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*From a Neo-Liberal to an Egalitarian State:
Imagining a Different Future*



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From a Neo-Liberal to an Egalitarian State: Imagining a Different Future

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Introduction

In this paper I will first outline a framework for creating a more equal and socially just Ireland. I draw on social democratic, feminist and socialist thinking to highlight the differences between the liberal views of equality and social justice that have informed so much of our policy-making, and a more robust equality of condition perspective. I then highlight the importance of focusing on creating a more equal society across different social systems, in the economy, in politics, in culture and in the care domains of life.

Addressing group-based inequalities and structural injustices is essential if we are to imagine a new future. The highly individualistic approach to social justice and equality favoured in the liberal tradition only means that while the faces may change at the top of the hierarchy of privilege or wealth, the injustices are created anew in each generation. It is only a matter of who will be at the bottom as the pyramid of power, wealth and privilege as the hierarchy is not disrupted.

In the second part of the paper, I will highlight some of barriers that we need to overcome if we are to have a new republic, a new Ireland. The barriers that I will focus on in particular are the ideological ones, those invisible barriers that control public consciousness and do not allow us to think differently. I will explore the fears we have of feminism and socialism and their roots in the anti-intellectualism of Irish policy and political culture. Although it is well known sociologically that there is no view from nowhere ideologically, why is this not admitted in political debates? Why is politics about personal styles rather than substantive issues? I will examine the implications of ideological closure, and the implicit censorship of new political ideas and concepts in Ireland. And I will argue that this closure has brought us to a place where neo-liberal capitalism and deep patriarchal values are entrenched in Irish public policy without any major political articulation as to their negative implications for so many people's well being.

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I will argue however that a new Ireland is possible. There is great hope for our future, not only because of our capabilities and our resources but also because we have an opportunity to create a framework for a more equal society where the well being of all is of equal importance. A time of crisis is also a time of opportunity and we have the chance not only to develop new ways of generating wealth that are truly entrepreneurial rather than speculative (about which so much is now being written and resourced) but also a chance to frame public policy in terms of equality of condition values.

The State we are in

The current financial and political crises in Ireland pose serious questions for the future direction of society. We need an engaged intellectual debate about what model of society we want to create, and what type of society we wish to avoid. We have a choice: we can either create a highly unequal and polarised society with a minority of very wealthy people, a sizeable body of secure middle class people and a rising number of poor and vulnerable people. Or we can create an egalitarian society, where no one will be destitute, where there will be high quality health care and excellent education for all age groups; where each will have a safe and secure home, where there is a well resourced welfare system based on a concept of rights rather than discretion and charity; where there is an accessible and affordable public transport system and proper supports for both the care of children, and of older and other vulnerable people. We can create a society in which women and men are equal to each other in all walks of life, not just in the economy but in sharing the responsibility for caring, in participating in politics and in defining what is of value in the cultural sphere.

However, inequalities between rich and poor, between women and men, between ethnic majorities and minorities, between the majority and minority worlds, between people with different abilities, between people of different sexual orientations, etc., have become normalised in Ireland. Most of us have become morally complacent, happy to live in our comfort zone with little serious commitment to altering the deep injustices at the heart of Irish society. And this is a core issue, I want to address here today, the need for a renewal of commitment to the equality and social justice for all rather than private profit and gain for some.

What type of equality is best?

In our book *Equality From Theory to Action* (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004, 2009) we identified three basic forms of equality, basic, liberal and equality of condition.

Basic equality is about upholding the principle that at the most basic level all human beings have equal worth and importance; all people are therefore equally worthy of concern and respect. The minimum standards involved in the idea of basic equality are far from trivial. They include prohibitions against inhuman and degrading treatment, protection against blatant violence and at least some commitment to satisfying people's most basic needs.

Liberalism represents the dominant tradition within egalitarian thinking. It has been interpreted in many different ways, all of them embracing basic equality but varying quite a lot in terms of the other types of equality they believe in. Liberal egalitarians include those who, on the one hand, move well beyond basic equality and, on the other, hold views that are clearly distinct from what we call equality of condition. Their positions, which might be called 'left liberalism', are often found in social democratic political movements. Liberal egalitarians in this sense typically define equality in terms of individuals rather than groups. But beyond this common assumption, they hold a wide range of views.

A key assumption of all liberal egalitarians is that there will always be major inequalities between people in their status, resources, work and power. They adhere to the view that public policy is about providing a fair basis for managing these inequalities, by strengthening the minimum to which everyone is entitled and by using equality of opportunity to regulate the competition for advantage. So liberals do not call for an end to inequalities, rather they are focused on the regulation of advantage and disadvantage. It is about changing the faces of those who might live at the pinnacle of the power, income or wealth hierarchy rather than eliminating the hierarchy itself.

Liberal political egalitarians also tend to accept the assumption that there is a public private divide; they do not address gender-related issues of injustice arising in the care domain. They do not define love and care as goods that people need to lead a minimally decent life. Their concept of justice has ignored the affective or care domain of social life and in so doing has tended to ignore the care, love and solidarity work that are necessary for human survival and development. Liberal egalitarian theory tends to be gender blind in many respects. It is about women becoming equal to men in the public sphere but it tends to ignore the fact that for this to happen, relations in the private or family sphere must also change.

Another weakness of liberal thinking is that it tends to ignore structural injustices that are perpetuated by institutions and culture. It does not address the way in which capitalism, racism, ageism, disablism, patriarchy etc., promote injustices that are often institutionalised in the fabric of work organisations, in political structures, in the ideology of family life etc., and are therefore extremely difficult to change. **Equality of condition** sets out a much more ambitious aim to liberalism, namely to eliminate major inequalities altogether over time, and to greatly reduce the current scale of inequality. The key issue here is to recognize that inequality is rooted in changing and changeable *social structures*, and particularly in structures of domination and oppression. These structures create, and continually reproduce, the inequalities that liberal egalitarians see as inevitable. Moreover, structurally-generated inequalities frequently have hegemonic status and are therefore not subjected to scrutiny or debate. An example of this would be the idea that people are entitled to higher incomes just because they are in certain professions: doctors thinking they are 'naturally' entitled to higher wages than nurses or psychologists thinking they are entitled to higher pay than child care workers or teachers.

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But since social structures have changed in the past, they can be changed in the future. Exactly what structures need to change is open to debate but one way or another they clearly include capitalism (a predominantly market-based economy in which the means of production are privately owned and controlled), patriarchy (systems of gender relationships that privilege men over women), racism (social systems that divide people into 'races' and privilege some 'races' over others), disablism (systems that divide people into categories as disabled or non-disabled and privileged those who are able bodied) and other systems of oppression.

This emphasis on social structures in explaining inequality affects the way equality of condition should be understood. In contrast to the tendency of liberal egalitarians to focus on the rights and advantages of individuals, equality of condition also pays attention to the rights and advantages of groups. In contrast to liberal egalitarians' tendency to concentrate on how things are distributed, equality of condition pays more attention to how people are related, through power, care, economic and cultural relations. In contrast to the tendency of liberal egalitarians to treat individuals as responsible for their successes and failures, equality of condition emphasizes the influence of social factors on people's choices and actions.

Equality of condition also challenges the redistributive-recognition dichotomy, arguing that you cannot have redistribution without recognition and recognition without equal distribution. All inequalities are overlapping or intersectional and inequalities in the exercise of power play a key role in maintaining other injustices. Finally, equality of condition challenges the public-private divide that is at the heart of liberal thinking; it highlights the fact that a society cannot have political, economic or social justice without taking account of the care domains of life; people are relational, affective (emotional and moral) agents, not autonomous being and both interdependency and, at times, deep dependency, are integral to the human condition.

So equality of condition is about the belief that people should be as equal as possible in relation to the central conditions of their lives. Equality of condition is not about trying to make inequalities fairer, or giving people a more equal opportunity to become unequal; rather it is about ensuring that everyone has roughly equal prospects for a good life.

Equality of Condition and its relationship to Socialism and Feminism

And I want to answer a question that people will ask, or should ask: what is the relation between promoting equality of condition and social justice and socialist and feminist values? If we are interested in promoting equality of condition, a society where there is substantive equality in life chances and well being (not merely formal equality which is really about having the legal right to something without the resources to attain it – effectively equal opportunities to become unequal) then we must endorse some of the core values of feminism and socialism and release our culture from the fear that surrounds even the mention of the words. The principles which currently inform mainstream thinking about public policy in countries we often admire, particularly Scandinavian countries are drawn

from the more radical end of social and democratic liberal thinking but they are also strongly informed by feminist and socialist traditions. And while Scandinavian countries may be called social democratic states, their taxation policies, their wealth distribution policies and their welfare codes are strongly informed by principles drawn from both socialist and feminist traditions.

What I am talking about here is having a country where wealth is produced commercially but is not allowed to dominate all other values; wealth is managed in the public interest rather than allowed to control public policy in the interest of private gain. Equality of condition is about ensuring that all people live lives of dignity and worth, where there is economic security and guaranteed welfare from birth to death; where health care is not just the preserve of those that can buy private beds in hospitals.

Equality of condition is also about endorsing feminism and normalising its core values: it is about having a society in which men and women are equal to each other in all walks of life, not just in politics or in employment but in the doing of care work and in taking responsibility for domestic work. It is about freeing men from the moral imperative to be the main breadwinners and freeing women from the moral imperative to always be the primary carers.

As a society, we do not have a strong commitment to public solidarity despite our rhetoric. This is reflected in failure over the course of the last 10 years for social welfare provisions to keep pace with the cost of living. We have one of the lowest rates of social expenditures on education, housing, transport and welfare within the EU. (See Tables 1 and 2 below using the SILC data). Our lack of commitment to the public sphere is evident in many concrete ways, from the lack of public spaces for play for children (especially safe indoor places) to the lack of public sports facilities, to the lack of investment parks and public amenities in so many towns and villages. It is even evident in our churches. Most of our leisure and sports facilities are actually privately owned by clubs that are legally constituted as private bodies; GAA pitches, tennis courts, gyms, rugby pitches, golf courses etc. are all private. Indoor play areas for children are almost universally commercial. And the lack of commitment to the good of the public sphere is evident when public and private interests collide; it is evident in the way space is organised and the quality of the built environment between public and private hospitals, in the relative luxury and comfort of private rooms versus public wards; it is visible in the pitches, tennis courts and other facilities in well-off schools compared with the bare yards of small fields that are there for those in less-well-off or poorer areas.

But another society is possible. We have the resources, education and capability of building a caring and egalitarian society in which the everyone will have a good quality of living not just a chance to have it; a society built on the principle of equality of condition rather than a naïve belief that we can have equality of opportunity in education in an economically unequal society. We need to move towards equalising incomes, wealth and well being if we are to enhance all children's development not just that of the relatively privileged.

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In Ireland we have enough land to house people many times over; we have sufficient education and skill to create new businesses and build new vibrant civil society organisations at local level; we have the moral capacity to do good, to create a great society, not just for our families or our neighbours but for all of those who live in Ireland and for those who are vulnerable and need our support in other parts of the world.

Moving Beyond the Obvious in promoting an Egalitarian Society: the role of the economic, political, cultural and affective systems

When we talk about a just or more equal society we generally tend to think in terms of wealth and money; incomes and wages. Or we may occasionally think of gender issues. However, promoting equality of condition needs to happen across a range of key social systems not all of which are obvious or even recognised. And while I recognise the centrality of the economic system to promoting equality of condition, on its own it will not achieve this aim for many people. Hence, from our work in *Equality: From Theory to Action* (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004) I suggest that there are four key systems or sets of social relations we must address if we are to promote a more equal society.¹

4 Key Systems where equality/inequality is generated mapped with 4 key dimensions of equality/inequality

Source: Baker, J. Lynch, K. Cantillon, S. and Walsh J. (2004, 2009) *Equality: From Theory to Action*

<i>Systems</i>	<i>Dimensions of In/equality</i>			
	Resources	Respect and Recognition	Power	Love, Care and Solidarity
Economic System	XX	X	X	X
Political System	X	X	XX	X
Cultural System	X	XX	X	X
Affective System	X	X	X	XX

4

4

A key system for generating inequality is of course the economy, the system concerned with the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services. As we think of it, the economic system refers not just to the set of institutions that

¹ The discussion of the equality framework here and in the previous section is taken from our book *Equality: From Theory to Action*, Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Lyons (2004) chapters 2 and 4

operate in the market (what might be called the ‘formal economy’) but to the whole set of relationships, regulations, norms and values that govern the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of goods and services.

A second important system for generating equality and inequality is a society’s cultural system, which is concerned with the production, transmission and legitimation of cultural practices and products, including various forms of symbolic representation and communication. This system is especially important in generating differences in social standing and status and while it is implicated in the economic system (rich people tend to have high status), it is separate from it. Cultural systems reinforce or detract from different valuations of people; they label and classify differences in appearance, language, body size, colour, values and preferences. They can challenge or reinforce structures of racism, disablism, religious oppression and homophobia, by challenging or endorsing different cultural and occupational expectations. The educational system, the media and religions all play important roles in granting or withdrawing respect and recognition.

The political system is the set of relationships involved in making and enforcing collectively binding decisions. As with the economy, we can distinguish between the formal political system - the set of institutions involved in making binding, coercively enforced decisions embodied in law - and this wider conception of the political system under which every social institution has a political aspect. In the political system, dominant groups generally use their power to pursue their own interests, while subordinate groups exercise whatever power or influence they can muster to resist this domination. The most prominent institution affecting the political system is the state, including the government, the legislature, the civil and public service and the legal system. Other institutions that play an important political role include political parties, lobby groups, campaigning groups and the wider range of organizations in civil society. However, collectively binding decisions are made throughout society: every social institution has a politics, including the family and work organisations.

A fourth system where equality and inequality can be generated is the ‘affective system’, which is concerned with providing and sustaining relationships of love, care and solidarity. Inequality in the affective domain takes two primary forms: when people have unequal access to meaningful loving and caring relationships, and when there is inequality in the distribution of the emotional and other work that produces and sustains such relationships. The types of people who are likely to be deprived of love and care (for example, children who are left without a primary carer due to war, famine, AIDS, or people who are in prison or institutions where they lack access to intimate others) are generally very different from those who experience affective inequality due to undertaking a disproportionately high level of care work (women compared with men). The key institutions in contemporary societies for providing love and care are families, although these relationships are also sustained by networks of friendships, by good relations at work or by neighbours.

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Solidarity is the more political or public face of our affective relations. It is both a set of values and a set of public practices. It refers to the work that is involved in creating and maintaining local communities, neighbourhoods on the one hand, and the advocacy work in civil society for social justice and human rights at local, national and global levels at the other. It finds its expression in our willingness to support vulnerable others within our own country or the level of support we give to peoples in other countries who are denied basic rights and livelihoods to live a life of dignity. Solidarity is the political form of love and finds expression in the values a society upholds in support of others who are not autonomous. The levels of solidarity in a given society are reflected in everything from the vibrancy of its community activities to the taxes people are willing to pay to fund and support vulnerable members of our own and other societies. It is where the moral, the affective and the political systems overlap in public life.

Although the distinction between the four systems is useful analytically, it should be clear from what is said that they are completely interwoven. The economic relationship between an employer and employee, for example, is also a relation of political power, as is the cultural relationship between a teacher and pupil. The relationships between a parent and a child are economic, cultural, political and affective. The significance of this for public policy is that it is not possible just to address problems of inequality or social justice in one social system without addressing inequalities in related social systems. Inequalities are intersectional or deeply interwoven because human beings are not singular in their identities.

So what I am suggesting is that if we wish to promote a new vision of Irish society we need to think in lateral ways; we need to think of all how the major institutions and structures impact on people as they impact very differently on different groups. It is clear that social class-related inequalities are generated in the economic sphere but they are not confined to this system; upper middle class and upper class people do not just have more money and better health care, they also exercise a claim of moral superiority to those who are less well off. This is reflected in the judgements they make about people who do not belong to their class or live in their neighbourhoods – derogatory terms such as describing people as being from rough areas or scumbags or lager louts etc., all carry connotations of moral judgement. They are forms of cultural denigration that map on to economic injustices and privileges.

Equally for women, there is a growing view in feminist circles, especially among feminist economists, that women's unequal relationship with men is deeply generated in the affective domain of life and is then reinforced in the economic, political and cultural domains. The moral imperative on women to be the default carers of society (and equally for me to be care-less apart from breadwinning) creates cultural expectations of the 'good woman' as a woman who is a primary carer. Men are absolved from care work (but not breadwinning) and this in turn imprisons them in a narrow definition of masculinity. So while culture may denigrate the feminine, it is arguable that the denigration begins in the denigration of love, care and solidarity itself.

Overcoming Fears: Left and Right, Feminism, Capitalism and Socialism

But first we must overcome our fears, including our fear of naming what we want. I will begin with naming fears about ideas and concepts related to politics; fears that have kept people silent and which are fed constantly by myths and fabrications.

While we have some civil, social and political education in Irish schools, the subject of CSPE is given very little time, resources or attention. There are no courses in Irish schools that systematically educate young people about different social and political systems, about different concepts of politics and social systems, or about different frameworks for organising society. There are very few people who actually study about capitalism, feminism, socialism etc., even in higher education.

Moreover in the public sphere of the media and the press, very little attention is given to new social scientific thinking. Social science publications in Ireland are rarely if ever reviewed in newspapers (unless the author happens to know a friendly journalist!). The review of books in our national newspapers focuses mostly on literature and history, and to some degree with politics. There is no social science page although we have Arts and Science pages. Yet there have been multiple Irish publications in sociology, education and social policy over the last 20 years that offer great insight into the operation of Irish life and that would have enriched policy-making if they were taken in to account. The failure to engage with sociological, social policy (and also educational) research is a serious omission in Irish cultural life. It has led to a serious deficit of understanding in public policy-making. Economic analysis has been allowed to have hegemonic control over public debate although it cannot answer sociological questions that are of equally profound importance in answering our social problems. This is not the fault of economics *per se* but as the discipline does not understand or analyse how social systems work, and as it is mostly coming from one intellectual tradition within Ireland (liberal classical economics), it must not be taken as the governing discipline for public policy-making. It needs to be complemented by understanding and analysis from social science disciplines where there is a diverse range of intellectual traditions.

It is not surprising then that words like 'socialism' or 'feminism' strike fear into people's hearts and minds. (I will not deal with the dearth of sophisticated social scientific education that lies at the root of this here but it is a seriously contributing factor). Our politicians, with a handful of exceptions, do not use such words to describe their politics, even to distance themselves from them. Yet, most people cannot define what either feminism or socialism means. Misconceptions and misrepresentations of socialism are ubiquitous. It is so pervasive that only the small parties of the left in Ireland are willing to claim any allegiance to the principles of socialism. For example, most people hold the misconception that all socialism (and communism) means that one will have no right to private personal property² similarly with feminism; very few people in politics actually claim this identity. To

² Socialism is about public control and regulation of productive wealth rather than personally produced goods and services.

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say one is a feminist is to incite fear and even loathing. It is to set oneself up to be cast out as a crank, and more likely as man-hating. Yet, the goal of feminism is very basic as well: it is about promoting equality between women and men in all walks of life.

Both those who are defined as 'left' and those defined as 'feminist; are constructed as 'dangerous' and irrational in Ireland. Yet a core principle of socialism: *'from each according to ability and to each according to need'* is eminently reasonable and is hardly something with which most people would engage in great dispute. And most people do believe that women and men are equal. However, the demonising of what are valued and long standing political and intellectual traditions in Europe be it socialism or feminism represent an attempt to control the political agenda. It is a systematic attempt to foreclose intellectual debate and to forestall the emergence of new politics.

The problem rests with the denial of ideology at the heart of party politics. Ireland's main political parties are populist; they conceal their own ideological roots. This forces the debate to be about personalities rather than policies, rhetoric and appearance rather than substance. It is a way of concealing the substantive capitalist and patriarchal values in political life. What I am saying is that the fear of the 'left' and of 'feminism' are orchestrated fears in Ireland; it is not accidental that those on the left are represented as 'pariahs' or that feminists are represented as 'fanatics' ; it is a deliberate strategy to maintain the myth that perspectives endorsing equality and social justice are neither desirable or realisable.

What is equally interesting is that no political party is defined as right wing or capitalist in Ireland. No party claims that label. Yet Ireland is classified in international political studies as operating a neo-liberal right wing ideology over the last 10-15 years (Esping Anderson, 1990, Murphy, 2006, Casey, 2007, Geoghan and Powell, 2009). Ireland has operated a system of tax incentives that entirely pro-capitalist be it in terms of the wide range of tax incentives for commercial property development, the massive reduction from 40 to 25% in capital gains tax and its extraordinarily low (12.5%) corporation profit tax and by being almost alone in Europe in not having a property tax. So Ireland operates its political ideologies silently by concealment of its true goals and purposes.

In the UN Gender Empowerment Index, Ireland has a very low status. The political representation of women in our national parliament at 13.9% puts Ireland in the bottom half of representation across the world (160 countries) and significantly below almost all of Europe: Spain is at 36.6%, Germany at 32.8%, Netherlands, 42%, Sweden 46.4%- Croatia 23.5%, Estonia, 22.8%, Bulgaria, 20.8% etc. (Women in Parliaments, World Classification, May 31st 2010). Yet there is no political strategy that will radically alter women's participation in public life. The failure of women to find a significant political space in Irish public life shows that party politics is deeply patriarchal even if the issue only comes to the surface of political debate as an afterthought.

If we exclude women systematically from public life through various forms of institutionalised discriminations and practices, including the lack of adequately resourced child care supports for employed parents, we cannot bring about an egalitarian or socially just society. Women are key players in realising change in Ireland, particularly if we include women from a diverse range of social class, cultural and other backgrounds in political life. The reason that it matters to have women in politics is not because of their biology or indeed their moral status. Women are as likely to be corrupted by power as men. However, at this moment in Irish history women's experiential knowledge is different to men's across all classes as women are the primary carers in all types of households (as well as being the principal earners in many cases) (Lynch and Lyons, 2007). It is women tend to manage the most vulnerable in society so they are aware of the costs of injustice at family level. We also know from studies done in many countries and in Ireland in the early 1990s (O'Neill, 1991) that women manage poverty in times of unemployment or hardship. Because of their life experience (not their biology) women comprise a constituency of interest and should be constituted as such within parliamentary politics unless some other method is found to equal their representation to men in the Dáil and other electoral assemblies. I personally cannot comprehend why it is that constituencies are defined by region only; yes regional politics matter but in this age of high mobility, extensive communication and easy travel, regional interests are but one constituency. Women are 50% of the population and as just are just as entitled to be represented as people in Dublin or Cork.

My argument here is that political parties of all persuasions must be required to claim what they actually own politically. The media and other analysts of politics need to hold them to account for what they do, not just for what they say.

Despite the silences, recent research comparing Ireland with a range of countries in the ISSP survey shows that most people in Ireland want a more just and equal society (Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 2007). In fact, they proclaim a belief in broad principles of equality more so than their European neighbours. They want relative equality between citizens, security of work, equal access to good health care, education etc. It would seem that Irish people hold quite egalitarian 'left' views when they are given the chance to express them but they balk at being called 'left wing'. Who has created this fear and why?

Fairness as a Distraction from Equality and Social Justice

Not only do we not have a debate about the differences between socialism, capitalism, feminism etc., and the interface between all of these, In recent times, there has been a systematic move from the language of equality and social justice to the language of fairness in public and political discourse. What is interesting intellectually about this is that the term fairness as become detached from equality, although when Rawls wrote his treatise (*A Theory of Justice*, 1971 and particularly his earlier essay *Justice as Fairness*, 1958) he defined justice as fairness in relation to 2 core principles, one was the principle of freedom and the other was equality.

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According to the first principle, everyone was entitled to freedom subject to compatibility with the freedom of others. The second principle is called 'the difference principle'. The core idea is that social and economic inequalities were permissible across social positions only a) if all had an equal chance to access positions (namely that there was fair equality of opportunity) and 2) if all inequalities created were to the greatest advantage to the least advantaged in society. In other words the socially just policy choice would be one made to the advantage of the least advantaged.

The original meaning of justice as fairness outlined by Rawls was therefore deeply attached to the principle of equality. Yet in public discourse, people talk about fairness as if it were a stand alone concept. This move is not unique to Ireland although it is particularly evident in the UK and US where it has become the new mantra of conservative parties. While no one would doubt the value of fairness, it is not a foundational organising principle for public policy-making for a number of reasons. First of all, fairness is not a robust theoretical or legal concept internationally or nationally; there is no law prohibiting it and it is not defined legally within any of the institutions of the state. Second, because fairness is not defined clearly in law or politics, what is fair or unfair is generally defined by those in power. There is no mechanism for challenging the definition or interpretation of 'what is fair' as the definition is the prerogative of those who set the terms of interpretation. Third, fairness, in so far as it is used as a discrete concept (for example in economics), is about the fair allocation of envy between individuals: a fair society is one in which no individual prefers the bundle allocated to her or him above the bundle allocated to anyone else. Fairness is about the equalisation of envy! The problem with such a concept is that it is not only highly individualistic (as it does not address group differences where much injustice is generated) it is also unworkable (who knows what will make others envious or not). In addition, fairness is tied to subjective preferences which may themselves be founded on deep injustices. Very often those who own a lot of resources will be envious of others who own more; but this is hardly a morally justifiable reason for granting them more than they have already! If the fair allocation-of-envy logic were followed, then all forms of envy would be equally valid so the very well off or the very powerful or privileged would have equal claim on resources as those who are poor.

What I am saying here is that language matters. Fairness is a dangerous concept when it is detached from principles of equality as it is not clearly defined, in built on dubious moral principles, is highly subjective and will be generally interpreted by those in power in their own interests. Relying on fairness as a guiding principle of policy will lead us down a moral and political cul-de-sac.

There is No view from Nowhere: Ideology and Politics

To create a new political space we need to address the strong anti-intellectualism that pervades Irish public life. There needs to be a recognition that, in both policies and politics, *there is no view from nowhere*. All political actions, all policies have an ideological base; this needs to be recognised and named in the public sphere.

Without open debate between socialists, social democrats and capitalists, between feminists and anti-feminists, between egalitarians and anti-egalitarians, between liberals and neo-liberals, we cannot see where we are going politically. We will remain lost in the ideological fog, failing to put down the signposts on the roads we are travelling; we will only know where we are going when we come to the end of the road. And as we have learned painfully over the last few years, it is too late to wait until the end of the road.

Over the last 10 years, however, most politicians, media commentators, and many policy analysts, denied we were following a neo-liberal capitalist agenda³ driven by powerful vested interests within the state despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary (Allen, 2007; Kirby, 2002). A strong anti-egalitarian culture was promoted; those who dared to question it were literally condemned from the pulpit of the political elite. A new orthodoxy was born where the powerful and wealthy, through their political and economic ventriloquists, became the arbiters of what was moral and what was good.

What is interesting is that the government did not proclaim their own ideological message. They call on 'experts', increasingly classical neo-liberal economists or other related professionals to proclaim the message; the expert masquerades as independent thereby alleviating the government of political responsibility for the articulation of political views. Experts have become the ventriloquists for politicians in power who want to distance themselves from the ideologies they uphold.

The Control of Consciousness and Learning to Think Critically

The mind is a site of social struggle. Powerful interests in society (be these political parties, commercial interests and/or the media or religious bodies) have much to gain by controlling how people think. Not only do powerful interest groups try to influence our thinking, they often control it very successfully. We see how this happens at every general election when vast amounts of money are spent on propaganda; we see it in everyday life where a consumer ideology is pedalled daily in advertising products that we neither need nor want but we learn to need as they are sold to us as essentials. The struggle to gain hegemonic (unquestioned and complete) control over public minds takes place in all spheres of ideology both in terms of what is said and is not said, in news programmes, in newspapers, in advertising and even in the soap operas and sport that keep us distracted from the worlds of political ideologies.

Our minds and thinking is controlled even though we do not know it or see it. Two recent books demonstrate clearly how ideology has worked to enable capitalist

³ A major objective of neo-liberalism is to allow the market to become the major provider of all services, even though the market is profit led. The move to the market means a reduction of State expenditure on public services which, in turn, reduces the cost of taxation of capital and increases profit. Under a market system one moves from having a 'right' to a service to being a 'customer' who can only have a service if one can afford to pay for it.

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interests and values have a global reach (Harvey, 2005, Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). These studies demonstrate how capitalism won control of the global order by winning control of the hearts and minds of people. It did not happen accidentally however, but through systematic education, beginning with the universities and higher education bodies, and feeding onwards and outwards to other institutions of ideology including political commentary and the media.

Patriarchal ideologies also control us as they are meted out every day in images of men in control of all areas of public life, from sport to parliaments, from businesses to literature.

The most visible way in which the control of consciousness is exercised in Ireland is through the daily diet of conservative ideologies that is fed to the public by a generally uncritical media and an equally conservative education. There is no major national daily that has produced a sustained, intellectually informed critique of the mythical Celtic Tiger over the last 10 years. Yes, some opinion columnists and commentators have raised doubts, but it is a drop in the media ocean. Led by advertising revenue and the capital that funds advertising, all our national daily papers (and for the greater part our television stations and radio) have fed us myths about ourselves. This has been epitomised by the production of the weekly 'Property Supplements' rather than 'Housing Supplements' in the major dailies. Housing, the most basic human need, was transposed from being a human right to being a market for investors. There was almost no critique or analysis of who was left behind by 'the property market'

But education must also bear responsibility. We have no culture of critical analysis in Irish education; we do not teach our young people anything about politics and the ideologies that underpin it. We do not teach them critical theory or sociology or feminist or egalitarian theories of how to promote more equal and socially just societies. Even in higher education, there is very little critical, feminist or radical analysis of the institutions of the state.

And there are no senior cycle courses in second-level schools that require students to think critically and analytically about the society they live in. Given this context, young people become adults who do literally do not know the difference between liberal and conservative, left and right, socialist and capitalist, feminist and anti-feminist, egalitarian and anti-egalitarian. All they are exposed to are soundbites and diatribes. They have no political vocabulary in which to analyse and to speak. And this is why we find it hard to create a new vision, and a new politics. The intellectual ground is arid; people lack the words to name their world critically. And it is not their personal fault as they have never been educated to be democratic citizens in a critically informed way. What I am calling for here is the introduction of good critically informed Social and Political Education based on accessible academic work. I know a programme like this is being planned by the NCCA and I sincerely hope it will have a sound theoretical foundation (similar to other courses of this kind in EU countries) and a critical analytical stance.

Community Development programmes as a sites of Change and Resistance

And we must ensure that adults are enabled to think critically when learning technical or other skills. We must allow a space for people to learn about where they are, who controls them, how society works, as all of this is part is empowering as it shines lights on the hidden corners of life, it shows us how we came to be where we are and how we can move somewhere else.

And this means that we must continue to support community development programmes and community education programmes that are now so seriously under attack. They are the political platforms for mobilising the views of some of the most marginalised people in our society; they are not just support services they are agents of political education. They are venues for active citizenry for real forms of political engagement. Indeed they represent in many ways a kind of political association or Greek 'agora' , a place where the public and private spheres of social life interface, a form of civil society that is vital to democracy (Geoghegan and Powell, 2009). Civil society organisations have remained throughout the Celtic Tiger years important voices for dissent in Irish life; they have brought new issues to the political table and without them our society would be greatly impoverished.

Learning to think Care-Fully

In the outline framework for developing a more egalitarian society, the UCD Equality Studies Centre has focused lately on the subject of *Affective Equality* (Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009). The reason for this is that we think it is vital to link general debates about social justice and equality with feminist debates about the ethics of care. It is important to take issues of care, love and solidarity out of the private domain and name them politically as we cannot have a new society or new politics without having regard for care politics. Moreover, care is a deeply gendered issue as most paid and unpaid work is done by women at this moment in history and for this reason it is vital to address it if the political status of women is to change in our society.

There is a deep ambivalence about caring and loving in society (hooks, 2000) and in the academy. Mainstream sociological, educational, economic and political thought devotes little attention to the issues of care. Love is equated with sentimentality; a phenomenon serious scholars view with the profoundest scepticism. To speak or write of solidarity is to consign oneself to a class of people who are not in touch with the individualist spirit of the age. In both liberal and socialist traditions, love and care have been treated as private matters, personal affairs, not subjects of sufficient political importance to be mainstreamed in theory or empirical investigations (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon and Walsh, 2004). Sociological, economic and political thought and the educational imagination has focused on the public sphere, the outer spaces of life, indifferent to the fact that none of these can function without the care institutions of society.

Within classical economics in particular there has been a core assumption that the prototypical human being is a self-sufficient rational economic *man* (sic). There has been no serious account taken of the reality of dependency for all human beings, both

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in childhood and at times of illness and infirmity (Badgett and Folbre, 1999).⁴ While we are undoubtedly economic actors, consumers and rational actors, neither our rationality nor our economic and consumer choices can be presumed to be devoid of relationality (Gilligan, 1982; 1995). For most of humanity, much of life is lived in a state of profound and deep interdependency and for some prolonged dependency (Kittay, 1999). Humanity may be characterised as *homo sapiens* or *homo economicus* but we are also undoubtedly '*homo interdependenticus*' and at times '*homo dependenticus*'. It is time to take love, care and solidarity work seriously in education.

Neo-liberalism, which now governs political values, shares with the classical liberalism, a tradition that defines the person as an autonomous and rational being, a Cartesian man *sic* whose humanity is encapsulated in the phrase 'Cogito ergo sum'. As such, it carries through into the 21st century a deep indifference to the inevitable dependencies and interdependencies that are endemic to the human condition (Noddings, 2003; Nussbaum, 1995a, 1995b). It is disregarding of the role that emotions play in our relationships and our learning, and correlatively indifferent to the central role of care and love relations in defining who we are (Kittay, 1999; Lynch, et al., 2009). In line with *classical economic* views of education, neo-liberalism also defines the person to be educated in economic terms, as 'homo economicus' a labour market actor whose life and purposes are determined by their economic status. These twin sets of values are reinforced with a third set of educational purposes, namely the conceptualisation of the person to be educated as a highly individualised, self regarding and consuming economic actor. Competitive individualism is no longer seen as an amoral necessity but rather as a desirable and necessary attribute for a constantly reinventing entrepreneur (Apple, 2001; Ball, 2003). What neo-liberalism has succeeded in doing, however, which classical liberalism did not do, is to subordinate and trivialise education that has no market value.

I am arguing therefore that not only do we need to create critically thinking citizens with a deep sense of commitment to the core egalitarian values of democracy, we must also creating caring citizens who are aware of how our inevitable interdependencies.

Conclusions

The evidence for having a more equal society in Ireland is compelling from international studies the most recent of which has been that of Daniel Dorling (2010). More equal societies are more politically stable, and there is less violence and crime. People also enjoy better health and have a longer and better quality of life in more equal societies: in Finland working class men and women enjoy better

⁴ Yet, a significant proportion of humanity is dependant for survival on the work and care of others at a given time, and every individual is at some time dependant (Kittay, 1999; Fineman, 2003). The daily reproduction of the self from the inner to the outer sphere involves work, the simple work of maintaining and nourishing the body and mind and the more elaborate work of producing quality of life for oneself and others physically, socially, and emotionally.

health on average than upper middle class men in the UK (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). There are also lower rates of mental illness and even less bullying in schools in more equal societies.

What must be recognised however is that liberal equality policies in fields such as education or employment will not create a really inclusive society because of the internal logic of liberal policies themselves. Social mobility, which is the mantra of liberal equality politics, is fundamentally about recycling injustices, moving a small number of poorer people, disabled people, Travellers or women up the social ladder. The evidence is that few of those on top ever move down so there is literally no room on the top step.

Both logically and socially it is impossible for liberal democratic policies to promote substantive and robust forms of equality as they are premised on the assumption that hierarchies are inevitable. Those in positions of power and wealth will protect their own interests unless they are seriously challenged by law and policy. There is compelling evidence that those at the table of privilege only allow others to sit with them when their own needs are satisfied and privilege has advanced to another level. In education, this is known as the principle of MMI, Maximally Maintained Inequality, where those who benefit most from a given level of education allow others in when the strategic advantage for that group is located at a higher level (Raftery and Hout, 1993) .

Second, in a hierarchical system there will always be someone at the bottom whose like chances and well being will be significantly undermined by either their lack of money, resources, power or even social standing. The faces may change at the pinnacle of the pyramid (from men to women or front white Irish to black or brown migrant) but the pyramid of power and wealth remains. But migrant workers are human beings, women and men with dreams and hopes of a good future and their dreams and their well being is no less important than that of the white Irish.

Yet, labels must not be allowed to control us. Whether the language we use is that of equality or socialism or feminism, or social justice, or the common good, we need to focus on what it is we want to achieve. Those who use different languages to name the same purpose must not dismiss those who may have similar goals but may wish to employ different languages and indeed different strategies to achieve the same purpose. While we may differ in the language we use to promote equality and social justice in Ireland, we must not allow differences of nomenclature to divide us.

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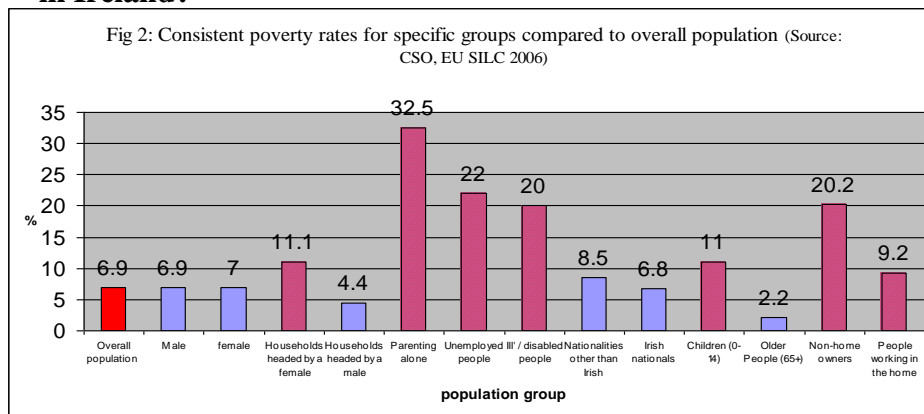
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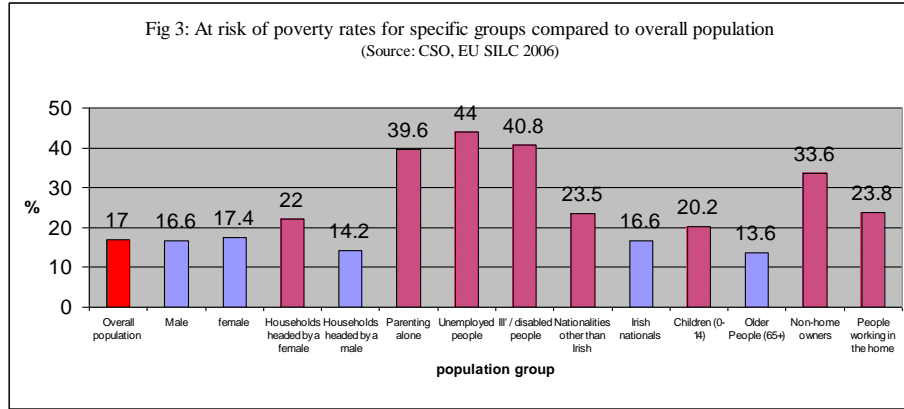
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Which specific groups are ‘Consistently’ Poor in Ireland?



Which specific groups are 'At Risk' of poverty in Ireland?



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