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FORWARD #25

A YOUNG VOICE FOR SOCIALISM



A Personal Experience of Precarious Housing - Gentrification - Student Accommodation

IRELAND'S HOUSING ISSUE



CONNOLLY YOUTH MOVEMENT

Campaign for Public Housing

In the past, young people were able to receive a home from the local authority which led to localized construction projects. Most people in Ireland lived in homes built by their local corporation or council, the same model existed in the United Kingdom where local authorities constructed mass local housing. Seems simple, right? Today the waiting list for housing is over 80,000 while almost 10,000 people, a third of which are children languish in homelessness. So what changed to create this horrible reality?

One of the things that the local authority stopped doing was hiring its own construction workers, plumbers, etc. Particularly during the much beloved Celtic Tiger, it opted to instead subcontract these services. Everything became subcontracted to the point that local authorities could no longer construct housing at-cost but instead had to take into consideration the profit margins of all the middlemen involved. Therefore, the cost of housing now became the cost that also included the dramatic profit margins of developers and all the other subcontractors that were involved, rather than just the material and wages that the local authority would have to pay.

In short, housing became a commodity rather than a pillar of society. Today, the average rent in Cork, Dublin and Galway is around €1,100 per month, while the average buying age is 34. This is the first time in history that we have had a housing epidemic of this nature while simultaneously seeing thousands of houses stand empty all over the country. The right to make a profit and private property supersedes the right of hundreds of thousands of

people to have a permanent roof over their head and security of tenure. The Connolly Youth Movement vehemently disagrees and our project titled 'Connolly Barracks' is our statement to Cork and Ireland that we do not recognise the right to private property over the right to housing.

Our statement has only been a nugget of the fight against the housing emergency. Another aspect to this battle is the Campaign for Public Housing. Launched in October, the Campaign provides much needed analysis into the left's fight for housing. Most political parties have been making a call for social housing – fine, yet that does not address the underlying question of developers, speculators and landlords cashing in even on social housing. We do not require more social housing, we do not require more affordable housing, what we require is a nationwide declaration of a housing emergency and the mass construction of public housing in hard hit areas. What is the distinction you might ask?

Public housing at a differential rate is the key demand of the campaign and what it means is that housing will be provided to all, irrespective of income, but the rent you pay back into the coffers of the state, not private funds will be determined on the basis of your income. In other words; from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. Those on low incomes will still be provided with housing and give some sort of financial input, those on higher incomes will also be provided with housing and give a greater financial input. Very straightforward.

Other key demands of the Campaign

include an end to all economic evictions, this reaches out to current home owners being turfed out by the KBCs of this world, as well as any illegal and legal terminations of tenancies. The landlord class in Ireland is on the offensive as they recognise, much like we Communists recognise, that the fight for housing is on. If they continue to triumph over us we will be facing ever higher rents. Not just one generation will be left without housing, but the one after us and many more. Another demand of the Campaign is the creation of a Tenant Bill of Rights that would safeguard all tenants against unscrupulous efforts by landlords and ensure that their rights are guaranteed. It is worth noting that recent cases brought to the Rental Tenancy Board have been interesting and the body has shown that it has legislative teeth.

Public housing for our generation is essential to the future of people living in Ireland. We are already having our working pay and conditions ripped apart in the workplace, but now even what we would have thought would be a right has been taken from us. We must work to live, grinding every day for pennies and filling the coffers of the hotels and call centres for a reward that does not even cover the costs of surviving. We must begin to struggle for public housing as it will permanently impact not only the landlord-capitalist class in Ireland but also allow our young people to stay in the country instead of constantly emigrating.

The question of housing effects all other political campaigns and works. Public housing is the solution - we need and demand that it is put into our constitution. AH.



A Personal Experience of Precarious Housing

As a person who has lived in 18 houses throughout their life and who is only reaching their 18th birthday in June, I have quite an extensive experience with housing issues. I have lived in a rural environment almost exclusively all my life and I grew up within close proximity of all my ex-houses, a reminder of the past in these houses and the torment caused by them. The main reasons why my single parent family of three constantly moved was simply rent. When your mother who lived on benefits until 2011 and started working in a local grocery store earning just over £100 a week, you can expect a lot of difficulties. The cheapest we have had on our monthly rent was around £350+. There have been numerous occasions where we have had to sacrifice luxuries such as the internet, heating or electricity in order to

afford living with a roof under my head, and yes, this is also with help from the state to pay the rent.

The worst experience my family experienced was also in our favourite house, number 12. It had everything we needed, warm rooms and a working shower (which is surprisingly hard to come by). However, the problem was with the landlords, a husband and wife from the Glens of Antrim. Not only would they enter the house with none of my family in the house and snoop about (we know this because they would ring my mother and complain about the mess of one of our rooms etc.), but they would constantly harass my mother through text and in person, accusing her of not paying the correct rent or simply putting her down, every time damaging her already volatile self-esteem.

I remember promising my mum when I was younger that I would become rich and build her a house so that we wouldn't have to move again, but I believe that my past and current circumstances are probably a major reason to why I have invested myself in studying Marxism. It has given me an explanation of why my family has had to experience all of this; an example being that since most landlords own only a

few houses, they are not seen as a high concern to the council or any other authority as major property associations are. This gives the already exploitative landlords more leverage over the tenants who are paying the landlord in order to access a fundamental need of shelter.

In my case, my mother who during the day is exploited in her workplace, returns to a house that is not in any way her own property, but one of a person who essentially pays rent to the banks and therefore in the grand scheme of things, the capitalist class. The majority of landlords within the U.K are workers who are under full time employment but invest in housing in order to climb the "property ladder". Whether or not these people are to blame for the housing crisis on the island of Ireland can be debated, however is the exploitation of your class for profit something you can turn a blind eye towards?

Public housing for all would remove the necessity of forcing people to ask themselves this question, and remove the experience many tenants have experienced of being trapped in the control of irresponsible, intrusive or exploitative landlords.

P. O'N.

Seizing the Dialogue: A Youth Strategy Against the Housing Emergency

In our country, there is an unprecedented level of class solidarity within the ownership class. Landlords have banded together in the creation of a golden age for slum exploitation, tax avoidance and artificial scarcity of housing. The state, half of whose TDs are millionaires, has failed to allocate sufficient funding for the construction of social housing. The constitutionally sacrosanct status of private property and the class nature of the state prevent a right to public housing from entering the dialogue. The same contradiction is seen as in all cases of artificial scarcity – there is a desperate need for a resource, but production is being restricted to ensure profit is maximised.

We have failed to grasp the power inherent in a shared class agenda, which the politicians in the Dail have enforced in a mutually beneficial arrangement with their class compatriots. The forces of wealth and power in Ireland have a strategy, but we lack one. Our efforts, no matter how passionate or stubborn, cannot produce concrete results until we have both disciplined

unity and a clear vision of how we can circumvent our disadvantaged position. The Connolly Youth Movement aims to serve this function on behalf of its own class by leading from the front, using our own lives to demonstrate to others how gains can be wrested from our class enemies with determined action. To do this, we need an analysis and we need strategies of our own. We must study to perform the opposite function of bourgeois analysts. We can think of the economy as functioning in tiers of security, in terms of the 'property ladder'. In the **first tier**, 10,000 people with illness, substance issues or simply bad luck are living on the streets. Young people have no more recourse to help from the state than anyone else who's homeless. To receive social protection, you need an address and once a person has fallen through the cracks, they are viewed as nobody's responsibility. Meanwhile, people's coffees are poured and their desks cleaned by people who belong to the ranks of the hidden homeless. The **second tier** consists of people in social housing who are facing increasing ghettoization as their choices are limited and their agency is hacked away. Single parents are trying to raise children next door or beneath houses with criminal activities, and entire communities are being abandoned to absent facilities. The project of building a modern society without no-opportunities address codes has been

abandoned by the state, as their mission of creating a core political support base of multiple-home owners has been achieved. Social housing was not intended to be a permanent resource for families but as a stepping stone for working class people in the past to 'rise up the property ladder' by saving to buy their house, and then mortgaging a second.

The **third tier** consists of privately rented accommodation, which is the centre point of struggles facing young people without an established foothold in social housing. Students and young workers cannot get a mortgage due to low income, they spend half of their income on rent, they are priced out of city centres where they can accessibly pursue educational opportunities while 40,000 vacant apartment blocks exist nationally. This group is the most rapidly increasing, rising from 7% in 2000 to 18% in 2016. Meanwhile, landlords are pocketing thousands in tax-free income from desperate young people living in terrible conditions, demanding payment in cash. Reporting it isn't an option when someone needs a room to keep their job or degree.

The **fourth tier** consists of first time home buyers who might consider themselves safe, but there are now multiple cases of banks like KBC using paramilitaries to evict young families from their homes by force. The nice bank which told you (as it always



does) that it's the "right time to buy" has no qualms sending paramilitaries to your door to throw you onto the street when you're in arrears. Some people would readily blame others for their poverty, but emergency accommodation is never more than a redundancy away. The **fifth tier**, of course, is the landowning class. Some members of this class may once have been working class themselves, but used opportunities provided by social housing and state jobs which no longer exist to save and enter the game of ownership and speculation.

The point of intervention where the Connolly Youth Movement can make the most difference is the third tier. This is where disillusioned young people are concentrated, those who pay the highest proportion of their wage, and who are at a direct interface with landlords and their representatives. These are the people who can be made homeless with the least effort. While they are constricted the most in terms of action by their precarity, class consciousness should be more easily developed in this group because of the highly visible nature of their exploitation.

The Connolly Youth Movement has won successes in Cork with the development of an occupation initiative centred on and by branch members. The immediate goal of this effort is to create a connected housing system which both realises our ideals in prac-

tice and provides a pool of expertise to create a grassroots coalition of mutually supported occupations of vacant houses, taking advantage of squatting law to evade eviction. Our ultimate goal is to force the state to recognise that its policies have made a sector ungovernable.

Our belief is that if we can break the status quo by diverting tenants into rent-free self-operated accommodation, we can change young people's paralysis of action into a directly experienced radical awareness of their control over their environment. The housing market in our cities operates by mechanism of supply and demand, and by creating an alternative and more favourable supply, we can create a movement that forces landlords to lower prices and accept that their monopoly on rents is no longer viable. By combining this forward thrust with ancillary rent strikes, where occupants refuse to pay rent or leave the accommodation, we can force the racketeering of the landlords into a state of its own crisis. The radius of universities, a large community with a shared forum, provides a unique weapon for strikes if student unions can develop the courage to support those they are supposed to represent.

Houses cannot be scabbed. New tenants cannot be brought in to generate profit from capital which is already occupied. Workers' power, by affecting profits, can force the state to intercede

to protect its larger interests. This will be the central mission of CYM branches from the 26th of May. By providing young workers with access to the necessities denied by the state and capitalism, we will prove the superiority of socialism and collective ownership. No empty slogans, words, or promises. We are advocating neither for hand-outs or assistance from above, but a movement for urban property reclamations that come from the youth for the youth, with workers supporting each other with materials, time and knowledge.

The resolution of this issue stands with self-organisation of red youth. This has not been a phenomenon in Ireland in recent history, and the ruling class is laughing at us. In the Repeal debate, young people were scorned as being stupid and frivolous, while the rich supported punitive measures which they will never face themselves. A huge impetus will be needed to network people together to stand as a class and this is where our branches step in as organisers of squatting workshops, sources of political education, and advocates for immediate action in communities. This is where individual members will come into their own as representatives of their class. We will confront the slow attrition of our livelihood that is quickly reducing us to serfs and forge a new era of lived class solidarity. FT.



Report on Gentrification

The housing situation in Ireland is depressing to say the least. Some landlords are charging upwards of €1,400 a month (roughly £1240) for what amounts to a one room studio apartment. People are left stunned by these meagre lodgings and they don't seem to recognise the reason behind rising rent prices and available space stagnating or even decreasing. These are symptoms of an illness rooted in the paradigm of profit-motivated production. However, along with these issues there is another that is hardly ever talked about in Ireland; gentrification. For those readers unfamiliar with the practice of gentrification, it can be defined as the purchase of cheap property and the creation of more marketable spaces such as luxury apartments, artisan cafés and delicatessens.

Where workers are living in deteriorating neighbourhoods, capitalists are eyeing up an easy way to capitalise on their situation. This phenomenon is not an isolated occurrence, rather it is part and parcel of the logic of capitalist expansion. A 1983 study found that in 5 US cities "nearly a quarter (23%) of residents in these urban neighbourhoods were displaced due to eviction, increased rent, or the fact that the house they were renting was sold between 1978-1980".

"Improvements of towns, accompanying the increase of wealth, by the demolition of badly built quarters, the erection of palaces for banks, warehouses, etc., the widening of streets for business traffic, for the carriages of luxury, and for the introduction of tramways, etc., drive away the poor into even worse and more crowded hiding places."
- Karl Marx, Das Kapital 1867

In *The Gentrification-Social Structure Dialectic: A Toronto Case Study* (1991), the authors describe gentrifiers' socio-economic features. It stated they are relatively young and educated white collar workers. In addition, "gentrifying households have few or no children and gentrifiers earn more than incumbent residents". Researchers discovered that "gentrifiers hold different values from mainstream middle-class members, most of whom still opt for suburban residences. Gentrifiers make greater use of recreational and cultural activities and exhibit 'distinctive' consumption tastes which are characterised by a dislike of mass-produced goods and a penchant for historic objects and buildings". Poor inhabitants are numerous and lack control of property and the means of production. Bourgeois gentrifiers are smaller in number but have control over property. Meanwhile, a midpoint between the business owners of the neighbourhood and the poor is formed by middle class renting inhabitants.

They have a complex relationship with the neighbourhood, fetishising its authenticity while marginalising its producers. The dawn of neo-liberalism and globalisation of production, coupled with imperialism's evolution is such that it's led to the concentration of capital so that the working class in imperialist countries is largely being paid with the surplus taken from the third world. Due to this move towards relying on the surplus provided by third world

labour, we find an increasing population of unemployed occupants in urban areas, beside an increasingly bored and adventurous affluent youth. These restless inheritors of the bourgeoisie are confronted with a tempting target in their own backyards, and so they choose gentrification, which eliminates the class identity of these communities beneath a saccharine veneer of respectable rebelliousness.

The reason no one has decided to stand up to the gentrifiers is due to the image they present themselves with. As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, we now live in an era where it seems impossible to oppose the establishment due to how pleasant it makes itself seem through contribution to charitable causes. To quote him in his book *Violence*:

"The same philanthropists who give millions for AIDS or education in tolerance have ruined the lives of thousands through financial speculation and thus created the conditions for the rise of the very intolerance that is being fought. [...] When we are bombarded by the heartwarming news of a debt cancellation or a big humanitarian campaign to eradicate a dangerous epidemic, just move the postcard a little to catch a glimpse of the obscene figure of the liberal communist at work beneath."

Capital is quick to adapt and in this new postmodern, neo-liberal culture and economy, we now see these same people being made into integral parts of the community, with big corporations donating to NGOs, exploitive bosses becoming more personable with their workers, and the very same landlords doing the same actions but under the pretense of "sprucing the place up." We must however, remember to always stand on guard and be highly critical of these people and their activities, to prevent the same mass exodus of young people from other city centres that has been witnessed throughout Europe and America. FC.



The Front Line in the Battle for Class Unity

Housing has often been the arena in which class consciousness and militant action has been instilled in the hearts and minds of the Irish youth. This struggle is ever present in the North. Segregation of housing in urban centres of Derry and Belfast remains an obstacle to social cohesion and the unity of class action from both Nationalist and Unionist communities. Stormont, underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) has largely excluded the working class from its benefits, with the 1998 agreement only serving to build limited cross-sectarian relations between careerist political entrepreneurs.

The Independent Housing Commission for Northern Ireland's 2017 report underlines the hunger among the disenfranchised working class for mixed housing and the extent to which the polarisation of communities exacerbates the prominent levels of child poverty within Belfast. With over 90% of public housing segregated on religious grounds there is appetite for a mixed approach to assist the need for social integration with "80% saying they would prefer to live in a mixed religion neighbourhood." It is no coincidence that Northern Ireland constituencies have some of the highest child poverty within the UK, with West Belfast having the second highest rate of child poverty in the UK behind Central Manchester.

There are still 109 peace walls across Northern Ireland, many in North Belfast which experienced some of the

worst violence of the conflict. The Northern Ireland Assembly pledged to remove all walls by 2023, this is a highly ambitious yet progressive step in easing sectarian tensions with cross-divide support. Steps have been taken in fulfilling this objective with progress being made when the Springfield Avenue barrier was taken down in September last year. This proves that with a willing working people, change is possible. A recent report found that "62% of the Protestant/Unionist community and 73% of the Catholic/Nationalist community do say they wish to see the barriers removed within the next generation." These radical changes in the architectural makeup of the city are facilitated by a changing demographic in the North. This includes the youngest average population in the UK, with more open attitudes than previous generations.

The ever-growing secular population in the North will go some way in decreasing tension between flashpoint areas. The Peace Walls, the front line to the sectarian conflict, will serve as our front line in the struggle for class unity. However, our actions must be conducted within the present material conditions and older generations remain permanently marked by the conflict. Peace Lines mustn't be removed until communities feel safe in doing so. As the post-conflict generation now enter the world of work and the polling booths, the shift away from sectarian neoliberalism is ahead of us

in the North. The Connolly Youth Movement must ensure that class politics storm through Belfast in the tradition of Connolly and Larkin.

Why do we have sectarian housing in the North? Sectarian housing is a blunt tool with which the powers of capital break us apart. This sectarian divide was inflamed in the minds of those living in Belfast throughout the non-sensical sectarian killings in the Troubles. Those in Nationalist and Unionist communities in 'flashpoint' areas often moved into 'safe' areas where the risk of attack by petrol bombs and stones from the other was significantly reduced. This was a result of some of the most horrific scenes witnessed in the 30 years of conflict that scarred the Province. On the 15th of August 1969 the RUC, followed by a crowd of Unionists opened fire on rioters and burned people from their homes in scenes of violence which left 6 people shot dead and 1,820 families forced to abandon their homes. Now in 2018, as armed campaigns are long over, we can develop a united working people in the tradition of great Irish socialists that went before us, to strike fear into the hearts of our oppressors.

In 1907 James Larkin, trade union activist and socialist, called a general strike of dockworkers during which the Royal Irish Constabulary refused to break up the strike action. The fearful Unionist aristocracy quickly retaliated by organising a regular British Army presence to quell any action. By 1919, a 40,000-strong engineering workers strike demanding a 44-hour week, a display of labour power resulting in a Belfast without trams, gas or electricity for 4 weeks. The greatest ever display of the iron fist of organised labour in Belfast resulted in the expulsion of 11,000 Catholics and 1,850 Protestant trade union activists. Sectarian measures were implemented, and Protestant workers began receiving benefits relative to Catholic workers such as access to jobs in manufacturing and better. Capital controlled organised labour by granting concessions to one side of the sectarian divide.

It seems unlikely that a united working class can be achieved without a proactive and sustained commitment by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). According to Savills, existing NIHE stock needs investment of £7bn over the next 30 years and nearly half its stock needs immediate attention. But there is still reluctance to change of status from the NIHE to enable it to borrow against its considerable assets to provide the adequate social homes and development of mixed housing projects badly required

as a result of the neoliberal austerity agenda. This provides the Connolly Youth Movement with an opportunity to build a campaign for mixed, non-sectarian social housing in Belfast akin to the current 'Campaign for Public Housing' facilitated by our comrades in Dublin and Cork. Such a campaign would also call for a choice-based lettings system which, in effect encourages those currently living in or wishing to be accommodated in social housing to "bid" for properties outside of their immediate neigh-

bourhoods

The political class of the North today aims to divide Unionist and Nationalist workers through housing to strengthen the hand of capital. A green or orange Belfast is a different shade of capitalism and it is a lot less terrifying to the faceless corporations on Lanyon Quay than a Red Belfast. Class solidarity will be built within the labour movement and expressed in campaigns to bring down the Peace Walls and build mixed social housing. RL.

"Such a unity is infinitely precious, and infinitely important to the working class. Disunited, the workers are nothing. United, they are everything." - V.I Lenin

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The Connolly Youth Movement is a youth organisation committed to fighting for democracy, freedom and unity in this country. The CYM takes part in the struggle to build socialism in Ireland and everywhere around the globe.

Since 2008 the crisis in Ireland has deepened which has seen many talented and gifted young people leave this island in search of a better life abroad. We as a youth organisation are fundamentally opposed to any government using its youth as a safety valve in trying to ease economic and political tensions. So we are determined to stay and fight the injustice brought on this and future generations.

Working with progressive movements to develop young workers' and students' consciousness in their own proud history and culture. As a member of the World Federation of Democratic Youth we struggle in opposition to imperialism and for liberation around the globe of all oppressed peoples, including ourselves.

The CYM has branches in Dublin, Belfast and Cork.

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