

# The Irish water war, austerity and the 'Risen people'

*An analysis of participant opinions, social and political impacts and transformative potential of the Irish anti water-charges movement*



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### 1. Summary of Survey Findings

*A note on the survey* The survey gathered the views of a large sample of people protesting against the water charges. It was not a survey of the entire population about attitudes to water charges but of the specific group who are opposed to, and protesting against the water charges. 2,556 people filled out the survey between December 7<sup>th</sup> 2014 and December 14<sup>th</sup> 2014. This is an extremely large survey sample size. Participants used the on-line survey tool Survey Monkey. The survey is, therefore, a very representative sample of those protesting against the water charges. It is accurate to state that it gives a useful insight into the views of participants in the 'water movement' – the largest social movement that has taken place in Ireland for a number of decades. A small amount of questions allowed participants choose multiple options and therefore the percentage answers for these do not add up to 100% but rather indicate broad preference (the letter M is put beside these questions).

- ❖ Broad demographic spread: slightly more respondents were male (53.6%), majority (61%) were between 30 and 50 years of age, 52% working full time
- ❖ Geographic spread: Dublin region 45%. Leinster 28%, Munster 16%. Within Dublin highest response from working class areas
- ❖ New people to protest: A majority of respondents (54.4%) had not protested at all before taking part in the current anti-water protests
- ❖ 'Austerity has gone too far' was the most cited reason (59.6%) for protesting, followed by to 'stop the future privatisation of water' (cited by 58.7%), protesting for 'abolition of water charges' 57.3% respondents), the 'Bank bailouts/debt' (42.9%) and 'water is a human right' (41.3%) (M)
- ❖ 90.1% felt the tactics of the R2W movement were effective
- ❖ 92% of respondents stated that they do not intend paying for water charges
- ❖ 69.9% believe the campaign will be successful
- ❖ 86% described the media portrayal of the anti-water movement as negative
- ❖ 82.6% were most informed about the campaign from social media
- ❖ 79.7% said the movement should organise more mass protests, 39.6% said the Right to Water should extend to other issues like the right to housing and 36.6% said the Right to Water should stand in elections (M)
- ❖ 83.1% of respondents indicated that they would vote for broadly 'Left' candidates ((31.7%) said they would vote for PBP/AAA, 27.5% for Left Independents, 23.9% for Sinn Fein, only 5.6% said they would vote for Right Independents and 5.6% said they don't intend to vote
- ❖ 65% of respondents stated that who they will vote for in the coming general election is a change on who they voted for in the General election of 2011 with the majority of these moving away from government parties to opposition Left parties and independents.
- ❖ 70% of those who indicated they will change their vote had voted for the government parties in 2011
- ❖ 79.3% will vote for candidates affiliated to or endorsed by the R2W campaign
- ❖ 79.6% stated that there is a need for a new political movement/party in Ireland
- ❖ Just over a half of respondents identified themselves what the priority issues for a new party should be. Equality and fairness was identified most (by 26%), followed by political reform/democracy (17%), standing up to Europe (12.7), fairer taxation (10%), for proper/decent public services (8.5%)
- ❖ 77.6% stated the most effective way of getting change was through protesting, voting in elections at 52.3%, local community activities at 40.8% and only 28% see the most effective way of getting change is by contacting a political representative (M)

## 2. Selection of Participant views

On the impact of austerity, bank bailouts, debt and the crisis:

- *"It's just unfair and too much. I cannot see at the moment where the money for water is going to come from in my already overstretched budget. As a student and a single parent I find it difficult as it is to make ends meet without having to face this also"*
- *"My mother and her 75yr old husband are homeless. My sister is €8K behind on her mortgage and banks are threatening to repossess her apartment. My 65 yr. old father has to use a food bank and cannot afford to heat his house. We've had enough"*
- *"I have lost all faith in the government, I was swayed in my last vote by promises that were not met. I knew the job to exit the troika and recover from austerity would be hard, but the low income, working class people have really felt the brunt of this government, and the wealthy and rich have once again emerged unscathed. Unfair, unjust and promises broken. I will not trust the main parties again, time for change, time for change time for change...enough"*

On the government:

*"Enda promised honesty, to do away with quangos and put an end to cronyism. Instead he completely betrayed our trust. This government set up the biggest quango in Irish history and stuffed it with their cronies. I'm disgusted. Secondly, I would not believe the Lord's Prayer from their mouths & I don't want the likes of Denis O'Brien getting his greedy corrupt paws on our water. Fianna Fail destroyed the economy but this shower has destroyed us - the decent hardworking citizens of this country. I lost my job recently and all thanks to Government policy. So much for job creation"*

On the establishment parties and Irish political system:

- *"In the last election and the next election my decisions are increasingly based on who's left to vote for. In both cases the main parties of this country have left me little choice but to not vote for them. To be honest, one is left very disillusioned by the whole thing. Independents are all that's left unless one chooses to not vote at all. And both of those choices are not particularly healthy for the country either, but no way are Fine Gael or Labour getting my vote, and I'll likely never vote for Fianna Fail again after the shambles they left this country with for decades to come. My grandchildren will be bearing the ill effects of that government and it saddens me"*
- *"Our political system is broken, our politicians and political parties are owned by corporate elites who act in their favour. I'm not standing for it anymore. I want a government for the people"*

On the Irish people 'rising up' in the water movement:

- *"I think for the first time ever Irish people are not just accepting what the government are throwing at us"*
- *"The government are worried they have made some changes, it has awoken the Irish people to the unjust way this country is governed"*
- *"We have empowered people with knowledge. Knowledge of how corrupt our government is. The mass protest movements have already seen impacts through the government reducing the charges, capping them for four years etc. But they have to be abolished. I want a fair society for all not just the rich"*
- *"They have galvanised the anger which already existed against austerity and the Water Tax from ordinary people, the silent majority if you like. This has already ensured several u-turns on Water Tax issues from the scumbags in government. There is a growing sense of empowerment amongst the man and woman in the street"*
- *"The Irish people have started to wake up so if Irish Water is not abolished there is a good chance over time that the civil war parties will be abolished and then ultimately Irish Water"*
- *"Ordinary people are finally seeing its right to stand and be accounted for in something they believe in"*

On the Right 2 Water and Community Water Campaigns:

- *"R2W have been excellent at holding peaceful protest mobilising tens of thousands of people, explaining exactly why this charge is unjust and unfair. It's one step too far for Irish people and they are reclaiming their country, R2W have highlighted the fact that if we allow our natural resources to be privatised then all our public services are up for grabs. Greedy people making money off the most vulnerable is not what living in a democracy should be about"*
- *"It's allowed a platform for the forgotten to speak up, enough is enough. It is probably the greatest community project that hasn't cost much to implement"*
- *"Mass mobilisation has resulted in the political classes starting to get the message; resistance of meter installation has shown people that civil disobedience is equally or more important than street protests, and can work"*
- *"Yes they have been effective and it is a building process. Right2Water can help build people's confidence and let them find a voice that has never been used, the voice of protest the voice that tells the government that enough is enough and they shall take no more from us to pay bankers and bond holders"*

On the need for a new political party:

- *"We need a party that effectively undoes the damage from austerity, creates a national public health service free for all, starts an enormous house-building programme, takes offshore resources into public ownership, etc"*
- *"We need a real Left political grouping and the end of Labour's pretence in this roll"*
- *"Logical socialism, properly enforced without bias or greed. taxes fully used to pay for services for the people, the basic needs of all, and improvements to infrastructure, education, health, and housing. In other words, the obvious things"*
- *"I believe in a United Left party based on red-line issues (e.g. tax rates for the wealth/corporate entities) as opposed to splintered groups like the current situation"*
- *"To have a proper left leaning political entity that has a view to create a socially democratic state in the vein of the Scandinavian model which would take back the rights to our resources, investment in public works, taxes to go to services rather than bondholders"*

### About the Author

Dr Rory Hearne is a Lecturer & Researcher in the Department of Geography, Maynooth University. He has researched and published extensively in the areas of housing, politics, political economy, privatisation, human rights, social movements, and community development. He is author of *Public Private Partnerships in Ireland*. He has also been involved for over 15 years in social justice, civil society, community, Left and independent politics and activism.

### 3. Ireland and austerity: where is the protest? Survey Background

A common question from the mainstream media and international observers through the years of the crisis, austerity and the bailout in Ireland from 2008 up until October 2014 was ‘why are the Irish not protesting’? Academics engaging in political theory and political economy similarly pondered on this apparent anomaly. Ireland was undergoing one of the most severe economic and social contractions in the global and European crisis. The banking crash was one of the largest in modern history and the costs of the crisis were being imposed by both Irish governments and the IMF/EU/ECB ‘Troika’ on to the majority of the population - low and middle income households. A series of austerity Budgets implemented from 2008 to 2014, along with conditions imposed as part of the international bailout from 2010 to 2013, involved cumulative cuts to public spending, social welfare and raising of taxes, predominantly on middle and low income households, of over €30bn (Table 1).

<b>Table 1 Budgetary Adjustments 2008-2013</b>		
Year	Amount of austerity	Key austerity policies
2008	€7bn	€5.7bn expenditure cuts Income levy on all earners
2009	€7.5bn	Cuts in public sector pay, €760m cut in Social Welfare, €1bn cut in capital investment
2010	€6bn	€4.5bn expenditure cuts incl. 10% reduction in new public servant's pay, cut in the minimum wage, student fees increase from €500 to €2000 p.a.
2011	€3.8bn	€2.2bn in expenditure cuts including €470 million cut to social welfare budget, €100 household charge
2012	€3.4bn	Increase in student fees to €2,500, property tax
2013	€2.5bn	€1.6bn in expenditure cuts including halving of under 25s unemployment benefit, elderly and disability supports, cut to public health spending of €666million

Source: (Social Justice Ireland, 2013)

The bailout of the private banking sector and developers cost the Irish people €64bn, equivalent to just under a third of Ireland's GDP. Proportionally, the Irish people paid, per capita, the highest cost of bailing out the financial institutions in Europe. The impact of these policies has been visible in the deprivation rate rising from 11% of the population in 2007 to 25% in 2011 and then, in 2014, to reach a staggering 31% - almost 1.4 million people. This includes 37% of children suffering deprivation (which is up from 18% in 2008). Yet, the question remained – why were the Irish people not protesting? While anti-austerity protests raged across Europe, there were no large scale protests in Ireland.

Ireland has been held up as an example by the international political and financial elite, the Troika, and particularly European leaders such as the German government, as a successful bailout model that maintained social order and achieved popular acceptance of the necessity of austerity and financial sector bailouts. This apparent absence of protest in Ireland has been the subject of international comment (Sally, 2012; The Financial Times, 2013) and domestic debate (Allen & O Boyle, 2013; Brophy, 2013; Cox, 2011; Hearne, 2013a; TheJournal.ie, 2013). The former Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan, commented in April 2009 that other European countries were ‘amazed’ at the Irish Budgetary adjustments and that there would be “riots” if these were introduced in other countries. Indeed, the Irish Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, was ‘rewarded’ with an appearance on the cover of Time Magazine in October 2012 where he explained to the world that there had been no large-scale demonstrations in Ireland because “(Irish) people understand that you have to do difficult things to sort out our own public finances” (Irish Independent, 2012).

The Irish response has been described as that of an ‘extraordinarily moderate and passive society’ (O'Brien 2011) and ‘not much more than a long collective whinge’ (Dwyer 2010: 2). Mair (2010: 7) describes a ‘passive’ and ‘demobilised’ citizenry. The dominant narrative asserts that the Irish waited to respond in a ‘pencil revolution’ in the 2011 General Election where they ejected Fianna Fáil and the Green Party from office. As Murphy (2011) notes: “when compared to Iceland's ‘Saturday Protests’, Spain's ‘Indignados’ movement and Portugal's ‘Desperate Generation’ protests, a sense persists of a relative lack of overt Irish protest. This sense is captured in a 2010 Greek protest chant ‘this is Greece, not Ireland, we the workers will resist’.”

Political scientists and commentators have argued that this is a result of the inherently ‘pragmatic’ and ‘conservative’ political views of the Irish people. Others argued there was a widespread acceptance of the elite narrative that the crisis was caused because the Irish ‘partied too hard’ in the boom and over borrowing to fuel ‘excessive’ lifestyles. Therefore, rather than expressing anger collectively in external forms of public protest they have internalized their response through passivity, self-blame, guilt, alcoholism, emigration and suicide.

In this context many political commentators, politicians, academic political scientists, and media journalists expressed surprise that the water charges protest movement emerged at what has been described as the ‘end’ of the period of austerity in Ireland.

This is the background and rationale for undertaking the survey of participants in the water protests, which is the subject of this Report. The survey and report are to try and understand why the water movement emerged when it did in Ireland and what the motivations of those involved are. Questions have been raised about whether or not this is a single issue campaign, an anti-austerity movement, or if it represents a more fundamental transformation of the Irish people's approach to and involvement in politics, indeed of the emergence of a new form of active citizenship in Ireland? It was attempting to

get a sense of the political implications of the movement and to what extent this marked something radically different in regard to citizen protest and voting intentions for the forthcoming general election. The survey was also undertaken to try and give those involved in the movement an opportunity to directly express their views (and where possible, in their own words).

In an attempt to answer these questions, the author, Dr Rory Hearne, Department of Geography, Maynooth University, with the support of a group of interested students from the MA in Human Geography in Maynooth University developed and undertook a questionnaire survey that was circulated through Facebook anti water charge groups in the run up to, and subsequent to, the December 10<sup>th</sup> 2014 Right2Water protest in Dublin City. This is an independent academic study undertaken by the author and no funding was received to undertake the survey or the report.

There were 20 questions in the survey. These cover three broad areas including participants' demographic profile, geographic origins and employment status, questions on their rationale for engaging in the protests, their level of involvement in the movement and whether or not they intend to pay. The second part of the survey covered participant's views on the next steps, the role of the media, and whether or not they believed the movement will be successful. The final part of the survey assessed the political implications of the protest for the upcoming election, desire for a new party and implications for citizen engagement in democracy. The survey was completely anonymous.

Within two weeks 2,556 participants of the anti-water charge protests took part in the survey. Most respondents filled out the survey on-line. The survey also draws on participant research and observation by the author who attended and participated in local public water charge meetings and most of the major demonstrations. The results of the survey provide very interesting and useful insights to the views, opinions and motivations of the 2,556 participants who took part in the survey. It provides the greatest level of in-depth, and scientific, understanding and analysis of the reasons why people are involved in the water charges movement to date. This research offers a unique insight into a social movement while it was in progress. This is contrast to much social and political research which is often undertaken *ex post* i.e. after major events or movements take place.

The outcomes of the survey raise a number of interesting findings and reflections for understanding the potential of the Irish anti-water charges movement, the anti-austerity movement, social movements, the changing nature of Irish politics, political organisations, democracy and society, and the development of people oriented, rights based, social justice, new Left or 'progressive' political alternatives.

I would like to express my thanks to the Department of Geography, Maynooth University, for their support in carrying out this research, and in particular, to the MA Students, Niall Buckley, Mary Murray, Aoife Kavanagh, Sean Brosnan, Siobhan Madden, Neil Brennan, and Michael Murphy. Also thanks to helpful input from Dr Cian O Callaghan.

#### **4. Short History of the Water Charges Movement**

The bailout agreement of 2010 between the Fianna Fail-led government and the EU/IMF/ECB (the 'Troika') included within its Memorandum of Understanding the introduction of household water charges "with a view to start charging by the end of the EU-IMF programme period". The Memorandum also included the setting up of a 'national public utility setting and providing for the establishment of Irish Water in its final form'. This new public utility, Irish Water, was to take responsibility for all water and waste-water provision away from local authorities. In 2010 Labour leader Eamon Gilmore ruled out water charges on the basis of the cost of installing meters as well as ruling out a property tax (Irish Times, 2014).

In April 2012 the Government announced the contract to run the company had been awarded to Bord Gáis Éireann, of which Irish Water would become a subsidiary. The Minister responsible, Phil Hogan, stated that the charges would be introduced in 2014 with water meters installed also that year. Opposition to 'water taxes' were included within the campaign aims of the anti-household charge campaign (which was called the Campaign Against Household and Water Charges) but the principal focus of that campaign was the household/property charge. In January 2013 the manager of Dublin City Council, John Tierney was named as the first CEO of Irish Water. John Tierney had been involved in the controversial decision pursue the Poolbeg Incinerator in Dublin. In October 2013 concern was raised about how businessman Denis O'Brien had bought a company Siteserv from the IBRC (formerly Anglo Irish Bank) in 2012. The Water Services (No.2) Bill 2013 was rushed through all stages in the Dáil over four hours on the 19th of December amid protest from the Opposition in order to implement water charges from Jan 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

**Table 2. Water Charges and Protests in Ireland: A short history**

2010	EU-IMF Bailout Memorandum includes introduction of water charges and setting up Irish Water
2010	The Labour Party rules out water and property charges
April 2012	Irish Water Contract awarded to Bord Gais Eireann, Phil Hogan states charges and meters to be introduced in 2014
Jan 2013	John Tierney named as CEO of Irish water on 200k salary per annum
June 2013	Siteserv/GMC Sierra owned by business tycoon Denis O'Brien (former Fine Gael funder) wins contract to install water meters
July 2013	Irish Water is incorporated as a semi-state company under the Water Services Act 2013
Dec 2013	Water Service Bill 2013 rushed through the Dail to implement water charges from Jan 1 <sup>st</sup> 2014
Jan 2014	€85 mil of €180 mil set up costs for consultants
Jan 2014	Local community protests against water meters emerge in Cork, Dublin, regional towns
May 2014	Water charges a major issue in local and European elections
July 2014	Commission for Energy Regulation states water charges will be €278 for a family of 4

2014	Groups protest at visit of senior government Ministers and Taoiseach to local events
Sept 2014	Right 2 Water 'a citizen's campaign' set up between trade unions and left parties
Sept 30 <sup>th</sup>	12 people arrested at water meter installation protest in Dublin North City
Oct 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2014	Cork Anti-Water Charges Occupy City Council Offices
Oct 5 <sup>th</sup> 2014	35000 sign Right2Water online petition
Oct 11 <sup>th</sup> 2014	100,000 attend Right2Water protest in Dublin
Oct 21 <sup>st</sup> 2014	One million (2/3) of households do not register for Irish Water- deadline extended by a month
Nov 1 <sup>st</sup> 2014	150000 attend 100s of local demonstrations
Nov 15 <sup>th</sup> 2014	Sit-down protest blocks Tanaiste in Tallaght
Nov 19 <sup>th</sup> 2014	Government places cap on charge until 2018 (€260 for family, 160 for individual) plus a €100 grant for every household
Dec 2014	Irish Times poll shows only 48% stated they will pay the charge
Dec 10 <sup>th</sup> 2014	40,000 attend Right 2 Water protest in Dublin
Jan 26 <sup>th</sup> 2015	Media show water protestor verbally insulting the President at local protest
Jan 2015	Only 760,500 of the 1.5 million liable households have fully registered
Jan 31 <sup>st</sup> 2015	50,000 attend 'Says No' and Community Against Water Charges protests
Feb 2 <sup>nd</sup>	650,000 (43%) fail to register by latest deadline. Deadline extended to June
Feb 13 <sup>th</sup> 2015	Arrest of 20 Tallaght water protesters (including children – a 16 year old) as part of 'dawn raids' by Gardai
Feb 2015	Irish Independent poll shows only 40% intend to pay the charge
Feb 19 <sup>th</sup> 2015	5 water protestors sentenced to between 28 and 56 days in prison
Feb 21 <sup>st</sup> 2015	15000 march in Dublin against 'Political Policing'
March 21 <sup>st</sup> 2015	80,000 attend Right2Water protest in Dublin
March 2015	510,000 (34%) fail to register for Irish Water

In January 2014 there was public shock and anger when it emerged that €86 million of its €180m set up costs was for consultants, contractors and legal advice (the Journal.ie, 2015). The water charges were a central issue in the local and European elections in May 2014 with anti-water charges and anti-austerity candidates receiving a significant increase in support. The socialist Party even changed its name prior to the elections to 'Stop the Water Tax – Socialist Party'. Just before the elections the Minister for Environment Phil Hogan announced that the average household would pay €240 per year in water charges and said that those who didn't pay would be faced with reduced water pressure. In July of that year the Commission for Energy Regulation revealed that the average cost for a household of two adults and two children would come in at €278.

At a grassroots community level, particularly in the large cities of Dublin and Cork but also in smaller regional towns such as Carrick On Suir, Cobh, and Dundalk, protests had been growing since the start of the year blocking the installation of water meters with some areas effectively stopping installation. In particular, the 'Dublin Says No' and other groups in Dublin stopped meter installations in Raheny, Kilbarrack, Edenmore, and surrounding areas.

The leader of the Labour Party and Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore said he couldn't understand why people were protesting the metering process "because in fact the water meters are being installed to enable households to reduce what they will have to pay" (the Journal.ie, 2014). Hundreds of social media groups also began to emerge – with activists organising local meetings, and arranging to block off access to streets, as contractors arrived. Increasingly protests took place at the visit of senior politicians to various local events. Wider public disquiet grew when Irish Water required people to provide their personal tax and welfare identification details -their PPS numbers - to the utility. The issue of the potential privatisation of Irish water was also raised as a serious concern.

As public opposition to water charges grew the "Right2Water" campaign was formed in September 2014 as "a public campaign by activists, citizens, community groups, political parties/individuals and trade unionists who are calling for the Government to recognise and legislate for access to water as a human right" and to "abolish the planned introduction of water charges". Right2Water involves the trade unions Unite, Mandate, the Communications Worker's Union, the CPSU and OPATSI, as well as the Left parties of Sinn Féin, People Before Profit, the Anti Austerity Alliance and the Workers' Party. The campaign is also supported by a range of community groups and individual activists. Right2Water started with a petition which aimed to collect 50,000 signatures before the October 2014 budget. They also outlined their intention "to raise awareness of this vital issue and to ensure that water charges remain in the public consciousness ahead of Ireland's next General Election and in the upcoming bye-elections". Within one week of the Right2Water online petition being launched, over 35,000 people had signed it asking the Irish Government to abolish domestic water charges and respect the people's 'human right to water'.

The first national Right2Water protest took place in Dublin on October 11<sup>th</sup> 2014. The massive turnout surprised organisers and most political commentators when between 80,000 and 100,000 attended the protest. The same day, former Socialist MEP Paul Murphy – who had run a focused anti-water charges campaign – won the Dublin South West by-election. Further controversy emerged when Irish Water revealed that private rented tenants would be liable to pay the bills.

By the first deadline of October 21<sup>st</sup> only a third (500,000) of the 1.5 million liable households on the public water network who would be customers of Irish Water had registered their details with Irish Water, forcing it to seek permission from the regulator to extend the registration deadline to November 29<sup>th</sup>. Then on November 1<sup>st</sup> the largest local level, cross-



country, protest in recent Irish history took place. Over 100 local Right2Water protests took place around Ireland with well over 150,000 people participating despite horrendous weather conditions.

**Figure 1 November protests around Dublin**

**Figure 2 November 1<sup>st</sup> protests across the country**



Artane, 11am, Our Lady of Consolation Car Park.  
Blanchardstown, various community demonstrations convening at the Blanchardstown town centre at 1pm.  
Ballyfermot, 1pm Civic Centre,  
Blanchardstown, Bank of Ireland, Blanchardstown Village, 1pm.  
Cabra, 2pm Cabra Bingo Hall.

Cabra, 2pm, Naomh Fionnbarr GAA Club.  
Clondalkin, 2.30pm from County Council.  
Coolock, Stall Northside Shopping Centre.  
Crumlin, 1pm Crumlin Shopping Centre.  
Donaghmede/Kilbarrack, 11:30am, Donaghmede Shopping Centre.  
Donnybrook, 1pm, Beechill.  
Donnycarney, Stall at Donnycarney Church.  
Drimnagh, 1pm Galtymore Shops.  
Dun Laoghaire, 1pm Glasthule Dart.  
Dundrum, 2pm, Dundrum Luas Bridge  
Finglas, 11.30am Cappagh House / 1pm outside Bank of Ireland Finglas Village,  
Greenhills (D12), Greenhills Church, 1.30pm.  
Harolds Cross, 1pm.  
Lucan, 2pm, Lucan Community Centre.  
North Inner City, 12 noon, Meet at Five Lamps, North Strand.  
Pearse Street, 1pm, Erme St Post Office  
Rialto, 12.30pm, Ardee SU/Cork St.  
Ringsend, 12.30 Ringsend Library.  
Tallaght, 11am Dominican St. Mary's Priory Tallaght.  
Walkinstown, 1.30pm, Lidl, Walkinstown Avenue.  
York Street, Dublin 2 at 1pm  
Swords, 11.30am Pavilions March to Fingal Co.Co.

Donagel, Lifford, 2pm, Bottom of Croshan Heights  
Galway, Galway, 1pm Spanish Arch.  
Kerry, Tralee, 1pm Horan Centre.  
Kildare, Athy, 1.45 The Arches, Athy  
Kildare, Celbridge, 12pm Rally Castletown Gates  
Kildare, Leixlip, Rally meeting point Leixlip Fire Station 2pm  
Kildare, Maynooth, 1pm, The Square.  
Kildare, Naas, 1.30pm The Courthouse  
Kildare, Newbridge, 2pm Ballymany shops, Newbridge  
Kilkenny, 1.30pm, Assemble at the train station  
Laois, Portlaurington, 2pm, Carpark of School across from St Michael's Church.  
Laois, Laois County Hall Car Park, 2pm.  
Leitrim, Carrick-on-Shannon, 1pm, Tesco Car Park.  
Limerick, Limerick City, 2pm Bedford Row.  
Limerick, 1.45pm, various meeting points including:  
• Treaty Stone, Clancy Strand  
• Pitches Cross, O'Connell Ave  
• Cloughaun GAA Club, Childers Road  
• Westbury Shopping Centre, by Tesco (meet 1pm for this one)  
Longford, Longford, Battery Road  
Louth, Drogheda, 2pm O'Rahallagh's GAA club to Shop Street.  
Louth, Dundalk, 2pm Fairgreen  
Meath, Navan, 2pm Fair Green.  
Meath, Kells, Rally starting at 2pm at Fair Green Kells.  
Meath, Ashbourne, Arkle Statue 2pm.  
Meath, Duleek, Duleek Village 12 noon.



Carlow, Carlow, 2pm Liberty Tree  
Cavan, 2pm beside Argos on the Dublin Road  
Cavan, 2pm, Market Square  
Clare, Ennis, O'Connell Monument 2pm  
Clare, Shannon, Shannon Town CTR Carpark (behind Kincera).  
Cork, Bandon, 12pm Main Bridge.  
Cork, Cork City, 2pm, Library, Grand Parade.  
Cork, Fermoy, 2pm Chapel Square.  
Cork, Mallow, 2pm, assemble at the west end of Mallow.  
Cork, Youghal, Barry's Lane, 1pm.  
Donegal, Ballyshannon, Saturday 2pm  
Donegal, Letterkenny, 2pm, Mr Chippy Roundabout

Mayo, Ballina, 1.30pm, Diamonds Carpark.  
Mayo, Castlebar, 1pm, Market Square.  
Monaghan, Monaghan, 2pm, Courthouse  
Offaly, Birr, 2pm, Old Post Office, Emmet Square.  
Offaly, Tullamore, 2pm, GAA Arden Road.  
Roscommon, Boyle, 1.30pm Royal Hotel Carpark.  
Roscommon, Roscommon Town, 2pm The Mart.  
Sligo, Sligo, 2pm GPO Sligo  
Tipperary, Carrick-on-suir, 3pm, Castlefield  
Tipperary, Cashel, 1.45pm, The Plaza, Main Street.  
Tipperary, Nenagh, 2pm, Railway Square.  
Tipperary, Roscrea, 3pm, Tesco Carpark.  
Tipperary, Tipperary Town, 3.45pm, Redmund Square.  
Waterford, Portlaur, 12 noon, Main Village.  
Waterford, Waterford City, Ballybricken Hill 2pm.  
Westmeath, Athlone, 2pm, St Peters Church.  
Westmeath, Mullingar, 2pm, Penneys Car Park.  
Wexford, The Quay, New Ross, 2pm  
Wexford, Enniscorthy, 2pm, Fairgreen, Enniscorthy.  
Wexford, Gorey, 2pm, Gorey Community School Car Park.  
Wexford, Wexford Town, 2pm, Riverbank Hotel.  
Wicklow, Blessington, 12pm, Aldi Car Park.  
Wicklow, Bray, 2pm Three assembly points: Lidl, Dell Boghall Rd. or St Fergals Church.  
Wicklow, Greystones, 2pm from Civic Offices Mill Rd.  
Wicklow, Wicklow, 12.30 Wicklow County Council.  
Wicklow, Arklow, Fr. Murphy Monument, Parade Ground 1.45pm

**Figure 3 Images from November 1<sup>st</sup> Protests Across Ireland: Wexford, Swords, Sligo**



Source: Indymedia.ie

In the weeks following this protest there was increasing focus by the media on a small number of more 'direct action' or 'civil-disobedience' type protests. The protest against the new Labour Party Leader and Tanaiste, Joan Burton, in Tallaght in November 2014 received a hysterical media response and was seized on by government spokespeople to try portray the protestors as 'sinister dissidents'.

The government undertook a significant u-turn on November 19<sup>th</sup> and stated that the water charges were to be reduced, with two flat rates introduced – to be in place until the end of 2018. This included capping the charge at €160 for a single adult household and €260 for all other households until 2018. The fees were to be subsidised with a water conservation grant of €100 per year for eligible households, leaving the net cost per year at €60 for a single adult and €160 for other households. The grant would also be paid to those on group water schemes who are not customers of Irish Water. Furthermore, in an attempt to address concerns about privatisation the government introduced legislation that a 'plebiscite' would have to be held if a government planned to privatise Irish Water.

Despite the government reduction in charges the next Right2Water demonstration, which took place at 1pm on December 10<sup>th</sup>, a mid-week working day, in Dublin, attracted a crowd of around 30,000. The media focused on the actions of a small group of demonstrators who blocked traffic in O Connell Street. The Right 2 Water campaign highlighted the plight of the residents of Detroit in the US as the future for Ireland unless the charges were stopped. They brought over activists from the Detroit Water Brigade who addressed local meetings and the protests. The campaign pointed out that "the commodification of water has already plunged thousands of Detroit families into water poverty, while countless Irish households will face the threat of water poverty unless domestic water charges are abolished". It also countered that in fact a referendum was still required to guarantee the public ownership of water as any government could change the existing legislation without having 'to go to the people' for consent.



On December 13<sup>th</sup> an Irish Times opinion poll showed that 33% of respondents stated they would not pay the water charges, 10% were undecided and less than half, 48% said they would be paying. In Dublin 39% stated they would not be paying the charges. While in terms of class, 69% of the highest socio-economic group AB and 54% of the next highest C1 stated they would be paying the charges while only 35% of the lowest F2F1 group said they would be paying. 29% of C1 said they would not pay, 41% of c2 and 42% of DE said they would not pay the charge.

Towards the end of January a video of a water protestor, Derek Byrne, verbally insulting the President at a local protest was shown on national news stations. Byrne later apologised for using the word 'midget'.

Significantly, protests organised a few days later by local 'Says No' Groups in Dublin, Cork and other places and the newly formed Communities Against Water Charges, built mainly through local community activists on Facebook, attracted 30,000 to the Dublin protest, with another 20,000 marching across the country.

By Jan 15<sup>th</sup> 760,500 of the 1.5 million liable households had registered. By February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the next deadline for registration, 850,000 homes had provided their details to Irish Water out of the estimated 1.5 million customers who will receive their first water bills in April 2015. The deadline for registration was then extended to June 2015. About 35,000 households returned their registration packages with no details.

In February 2015 the Gardai arrested 20 protestors involved in the Tallaght protests against the Tanaiste. There was accusations of 'political policing' as an attempt to try break and divide the movement. Local activists claimed the Gardaí were "terrorising" the community and questioned why groups of up to ten officers were turning up to make the early-morning arrests. Protestors also reported heavy handed tactics by the Gardai at local water meter installation protests with numerous 'you tube' videos showing this to be the case. The jailing of four water protesters – including Derek Byrne – for breaking a court injunction on staying a certain distance away from water meter installations, lead to further large scale protests. The protesters were sentenced to between 28 and 56 days in prison – however they were all freed early after two and half weeks in prison after a surprise ruling from President of the High Court Nicholas Kearns, who found there were a number of errors in their detention.

In February, an opinion poll carried out by Millward Brown for the Irish Independent showed that only 40% of respondents stated they would be paying the charge, 30% stated they would not be paying, 10% were undecided and 10% stated 'it depends'.

By March 15<sup>th</sup>, at least a third of households liable for the water charges had not returned their registration forms. Irish Water claimed that registration had reached 990,000 households to make up 66% of their potential total customer base. While government Ministers tried to talk down and dismiss the water movement, 80,000 attended the Right2Water demonstration in Dublin on March 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Figure 4 Images from various water protests in Dublin in 2015**



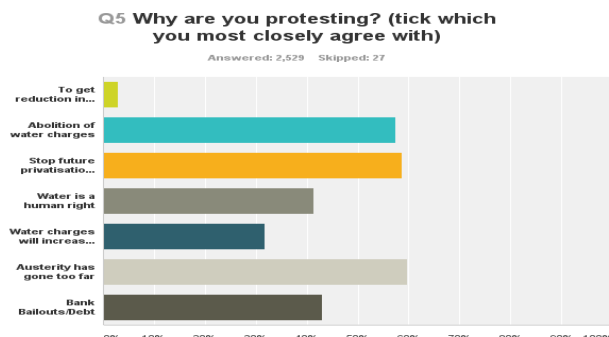
Source: Rory Hearne, 2015



## 5. Reasons for protesting 1: The real life suffering caused by austerity

The responses to the survey clearly show that the water protests are an expression of people's anger against the cumulative impacts of austerity, the injustice of the 'socialisation' of the banking debts, inequality, corruption and cronyism, and the 'give-away' of Ireland's natural resources. The water charges are viewed as an austerity measure too far. They 'were the straw that broke the camel's back'. This is shown by the fact that in the survey 'Austerity has gone too far' was the most cited reason (59.6%) for protesting, followed by to 'stop the future privatisation of water' (cited by 58.7%), protesting for 'abolition of water charges' 57.3% respondents), the 'Bank bailouts/debt' (42.9%) and 'water is a human right' (41.3%) (see Figure 6). This was a multiple options question.

**Figure 5 Respondents reasons for protesting against the water charges**



Many respondents highlighted that they cannot afford the charges because of the costs of existing household bills, rent increases, illness, reliance on welfare such as disability, being a student living off loans, facing repossession, and facing homelessness and are already suffering too much under austerity (see Table 3). Some respondents stated that they are going without basics necessities such as food. The real life impact of austerity was starkly described with some participants highlighting the 'low point and sense of hopelessness at which people are at'.

Respondents stated that they have been 'pushed so far' they feel they 'have no choice but to fight back' as they 'can't live like this anymore.' Respondents also highlighted that they believe the water charge is a form of 'double taxation' as they 'pay for their water already through general taxation'. The lack of clarity about what people get for their taxes was also highlighted with one respondent stating, "other countries that pay water charges get benefits in other ways (childcare, healthcare), we get nothing for our taxes" while another complained that the "state has done nothing to improve or repair the service in all those years. I pay tax, USC and won't the pay water charge". It was also highlighted that it is an unfair charge because it is a 'regressive flat charge' where 'a millionaire will pay the same for water as someone on social welfare. A number of respondents highlighted the exemption ('opt-out') Ireland has from introducing domestic water charges from the 1999 EU Water Framework Directive.

**Table 3 Reasons for not being able to afford water charges**

- *Soon to be homeless because of the Rent Allowance*
- *I am ill, my home is being repossessed by the bank and this is just one more charge too far*
- *I'm on disability and they are cutting everything I can't afford anymore*
- *Have cancer use loads of water*
- *I have nothing left to pay without cutting into the little food money I have*
- *With 5 kids and a mortgage on a part time job cannot pay.*
- *Enough is enough, I have no more to give*
- *I am single mother with 2 children. I am poor I cannot afford another bill I can't pay the ones I have already*
- *To tell the government to stop the austerity*
- *My 3 educated kids left their home country due to introduction of all the taxes*
- *Just sick and tired of been dumped on by people in power while they make no sacrifice at all*
- *Inequality of austerity adjustments*
- *The budget hits the poorest hit by austerity*
- *As a housewife at home we just can't take anymore extra charges*

Using a political economy framework of analysis we can see that the impacts of austerity had reached a tipping point in 2013 and 2014 in terms of the real impacts of austerity, and that austerity had extended out to impact a broad section of the population by the end of the troika bailout. A number of societal crises were emerging together – from the housing crisis to unemployment, emigration, mortgage arrears and the cumulative impacts of cuts such as medical cards and disability services. This contributed to a collective exhaustion with austerity amongst the population. It also contrasted strongly with the government's narrative of recovery and pointing to economic growth figures beginning to improve.

The water movement provided those feeling excluded from the recovery and suffering from the legacy impacts of austerity an opportunity to highlight the gap between the government's narrative of 'recovery' and the reality of their conditions that had remained static or worsened for significant proportions of the population, and particularly in large areas within and

outside the capital, Dublin. Furthermore, the fact that the water charges affected most people in a way that no one particular austerity measure did up to this point also presented a more favourable opportunity for people to come together in a common campaign.

The legacy of austerity and the socialisation of the costs of the debt and financial crash are multiple. Take the housing crisis that emerged in 2013 as a result of austerity reductions in funding for social housing, the role of NAMA in rebooting the property market and insufficient tenants' rights. Mortgage arrears also rose dramatically from 2010 onwards. House repossession started to emerge in 2014 as an issue as the banks issued 50,000 repossession notices to homeowners in arrears. Homelessness and families living in emergency accommodation also escalated along with renters being evicted as landlords hiked up rents in Dublin. Alongside the housing crisis, there is a crisis in childcare, hospitals and mental health services, and the on-going fallout from the radical reduction in funding and restructuring of community and youth services. Unemployment figures remain double what they were pre the crash in 2007 –up from 5% to 10% (having reached 14% at the height of the crisis). Youth unemployment is 27% while disadvantaged and working class areas in Limerick, Cork, and Dublin and some rural towns have general unemployment rates of over 30% and some even as high as 55%. The unemployment figures would be closer to 20% was it not for emigration and the use of unpaid jobs schemes and various methods of excluding groups from the live register figures. Emigration has left an open wound in many communities and homes. Almost 10% of Irish young people emigrated during the recession. That equates to over 30,000 young people, aged between 15 and 24, leaving each year. Emigration steadily worsened the longer the crisis dragged on. Just fewer than 20,000 Irish emigrated in 2009. This rose to 30,000 in 2010 and then reached over 50,000 in 2013.

There are wider structural issues in the Irish economy that result in worsening levels of inequality. Ireland has one of the highest rates of jobless households (over a fifth of all households) and low paid workers (over a fifth) in the EU and OECD. Combined with the rise in precarious working conditions and the radical restructuring of welfare and care support for the most vulnerable – the crash and austerity has radically restructured Ireland by devastating the minimal welfare state that existed. While just over 50% of income tax cases (earners) have a gross income of less than €30,000 per annum. The top 5% of income cases had a gross income in excess of €100,000 and 1% had an income in excess of €200,000. ESRI figures show that the top 30% have 51.6% of income, while the bottom 30% get a mere 14%. This explains the high proportion of respondents who explained that they opposed the water charge principally because they cannot afford any more austerity. It also explains why equality and fairness were highlighted as some of the most important reasons for people protesting. They highlight that, despite the claims that all suffered equally during the crisis, those protesting have experienced inequality worsening considerably in Ireland. Here is a selection of respondent's comments on the impact of austerity:

- *"Can't take any more. There are days I don't eat so that I can pay the bills and my kids don't realise that we haven't got money to buy stuff".*
- *"I do not have the money to pay it. I'm struggling paying property tax as with other bills - nothing left to shop with -sometimes I think I'd be better of dying it gets so bad."*
- *I will end up in arrears over water! I have no more money to give, I'm on the brink. So rather than sit at home and give out about it, I've decided to support the campaign*
- *"I'm trying to live on disability for multiple health problems & I live alone so I have nobody to half the bills with! I'm one step away from the street & living hand to mouth trying just to have the will to keep on living! The Government Has Put People In Their Graves Already "WHO JUST CANT COPE TO BASIC LIVING!! WE CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE"*
- *"Its just unfair and too much. I cannot see at the moment where the money for water is going to come from in my already overstretched budget. As a student and a single parent I find it difficult as it is to make ends meet without having to face this also".*
- *"I feel that it's leading towards people committing suicide. People just are in such a dark place and each cut is hitting those with the least. It feels as though our government don't care about the people at all"*
- *"My mother and her 75yr old husband are homeless. My sister is €8K behind on her mortgage and banks are threatening to repossess her apartment. My 65 yr. old father has to use a food bank and cannot afford to heat his house. We've had enough"*

Austerity is also affecting people across the classes as highlighted by the following respondents:

- *"I work, my husband works and we can't give anymore, I can't imagine how people who don't work will manage if we don't change things as we struggle with two wages coming into our home"*
- *"I am a student with NO help at all from the government, I'm already working part-time during my Master to be able to pay my rent and food and I have a loan for my Master fees, so I don't know how I can pay more than that. And my rent keeps rising. STOP."*
- *"Usc is now permanent. They took two days holidays off all us nurses and make us work an extra one and a half hour extra each week for no pay which adds up to two weeks per year. Enough is enough."*
- *"Sick of a tax being added onto everything. We are at two income family with 4th level education, 2 good jobs, 1 child another on the way and crèche fees higher than our mortgage. It's actually getting to the point it's costing one of us to work, and we are on so called good wages. Every time we scrimp, they find something else to chip away on us."*

## **6. Reasons for protesting 2: Anger at government, corruption, debt and 'Disaster Capitalism' in Ireland**

*Government failure, cronyism in Irish Water set up and systemic corruption in Ireland*

Respondents identified as feeling 'betrayed', 'let down', 'ignored' and 'not listened to' by the government (See Table 4). There was an expression of a lack of trust and being 'sickened' about government 'incompetence' and 'arrogance' and 'lies

that government told in pre-election promises'. Some felt the water charges issue should have been 'put to the people' in a referendum. One respondent explained that "the protests were in order to let the Government know that they can't impose decisions where there hasn't been proper consultation with the people they're supposed to be representing". They highlighted that the people are 'citizens' and not just 'consumers'.

Table 4 Description of the Government by respondents	
Respondents described feeling...	Respondents criticised government for...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Betrayed</i></li> <li>• <i>Let down</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of trust</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of democracy</i></li> <li>• <i>Frustration</i></li> <li>• <i>Bullied</i></li> <li>• <i>Disenfranchised</i></li> <li>• <i>Ignored</i></li> <li>• <i>Disgust</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Cronyism</i></li> <li>• <i>Broken election promises</i></li> <li>• <i>Failure to listen</i></li> <li>• <i>Corruption</i></li> <li>• <i>Lies</i></li> <li>• <i>Arrogance</i></li> <li>• <i>Incompetence</i></li> <li>• <i>Unaccountable</i></li> <li>• <i>Not representing</i></li> <li>• <i>Lack of transparency</i></li> </ul>

They also stated they were angry at government 'corruption', 'cronyism', and they believe that there has been a lack of democracy in the way in which the water charges were implemented (Table 5). Participants criticised the government for 'ignoring the people' and prioritising 'corporate interests'. They expressed their belief that the government was 'giving away' and 'privatising' 'Ireland's' and 'the people's' natural resource (water) to the government's corporate 'friends' and the 'golden circle'. Respondents believed that the government is 'protecting wealthy people like tax exile Denis O'Brien and shafting ordinary families'. One respondent stated that the government "need to be reminded that Ireland and its resources belongs to the Irish (new or old), not to them and their friends / superiors". While another stated the government "are supposed to uphold the interests of the people before the interests of big corporations and banks". They said "we no longer live in a democracy - we live in corporate enslavement".

Respondents described how they were motivated by opposition to the manner in which Irish Water was set up and the tendering processes, the costs associated, consultancy fees, and, in particular, Denis O'Brien's involvement. One respondent stated, "The whole setting up of Irish Water and the Sierra/GMC contract is corrupt and sickening that it occurred the way it did". Another stated "Irish Water was set up by cronies to be run by cronies". Another described Denis O'Brien as "the real leader of Fine Gael".

<p><b>Table 5</b></p> <p><b>Anger at government 'corruption', 'cronyism', and the lack of democracy in setting up Irish Water</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Incompetence of Irish water, cronyism in tender process</i></li> <li>• <i>Opposition to government 'giving away' and 'privatising' Ireland's and the people's natural resource (water) to the government's corporate 'friends' and the 'golden circle'</i></li> <li>• <i>Protecting wealthy people like tax exile Denis O'Brien and shafting ordinary families'</i></li> <li>• <i>We no longer live in a democracy</i></li> <li>• <i>We are citizens not just consumers</i></li> <li>• <i>The commoditisation of water for the benefit of vulture capitalists is a step too far</i></li> <li>• <i>Contempt the political class have for working class people</i></li> <li>• <i>lack of respect for the dignity of human beings</i></li> <li>• <i>Decision to set up Irish Water and implement charges should have been put to the people in a referendum</i></li> </ul>
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There were repeated and multiple references by respondents to the issue of Denis O'Brien's involvement in the water issue. It has been alleged in the Dáil that Denis O'Brien's close political connections may have been instrumental in his bid to buy Siteserv. €100m of the debt that Siteserv owed to the Irish taxpayer i.e. the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (formerly Anglo) was wiped off. It is also alleged that two higher bids for Siteserv that would have earned the State more money were rejected. A former Fine Gael minister was chairman of IBRC at the time the deal was approved. Independent TD, Mick Wallace, expressed concern at "the revolving doors that exist between the corridors of power and governmental bodies and it further undermines the Taoiseach's assertion that he wants to separate the ties between government and big business". This became significant because in July 2013 a subsidiary company of Siteserv, GMC Sierra, won various contracts throughout the country to install water meters. The Moriarty Tribunal into payments to politicians found that Denis O'Brien's company Esat Digifone had engaged in a "conspicuous" campaign of financial support to Fine Gael before a Fine Gael-led government awarded them the largest commercial contract in the history of the State in the 1990s. Denis O'Brien is also a major owner of various radio and print media outlets in Ireland.

Respondents also strongly outlined that they are against any future privatisation of water with this receiving one of the highest indicators as reason for participating in the protests. They also strongly believe water is a human right (with 40% citing it as an important factor). As one respondent explained, "The commoditisation of water for the benefit of vulture capitalists is a step too far". A concern with privatisation is that, just like the privatisation of waste, the water charges will

rise substantially and allowances will be scrapped. This opposition to the privatisation of water is linked to the belief about perceived corruption and cronyism involved in the set up and roll out of Irish Water as utility.

This opposition to privatisation is very interesting given that the general perception is that the Irish public is more free-market oriented and less supportive of public services than in other European countries. Their opposition to the process of trying to commodify –that is, turn into a monetized asset that will someday be privatized – a public asset – is, according to respondents, because they view water, and the water infrastructure, as a public good that should meet the ‘common need’ and be provided as a human right. The issue of privatisation was also connected by respondents to the ‘loss and give away’ of other Irish natural resources such as oil, fish, and gas. It also represents a strong commitment to equality and social justice with the idea that this public asset should be available to all. The concept of human rights clearly fit very well with the public mood in relation to this as a sense that public water should be available to all irrespective of ability to pay.

The way in which Irish water was set up also tapped into a general disquiet and anger at legacy corruption issues in Irish politics. There is a significant lack of trust between the people and the state, government and politicians as a result of decades of scandals around cronyism and corruption in Irish politics. This was repeated by respondents through the survey. What is clear then is that protestors do not trust either the Government or Irish Water. They believe that charges will increase in the future and that Irish Water will be privatised. People pointed to the example of the bin charges for this. The waste provision service in Dublin and other major urban centres were publicly operated when waste charges were introduced in the early 2000s. Within a decade most of these services were privatised with major issues related to the deterioration in quality of service and rising charges. They believe that Ireland is dominated by corruption and cronyism with governments acting in the interests of big business, corporations, Europe, bankers and bondholders before the interests of the Irish people.

### *The Debt and Bank Bailouts*

Respondents continued this sentiment in their expression of anger over national debt arising from the bank and developer bailouts and the Troika agreement. These were strong motivating factors with 42% citing the debt/bank bailouts as a reason for protesting against the water charges. Respondents are angered and upset at the way in which the Irish banks were bailed out at the cost of the Irish people; the role of the IMF, EU and ECB in forcing austerity on the Irish people; and the unequal impact of austerity and the debt on the vulnerable, working class, working and middle income people. This sense of injustice and anger that the ordinary Irish people have had to pay, through austerity, for the bailing out of banks, developers and the European financial system and the Euro was repeated throughout the survey. They are angry because they believe community services, health services, special needs assistants, disability services, careers, lone parents – the fabric of communities and Irish society – has been radically cut, reduced or removed - so that the bondholders would get repaid and the European banking system would remain intact.

**Table 6. Respondents describe the injustice of the banking debt**

1. <i>I cannot afford Pay for bad decisions made by banks and bond holders I have nothing left.</i>	2. <i>Austerity has gone too far and my 8 month old child was born with a debt that can never be repaid</i>
3. <i>Before I feed my kids I'll be putting a first class spread on the table for a bondholder &amp; bankers family.</i>	4. <i>This charge is being imposed on us by the IMF and it is to feed the greed of international corporations, and to date no one has been charged or had to deal with the consequences of the bailouts</i>
5. <i>We are in this situation because we were forced to undertake a debt that is simply not ours.</i>	6. <i>Indentured servitude of the Irish people by German bondholders</i>

One the biggest legacies of the 2008 crash and subsequent Irish governmental and Troika responses through bailing out banks, austerity and the failure of the European Central Bank to support peripheral debtor nations, is the significant increase in Irish national debt. In 2009 Ireland's national ‘general government’ debt was €104 billion. In 2014 it stands, over double that figure, at a staggering €210 billion. In 2009 the Irish debt to GDP ratio, the figure used to assess the sustainability of national governments debt levels, was 62 percent. This year it has risen to 108 percent. In 2009 Ireland paid €2.5 billion in interest on the national debt. This year it is paying three times that figure – €7.3 billion. The challenge for an economy that has undergone such a deep recession to pay double in debt payments what it was paying during an economic boom is extreme. That €7.3bn debt interest is twenty percent of all taxes taken in by the government. It is equivalent to the entire education budget. But these repayments and the debt are going to get even worse in the coming years. The national debt will be €214 billion in 2018.

There was a strong sense of injustice amongst respondents that successive Irish governments have acquiesced to the EU and ECB's demands not to burn the bondholders and to lump the Irish people with €64bn of bankers' and developers' gambling debts through Nama, bank recapitalisation, and the Anglo debt. Over and over, respondents criticised the government's decision to dramatically reduce the funding for vital public services such as health and housing, communities, lone parents, carers, and disability services in order to ensure the repayment of bondholders and French and German banks who had gambled on the Irish property market and the stability of the European financial system. They strongly criticised that the corporations and the wealthy carried the least of the burden of austerity.

These responses contrast to the Irish government's claims that the Irish national debt will and should be paid and is legitimate and sustainable. The government has dropped public calls for debt relief for Ireland and opposed the Greek Governments' proposal for a European Debt Conference. Respondents clearly disagree with this narrative that the Irish



debt is sustainable and legitimate i.e. that the Irish people will, and should, pay it back and that Ireland should take a 'softly-softly' approach to dealing with Europe and the IMF on the debt.

#### *Disaster capitalism in Ireland: the people get austerity and debt while bondholders/banks get bailed out*

An academic analysis of the situation whereby the people of Ireland suffer harsh austerity in order to pay for the cost of the financial collapse and repaying bondholders and bailing out banks would highlight that this is a form of disaster capitalism or 'shock doctrine' that ensures the wealthy and private corporations benefit from crisis while the ordinary people suffer and public services are reduced or privatised. The case is made that this is not some unfortunate result but an intended policy outcome of the response to the crisis. Neo-Marxist critical theorists like David Harvey (2013) and Hardt and Negri (2004) have argued that austerity such as water charges and indebtedness are implemented not to in fact improve the economy for people but to implement extreme neoliberal, financialised, capitalism that benefits the wealthy and the financial system. One key aspect of this has been for the state and government to find new ways for private corporations and capital to make profits. This has been done by converting public goods or assets like public services (health, housing, transport and education) and natural resources (gas, water and seeds) into financialised commodities that could be bought, traded and sold by corporations. When countries are forced to implement charges, privatise their public assets, cut funding due to austerity and repaying debt, seek Public Private Partnerships because they are too indebted to borrow, it is the private corporations that benefit by stepping in and buying up public assets or providing former public services or new infrastructure at a profit. Indeed at the heart of this project of neoliberal capitalism is the commodification of everything. In this framework of analysis everything is to be turned into something that can be bought and sold, traded on markets, profited from, commercialized by private corporations.

Neoliberalism is about the utopia of individualized consumerism whereby everything is controlled and sold by corporations. Your existence is commodified through corporate takeover. You must pay for everything –from the air you breathe to the water you drink, your health services, your housing – and increasingly it will be paid to private corporations. The natural resources in communities no longer belong to the communities or people of a nation, they are instead transferred to corporate ownership either through privatisation or austerity and indebted states. Values of solidarity, public good, and co-operation are replaced with competition, individualism, commercialism and materialism. These views and frame of analysis was clearly expressed by participants in the survey.

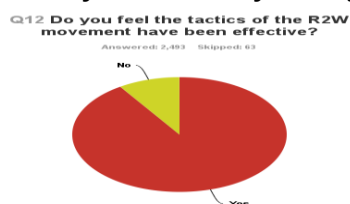
Naomi Klein in her 2007 book *Shock Doctrine* has used an interesting term 'disaster capitalism' to describe the way in which the governments and elites use crises to further intensify exploitation and commodification for private corporations. Using Klein's framework we can analyse the Irish government, International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank, and European core governments of Germany and others having used the crisis to enforce an extreme version of neoliberal austerity on to the Irish people in order to protect the billionaire bondholders and large European financial banks.

The overriding Irish government policy objective was to show the international markets and foreign investors that the Irish state could enforce on its people whatever level of austerity was needed in order to repay the debts of the international financial system. In this way, using Harvey's theory of 'accumulation through dispossession' the Irish state acted on behalf of the international multinationals, financial markets and bondholders and the domestic privileged elite by making middle and lower income working people and the poor pay for the costs of the crisis by dispossessing them, through austerity, privatisation and the introduction of new charges of their natural resources, public services, wages, welfare and community services.

### **7. Why the protests are so large: the Irish people have awoken and the water movement is winning**

The water protests have, according to respondents, achieved a number of key aims of the campaign. These include, forcing the government to reduce and place a cap on the water charges, Irish Water not to require PPS numbers, changing of the dates for registration and for payment of the charges on a number of occasions, an admission of fault and 'making a mistake' by the Irish Government and Irish Water, and the introduction of the €100 'conservation grant' or 'bribe' as some respondents referred to it as. It has also been effective at slowing down the work of installing meters, thereby, as respondents explained, 'keeping the entire debacle in the media and costing Irish water more.' This explains why 90.1% felt the tactics of the Right2Water movement were effective also showing the strong support for the movement organisers, activists and leaders (Table 7). Most significantly it has given confidence and strength to people to boycott the charge as indicated by the high levels of intended non-payment.

**Figure 6 Respondents views on the effectiveness of the tactics of the Right2Water movement**



**Table 7 Respondents explain why the Right to Water Campaign and other water charge protests have been effective**

Mass mobilisation	Combining local involvement and national resistance	grassroots-based/include rural people	huge community support throughout the country
Diversity of protestors	Cross section of society participating	has the support of the majority of society	brought the country together
social media presence	easy to share with others	Clearly designed site and message	caught the mood of the people
people are becoming politically aware	opened the eyes of the Irish people on corrupt government	built a platform for solidarity on other issues	Citizens are more politically educated/active citizenship
I feel proud to be Irish again	has highlighted the corruption in Ireland	people power does work	they have mobilized, politicized the people
Empowered people	brought people together for the common good	All people sticking together	Making people aware that they are not alone against this
People are realizing they have a voice they have a power	Focusing general disquiet	gives a forum for people to voice their opinions, their needs and their fears	It has been simple, peaceful, direct, inclusive
Raising awareness	many people have learned the truth about austerity	given a voice to marginalised communities	effective organisation
People are waking up	Have awoken a sleeping giant	The people have woken	Finally people are beginning to stand up for themselves
It has united the people and given hope	got the people together for the first time	Peaceful protest attracted large numbers of people / family friendly,	Has brought all groups under the one banner
People power in a peaceful way	collaborating with left wing politicians and TD's	Organisers not tainted as per SIPTU leadership etc	the Unions have legitimised the protest

Most significantly the movement has been successful because it has provided a 'unifying theme and 'a nucleus' for the general public, 'whether purely to protest the water charges or whether they are protesting austerity measures', around which they can gather. The 'people' are 'for the first time' resisting and opposing austerity as respondents explained their views:

- ❖ Successful Mobilisation of all classes, ages, economic backgrounds. All Ireland needs is mobilisation, anger has been simmering with anti-austerity policies and arrogance of government for years. We just need a platform
- ❖ This country has been SCREAMING for SOMEONE, an Icon, a fulcrum to channel our voice against what appeared to be a WALL of austerity. We, the general public, have finally got off our backsides and refused to be force fed the RUBBISH THESE governments have been shovelling.
- ❖ R2W have been excellent at holding peaceful protest mobilising tens of thousands of people, explaining exactly why this charge is unjust and unfair. Its one step too far for Irish people and they are reclaiming their country, R2W have highlighted the fact that if we allow our natural resources to be privatised then all our public services are up for grabs. Greedy people making money off the most vulnerable is not what living in a democracy should be about.
- ❖ The government are very scared, People have been really mobilised from all walks of life and feel they can win. Parties from all strands of the left have banded together under R2W banner from SF to anarchists
- ❖ Its connected a huge spectrum of people on one front and allowed the connecting issues of austerity and corruption to get a hearing as well , its educational, and the government has made concessions. Its showing how we can remind government who they work for. After Wednesdays Rally they government appeared dazed and confused. It has consolidated our needs for fairness, equality, protection and justice as a political energy.
- ❖ They have galvanised the anger which already existed against austerity and the Water Tax from ordinary people, the silent majority if you like. This has already ensured several u-turns on Water Tax issues from the scumbags in government. There is a growing sense of empowerment amongst the man and woman in the street.
- ❖ It has shown the working class peoples breaking point as they can no longer afford these charges and for the most part the protesting has been peacefully and exposes the way the Garda have acted in a disgraceful manner on behalf of the government and it has also shown the lies of the government and there scare tactics which have not worked on the majority of people.
- ❖ It has become a rallying point for citizens who feel betrayed by government, Europe and all of those who hold power, political or economic
- ❖ Well, just look at the amount of people online sharing and reposting memes, posts and info. It's only brought Irish people together in solidarity because our government, our media and our civil servants have failed us
- ❖ Water charge protests have been effective in crystallising a broad anti-austerity movement

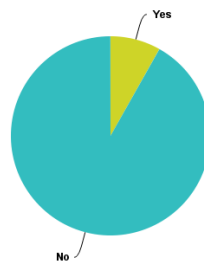
Respondents believe that 'the government are on the run' and 'without the protests they would never have backtracked The protests 'brought the water charges to the top of the political agenda' and 'made the government take stock and realise that the people of Ireland have had enough and they are not taking this one lying down.' They 'made the government notice that we, the people, will not just accept all they throw at us' and it has 'shown the government that we have a voice and a say in how our country is run'. The 'government are panicking because the Irish people have never stood up to them like this before'. This will impact on other issues too as respondents believe 'the government will think twice before throwing another flippant decision at us'. The protests also proved 'that it was never about conservation as charges were capped

and this is just a tax which can be increased after installation of meters'. Respondents also believe that the protest will result in 'getting rid of this government' either before or at the next election.

Furthermore, a significant majority (69.9%) believe the campaign will be successful. This is a high level of confidence and determination that the water charges and Irish Water will be completely abolished. It suggests that of those who filled out the survey they are determined to continue to campaign and have indicated that 92% of respondents stated that they do not intend paying for water charges. This demonstrates again that the issue is not one of reduction of charges but abolition. This can be seen in the high level of non-registration for the charge and if it follows through to non-payment of the charge is likely to result in serious viability difficulties for Irish water. It also highlights that it is the intention for participants not only to protest on the streets but to extend that protest to boycotting the charge. The survey, therefore, demonstrates the determination of participants in the water charges movement to continue campaigning until they achieve the abolition of water charges and Irish water. This is supported by the opinion polls that show high levels of non-payment.

**Figure 7 Do you intend paying for water charges?**

Q8 Do you intend paying for water charges?  
 Answered: 2,518 Skipped: 38



There was also a strong belief among respondents that the movement has not won yet and will not have won until the charges and Irish Water are abolished and water is protected as a public asset and publicly provided. Respondents believe that the cap will be lifted in the future, Irish Water will be privatised and 'the costs will go up and up'. 'Real change' hasn't really occurred yet and therefore the campaign should support 'mass non-payment'.

#### *Ideas on next steps:*

A number of respondents expressed the view that if these protests didn't work then they should escalate and 'protest until it's done' even 'if it takes four days - we sit out for four days, if it takes a month so be it'. There was also support, but significantly less than that for mass protests, non-payment and strikes, for 'non-violent' and 'peaceful' civil disobedience such as 'loud pot banging protests outside government buildings', targeting the government but not disrupting the average citizen, the mass removal of water meters and leaving them outside the Dail, sit-ins, blocking the ports, and a 'mass-burning' of the first water bills. There was a strong emphasis that protests should be peaceful.

It was also suggested to undertake 'more localised targeting of TDs and Senators who voted for water charges in order to 'bring the question directly to the politicians'. It was highlighted that politicians themselves are not really feeling the anger of people and therefore when protests affect them individually it is more effective 'as otherwise they hide behind the party and Dail'. Ideas in this vein included a mass mail campaign to all elected officials, protest outside TD's homes, and campaigning to Ministers directly.

Other ideas included a large public concert. There was also suggestions that all anti-water charges groups should work together, for a local focus, to organise public debates such as Town Hall meetings, and citizens' assemblies.

There was also support for 'formulating a workable, viable, alternative' which would outline how improvements will be made to water infrastructure and maintenance of the water system will be done without water charges, managing water conservation and provision. There was again a strong emphasis on the desire to focus on the privatisation issue with suggestions for the 'constitutional protection for water' through a referendum to 'put it in the constitution that water cannot be sold for a profit'. It was reiterated that water should be treated 'as a commons, with the service run efficiently as a commons rather than as for profit'.

A public forum was suggested to come up with 'tangible, constructive, realistic alternatives' that should 'explore and communicate what are the desirable solutions to effective water supply services considering the triple bottom line of social, environmental and economic sustainability'.

There was also a strong emphasis on the need to publicise these alternative views in order to challenge and balance out the media's 'biased' reporting. The coverage of the water protests by RTE came in for particularly strong criticism with one respondent describing them as a 'disgrace'. A number of respondents suggested a 'boycott' and 'campaign' against RTE's 'biased news broadcasting' including 'boycotting the TV licence'. Others emphasised a need for better visibility and presence of the campaign in the mass media and public debate.

There was a handful of respondents that stated that the campaign should stop protesting and people should pay for their water. They were clearly against the campaign.

### *The people have awoken*

A very strong theme that respondents consistently highlighted was that the water movement has successfully mobilised huge numbers of people (the sheer number) and has 'woken the people', and 'helping the people to wake up' and now 'the people have woken up'. Respondents stated that the protests are so large because the Irish people have 'risen'. Some used the Irish revolutionary, Padraig Pearse's phrase, 'beware the risen people'. The huge protests are historic as 'they have not been seen in Ireland in a significant time period.' This has been effective because 'mass demonstration is the only thing that even slightly gains political attention as evidenced in the government's preoccupation with protest turn-out'.

There was a strong absence of fear and a real sense of power in respondents' views which can be contrasted to the dominance of fear and sense of powerlessness amongst many Irish people in the period of 2008 to 2013. People have 'awoken' and been empowered because they actually feel they have the power to stop the charges. It is interesting to analyse how individuals can actually resist the water charges – be it through not registering for Irish Water, non-payment, and stopping water meter installation. In the case of the water charges people have the physical and real power to disrupt and actually stop the imposition of Irish Water and the charges. And so, while other issues of austerity such as the housing crisis and health are clearly as important to people, and for some even more important, the water protests has emerged as a very real way in which ordinary people feel (correctly) that they have the power to actually stop austerity and not just merely protest against it.

Respondents stated that they were taking action in order 'not to be a silent citizen, to voice my opinion on the current situation the country is in and fear of where and how it could end up'. People are 'getting informed' and it is raising political awareness and education (politicising people) more generally of broader issues of systemic corruption, the unfairness of current government policies, the bank bailouts, the role of the Gardai, democracy, human rights, poverty, issues:

- ❖ *It is a ground up movement that highlights the importance of basic human rights and reminds the government that they are meant to be representative of the people who elected them.*
- ❖ *Peaceful protests have highlighted: 1. The government have no interests in the peoples wants or needs. 2. The Gardai now exist solely to protect the government. 3. People used to complain to each other and think nothing could be done, This movement has overseen the people giving themselves a voice.*
- ❖ *It has gotten people thinking about politics and government policies. Before this, I don't think people were paying attention to politics or government policy as much.*
- ❖ *It informs people of their rights and provides us with knowledge and the representatives of R2W have been respectable and inspiring*
- ❖ *It is raising awareness and decreasing political apathy*
- ❖ *Helped to spread the truth about the water charges, corruption and bank bailouts*
- ❖ *The campaign has educated the general public about the despicable corruption that is going on in our country*
- ❖ *Power in numbers and power in Knowledge! The only reason the government has gotten away with robbing from its people for so long its because it depended on keeping the people ignorant. more and more people are educating themselves , and questioning everything they are being told!*
- ❖ *Gardai engagement forcing water meters by holding back innocent people, doing O'Brien's work abusing public in large numbers will not be forgiven or forgotten*

This is leading people to be 'proactive in civic issues rather than sit by passively and accept any changes or policies imposed by the government.' It is leading the movement to develop an alternative politics and vision for Ireland that is challenging the 'corruption, dishonesty, incompetence at the heart of Irish public life':

- ❖ *The government are worried they have made some changes, it has awoken the Irish people to the unjust way this country is governed*
- ❖ *I have seen the campaign grow and experienced first-hand the passionate, honest and peaceful tactics of the campaign which truly represent the type of Ireland we want to live in*
- ❖ *Because you have brought a nation together, to stand up, to voice our concerns and not to be afraid of confronting the rot that's spreading in the Dail.*
- ❖ *We have empowered people with knowledge. Knowledge of how corrupt our government is. The mass protest movements have already seen impacts through the government reducing the charges, capping them for four years etc. But they have to be abolished. I want a fair society for all not just the rich*

Respondents highlighted that this is a really 'exciting social movement and a transformative moment' and it is 'the awakening of the people'. The various comments and speeches at protests demonstrate a strong historical connection with the 1916 Rising. Protestors believe they are engaging in a struggle that has parallels with that historical resistance and participants are clearly inspired by the ideals and vision of those involved in fighting for the Republic. Protestors talk of how 'the people have arisen once more'. This indicates that it not just a once off protest but a people awakened on many levels – determined to succeed, willing to protest, politically aware and empowered, and connecting their struggle to a long historical struggle for Irish sovereignty and freedom for the Irish people from oppression by empire.

### **8. Why the movement is effective: grassroots, broad, diverse and peaceful**

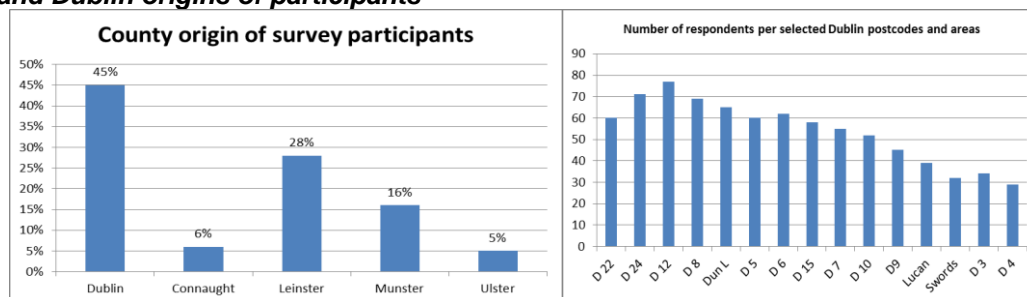
Respondents explained that they believed that the water movement has been successful and effective because it is a genuinely grassroots and local movement and it has 'mobilised every village, town and city of this country as well as gaining international attention too'. It is effective 'because it is at the local level combined with national protests. It is too visible to be ignored by government'.

The movement has also been successful, according to respondents is because it has managed to 'unite together the people as one voice' The fact that it has 'rallied Irish people from all walks of life' is why it is effective and the fact the such

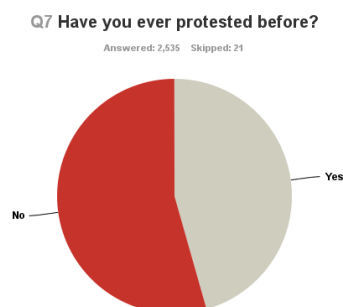


a diverse group has decided to mobilise has been central to its success. The importance of the diversity of participants and the ‘solidarity across all classes and social groups’ was highlighted (see Table 7). What is clear from the survey (and observation at protests) is that this is a broad movement that has brought many people into the protests who had not protested before. The demographic profile of the survey responses shows this as it was relatively even with regard to gender, a majority were in the age category 30 to 50, and it is quite representative of the general employment status of the population. There was a broad geographical spread of participants. The largest number of survey participants came from the Dublin region (1,122, 45%). Leinster was next most represented at 28%, followed by Munster at 16%. Within Dublin the highest numbers of respondents within Dublin came from the more working class areas of Dublin 12 (Drimnagh/Crumlin, 77 participants), Dublin 24 (Tallaght, 71), Dublin 8 (Inchicore, 69), and Dublin 5 (Artane/Coolock). There was also a good response from socially mixed areas such as Dublin 7 and 9. While the lowest areas included Dublin 4, and the inner-city postcodes (see Table 8). In regard to their involvement in the water protests a significant majority of respondents had taken part in the street protests (76.1%). Involvement in the campaign through social media was also high at (70.7%), 55.2% had signed a petition, 33.2% had attended local meetings and 10.2% had resisted water meter installation. This shows the survey is representative of a broad range of protestors and activists in the movement. This also points to the fact that those involved in the movement were doing activities beyond just attending protests. This is highlighted by the fact that a third had attended local meetings and 70% had engaged on social media.

**Table 8 County and Dublin origins of participants**



**Figure 8 Percentage of respondents who have protested at some point before the water movement**



Most significantly a majority of respondents (54.4%) had not protested at all before taking part in the current anti-water protests. This again highlights that this movement has involved significant numbers of people who were not actively involved in protest politics before. It also demonstrates that participants in the survey were not just ‘seasoned protestors’. This shows that the water movement has gone beyond traditional involvement in protests and engaged and motivated a broad cross section of the population, and in particular mobilised lower income and working class areas.

#### *A peaceful movement despite the violence of austerity and large Garda presence*

The survey showed respondents are strongly supportive of a peaceful movement but also a movement that engages in large scale protest. There is a stark contrast between the riots that have taken place at anti-austerity protests in Greece and Spain and the fact that there was not one incident of what could be classed as violence at any water protest. There was not one window smashed nor one petrol bomb thrown. This is an incredible level of self-discipline and collective decision making by those participating in the protests to maintain such a non-violent peaceful stance in the face of such a violent regime of austerity which inflicted severe suffering on the population.

This is also significant in what could be described as provocation by the state through the heavy handed use of the Gardai at various meter installation protests. Indeed the few incidents that were hysterically reported as ‘violent’ or ‘threatening democracy’ such as the blockading of Joan Burton in Tallaght or the verbal insults of the President really pale into the level of farce in comparison to the riots that have taken place at European protests. It is interesting to compare the extensive media coverage of a small number of these incidents by protestors and government criticism of them with the failure to criticise or cover the role of the Gardai in their heavy-handed policing of democratic protests. Indeed many have contrasted the inability of the state to police many disadvantaged communities being terrorised by drug gangs in recent decades with the ability of the state to mobilise a huge Garda presence in these same communities to stop anti-water meter protestors.

These actions say clearly to these communities that the government and the state does not care for their actual living conditions or safety or well-being, but is principally interested in ensuring the imposition of a form of permanent austerity on their communities through water charges.

A number of respondents critiqued the protests that involved the blocking of roads and O Connell bridge for generating 'negative publicity' and being counter-productive as it was 'blocking members of the public from picking up their kids from school and getting home from work'. A respondent noted that 'any form of violent protest 'is exactly what the media/government (regime?) want so that they can portray all of the protestors as the sinister fringe'. They felt that 'violence and intimidation compromises the capacity to win widespread support'. Overall the campaign and protestors have been acutely aware that in order for it to engage larger sections of the population it must be peaceful. In this way the movement is far from a rag-bag of dissident individuals intent on violence but is in fact a politically astute, mature and disciplined movement. This is clearly one of its key strengths.

### ***9. The Irish did protest austerity: the birth of a new civil society***

It is important to highlight that there was nothing inevitable about the emergence of the water protests and movement. It took many thousands of individuals at various scales and levels (from their family, workplace, home, community) to start thinking about resisting, to decide to resist, and to take the action of resistance. It also required organisations that had the resources and capacity to get involved and support these individuals and communities. The Right2Water campaign and its constituent parts (locally based community groups, trade unions, smaller Left parties, Sinn Fein, independent politicians) played the essential role, therefore, in making this a mass movement with the political impact and scale that it has reached. This highlights the importance of the political decisions and action taken by different actors within the societal sphere of what is known as 'civil society' which includes the various organisations from community, NGO, and trade unions who are part of general society and supposed to be made up of, and act in the interest of, the 'ordinary citizen'. Civil society is considered 'independent' both organisationally and in terms of representing citizens' interests as distinct from the state, private business and mainstream political parties.

Political theorist Noam Chomsky has shown that the state (and increasingly private wealth through media ownership) actively uses various methods to minimise societal dissent and critique emerging from within the civil society sphere through a process of manufacturing of wider society consent (passivity) – in key part through control of the media by reducing coverage of protests or failing to provide alternative critical voices and analysis, the demonising of those who engage in dissent and protest, and the absence of systemic questioning and critical thinking amongst civil society organisations. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci also theorised the important role that civil society plays in constructing wider popular support and legitimacy for the existing political and social order (hegemony) and thus also the potential role it has in organising social resistance and radical transformation.

Adopting this framework of analysis to develop an understanding of the emergence of the Irish water movement and its wider political and societal implications we can see that the decision of the Right2Water unions, radical Left parties, independents, Sinn Fein and community groups to organise and participate in the anti-austerity social movement to oppose the water charges can be contrasted to the decision of the traditional civil society and Left organisations in Ireland to either support water charges implementation (Labour, Greens) or to not oppose them (the large public sector unions of the INTO, IMPACT etc along with SIPTU, ICTU, NGOs, charities). If the grassroots community groups, trade union and Left political parties had not stood up but had waited for the traditional Left and civil society organisations to respond then there would be no water movement like the one that exists now. This marks a moment of historical significance and turning point in the nature and form of Irish civil society and Left politics that is likely to have very wide spread political ramifications in many spheres of Irish politics, society and economy for decades to come. The groups that have supported ordinary people to resist and fight back against the water charges and austerity have, therefore, gained a new position of respect and leadership amongst the ordinary citizen.

#### ***The impact of social partnership on civil society***

So why did the traditional NGOs, civil society groups, charities, services, and trade unions that have dominated Irish politics and society since the 1980s (and in terms of the left politics – the Labour party from the foundation of the state) not only fail to oppose water charges, but furthermore, offer no meaningful resistance to the crisis or austerity and in, the case, of the Labour party actively implemented it. Why did the traditional, mainstream, trade union, civil society and Left leadership agree with the Irish state strategy aimed at regaining Ireland's (theoretical) economic 'sovereignty' through neoliberal policies that aimed to convince international markets of Ireland's commitment to fiscal responsibility and social 'peace', in contrast to Spain and Greece? There are many complex reasons but the dominant civil society response to austerity can be traced back to the approach pursued by the Irish unions and civil society NGOs since the 1980s to consent to the dominant strategy of improving national development based on low corporation tax in order to Foreign Direct Investment while wages were to be restrained and there would be minimal investment in public or social services. Civil society and the trade unions after a short period of mobilisation in the late 1970s and early 1980s concentrated their action on these 'social partnership' agreements with government rather than organising grassroots empowerment and opposition (Kirby and Murphy 2011). Insufficient priority was given to developing or fighting for progressive alternative policies in this period (Allen & O Boyle, 2013). There was a challenge to this narrative from the Workers Party and community organisations in working class areas in the 1980s but the 1990s saw a decline in these as mobilising political forces for varying reasons. Irish community NGOs, trade unions and Left politicians became dominated by corporatist and state partnership political strategies.

Furthermore, many of the NGOs and community organisations also become local public service providers dependent on state funding during this period of the 'Celtic Tiger'. Grassroots empowerment and critical advocacy received less funding by the state as it sought to maintain control over civil society and hand over (privatise) the provision of public and social services of the welfare state to NGOs and charities. In the 2000s there was increasing conditionality imposed by the state that forbade social justice advocacy using government funding provided to the community and voluntary NGOs, charities and community groups. Social researcher Brian Harvey has highlighted the disciplining impact of conditions such as the stipulation in HSE grants to community organisations that: *'You must not use the grant to change law or government policies, or persuade people to adopt a view on law or public policy (SLA 2.8)'*. Some organisations expressed a fear of losing state funding if they publicly took a critical position on public policy, while others believed that, similar to ICTU, the only 'responsible' and realistic approach was one of partnership and consensus with the state (Harvey 2014).

Within the period of austerity this process of state disciplining and constraint through funding was extended as funding was directly reduced for more vocal civil society groups. For example, funding for the Community Development Programme, which had developed through the 1990s and 2000s to provide funding for locally based community empowerment, equality and anti-poverty work, was reduced by a much greater proportion than general public sector cuts, from €84.7 million in 2008 to 47.7m in 2014 - a 43% reduction.

#### *The Irish did protest austerity*

This is not because of an unwillingness of the Irish people to protest, despite portrayals to the contrary. In spite of the portrayal of general passivity, the truth is that the Irish people did protest against austerity. Tens of thousands of pensioners, students and community projects protested in 2008 and 2009. More than 100,000 participated in the Irish Congress of Trade Union (ICTU) organised march in February 2009 and 150,000 attended in November 2010 against the imminent Troika bailout. But ICTU's opposition to austerity was restricted to just four one-day national protest events in the period between 2008 and 2013. ICTU organised no protest in the entire two-year period between November 2010 and February 2013. ICTU did not even participate in the European Confederation of Trade Unions' coordinated day of 'Action and Solidarity' against austerity in October 2012.

It remains a major question about why such civil society organizations did not organize major resistance when Ireland was bailing out banks by the billions, being forced into the Troika bailout programme, when the ECB told Ireland we couldn't burn bondholders, and when the population clearly wanted to resist as indicated in the large numbers that turned out when marches were organised. It was clear, as demonstrated by the water movement, that they were moments which could have challenged austerity and fractured Irish politics and society towards more rights based and social justice alternatives. Senior trade union officials have described that they were trying to maintain social peace because they were worried about collapsing the banking system, frightening off foreign investors and they were afraid of losing the battle and the emergence of even worse conditions. The 2011 General Election marked a watershed in Ireland. It was the moment when the Irish people expressed their anger in the 'pencil revolution' by decimating Fianna Fáil and electing Labour and Fine Gael on the promise of "mending the pieces of a fractured society, a broken economy, and to provide a sense of collective hope in our shared future." But it became apparent that the new government's promises of standing up to Europe, bondholders and the Troika would not be fulfilled. ICTU, and most of the other civil society organisations decided not to protest due to the reasons explained above, but in addition, they now also supported the Labour Party in government and thus any hint of potential opposition was considered disloyal and counterproductive to a strategy of supporting the Labour Party to mitigate Fine Gael. There was silence from the civil society 'insiders' as they decided they were on the side of the defending the establishment while the most vulnerable paid the price of the crash through austerity policies such as cutbacks to social welfare payments, reductions in funding for social housing, lone parents and disability payments, the household charge, and to funding community projects. There was also indications that the mainstream Left and trade unions were dismissive of the household and water tax protestors because this wasn't the type of protest or issue they wanted to support. Rather than seeing the opportunity to express solidarity with ordinary people as they became empowered to oppose austerity and stand up to the establishment and Europe in a way that they both wanted to and could do, the traditional Left and unions focused on the 'incorrect' nature of the particular issue (such as the 'need' for water and property charges to fund services) and thus lost sight of how these are anti-austerity movements that contain the potential for much wider societal transformation. This questions the extent of social solidarity and desire for radical transformation that exists in traditional Irish civil society organisations.

And in this context the Irish people were left disillusioned and abandoned by both the mainstream political opposition and civil society leadership. Those who wanted to oppose austerity, the government failures, the bank debt etc – the middle and low income workers, the discriminated and marginalized realised that they would have to take action themselves and look beyond the traditional parties and civil organisations to organise and mobilise resistance and get their interests represented.

Into this vacuum resulting from the absence of leadership from traditional representatives in the large trade unions and civil society and the Labour Party, small grassroots community and Left activist protests emerged to support people at the grassroots in resisting austerity. These included the Occupy protests in 2011, anti-austerity Budget protest organised by the Dublin Council of Trade Unions, disadvantaged communities who were being decimated disproportionately from the cuts ('the Spectacle of Defiance'); the anti-bank debt 'Ballyhea Says No to Bondholder Bailout' group set up in March 2011 (involving ordinary citizens with no previous political involvement, starting in a small rural town in Co. Cork organising weekly protests that continue to the present, and 'Says No' groups spread to a number of other towns and cities across the country. There were also very large protests in response to the rationalisation of hospital services, with 8,000 people

attending a protest in Roscommon town (population of 12,000) in August 2010 and 15,000 in Waterford city (population of 50,000) in 2012. There were disability groups, youth groups such as We're Not Leaving, lone parents, special needs assistants, and the successful protests against plans to sell off the national forests.

April 2012 saw the largest anti-austerity protest, and the foundations for the water charges campaign, when half the population refused to pay the household charge. This protest is not given sufficient recognition as it contradicted the narrative that the Irish passively consented to austerity as the necessary 'medicine' for recovery in contrast to the Greeks, Spanish and others. The socialists, Left independents, community independents, anti-debt activists, and community groups led the 'Campaign against the Household and Water Taxes'. Tens of thousands of people participated in protest marches and local actions. This movement contributed to the largest expression of resistance and opposition from the Irish people to austerity prior to the water charge movement. There was a mass boycott of the charge initially when 49 per cent of the 1.6 million households liable for the charge refused to pay it by the deadline of April 2012. Indeed, by September 2012, there was still a 40% non-payment rate nationally. The transfer of power to the Revenue Commissioners to collect the charge meant the campaign was defeated as people had no choice but to pay it.

The Anglo Not Our Debt Campaign also gained momentum as public opposition grew in 2012 and early 2013 against the annual repayment of €3.1bn of the €30bn Anglo Bank debt. In February 2013, ICTU organised its only protest against the current Government. A reported 100,000 marched across the country against the Anglo debt and austerity. In the run up to this protest, the government proclaimed a 'deal' on Irish debt. However, it was no deal of substance and €25bn of the Anglo debt remains. The Irish Central Bank is in the process of converting it into national debt. Further revelations emerged in 2013 about Anglo Bankers in the Anglo Tapes adding to people's growing sense of injustice.

What is clear from this is that the water charges protests didn't suddenly emerge out of nowhere. They came from the small left-wing groups, community activism and groups, anti-partnership trade unions, Sinn Féin, and individuals who have been protesting and organising at grassroots level for years with little recognition from the media or political establishment. They were wrongly ignored and written off. And so it is clear from this analysis that the water protests built upon existing community campaign and political networks that had been growing since the start of austerity in 2008. This also explains why the movement has been successful, and why it is likely to continue, as they are the culmination of many different protests over the last few years that have been ignored or downplayed by media commentators, establishment political parties, and academics.

For example, of the respondents who stated that they had protested before, the most referenced was protests against austerity and cuts in areas such as the water and household/property taxes, cuts to the community sector, public sector cuts, lone parents, student fees, Special Needs Assistants, medical card, the health service, and cuts to local hospitals. Respondents also protested against the bank bailout and the bank debt. Another major issue that respondents had protested over was the issue of reproductive choice, Savita Halappanavar, women's right to choose, repeal the 8th Amendment, and abortion rights. Anti-war protests were also significant. Therefore, we can see that grassroots campaigns had been building and learning from each of these struggles which were then brought into the water campaign.

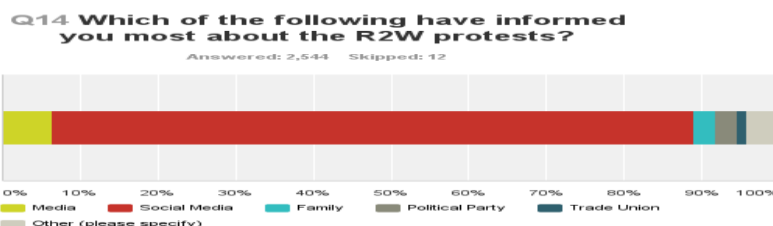
It is within this context that the Irish water movement burst on to the Irish (and international) political stage. It cannot be over emphasised the historical, social and political importance and significance of this movement on many levels both for Irish society and Irish politics and internationally for social movements and democratic politics. In regard to Ireland it is correct to state that this is the largest and broadest, and most sustained, social movement in Ireland since independence in 1921. At a local level communities have been engaging in protests against the installation of water metres for well over a year. At a national level there have been five demonstrations that have drawn between 20,000 and 150,000. To put this in a comparative context, a demonstration of 100,000 in Dublin would be equivalent to a million people protesting in Madrid.

## 10. The role of the media

The issue of the media was repeated as a significant theme in the respondents' answers throughout the survey. They referred to the media portrayal of protestors as 'biased' and that the media was acting as 'government supporters'. They criticised the media for its 'failure to be objective'. They expressed strong feelings of contempt and anger at the coverage of the protests by the mainstream media. 86% of respondents described the media portrayal of the anti-water movement as negative. This composed of 45% describing it as 'undermining the campaign' and 41% saying it was 'unfair'.

Significantly Q 14 shows that protestors' principal source of information about the campaign is overwhelmingly coming from social media as opposed to the traditional media. 82.6% were most informed about the campaign from social media. Only 6.4% of respondents were most informed from traditional media outlets.

**Figure 9 Sources of information that most informed participants about the water protests**





Even taking for the fact that this survey was completed on-line and through social media, and therefore is likely to be biased towards those using social media, this is an extremely large figure and highlights the changing role of social media in protest movements and the importance of non-traditional sources of information. This also points to a reduction in the power of traditional media (and those who rely on that source such as government and establishment parties) to influence the public. It also shows an increasing disconnect between the traditional media and general population. The media completely underestimated the size of protests and their determination to continue. The role of the media in undermining the movement and being biased in favour of the government and being perceived as 'anti-protest' was strongly expressed as an issue for protestors.

In this context, respondents pointed to the effectiveness of the water movement in raising awareness amongst the general public of issues relating to Irish water, particularly corruption, such as exposing the vested interests involved in Irish Water and the potential for privatisation of Irish water in the future. In particular it was noted that they have used social media very effectively as a way of providing information that the mainstream media has not covered. The movement has, according to respondents, overcome the 'propaganda' from the mainstream media, gained attention of foreign media, and 'brought the issue to national attention'. It has done this through 'the effective use of social media to discredit mainstream media'. Respondents are concerned that 'lies in the media with the help of the Gardai about the real number of protesters is unjust and unfair and if others knew how many were really there they might get interested and get educated about it'.

Sociologist and urban social movement theorist, Manuel Castells, has written extensively about the significance of the emergence of social media as providing a form of democratic empowerment for networked social movements in his work 'Networks of Outrage and Hope' (Castells, 2012). The innovative use of various forms of alternative media (TV, internet and social media) has also played a central role in the rapid growth of the new political party, Podemos, in Spain. The results of this survey and the important role that social media has played in the water movement lends support to Castells' analysis. The significant and important changing power dynamic that this represents – away from the establishment media – and therefore, ruling elite groups, and to – unrepresented, disempowered and marginalised groups cannot be underestimated. Social media can play an important role in the creation of horizontal, democratic, networked campaigns as local groups and individuals can link up, coordinate, and inform each other through various social media and the internet. This is most clearly demonstrated in the ability of the movement to bring almost 50,000 people on to the streets to protest on January 31<sup>st</sup> organised primarily through the community networks through Facebook and other social media. But the social media only has its power due to the existence of networked campaign groups on the ground in communities across the country who actively leaflet, poster, inform and engage their community around the campaign. Respondents explained how the campaign has informed people and used social media to raise awareness and organise:

- ❖ *It has engaged enough people, and provided enough information so the government cannot deceive the public that this is what needs to be done anymore*
- ❖ *It has successfully mobilised public opinion and now people know that they are the power in this country not the politicians or the police or the banks*
- ❖ *Only For Facebook & Right2Water I would be clueless as to WHATS REALLY GOING ON IN THIS GOVERNMENT & IN IRELAND as the papers & news on TV DO NOT & DID NOT TELL THE REAL TRUTHS OF WHATS GOING ON !.*
- ❖ *Mass awareness via social media has helped people understand that they have real democratic power when they stand together*
- ❖ *They have mobilized the social media campaign to reveal how the government and the media ignore or subvert the wishes of the people. By sharing information online, by doing our own independent research, the people of Ireland have found a new and strong community online.*
- ❖ *They have been effective at raising public awareness regarding the unfairness of these charges and the plan to eventually privatise public water networks.*
- ❖ *They've managed to mobilise in spite of negative media portrayals and disregard by government*
- ❖ *The media has not spoken about the need for change Social media sites and political groups have advocated the need for change. RTE only supports the interests of the wealthy that is why they have continually undermined the Right2Water campaign. But there is a need to combat the greed that is systemic in politics, which has been an integral part of the Irish political system since before the foundation of the state and thereafter.*

## **11. 'The republic has failed the people, the country needs to start anew': the shift away from establishment parties**

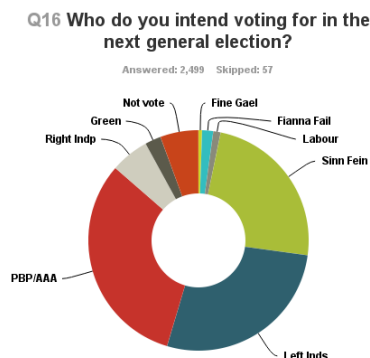
Most respondents expressed a more profound critique of Irish politics and the state than just opposing austerity or water charges. Respondents sought a change in the way politics is operated in Ireland so that politicians stop making false promises and can be held democratically accountable. One respondent described this as, *"our political system is broken, our politicians and political parties are owned by corporate elites who act in their favour. I'm not standing for it anymore. I want a government for the people"* while another said, *'The Republic has failed its people. The country needs to start anew'.*

Other issues were highlighted such as an the need to address inequality and its effects on communities and young people, the attitude of contempt from Government towards its citizens, the lack of prosecutions of bankers and others that caused the crash, bias in media, the sale/'give away' of natural resources to corporations, the lack of fairness in taxation, the lack of affordable housing and homelessness, and the lack of real employment. Respondents highlighted a concern for their children's future. One respondent stated they were protesting 'To save my daughter from a bleak future where she will no choice but to migrate' while another said 'I am also worried about the future of my own children. Times are hard now but I think that they will be a lot harder for my children'. Another respondent captured the desire for 'a new beginning': "It is a

time for a new beginning which we won't get with the 'old guard' and if this becomes a mass movement it might create an opportunity to change the political and economic system that we have"

In the first instance, respondents felt absolutely let down by the government's failure to deliver on many other of its pre-election promises. This is indicated by the fact that respondents indicated that they are moving their vote away from government and establishment parties to anti-austerity, Left parties, and independents. Just under a third of respondents (31.7%) said they would vote for People Before Profit or Anti-Austerity Alliance, 27.5% said they would vote for Left Independents, 23.9% will vote for Sinn Fein. 5.6% said they would vote for Right Independents. Combined therefore, 83.1% of respondents indicated that they would vote for broadly 'Left' candidates. Also significant was the fact that only 5.6% said they didn't intend to vote. Given the level of political apathy this is surprising. This figure also suggests a very high level of engagement in the political process of change.

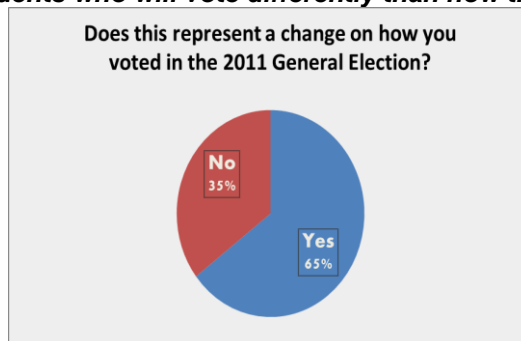
**Figure 10 Who will participants vote for in the coming general election?**



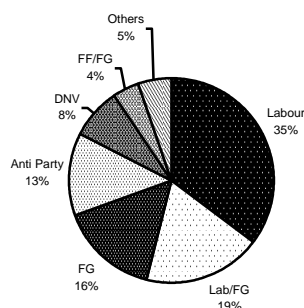
### Failure of 2011 government of Labour and Fine Gael to deliver change

A majority (65%) of respondents stated that who they will vote for in the coming general election is a change on who they voted for in the General election of 2011 with the majority of these (70%) moving away from government parties to support opposition Left parties and independents. This is because respondents feel they have been lied to by Fine Gael and Labour who just subsumed the position of the previous government of Fianna Fail and the Greens. Respondents felt that the key pre-election mandates and promises of the government parties have been completely abandoned and that the current government are 'just maintaining the status quo of cronyism, greed and inequality that existed prior to the 2011 election'.

**Figure 11 The percentage of respondents who will vote differently than how they voted in 2011**



**Figure 12 The political parties that respondents voted for in 2011**



Respondents believe that 'the government has broken every promise made prior to the election'. They had voted for Fine Gael and Labour as they were 'hoping for a new way of doing things' but 'they did not fulfil their mandate'. The phrases and

emotions used by respondents to describe how they now feel about their vote for the government parties in 2011 are significant in their depth and strength of anger. Many respondents expressed that they felt like 'idiots', 'stupid' and 'let down' for 'believing the lies' of the government parties.

The largest shift is away from Labour with over a third of respondents (35%) indicating they had voted for Labour in the last General Election. Table 9 highlights how Labour voters and long-time members had supported them in 2011 in order to protect the vulnerable and working classes of Ireland but respondents believe they have overwhelmingly failed to do this. This gives an insight into why the dramatic drop in Labour support has taken place in recent opinion polls and highlights that they are unlikely to recover this support before the next general election given the depth of anger felt towards them by their former voters among the respondents to this survey.

**Table 9 Reasons for No Longer Supporting the Labour Party cited by respondents**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I always voted Labour, but they have abandoned the citizens of Ireland!!</i></li> <li>• <i>I was foolish enough to think that labour would be a watch dog to FG</i></li> <li>• <i>Labour have abandoned the working class people they are supposed to represent</i></li> <li>• <i>Voted labour but they sold out the working man</i></li> <li>• <i>I voted labour on the promise of 'labours way or Frankfurt's way'</i></li> <li>• <i>I was a labour party member but I handed back my membership in protest. It will be a very long time before I vote for them again</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Labour abandoned their chance to be the lead opposition</i></li> <li>• <i>Voted for labour, who then went against everything they stood for</i></li> <li>• <i>I have lost faith in the Labour party. They have no principles left.</i></li> <li>• <i>I would have voted labour in the last election, they are no longer a party of the people</i></li> <li>• <i>I voted Labour and now I have realised how out of touch they really are with the people and Joan Burton is the most out of touch. "Ignorance" is a nice word to use to explain her.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Labour are not left, as they suggested in 2011</i></li> <li>• <i>Shifting from established political party (Labour) as they have sold out any notion of mainstream left-wing politics</i></li> <li>• <i>Manifesto lies...Labour politician lied to me and I was gullible enough to pledge my vote to him(as I promised)</i></li> <li>• <i>Will never vote for Labour again. While being part of a coalition means that compromises have to be made, I believe that they have abandoned working class and progressive principles</i></li> <li>• <i>The Labour Party has sold its ideology. It has no interest in social justice. They have lied their way into power on the reasoning that they'll protect workers and the most vulnerable in our society.</i></li> </ul>
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What is significant also is the relatively high proportion of ex Fine Gael supporters that are now involved in the water protestors. 16% of respondents indicated that they had vote for Fine Gael. When Fianna Fail are included, 74% of the respondents who are changing their vote are moving away from the establishment parties of Labour, Fine Gael and Fianna Fail. This represents a strong shift away from the main 'establishment' parties. Some respondents argued that because Fine Gael made promises that they did not live up to they have shown that they are no different to Fianna Fail and therefore the two parties should merge 'as they have the same policies and do not reflect left and right leaning stances which is vital for healthy opposition'. Their critiques of Fine Gael included:

- ❖ *I voted FG and labour last time because they promised change on how we are governed, scrapping quangos and reducing TDs instead they set up the biggest quango in Irish history*
- ❖ *The level of cronyism, corruption that FG are involved in and the sheer arrogance in which they behave; they promised us change but we got more of the same and even worse; politicians are completely out of touch with reality on the ground.*
- ❖ *Yes, I naively voted for FG last time believing they offered an alternative and could provide some solutions to upcoming problems.*
- ❖ *I always voted FG, never again, they make Maggie Thatcher look like Mary Poppins*
- ❖ *FG and Labour have been pathetic and let people down*
- ❖ *I foolishly voted for Enda Kenny & his 'promises'*
- ❖ *Sadly I voted Enda's party. huge mistake totally regretted it*
- ❖ *I trusted FG. I was an idiot. I am a life -long FF voter I but won't vote for them either.*
- ❖ *I always voted Fianna Fail in General Elections until 2011 when I voted Labour as FF had failed this country so badly. It turns out FG and Labour are even worse.*
- ❖ *I was so angry with Bertie Ahern I voted Fine Gael. In hindsight it was a grave mistake that will never be repeated. I'll never vote for a party again. Politicians need to be answerable to the people, Enda Kenny is answerable to nobody but Denis O'Brien.*
- ❖ *I mixed my vote between FF, FG & labour. I will NEVER EVER vote for them again*
- ❖ *Voted Fine Gael to get rid of Fianna Fáil, despite having a very tough job, not much has changed*
- ❖ *Always voted FG, never will again due to abortion pre-election promise been broken*
- ❖ *I voted FG last time. I never thought they would screw the Irish people like they have*

Another respondent highlighted how the low income and working class people have been let down by the establishment parties and this means they are looking for real change in representation:

*"I have lost all faith in the government, I was swayed in my last vote by promises that were not met. I knew the job to exit the Troika and recover from austerity would be hard, but the low income, working class people have really felt the brunt of this government, and the wealthy and rich have once again emerged unscathed. Unfair, unjust and promises broken. I will not trust the main parties again, time for change, time for change...enough."*

The extent of respondents' anger is captured by the statement of one participant who feels 'violated' by the government's u-turns:

*"I voted for FG and second, Independents. The government lied through their teeth about every single they said before they were elected. It makes me physically sick to think that a person can do such a U-turn on the people. I am violated. I understand that this is a regular thing in politics, but this is one of the reasons why people are so enraged with the current regime."*

Respondents believe that the established parties are incapable of change. They identified that people 'won't fall for the same spin again'. They outlined their disillusionment with 'all' political parties which stems from their belief that the three main political parties (but also the Greens and PDs as outlined by some respondents) have failed to fulfil their electoral promises and this underpins the rationale for the move towards independents but also to people not voting and other forms of political engagement such as protest (see Table 11). Respondents outlined how they have 'no faith in what any of them can do' and they have a 'distrust of all political parties'. They 'feel betrayed by party politics' as 'party politics has failed and no longer function to serve the people of the country as the Party comes first'. Parties can no longer be trusted. 12.5% of respondents expressed a complete distrust of the entire party political system of politics in Ireland. They do not feel confident in voting for any party. They believe that democracy within party politics is gone as parties no longer represent the people and, once in power, they will 'return to business as usual'. The respondents outlined according to respondents as the 'main political parties all move in the same direction once in power'.

This picks up something more profound that is taking place. The dominant approach in mainstream Irish politics has been described as a 'non-ideological', non-political approach to politics. That is to focus on local personalities and a clientelist system rather than policies and encouraging an actively politicised citizenry. This comment that people will not 'fall for the same spin again' highlights the politicisation that was also raised elsewhere in the survey whereby the water movement has politicised many people who had not protested or being engaged in active politics before. This is shown by that fact that 77.6% of respondents said that they believed the most effective way of getting change on issues such as water charges, housing was through protesting. The next most effective way was cited as voting in elections at 52.3%, engaging in local community activities at 40.8%. Contacting your local TD was indicated by 16.4% and contacting local councillor was indicated by 12%. This is significant in regard to the way in which politics and democracy operates in Ireland that only 28% see the most effective way of getting change is by contacting a political representative. This is, therefore, a new form of politics and represents the potential for a more deeply engaged citizenry within politics and therefore a more mature and real democracy.

**Table 11 Respondents' views on the establishment parties and party political system**

<i>Main political parties have bowed to banks, Troika and Europe. They don't care about the Irish people</i>	<i>Current government has spectacularly failed on its mandate of "democratic revolution". Follows the same cronyistic and unfair policies as previous administrations</i>	<i>Parties will not change the system, it suits them. There are too many TD's we are over represented yet under resourced.</i>
<i>Party politics are undemocratic</i>	<i>I have always voted- I see it as my civic duty, but, I am disheartened- politics is run by the senior civil servants who dictate policy, not political parties or independents ideals. Very little can be done until this system changes.</i>	<i>I have lost all faith in main parties and feel that those who stand with people at grass roots level are in a better position to represent</i>
<i>No trust in traditional/dynasty politics</i>	<i>No faith left in the trio of FG, LAB or FF</i>	<i>What is the point in voting in any of the main parties, their agendas are all the same.</i>
<i>The party system has failed this nation and its people</i>	<i>I have realised that the older parties are merely middle class boys clubs.</i>	<i>Want people with our country's interest at heart not themselves</i>
<i>I don't believe any of the major parties are in touch with reality and they just want power</i>	<i>At the moment no candidate in my locality seems sincere in their willingness to represent my views</i>	<i>Corruption and cronyism appears to go to the core of all the present parties and I no longer believe party politics is the way to go. Nothing changes.</i>
<i>Party politics (FF FG Lab) have proven to side with the rich and have made the poorest pay for all the austerity</i>	<i>Parties of the centre right benefit the elite only</i>	<i>I am an anti-capitalist left-wing voter. In saying that, the voting system is flawed in that most of the candidates are unrepresentative of equality and justice on behalf of the citizens</i>
<i>Large parties are too close to big business, only lining their own pockets, system is rotten</i>	<i>None of the main parties represent the people, they are more interested in corporations and their own pockets.</i>	<i>I hate all the mainstream parties equally, including Sinn Fein. There is no difference between the political parties at present</i>

There should be the 'abolition of the government' in order to let the people decide whether they wanted water charges and meters or not. Many respondents felt that there should be a public call for an election as there was no point in 'asking for change from a government who refuse to see or listen' as 'this government has not and will not meet the needs of the Irish people'. A respondent stated that there needed to be, *'complete and utter civil disobedience until the present government have been thrown from Leinster house and into a prison cell charged with treason'*. While another stated, *"we need an election now, the people want it but again, democracy doesn't exist in Ireland anymore"* and another respondent explained

that they believed the campaign should *'keep the pressure on until we get rid of this government and make sure all people standing for election listen to the people in future'*. There was also a suggestion for a 'candle light vigil at the Aras to ask the president to dissolve this government and put us out of our misery'. In relation to the next steps to achieve political change there were a number of suggestions put forward. Here are a selection of respondent's ideas:

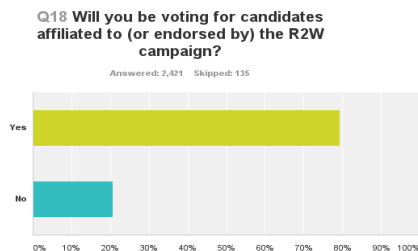
- ❖ *'Making Ireland more equal by using grassroots mobilisation and strategy to influence policy. Create alternative policy , budgets and start using direct democracy on a local level to show a viable alternative'.*
- ❖ *'Empower people to create the reality they do want by using techniques such as 'theatre of the oppressed' - helps people formulate solutions to their communities problems} and give support and backing for communities to boycott protest campaign for abolition of the things that stand in the way of that reality...such as needs for local community spaces, needs for people to be allowed work voluntarily to help their communities most impoverished etc.'*
- ❖ *'I'm less interested in right to housing etc than fixing the way this country is managed. For me that is the number one priority. The PEOPLE should be the primary focus of any government'*
- ❖ *We need honesty, we have been so fooled by them, don't please let it happen again, they are completely corrupt, we knew they were given a hard task after the last shower, never did I think they would stoop so low as to hand back our water directive, I'm so upset.*
- ❖ *There needs to be a brain storming to put forward the best ideas in a coordinated manner with the aim of having a single progressive vision for going ahead along with the necessary professionals on board to orchestrate this plan. Organisation and mobilisation of necessary skilled people and plan is key to 1. setting goals 2. action plan 3. profession knowledge of systems and strategy deployment.*

In line with the emphasis on political reform there were suggestions that R2W should 'start developing a new type of politics incorporating all important issues and mobilising the electorate to participate in our democracy'. Ideas around this included organising meetings with speakers providing education and 'empowering people to begin a new republic movement'. Another was to set-up a website to outline the injustices caused by the corruption of Irish political/policing/media/councils' while another was 'have a conference to bring all activists together'.

## 12.Support for a new political movement/party in Ireland: protestors seeking a more fundamental transformation of Irish politics and the state

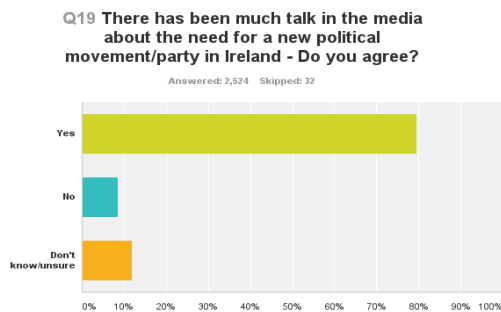
In order to address these issues there was strong support for the water protests to move to include other forms of political action. Almost 40% of respondents stated that Right2Water should extend to other issues like the right to housing, and just over a third, 36.6% said the Right to Water should stand in elections.

Figure 13 Percentage of respondents who will vote for Right2Water candidates in the coming election



There was even stronger support for Right 2 Water engaging in an electoral strategy that endorsed candidates as an overwhelming majority (79.3%) of respondents stated they would vote for candidates affiliated to or endorsed by the Right2Water campaign. This highlights that the water charges will be a significant deciding factor in respondents' voting decisions in the coming election. The participants represent the type of voter that is swinging away from, mainly Labour (but also Fine Gael and Fianna Fail) to Sinn Fein, the socialist left and independents. They are also, interestingly, looking for a new political party to represent their views as 79.6% agreed that there is a need for a new political movement/party in Ireland (Figure 14). This is radically challenging the conventional conservative assumptions and analysis of Irish politics and citizen engagement and is consistent with recent national opinion polls that show that almost half of voters want a new party to be formed and two thirds do not trust the current party political system.

Figure 14: Percentage of respondents who believe a new political party is required in Ireland





This strength of support for a new party is surprising amongst participants given the strong support indicated for People Before Profit, the Anti-Austerity Alliance, Sinn Féin and the Independent Left in the voting intentions. This is likely to be the case because a majority of respondents indicated that they have switched their vote away from other parties in the last election and are, therefore, only new supporters of these alternative politics. They are therefore, perhaps, still unsure about the alternative representation that exists and are therefore still looking for, and open to, something different. It also indicates a lack of faith in the entire political party system which has been highlighted repeatedly in the responses. It is also significant as it demonstrates that those involved in the protests are not just looking for abolition of the water charges but are seeking more profound political and social transformation in Ireland.

It can be analysed from the survey responses, therefore, that there is a general support for the idea that the next steps of the water movement should include identifying other issues beyond water to focus for the campaign including other issues to protest about and the involvement in elections, and support for the formation of a new party (although there is not majority support for Right 2 Water itself forming the new party). As one respondent explained: 'the movement has achieved a lot and galvanised public support and consideration for putting solutions together for other issues while that support is high would be the logical next step'. There is a clear sense that the issues flow naturally from each other and this has been identified as emerging organically within the movement.

Some respondents did point out the dangers of a potentially negative effect from standing in elections if there wasn't enough organisation, or money for basic things like flyers and posters for a candidate, which might result in a low vote and people getting demoralised. Another respondent felt that there was a need for 'a more of a grassroots approach' as R2W 'seemed more like an umbrella group of unions which while useful doesn't really represent a movement itself'. While another respondent criticised R2W as they felt 'their organisation process is not that transparent, and the many individuals behind it need to be a bit more visible – to be seen to be working with the people rather than just assuming leadership them'. Here is a sample of some of the respondents' views on this:

- ❖ *Coordinate with other anti-austerity groups in an effort to CHANGE the system through the ballot box. Electing new, non-party T.D.s. It's the only hope. WE NEED CHANGE!!!*
- ❖ *Trying to come together with the various other groups who are also against this unfair charge and try find a few people to put forward for election - maybe form a new party? The people need an alternative to what we have, we need people to vote for who will actually put their actions behind their words.*
- ❖ *We need new parties to go back to where this all began, lock up corrupt ministers, bankers and bond holders. Burn the bond holders who are glorified gamblers and get our services back for our sick, young, old. Create a mental health strategy. Sort out property tax which will cripple people. Stop banks selling our houses to vulture funds as rents are unaffordable. Cut wages and get rid of Ministers' benefits!*
- ❖ *Remove the current govt. change the political landscape and format for Ireland. Remove FF, Labour and FF as viable choices forever more. Elected politicians in constituencies should carry the will and words of their constituents to the Dáil. These aforementioned parties fail to do so. By the way, Sinn Féin carry great doubt and a murky closet too.*
- ❖ *I suggest uniting all groups; housing, water, wages, education and move forward to create a new government that looks after the Irish people and pushes for the pride of a nation united*
- ❖ *The Irish people are in a position of strength and it has taken a lot for people to have the courage to stand up to corruption. This needs to be built on to make lasting change, not just cover up the cracks!!!*
- ❖ *Build alliances with other human rights groups here and maybe water ones abroad. I think R2W has been a bit divisive without recognising the benefits of engaging all of those who would be part of it.*
- ❖ *'The current parties are basically the same there are no credible left candidates - this needs to be rectified'*
- ❖ *'A new political movement is required that will represent reform and encourage genuine participation in our political system'*
- ❖ *'We need a social movement and I hope this comes in the form of r2w and not some political party drenched in the past'*

A very small number of respondents criticised the involvement of political parties and that the movement was becoming too 'extreme'. Here are some of their comments:

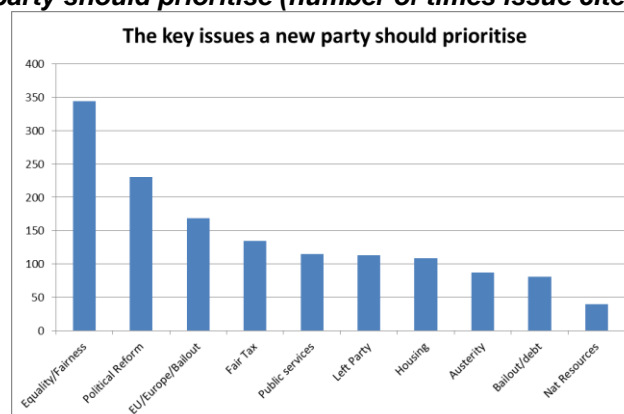
- ❖ *Remove politicians from the organisation – it is supposed to be a peoples movement*
- ❖ *I think it's important the movement distances itself from extreme left wing groups, especially Sinn Féin as they are alienating a lot of supporters. I don't see this as a poverty or left wing issue, its more about fairness and ensuring there is transparency in government.*
- ❖ *Keep information free of propaganda, biased, hyperbole... it needs to be aligned with people across society so that it maintains a strong anti -extremist voice*
- ❖ *Stop Sinn Féin hijacking the protests it's about people power not political power they can't tell the truth while not in government this would only get worse.*
- ❖ *Try to not align themselves with any political party, worried about Sinn Féin's take-over of the issue*
- ❖ *Don't allow political affiliated banners to be flown at marches or the handing out of leaflets to sign up to parties. This is not a point scoring exercise!*
- ❖ *De-politicise protests, no flags or party affiliations*

#### *The potential issues for a new party*

A majority (52%, 1,327) respondents identified what they believed were the key issues that a new political party should prioritise and stand for. From Table 12 we can see that equality and fairness is the priority issue (identified by 26%, as a priority issue). Table 13 provides detail of what participants defined by equality and fairness. The second issue is political reform (17%), the third is standing up to Europe on the issues of the debt/bank bailouts and natural resources, 'putting the Irish people first' (12.7%). The next most important issues are a fairer taxation system (10%), for proper/decent public services (8.5%), forming a new Left Wing Party (8%), addressing the housing and homelessness crisis. Based on this it is clear that the respondents want a new party that stands on a platform of anti-austerity; is for radical political reform involving a 'clearing out' of the 'establishment' political parties from power; that is anti-corruption, anti-cronyism and for

democracy where government acts for the people and not the elite or 'golden circle' (politicians and their 'cronies' in business, the wealthy, corporations, bondholders, in Ireland and Europe) and where the ordinary people have the power over government. They want it to stand for fairness, equality and social justice in society and the economy and where housing, health, water and education are provided as human rights for all citizens, and in particular, that the vulnerable are protected. They also believe it should stand for justice on the debt related to the bailout and banks from Europe, and where the natural resources of Ireland are used for the benefit of the people of Ireland.

**Table 12 The key issues a new party should prioritise (number of times issue cited by respondents)**



It is important to note that singling out these issues is slightly misleading as most respondents identified a number of these issues together that the party should stand for as one respondent explained that the new party should stand for 'The citizen. We are a society before an economy. It should above all stand for equality and fairness and honesty.'

**Table 13 Suggestions for Equality/Fairness/Social Justice**

A more equal society	Social Equality/Equity in society	Tackle/reduce income inequality	Economic/Financial equality	Equality for all 'not just jobs for the boys'
Fairness/Fairer society	Socio-economic fairness	Social Justice	Create as just as society as possible	Rights to a decent standard of living
Support working class/people	Improve quality of life for the working poor	Right to comfortable life for low income families	Help/acknowledge the middle classes	End to class division/classless society
Support unemployed	support people at the margins/the underprivileged, lower classes	Helping middle income earners with kids	Poverty/help poor/address needs of the poor/	workers' rights
combatting wealth inequality/ equal distribution of wealth /Setting a maximum wage limit	fairness to all not rich getting richer at expense of poo	widening gap in equality between wealthy and working class/unemployed	Looking after the vulnerable/ helping the least well off/working class instead of the wealthy	Prevent poverty and create more equal society

A strong theme that came through from the respondents was the desire for the new party to act for the 'ordinary' Irish People and citizens first before Europe, banks, bondholders, and corporations. This idea of 'putting the people first' was repeatedly referred to within the responses relating to demands for greater democracy, equality, and in relation to Europe and the banks. As one respondent explained the new party should "address concerns of people on the ground rather than those of the elite who have not been as affected by the austerity measures (i.e. earn so much that it's not made much of an impact), address payments to unsecured bond holders, and hold those accountable who contributed to the financial collapse".

The respondents explained that, in their view, the democratic system in Ireland is broken and there is too much influence from big business (see Table 14). There is a need for a fresh and transparent political system that stands 'for the people, all the people and not the richer higher elite'. A new party should stand for a system where 'everyone should be equal regardless of the amount of brown envelopes they've received'. There is a need for people who 'genuinely care about the nation, not just themselves and their buddies'. As one respondent explained, 'there should be an end to lineages of political parties as it was for this same reason we got rid of kings'.

**Table 14 Criticisms and alternatives of Irish politics and governance highlighted by respondents**

Criticisms	Alternatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The lack of a clear plan for our country or future vision</li> <li>Endemic cronyism that follows government after government</li> <li>Corruption in government departments</li> <li>Disgust at Irish politics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abolishment of the whip system, right to recall</li> <li>To let future governments beware of betraying the Irish people</li> <li>A radically egalitarian Ireland</li> </ul>

<i>Inequality in society</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Regressive charges</i></li> <li>• <i>No faith in political system or government We need a new fairer society</i></li> <li>• <i>The system is broken. Time for a new one.</i></li> <li>• <i>Unjust Irish society</i></li> <li>• <i>Ending the current system of status quo being clinged to by tired old corrupt men</i></li> <li>• <i>Endemic corruption in Irish public life</i></li> <li>• <i>To prevent my children &amp; grandchildren's future enslavement</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Social justice</i></li> <li>• <i>Progressive taxation</i></li> <li>• <i>Government for the people</i></li> <li>• <i>For fundamental changes to politics in Ireland and the Constitution</i></li> <li>• <i>Ensure future generations live in a more egalitarian society</i></li> <li>• <i>Create a more equitable society</i></li> <li>• <i>I want a new Republic that works free of vested interests</i></li> <li>• <i>Citizens need to have an active role in Ireland's decision making</i></li> <li>• <i>Own our oil, gas, fishing and forestry</i></li> </ul>
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Respondents said that the new party should 'put Irish people first' and stand up to Europe such as taking back our fishing rights 'which were lost to Europe' and our oil and gas (Table 15). This anger over the 'give away of Irish assets' was highlighted repeatedly. Respondents stated that the new party should 'take Ireland back and give it back to the Irish people' as 'there's too many outsiders having a say in the running of our country.' Other respondents explained that the new party should:

- *"Burn bondholders, stand up to Europe...want massive write down of debt or else we leave"*
- *"No more paying illegal debts to EU, get our natural resources back, amend the constitution, get us out of EU, tackle homelessness and health service urgently, jail the politicians and bankers that caused this and betrayed our country"*
- *"Getting away from Europe, taking back our resources, standing up for Ireland and making us self-sufficient again - we should be producing in this country - get industry going, drill for our own oil and gas, treat and distribute our own water (as opposed to the inevitable sale of Irish Water to an international company). Boost farm production, the more we can produce in Ireland, the less we rely on Europe. A new party needs to be full of intelligent passionate people who are not in the job for money, but instead want to make a meaningful positive difference to the country"*

**Table 15 Respondents explain new party should stand for interests of 'the people not elites, corporations or Europe'**

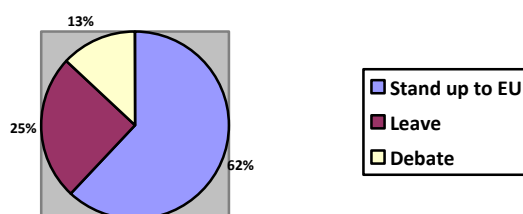
<b>Stand for all the people not just rich and elite</b>	Looking after the people	Ordinary people rather than elites	What ordinary people need not what wealthy can gain
<b>People's rights - Put People First</b>	Stand for the people of Ireland	The people and For the people	Work for the people not against them
<b>People before corporations</b>	The people and not companies/	Working for citizens first and banks/markets second	Govern for the people
<b>Represent the Irish people and not EU</b>	Irish People First before Europe and the banks/ Stand for the people not banks and bondholders	A party that stands up for the taxpayer and also to the EU and represents Ireland properly.	Fight for the Irish people not Europe - Ireland losing out there
<b>Reclaiming natural resources for the Irish People</b>	To keep our natural resources in the hands of the Irish people	Irish natural resources should benefit the Irish people	Public ownership of resources including Corrib Gas.

Of the respondents who referred to Ireland's relationship with the EU and the Euro, 62% stated that the new party should take a stronger stance to Europe in representing the Interests of the Irish people (Figure 16). 25% stated that Ireland should leave the EU. One respondent explained we should 'Leave the EU and return to community and compassion'. With the remaining 13% explaining that the felt we needed to debate whether or not we had a future in the EU. Respondents expressing these views cited the following approaches to take to the EU/Europe/the Euro:

- *Have concern for what's best for Irish people rather than Europe/EURO*
- *Stabilise Ireland rather than doing what EU wants us to do/Interests of Ireland*
- *Firmer stance with EU on our financial position*
- *Not bowing to Europe*
- *Eurosceptic*
- *Deference to the EU has to stop, work in national interest not corporate or EU federal interests*
- *Stand up for people and not be ruled by Europe*
- *Renegotiate with IMF/Europe Less influence re Banks from EU – stop prom notes payment*
- *A party that is for the people and Ireland, not the EU and banks.*
- *Getting out of the European union before it's too late*
- *The EU it isn't working*
- *Escape from the EU jackboot*
- *Move away from Euro to a value based currency*

It is interesting to note that one respondent explained that they were in favour of 'Social Justice and Irish Sovereignty\* (\*not nationalism)'. They went on to state that in their view, "This deference to the EU has to stop. Politicians should work in the national interest not corporate or EU Federal interests. It's Church/ Monarchy all over again". Another respondent explained, that the new party should be 'Serving the needs of the Irish people and standing up for the needs of the Irish people as a priority over carrying out the disconnected demands of the EU'.

**Figure 16 Respondents' (of those who cited the EU as an issue) views on the EU**



Respondents also explained their desire for the party to take a strong position against paying back the bank debt and to burn the bondholders. Respondents explained that it is 'not our debt', that it is the 'banks and gambler's debts' and therefore Ireland should 'stop paying the bondholders and stop making the people pay'. They believe that all the issues relating to austerity are as a result or a 'symptom' of the banking debt and bailout. This remains an issue of strong sentiment and respondents want more attention to brought to the on-going issue of the bank bailout. There was a concern that the bank debt should be removed 'from future generations' and that 'the unfair bail out debt' is a form of 'collective financial enslavement', and therefore, Ireland should stop paying it. Respondents explained that there should be, *Retrospective debt write-down; Cancel the banking debt; Getting Ireland a fair deal on the bail-out; Burning the bond holders; and Focus agenda purely on bank/national debt repudiation.*

Issues were also raised in relation to holding the bankers and politicians deemed as responsible for the bailout and banking crash to account such as bringing them to court and putting them in jail. Here is a selection of respondents' views on what the stance a new party should take on austerity, debt and bailouts and Europe:

- ❖ *Not bailing out the banks all the time, not bending over backwards to Europe, putting an end to the shameless and blatant nepotism and cronyism, ending the huge tax breaks for big corporations (they say it's a trickle down system but it's NOT trickling!!!)*
- ❖ *That austerity measures should not be placed on those not involved in gambling but placed on those who gamble. Banks, Bond Holders and Governments*
- ❖ *Equality for all, leave the EU, refusal to pay anymore of Europe's debt until it is equal repayments across all of Europe, criminal proceedings against, corrupt politicians, bankers and judiciary, self-sustainability measures implemented, truthfulness, involvement of the people in all decisions*
- ❖ *Demand a moratorium on National debt, get the bondholders out of office, ban any future plans for privatisation of water and demand the abolition of Irish water and the government step down.*
- ❖ *I would also like to see us take back our natural resources. Renegotiate the bailout deal, we should not be propping up Europe, leave Europe if necessary. Finally strip the current government of all pension entitlements and charge them with electoral fraud and treason.*
- ❖ *Something to reinvigorate the country, stop giving away billions to bondholders who have no right to it, no more selling oil and gas fields to private corporations. Basically stopping privatization and working on nationalizing. Anti cronyism, working for the people. Greater tax on the wealthiest top percent. Having corporations at least pay the full 12.5% tax that they are supposed to pay.*
- ❖ *Bank debt is central to everything. This needs to be dealt with first and foremost in conjunction with other left forces in Europe. An end to austerity. End of the two tier health system. Restructuring of the tax system with emphasis on Income tax and removal of USC and regressive elements of user fees and charges. A third rate and fourth rate of tax if necessary. Introduction of an FTT with a program set up to redistribute the funds into growing domestic industries. The Corporate Tax Regime is unsustainable long term in light of BEPS etc. An effective rate of 6.5% should be enforced for now. The poor performance of the indigenous sector needs to be examined and developed particularly in areas like green energy and new technologies. This should be done in parallel to the FDI developed sector to wean Ireland off the reliance on FDI investment. At a point where domestic industries are creating jobs, more pressure can be put on the corporate sector in terms of paying reasonable rates of tax. The biggest problem for any left organisation trying to implement these policies is the structural power of business over the economy to effectively shut the country down if their interests are not met. In my opinion, there is a severe lack of understanding on the part of the left to really prepared for the level of experts and knowledge to challenge in particular the financial sector. A serious education programme needs to be undertaken on the left in areas of economics, finance and industrial development. An alternative media needs to be developed and not just fb. An emphasis on cooperatives as a feasible method of organising businesses and start-ups. Capital development*

The issue of natural resources being retained or regained and therefore used to benefit the Irish people rather than Europe or the corporations was clearly important to respondents. The ownership of natural resources was of central concern with respondents explaining that they wanted Ireland to 'regain control over ALL of our natural resources - fish, oil, water etc.' Respondents explained that they wanted a new party to demand that we 'take back our natural resources so they benefit the people not corporations' such as oil and gas and 'stop the government selling our natural resources to private companies and Europe'. Ireland should, according to respondents 'get back our rights to natural resources (oil and gas)'. Nationalisation or public ownership was suggested as a way to keep and own more natural resources e.g. gas. Ireland should 'protect our gas and oil and forest reserves from exploitation: they belong to the populous'. There should be a 'referendum on public ownership of resources' or 'a New Constitution to protect natural resources from privatisation and organise against TTIP'. Another suggestion was to make 'changes to the constitution to protect citizens from the sale of

natural resources'. This protection of 'our natural resources' was central to protecting 'sovereignty'. There is a need to 'empower communities to manage natural resources sustainably so we will never be under the thumb of oligarchs to the extent we are now'. It was pointed out that we should manage resources in a 'fair way' and look to Norway and Sweden as examples. Respondents explained their views:

- ❖ *Water, oil, and all mineral rights returning to the control of the Irish citizen/individual, and not using our inherent assets as collateral for multinational corporations profits, this party should stand for equality, humanity, humility and a party which learns from history, and knows not to keep repeating the same over and over expecting a different result, which is the definition of insanity.*
- ❖ *Taking back Ireland's resources in a way that benefits the people. (Look at Norway) Social equality. End quangos and nepotism. Power to the people not faceless corporations.*
- ❖ *Reclaiming Irish natural resources for the Irish, Healthcare, Education...Ireland should be the IT and developing technology capital/gateway to Europe. Green Energy (wave/tide, wind etc)*
- ❖ *That there will be a constitutional guarantee that all of the natural resources of the country must be held in trust for the people and can never be privatised and that those that have been given away such as gas should be nationalised.*
- ❖ *Against the bailouts, standing up to Europe, and for keeping natural resources for the people not corporations*
- ❖ *Against bank bailout, bonds, austerity etc. Keeping and owning more natural resources, e.g. Gas. Less church involvement - marriage equality & pro-choice legislation*

It was notable that the country that was most pointed to as an example to dealing with these issues of banking debt, the bailout and natural resources was Iceland. A number of respondents highlighted that they believe Ireland should follow Iceland's example. These respondents stated:

- ❖ *Stop eviction now. Banks got bailed out. Get out of EU take back oil fish and what-ever else we lost. Copy Iceland. Rewrite the constitution and jail the bankers, Stop the IMF and the troika - throw them and their offices out of the country and stop paying the bond holders, even better demand they repay us. Basically copy Iceland*
- ❖ *Democracy. Like Iceland or Denmark. Not the corruption that we have endured*
- ❖ *People before profit. Taking back our oil reserves, the whole social services system restructured. everything Iceland did regarding jailing corrupt bankers, politicians and also Dennis o Brien*
- ❖ *I'd like to see a movement based on the Icelandic model - putting the needs of the country before all external demands. Ireland needs a vision for Ireland's future that is proactive and plays to our strengths*

#### *Greater democracy and real political reform*

In relation to democracy and political reform there was strong support for the movement to protest for an immediate general election, significant political reform and greater democracy (see Table 16). These included reform of the existing political and governing structures including the removal of the existing government (both TDs and governing structures) and the creation or amendment of the Irish Constitution. It was made clear that the existing government, and its predecessors, should be made accountable for their action in leading Ireland into the present circumstances.

**Table 16 Respondent's suggestions for next steps of the R2W campaign in relation to Political Transformation of Ireland**

<i>Listening process to discern peoples priorities</i>	<i>Consult the people in developing a new constitution for the people of Ireland</i>	<i>Educate the masses</i>
<i>Define what type of country do we wish to live in and how can we achieve it</i>	<i>Debate about the sort of civil society Ireland wants after the crash</i>	<i>Start a proper, intelligent and civil discourse about how we, as Irish citizens (not consumers/customers) wish our country to be governed</i>
<i>Build a strong united grassroots movement rather than go for elections</i>	<i>Bring about a peaceful revolution</i>	<i>Changing Irish politics and our constitution with the view of full equality for all.</i>
<i>Encourage working class self-organization and assembly-based real democracy, the likes of which we are seeing the shoots of in this movement</i>	<i>Develop new and effective ways we can tackle the issues that exist in our society fairly and progressively</i>	<i>Develop an active citizen program that can be run through secondary schools to encourage active participation of our young people</i>
<i>Coordinate teams of professionals in key areas such as law, finance, politics, communications etc. to act as advisory groups to form</i>	<i>The creation of a non-biased newspaper and steps to consider abolition of monetary system</i>	<i>Restructure our ever corrupt two party Dail system</i>

Respondents outlined their desires for democracy and political reform:

- *New political/governing structure/ New system of governance*
- *New politics/New way of thinking/Second Republic*
- *Change that exists past the election - long term perspective outside of electoral cycle*
- *New political order - Abolish the system as it is and draw up a new constitution based on the ideals of the people who fought for our Independence.*
- *A new Ireland free of corruption - tackle corruption, cronyism - people getting punished for committing while collar crime – those responsible for the (banking) crash to be held responsible*
- *Open transparent accountable government*
- *Stop this cronyism culture*
- *Need for openness, honesty, truth, transparency, accountability, integrity*
- *Direct democracy- Not a new political party per se but a whole new structure of direct democracy is needed*



- *Do what said elected to do/adhere to mandate: Whatever they stand to, they should stick to. At least be honest about their predominating philosophy which informs their decision making. Yes, sometimes people have to compromise - that is the nature of life and politics, but wholesale turnarounds on pre-election promises is a type of hypocrisy which should not be accepted. Keep the promises upon which they were elected.*
- *Switch to Participatory Democracy - empowering people and communities - power needs to be given back to the people so we can make decisions*
- *Democracy by referendum - Put a new clause in our constitution "We the people have voted and reached the required quota require the government of Ireland to resign now and ask the president of Ireland to order a new election to take place"*
- *Giving power back to the people - Direct Democracy where the people have the right to vote out political people/bodies not performing and looking after the rights of the electorate in their area - whoever is in power next must realise that they work for the people. They must be afraid of people power. If they're not up to the job then they're sacked.*
- *Listen to the people - be aware of issues on the ground - engagement with people 'on the ground'*
- *Abolishing government ability to appoint people to key positions*
- *Get whip system out of government - TDs must represent views of electorate, not secret discussion*
- *Decrease the number of TDs, senators and public servants*
- *Changing the law so politicians can only receive a pension at 65 like the rest of us,*
- *Reduce TDs salary, expenses & pensions - lower TDs benefits and wages to a more realistic level -ending disparity between politicians and civil services rates of remuneration, expenses, and work targets, with those of the average taxpayer.*
- *Governments should be run to benefit the people of the country not the individuals in the government.*
- *Political reform. Politicians should earn an average wage, their pensions should also be average public sector pensions. They need to live in the real world with the rest of us.*
- *Return power to local elected reps/ local government reform/supporting county councils/localised governing*
- *Politicians should be subject matter experts*

Here is also a sample of more general statements that included ideas for greater equality and democracy from respondents:

- *Lots of things but they could possibly be summed up by anti-corruption. At the root of a lot of the issues Ireland has seen in the past decade, corrupt political decisions have contributed to all of them in a major way*
- *Equality needs to be addressed throughout all sections of society and cronyism must, at long last, be abolished*
- *Social justice - we are not merely an economy but society has been abandoned by the establishment parties*
- *To reinstate democracy in this country, end cronyism and have more equality*
- *Equality, unity, communities working together. People feeling empowered. New government to realise they work for us and answer to us.*
- *Economic equality, corruption, cronyism. Nothing else can be dealt with unless these issues are dealt with first.*
- *Equality, fairness, combining socialism and meritocracy but not one over the other. Law reform, constitutional reform, Oireachtas reform, voting reform, media reform, local government reform*
- *Taking the power out of politics that are being ruled by the banks and the bondholders*
- *Solidarity, equality, helping the least well off, cutting the fat in government quangos, honesty, best value for money government*
- *To serve the people not big business, Vote on major issues for example do you want a bank bailout, Do you want water charges, have a proper debate about these issues instead of trying to ram raid legislation in and make a complete balls of it. immigration issues no social supports unless you intend working if you have no job or have not worked deportation back to the country you originated from, Social welfare reform which Joan Burton has made great strides in, We need to get away from the social welfare system as a lifestyle choice*
- *I certainly want to see new ideas on our way of government. I am not concerned with left or right or spectrum. I want a parliament that can 1 access public opinion on its proposed legislation and a right to a quorum of public opinion through signatures. that would allow us to call for the govt to dissolve when govt mandates and the citizens mandates are in opposition. I want every td to sign a contract with his constituents that on issues he votes for constituents not party.*
- *To wipe out cronyism and corruption that is endemic in Irish Politics. To keep our natural resources in the hands of the Irish people. That every person has the right to housing. Listen to the people. Decent healthcare for all, get rid of the two-tier system in Irish healthcare.*
- *Stand for election on the following mandate: burn bond holders, tell Europe to back off, (if we collapse the euro will too), cancelled all TD PENSIONS- change the law to do this if necessary, all TDs to be banned from sitting on boards of companies who have benefited from finance from the Irish state for a minimum of 5 years after standing down, do so before and lose pension, reclaim empty properties from developers and house families, disband HSE- Same rules for HSE chairs as TDs etc*
- *Reform of democratic system, party whip removed so TDs can act on the wishes of the people, decentralised power back to local authorities, full accountability for politicians, past and present, with proper penalties for crimes committed, e.g. pensions stopped, jail etc; referendum to allow the full protection of the constitution for all our resources, water, gas, etc; Bank bailouts stopped, leave the EU, pension/paycuts for TDs*
- *Transparency, housing for all, rent caps, actual job creation not jobs bridge style slave labour, publicly owned natural resources like water and gas, increases corporate tax, a 4-5 tier tax system where the rich pay higher taxes and less for low earners*
- *More like a new political system; issues such as homelessness; poverty; corporation tax adherence; employment for Irish citizens, no cronyism, no whip system.*

### **Taxation**

In relation to taxation, the majority sought a fairer ('fairly distributed') and more equal or equitable taxation system. Of the respondents citing taxation as an issue the greatest support was for a taxing the rich and a wealth tax ('those who are able to pay') (18%) (Table 17). These sought to tax the 'superrich' and increase taxes for wealthy. The reason for this is to create a 'fairer tax regime that redistributes wealth to the most needy'. Other suggestions included a higher tax on higher

income earners (those on 100,000 plus), or a '4-5 tier tax system where the rich pay higher taxes and less for low earners'. Respondents explained that there should be a greater tax on the wealthiest top percent and increases in tax on the rich in order to 'take care of the working class people' and 'stop unfair taxes on poor'. There should be a 'more progressive taxation system' in order to 'reduce taxes' on those on lower incomes.' A number of respondents suggested that in order to get 'better public water and healthcare' it needed to be 'funded by an increase in income tax on a percentage basis'. The next most supported tax reform was the abolishing of water charges, stealth taxes (property charge) and the USC. Respondents explain their views:

- ❖ *I think the most important thing for me is that fairness is shown to ALL the people, not just the bloody rich getting richer at the expense of the poorer*
- ❖ *Right to a comfortable normal life for low income families*
- ❖ *Abolish USC. Fairer more equitable tax system. Reversal of cuts to education and health. Transparency. Reduction in salaries for TDs and abolition of expenses for all public sector workers.*
- ❖ *Increasing the Tax Bands to bring more into and take some out of certain bands. Its entirely unbalanced presently and basically is anti-work on top scale and bottom scale*

Again, these were seen as 'unfair taxes on poor and middle classes' and there should be 'abolished' or 'fairer taxes introduced on the lower paid' or 'lower (reduced) taxes for low income earners/ ordinary working class'. Some respondents explained that they had paid high taxes on their income all their life and 'don't wish to have to pay tax again on that same income'. Others believed that it is about the 'the rights of the ordinary working people of this country' who are 'the group that are suffering most (the middle tax bracket)' as they 'earn too much to get any allowances, yet we pay the same tax as the highest earners'. Respondents also felt that multi-national corporations should be 'paying their fair share', that their tax incentives and 'scams' and 'huge tax breaks' should be tackled. As one respondent explained the government should 'leave the middle class family and poorer family alone and taxing the big corporate companies'. The greater support was for 'having corporations pay at least the full 12.5% they are supposed to pay' with a lesser support for increasing the rate of corporation tax. Respondents' comments on this included:

- ❖ *Anti-austerity, scrapping of Water Tax, ending the situation whereby those with the least resources have to suffer the worst of any cutbacks, ending of tax scams by multinationals - the 12.5% rate is too low in the first place, abandoning scams like jobsbridge, gateway, Tus schemes etc.*
- ❖ *Fairness and to have equal tax and social responsibilities to every member of the state as well as target multinational tax incentives that have invited jobs but have given Ireland a negative impression with other countries.*
- ❖ *Fairer system of tax (Abolition of USC, Increase in Higher rates of tax i.e. tiered system), Social Housing, Drug reform*
- ❖ *Less tax for lower wage, raise for higher and stop the double Irish tax system*
- ❖ *Higher taxes on the wealthy, social equality, anti austerity, anti capitulation to the demands of global capital, make multinationals pay the full 12.5% corp tax - no loop holes or special deals*
- ❖ *Restructuring of the tax system with emphasis on Income tax and removal of USC and regressive elements of user fees and charges. A third rate and fourth rate of tax if necessary. Introduction of an FTT with a program set up to redistribute the funds into growing domestic industries. The Corporate Tax Regime is unsustainable long term in light of BEPS etc. An effective rate of 6.5% should be enforced for now. The poor performance of the indigenous sector needs to be examined and developed particularly in areas like green energy and new technologies. This should be done in parallel to the FDI developed sector to wean Ireland off the reliance on FDI investment. At a point where domestic industries are creating jobs, more pressure can be put on the corporate sector in terms of paying reasonable rates of tax.*

There was also a view from some respondents that there is a need for reform of the taxation system more generally including a 'more effective spending of money raised through taxation' and 'proper spending of tax' and the 'reform of public expenditure to avoid wasting tax' and the 'efficient use of tax'. Others expressed the view that taxes should be 'fully used for services for the people' and that 'taxes should go to services rather than bondholders'.

**Table 17 Respondent's views on taxation reform (of those who cited this issue)%**

Wealth tax/tax rich	18
Abolish water charge/tax	15
Abolish USC	10
Fairer Equitable taxation	10
Progressive tax	10
MNs effective rate	8
Abolish taxes on lower paid	7
Increase corp tax	6
Stealth/property tax	3
Tax is anti-work/Reduce taxes/less tax more spending	3
Tax avoidance/evaders/exemptions/closing loop holes	3
Others	7

### Public Services

Public services and social issues were highlighted also by respondents as a priority issue for any new party. The guaranteed provision by the state of health, housing, and education 'for all citizens of Ireland' were repeatedly highlighted as key concerns in achieving an equal society and are essential aspects of a 'progressive vision for the future of the country'. They are needed in order to 'undo the damage from austerity' and create 'fairness in society and a healthy dignified standard of living for everyone (as a right)'. According to respondents every person should have the right to housing, education and health and these three issues were linked directly with achieving equality, a key policy goal for the

majority of respondents. They were highlighted as 'basic human rights' (along with water). There should be 'full commitment of a government to maintaining public services such as housing and education' and 'reversing the cuts to public services' in order to reduce inequality. Education and health should be free and available for all. In relation to healthcare respondents highlighted that there is a need to 'tackle health system urgently' such as 'getting people off trolleys' and extending to create a more equitable health service and a proper public health service. Respondents sought 'decent healthcare for all' through a 'national public health service' which requires 'getting rid of the two-tier system in Irish healthcare'. In the area of health respondents sought:

- *Radical improvement to the health service*
- *A better health service*
- *Proper public health service*
- *health service reform*
- *Better mental health services*
- *reversal to budgetary cuts to health*
- *National health for all citizens funded through a centralised national insurance scheme*
- *Real universal health care*
- *End to 'two-tier' health care system access to adequate health care services*
- *universal health care system*
- *Not waste money in health service*

In the area of housing the key concerns were addressing the homelessness crisis, helping people in mortgage arrears, providing social housing, NAMA and addressing rising rents. There was suggestions for a 'Right to Housing' campaign and another for a 'Right to Homes' campaign prohibiting repossession of family homes. Other suggestions included the government should also 'cap rents, put whatever measures are needed to stop property bubbles' and 'ensure affordable housing whether rented or bought'. Respondents identified the following suggestions:

- *Increased Social housing*
- *Ending homelessness/house the homeless*
- *Providing a right to housing*
- *Rent controls*
- *Stronger tenants laws/rights*
- *Housing and accommodation for low earners*
- *Affordable housing*
- *Help people in mortgage arrears*
- *Housing for all*

There should be a programme of public works to provide these services and 'capital development projects and investment in projects in areas of housing, schools, infrastructure'. Respondents' comments on this included the suggestions that the new party should address:

- ❖ *Human rights, equality, work, social issues like housing, Improving the communities we live in*
- ❖ *Anti austerity, programme of public works, social housing construction, health, free education, wealth tax, enforcement of corporation tax*
- ❖ *Poverty, homelessness, drug addictions, more mental health services and making college more financially affordable for everyone.*
- ❖ *Austerity, health care, support for local businesses and communities, settle matters such as homelessness and unemployment*
- ❖ *Human rights and equality, repealing the 8th amendment, an end to the constant battering of the weak and poor in our society.*
- ❖ *Equality, reforms of Garda, education, health care, civil service, tax wealth, increase corporation tax, cap rents, protect tenants, housing, sustainable agriculture, community job creation, renewable energy production*

Other social issues that were identified to be addressed included mental health, disability services, pro-choice/women's rights, abortion rights, LGBT and Marriage Equality rights, jobs for unemployment and 'strategic thinking around employment', 'improving the communities we live in'. There should be a focus on 'long term' and 'sustainable' economic growth. Ideas around this included Ireland should be the IT and developing technology/gateway to Europe around Green Energy (wave/tide/wind etc). There is also a need for 'better options for start-ups in the private sector'. Worker's rights and ending 'exploitative government programmes like Jobsbridge' was also highlighted. There is a need for employment, 'not only in terms of lowering rates of unemployment, but making Job-bridge and community employment schemes more beneficial, to offer more long-term, permanent jobs'. Environmental concerns, including climate change and sustainability were also highlighted. The way public services are provided was also highlighted as requiring to be addressed with calls for 'the reform of poorly functioning state bodies', 'transparency in local government', 'decentralised services', to 'not waste money' and to address the 'useless bureaucracy':

- ❖ *"A fair and just society for all. Reform of poorly functioning state bodies including tightening up of social welfare system in a way that does not penalise newly unemployed or permanently disabled, transparency of expenditure, tax take, clampdown on major tax evaders"*
- ❖ *"Justice. We need to look after the vulnerable in society, our elderly population, our young population and our special needs population. We need to look closely at education and health and not waste money. I cannot believe the utter incompetence of this gov. We need to keep our qualified Irish doctors at home, we need to support our schools and spend our budgets wisely. Get rid of useless bureaucracy"*
- ❖ *"Stop the gravy train, cronyism, and corruption. Work for the people. Get rid of all the waste in the HSE and public services. Hold people accountable when they don't do their jobs properly"*

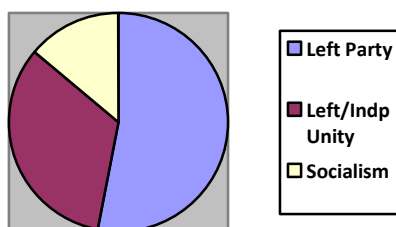
Other respondents sought 'a stronger welfare state' but one 'with realistic work plans and targets' and cited the Scandinavian countries/model for inspiration in these areas. While others sought a social welfare system that protects the vulnerable and tackles 'career' welfare recipients: *"Equality (poor, women), education for all and an equitable social welfare*

system that protects the most vulnerable while at the same time, tackles those who never contribute to society and see welfare as a career option.” A small number of respondents called for a reduction in civil service administration and to cut the ‘bloated state sector’. There was also a need for ‘value for money in all parts of public sector’, to ‘cut the fat in government quangos’ and ‘deal with public sector waste’.

*What type of party: Left, Right, independent?*

Figure 16 shows that the strongest support amongst respondents for any particular type of party i.e. Left, right, centre, or independent, was for a new Left-wing party. Of those respondents who cited that they believed the new party should be a Left party, the majority (54%) sought a ‘proper left-wing party’, a party that is ‘Left of centre’, and ‘a genuine/real social democratic’ party. Others included within this group sought ‘a proper decent labour party’. Respondents highlighted the need for the creation of a New Left Party in order to bring about ‘a proper left right political spectrum rather than the civil war politics’. The new party ‘must be leftist and also moderately Eurosceptic, though not Europhobic -there are enough right wing parties’. Another respondent suggested that there is ‘currently there is no coherency in the left policy’, and, therefore, a ‘serious coherent document needs to be drawn up over the coming months between left academics with knowledge and expertise, trade union groups NERI, TASC, Social Justice Ireland, to be presented as the pathway for a left government, a programme for government that any left government can draw from’. Another responded pointed to the need for ‘a left alternative’ that ‘moves way from the traditional language of 20th century socialism and sectarianism like Podemos’ (the new Spanish anti-austerity party). They noted that ‘the language of these (socialist) groups is still feared in rural Ireland and smaller urban areas and while people engage in protests relating to closure of hospitals, property tax, water charges this should be not conflated with support for a hard leftist position’.

**Figure 16 Respondents who suggested the new party should be a Left Party**



Here are some of the views of respondents commenting on this:

- Just to be opposite to FF, FG, Lab. A Left or at least centre-Left Party. A more Socialist Democratic stand.
- I think we need an organised left party that pulls together.
- A relatively mainstream left wing party to fill the gap left by labour, and now filled by the opportunist Sinn Fein.
- It has to be soft-left, with sound economic policies and no connections whatsoever to vested interests, including trade unions
- Broad socialist/social democrat party: liberal on human rights issues, socialist/social democrat on economic issues
- A proper left wing party is badly needed. Social housing and the unequal society are major concerns
- We need a left wing movement with a conviction about policy
- We need a real Left political grouping and the end of Labour's pretence in this roll
- Logical socialism, properly enforced without bias or greed. taxes fully used to pay for services for the people, the basic needs of all, and improvements to infrastructure, education, health, and housing. In other words, the obvious things.
- I believe in a United Left party based on red-line issues (e.g. tax rates for the wealth/corporate entities) as opposed to splintered groups like the current situation.
- To have a proper left leaning political entity that has a view to create a socially democratic state in the vein of the Scandinavian model which would take back the rights to our resources, investment in public works, taxes to go to services rather than bondholders
- A strong left with a focus on needs of the people and prepared to stand up to the big corporations, make them pay their way. Get back our rights to natural resources (oil and gas), fix the Gardai get rid of the dirty Gards and protect the whistle-blowers. Tidy up the civil service, it isn't effective or efficient. People must come first.
- Democratic reform, equality and social justice. A fresh look at our tax system to create more balance. A sound left but not hard left approach that could be inclusive of the many groups seeking change. (including also a different approach to the bailout loan 'deal' and our relationship with the EU/Trade agreements etc) Plus, to take advantage of what could be a huge sea change in Irish Life and democracy, I have concerns about groups recently leaning too heavily on the class issue in isolation, this should be beyond that - the poverty gap is real and serious but the last thing we need is to entrench a classist view by suggesting that any of our concerns, be they water or housing, affect/concern only the working class. Alienating each other or delineating a strict working/middle class divide in what is a pretty fluid society in many areas could be a mistake. Social justice and equality should be an issue for all. Advocacy for fairness and a just society should be paramount.
- A Labour rights party that actually stands for the working poor would be a nice sight.
- Left wing politics. There is a corporate take over me governments happening across the world. It's not illegal they have just learned how to manipulate democratic instruments in a legal way. Politics is entirely in thrall to them and their lobbies and

The next most supported suggestion was for Left independents and the 'Left' in general to form an alliance or to have greater unity (33%). Of these most respondents sought 'not a new party but more cohesion between left wing groups' and 'left unity.' They suggested that the various left candidates and independents should unite, 'pull together' and form a 'Left wing alliance' or an 'umbrella party'. This idea of *'a left front collective of independents' is what is required, according to respondents rather than another party which would 'tow the party line at the cost of the people'*. Respondents were critical of the 'infighting and nonsense' as was experienced in the United Left Alliance. They feel that it is hard to see things changing unless there is more unity on the Left. They highlighted that there should be a focus on what is held in common between the Left:

- *Wish that a cohesive left party could be formed with no more in-fighting and nonsense as seen before from ULA, AAA, BPB SP, SWP etc. Surely what they hold in common is more important than their differences. I feel really let down by the lack of cohesion on the left in Ireland - and no, I don't count Labour as left.*
- *The left need to stop arguing amongst themselves and form a cohesive group that can work together*
- *It is hard Change needs to happen, however with so many independent, people before profit TDs etc not under the one umbrella be very hard to see it changing. Issues homelessness, housing social and ongoing issues re: rents, people in arrears and high mortgages. The most vulnerable in our community and our future, children and young people*
- *Don't know if another PARTY is the solution...but certainly a cohort of like-minded INDEPENDENT politicians who can agree on policies that bring about a more equal society. The WHIP system is defunct. There are very able and capable individuals who can and will AGREE on core basic policies to move this egalitarian agenda forward. I hope so! But would not be opposed to a "party" that could do this.*

Another respondent highlighted that this lack of ability of the PBP/AAA and the United Left Alliance to organise themselves 'does not inspire confidence'. In particular the collapse of the ULA and the decision of People Before Profit to run against Paul Murphy in the European elections was highlighted. It was also pointed out that the failure of the Left to organise itself across the country means that in a lot of constituencies there are no alternative 'Left independent' candidates standing for election and therefore 'while there is high support for independents in the polls, the candidates to capitalise on these polls are not actually there or if they are they are ex FF/FG/LAB/PD's'. There was also some criticism of People Before Profit and the AAA for their *'hard party campaigning they carried out at the last (and in the run up to other) protest, which was off putting, seemed self-interested and opportunistic, despite my sympathy towards the party.'*

14% of respondents who identified that they wanted the new party to be a left party stated that it should be socialist or stand for socialism. Within this group a small number sought 'alternatives to neoliberalism', 'the abolition' or 'rethink' of 'capitalism' or identified themselves as 'socialist republicans'.

Sinn Féin was also identified as part of this potential for creating a stronger Left, with respondents citing 'Sinn Féin as getting to the important Left positions'. Although there was also a cautious reluctance expressed by some respondents towards supporting them and doubt around whether they will provide this new Left party. One respondent explained that what was needed was a 'change from Labour and an actual left party'. They stated that 'maybe Sinn Féin won't be it but we got to have a go!'. Another stated that they voted labour because they thought 'they had more of a social conscience'. They stated that they 'don't want to vote SF - but will do so as it is two fingers to FG/FF and Labour'. Respondents also stated that they felt it was more effective to vote for Sinn Féin than independents; "I would rather vote independent but I feel SF have a better chance of shaking the political tree". Respondents also stated that they voted for independents at the last election, but will vote for Sinn Féin this time as the 'independent majority won't be enough to keep FG/FF out of govt.... only hope is a SF majority or at least enough to lead a government'. Thus, voting for Sinn Féin is 'not ideal' but 'better than the alternative'. Others explained the failure of the establishment parties lead them with no alternative but to vote for Sinn Féin as 'at least they stand up for what they believe in':

- *"Well you can vote for the ones that ran over the country (Fianna Fáil), the ones that then backed up and reversed over the country (Fine Gael) or vote for the simpering idiots that enabled the last two (greens and Labour) or vote for hodgepodge of small parties and independents and out of all that I'd rather vote for the political wing of a terrorist group - at least they stand up for what they believe in"*
- *"Fine Gael had always been my party of choice till the last election when I turned to Labour. They said they were all for water charges so I switched to Labour who said they were against the charges. I intend to give Sinn Féin a chance this time and as long as I live will never vote Fine Gael, Labour or Fianna Fail again."*

Others explained that they are voting for Sinn Féin because the local Sinn Féin candidate 'always keeps in touch with his electorate and has helped with both family and community issues' whereas the local Fine Gael candidate 'when in opposition was very vocal and helpful since being elected has not even replied to correspondence. Others believe that at least Sinn Féin have 'stood with the people' and 'have always been hands on and helpful among the community.'

But there were also some criticisms of former voters of Sinn Féin for being 'just as bad as the other parties now' and becoming 'part of the establishment'. While others criticised their approach to the water campaign:

- *Sinn Féin are being ridiculous, acting as if they were behind the R2W campaign since the start. I will not be voting for them, they have acted cowardly.*
- *I usually vote Sinn Féin but after seeing how they handled the water charges shows them for what they are. Just another run of the mill money grabbing self-interested Irish Political Party*
- *Previously voted for Sinn Féin before. Lack of support against the water charges.*

Another respondent explained that they do not expect Sinn Féin to be any different from the Greens or Labour if they go into coalition with Fianna Fail:



- *The Green party have shown themselves to be useless political pawns of Fianna Fail and I do not expect any different from Sinn Fein if they go into coalition with Fianna Fail.*

A small number of respondents in relation to this issue stated that the Left and Sinn Fein should come together while a small number of respondents also stated that Sinn Fein should be excluded from a new Left alliance.

A smaller proportion of respondents identified that they wanted independents rather than a new party. They stated that they wanted 'Independent thought, no whip, equality, non radical' politics. Another respondent stated that they thought 'Ireland needs more independent TDs from all colours of the political spectrum who vote according to their conscience and the mandate of the people who elected them'. Others want to 'abolish the parties and have independents that directly represent the people!'. What is needed is 'for once, the people and not themselves' and that 'it may be better just to keep it independents to achieve this goal'. They want independents as 'the current system is destroying the country and the people - they are rotten to the core'. Current parties are, according to respondents, 'disengaged from the people'. There is a need to remove the 'inherent corruption that is imbedded in political parties'.

There was also suggestions for 'getting the independents together' and 'something stronger than individual independents' as 'individuals they are not united and proper decisions are not taken'. One suggested 'the Technical Group and some Independents' should run the country with Recall and more women in office'. While another stated that they 'did not agree with Reform Alliance but may be interested in Shane Ross getting a group together.' Another suggested Sinn Fein getting together with Shane Ross and his independent alliance. This highlighted a view expressed by some respondents that rather than defining the new party or independents as Left or Right they should 'stand for what is right and fair for all people, and not cronyism'. Another similarly explained that they will vote for Direct Democracy Ireland or a new party lead by Shane Ross, but that 'it must have a left/right balance'. While another respondent stated:

- *"I do not believe in the Party political system as is presently constructed and I believe the taxpayer should not fund the Parties to the extent that they are. There needs to be a level playing field to allow Participatory Democracy take hold. As none of the political choices on the ballot paper met my expectations, I had no option but to spoil my vote which should have accounted as a valid vote all the same. If there were a candidate for Direct Democracy in my constituency they would have got my vote."*

Others stated that what was needed is 'a new system not a new party' and that they are not sure a new political party can bring about a more equitable society. Another highlighted that the movement should be the priority not creating new 'leaders':

- *I'm all in favour of a new political movement (not party-political, whether existing or new), but am also highly circumspect of many self-appointed leaders on the left, thinking the sun shines out of their arses and the sound of their own voices to be leaders in such a new political movement - I'm opposed to that. We need a movement, where we are all leaders, making the concept of leadership redundant. The history of leaders on the left turning into tyrants if they ever get into power needs to be learned from. Let's not give anyone that chance from the outset.*

Another group of respondents that what was needed was to 'focus on engagement with communities, not on top-down directives and corporate pandering' and that what was needed was 'a new political movement, not new political parties' and the 'encouragement of anti-parliamentary politics, as we have seen in the water charges campaign':

- *A new political movement is required that will represent reform and encourage genuine participation in our political system*
- *More people focused and prioritizing the real needs of people. I think what the right to water campaign had achieved and what it must keep in its sights is an awareness of other worthy social issues needing a voice. There has to be more in this country than financial institutions, budgets, big business. We need a social movement and I hope this comes in the form of r2w and not some political party drenched in the past.*
- *I don't know who to trust but a new party will have to prove themselves first. They will lie to our faces just the same as the rest so it really doesn't matter as long as we change these in power now*

There were also suggestions for the involvement of 'intellectuals' holding and expressing their opinions

- *Everyone sits firmly in the centre looking after their wallets. It would be nice to see more intellectuals who have a firm position openly discuss their dedication to a cause, hold their position honestly and that their opinion would be strong and heard on issues. There needs to be a representative for atheism, for women, for equality, for a contemporary human being living in a contemporary Ireland who has no interest in corruption or red tape but actually wishes to see a government in unison with its public.*
- *Ireland needs politicians that work in service of the people, not professionals that pursue their own interests and agendas. We need educated people and academics not afraid of change and ready to stand up for the interests of Irish people internationally.*

A small number of respondents highlighted the lack of the option of selecting 'centre', or 'all' independents, Greens and Direct Democracy Ireland in the survey questions. These were oversights on the author's parts.

### *Right Wing Views*

There was a very small number of what could be classed as 'right-wing' or 'conservative viewpoints expressed by respondents. For example one respondent wants the new party to be a 'right wing conservative party that will cut welfare payments and pay child support for one child only. Another explained they were 'right wing' and they wanted a new party to 'get rid of the welfare state and that taxes must be reduced'. Another wanted Ireland to 'escape from the EU jackboot, and smaller, minimal government' and to 'dismantle the welfare state'. While another stated that we should 'concentrate on educating young out of the 'social welfare mind-set' where having kids means a free house, welfare and no reason to work and teach them the value of having structure in their lives'. Another respondent stated that the 'the welfare of the Irish people should be protected to fund charity /problems at home before sending monies to charities abroad'. Similarly another respondent stated that the 'issues of the health system, education, housing crises, all these things need to be sorted before the banks or any other country currently receiving aid from the Irish government'. There was also a tiny number of anti-immigration views expressed. One respondent explained that a new party should: 'stop immigration as there are no jobs for Irish people also we need to look after the people living here before we can accept more'

### **13. Ireland in context: political theory and the emergence of new political parties in Europe**

These survey results suggest that Ireland is following (in its own unique way and timeframe) a pattern that has been identified internationally whereby citizens are increasingly moving away from engagement in traditional and establishment political representation and elections. As political scientist, Peter Mair explained in 2005: “citizens are withdrawing and disengaging from the arena of conventional politics....they are withdrawing and disengaging from involvement in big ‘P’ politics. Even when they vote, and this is less often than before, or in smaller proportions.” Critical political theorists argue that this is because they view these parties and the state as representing big business and multinational corporations, state institutions and supranational organisations such as the IMF, EU, WTO, the wealthy, corporations, and the financial system rather than the needs and requirements of ordinary citizens. This has been referred to as the crisis of democracy whereby the main political parties have been ‘captured’ by big business interests. There is also a process of ‘hollowing out’ of the national state as it loses functions and power to the private sector and supranational bodies, financial markets, bondholders, credit ratings agencies, international mobile capital and corporations. Ireland clearly has had its own particular version of this ‘crony capitalism’, whereby since the 1960s, politics (at local and national level) has been the servant of a ‘golden circle’ of wealthy businessmen, banks and developers (Hourigan, 2015).

It also results from the right-ward shift of social democratic and socialist parties to accepting that there is ‘no alternative’ to globalisation, capitalism and neoliberalism and the collapse of communist parties. This has contributed to the citizen disillusionment in politics. In particular, the emergence of the ‘Third Way’ social democracy embrace of neoliberalism in the UK (Labour, Blairism), the US (Democrats, Clinton), France (Socialist Party) and Germany (SPDs) has brought about a crisis of representation for those losing out such as lower income and marginalised people. These parties, having emerged from challenging capitalism and providing a welfare state, state employment and strong state regulation of the financial sector (Keynesianism and socialism) in order to mitigate its worst accepts and provide social justice and equality, have since the 1990s, argued that there is no real possibility of challenging global capitalism and they shifted to facilitating and promoting capitalism. Rather than challenging the financial power of capital they now focus policy and the state on supporting it.

This period of the ‘New World Order’ post 1990s and the collapse of Communism was defined as the ‘end of history’ by Frances Fukuyama in reference to the supposed ‘triumph’ of western ‘democracy’ based on the free market and capitalism. It was argued that the capitalist democracy of the West was the zenith of human development and there was no longer any need for politics to propose or debate different ideologies such as Keynesianism, or democratic socialism, but instead should focus on who best can manage the existing system. However, radical political philosophers argue that this attempt to create a ‘post-ideological’ politics was a deeply political act that aimed to remove the political discussion of alternatives necessary for democracy. They highlight that politics should be about democracy and equality rather than this technocratic, consensus-based, political administration.

#### *New social movements and New Left governments*

In this political vacuum, ‘social movements’ from civil society have emerged from Latin America to Europe organising mass protests and resisting various forms of neoliberal and financial capitalism including privatisation (notably water in Bolivia), austerity and debt (IMF structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s), corporate exploitation (Coca Cola, Shell, Monsanto etc) and they have attempted to develop alternatives. Most notably in Latin America ‘progressive-populist’ regimes emerged in the early 2000s, most notably, Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela, Evo Morales’ Bolivia and Rafael Correa’s Ecuador. There is a difficulty of locating these political movements on the traditional coordinates of modern politics but they are broadly anti-neoliberal, and advocate a politics of democracy, social justice, human rights, and equality. This has been described as a ‘new’ form of ‘Left’ politics or a ‘Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’. They have promoted and implemented policies the prioritise improving the lives and conditions of the poor such as providing greater access to health and education, nationalising former privatised services and industry and increasing democratic participation and the involvement of marginalised groups such as their indigenous populations.

The 2008 crisis and imposition of austerity and debt on peripheral bailout countries in Europe has resulted in the emergence of new social and political movements that have parallels to what has taken place in Latin America. The new social movement of the *Indignados* emerged first in Portugal in 2010, with 300,000 taking part in the protest of the Manifesto of a Generation in Trouble, and then spread to Spain, where it occupied public squares. In March 2011 the movement mobilised a million people and occupied Madrid’s Puerto Del Sol where it became known as the ‘15M’ or ‘Indignados’ movement, and in May 2011 the ‘movement of the squares’ emerged in Greece. It was this European movement that inspired US Occupy, which held its first protest in September 2011. The Indignados have been described as “the largest democratic insurrection of the last half century” (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2011, 66). It declared itself a ‘democratic revolution’ based on a horizontal, non-hierarchical, spontaneous, form of autonomous organisation, distinct from the traditional opposition forces of trade unions and Left political parties. Its base is the ‘multitude’ a new subject of political action identified by Italian post-Marxists, Hardt and Negri, as being made up of “the unemployed, students, service workers, the working poor, precarious workers, trade unionist activists, pensioners, users of social and health care services under privatization, and public sector workers”. It is a movement that has been built at “the margins of the institutional Lefts, outside the channels of representation and electoralism.” It completely rejects any faith in official politics and the solutions of the elites and pointlessly waiting on initiatives ‘from above. The movement “comes from below, through the absolute questioning of the democratic forms trapped in the formalism of representative politics”. It was from these movements that the new parties, of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, have emerged. They represent, similar to Latin America, a

'new-Left' populist politics based on a critique of austerity, the failure of Europe to protect the crisis countries, standing up to the elite and financial markets, supporting local democracy and empowerment of ordinary citizens, a greater role for public services and improved worker's rights.

#### *A new Left populism: the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe*

They draw on the ideas of political theorists, Laclau and Mouffe (1985; Laclau (2005); Mouffe (2013)) who, developed Gramsci's theory of transformation in order to try understand the potential political forces (the new subjects of emancipation) and strategies that could bring about radical democracy and equality in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Laclau and Mouffe argue that the Marxist concept of the working class as the key agent of social change and object for political organisation to achieve a socialist society needs to be replaced by a broader conceptualisation of diverse 'antagonists'. Political subjects are not strictly speaking classes, but complex "collective wills" that are formed from concrete social struggles and can involve parties and trade unions, but also territorial communities, ethnic groups, or collectives of uncertain identity that construct an identity appropriate to the occasion for the struggle (Keucheyan, 2013). This is because, the industrial working class has lost its centrality in social conflicts, and the emergence of 'new social movements', implies that conflictuality is no longer necessarily organized around economic demands bound up with work. Thus modern global capitalism has created a new form of working class comprised of diverse exploited and marginalised groups (Hardt and Negri's 'multitude').

In their theory the diverse social sectors from the economic sphere (trade unions), the community sphere (ethnicities), or others interact with the existing government and institutions, making demands that are specific to them. These demands are sometimes met, in which case the relevant sector goes on engaging in its activities normally. But if a government and state institutions refuse to meet these demands then the sector specific character of the demands stops being such once they meet with rejection from government (Keucheyan, 2013). They now possess at least one characteristic in common – that of having been rejected – which creates the conditions for an alliance between them. Populism can then enter as sectional particularisms have been transformed into more general demands, which can become a 'chain of equivalence' that creates a link between the diverse groups who become the 'people' - those whose demands have not been met. The *people* are constituted in opposition to an adversary – for example, the *establishment*. Rather than focusing on 'class warfare', those on the Left and socialists should, therefore, seek to unite discontented groups – such as the unemployed, low paid and precarious workers, public service users, feminists, environmentalists – against a clearly defined enemy e.g. the elite and Europe/ECB.

Therefore, political organisation should focus on trying to develop narratives and alternatives that speak to, and represent, the various exploited and alienated groups. This extends to the middle class who are increasingly impoverished, excluded, and alienated from austerity, financial capitalism and globalisation. From this broad diversity of oppositional groups political theorists, leaders and activists should try develop, with those groups, a common identity that can counterpose the needs and desires of the multitude (the majority) to that of the 'elite', the 'wealthy', the 'establishment', the upper 'caste' who are made up of traditional political parties, the state senior bureaucracy, the corporations, the supranational organisations of the EU/WTO, financial markets and institutions etc. A charismatic leader who takes on the powerful can provide an important unifying role amongst the diverse opposition.

This approach attempts to create a political project that not just resists exploitation but actually can mobilises the support and involvement of a majority to gain power. There is a need, therefore, to create a political party that can represent and involve the *people* in order to gain governmental control democratically and thus bring about reforms that will benefit ordinary people and try reverse neoliberal, financial, austerity and globalisation. This is the form which a 'new' Left or progressive populist politics can take. This approach stands in contrast to the social democratic parties who have given up on challenging neoliberalism and austerity and also stands in contrast to the smaller Left Trotskyist and communist parties and their united fronts who remain fixed to the rigid and dogmatic model of building a revolutionary party and are not interested in reforms or government and are focused on various forms of 'permanent revolution'. While resistance, opposition and struggle are essential, the current period demonstrates a strategy of political transformation that aims to gain power through government in order to start reversing austerity, improving democracy and taking on the real power of financial markets and capital is also required. The political system and institutions should not be left as a playground of the elite. There is, therefore, the need to develop alternatives that can win a majority to provide a progressive, rights-based, government that can achieve changes here and now to alleviate people's suffering, engage people in democratic political action and give hope in the possibility of alternatives.

Laclau and Mouffe argued that liberal elites decry such politics as 'populism' because they are scared of ordinary people becoming involved in politics. The rise of right-wing populists such as Marine Le Pen's Front National in France or Nigel Farage's UKIP in the UK is proof that the post-Thatcherite consensus – cemented by "third way" social democrats such as Tony Blair – has left a dangerous vacuum. The choice that faces us today is therefore between right-wing or left-wing populism (Tremlett, 2015).

#### *A useful example in practice: Podemos in Spain*

The Podemos ('Yes We Can') project is being lauded as one of the most important examples of putting this radical theory of Left populism into practice. Podemos is a new political party in Spain that was set up less than two years ago but now is polling on equal support to the two traditional and largest political parties in Spain. Podemos was initiated by a group of Left academics and an anti-capitalist network. Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's political theory and the experience of Latin America, Podemos has been built through citizen involvement in local "circles", or assemblies. These circles, built around

local communities or shared political interests, meet, debate and vote in person or online (Tremlett, 2015). The Podemos project contains the contradiction that it is both radical and pragmatic in its pursuit of power. It aims to win: to become the majority party. It has won the support of large sections of the Spanish people through its roots in the *Indignados* protest movement and its argument, communicated effectively by Pablo Iglesias, the front spokesperson and leader of Podemos, that the blame for Spain's woes lay with "*la casta*". 'La casta' is the name given to the corrupt political and business elites they claimed had sold the country to the banks. The other enemy is Germany's chancellor Angela Merkel and the unelected officials who oversaw the euro from the European Central Bank in Frankfurt. Podemos do not want Spain to leave the European Union, but are not satisfied with it either. Their Left populism argues for the need to take back power from 'self-serving elites' and hand it over to the people. They set up their own political show on a marginal TV channel that became a form of communication and hugely popular and have successfully set up on-line forms of voting, deciding policy and debates (Tremlett, 2015).

Democracy and political parties are in a major state of flux and crisis in Europe. These crisis intertwine with (and result from) the crisis of the Euro financial system and the EU itself. The coming year will see significant indications of the extent to which alternatives are being developed such as the Greek situation (with many possibilities including a Grexit, debt write down, easing of austerity etc), the UK election in May (with the growth of anti-EU and anti-austerity parties) and the Spanish election (Podemos) at the end of this year. These will all be watched closely in Ireland and are likely to affect how the political situation evolves here.

#### **14. The movement for a New Republic: water, housing and a new party**

##### *The Future of the Water Movement*

The Irish water movement faces three possible future scenarios. Firstly, if the size of the non-payment campaign is not sufficient to affect Irish Water and anti-water and anti-austerity candidates do not do as well as expected in the coming general election, then it is likely the movement and protests will rumble on as a much smaller campaign and will ultimately be defeated as the bin charges or property charge campaign were. The government will feel emboldened to put in place penalties for those who do not pay (such as water pressure reduction and shut off) and the movement will reduce in size to where it is no longer viewed as politically relevant. Further repression of the movement involved in various forms of protests against meters through arrests and heavy Garda presence are likely to continue. The second possibility is that the water movement has sufficient momentum to carry it through to completion and force either a complete government reversal, or in the context of a new government that abolishes Irish Water and charges. This would be achieved through a non-payment campaign and continued mobilisations at community and national level, along with a strong campaign by anti-water charge candidates in the general election, that would achieve sufficient non-payment to make Irish Water non-viable. A third possibility is that the extent of the anti-water charge sentiment is so strongly expressed in the general election that a new government elected abolishes the charges and Irish Water.

The second and third outcomes are most likely because the movement, as demonstrated in the survey results and ongoing mobilisations, has the balance of power and majority support in its favour. It is determined to 'win' the water war outright, which is likely to give people confidence to extend to other issues and to challenge the establishment. But it is also because the water movement represents something much more profound in terms of the people's resistance to austerity and desire for a radical change in Ireland. This suggests that the determination of protestors is much greater than that which the establishment is ascribing to it or, in fact, can understand. The non-payment campaign and protests will continue therefore to involve large numbers. Furthermore, the campaign and communities are going to make the general election a referendum on the water charges and Irish Water (if it doesn't face abolition resulting from a crisis engendered by the Eurostat ruling on its compatibility with EU public investment rules). The outcome of the Irish water war, therefore, will depend on the extent and success of the non-payment campaign and the outcome of the general election in regard to a growth in support for anti-establishment and anti-water charge candidates and parties. If the water movement can convince sufficient numbers not to pay then Irish water is non-viable and will have to be completely abolished or reformatted. As the current polls show that is certainly a strong possibility but for the government it will it is a central battle and therefore, it will try ensure that this is not the case. Furthermore, if the general election provides a strong anti-water charge mandate – which would see government parties suffering severe losses and a further shift to anti-austerity and anti-establishment parties and independents– and the water charges being identified as a key factor in that shift - then any new government would, if it wasn't to face mass protests again, have to abolish the charges and Irish Water.

As already identified, the water movement, is part of a trend since 2008 of the emergence and growth of protest movement and campaigns in Ireland around other issues related to the crisis, corruption, democracy, austerity, the banks, debt, the bailout, the sell-off of natural resources and inequality generally. Given the continued impact of austerity, the failure to achieve national debt relief, on-going issues around worker's rights and the worsening of issues of low pay and precarious or casualised employment, and the government's indication to restrict public spending and instead provide tax breaks to those on higher incomes, suggests that many issues will continue to emerge and elicit resistance from middle to lower income households and the most vulnerable. Other examples of issues include cuts to Lone Parents' allowance, cuts to local and community services, transport costs, and the on-going health and housing crisis. The water movement is likely to have empowered many groups and individuals to believe that they can achieve change on their issue. It has facilitated and strengthened the growing movement of a more empowered/animated/active and politically aware/conscious citizenship at

the grassroots of Irish society. Alongside this there is a small, but also important, process of popular education in political economy, economics and politics and social issues being undertaken by NGOs, trade unions and community groups. Extending this would be beneficial to further develop the capacity of individuals and groups to deepen the process of self-empowered change that is underway. Empowered communities and citizens are a necessary and essential element to challenge all politics and political parties in order to ensure a genuine democracy. One of the areas that is receiving increasing attention is the issue of housing.

#### *Housing Crisis: NAMA, debt, austerity and a new protest movement*

Extending the Right to Water to campaign on the issue of housing received support from 40% of respondents. This indicates the importance of the issue to those involved in the movement. The housing issue has emerged in the last two years as a key social concern as a result of a growing crisis affecting hundreds of thousands of people across the country.

The housing crisis is made up of a number of parts. Residential house prices have increased by a staggering fifteen per cent over the last year while in Dublin they rose by twenty per cent. But the real pain in the housing crisis is being felt by the homeless and those living in emergency accommodation, private tenants, those living with families in overcrowded conditions and on the social housing waiting lists, those living in substandard social housing, and homeowners in long term arrears. Dramatic rent hikes by landlords in Dublin, Meath, Kildare, Wicklow, Cork and other large urban areas combined with the government's failure to raise rent supplement caps in line with this increase is leading to thousands of the poorest families in the country being left with no choice but to divert their little income from basic necessities such as food into rent. It is also forcing others to leave their accommodation and become homeless or move back in with families leading to overcrowding. Increasingly private tenants are presenting to local authorities in need of emergency accommodation as landlords refuse to renew their leases in order to get in new tenants on higher rents or to sell the property. In Dublin at least 40 families are becoming homeless each month. In May 2013, 58 adults with children were in hotels, bed and breakfasts or other emergency accommodation in Dublin. By May 2014 that number had risen to 184. And in October 2014 it had risen to 421 (307 families with 680 children) – living in emergency accommodation in Dublin.

But local authorities do not have sufficient housing due to austerity-related reduced state investment in social housing as a result of budget cuts and the privatisation of social housing through various private rental schemes. The austerity budgets led to a drop in funding for local authority housing from €1.3bn in 2007 to just €83 million in 2013. As a result, only 8,200 units were delivered in these years. Had spending being maintained at the 2008 level an additional 25,000 social housing units would have been provided. This shows the legacy impact of austerity on the current housing crisis and what is fuelling the anger of protestors in the water movement. The government's Social Housing 2020 Strategy includes a welcome return to direct provision of local authority housing as a central plank of housing policy. However, funding remains inadequate and policy is overly reliant on private sector provision.

The Central Bank's recent Credit Market Report showed that one fifth of all residential mortgages remain in arrears including 117,000 on their primary home. Furthermore, the numbers of buy to let mortgages has remained static and homeowners in long term arrears (over 720 days) has actually increased to 37,000. The 'solutions' to these arrears is being forecast as involving significant repossessions, i.e. the loss of the primary family home, in 50% of cases. Furthermore, a quarter, or 26 per cent (38,463) of all buy-to-let mortgages are in arrears, and of these 15,435 in arrears of plus 720 days. Anecdotal evidence suggests that as receivers take over these units to either to sell or rent that the sitting tenant is being told the rent is significantly increasing or in the case of sale they have to leave. This is leading to a lot of economic evictions.

A significant contributor to the current crisis is the way in which the response to the crisis was built upon a strategy of recreating a rising property market which has also become central to the government's strategy for economic recovery and political recovery. Take NAMA, for example. In order for the Government to trumpet its 'success' and for it to be wound up early, provide a 'return' to the tax payer and pay off its debts, property and rental prices must continue to rise so that international financial investors will buy up the office and apartment developments that it is in the process of selling. While there is an acute housing crisis NAMA is planning to sell up to 10,000 residential units (mainly in Dublin) in the coming year to real estate investment trusts – vulture funds and speculators. NAMA is also planning to use €3bn in constructing 22,000 housing units and massive commercial office space in partnership with property developers, international financial and property speculators in the next couple of years. This is public/state finance that could be available to develop social and affordable homes on these publicly owned sites. The banks are also dependent on rising prices to improve the asset values on their balance sheets and repossessions and sale remove the problems of arrears. The scale of potential losses from the mortgage arrears crisis is lowered as projected income from sale or renting of future repossessions increases. As the government plans the sale of AIB it is supportive of this strategy.

The new Central Bank rules on lending might temporarily slow the rise in house price rises but without other interventions such as the immediate diversion of all NAMA residential property, office and development land to meeting either below market rental or social housing, real rent control (and retrospective reduction), increasing rent caps for rent supplement, the Icelandic solution of significant mortgage debt write-down, a moratorium on repossessions of primary homes, and a serious expansion of direct local authority provision, the crisis will escalate. In this context, those in mortgage arrears facing repossession, private renters facing economic evictions from landlords or receivers acting on behalf of banks, those unable to afford escalating private rents, the homeless and those living in emergency accommodation, and those in substandard conditions in existing social housing are a potentially new sector of opposition. This represents a significant increase in the size of the population and groups that are being excluded from the housing market. Furthermore there are increasing numbers of people who are not facing economic evictions but want rent security and tenants' rights to make the private



rented sector a long-term viable and affordable form of housing, and to assert and achieve a right to housing for all. There is the possibility of these groups combining, across the country and in communities to start protesting against evictions (as is happening) or at NAMA owned housing and apartments. They could connect with allies in the political, trade union, NGO, and academic sphere and ordinary citizens who believe in a housing system based on need and human rights and not the current property speculation model of housing provision. A networked campaign approach could provide a movement to challenge the prevailing model that is benefitting the international vulture funds, the Irish property industry, developers (many of whom caused the crisis and received significant debt write-downs), banks (the same that were bailed out and capitalised with public money), and establishment politicians wedded to the private ownership model and the current strategy of rebooting a private housing market (a quarter of whom are landlords).

Already groups such as Housing Action Now and local anti-eviction groups have begun to network around this at a community and Dublin city wide level. They are supporting individuals and families in crisis situations and starting to explore the possibility of city wide and national housing rights campaigns. Clearly the housing issue is one of the most pressing crisis facing some of the most vulnerable in Irish society but it is also extending to wider groups who face rent increases, mortgage arrears, overcrowding, poor standards of private rented and social housing and the question is whether these can come together into a new social movement.

While the crisis does not immediately affect everyone in the way water does - it is affecting increasing numbers of people who are looking for a way to take action to change the situation. The crash and emergence of this crisis highlights the failures of the existing housing system in Ireland which is focused on promoting speculative property development, and a indebted, financialised and commodified, home ownership model. There is a growing mood (as expressed in the survey) for a radical change in government policy and regulation in housing. The issue of housing also connects clearly to the sense of injustice of austerity and the price paid by ordinary people for bailing out banks and developers and this sense of the government supporting the rich, their cronies and the corporates. The current crisis is in large part due to that the state and government response to the crash was to concentrate on saving their associates and elite colleagues in the banks and developers through imposing austerity on the population while those in need of social housing and affordable housing and debt write-down on mortgages were left with little support. This crisis is evoking for people the historical memory of the colonial landlord class who evicted families during the famine and the resistance of ordinary Irish peasants and the poor through the Land League. It will be interesting to see if such a 'right to housing' movement emerges and if the water movement is, in fact, already reshaping the Irish political, economic and social landscape by motivating citizen engagement and protest on wider issues such as housing.

#### *A new party for A New Republic: recolonization and unfinished business*

This final section suggests some possible ideas that could contribute to the development of a new political party and movement that could broadly represent both the water movement and the broader desire of a significant proportion of Irish people for a more profound transformation of Ireland.

The key questions that require to be answered on this include; who would form it; what would it stand for; how would it operate; what are its aims and importantly how could it win majority support? This section attempts to provide some preliminary responses to these questions.

There is clearly much to be learned from the international experience and political theorists about how such a new party could be formed. But it is important that political theorists and activists here in Ireland do not just try replicate what exists internationally and apply it directly without assessing what the particular Irish political, economic, social, historical and cultural circumstances require. Ireland has a very different history from the rest of Europe. Many would argue that Irish political culture and society is closer to that of the post-colonial nations of Latin America than the likes of the UK or the rest of Europe. Therefore we need to develop our own, Irish, frameworks of analysis and theoretical development and practice of politics that could provide possible routes forward. This report has tried to do this by drawing on the results of rigorous and extensive research into the views of the people involved in new protests and analysing these using diverse theories and understandings from historical, geographical, political, economic, cultural and sociological analysis and perspectives that are relevant to the current conjuncture in Ireland. The aim is to provide a reflective and critical assessment of the progress and potential for radical transformation in Ireland.

The starting point must be the ideas being expressed by the movement and people themselves and assessing how can these be drawn together into a political representation of the majority. A possible concept that could provide a framework for the key narrative of a new party is the call for a 'New Republic' (O Toole, 2010). This draws on ideas being developed organically within the water movement where participants are strongly connecting their struggle to the anti-colonial, anti-imperial and anti-exploitation struggles for an independent Republic at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Ireland and the labour movement of Larkin and the 1913 Lock Out. Participants in the water movement believe that the Republic that was fought for in 1916 and is defined in the 1916 Proclamation of the Irish Republic as an independent and sovereign Republic that "guarantees...equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens", has been given away, destroyed, and sold out by the current establishment and the elite in Ireland and, therefore, a New Republic is required.

Using this lens enables us to view the current state of the Republic as being 'recolonized'. A century after rising up and (partly) freeing itself from hundreds of years of colonization and associated enforced famine and oppression, Ireland has once again become a colonised state. Its sovereignty and the dignity of its people, its natural resources and public assets having being handed over to financial and corporate capital (big business) by the Irish political establishment and management classes. From Irish water, publicly owned land, to the Corrib gas field in Mayo, our fisheries, our wind, motorways, housing, welfare job supports, community services, public transport, health services - they are all already, or

are in the process of, being privatised and sold off to the control and ownership of private corporations and their wealthy owners. The most grievous forms of re-colonisation and abandonment of the principles of the Republic took place when the Irish people bailed out domestic banks, developers and the European financial system. As a result, the people suffered massive austerity and the national debt has reached the point whereby a fifth of all tax revenues are now paying debt repayments rather than much needed public services. People are being evicted from their homes and made homeless or suffering from exorbitant rent and mortgage repayments in order to satisfy the profit seeking of the banks (including state owned AIB), and this is being worsened as NAMA and the government enable international property vulture investment funds to buy up swathes of Irish homes and land, irrespective of the short and long term social impacts. The Euro financial system and associated treaties such as the Fiscal Treaty have removed much of Ireland's sovereignty. For example, Ireland is restricted in its ability to borrow or increase investment in vital public services and infrastructure because of EU Treaty and Euro financial rules. Germany and the core European countries are dictating the imposition of austerity across all countries. How is Ireland still a sovereign, independent, country in this context? How can the will of the Irish people be expressed and translated into practice through their democratically elected government? In a way, Ireland has become a neo-colony of neoliberal capitalism, US multinationals and the EU.

James Connolly's assertion that without a radical change towards the needs of the people (his term 'socialism') then Ireland would never be truly 'free' has a strong connection to Ireland's present circumstance. Connolly wrote: "After Ireland is free, says the patriot who won't touch Socialism, we will protect all classes, and if you won't pay your rent you will be evicted same as now. But the evicting party, under command of the sheriff, will wear green uniforms and the Harp without the Crown, and the warrant turning you out on the roadside will be stamped with the arms of the Irish Republic".

Another concept that has been developed is that these protests represent the potential to complete the 'unfinished business' of the unfulfilled social and political revolution of Connolly and others outlined in the Proclamation.

Connolly, the Irish Citizen Army and others fought to create a Republic of equality for the workers and the poor but these are now once again excluded and marginalised in the view of the protestors. Banners on the protests read 'Beware the Risen People', drawing from Padraig Pearse's the 'Rebel' where he wrote: 'And I say to my people's masters: Beware, Beware of the thing that is coming, beware of the risen people, Who shall take what ye would not give. Did ye think to conquer the people, or that law is stronger than life, And then men's desire to be free?.' In this sense then, Irish people, never truly freed themselves from the system, mind-set or culture of colonisation (even in the South). Colonisation and oppression was continued in various forms after independence by the church and the conservative elite, the civil service, and then the EU, Foreign Direct Investment, the ECB, international markets and now bondholders and international property and finance speculators. Rather than standing up and asserting the needs of the Irish people to foreign capital and Europe, the Irish politicians and civil servants have played the role of the 'cute hoor' joker, never genuinely standing up and asserting the needs of the Irish people to power but yet pretending that they had stood up and won some crumbs off the table of the powerful. People see that the elites in Ireland are willing to be the local *compradors* (or 'agents/enforcers') for the corporations, vulture housing speculators, the EU, ECB and international bondholders. They impose the policies of the colonizers in return for holding on to their privileges. Connolly's words again are insightful in understanding this. Writing in Shan Van Vocht (socialist newspaper) in January, 1897 he said;

*"If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organization of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs".*

#### *The fracturing of the social contract*

The fact that all the establishment parties, including the Labour Party, Fianna Fail, the Greens and Fine Gael, have facilitated this form of re-colonization of Ireland by the (the Irish 'golden circle'), the wealthy financial elite, private corporations, the European Central Bank, highlights the democratic and representative failure to fulfil the ideals and vision of the Republic outlined in the Proclamation. Citizens' rights and democracy have been reduced to meaningless soundbites by these parties. The delivery and planning of public services or infrastructure such as water is planned increasingly according to the priority of business needs - not local communities. The law is used to defend the interests of corporations such as Irish water over those of communities and democratic protest. The media, supposedly a cornerstone of democracy, has, in the main, played a largely unquestioning role. It was repeated throughout the survey that participants believe the establishment political parties are acting in the interests of large corporations, the wealthy, the EU, ECB/IMF, and the not the Irish people. This is the core to the abandonment of democracy and equality enshrined in the Republic. There is a belief, therefore, that none of the establishment parties can achieve the transformation that respondents believe is required.

This is the defining feature of the fracturing of the social contract between the Irish people and the establishment parties that has been part of the Republic since its foundation. It is this fracturing that presents the possibility for a fundamental transformation of Ireland towards more equitable economic development and a society of democracy and social justice.

It is, therefore, accurate to describe the water movement, and the growing protests since 2008 as a process of 'awakening' of the Irish people to the necessity of fundamental change *and* the necessity for them to resist in an active manner and become politicised active citizens. In this way we can see that the Irish Water movement is in the process of transforming Irish society and politics. The protests are a new type of active citizenship and social movement politics in Ireland. This involves regular protests that express a refusal to accept injustices and new forms of democratic self-empowerment. It is a logical response when the system fails you. Protests, as the water charges movement shows, are a way of influencing

political systems without having to wait for elections. It can be even more effective than voting as it is a direct and immediate way of changing policies. But the fact that they are protesting also suggests a self-awareness that self-empowerment and action is required to bring about transformation. They are seeking a citizen and political engagement beyond traditional politics and elections. This could be seen as the fulfilment of the anti-colonial and anti-oppression struggle that was halted after independence. It is the Irish people addressing their internalised colonialism, their collective and individual guilt and shame, the suffering from institutional and personal abuse (Hourigan, 2015), the scar of emigration, and the decision to no longer passively 'accept' injustice but in fact to publicly and collectively resist in defiance of the claims of the elite and the neo-colonisers, that the crisis was 'their fault'. The abused victim is no longer silent but is standing for itself – to get justice through self-empowerment. This is the significance, therefore, of the water movement and current juncture - that a large proportion of (extra)'ordinary' Irish people, along with critiquing the system, are actually engaged in political resistance and the political system by seeking out political alternatives in contrast to decades of citizen passivity and acceptance of a corrupt political establishment. This is the real crisis that faces the established Irish politics and the existing system. It could be argued that this is the most serious crisis of legitimacy for the governing elite since independence. The current model of the Republic faces serious cracks that have been growing for over a decade but have been revealed in a stark manner since 2008. The movements for justice for forgotten and abused in religious and state institutions, the movement for equality for the LGBT community and minorities, the radical left, Left independents, Sinn Féin, the water charges protest, the household charge protest, those affected by emigration, precarious work, unemployment and low pay, the pro-choice movement, Occupy, We're Not Leaving, those fighting for special education's needs, those marginalised in small rural towns and disadvantaged city communities, disability groups, carers, Community development projects, Shell to Sea in Mayo, the Ballyhea and other says No groups – all these represent diverse forms of a statement of defiance and 'no' to the colonised and oppressive Republic and represent a demand for a Republic built on citizens not consumers, for 'community' or 'social justice, democracy, solidarity and equality'. This is the answer to the 'who' could form this new party- these are the potential coalition of political forces that represent a movement for a New Republic.

In a more theoretical sense, therefore, the water and anti-austerity and anti-debt movements represent a new movement of resistance against the re-colonisation of Ireland and the abandonment of the ideals of the Republic and thus aims to complete the unfinished business/revolution of the period 1913 to 1921. The logical conclusion of this is that there is a need to create a New Republic that would be governed according to the values and ideals of the original Proclamation that is updated to take on the priorities and views of the Irish people today. This could become a key mobilising component of an alternative political narrative. In this way, the idea of a 'New Republic' can help build a broader political movement of Laclau's equivalence amongst those angered by the 'selling out' and abandonment of the ideals of the 1916 Proclamation by the current establishment parties. The approaching anniversary of the 1916 rising and the Proclamation of the Irish Republic holds clear potential to inspire and motivate alternatives.

#### *Defining moment of new political possibility*

Three key aspects have emerged that define this change in Ireland. The first is the emergence of popular community struggle, protest and self-empowerment, secondly a new civil society leadership in smaller trade unions and, thirdly, a new Left and anti-establishment politics in the form of Sinn Féin, the radical Left and independents. Major questions lie ahead as to whether these forces, together, can define and create a New Republic. It will depend on whether or not those who are arguing for a pluralist community and grassroots politics, can link together and mutually strengthen the diverse struggles and campaigns over water, housing and other issues while also developing an alternative political, economic and social vision for Ireland that can attract a majority into supporting a new political movement/party.

Drawing on the political theoretical frameworks of Laclau, Mouffe and Gramsci, the experience of new political parties and movements in Latin America (Bolivia, in particular) and Europe (Syriza and Podemos) the water movement represents a fracturing of the social contract that underlay the Republic from independence until 2008. The response to the crash has shown the majority of Irish people how the elite classes, state, government and establishment politics in Ireland protect the wealthy minority and those responsible for the economic destruction of the country along with international billionaire bondholders and the Euro system while enforcing cruel austerity on to the majority. Initially the population believed that Fine Gael and Labour were different to Fianna Fáil and would protect the vulnerable and stand up to Europe, achieve a sharing of the burden across society and bring about a democratic revolution. However, Fine Gael and Labour failed to make any significant changes. And thus the antagonism emerged in Ireland that has the potential to form a political alternative. The chain of equivalence includes all those groups suffering under, and resisting, austerity, the middle and low paid workers, and the poor. They are united against the elite, the cronies, the wealthy and the rich. There is not a lower class, a 'squeezed' middle and a higher class as the government would like the people to think, but instead a choked 'working and poor' majority. The recent tax reductions, for example, only benefited the top 18% of earners. The government is governing for the top 20%, the establishment political parties and elite groups, Europe, the corporations, the property vulture funds, the banks, and Germany (the Euro core).

From independence the ordinary Irish people have accepted the form of a social contract whereby they accepted low pay, low standard public services, or corrupt governments in the broader interests of 'national development', or the 'national interest' of Ireland and because they felt there was no alternative but to try survive within the system or emigrate. There was an 'Ireland' that people felt politicians were striving for and even if they were 'dirty' politicians and the majority were poor and lost out, at least there was a 'free' Ireland, built on the aims of the Republic in the 1916 Proclamation, and against on-going British occupation, that 'the Irish people' were all fighting together for. That idea of fighting and struggling together

for a common Ireland has been shattered in the minds of the majority as a result of the antagonism created by the establishment's response to the crisis which was to burden the majority with austerity and the bankers' and developers' debt. There is no longer a common nationalist Ireland being fought for. It has also been shattered by the increased lack of trust in state and religious institutions as a result of the abuse revelations. There is no common Ireland that justifies abandoning strikes and protests and accepting an oppressive system. There is no longer a conservative church or political elite with the power to keep the people oppressed and passive. Instead there are now two Irelands. One is the Ireland of the bankers, developers, establishment parties, NGOs, the wealthy and Europe, the 'insiders', which benefitted from an oppressed people, and no longer has any elements of the original Republic or common interests of the majority it purported to represent. And then there is another Ireland of ordinary citizens who have been sacrificed in the interests of the elite and Europe. And it is this second Ireland to which the majority of citizens feel allegiance to as these people (for example in the water movement) aim to represent, and fight in common for, the ideals and visions of the 1916 Republic of democracy, rights, equality, social justice, solidarity and community. It is this second Ireland that is in the process of freeing itself of multiple oppressions as it awakens to its power. It is to this vision of Ireland and the Republic that a new political project is required to give expression to and communicate the idea of the two Irelands, the Ireland of the bankers versus the citizen's Republic, and the need for a New Republic, a New Ireland, to be constructed and born.

In the context of the crash and the response to it, in the context of the give-away of Ireland's natural resources, of the obsequience and deference to Europe and acceptance of paying Europe's debt, it has become clear to ordinary people that they have to look elsewhere for new politicians and parties that will represent and fight for their Ireland of a New Republic. If the anti-austerity chain of equivalence can unify around this idea of a *New Republic/A Republic of Equality, Social Justice and Democracy*, and this can be brought into the open – into the public realm and mainstream political debate and amongst ordinary citizen's conversations then there could be a potentially much more profound and historic transformative moment underway in Ireland.

I would argue that there is an opportunity, therefore, for a new political movement to emerge that represents this will of the people to reassert the ideals and vision of the 1916 Proclamation, and the ideals and values of a majority of people today in Ireland - in a meaningful way – for a sovereign, democratic, nation of equality, social justice, based on the protection of the vulnerable, community and fairness and assertion of the rights of all. Central to achieving this is gaining majority support to become the government. The experience of other countries suggest that the success of new parties is exactly that – that they are actually new and do not have the baggage of history. However, Syriza shows also that alliances of parties, some new and some older also can represent a new politics.

In Ireland, the political landscape is complicated. Clearly, Sinn Féin, People Before Profit, the Anti-Austerity Alliance and some independents each represent aspects of a new movement and a potential new party, however, it is clear from the survey results and recent opinion polls that many of those seeking out alternatives do not yet see any of these on their own as providing that all-encompassing party or movement that can involve or achieve majority support. Recent opinion polls show that almost half of voters remain either undecided or are supporting independents. Therefore, it is clear that the protestors in the water movement are looking for another political force that stands for the principles and values outlined by participants in the survey. The values, views and language that were used by the majority of respondents could be classified as broadly 'Left-wing' but the respondents did not, in the main, use the term Left or socialism. A new political party is more likely to be successful if it builds itself upon the views and language as expressed by the people. Those involved could be described as articulating a demand for a 'New Republic of Equality, Social Justice and Democracy' that is built upon the original Proclamation of a Republic. They are looking for a party that they can unify all the various excluded groups, from the rural to the urban, the poor, working and suffering middle classes, something a majority can identify with, such as an Irish Podemos, an 'Is feidir linn' (yes we can) party, or a *New Republic of Equality, Social Justice, Democracy and Rights* party.

There are a number of possibilities in relation to the potential emergence of such a new political party. Firstly, politics could continue as usual if there are no such new political parties or alliances emerging from the water movement or other new protest movements. Secondly, Sinn Féin could form an alliance with others from the water movement, the radical Left and/or civil society to create an alternative political platform for the elections. Thirdly, the radical left in the PBP and AAA could form a new United Left Alliance. Finally, independents, communities and grassroots trade unions could form a broad anti-austerity 'New Republic' type party that explicitly states its intention is to win a majority public support for a government 'of the people not the elites', which could win the support of many anti-establishment and undecided voters and a wide breadth of societal groups. This final option, in an alliance with other new groupings, Sinn Féin and a potential new ULA could, if not at this election, then by the subsequent election, (which could come sooner than expected given the likely political volatility) form an anti-austerity, *Republic of Equality, Social Justice, Democracy, and Rights* government without the involvement of any of the establishment, conservative, parties (Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, Renua, Labour).

#### *There is the space for a New Republic of Equality, Social Justice, Democracy, and Rights party*

There is clearly the space and necessity for such a new political force. There is the potential and opportunity for such a new party to emerge in Ireland given the extent of the current crisis and new politics of protest. This new political force could provide the answer to the most outstanding task that the anti-establishment forces face. That is how to win a majority of the population behind an alternative political project that challenges the establishment parties of FF/FG/Labour and their ex-members in Renua. The danger is that without such a new party we will end up in the first scenario outlined above – that many voters will end up voting for another establishment government because the lack of an alternative. Furthermore,

independents could be swayed to supporting a government led by Fianna Fail or Fine Gael. While some commentators argue that Ireland needs a new conservative party like the Reform Alliance, the Irish water protests and the outcome of this survey suggest otherwise. Commentators will still assert that there is an inherent conservatism within the Irish voter which will mean that, when faced with choosing a government, the majority will vote for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The status quo of austerity, neoliberalism, inequality, and privatisation could, in fact, be strengthened in the coming election if the independent sentiment is captured by a new party of the right, such as the Renua, or even independents supporting Fine Gael to remain in government or put Fianna Fail back into power. This would also be continued through a Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael coalition, which is a real possibility as indicated by their current pacts in councils across the country.

Neither Sinn Féin, nor the independents nor the radical Left alone are going to achieve a majority in the short to medium term without radical change. Sinn Féin is likely to be the largest anti-austerity and Left party in Ireland in the coming years and therefore, it will play an important role in the formation of any future anti-austerity, rights-based and progressive government. It would seem obvious that any additional new party should indicate its willingness to work with Sinn Féin and other political groups that agree with a government for a 'New Republic' as this would indicate clearly its desire for an alternative government. In regard to the radical Left and socialists, they have to decide if they are going to support such an alternative government, and reduce their divisive actions and attacks on others on the political Left, and their dogmatic approaches that alienate many potential supporters, or whether they want to stay as purely oppositional forces.

But a new party that is clearly anti-establishment, standing for the ordinary people against the cronies and elite, made up of leaders that are new (or clearly independent from) to the political system, could gain the additional support required to create an anti-establishment, anti-austerity, government.

The European dimension is also very important as without radical change to the European structures then Ireland is limited as to what it can do. Many Irish people are clearly seeing this and desire a change in Europe and are looking for a government that works in solidarity with other progressive governments who are pushing for radical change such as the Greek government and not against them as the current Irish government is doing. The coming election could also offer a new government an even stronger mandate to get a deal from Europe on our unsustainable (and unjust) debt. The last two governments played the 'good child' of the class and made no real progress on this. Electing a government with a mandate and willingness to demand a significant debt write-down will be much more likely to achieve this, particularly if it expresses solidarity with Greece.

Clearly there is a need for much more serious consideration, thought and analysis to be given to the challenge of how a new political movement could be developed to represent and strengthen those protesting against austerity, for radical political reform towards democracy, equality, social justice, i.e. a New Republic. The sooner the new party starts, the more likely the coming election, and subsequent elections and possibility government, will be influenced by the new party. But this process of creating a New Republic should also go beyond the elections to a process of empowerment of people through various local to national scales, in workplaces, schools, the media, universities - creating a new citizen engagement in a true democracy.

There is, despite the caricatures of division, much ground for agreement amongst protest movements and Left parties in regard to an alternative policy programme that could include some of the following:

1. Reversing water and household charges and the aspects of austerity that have affected the most vulnerable, such as cuts to disability, lone parents and community services;
2. Standing up to the EU to achieve a significant write-down on Ireland's bank-related debt (stop the conversion of Anglo Debt into national debt) and a write-down of mortgage arrears for struggling families, similar to that done by Iceland;
3. Addressing inequality through increased wages for the lower paid;
4. An historic expansion of public investment to provide social and low-cost housing, state-provided affordable childcare, improved transport (e.g. light rail in Cork, Galway, and Limerick), and a public health system that would end the apartheid between public and private healthcare;
5. A series of referendums on returning power to local areas and communities and enshrining basic rights in the constitution such water, housing, health, and welfare;
6. A state and indigenous-led economic strategy centred on environmental technology and moving us away from the dependency on multinationals, thus enabling the creation of employment.

This programme could be funded through the saving of €2bn a year on debt interest payments, extension of our deficit targets, a wealth tax, an increase in effective rate of corporation tax, changes to private pension reliefs, the financial transaction tax, stimulus investment from Europe, and extracting a greater return (or nationalising) from our natural resources (gas, water, seas, wind).

The state-led economic development and public investment would also provide significant multiplier impacts such as increased tax revenue and reduced unemployment spend. These are not utopian policies. They are implemented by countries much more successful than Ireland and by those that have avoided the boom-bust neoliberal model, such as Sweden, France, Denmark and Austria.

Its aim has to be for the forces of anti-austerity and anti-establishment and the Left to not just be in government but to be the government. The experience of Labour and the Greens highlight that it is pointless for smaller 'left' parties to support larger right wing parties in government. Unless the movement for a New Republic can get a majority support for an alternative policy programme then it is counterproductive to go into government.

However, the alternative policies of a new party should be determined democratically by the people at the grassroots. A key demand of the movement is for genuine and participatory democracy. Either trade unions or Left political organisations



setting out the policies first rather than developing them from the grassroots ignores the demands of the people and misses the aspirations of the new movements and is doomed to repeat the mistakes of the establishment parties.

There is much to be learned from how Podemos has built itself so successfully in a short period of time. For example, a new party or movement in Ireland could initiate community based forums and groups where people could identify their key issues that could be united around, for example, of opposition to austerity, for democracy, equality, social justice, human rights, for public services and for a New Republic. Right2Water could, rather than becoming a new party, facilitate and support the emergence of a new party that might involve some of its constituent groups. It could work on facilitating local and national coordination of a new party, facilitating alliances and dialogue and host citizen's forums in every constituency (and people's forums in every town, village, community, work place) where ordinary citizens, the independents, unions, communities, could come together in a public way and develop a Peoples Charter for a New Republic. Candidates could stand on this charter. This could also create local forums where citizens could engage in the water movement, other protest movements and elections and provide accountability so that after the election these forums should recall and assess how their candidates have stood up to the promises. Any programme for government could go to these Citizens Constituency Forums before being agreed upon. The political forces to help bring this about are there - independents, and community groups and campaigns across the country –from the cities to small towns, academia, trade unions, NGOs, new Says No groups – these could provide a solid leadership to start this new party and movement.

Nothing is inevitable about this process of change – it is about how the balance of forces and power are altered– which is the outcome of a political and social battle in which ordinary citizens must play the central part. While the current European system restricts the potential of radical change, it is in a crisis that necessitates the changing of the rules, and building an alternative Europe of solidarity. The question will be whether the forces of anti-austerity, anti-establishment and progressive Left can build solidarity and alliances to ensure the new rules favour the people of Europe rather than the elite.

Since the foundation of the state Ireland has always been led by one of the two centre right parties (FF or FG). But now there is a real possibility of an anti-establishment, or 'citizens' government of equality, the Left and social justice that could begin a more profound processing of creating and facilitating the development of a *New Republic of Equality, Social Justice, Democracy, and Rights*. The possibility of this is shown by how communities, ordinary citizens, and smaller trade unions, in alliance with the left political parties in the water protests have created the biggest popular movement in Irish history. Most significantly, the Right to Water campaign has shown that the 'left' and anti-establishment groups, so often caricatured by their division, can work together.

But be very aware that if such a new party was to emerge and an anti-austerity and anti-establishment government was to become a real possibility then the elite and establishment would undertake a media offensive that would make the media coverage of the water movement look positively supportive. They will make the case why the economy will be 'wrecked' as bond markets won't lend to us and corporations will leave. But the fact is that other countries are turning to alternative governments, and radical alternative solutions are required to address the crisis of the people of Europe. The political system is fracturing across Europe and we are likely to see this further in the coming elections in the UK and Spain. People are looking for alternatives and if the progressive forces who believe in equality and social justice do not provide a populist people's alternative then other more sinister and conservative forces such as right wing anti-immigrant groups like UKIP will stand up and represent the disillusionment and growing disgust with traditional politics and Europe. This is because the current crisis of democracy and representation is not just in Ireland, as I explained earlier, but it taking place across Europe.

There is a clear responsibility on those who stand for such a new politics and claim to represent the movement for radical change to work on initiating a democratic process of local and national mobilisation that could create a new party as otherwise the danger is that these hopes and idealism and the awakening of the people will end up with disengagement and disillusionment and the moment of opportunity for radical change in the interests of the majority and fulfilling the unfinished revolution will be lost.

Overall, the potential for transformation is dependent upon the continued mobilisation of the water movement, extending protest and education and empowerment to other issues in social movements and trade unions, and the creation of a new political party/movement/alliance (perhaps for a *New Republic of Equality, Social Justice, Rights and Democracy*) that aims to win a majority and take political power.

Will those forces who made up the Right 2 Water movement overcome Brendan Behan's curse about the Irish left that the first item on the agenda is always the 'split'? Will a new party manage to bring in the communities, the citizens and ordinary people newly politicised and seeking an alternative? Will it manage to convince the majority of the Irish people that this is the alternative government they want and need? That depends ultimately on what we all actually do about it.

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