In their position paper entitled *New Politics*, Fine Gael (2010) outlined a number of key areas for reform. *New Politics* is based on four pillars:

- A single house of the Oireachtas
- Reformed Dáil with, *inter alia*, more power for committees
- Open Government
- Empowerment of the citizen and local communities.

Fine Gael proposes a Citizen’s Assembly, although the exact mandate, powers and mode of election of such an Assembly are not spelt out<sup>1</sup>. Integral to the reform of political institutions and the Constitution are Fine Gael’s proposals for radical reform of the public service. Many of these proposals converge with ideas put forward by the Labour Party in April 2009 (Labour Party, 2009 and Labour Party, 2011). Both the Labour Party and Fine Gael are agreed on the need for a new constitution. Labour, in particular, is committed to establishing a Constitutional Convention, to report within a year of being set up.

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1. This essay was written in the autumn of 2011, and thus does not take account of recent moves to establish a Constitutional Convention

56 There is a shared sense that we need to become more a Republic in deeds and not just in words, with power vested, more effectively than heretofore, in all the people. The lesson of the Celtic Tiger and its subsequent implosion are that something was very wrong with politics, political institutions and values in the public sphere. There was ‘something rotten’ in the State of Ireland.

### **CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

The intention contained in the Programme for Government (2011) to establish a Constitutional Convention provides an opportunity to review the purpose and relevance of the Constitution as a whole as well as in specific parts. This debate is long overdue. However, there are currently at least two risks in such a process:

- Particular groups could seek to hijack the debate and push particular agendas
- The Government of the day may revert to piecemeal change focussed on ‘low hanging fruit’, while shying away from a more fundamental review and change.

Any process to reform the constitution – and with it particular institutions and rules – must involve a debate that goes far beyond the political insiders or legal and constitutional technocrats. The need for reform needs to be carefully spelt out, explained and proposed. Above all, a constitution needs to set out principles and institutional forms in a very clear way, allowing parliament, the executive and the judiciary sufficient scope within which to carry out their functions. A constitution is not, perhaps, the appropriate place in which to legislate and prescribe in detail. At the same time, the ‘short, simple and vague’ approach is not appropriate. Principles need to be clear.

### **REFORM OF THE OIREACTHAS**

#### **DÁIL**

The size, composition and functioning of the Dáil has attracted greater attention and scrutiny since the onset of the current economic crisis. In many respects the Dáil, as it currently works, is relegated to a secondary role, since the Government parties who capture a majority of seats can

control the agenda and enforce a strict whip on most issues. This inhibits a more full, open and free discussion of issues and militates against greater parliamentary scrutiny. A crucial challenge is how to strengthen the role of the Dáil *vis-à-vis* the executive. 57

A key feature of both the Dáil and the Seanad is the way in which the Government parties of the day dominate proceedings, including the allocation of time and the system of parliamentary committees. This feature is not common internationally as Hardiman (2009) has pointed out. Use of the guillotine and the operation of a tight whip system mean that debate, exploration of issues and constructive democratic deliberation are constrained. Is it acceptable to reduce the number of Dáil deputies without, at the same time, significantly changing the culture of political representation so that local democracy is greatly strengthened, powers are delegated to local authorities from central government and the business of the Dáil becomes more focussed on matters of national importance, legislative development and political strategy? In short, a programme to reform the composition, role and workings of both houses of the Oireachtas would fail without fundamental changes in political culture and the wider institutional environment within which the Oireachtas operates.

The depth and scale of the economic and political crisis in Ireland since the latter half of 2008 has exposed at least one major flaw in Irish political governance – the absence of a right of recall over a Government in a truly national crisis. The provisions for a recall are much too weak or non-existent. By-elections, defections or minority coalition party revolts are not a sufficient basis on which to hold Government to account when issues of such huge import as NAMA or questions about the bank guarantee, Anglo Irish Bank and the main Government party arise.

When the whole credibility of the political system is at stake, there must be a constitutional provision for citizens, local authorities and the President to hold the Government to account and, *in extremis*, compel the seeking of a new mandate.

The sitting time for the Dáil accompanied by a 'long hours culture' is unacceptable. Underlying this is a culture and work profile for TDs and Ministers which is excessively orientated towards local constituency

concerns and client representations. There is a case for reviewing the system of electing TDs. However, care is needed when moving away from an arrangement that has served the people for almost a century. Two attempts to abolish proportional representation rightly met with popular rejection in the last century (1959 and 1968). Consideration should be given to a mixed system involving party lists combined with multi-seat constituencies based on the existing arrangement. Also, it should be possible to draw expertise from a wider pool of publicly elected representatives in both the Dáil and a reformed Seanad. However, the importance of the principle of proportionality between votes cast and deputies elected must be maintained. The introduction of the multi-seat single transferable vote system in local government over a century ago was designed, specifically, to ensure that minorities would not lose out in electoral contests.

#### **SEANAD**

That the Seanad is in need of radical reform is beyond dispute. Proposals for reform have been made on numerous occasions down the years. Rather than abolishing it, the Seanad could be reconstituted as a more representative body but with a specific focus and mandate that enables it to add value to the mandate of a reformed Dáil. Included in the electorate for some representatives in a reformed Seanad could be all Irish citizens living abroad or in Northern Ireland. A reformed upper house could also assume some of the functions of the social partnership process involving consultation and, where appropriate, decision-making with a wide range of representative civil society organisations.

Ireland is relatively unique as a small country with two houses of parliament. Some voices have been raised in support of abolition of the upper house. However, it is not clear that moving to a single chamber – albeit with a reformed committee structure and enhanced role for local democracy – will deliver a more effective parliament.

#### **THE PRESIDENT**

The Office of the President can serve an important role in developing consensus, promoting public debate, representing Ireland globally and acting as a voice and champion of last resort for the whole people. The style of presidency has changed for the better in the last two decades.

How is it possible to build on established practice? Would a shorter term be preferable? How might it be possible to have less politicisation in the selection and promotion of candidates?

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#### **OIREACTHAS COMMITTEES**

There is a compelling case for a stronger, more independent and better-resourced system of parliamentary committees.

#### **LOCAL DEMOCRACY**

Ireland is a highly centralised country. The powers of local public authorities are very restricted and their capacity to raise revenue from citizens is limited. At the same time, decisions on local public services, planning and the environment are taken at central government level or, in some cases, by local public officials rather than locally elected representatives. This situation reflects a number of developments in the last century, including a strong distrust (not entirely without cause) of the local by the central. Compared to almost all European countries of similar size, Ireland retains a highly centralised political system.

In the public consultations carried out by the Taskforce on Active Citizenship in 2006, a number of key messages emerged and were summarised in the ***Report on Active Citizenship Consultation***. It would be valuable to study these messages in conjunction with other more recent citizen consultation processes such as that undertaken by We, The Citizens.

The Programme for Government (2011) commits to a number of specific changes and improvements in the way local government is organised, such as the replacement of a County Manager with a post of CEO to *facilitate the implementation of democratically decided policy*. Commitments are given to merge or streamline various local services (presumably to save money as well as to enhance services where feasible). It states that (P27):

*'We are committed to a fundamental reorganisation of local governance structures to allow for devolution of much greater decision-making to local people. We will give local communities more control over transport and traffic, economic development, educational infrastructure, and local responses to crime and local healthcare needs.'*

To enhance the quality and impact of local governance reform is urgently needed in the following areas:

- Local revenue-raising powers need to be increased and linked directly to local public service provision where the link between what we pay in taxes and what we receive is more evident
- Some central equalising process is needed to ensure that local authorities that are disadvantaged in terms of revenue base are assisted
- Direct democracy, plebiscites and elections should be used on some matters of local concern
- Sub-county level forums or community councils should be established with delegated roles in respect of consultation and possibly decision-making where appropriate. Setting up such councils is feasible and within the discretion of local authorities even under the terms of existing local government legislation.

#### **ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Long before the economic crisis of 2008-2011 it was clear that political reform is essentially interwoven with European Union affairs. The debates around how Europe is to be governed and what the appropriate relationship is to be between the body politic here and abroad have featured in the various European referenda held since the 1970s. Membership of the European Union has had a significant impact on our political institutions. Moreover, membership of the Eurozone and the transfer, in large part, of domestic monetary and financial policy to various European institutions has at one and the same time:

- Restricted national sovereignty in many areas of macro-economic, fiscal and monetary policy
- Widened national sovereignty in a pool of shared sovereignty.

In 2011, Ireland is donning its green jersey on the European fields of negotiation on debt, taxation and fiscal coordination. However, there are at least forty shades of green and some other colours may be just as relevant, like touches of blue and red as indicated by the fraternal visits of Irish political leaders to our European cousins. Reform of the Oireachtas and other political institutions needs to be seen in the light of a more general movement to reform Europe and make it more accountable to



citizens while also stressing the social dimension of the Union. Specific changes are needed in the following areas:

- Scrutiny and accountability of Ministers and other public officials with regard to European Union affairs before the relevant Oireachtas committees and plenary sessions of both houses of the Oireachtas
- Building of strategic alliances with movements and countries on particular issues of European and domestic concern
- A more generous, imaginative and creative approach to sharing risk, sharing a restructuring of debts and sharing of new rules and frameworks not only to promote a fiscally sustainable and competitive Europe but also a more democratic, inclusive, just and environmentally sustainable one. These aims are not necessarily contradictory, and it should not be a case of ‘fixing the economy and banking’ first before addressing European poverty, unemployment, exclusion, debt burden on the poorer regions and groups.

Ireland should link its commitment to a target of 0.7% of GNP for Overseas Development Aid to proactive engagement in helping countries and communities to strengthen their social and democratic structures. With a two-way street of support and ideas, it is possible to aim for a win-win solution in terms of humanitarian aid, trade, education and sharing of experiences. Reforming political institutions at home can go hand-in-hand with reforming and improving institutions well beyond our shores.

### **ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

The recent example of the grassroots and people-focussed Ministry of Ideas forum in Iceland is suggestive of the possibilities for national goal-setting exercises. There are now very rich examples of deliberative politics and models for civic engagement from many parts of the world which could be applied when building the Civic Republic in Ireland.

A key issue for civil society is access to information. Democracy must be underpinned by access to information, access to power and deliberation and resolution of matters of public concern. Currently, the provisions for Freedom of Information have been rowed back and re-interpreted in a way that undermines democratic deliberation. Use of such provisions as ‘under deliberation’ is invoked to avoid providing key information to those who

request it. The culture of secrecy and not telling is, by default, still alive and well in Irish political and administrative institutions. Likewise, the responses to parliamentary questions reveal a marked reluctance to be completely open or to directly answer the question asked. Partly as a result of this, the practice of oral parliamentary questioning has been reduced to a political tennis game where, frequently, the main issues are avoided and politicians score points before the public and media galleries. The proposals contained in the Programme for Government (2011) to reform and extend the parliamentary question system are welcome, provided they are accompanied by a break with the culture of withholding information, on the one hand, and using the system to score points, on the other.

Niamh Hardiman has remarked (2009: 15):

*'It should not be necessary to invoke Freedom of Information to find out most things. We need to move to a position whereby we should expect that issues are normally aired openly, and that vigorous policy debate is encouraged, unless there is very good reason to do otherwise. A presumption of openness should prevail, not a presumption of secrecy unless disclosure turns out to be absolutely unavoidable.'*

When voting on the annual Budget and Finance Bill, there is little or no room for civil society to input into the debate or even for politicians to deliberate on proposals and options. The annual Budget is a done deal with little or no scope to revise proposals or seriously debate issues. The problem is compounded by a remarkable lack of transparent and accessible information on key items of expenditure and revenue placed in an international and through-time comparative framework. Budget documentation is handed out during the Minister's speech as media and other commentators scramble to read the documents and seize on to instant reactions. A thoughtful and in-depth analysis of all the issues (macroeconomic, social and environmental) is not possible except through a planned, prolonged process of deliberation and information-sharing over a period of time.

The establishment of an Independent Fiscal Council has some merit. In particular, the proposal by the Labour Party that:

*‘The modelling assumptions and inputs of the Fiscal Advisory Council will, as far as possible, be open to public scrutiny and its outputs would be freely available to external bodies, including in particular, the opposition parties.’ (Labour, 2011:11)* **63**

The Social Partnership process, as it was in 2008 and had evolved since 1987, has been criticised for creating a *‘parallel system of policy formation’* (Fine Gael, 2010:23). Fine Gael have called for a broadening of the process *‘in order to provide a voice for consumers, small businesses, users of public services, parents and families, among others.’* This observation has some merit, although it neglects the fact that many in the Community and Voluntary pillar of social partnership represented some of these perspectives. Space needs to be created for a Civic Forum (and possibly an all-island one) with a wider consultative status which could perhaps take on board these concerns. Indeed, such a Forum could be considered as a replacement for the Seanad, or could work in conjunction with a radically reformed Seanad.

#### **REFORMING THE PUBLIC SERVICE**

Public service has been viewed as a calling and vocation to serve the public (common) good. Whether the service involves nursing, policing, teaching, administering or regulating, it has been viewed as something undertaken under trust and within a framework of accountability, ultimately, to the Oireachtas where expenditures and legal provision apply. It is clear that there have been individual as well as systemic failures within the broad public service. At best, these failures relate to lack of planning, openness and transparency. At worst, these failures reflect a marked lack of responsibility in regulation and the absence of a proactive response to clear societal risks. In a few cases, corruption has been present (e.g. in regard to land re-zoning and bribing of public officials). It is regrettable that these failures have been used by some commentators to sully the image and reputation of the public service as a whole.

Assertions, unsubstantiated by data or evidence, have been made suggesting a service that is bloated, inefficient, sclerotic and incompetent. The 2008 review by the OECD of the Irish public service paints a different picture. It suggests a service that is relatively smaller than in other countries and one that has managed to deliver significant success over the decades. Nevertheless, the Irish public service needs to be reformed and

64 practices, culture and working approaches need to change. This is more than just an attempt to import business planning and customer-service-speak into public service delivery. It is also more than a mere opening-up of competition for various posts in the system which have thrived for too long on time served and on restrictive practices in regard to promotion and recruitment.

One of the first principles of public service reform should be a return to the idea of public service as a noble calling to serve the common good. Idealism, leadership and service of the public good must inform service delivery and policy design. For too long managerialism, pragmatism and excessive deference to the political establishment have held back the public service from offering more independent and provocative advice, while also disincentivising the assumption of greater responsibility and accountability, where individuals and teams are held responsible for implementing a project within a given timeframe.

Public service reform needs to involve a cultural shift away from secrecy, top-down control and detached decision making. Bringing about change is never easy. The introduction of legislation such as Freedom of Information and Ethics in Public Office along with Equality legislation in the 1990s involved contestation.

The Labour Party has already stated its support for:

- greater mobility of staff within the public sector
- full flexibility of movement between all branches of the public and civil service for relevant grades (where there has been much talk but no delivery to date)
- and open recruitment to all public service posts (not universal in many cases)

With the follow-up to the OECD Review published in 2008 on Irish public service reform, change is happening at a snail's pace and is very much 'top down' rather than led from the ranks. Paradoxically, the imposition of 'control and command' in regard to every single post subject to the public service moratorium, allied to micro-management from the centre of relatively small grant payments, runs counter to the spirit of the OECD

report which advocated more delegation of responsibility and authority to decide on resource allocation allied to ‘working within budgets’ and being called to account for outcomes and delivery, rather than micro-management of input and process. The system does not seem to learn from, or apply the lessons, of past failed initiatives from the 1960s Devlin Report onwards.

Talk of reform is not new. On 20th November 1969, Deputy David Thornley stated in a Dáil debate:

*‘The Minister enjoys a justifiable reputation for the firm way he controls the Civil Service. I wonder could he elaborate on the well-known Civil Service phrase “in due course?” It seems to us on this side of the House that no matter what questions we ask about the Buchanan Report, the Devlin Report, the Todd Report and one hundred and one other reports the phrase “in due course”, whatever that means, seems to hang over the point which we are to have explained to us when major social decisions are to be taken by the Government in the light of these reports. As a student of the Civil Service, I have often wondered what the phrase “in due course” means in specific terms.’*

The then Minister for Finance (with responsibility for public and civil service reform), Charles Haughey TD, replied as follows:

*‘It is a phrase that is used when you cannot use anything more specific.’*

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS TO BEGIN A DEBATE

This essay has drawn attention to the central importance of practices, norms and habits alongside that of institutional structures:

*‘But often, reform proposals risk bypassing what really matters, which is the ideas and priorities that inform political life. If we are not sure what exactly we want to achieve, we might change the structures without touching practices. We need to look at the cultural habits and learned behaviour that really need to be changed, then consider how best to achieve that change.’ (Hardiman, 2009:4)*

Practical steps are needed. To begin with, a debate is needed – an honest debate and one where people ‘speak the truth to power’. There is an onus on each individual and citizen to ‘to take responsibility for acting, speaking

*and voting to promote a just and compassionate society'* (Brown, 2010: 138). But change needs to happen not only at the level of individual, local community and social network level. It also needs to happen at the level of politics, institutions and public values, as argued in this essay. All are inter-related, and this essay has sought to highlight the links.

The following grassroots initiatives could help:

- Harness the energy, positive anger and thirst for an alternative vision of the future through local organisations, networks, bulletin boards, local meetings and seminars
- Encourage adult education and community empowerment to enable communities to deliberate, organise and campaign for change starting with their local affairs
- Build progressive alliances and shared platforms across various political and community organisations
- Work within the existing media and develop new media outlets
- Keep the faith and keep going!

To conclude, the words of Kevin O'Higgins speaking in Dáil Eireann in January 1922 set a keynote for such a grassroots movement and for every citizen:

*The welfare and happiness of the men and women and little children of this nation must, after all, take precedence over political creeds and theories.*

If only!

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## After the Celtic Tiger: a Nordic Vision for a New Ireland?

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Robin Wilson

### INTRODUCTION

The first decade of the new millennium saw a remarkable turnaround in Ireland. The ‘Celtic Tiger’, acclaimed as the poster-boy for neo-liberal economics around the world, bounding so effortlessly forward just a few years ago, was mortally wounded by the local manifestation of the global collapse of financial capital, the black hole that was Anglo Irish Bank.

Suddenly, there was what Antonio Gramsci (1971: 210) would have diagnosed as a crisis of representation. Fianna Fáil was able to manage, and prevail beyond, the emigration crisis of the 1950s and the fiscal crisis of the 1980s. But in the noughties its close association with the developers and bankers who played the capitalist casino at ever higher risk, happily to discover the taxpayer would be called on to cover their stakes when their value plummeted, has seen its support correspondingly collapse.

Since the foundation of the state, Labour had been victim of a *volkish* political culture which had privileged ‘communal solidarity’ and so ‘pragmatism within a conformist consensus’ (Garvin, 2005: 7), thus underperforming electorally against a wider European social-democratic canvas, partly because of FF’s significant support among the working class. Apparent breakthroughs, as in 1992, proved ephemeral. And, since the 2011 election, Labour’s new dawn could prove a false one.

Gramsci’s great insight was that the left needed to articulate a potentially hegemonic narrative, as otherwise a crisis could see a top-down process of ‘passive revolution’ through which authority was recuperated (Buci-Glucksmann, 1980: 314-5). And, as Ray Kinsella (2010) has pointed out in an Irish context, ‘there appears to be no mainstream political alternative to a failed orthodoxy’. The immediate danger, therefore, is that Labour will once more be the ideological junior partner in a Fine Gael-led coalition, struggling within a fiscal straitjacket, with the same demobilising and disillusioning effects as the windblown coalition of 1973-77.



What would be the basis of such an alternative narrative? While many NGOs have protested against the deflationary agenda of the current and previous administrations, and in particular its impact on the most marginalised, this in itself has not challenged the fundamental logic of the dominant position – that the republic should remain a ‘low-tax’, capital-friendly state, whose fiscal deficit must therefore be rapidly reduced to maintain the ‘credibility’ of the financial markets. Indeed, Labour has embraced the ‘fiscal compact’, even though it effectively outlaws counter-cyclical Keynesian policies and assumes – in defiance of basic accounting identities – that Germany’s current-account surplus can be generalised to the eurozone as a whole.

An emergent alternative has however been apparent in the argument articulated by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (2009). This has been evident in its Keynesian rejection of the deficit-reduction timetable. The ICTU claim in effect is that after Charlie McCreevy’s pro-cyclical budgets inflated the bubble, Brian Lenihan’s pro-cyclical budgets burst it, rather than letting the economic balloon cool gently. The task now is to ensure revenue is raised primarily from the wealthy, with a lower propensity to consume than the poor, and to invest in sustainable economic recovery, so as to avoid the 2010s being a Japanese-style ‘lost decade’.

More broadly, David Begg of ICTU has seen in the crisis the opportunity to open debate on an alternative social model for Ireland, based on the experience of the Nordic countries (Begg, 2008). If Mary Harney’s slogan placing Ireland ‘closer to Boston than Berlin’ encapsulated the claims for the Celtic Tiger, this not only discounted the key role played by the European-style social-partnership arrangements which resolved the 80s crisis and provided the basis for the macro-economic stability on which expansion was built (Sweeney, 2008: 115-26). It also of course defied geography – and Copenhagen, Stockholm, Oslo and Helsinki are all close European neighbours too.

In developing its ‘social solidarity pact’ as a route out of the crisis in 2009, ICTU was assisted by an economist who advised the then social-democrat finance minister tackling the early 1990s financial crisis in Sweden. The key lesson he drew was the need for equitable burden-sharing (McGreevy, 2009).

This essay sets out what is meant by the ‘Nordic model’ in various domains: the welfare state, the society and the economy. It explains why it is superior to the Anglo-American approach implicitly pursued in Ireland, and indeed to other continental European models. It addresses the limits of the model and the need for renovation. And it offers concrete implications throughout for the Irish context, socially, economically and politically.

### THE WELFARE STATE: ‘THE PEOPLE’S HOME’

Twenty years ago, the Swedish expert Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990) established an enduring typology of welfare states, as responses to the challenge to social cohesion posed by the capitalist mode of production: how could workers be expected to cope with the insecurities of a market economy in which labour itself had been reduced to a commodity? His three types were:

- **‘liberal’**, exemplified by the US (but also characteristic of the UK and Ireland), with means-tested benefits constrained so as not to undermine work incentives and encouragement of private welfare provision;
- **‘conservative’**, exemplified by Germany, with more generous social insurance schemes, constructed however so as to sustain status hierarchies, including traditional family structures (by excluding non-working female partners); and
- **‘social democratic’**, exemplified by Sweden, with extensive provision of universal benefits funded by progressive taxation systems, favouring a decommodification of labour and the socialisation of family burdens.

The last, Nordic model has been demonstrated to perform better than the Anglo-American and continental European alternatives (Esping-Andersen *et al*, 2002: 13-17; Irvin, 2008: 83-107; Schubert and Martens, 2005), despite claims that it could not withstand the pressures of globalisation (Greve, 2004: 118). As everyone benefits at some point in life, there is a sense of legitimisation and common attachment: the phrase *‘the people’s home’* came to encapsulate the welfare state constructed in the decades of almost unbroken social democratic rule in Sweden.

A particular benefit of the system is the egalitarian effect of graduated taxation according to income and universal welfare according to need.

Thus, whereas market incomes in the Nordic states are if anything rather widely dispersed by European standards, post-market incomes show a much narrower dispersal (Guio, 2005: 4), as taxes hitting the wealthiest hardest are transferred in benefits benefiting the poorest most (though not exclusively).

There has been retrenchment in Nordic welfare states since the 1990s, particularly with governments of the right being elected, and re-elected, in Denmark and Sweden. In the latter case, voucher schools have been introduced, inevitably fostering social segregation; greater conditionality has been added to active labour-market schemes; and increasing social marginalisation has engendered a population of the socially excluded for which the social-democrat welfare system was not designed (Andersson, 2010). Indeed, in Finland as well as in Sweden, social assistance for the latter group has been significantly reduced in recent times (Kuivalainen and Nelson, 2010).

Having said that, the fundamentals of the Nordic system remain, for the present at least. As one political scientist in Sweden said after the 2010 electoral victory of the centre-right (Ward, 2010), *'The Social Democrats' greatest triumph was to persuade the Moderates that it was impossible to win elections in Sweden if you are perceived as threatening the welfare state.'*

Income dispersal in Ireland widened during the Celtic Tiger years (O'Donoghue and McDonough, 2006: 57). As other European societies became wealthier, they tended to devote increasing shares of GDP to public provision rather than private consumption, yet the republic's 'welfare effort' fell proportionately as the economy grew (Smith, 2005: 200).

Because of the republic's comparatively poor fiscal effort in terms of taxation (NESC, 2005: 14) and its weak expenditure on social protection relative to gross domestic product (Petrášová, 2008), even though it has less stretched market-income scales than the Nordics, it is among the most unequal European states when it comes to 'real', post-market incomes (Guio, 2005: 4).

This has left it very ill-equipped to have a sensible debate about how the social costs of the recession should be spread, and how (relatedly)

revenues are as critical as expenditures to the budget equation. In particular, in the absence of a clear alternative, there has been a wholly misplaced emphasis on improving the supply side of the labour market by reducing welfare ‘dependency’ – as if supply created its own demand. Inequality has correspondingly risen markedly since the recession began, the Gini coefficient of income inequality increasing from 30.7 to 33.9 between 2008 and 2010 (CSO, 2011: 2).

Recent research on inequalities in health (Marmot, 2004; Wilkinson, 2005) and more generally with regard to a range of social pathologies (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009) finds the Nordic countries consistently dominating the desirable end of the graphs and tables. It also indicates that the conventional emphasis in the republic on reducing ‘absolute poverty’ is not only out of line with international standards (Timonen, 2005: 22), but is also intellectually obsolete. For it is *the scale of social hierarchy* which we now know is key to well-being, and so initiatives focused on the poor in isolation will at best increase ‘churning’ at the bottom of the social gradient – but will have no effect on the steepness of the gradient itself.

This research explains the markedly egalitarian shift in public attitudes in the republic in recent times, which TASC has demonstrated through surveys it has commissioned. In 2009 it found that fully 91 per cent of respondents agreed that *‘government should take active steps to reduce the gap between high and low earners’* (TASC, 2010). Equality is in the broad public interest. This is not only because almost every individual is better off and social mobility is correspondingly higher if the social gradient eases, though that is true. It is also because overall social performance – for example in education, where Finland is the best European performer – is also superior in countries where a low gradient lifts the average.

Finland’s success is reflected in the international standard PISA data on performance by schoolchildren. There, school starts only in the year a child turns seven, classes are small and lunch is free. Teachers move with their classes, so they can develop pastoral relationships with their pupils. They all have a masters qualification and they are trusted with considerable autonomy on how they teach the curriculum. There are almost no competing private schools and there are no inspections. There are no national examinations until students leave at 18. While there is a

separation between academic and vocational strands at 16, each can lead to a university place – that, too, is free (Vasagar, 2010). The latest glowing PISA report stresses the importance of a common school system and a belief that all children can achieve high standards (OECD, 2010).

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Yet in Ireland Labour has failed to press the egalitarian case. Indeed, one senior Labour figure once confided to this author her view that Labour should focus on ‘liberty’ instead – and in the 2007 election the then party leader, Pat Rabbitte, took the populist tack of pledging to reduce the standard rate of income tax. Yet the alpha and omega of the political left since its emergence has been the substantive demand for equality (Bobbio, 1990) in the face of a capitalist system whose dynamics, left to itself, will always engender inequality through the tension between the social nature of production and the private appropriation of the wealth it generates.

Labour’s most resonant political campaign in recent years has been in favour of universal health insurance, to replace the two-tier system favouring private patients and stigmatising those holding medical cards. And a commitment has been made by the coalition to issue a white paper on the subject by the end of 2012 (Department of the Taoiseach, 2012: 26). The key lesson of the Nordic model is that when egalitarianism is couched in the language of universalism it not only attracts legitimacy but also appeals to broad self-interest.

### **CIVIL SOCIETY: VOLUNTARY ACTIVISM**

Between the state and the economy is the domain of civil society, best conceived of as the ‘public square’ where non-governmental organisations organise and advocate and norms of the ‘good society’ are advanced (Edwards, 2004). The former taoiseach Bertie Ahern appeared to be concerned about the adequacy of civil society in Ireland, engaging the ‘social capital’ guru Robert Putnam and in 2006 establishing the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.

At one level, the third sector looks strong in the republic, measured by its size on a European scale. But this is largely because of the influence of faith-based organisations in public services since independence from Britain, rather than reflecting a strong movement for social justice. Moreover, when using a narrower definition of the voluntary sector

and adjusting for population, the number of organisations, their staff, financial and research support and volunteering are all lower in the south than in the north. The earlier development of the welfare state north of the border, and the relative largesse shown to third-sector organisations during the ‘troubles’, favoured a stronger infrastructure there (Acheson *et al.*, 2004).

The communitarian thinking so strongly rooted in Ireland – and not just in the north – stands in the way of the *social* solidarity at the heart of the Nordic model, where individual and collective advancement can be seen as linked by the pursuit of the common good (Andersson, 2010: 106). On the wider European canvas, Sweden’s third sector thus stands out for its activism and volunteering and, as a subordinate element, its social enterprises. This has been described as the ‘popular mass movement model’ (Olsson *et al.*, 2009: 159) of civic society.

The ‘movements’ embrace the traditional labour movement, which played a formative role in the emergence of Sweden’s post-war, universal welfare system, and the new social movements of the 60s – the women’s, environmental and peace movements – as well as consumer co-operatives, sporting and educational bodies. Indeed, the Swedish word for popular mass movements (*folkrörelser*) is much more commonly used than the phrase ‘third sector’. Key aspects are open and active memberships, transparency in the operation of the huge associations, a high degree of formal internal democracy and fairness, and generous funding (Wijkström, 2004: 11).

Relatively speaking, in the Nordic model, and here Denmark is as good an example as Sweden, voluntary organisations working in welfare provision – such as social care – play a minor role, because of the commitment to the welfare state. And the paid third-sector workforce is relatively small, because of the strong commitment to volunteering (Henriksen and Bundesen, 2004: 621). The tradition of the third sector in Denmark and Sweden, unlike the subsidiarity-based version in Ireland and the philanthropic UK model, is of a civic commitment to equality and democracy (Defourny and Pestoff, 2008: 3-4).

The Swedish word for ‘charity’ (*välgörenhet*) acquired a negative connotation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with welfare coming to be

understood as a matter of civil or social rights. And even the non-movement aspect of the third sector in Sweden predominantly comprises a member-based mutual or co-operative social economy, rather than Anglo-American style welfare providers.

The Nordic model shows why it is wrong to pit the strong society against the strong state, as if the latter worked against the former – quite the contrary (Trägårdh, 2007a). In Denmark, voluntary organisations have been promoted by the state, partly as places for learning basic democratic skills (Kaspersen and Laila Ottesen, 2006: 118). In Sweden, citizens are on average members of around three associations (Grassman and Svedberg, 2007: 134).

Moreover, Swedish associations operate on the premise of the ‘active’ member – rather than one, say, sending off a payment to Greenpeace as a conscience-salver. Volunteering then becomes a dimension – even a duty – of membership, rather than merely unpaid employment. Around half the population between 16 and 74 years volunteers and, of those, seven out of ten are also members of the organisation concerned (Olsson *et al*, 2009: 163).

This is not to say that everything is rosy for the Swedish third sector. Membership activism, though still very high in comparative terms, has actually fallen since the 1990s (Wijkström, 2004: 16), indicative of an erosion of older organisations and the emergence of new bodies to which members may merely make payment for services or make donations (Trägårdh, 2007b: 268).

Denmark has exhibited a marked growth of voluntary activism in recent decades. Half of Danish third-sector organisations were created after 1975, and one quarter after 1990. Between 1993 and 2004 the proportion of the adult population engaging in voluntary work rose from one in four to one in three. There are trends, though, here too towards a more instrumental relationship between members and associations (Defourny and Pestoff, 2008: 13-14).

The ‘popular mass movement’ model, distant from the paternalistic philosophy which dominates civil society in Ireland with its faith-based traditions, corresponds to an engaged relationship with the state. This is

similarly at variance with the clientelistic culture pervading Irish society. In this regard, while a former senior FF minister once cynically described to the author how he ran his local surgery as a vote-gathering exercise *vis-à-vis* his party competitor in the constituency.

In Sweden a Popular Mass Movement Council (*Folkrörelserådet*) was established in 1989 to promote these organisations' collective policy agenda. In 2002 a Forum for Popular Mass Movements (*Folkrörelseforum*) followed, to foster dialogue between the government and public authorities on the one hand, and the movements on the other. This supplemented an Intergovernmental Working Group on popular mass movement policy formed the previous year (Olsson *et al*, 2009: 170).

A sense of participation and stakeholding is more broadly promoted in Sweden by involving the institutions of civil society in policy-making. The mechanism is provided by governmental commissions (*statliga utredningar*) – of which at any one time fully 200-300 are in operation – focused on a particular issue, with a view to preparing major legislation. This not only allows ministries to have very few permanent staff. It also provides the institutional lynch pin in a system of democratic governance involving a mix of civil servants, politicians, academics, experts and representatives of relevant civil society organisations.

When such commissions produce their reports, there is a consultation process (*remiss*) during which the document is issued to all affected organisations. Their responses – indeed, those of any interested individuals – are all included in the final version of the report, which is the basis on which government then drafts a bill for the parliament to consider. So serious is this process of engagement that it may take up to six or eight years, or even longer, from the appointment of the commission to the legislation being enacted. By the conclusion, however, a substantial social consensus behind the legislation tends to have been gathered (Trägårdh, 2007b).

Perhaps inevitably, one governmental commission has focused on 'popular movement politics' itself. And on top of the commissions there are specific avenues for influence which allow the ethos of the third sector to permeate the state, in the manner of a 'marinade' developed through



close collaboration between the popular movement organisations and a friendly state apparatus (Wijkström, 2004: 12-13). 77

The moral for Ireland is clear. If there is concern about a weakening of the social fabric, it will not be addressed through a vague desire for more civic responsibility. The route to a vibrant civil society lies in NGOs investing in membership activism, involvement and democratic control, with support and assistance from public authority. Yet, as of now, with the exception of The Wheel, we do not have an umbrella body covering the third sector in Ireland as a whole.

In particular, the Swedish governmental commission approach, and especially its participatory and painstaking character, offers an interesting model for how Ireland's political structures should be rethought for a new era. TASC's Democracy Commission (Harris, 2005) was an independent effort with limited time and resources, convened in advance of the onset of the crisis, which nevertheless began this process. At Labour's instigation, a constitutional convention is to be established (Department of the Taoiseach, 2012: 20), but this has a populist ring to it of dismissal of the 'political class' and is unlikely to lead to a more coherent outcome than the disparate series of 'Renewing the Republic' articles in the *Irish Times* after the crisis broke, which offered a *smorgasbord* of individual solutions.

#### **THE ECONOMY: HUMAN CAPITAL**

In the orthodox capitalist economic model, labour is reduced to a commodity and the focus of public policy at national or regional level is on creating a 'business-friendly' environment, with a view to attracting mobile capital. In Ireland, tax breaks have provided the incentive. But there is an economic argument that this approach should be stood on its head in today's economic context.

The transition from a conventional industrial capitalism to an 'informational' variant (Castells, 1996), in the age of the computer and the satellite, has been associated with a remarkable reprise of the 'labour theory of value'. While often seen as originated by Marx, in fact he drew it from the English classical economists (Lippi, 1979), living as they were in

78 a literal age of ‘manu-facture’ and before the full ‘subsumption’ of labour, following the industrial revolution, of which Marx spoke in *Capital*.

When the labour process was dissected and reaggregated by Taylorism and Fordism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was hard to argue that value reflected embodied labour, given that the conditions of existence of that labour were determinant and yet were not under the labourer’s control. But the transition to a post-Fordist ‘knowledge economy’, where mass production and competition by price were transcended by customer responsiveness and competition by quality, once more elevated the contribution, and the competencies, of individual employees and work teams.

Every significant firm nowadays has a ‘human resource director’, who can be guaranteed to plagiarise Marx by declaring that the biggest asset of the company is its staff. But if this is indeed so, then capital – hardware and software, buildings and equipment – should be deployed by labour to greatest effect, rather than the other way around.

This is the insight behind the Nordic economic paradox. In orthodox terms, the Nordic countries should be basket cases. Their high-tax regimes and partial decommodification of labour through expensive welfare states should divert capital to more ‘competitive’ environments. Yet, on the contrary, in all the relevant international league tables the Nordics consistently emerge at or close to the top. This is true of the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report (WEF, 2010), the Economist Intelligence Unit’s business environment rankings (Whyte, 2005: 40), Richard Florida’s index of economic creativity or Deloitte’s ranking on the basis of innovation, enterprise and macroeconomic data (Färm *et al*, 2006).

The Nordics have proven so successful in attracting foreign direct investment because of the educational standards of their workforces, their developed infrastructures, their commitment to research and development, and their probity and transparency (Whyte, 2005). Innovation is seen as being facilitated by the security provided by the welfare state, rather than being driven by fear of failure in highly competitive markets (Andersson, 2010). In particular, the Danish welfare variant of ‘flexicurity’, where weak employment-protection legislation is offset by high levels of replacement income and retraining support for those who lose their jobs, is seen as

favouring a willingness on the part of employees to risk job moves in a globalised context of change, rather than workers seeking collectively to defend perhaps outmoded jobs at all costs. Interviewed by the *Financial Times*, the chair of Nokia and Royal Dutch Shell rhetorically asked (Milne, 2009): *'What is the future of capitalism? In one way or other the answer is to solve these issues that the Nordic model does well.'*

In Ireland there has been a viscerally dogmatic defence of the low corporation tax rate. Yet a 2002 survey by Forfás found that 57 per cent of foreign enterprises ranked appropriate skills as the most important advantage of their location in the state (Smith, 2005: 76). And in 2008 the US ambassador told an Institute of Directors meeting in Dublin that low corporation tax was *'not critical'* for American businesses in Ireland and a hike in the rate would not itself lead US multinationals to pull or defer investment plans (Stirling, 2008).

Had low corporation tax been decisive in the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, it is hard to explain why three and half decades elapsed between the state's opening up to foreign capital and the spurt of growth which began in the early to mid-1990s. Clearly a number of factors laid the ground in the meantime, including compulsory secondary education in the 60s, access to a tariff-free EU market in the 70s, macroeconomic stabilisation in the 80s, implementation of a 'liberal agenda' in the 90s and – last but by no means least – the emergence at that time of a stream of qualified workers from the institutes of technology, contrasted with the overwhelmingly academic focus of advanced tertiary education in the north.

The foregoing discussion indicates a degree of deadweight subsidy in the low corporation tax regime. While the volume of tax itself was raised by the incentive to multinational firms to allocate profits to Irish divisions, this came at the expense of an intangible loss of goodwill in mainland Europe. In 2007, the German finance minister Peer Steinbrück accused the republic of subsidising its public services with EU funding while engaging in unfair tax competition (Smyth, 2007).

It is time to end this costly exercise in beggar-my-neighbour economic policy. Raising the corporation tax rate and introducing a property tax in the republic would strike a chord with the widespread sense of unfair burden-sharing experienced by PAYE workers since the crisis. And it

would militate against a renewed property bubble, and thus favour diversion of capital towards more productive investment.

The deference to capital in the Irish political establishment lay behind the disastrous decision in September 2008 to guarantee all banking deposits. This transferred risk to the taxpayer, burdened as a result by sovereign debt reaching nearly one-third of annual gross domestic product by the time the guarantee was renewed in September 2010 – with yields on government bonds now rising above seven per cent, the bail-out inevitably had to be sought two months later. By contrast, in the early 1990s, the social democratic Swedish government stepped into the financial crisis with equity stakes to recapitalise the banks – stakes subsequently sold at a modest surplus.

Jenny Andersson (2010: 150, 46) argues, however, that the loss of momentum of Swedish social democracy in recent times can be put down to the lack of a ‘critique of capitalism’, since capital successfully resisted the radical 1970s ‘wage-earner funds’ idea to transfer ownership of firms progressively to their employees. Yet modern management theory focuses not on an alignment of executives with shareholder interests, as in the ‘shareholder value’ orthodoxy whose perverse incentives led to the Enron disaster, but on an alignment of autonomous employees with consumer demands (Hamel, 2007). This is because, in today’s post-Fordist times, such demands are individualised, complex and volatile, and cannot be met by top-down directions, as if executives were omniscient and omnipotent, but rather require individual staff teams to be flexible and responsive.

This chimes with the Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) focus on flattening social hierarchies, which leads them to call for employee ownership. If robust welfare states decommodify labour to an extent, by regulating the labour market, employee ownership represents the ultimate decommodification, by turning the labourer from a commodity into a *citizen*, equal in social status to his or her fellows. This can tap productive potential which the ‘mere’ labourer will not freely release, as it would simply be captured by their employer. Hence what in capitalist terms seems the counter-intuitive practice of Google in allowing its employees to spend up to one fifth of their time on their own projects – from which, of course, many if not most company initiatives originate (Hamel, 2007: 112-3).

The success of John Lewis in the highly competitive UK retail market shows the edge which employee ownership can provide. In sharp contrast with the bonus culture of the City of London – which has allowed gross rent-seeking by top individual players in the capitalist casino, including gaining vast bonuses even when profitability has been poor – at John Lewis annual profits are subsequently distributed to all ‘partners’ (staff) as an identical bonus, calculated as a percentage of their salary. The company has a constitution, which states its ultimate purpose as ‘*the happiness of its members*’. David Begg of ICTU has always had a personal interest in employee share-ownership programmes, and Labour in Ireland should take up this theme and run with it.

#### **CONCLUSION: THE CRY FOR SECURITY**

If a spectre is haunting Europe in 2012, it is not of communism but the xenophobic populism of the 1930s. The electoral success of Marine Le Pen in the first round of the French presidential election and the collapse of the Dutch government due to the withdrawal of support by Geert Wilders exemplify how an atmosphere of widespread insecurity can be exploited by those on the far right who would undermine social solidarity by setting the idealised ‘community’ against the stereotyped ‘alien’, rendered scapegoat for all ills (Wilson and Hainsworth, 2012).

The Nordic welfare states were established to offer a genuine, rather than illusory, security. In that sense, social democracy represented the key 20<sup>th</sup> century competitor with fascism for popular affiliation, a competition from which it emerged in the post-war period triumphant (Berman, 2006). Nordic universalism in particular engendered social trust, as reflected in international public attitudes surveys, whereas selective systems favoured prejudice towards benefit claimants which could so easily be given an ethnic inflection in fractured societies (Rothstein, 2005).

The breakthrough of the Sweden Democrats in the 2010 Swedish elections crystallised the fear that welfare retrenchment and populist advance were going together across Europe. The revelation that year that the republic had the lowest rate of acceptance of asylum claims in the EU (Smyth, 2010) indicated that post-crisis Ireland is not immune from these xenophobic trends.

But *'pessimism of the intelligence'* in the face of such trends should be matched by *'optimism of the will'*. The Norwegian Labour Party's experience in recent years shows that another way is possible (Biermann and Kallset, 2010). In 2001, when the media portrayed its leader as 'Norway's Tony Blair' and some 'modernising' initiatives had unsettled its supporters, the party suffered its worst election defeat in 77 years. Yet, it regained power in 2005, and retained it in 2009, leading a 'red-red-green' coalition with other progressive parties. It pursued close co-operation with the trade unions and other civil-society organisations, articulated a popular case for 'collective solutions' rather than privatisation, and secured disproportionate support from women – reflecting, for instance, its action in government to make 40 per cent female quotas mandatory on company boards. Its integrationist slogan was 'Everyone on Board' (*'Alle skal med'*).

Perhaps the strongest expression of the moral authority of the Nordic model came in how Norway faced its most awesome tragedy – the brutal massacre of young social democrats on the island of Utoya in July 2011 by the far-right militant Anders Breivik. The prime minister, Jens Stoltenberg, declared at a public vigil in its wake, and that of a fatal bombing by Breivik in Oslo, that the solution was 'more democracy, more openness and more humanity'. During Breivik's trial in 2012, tens of thousands mobilised across Norway to sing the folk song he detested as a symbol of intercultural tolerance, 'Children of the Rainbow'.

The Nordic experience is not a hand-me-down toolkit for Ireland. The model itself clearly needs renovation and renewal. But the swirling insecurities that beset Ireland can only be overcome by a politics which offers a clear vision of what the state, society and economy should become. And there is no better foundation on which that vision can be constructed than the Nordic model.

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Sinéad Pentony

This essay aims to stimulate debate on the society we would like to live in 'after the crisis', and on how the economy needs to be transformed to service a flourishing society. There are realistic, progressive alternatives to a return to 'business as usual'. These alternatives involve a new and different growth model: one that seeks to optimise economic, social and environmental sustainability where possible.

The predominantly market-driven, infinite-growth model of the recent past has let us down. The financial crisis exposed deep flaws in the approach to economics that has dominated policy-making for a generation. Economic liberalisation has not delivered on its promise of rapid growth on a consistent basis, but has rather been characterised by booms and crashes.

A minority of people and corporations have benefited disproportionately from the booms, as wealth and incomes have become increasingly concentrated, while those who experience the most negative effects of crashes have seen few benefits in the good times. Inequality in advanced economies has risen to record levels, and has contributed to and exacerbated many of society's ills. There is also emerging evidence that rising inequality helped create the global crisis.<sup>1</sup>

Essentially, orthodox economic theory assumes the ever increasing consumption of finite resources. Growth, in the sense of using more and more resources, is not sustainable when there is a limit to those resources. The assumption that economic growth is a good in itself, and that the benefits of economic growth automatically trickle down to all, has proven to be flawed.

The market-driven model of economic development has given rise to the situation where society serves narrow short-term economic interests, rather than the economy being designed to serve society for the benefit of all citizens. Consequently, an over-emphasis on growth has superseded a focus on societal and human well-being, demonstrating a profoundly distorted sense of values in which quality of life, human life and dignity are subordinated to material achievement.

The world is warming and we are running out of non-renewable sources of energy. The atmosphere cannot absorb the levels of carbon dioxide being pumped into it for much longer without triggering irreversible climate change. We can use what we have more efficiently, but this too has limits. Our ‘footprint’ in the developed world has grown too heavy, and we are showing no signs of being able to tread more lightly.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, material advances such as better housing are important. We want a future where people can work, where basic needs are satisfied and human dignity respected. But can we perhaps achieve those goals within an economy defined by a new vision: a vision premised on the idea of flourishing within limits? In the context of this vision, we need to create a culture which values the collective as well as the individual, a culture of the common good that has equality at its core, and which assumes responsibility for inter-generational care of the planet.

The time is therefore ripe to develop a new vision for the economy – one that does not rely for its stability on relentless growth and expanding material throughput. Such an economy must be informed by a different set of values. It must create the conditions for a flourishing society while respecting the environment and limits on natural resources upon which we, and future generations, depend.

#### **CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT THE ECONOMY AND MEASURING PROGRESS**

*‘Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.’* Albert Einstein

The challenge of ecological sustainability is now widely recognised, but what instruments are needed to achieve it and, crucially, how can we avoid unduly sacrificing other important social goals (equality, good jobs, quality public services and rising living standards)? There is, as yet, no clear model for achieving economic progress without consumption growth.<sup>3</sup> Nor do any of the existing models take full account of the macro-economy’s dependence on ecological variables such as the opportunity cost of depleting finite resources.

We need to rethink what we value, and how we quantify these values. The progress of countries has traditionally been measured using Gross

Domestic Product (GDP), which measures the value of goods and services produced by a country in a single year. However, GDP critically ignores the value of services not supplied by the market, such as state healthcare and education or unpaid childcare provided by parents or extended family members. GDP-led growth does not necessarily mean better access to public services such as health and education, and it doesn't measure environmental impact, sustainability or the fact that there are limits to natural resources.

There is clearly a mismatch between GDP as a measure of economic growth and critical social and political measures of progress. A uni-dimensional focus on GDP as a measure of success has fuelled dangerous risk-taking, chronic over-consumption and unsustainable resource depletion. GDP is a flawed measure of progress as it has been proven not to automatically deliver inclusive and sustainable development, or a reduction of inequality.

There needs to be a shift in emphasis from a 'production-oriented' measurement system to one focused on the well-being of current and future generations, i.e. a shift towards broader measures of social progress. Building social and environmental values into the measurement of progress should be the central goal of policymakers.

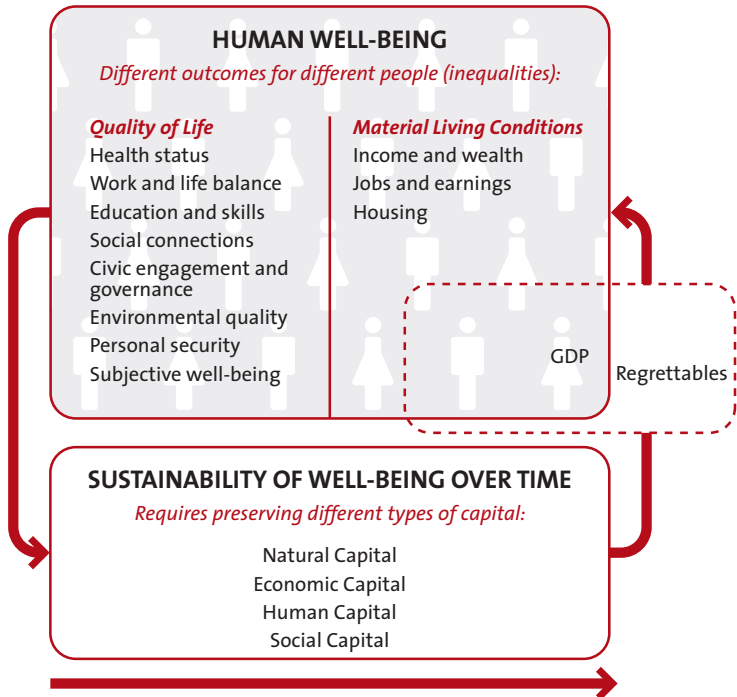
The price we pay for goods and services needs to reflect real social and environmental costs and benefits if we are going to achieve a paradigm shift away from unsustainable development. We need to make 'good' things cheap and 'bad' things very expensive. For example, this can be achieved through the taxation system in the form of carbon taxes, always assuming that they are equality-proofed. Markets should continue to have a role in a transformed economy, but we need to debate how the state and the market should relate to one another. In other words, what is the role of the state in configuring the market for social development and how should the state exercise that role?

A new vision for society, and the role of the economy within that vision, must be accompanied by different measures of progress and well-being. There is a growing body of work in this area, including the UN Human Development Index and the Happy Planet Index developed by the New Economics Foundation.

More recently, the OECD has developed a framework for measuring well-being and progress, building on the work of the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission.<sup>4</sup> The framework, illustrated below, aims to address the growing concerns relating to the limitations of macro-economic statistics such as GDP as measures of social progress and development. The OECD framework can be categorised into three distinct areas: material living conditions; quality of life; and sustainability, each with their relevant dimensions.

In a flourishing society, progress must be focused on improvements in the well-being of individuals and households. This requires an examination of the functions of the economic system and the diverse experiences and living conditions of people.

**OECD FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURING WELL-BEING AND PROGRESS**



## **TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMY**

Our understanding of the economy needs to undergo a radical transformation if we are to move beyond a narrow GDP measure and towards inclusive and sustainable growth. The current crisis has been described as the ‘triple crunch’ of climate crisis, economic meltdown and energy security.<sup>5</sup> The ‘triple crunch’ has also fuelled new questioning of old assumptions underpinning economic growth.

Growth as we know it is unsustainable, and the implications of this for the Irish economy are immense. The weaknesses of the Irish economic model need to be addressed as part of this process of change. These weaknesses are essentially features of a model which is highly dependent on foreign direct investment, pursues a low-tax strategy with tax haven characteristics, and is weak in terms of redistribution of income and wealth.<sup>6</sup> The Irish model is ill-prepared to deal with the challenges associated with transforming the economy. However, policy responses to the ‘triple crunch’ crises can put the Irish economy on a more sustainable footing and create the conditions for greater economic security, and for an economy and society focussed less on growth and consumption, and more on sustainability and well-being.

In the short to medium term, a radical shift in economic structures is required, together with structural reforms of supply-side policies, in order to move to a smart, green and inclusive growth. The focus must be on building a more diverse economy, where we produce a wider variety of goods and services, and add value to products in new and innovative ways. The more diverse our economy, the more we will be cushioned against future economic shocks. Supply-side policies include reform of labour market activation measures that support the development of a highly skilled workforce. In the medium to long term, we must support innovation and develop industries that build on Ireland’s natural advantages, such as wind and wave energy.

In the midst of the present crisis, there is a huge opportunity to do things differently: stimulating economic activity through a massive programme of investment; cutting our reliance on imported fossil fuels; and drastically cutting carbon emissions. By spending now to build a low carbon economy, we could generate a new wave of highly skilled, green-collar workers, building a new power infrastructure, transport networks

and super-efficient buildings. Low carbon economic activities that employ lots of people in high-quality jobs will have to be central to a sustainable and inclusive economy – an economy in which humans flourish.

Public investment and incentives are needed to stimulate the emergence of a new low carbon economy. We need a joined-up programme that simultaneously addresses at least three priorities: promoting economic recovery; avoiding the worst effects of our over-dependence on fossil fuels; and cutting carbon emissions.

Our immediate economic priority should be to favour labour over capital, focus on work and jobs as our primary concern, and reduce income inequality. This could be done by stabilising or increasing the incomes of those at the bottom of the income ladder while giving consideration to salary caps at the top and promoting more progressive redistributive tax policies.

Ireland cannot have a sustainable and thriving future as a low-wage economy.

The economy needs to be re-embedded within society, rather than being viewed as separate from the functioning of wider society. This re-embedding will require a number of key issues to be addressed.

The need for a sustainable and less growth-oriented economy has been discussed above. Two other key issues associated with embedding the economy back into society include the need for greater economic security and a reconception of the types of work required for human flourishing and a flourishing society.

The current crisis has led to higher levels of economic insecurity across society – for individuals, families, businesses and communities. High levels of economic security, coupled with participatory democracy and equality, are key determinants of well-being and social stability. People in countries with a high level of economic security have a higher level of happiness on average, as measured by surveys of national levels of life satisfaction and happiness;<sup>7</sup> according to the International Labour Organisation, which found that ‘welfare state’ provision of social security for citizens is an important determinant of high economic security.



The International Labour Organisation report also points out that insecurity is generated by patterns of economic globalisation which produce endemic or structural insecurity in terms of employment, social welfare and income due to countries '*racing to the bottom*' by lowering worker protection and welfare provision. It describes how '*footloose*' multinational capital and the demands of international economic competitiveness, by their very nature, undermine economic security as companies can always move in search of higher profits and lower wages.

Wage floors, together with robust regulation of the labour market and a well-resourced welfare state and social insurance system, are essential ingredients for enhancing the levels of economic security without which a flourishing society cannot be realised.

The second issue associated with embedding the economy back into society requires us to reconceptualise the types of work required for human flourishing and a flourishing society. To do this, we need to move beyond the division between 'paid' and 'unpaid' work – a division which assumes the former is more valuable than the latter, by virtue of the fact that remuneration is attached.

Reframing all types of work associated with a functioning society as 'productive' broadens out the concept of work in the context of what is needed for a flourishing society. 'Productive work' includes the socially necessary and desirable work such as caring for children and dependent adults, which takes place in homes, communities and businesses across the country. Boyle and Simms (2009) have identified the need for '*a redefinition of work to include the full diversity of what is necessary for life. It requires we find new ways of valuing parenting, caring and community building as much as paid work.*'<sup>8</sup>

Transforming the economy for a flourishing society must go hand-in-hand with measures to reduce inequality, and with changes to our quantitative concepts of growth in favour of a more qualitative approach. There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that more equal societies do better across a range of outcomes including health, education and crime.<sup>9</sup> Equality is good for everyone in society, regardless of whether they are at the top or the bottom of the income ladder. Countries with greater levels of equality have also fared better in the economic crisis. They have not felt

94 the acute economic decline to the same extent as less equal societies, and are proving to be better able to recover from it.<sup>10</sup>

### **THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMY**

The state has a key role to play in creating the conditions for a transformation of the economy. In the absence of explicit interventions by the state, market economies produce undesirable outcomes: booms and busts; rising inequalities; economic imbalances.

This was a characteristic feature of the post-1980 period dominated by neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus; by the idea that the ‘market knew best’ and that it was not appropriate for states to ‘interfere’ in the efficient functioning of the markets. State intervention, far from being inherently inefficient, turned out to be essential to prevent system-wide collapse. As a society, we cannot return to having blind faith in markets to deliver a future of endless, rapid and consumption-led growth.

In Ireland, the role of the state has been to promote the maximisation of competitiveness and profitability over investment in social and economic infrastructure and the welfare of society. The role played by the state has configured both capital accumulation and distribution in ways that respond much more to the needs of corporate capital than to the needs of citizens.

Therefore, the role of the state must also be transformed if it is going to facilitate the shift towards a different type of economy. The experience of the Nordic countries provides ample evidence of how strong social democracies have a role in creating the conditions for regulated social market economies – economies that afford their citizens a high quality of life and place equality at the core of public policy making.

During the boom, the increased living standards and improved employment opportunities generated by the Irish model improved the lives of many. However, during this time little attention was focused on the growing inequality that characterised the period. Nor was sufficient attention paid to the need to invest adequately in universal high-quality public services.

The current economic crisis has highlighted the need for debate regarding the appropriate level of public spending in Ireland. The benefits of public spending, as evidenced in the Nordic countries, are numerous and include: the provision of public services such as education and health; reducing inequality through redistributive measures; and providing a social safety net and a minimum standard of income. It is clear that public policy in a range of areas can exacerbate or ameliorate inequalities in society. 95

Two of the areas which have the greatest impact on the levels of inequality are taxation and public services. The United Nations Human Development Report (2010) identifies fiscal policy as a vital lever to reduce inequality *‘...with spending much more powerful than taxation. Public spending on services and social protection improves distribution – and among publicly provided services, healthcare and primary and secondary education have the biggest impacts.’*<sup>11</sup>

While public policy during the boom failed to use the taxation system to redistribute resources (whether directly, or through improved funding of public services), the austerity policies pursued over the last number of years have resulted in reduced incomes for many low-income families and social welfare recipients, while also depleting public services through spending cuts. These reduced incomes impact on the economy as a whole through reduced aggregate demand, as well as on individuals and households.

To provide Western European standards of public services, the tax take would have to increase significantly, to a European average of 45 per cent in the medium term.<sup>12</sup> Our system of taxation also needs to be more stable and progressive, and this can be achieved by levying taxes on wealth as well as income, and by ensuring consumption taxes do not impact disproportionately on low earners and social welfare recipients. The tax system also needs to be reformed through the abolition of tax expenditures, which fail to show a net positive economic benefit and exacerbate income inequality by enabling high earners to reduce the amount of tax that they pay.<sup>13</sup>

Contributions to tax revenue from the corporate sector also need to increase to ensure that all sectors are contributing on a progressive basis. Reports on the tax take from multinational companies demonstrate how

complex financial instruments and taxation arrangements are being used to drive down the amount of tax that they pay.<sup>14</sup> Tax avoidance by multinationals is a growing global problem and is increasingly depriving countries of vital revenue. The estimates vary widely, but conservative assessments put the global revenue losses at hundreds of billions of dollars. Efforts to address the issue of global corporate tax avoidance include legislation aimed at forcing multinationals to report on a country-by-country basis which would lead to greater transparency and accountability.<sup>15</sup>

However, individual efforts by nation states cannot fully meet these challenges. The tax policies of one country can seriously harm the citizens of another. Stronger tax cooperation is the best way to strengthen national tax systems in the age of globally mobile capital.<sup>16</sup>

The relentless drive for profit maximisation is a key feature of the 'shareholder model'. A transformation of the economy requires us to question the value of this model in the context of the shift towards a more sustainable economy. There is a need for more democracy in public and private enterprises, with a shift in decision-making power from a small minority of corporate shareholders, whose focus tends to be on short-term profit maximisation, to a larger majority of public and private stakeholders, who are more likely to take a balanced and longer-term view of maintaining a viable business while also taking other factors, such as environmental impact, into consideration.

### THE ROLE OF BANKING AND FINANCE

The current series of crises have their origins in the financial and banking sectors. The finger has been pointed at the failings of regulatory systems to regulate these sectors adequately in terms of managing risk, corporate governance and transparency. However, there are more fundamental questions to be asked of these sectors and their role in the economy – the answers to which should inform any process of reform.

There are many critiques of the origins of the financial crisis, and it is argued that what has happened in the past three decades has been the socialisation of risk and the '*democratisation of debt*' accompanied by the continuing privatisation of profit and unequal distribution of wealth. The

public bailouts of the banking system across the world have led some to talk of ‘*socialism for the rich, capitalism for the poor*’.<sup>17 18</sup> 97

‘*Socialism for the rich*’ denotes the transfer of wealth from the public, via the state, to financial capital, while at the same time it is the most vulnerable in society who suffer from the spending cuts made as a result of austerity measures. Notwithstanding these criticisms, the financial and banking sectors are crucial to any modern economy. However, they have become detached from the ‘*real economy*’, and over the last two decades they have been built on trading and speculation for the sole purpose of generating profit and wealth for investors.

Finance and banking should exist to serve society. Therefore, democratic financial reform must be a cornerstone of economic change. Credit should be viewed as a social utility. The fundamental roles of the financial and banking systems should be to:

- act as a repository and provide access to liquid assets
- provide financial services and extend credit to households and the business sector
- allocate and transfer capital investment for productive use by connecting investors to entrepreneurs<sup>19</sup>

Pure speculation is not associated with productive activity, and should be discouraged to the maximum degree possible. Reform of the financial and banking sectors needs to be informed by a different vision of their role in the economy.

The provision of finance constitutes a public good. Therefore, the future of banking and financial systems should be built on a core of public service, mutual and/or cooperative banking. Banks need to recognise that they have obligations to all stakeholders rather than just to shareholders, and that they have a social function in serving the ‘*real economy*’.

The financial crisis has resulted in the withdrawal of a number of banks from the Irish market – and banks have also physically withdrawn from many small towns and villages. The European Commission has estimated that 17 per cent of Irish people live in households with no access to a basic bank account. The levels of financial exclusion in Ireland are high

relative to other EU countries, and there is a correlation between financial exclusion and low income, as many financially excluded people are likely to be social welfare recipients.<sup>20</sup> The European Commission<sup>21</sup> is putting pressure on member states to address the issue and the Irish Government has made some progress by developing a strategy for financial inclusion.<sup>22</sup> However, there is clearly a need for different types of banking to meet a variety of banking needs.

We already have a strong tradition of banking serving communities through the credit union movement, which provides a firm basis on which to build a new financial and banking system. Post offices could also be strengthened to provide a local banking system that can provide untainted and impartial information and advice. Financially and economically, the credit union and post office networks could aid the development of a dynamic small and medium enterprise sector that is the largest employer in the country and the life blood of the domestic economy. Building a new lending infrastructure for local communities and enterprises could help prevent a return to the speculative economy – a speculative economy which undermines the real economy and is antithetical to a flourishing society.

#### **TIME FOR A NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY**

A political economy is something which exists to create and sustain the kind of society you want. The economy needs to be designed to promote quality of life, equality and environmental sustainability as primary goals. Political economy is the application of a set of political values to economic thinking, and action to achieve these goals.

What are the means by which we can strengthen the economy so that it becomes more democratic? A new political economy must engender active economic citizenship, whereby we demand the right courses of action from those in decision-making positions.<sup>23</sup> We need to ask whether the decisions that are taken are based on sound reasoning and robust evidence.

Without an active economic citizenship, we will always be the victims of people, institutions and bureaucracies that tell us things happen because they have to, and that there is nothing we can do to alter them, however

unpleasant and unjust they may appear. The current policy of pursuing austerity measures serves as a perfect example of how we are told *'there is no alternative'* in response to the Irish economic and financial crises.

TASC and others (such as the Nevin Economic Research Institute) have developed investment strategies aimed at supporting economic recovery and putting the economy on a more sustainable trajectory.<sup>24 25</sup> These strategies are costed and specify sources of investment. Such an investment programme must be accompanied by a fiscal policy that narrows the gap between revenue and spending by focusing on the least contractionary forms of fiscal adjustment. This requires progressive and equality-proofed taxation targeting high-income groups, property assets and other forms of wealth, unproductive activity and passive income, as well as environmental measures.

We need to reshape the way we think about economic progress by assessing everything we do in terms of impact on well-being, equality and environmental sustainability. This is the way to create a dynamic, innovative and prosperous society. A new political economy should help us explore how we can become more enterprising and creative. It should also regulate markets in the public interest, support a diverse range of enterprises and make sure that companies are democratised and focus on the interests of stakeholders as well as shareholders. This would lead to a different kind of economy – a truly stakeholding economy.<sup>26</sup>

We need a step change in policy if we are to begin to shape an economy that offers everyone a satisfying and rewarding role, while at the same time recognising that there is much of value beyond the realm of formal employment and monetary gain. A less growth-driven economy will improve people's work-life balance. Changing today's economy into one that meets the needs of society would have a transformative effect in improving the quality of life of everyone in society and restoring the underpinnings of a flourishing society.

Above all, a new political economy must move from the work ethic to the care ethic. Transforming the experience of people's 'productive' lives would lead to new levels of dynamism and innovation, putting us on the 'high road' to social and economic prosperity, as well as changing the quality of people's everyday lives.

Steps towards creating a new political economy will include a focus on creating the conditions for more economic democracy; developing a system of progressive taxation to fund universal public services; and reconfiguring growth so that it is sustainable and regionally balanced. The creation of a new political economy should also reclaim ‘economics’ by rediscovering the political, social and cultural in ‘economics’.

Economics is not, and cannot be, neutral. The questions we seek to ask, the assumptions we choose to make and the options we decide to pursue must be informed by the values of equality, sustainability and democracy.

Ultimately, a new political economy must articulate the fundamental choices facing us and the values informing those choices, while mapping out alternative routes towards a flourishing society.

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## A Vision of a Flourishing Society

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### TURNING VISION INTO REALITY

We need to imagine a better and brighter future for all people living in Ireland. And we need to identify the steps that will move us closer to making that vision a reality.

TASC – Ireland’s independent progressive think-tank – celebrated its tenth anniversary last year. During the past decade, we have published books, policy documents and discussion papers covering a wide range of public policy, from housing, transport and pensions, to issues of gender inequality, democracy and economic development.

Our vision is of a flourishing Irish society which has accountable government, is moving steadily towards equality and social justice for all, and enjoys growing levels of public discourse and engagement.

TASC’s contribution to realising that vision is to promote research and public education in issues of public policy, politics, economics, culture, the environment and other related fields, so as to encourage a more equal society based on a sustainable, socially-responsible economy.

If most of us agree that we want to achieve a flourishing society, it is clear that fundamental changes, rather than piecemeal reforms, will have to be undertaken in the economy, combined with a process of wholesale social renewal.

In this context, TASC commissioned a series of papers analysing Irish public life, traversing the economy, arts and culture, and the political, institutional and legal framework. Drafts of those papers were published in 2011, and have now been updated and collated into a single volume. This essay weaves together the thinking in those individual contributions into a progressive vision – a vision describing what Ireland might look like if TASC’s ambitions for change were realised.

The aim of this project is to stimulate debate and to generate an awareness of real alternatives. No single individual or organisation has all the

answers. But genuine open debate and discussion will show that Ireland has real options for learning from the failures of the past and moving in a new direction in response to the current economic crisis.

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This essay is divided into six main sections. The first identifies the new values which will need to inform a flourishing society in Ireland. The second provides some detail about the kind of society that could exist in Ireland, making reference to specific policy areas. These two sections provide the context for the third part, which describes how the economy could be configured to serve society better and foster greater equality. The fourth and fifth sections outline how the political realm and public services could be transformed to make this vision a reality. The sixth and final section is a stark reminder of the consequences if we fail to fundamentally change Ireland in order to avoid repeating past failures.

#### **A HUMAN-CENTRED VISION**

When Ireland becomes a flourishing society, this will be because of a broad public consensus supporting this objective, combined with new public expectations about the rights and responsibilities of individuals, the role of the state and the role of the economy.

When Ireland becomes a flourishing society, a strong level of social solidarity will exist because solidarity is necessary for us to emerge from the economic crisis as an intact society, and to overcome the hardship that this crisis has caused for so many people.

This new level of social solidarity will underpin greater autonomy of individuals, who will each – as a result of more equal access to education and better distribution of resources – be in a position to participate fully in society, and to achieve his or her personal potential.

In a flourishing society, the newly expanded diversity of Ireland's society will be recognised as a permanent feature of our country. Our diversity will be celebrated, and equality of participation will ensure all voices are heard in the debate about shaping our country.

Active public participation, through Claiming our Future and other civil society organisations, will in turn generate a new political order based on

shared democratic values and respect for everyone's human rights. There will be plenty of room in the flourishing society for disagreement, but this will be based on the evidence underpinning alternative approaches to governing the country. The old Civil War politics will be forgotten and obsolete, and the politics of clientelism, patronage and populism will be ended through transparency and strict regulation.

Public authorities must operate on the basis of impartial rules, rather than the basis of who knows whom. A transparently fair system will foster people's allegiance to the state on the basis of an equal allocation of benefits to all who live in Ireland.

In order to achieve this vision in a new flourishing society, people in Ireland will have changed their self-image as members of society. The universal values of liberty and equality will be restated for a new generation. These values prioritise the individual well-being of all, particularly the most marginalised. It will be recognised that real liberty to make personal choices presupposes equality of outcome in terms of income, education and health, as well as equal rights to participate in decision-making. These values give rise to a greater sense of belonging to a diverse society, in which each individual is a fellow citizen, based on our common humanity.

#### **MORE EQUAL BENEFIT FROM THE ECONOMY**

Ireland in future will be a more economically equal country, with economic benefits shared between all citizens. Greater economic equality will be accompanied by reduced levels of social problems, such as crime, ill health and poor educational attainment.

This vision of a flourishing society is not mere ambition: rather, it is rooted in strong evidence from international studies showing that more equal societies tend to do better in terms of the wellbeing of all citizens.

In future, Ireland will compare itself to the best countries in the world in which to live.

Economic prosperity in a flourishing Ireland will be measured in terms of individual wellbeing, including health, housing standards, income

security and other vital measurements that were excluded from the calculations of earlier, failed economic models of development. Studies have shown that, even as countries grow richer, individual well-being can decline. Old fetishes, like GDP per capita, will be consigned to the footnotes of comprehensive and modern economic studies that take fuller account of people's aspirations and quality of life.

People living in Ireland's flourishing society will treasure many of the things that economics has historically failed to measure, such as leisure, shorter commuting times, a healthy natural environment, time with friends and family, access to public amenities and other aspects of quality of life. While this leaves room for luxury goods, the conspicuous consumption of the past will be seen as the vulgar greed it always was, fuelled not least by media portrayals of 'celebrity lifestyles'.

Ireland's flourishing economy will not be based on the ever-increasing private debt of past decades. Banking and credit will be strictly regulated and provided as public utilities, and working incomes will be sufficient for everyone can satisfy their needs without being forced to bridge the gap with unsustainable loans at punitive interest rates.

A decent standard of living for all will be underpinned by public policy aimed at ensuring adequate minimum incomes for everyone, whether employed or in receipt of social transfers. In a flourishing society, maximum employment will be a priority for Government. To this end, strategic investment programmes will be designed to counter cyclical contractions and foster a job-rich, environmentally sustainable economic recovery. Greater levels of industrial democracy will be combined with stronger guarantees of 'social wages' – non-pay goods and services such as healthcare, childcare and public amenities, which have a tangible impact on quality of life and wellbeing.

Members of a flourishing society will seek to maximise their wellbeing, rather than merely their cash incomes, thus placing a new emphasis on work-life balance and gender equality. A long-term economic strategy will value wellbeing as highly as growing national income.

The vital contribution of women to Ireland's recent and future prosperity will be recognised through a fundamental re-orientation of state

services to support women. The old ‘breadwinner’ welfare model will be restructured to end the dependency of female spouses on unemployed partners, and to eliminate the high level of poverty among lone parents and retired women.

Public investment in childcare and early childhood education will ensure that children and adults reach their full potential, and will facilitate women’s capacity to pursue a career and other interests outside the home. Quality socialised care will not only liberate women to work, but will also provide professional job opportunities in the welfare system in a high-employment society where dual-earning households are the norm.

It will take time to build a strong, publicly-funded, universal system of childcare and comprehensive early childhood education. However, in line with the international evidence, investment in this area will be rewarded by significant long-term strengthening of the economy, as well as the betterment of society.

Families of all types will be equally recognised and respected in future, including same sex couples and their children.

In our flourishing society, unpaid care within the home will be recognised for the social benefit it provides, and will be supported. Care givers and recipients will have the choice between care-giving at home, care through public services or a balance between the two.

The wellbeing of people in Ireland will be ensured, in large part, by reformed and renewed public services. As part of this renewal, some services will be provided through ‘co-production’ between professional staff and service users, which will improve productivity. This will offer higher user satisfaction and give greater job satisfaction to those providing those services.

To achieve this level of prosperity and shared wellbeing, public spending and taxation priorities will be fundamentally changed.

Public investment in a flourishing society will be redirected from inefficient ‘negative’ spending (such as an ever-increasing number of prison places) to positive social renewal (such as universal early education), in recognition

that universal services and a decent quality of life for all diminish many of the root causes of crime and other social problems. **107**

Spending on quality public services will approach average European levels, paid for by higher levels of taxation spread across individuals and companies in the economy. People will be willing to pay more tax on the basis of a transparent system that shows the benefits to them from public services – and the consequent reduction in the expenses coming out of their take-home pay.

Ireland's future tax system – the tax system underpinning a flourishing society – will be stable, sustainable and progressive. It will tax wealth as well as income, and emphasise taxes on negative social and environmental effects, like pollution. Long-term fiscal planning will ensure that the tax system can never collapse again, as it did after 2008 when property-related taxes and other transient revenue from the boom period suddenly evaporated.

The illusion of European-quality public services funded by US-levels of taxation will be replaced by recognition that paying tax in exchanges for high-quality, not-for-profit public services benefits most of us more than buying them from profit-making companies.

In a society where everyone benefits from high-quality public services, tax avoidance will be seen for the anti-social behaviour that it is. The crime of tax evasion will be robustly pursued with serious penalties for offenders. The system of tax credits, reliefs and incentives will be reduced to a modest scale, to ensure a more stable tax system and better redistribution of income. An equality-proofed site value tax will help generate sustainable revenue streams for the state. Ireland's practice of aggressive tax competition with other economies will have been stopped, to be replaced with a transparent and fair level of competitiveness.

In this context, we will have changed our assumptions about the role of tax in economics. There will be no 'sacred cows' of low personal or corporate taxation. Instead, tax rates will be determined on the basis of good economic sense, including the need to encourage state spending during recession, and the need to redistribute income to achieve equality.

The tax system will be combined with appropriate regulation to discourage excessively high salaries and bonus inflation which, coupled with irresponsible investment in property and financial instruments, helped cause the financial crisis.

Measures such as these will ensure that a new, flourishing Irish economy will have recovered from the high current deficit resulting from the economic crash and subsequent collapse of the tax system. The reduction in income inequality – through improved social protection and minimum incomes at work – will have led to stronger consumer demand in the economy, providing a basis for businesses to grow and expand.

Social protection entitlements will be universal, reflecting the benefit that everyone gains from investing in social solidarity. As in the Nordic welfare states, the receipt of benefits and quality care by everyone will reinforce popular support for a well-funded public system. The evidence from the Nordic examples shows that where all contribute and all benefit, and where the system is simple and transparent, social solidarity is high. People will look back in embarrassment at an era where services for ‘poor people’ were regarded as poor services. The myth of the ‘undeserving poor’ will have been quashed.

Social solidarity will be reinforced by active citizenship. The personal security that strong income protection and social services bring will translate into greater freedom for individuals to participate in their communities through a wide variety of voluntary organisations. The Nordic examples show much higher levels of social participation in organisations which, in turn, are well-funded and membership-controlled. As we move towards a flourishing society, more people will become involved in civil society and civil society organisations will become more transparent and democratic.

#### **AN ECONOMY SERVING SOCIETY WITHIN ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITS**

The economy of a flourishing society is one that serves society’s needs. This is a fundamental shift back to an earlier – and better – understanding of economics, which replaces the failed notion that if one looks after the economy, society will look after itself.



One of the main measures of a successful economy must be the extent to which it generates maximum ecologically-sustainable employment. 109

A flourishing society's economy will support enterprises, businesses and innovation that make a real and sustainable contribution to communities. In this model, businesses will take account of a wide range of stakeholders, including employees, customers and others whose lives are affected by a business's activities. The failed notion of 'shareholder value' will be rejected as a major cause of the unsustainable, boom-bust cycle. It will be seen as a voracious model that depletes natural resources and harms communities through its blinkered pursuit of profit.

The knowledge economy of the twenty-first century will place greatest value on human resources – people – as the key assets of any business. Management will align the aspirations of workers with those of customers, ensuring that the former are able and willing to respond flexibly to the needs of the latter. The new 'stakeholder value' model will favour employee autonomy and participation, up to and including employee ownership. Research shows that such schemes are not only beneficial to the enterprises in question but also help flatten social hierarchies, thus promoting equality and enhancing the trust levels required if we are to provide universal welfare services as part of a new social and ecological market economy.

International evidence points to the strength of economies that have greater worker representation on the boards of companies. Employee participation models in a flourishing society will be buttressed by effective systems of skill development. This will start with universal early education, and finish with at least three years of tertiary education or training. The aim will be for Ireland to match the quality and export competitiveness of the goods produced by the hubs of European industry, such as Germany.

Neither economies nor enterprises exist in a vacuum. Both must plan for a changing world in which the rules of the game are being fundamentally changed by the rapid exhaustion of finite global resources and the potential for catastrophic climate change.

Enterprises cannot (and will not) manage this challenge alone: that is a task for political leadership. Achieving an 'ecological modernisation'

of the economy is essential if enterprises are to survive in this evolving context. This will not only mean restructuring the industrial base in favour of products based on green technologies (such as the renewable sources on which energy production in Ireland increasingly depends), it will also mean all enterprises achieving ‘eco-efficiencies’, which will increasingly be a major competitiveness factor.

For too long, Irish economic development policy has focused on attracting individual large transnational companies, while neglecting the public realm on which all firms – indigenous and foreign – depend. Sweden, by contrast, has been relatively successful in attracting such firms without resort to ‘beggar-your-neighbour’ tax incentives. It has done so by investing in the quality of the public realm, notably in research and development and workforce skills. Public policy also needs to focus on achieving ‘agglomeration effects’ by developing relationships between firms, including indigenous enterprises and SMEs; and between firms, research institutes and other public institutions. A flourishing economy will be one that has learnt these lessons.

Ireland’s flourishing society will also be characterised by global solidarity. One of our enduring strengths is our support for developing countries. Building on this, we will develop our international role as a positive influence helping others to develop their own economies and societies.

#### **RESTORING TRUST AND RENEWING THE PUBLIC REALM**

Ireland’s flourishing society will be served by impartial, accessible and accountable public institutions. Levels of trust in social and political institutions will have been painstakingly restored from the depths to which they fell before, and during, the economic crisis.

Parliament will operate as a centre of debate and discussion about national policy concerns. Public representatives will defend local interests, in the context of promoting national solidarity and lowering regional inequalities. At the same time, the role of the individual TD will be radically changed. Client-centred constituency business – with the implicit ‘payment’ of a vote anticipated – will be replaced by professional and accessible citizen advice services. Public representatives will be supported and resourced in focusing on national issues. Such resources

will include research staff, access to timely information and a powerful, independent committee system facilitating detailed scrutiny of policy and improved executive accountability. 111

Stronger local government will have exclusive responsibility for issues within its remit, without interference from national politicians who will focus on national policy. Critical to this will be substantial revenue-raising powers for local authorities, including the ability to raise revenue as mandated by the local electorate. As well as input from elected representatives, civic engagement and public participation will play a strong role in local government.

As people see the benefit of social solidarity and improved national policy in a flourishing society, there will be a gradual shift in voting behaviour, with politicians being increasingly rewarded on the basis of policy performance rather than constituency work. Changes to the conduct of elections – and perhaps the electoral system – will occur to facilitate this.

A culture of public service will have replaced the outdated concept of political patronage. Appointments to public bodies or executive positions will be made through a transparent and impartial system, ensuring that the qualifications of the appointee are the best fit for the job, based on objective criteria. This transparent impartiality will, in turn, foster higher levels of trust, as seen in the Nordic societies.

The manner in which the public sector operates, and is seen to operate, will be central to restoring trust. The vocational element of public service will be restored, with public servants working within professional and accountable institutions. Public servants' morale and commitment to the public interest will be strengthened.

Transparency will be a reality – not merely a word – in Ireland's flourishing society. Many of the benefits of social solidarity and higher levels of trust will only be realised once the public has reliable and easy access to information held by public bodies. The activities and spending of public bodies must be public knowledge. 'Freedom of information' and 'whistleblower' laws, along with strengthened powers for parliament, will ensure that the decisions of ministers and public servants will be fully scrutinised and democratically accountable. The culture of excessive

112 executive secrecy will be ended, as will arbitrary powers to deny the public access to information. Open Government – with clear explanations given for official decision-making – will restore trust and ensure better quality decision-making in the public interest.

Government in a flourishing society will not only act in the interests of citizens, but will actively draw on the expertise of citizens to complement and enhance the experience which exists inside the formal political arena. As in Sweden, governmental commissions will facilitate widespread public participation and fuller debate of particular social issues before legislation is drafted in parliament. This will result in more considered legislation – which, in turn, will attract greater public acceptance.

Other mechanisms will be created for society as a whole to make an input into policymaking. The flaws in the old model of social partnership will be addressed, and new forms of co-operation between the trade union movement and the community sector will play a role.

The day-to-day involvement of more people and organisations in policymaking will not only satisfy the demand for stronger democracy in Ireland. There is also evidence showing that optimal policymaking and economic performance, as well as effective and accountable government, are determined by certain key factors including the quality of democracy, the level of civic engagement and the ability of institutions to learn from their mistakes. Achieving this will mean establishing mechanisms to review and challenge institutional performance, coupled with the flexibility to make the necessary reforms.

A vibrant public realm in a flourishing society will enrich the life of all. The collective benefit of goods produced by the public realm – such as education, public transport and health care – will assume greater importance.

Investment in the public realm to undo decades of underinvestment will ensure a sufficient quantity and quality of these social goods. Quality will also be improved by changing management styles to favour dialogue between providers and users of public services.

**REFORMED AND RENEWED PUBLIC SERVICES**

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In a flourishing society, people will recognise the value of collective goods and services – from a well-planned built environment in housing and transport, to the cost savings for most individuals as a result of not-for-profit public services in health and education.

Education and health care in Ireland’s flourishing society can be examples of international excellence.

Education will be centred on developing children into well-balanced adults, curious about the world and able to think critically and independently as participants in society and democracy. Narrow definitions of achievement from the past – such as ‘points’ – will be rejected. Every parent will be able to send their children to a school that caters for their religious beliefs, or their preference for a secular education. No child will be forced by circumstances to attend schools under religious control against their parents’ wishes, or to commute excessively long distances to access secular education. Civic virtues such as human rights, tolerance and solidarity will be taught to all.

The goal of the educational system in a flourishing society will be to ensure equality of outcome across Ireland. State subsidies to private schools, which are by definition exclusive, will be eliminated. Educational attainment will be determined by individual ability and application, rather than by economic advantage. The gaping divide between schools in advantaged and disadvantaged areas will be only a shameful memory.

Healthcare in the flourishing society will be universal, and health itself will be seen as a social good. Health services will be efficient, and respond flexibly to patients who will be treated on the basis of their need rather than on their ability to pay for medical treatment. The unwieldy bureaucracy of the past will be radically reconfigured and streamlined.

A flourishing society will invest in its health services to provide quality care on a universal basis. State supports to privatisation will have been eliminated. No longer will private patients be able to move faster in the same queue for services as public patients.

Primary and preventative healthcare services will be bolstered by major investment, which will – in line with international evidence – be far more efficient and cost-effective than expenditure on hospital treatment. The narrow debate about the number and location of hospitals will have been replaced by a new debate on achieving optimum health in a flourishing society.

Public health initiatives to change individual ‘lifestyles’ will be effective thanks to the economic equality of the flourishing society. International evidence – such as the research by Wilkinson and Pickett – indicates that such equality is a necessary pre-condition for people’s lifestyles to become significantly healthier.

Oscar Wilde warned against those who know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Ireland’s flourishing society will be a place where the cultural sphere and social goods are valued.

Public art will be developed as the expression of individual artists, not as a by-product of tax breaks or corporate patronage.

The built environment will be a comfortable and secure place for people to work and live. There will be a process put in place to create and strengthen communities, and shared public space, for the many people who live in poorly-planned and poorly-served urban sprawl or one-off rural housing. Rural and urban communities will benefit from transport planning, ecological protection, the preservation of character and visual aspect, and access to amenities and public services. Ghost estates and poor-quality housing will be eradicated.

In the flourishing society, a much greater value will be placed on high-quality architecture, good planning, and compact and multi-use neighbourhoods. Such a liveable milieu will foster a sense of civic responsibility, and of solidarity among strangers. Today’s individualistic society is in urgent need of such a solidaristic sense. Social and ethnic integration will be promoted through the creation of diverse neighbourhoods of a manageable size – neighbourhoods that, unlike gated communities for the wealthy and ghettos for the poor, encourage community and face-to-face contact.

Housing will be affordable and the family home will be given equal protection across all tenure types.

Ireland's civil society and participatory democracy will be served by a range of media companies, promoting informed debate. The over-concentration of media ownership will be ended through regulation limiting the share that any one person or organisation can hold. The resultant diverse media will ensure continuous promulgation of a wide variety of perspectives. A narrow consensus on social and economic issues, encouraged by vested interests, will never again be allowed to block reasoned and rational consideration of the full evidence and the long-term public interest.

Discussion of the economy will reflect the wide variety of policy options that work across the world. Economists, social scientists and community activists from academia, trade unions and civil society organisations will be given equal opportunity to participate, alongside business interests and stockbroker economists. Economic journalism will reflect this diversity, and economics will be viewed as a social and democratic discipline, where the views of all those who live in the economy (employees, small business owners, social welfare recipients, etc.) are fully reflected.

Politics in a revitalised and democratic flourishing society will no longer be reduced to the party-political 'horse race' of polls and elections. Serious and well-informed policy debate will dominate.

Informed social policy and economic expertise will be widely available in the media, so the social determinants behind the news stories (e.g. stories relating to violent crime or drug abuse) will be fully explored. The experiences of marginalised groups – ranging from migrants and Travellers to social welfare recipients – will no longer be ignored, and their voices will be heard directly and often. No longer will marginalised groups be merely objects in stories which are frequently sensationalist in tenor and serve to reinforce, rather than challenge, preconceptions and stereotypes.

The new media culture will stem, in large part, from the participation of journalists – new and established – working with all of us to achieve a flourishing society. There will be more diversity in the media newsrooms and boardrooms, and a greater spread of ownership.

### THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE

TASC's vision of a flourishing society is realistic. It is based on evidence and the examples of success in other countries – countries which did not enjoy any special advantage Ireland lacks when they made major changes to the direction taken by their economies, public services and societies.

We can create a flourishing society in Ireland, if the political will and public demand is channelled in the right direction. The vested interests of those who profited from the old way of doing business must be challenged directly, so that they do not hinder or weaken the impulse for reform.

We must strive to make fundamental changes in almost every area of Irish society and the economy. The consequences of failing to make this effort could not be more stark.

If the old economic model survives, we now know that banks and property developers will not generate sustainable prosperity. We now know that tax breaks will not guarantee foreign direct investment, and jobs, in Ireland. Continued emigration and regional disparities are likely to worsen the situation. Inequality will continue to rise and social cohesion will be permanently damaged.

If we fail to take ecological challenges more seriously, Ireland will be directly threatened by our over-reliance on oil – e.g. for agriculture – as well as indirectly threatened by the global poverty and increased migration engendered by climate change.

As failed economic assumptions have proven to be false, we have to look again at the assumptions regarding the nature and extent of our democracy, the effectiveness of our political institutions and the degree to which our regulatory frameworks are fit for purpose.

Declining confidence in our economic and political model has been mirrored by reduced trust in many civil society institutions, ranging from the churches (following revelations of decades of systematic child abuse and cover-ups) to the media (which enjoys significantly less public trust than in other countries). At the same time, the institutions of social partnership – long viewed as one of the bulwarks of Ireland's economic success – are coming under increased scrutiny and require profound reform.

Old certainties no longer apply.



Ireland's financial and economic collapse has exceeded even the worst nightmares of those who anticipated a hard landing. For decades to come, generations of taxpayers will be picking up the bill for poor decision-making by the banking and political establishments. Reckless lending, light regulation and pro-cyclical economic policies combined to ensure that Ireland has been disproportionately affected by the international economic crisis.

If we fail to foster a public appetite for social solidarity, we run the risk that individuals will each seek their own way out of the mess, through emigration, tax avoidance, poor quality goods and services, and lower pay for workers. Such forms of individual escape, rather than collective remedy, will sow the seeds of an unequal, miserly country, which personifies Thatcher's assertion that there is no such thing as society.

That is the choice facing us: to maintain a society in decline, or to create a flourishing society.

#### **HELP US ACHIEVE A FLOURISHING SOCIETY!**

TASC's vision of a flourishing society is a vision for today. It recognises that the rigid party alignments which emerged a century ago are today obsolete in Ireland and Europe – as are the old economic certainties.

While much public debate has centred on the economy over the past decade (during both boom and bust), significant social changes were also taking place. Demographic changes during the boom years included suburbanisation and substantial levels of immigration. Ireland today is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-denominational society. Many of our institutions (ranging from schools to health facilities) are still struggling to catch up with these changes.

TASC's vision is unabashed: it is one where the economy serves society and the environment. It charts a route to social progress which recognises that it is neither possible nor desirable to replicate the consumption-led, debt-fuelled economic growth of the later 'Celtic Tiger' years. It suggests how social progress can be funded, even in straitened times, and public expenditure made more efficient. It highlights the potential role which a reinvigorated state could play in strengthening society – and it shows how such a strengthened society would be characterised by greater civic activism. It paints a picture of a vibrant public realm, where a narrow focus

118 on individual consumption is replaced by a wider focus on the collective consumption of social goods – such as education, transport and healthcare.

It is, in short, a vision of a flourishing society. And it is a vision which all of us can help achieve in countless ways, not least through democratic participation and stronger public debate.



TASC is an independent, progressive think-tank dedicated to promoting equality, democracy and sustainability in Ireland through evidence-based policy recommendations.

The essays in *Towards a Flourishing Society* are a contribution to the national debate about strengthening Ireland's democratic institutions and developing a sustainable alternative to the current economic model.

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