

OPENING REMARKS

Proinsias De Rossa, Chair of TASC's Board

We are about to hear from an economist and academic who has generated unprecedented media and public interest for a dense academic study on economic inequality. Efforts have been made in predictable quarters to undermine his work but they have been easily repudiated by the rigour of the work done.

Here is a study of 'Capital' which identifies why we are in this place at this time, and the damage that is being done to human beings and our society by a reluctance to abandon 'a dead ideology' to borrow from Keynes.

Professor Piketty will be followed by the Governor of the Irish Central Bank, who is also a Director of the European Central Bank. He therefore is a policy-maker whose views and policies are critical to the well-being of the Irish economy and thus of Irish society. I look forward to his contribution with as much anticipation as I do to Prof Piketty.

Irish Policy makers need to engage in this debate about the causes of rising global inequality and the means by which this might be stemmed and indeed reversed. They need to draw conclusions based on it, and most importantly they need to revise their policies, if they are to remain relevant to citizens' concerns in the Ireland of today, and in demonstrating this relevance, to rebuild confidence in democratic decision-making.

The media also need to facilitate a much more robust debate on social and economic policies. The phrase 'tax burden' should be red-pencilled by every journalist in the country. It's time we began to describe tax as the essential resource it is, if we are to deliver the public services we all need for a decent dignified life from childhood to old age, and all of which are necessary to begin to address economic inequality.

The question for policy makers, those elected obviously, but also the many non-elected people who help shape the policies of the elected, is whether they are prepared to openly engage in this debate

or

Whether they will just smile politely and continue as before with the failed neo-liberalism which is continuing to ruin the lives of those who are paying the price of inequality with blighted, shortened lives.



In Ireland the immediate context is the shaping of the Irish 2015 budget that is being prepared at present.

The wider context is the part it forms of the contributions Irish representatives, Ministers, MEPs and Commissioner, make to shaping the EU's social and economic response to the damage done by unregulated, and democratically unaccountable globalization.

TASC is an independent and politically non-partisan think-tank and our doors are open to all political persuasions which respect the dignity and rights of the human being.

But we are not neutral on fundamental issues, the most fundamental of which must surely be the right to live in a society that does not tolerate the kind of runaway economic inequality that Prof Piketty's analysis demonstrates.

We believe today's debate around the indisputable research findings which Prof Piketty has laboured to produce needs to be carried forward by all political parties in Dáil Éireann. TASC has recently launched a taxation document as a way of seeking to channel that debate and stands ready with your help to assist in the drawing of conclusions in whatever way we can.

The welcome Prof Piketty's work has generated is a signal; a signal that there is a weariness with the old exhausted economic model, a hunger for a better society, and a belief that it can be achieved if parties base policy-making on policy research rather than on focus groups.

This debate must not end this afternoon.

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