

# The Workers Party

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## Workers Party Submission to R2W Consultation.

### Introduction:

*The Workers' Party is committed to fundamental change, to a sustained challenge to the system in which we live. We stand for the overthrow of capitalism, to place power firmly in the hands of workers and to construct a socialist society and to build a secular, socialist, unitary state on the island of Ireland, a Republic.*

*The Workers' Party congratulates the R2W group on their initiative in organising the very successful event on May 1<sup>st</sup> and also on the organising the conference planned for June 13<sup>th</sup>.*

*We think the consultation documentation already circulated provides a useful framework for debate and discussion and that a useful political initiative can develop. In that spirit we make the observations below.*

### 1. Wages, Labour Rights, Decent Work and Employment –

- \* We affirm that all adults have the right to meaningful work with proper rates of pay and decent working conditions.
- \* That all workers have the right to join and be represented by a trade union and that legislation on union recognition is immediately introduced.
- \* That the “Living Wage” should be the basic wage level for a full weeks work.
- \* That no worker should have their health or wellbeing placed in jeopardy by their conditions of employment.
- \* That the gross exploitation of jobseekers through unpaid internships and schemes like Jobsbridge be outlawed.
- \* That zero-hour contracts, no matter how they are labelled, are outlawed.
- \* That staff recruited via private or other labour agencies cannot be paid at rates of remuneration less than that prevailing for other workers in the sector, or under terms and conditions that are inferior to the industry norm.

### 2. Banking, Public Debt and Private Debt –

- \* We call for State control of all our banking institutions.
- \* That the state uses its present ownership of the AIB/EBS to create a viable state-owned commercial bank that will offer an alternative to the existing monopoly of the private banking corporations.
- \* The state must repudiate the debt accrued to pay bondholders of Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide.
- \* We recognise that the mortgage arrears crisis is multifaceted.
- \* Banks have already received state funding to cover mortgage write-off.

\* Mortgage debt on private homes must be separated from mortgage debt on buy-to-let properties or “trophy homes”.

\* Reformed personal insolvency legislation, split mortgages, and long-term tenancy agreements must be used to solve this problem without adding to the already massive housing crisis.

\* We support the Credit Union Movement as progressive, community-based alternatives to the banks.

### **3. Public Services: Health, Education, Childcare, Public Transport and Others –**

#### **A: Towards the creation of a comprehensive health service by:**

- Taking full control of all publicly funded and assisted medical, surgical and nursing care institutions
- Ending the two-tier health system
- Free primary health-care for all
- Ending Hospital charges
- Ending the scandal of private consultants' beds in public hospitals
- Freeing up acute beds by providing humane and dignified convalescent centre and nursing homes
- Providing Adequate hospital beds (as already promised)
- A massive investment in mental health services
- Replacing the Lunacy Regulation Act (Ireland) Act 1871, with the 2013 Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill as promised in the Programme for Government.
- Ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Proper funding of the health system from a fair tax system – ending tax subsidies to private hospitals, nursing homes, and insurance companies.

#### **B: Towards the creation of a comprehensive Education service.**

- The education system must be developed on an egalitarian, democratic and secular basis. All schools receiving state funding must be under democratic control and management. Sadly, one of the hallmarks of the Irish education system is the huge discrepancy that exists between schools in relation to pupil background, the manner and extent of resourcing, ethos, facilities available, and the academic progress of students.
- Education should be free at the point of entry from pre-school to post-graduate studies, with all educational requirements, including books and IT equipment, provided free at primary and post-primary level and adequate grants provided to students in higher and further education.
- "Voluntary contributions" in publicly funded schools should be prohibited.
- That no privately owned schools and colleges should receive funding from state resources, and that no salaries or wages of those employed by the same shall be paid by the state or any of its agencies..
- All schools should provide open access to all children, regardless of ability.
- Private schools should be obliged to put facilities in place without state funding to support their students with special needs.
- For-profit companies should not be allowed to exploit the publicly funded education system through recruitment practices.

- All students should have access to up-to-date science, language, ICT, and sporting facilities.
- Comprehensive and properly-funded supports should be put in place to facilitate children with special needs, those in danger of dropping out, or students at risk of not achieving their potential.
- Financial and learning supports should be available to facilitate adults re-enter the education system at any stage.

### **C: Childcare in Ireland**

- Childcare in Ireland has developed not as a strategic policy around families and children's welfare but as a system to ensure 'women could work when needed'.
- The Workers' Party argues for a state childcare system based on the primary school model, encompassing infant care, early childhood education and after school care, and which is accessible to all parents. This would replace the present public subvented market model which is inaccessible to many, particularly young mothers in less well-off communities who are denied an opportunity to prepare themselves for the workplace through return to education.
- It is estimated that a large proportion of the funding of this service would come from the knock-on benefits to the exchequer yielded by such a model

### **4. Housing, including Public and Private Housing, Social and Rental**

- There is a huge housing crisis in this country.
- House building has virtually collapsed in this country.
- Ireland has thousands of unemployed and exiled building workers,
- There are thousands of empty houses and ghost estates in towns and villages throughout the country where there is no present or likely future need for them.
- Due to concerted government policy over three decades public housing has moved from the local authorities to private builders /landlord.
- We need a massive investment in Local Authority housing.
- Control of the cost of building land through immediate implementation of the Kenny Report
- A punitive derelict sites tax applied to hoarded / non developed residentially zoned land.
- Proper regulation and inspection of all new residential building.
- Rent control and a regulatory mechanism be established providing full oversight in the private rented market

### **5. Equality – Social, Cultural, Political and Economic –**

#### **A: Reproductive Rights**

- The Workers' Party wholeheartedly supports the Policy Submission to Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment of Bunreacht na hÉireann as submitted to the Right2Water Campaign by 'The Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment'. We do so in the belief that barriers to reproductive rights for women are also barriers to full social, economic, political, and workplace equality. It is, we believe, a woman's human right to have autonomy over her own body.

- The 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment equates a woman's life with that of a foetus. It denies a woman the right to an abortion even when her health, other than where suicide is a risk, is in danger. Although women can travel abroad to obtain an abortion this is not an option for many women, including migrant women, who haven't got the money.
- The 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment is an affront to women's dignity. The Worker's Party reiterates the call of the Trade Union Repeal 8<sup>th</sup> Campaign to the Right2Water Campaign to have the courage to take a leadership role on repeal and act as persuaders to those who have not yet reached that position.

## **B: Violence against Women**

- Violence against women is a fundamental rights issue and one the Workers' Party believes should be taken much more seriously.
- Austerity has dismantled a fragile system and increased barriers to safety for women and children according to SAFE Ireland – the National Organisation of domestic violence services
- The results of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights survey (2014) revealed that Irish women are far less likely than the European average to contact the Gardaí or any other organisation after enduring abuse.
- One in four women said their needs weren't met when they sought practical help.
- Almost 400,000 women, between the ages of 18 and 74, living in Ireland have experienced either physical or sexual abuse according to the survey.
- 470,000 Irish women have endured psychological abuse from a partner.
- The Workers' Party calls on the R2W Campaign to advocate for the Ratification of the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
- It further calls on the campaign to highlight the extent and enormity of this issue and to advocate for the putting in place of the 2014 – 5 Achievable Goals as set down by SAFE Ireland.

## **C: Gender Identity**

- The Workers' Party in welcoming the announcement by the Tánaiste that the application process under the Gender Recognition Bill will, for people aged 18 years or more, be based on the person's self-declaration by way of a statutory declaration, calls on the R2W Campaign
  - (i) to actively support campaigns for inclusive gender recognition legislation.
  - (ii) to oppose the exclusion of under-16s from the gender recognition legislation and support the Ombudsman for Children's position that 'maintaining an absolute exclusion on young people or their parents seeking a gender recognition certificate is a disproportionate interference with young people's rights to gender recognition'. Without legal protection these young people will be open to discrimination.
  - (iii) to advocate for the introduction of measures to prevent hate crimes against trans people

## **6. EU and International, Trade and Peace –**

*Ireland's foreign policy must:*

- Be based on a vision of a common humanity, equality, global solidarity, international trade for the common good, peaceful relations between states and peaceful resolution of disputes between and within states, and positive neutrality. If these values do not underpin our objective then our foreign policy and external relations descend to unprincipled and Machiavellian pragmatism.
- Place the protection and promotion of human rights at its centre. All aspects of bilateral treaties, including tax treaties, must be compatible with our human rights commitments and must be assessed for negative impacts on developing countries.
- Require multinationals headquartered here to disclose all international related-party transactions producing a significant tax advantage and exchange this information with relevant countries.
- Maintain a commitment to peacekeeping under properly mandated United Nations Chapter VI protocols only.
- Investigate the past and present use of Shannon Airport for illegal activities by USA/NATO.

*The EU serves the interests of big capital and the monopolies. The Workers' Party stands for a different Europe, a Europe based on genuine internationalism, peace, equality, solidarity, dignity, social progress and workers' rights, a respect of and a defence of the environment and the value of all living things over private profit and corporate greed.*

- End the austerity and anti-people measures being implemented by the EU.
- Oppose the introduction of TTIP and CETA.
- Opposing the ongoing militarisation of the EU, including involvement in EU or NATO battlegroups.
- Ban trade with entities operating in Israeli settlements and those complicit in such and support an EU arms embargo on Israel. Support the suspension of Israel from the Euro-Med agreement.
- Oppose the racist policies which are developing a 'Fortress Europe' mentality.

## **7. Political Reform, National and Local, People's Power -**

*We call for*

- \* The building of effective representative and democratically accountable systems of governance at central, regional and local levels of the state
- \* Oireachtas debate and scrutiny of all legislation and directives transposed into Irish laws from the European Parliament or Commission
- \* Full and open Oireachtas debate and scrutiny of all government votes at EU Councils of Ministers
- \* Election to the Seanad by universal suffrage and on the same day as Dáil elections
- \* The creation of real local government and local democracy by divesting powers from central to local government
- \* The enhancement of democracy by divesting powers from Council CEOs to the elected members.
- \* Restoration of democratically elected representative bodies, with local autonomy, to all areas of the state, both rural and urban.

### **Recognising the powerful role of the media in society we:**

- \* Recognise the serious dangers of media monopolisation;
- \* Call for a full review of defamation law;
- \* Demand the immediate repeal of our blasphemy legislation.

### **8. Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change –**

- We recognize the growing level of environmental challenges facing humanity: Climate change; degradation of water resources; destruction of the rain forest; constant soil erosion and desertification; air pollution; the reduction of free green spaces in urban and semi-urban areas; the further commercialization of land.
- The environment will be endangered as long as the private ownership of the means of production exists.
- We are in favour of the social ownership of all the natural resources and the means for their utilization, on production with social prosperity as its criterion.
- Food production, where the people's needs are sacrificed at the altar of the profitability of the monopolies, through the use of GMOs, monoculture, intensive pesticides and herbicides, and price fixing endanger the planet and impoverish our lives.
- Waste management has developed into privileged terrain for the profitability of the monopolies, creating serious dangers for public health.
- The privatization and commodification of large tracts of the public space – areas of natural beauty, beaches, forests, parks etc - is a recipe for environmental degradation.
- The present over-reliance, and intensified exploration and production worldwide, of fossil fuels for our electricity and other energy needs cannot be sustained..

### **9. Public and Private Enterprise Policy, the Indigenous Sector, National Resources**

- We recognise that our commercial state and semi-state companies, across a wide spectrum of economic activities, have been a powerhouse of economic and social development in this state and have traditionally provided stable employment and decent working conditions to thousands of workers.
- We totally oppose the sell-off of any further sections of our commercial state or semi-state enterprises.
- The expansion of our state companies is the central plank of our jobs policy
- The nationalisation of our oil and gas and the creation of a State Energy Company is a vital national prerequisite as a major step to energy security and long term employment in the primary and downstream industries.
- Recognising the importance of the combined agri-food sector to the Irish economy, and specifically to the rural economy, we propose the strengthening of Coillte and Bord na Mona as potential key anchors and drivers in this sector.

## **10. Social Protection, Poverty and Deprivation, Pensions –**

\* Social protection (pensions, unemployment payments, sick pay, anti-poverty measures) and essential social services (health care, education, childcare, etc) can only be effectively delivered by the state.

\* These services can only be funded through an adequate and equitable tax system.

\* Research from the National Disability Council and the Disability Federation of Ireland has shown that people with a disability experience higher everyday costs of living because of their disability when compared to others in society.

\* The immediate restitution of the wide range and harrowing series of cutbacks in finance and services which have decimated working class communities and which have disproportionately impacted on women and children.

## **11. Building a secular Ireland**

\* We commit to the primacy of a secular democratic society based on principles of equality and justice and support the need to defend the state against all those who seek privileges and special treatment on the grounds of their religious belief, whatever that belief.

\* The complete separation between church and state i.e. that there is no place for the special position of any church, denomination or religious belief in the public life or institutions of the state.

\* All citizens must be free to practise their religious beliefs subject to respect for the rights of others, to change their religious affiliation or to choose not to hold any religious belief.

\* No church or religious belief should be endorsed or conferred with any special rights or privileged position by the state.

\* It is the duty of the state to create public institutions and spaces which are religiously neutral and this includes schools, hospitals and places of work.

\* The children of the nation should be educated through and in a properly integrated system of education.

\* The state should abolish religious declarations and oaths for public positions including the office of President and judges with immediate effect.

\* That the existing charity status of all religious organisations and institutions be removed, and that all of their assets and incomes be subjected to the same taxation as other private owned institutions.

## **12. Fiscal and Budgetary Policy, Taxation and Public Expenditure, Social Wage –**

\* A progressive income tax system, applied to all income regardless of source, allied to a progressive Social Insurance system with balanced employee and employer contributions is the most equitable taxation system.

\* Our corporate tax regime must become transparent and we must cease to be a de facto tax haven for multinational firms.

\* Our shadow banking system must be properly regulated and taxed.

\* Spending taxes and charges for state services impact negatively on low income households.

- \* Our target for all state payments must be the Living Wage
- \* An end to the “tax exile” status. These people are tax fugitives who are using an arcane law to rob the Irish state. The hypocrisy with which some of these fugitives then portray themselves as philanthropists adds insult to injury.
- \* The treatment of all income (EG sale of shares, etc) to be on the same basis as PAYE
- \* A complete review of the tax reliefs and shelters.
- \* The introduction of a wealth tax and also the introduction of a windfall tax on land rezoning or speculation.

### **13. Water Policy**

- \* We endorse the position of the United Nations that the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.
  - \* We are totally opposed to privatisation of any aspect of the provision or maintenance of water and sanitation systems.
  - \* Water is not a commodity – as a necessary prerequisite for all animal and plant life it is a social, not a tradable, product.
  - \* Domestic water supply and sanitation must be funded through central taxation.
  - \* The Workers Party opposes the government’s policy of charging for domestic water supplies and calls on the Right to Water campaign to launch a vigorous campaign of non-payment of water charges
  - \* We demand that water and sanitation services should revert to the control of local authorities directly employing all the necessary personnel to operate the system.
  - \* We advocate strongly for water conservation measures and for a public education programme to be put in place in order for people to understand the necessity of water conservation.
  - \* All new homes must have water conservation measures, i.e. rainwater harvesting and/or dual flush systems. The introduction of these measures should not place any additional burden on householders.
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