

WHOSE CITY? *OUR CITY.*

Local Election Manifesto 2019.

THE WORKERS' PARTY



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Introduction

Dublin is a difficult place for working people to live.

Growing sections of the economy revolve around low-paid insecure employment — or even bogus self-employment — while workers such as nurses, teachers, and plumbers, struggle to make ends meet. The days when most families could survive on one income are long gone. Quality of life in the city is affected not only by the pressure on wages, lack of affordable housing, and expensive childcare, but by underfunded public transport and the epidemic of dumped waste on our streets that impinges on our daily lives.

Meanwhile, the multinational takeover of Dublin city continues - our public spaces are privatised, our city turned into a conglomeration of hotels, office blocks, and overpriced student apartments. Dublin should be a living city for working class people, not the plaything of multinational tech, property, and financial corporations.

Fundamental change on the range of problems facing Irish society requires national government intervention. But there is still much that local government can do. It can choose not to sell off public land to private developers; it can build mixed income public housing; it can restart collection of household waste; it can ensure that every contractor for a public service pays at least the living wage to its employees.

But the senior council officials and establishment parties from Fine Gael to Sinn Féin won't do it. These senior officials are enmeshed in a neoliberal framework which aims to remove the public service from providing direct public services and to outsource them to the private sector. It thus reduces both their expenditure and responsibility while increasing the prospect of profits for the private sector. The private sector is driven by the need for profit and this necessarily forces them to cut workers' wages and skimp on the quality of service. The result is a lower quality city for everyone.

It can be different. But different results in terms of housing, waste, and public transport requires a different approach: a state-led public sector drive to directly deliver these services. Neither the corporations, the right-wing government, nor the senior council officials are interested in changing the dynamic. Change must come from the outside, from working people organising to fight for their own interest. At a political level it requires representatives who prioritise working class interests and who are not afraid to stand up to the officials to do so.

Working class interests are advanced by two equally important strategies: trade unionism and a workers' party. Both have been under attack in recent decades and the result has been a dramatic loss in relative living standards compared to the wealthy in our society.

If the race to the bottom is to be avoided, then both need to be revitalised. The establishment media like to spread the message that all politics is corrupt, self-serving, or pointless posturing. This should be recognised for the propaganda that is: the self-serving interests of the establishment to disorganise working people from fighting for their own interests.

We offer no false promises. Local government elections are not going to change the world. But not only can they make a difference in pressurising the establishment, they are part of rebuilding the working class movement in this country, the primary agent of progressive change in modern times.

Our manifesto offers a vision of a different type of city – a Dublin that works for the great majority of people, not the wealthy elite.

We envision collective solutions – public provision of housing, waste collection, childcare, transport. We believe in democratic accountability and transparency in local government, in the place of unelected council bureaucrats. We want to fund a better future for all our citizens by introducing heavily progressive taxation at a local level.

Only a strong and principled socialist party, rooted in working class communities and trade unions, can make such a vision reality.

Democratic and Accountable Local Government

As a socialist party, the Workers' Party believes that local government must serve the public good, not private greed. We believe in democratic control of local government and we want to deliver quality public services that enhance people's lives, not shoddy services that cheat communities and benefit only the fat cats.

Instead, the local government we have today faces a variety of challenges:

- Through privatisation and Ministerial control, few services are run at the most appropriate level, i.e. the local level.
- So-called reforms (including merging councils) have made local government less democratic and less responsive.
- The system of 'reserved' and 'executive' functions leaves the Chief Executive with a monopoly on information and the elected councillors unable to do the job they were elected to do.

Anyone living in one of the wealthiest countries in the world should be able to go to sleep knowing that in the morning the bins will be collected, there's a local creche for their child to attend and there's a safe park to walk through. What's more, they should know that there's a well-resourced local government providing these services and who to hold responsible if they don't work.

If we want to achieve that then we must directly confront the structural factors that perpetuate the commodification of all aspects of our daily lives and offer a vision that is public and inclusive.

The developer-led planning model has meant that where profits are to be made, development has happened regardless of how appropriate it is. And where there is no profit, little or nothing has happened, regardless of need. Ultimately, our State's reliance on private speculators for investment and corporations for delivery means those private interests hold all the cards and democracy is held hostage.

We need to recognise that the local level is often the appropriate one at which services should be organised, to disentangle those services from the web of private interests and support local government to provide them through a radically restructuring and proper funding. Then, we can create liveable communities where people can finally begin to gain control over their own lives.

Our proposals

1. Get rid of the unelected, unaccountable council Chief Executives and introduce a new 'cabinet style' system of local democracy

- The current system of 'reserved' and 'executive' functions should be abolished and replaced with a parliamentary model. The party or coalition with the most seats elects a cabinet comprising a mayor and vice-mayors with responsibility for the council's various competencies. The mayor and vice-mayors would have the power to make decisions and the responsibility to be accountable for them.

2. Increased power for local authorities - including responsibility for childcare, transport, and education

- Local government must be recognised as the basic level of democratic representation. Its function is to respond to the needs of the community and so its powers should arise from the need to fulfil this role. The first step to rebuild capacity within local authorities should be to re-municipalise waste services, create a new model of community childcare and early years education, and divest all publicly-funded schools from private bodies and transfer them to a locally accountable and democratic body.

3. Neighbourhood councils to keep neighbourhood decisions close to home, and a new Dublin regional authority governing the Greater Dublin Area

- Neighbourhood or district councils should be composed of members elected by direct universal suffrage, by a system of proportional representation, and for areas of approximately 10,000 people. A parallel system of elections should elect members to a new municipal / regional council, which should comprise areas which form a coherent economic and commuting unit e.g. the Greater Dublin Area.

4. Introduce a Public Accounts Committee on every local authority to make council officials and councillors accountable for their spending

Homes for All: Public Housing on Public Land

Housing is a fundamental right. With secure and suitable housing, the rest of our lives open up - whether that means space to study, to cook, or to have the peace of mind to think about the future.

In Dublin right now there are over 10,000 people homeless. The Government admits to having over 70,000 families on the social housing waiting list. Two full-time minimum-wage workers cannot afford to raise a family in the Dublin area without State intervention, while hotels in the capital made €47m from accommodating homeless families in 2017 alone. For homeowners the problems are different but they are no less real; Ireland's dependence on mortgages means that any change in income levels can quickly cause an arrears crisis. And the vultures aren't just circling, they've been invited in.

The problem isn't moral failing or young people's 'lifestyle choices'. Contrary to the dogma of its ideologues, the private market is not up to the task of universal provision. Even before the crash it couldn't provide, with housebuilding far exceeding demand and ghost estates left scarring the landscape.

Official government policy continues to maintain that the various private market subsidies are just short-term measures, but they continue to be the sole component of social housing provision which is growing: only one in three of the Government's *Rebuilding Ireland* 'social housing solutions' are actually new social housing.

The Housing Assistance Payment, rent supplement and the other long-term leasing programmes show clearly how market solutions push costs onto society, never mind the stress to tenants and the additional costs of regulating them.

Sometimes it's worthwhile stepping outside the bounds of conventional wisdom and questioning whether our current 'normal' is an eternal feature of society or has been created. For example, rent as a percentage of average wages has more than trebled since 1991. People want affordable housing in sustainable, inclusive communities.

The current environment is antagonistic to collective solutions because there are existing powerful interests - private landlords, property developers, banks, and vulture funds - who will lose out from change. But the case for public ownership of housing is too strong. In cities like Vienna and Copenhagen, public ownership delivers affordability, quality, and security. That's what people in Ireland want and deserve.

The Workers' Party introduced the 'Vienna Model' of 'cost-rental' or mixed-income public housing to Ireland through our 'Solidarity Housing' proposal in 2016 and built on this policy framework in our recent publication *Homes for All: A Public Housing Revolution*.

Our ideas on mixed-income public housing are now becoming mainstream, with city council officials and right-wing parties, who once rejected them, now claiming to support them.

We will continue to fight for mixed-income public housing as the solution to the housing crisis and force the establishment parties to put their money where their mouth is.

Our proposals

1. Build Public Housing on Public Land

- End the sell-off of public land to private developers. Public land should only be used to build mixed-income public housing – rented to a mix of people, paying according to their income.
- Establish a state housing corporation to fund and construct mixed-income public housing along the lines of the Workers' Party's *Solidarity Housing* proposal. *Solidarity Housing* proposes a radical widening of public housing provision to cater for a greater range of households, paying according to their income.
- For all new developments, provide green space, infrastructure, and amenities, before housing is built.

2. End Landlord Rule – Rights for Renters

- Introduce leases of indefinite duration in place of the current system of Part IV tenancies (where landlords can evict tenants without reason every 4-6 years). Any new tenancy signed would only come to an end when the tenant chooses, and fixed-term leases would only be granted (by the Residential Tenancies Board) in exceptional circumstances.
- Introduce anti-eviction legislation, including ending the loopholes which allow evictions where the landlord or their family want to move in.
- Introduce a ten-year cap on current rents
- Establish a rental index setting the maximum rent for a one-bedroom property at a third of the current average wage and reducing rents for existing tenancies.
- Establish neighbourhood rental tribunals, under the auspices of the Residential Tenancies Board, where tenants can challenge unaffordable rents
- Make landlords - not tenants - pay for improvements to rental properties.
- Establish a Tenancy Protection Fund (to fund repairs where landlords refuse to do so) paid for through collecting a landlords' income levy, and set up the Deposit Protection Scheme.

3. End 'AirBnB' rentals other than principal primary residences

A Public Waste Collection Service

In an era of looming climate catastrophe, the primary objectives of household waste management should be to reduce the amount of material which households dispose of to the smallest amount we can, while at the same time ensuring that as much of our disposed material as possible is recyclable.

Ireland's system of multiple providers competing with one another to collect waste from households ('competition within the market') is a total failure. And for good reason:

- Workers' rights have deteriorated significantly since privatisation;
- Competition and 'choice' are illusory where bin collection is less profitable; and
- Local authorities now face higher costs in clearing dumped bags and in monitoring and prosecuting illegal dumping thanks to higher bin charges.

This system is neither environmentally sound, socially acceptable nor financially sensible.

The Government's willful misinterpretation of the 'polluter pays' principle shows just how seriously they take climate change. With the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive it is the producer not the purchaser who bears the cost of recycling but whenever possible the Government forgets this model so as to defend private interests.

For example, the Government set out a suite of measures to implement the EU Waste Directives. Yet somehow only the measures which fall to households (pay-by-weight charges) have been progressed significantly since 2012. There has been no movement on having private providers reduce waste, provide food waste collection, deal with recyclables sustainably and in Ireland, or bear the cost of monitoring.

The situation is too stark to risk continuing with failed policies and failed ideologies. Private interests cause the damage so they can pay their fair share.

Environmentally sustainable capitalism is a contradiction in terms. We have succumbed to the idea that private companies are the rightful owners of all profitable enterprises - no matter what the consequences.

If our objective is to ensure the protection of our environment while preserving people's employment and their health and well-being, then the only option is a publicly-owned and publicly-provided household waste collection service.

Our proposals

1. Re-introduce a public household waste collection service, free at the point of collection.

This should be a single-collector, publicly-owned waste collection system, funded primarily through the operation of a publicly-owned recycling industry. It should include the free collection of all recyclable material for all households.

2. Transform Bord na Móna into a national recycling company, with profits from recycling used to fund the household waste collection service.

Establish a national recycling 'centre of excellence' under the auspices of Bord na Móna, which is run on a commercial basis and with the surplus reinvested into subsidising waste collection services. Given that it already operates a minor waste-to-energy facility and the need to transition away from peat production in a socially responsible manner, transforming Bord na Móna into a national recycling company simply makes sense. Each local authority would have shares in the new company and would be issued with a rebate proportionate to the amount of recyclable material it collects, to be reinvested into fully covering the costs of waste collection in that area.

3. Focus on the real waste producers – introduce mandatory packaging reduction measures for retailers.

It is not possible for individual households to 'choose' to reduce the amount of waste they produce.

- Radically re-interpret the 'producer pays' principle to place the burden for waste reduction on the entity (almost always a profit-making company) which takes the decisions as to how to package the good and makes profit from the sale of the good,
- Disband REPAK and create in its place a publicly-owned body which establishes mandatory waste reduction and packaging standards for all goods retailers, including
 - A ban on the use of non-recyclable or non-reusable materials for packaging,
 - The elimination of packaging for the majority of fresh produce, and
 - Introducing a rating system for retailers and goods producers.

Introduce free public childcare

Relying on the market has directly led to the spiraling costs of childcare in Ireland. We now have the fourth-highest net cost of childcare as a percentage of family income in the OECD. For lone parents, only the US and Canada have higher childcare costs.

The cost of childcare is a huge burden on working families and parents, and often means that taking up employment is unaffordable, pushing some parents out of the workforce.

It has also meant that there is little planning – unlike at primary or secondary level, where the Department of Education and Skills uses a demographic model to assess where we will need schools now and into the future, the market model leaves us with vacancies in some areas and over-subscription in others.

And it's not the workers who are making profits off this system. Another innovation of the market model is that it has led to low-paid, precarious employment for a skilled and almost-entirely female workforce.

Childcare and preschool matter in childhood development and they are an important factor in women's ability to participate in the workforce and access education and training. Instead of squandering potential, let's develop it.

Our proposals

- 1. Childcare and pre-school education should be viewed as part of a mainstream education system that aids a community's development and resources.**
- 2. Childcare services must be free at the point of service and universally accessible.**
- 3. The system needs to be both planned and accountable. Planning and funding should be organised centrally through either the Department of Education and Skills or the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, with local government taking responsibility though the local joint ETB/County Childcare Committee.**

Unclogging Dublin: urban transport

Currently, transport sits with national government and the National Transport Authority (NTA). The effects of this on Dublin, a large city, are clear to see: Dublin is one of the slowest-moving cities in the world. The proposals below remain primarily the concern of national government. However, as city representatives, we have a role in promoting them and campaigning for them.

The high rate of car usage in cities is no accident. Since the early twentieth century, personal car ownership was regarded by corporations as one of the single biggest areas where money could be made. In cities like Los Angeles, light rail 'streetcar' transport systems were systematically bought up and destroyed by large motor vehicle producers, in order to create a demand for personal car ownership. The reality is, dependence on car usage for day-to-day transport benefits those corporations - but not many other people.

The clogging of Dublin's roads is worsened by poor urban planning and the housing crisis. It should not be tolerated as 'normal' that people are forced to travel hours each day to their place of work. The proposals set out below should be read in conjunction with the rest of this manifesto, which aim to build cities where it is possible to work, live, bring children to care or school, and socialise with friends and family, within one vibrant, sustainable neighbourhood.

Our proposals

1. A *real* Rapid Bus & Tram Corridor system

- The Workers' Party supports the development of a Rapid Bus Corridor (or equivalent light rail) system, as the primary transport mechanism for all residents not within walking and cycling distance of their destination. The current 'BusConnects' proposal has many benefits, however it will not function properly without modifications:
 - Fully-segregated cycle lanes along the entire route
 - Pre-boarding payment / tagging system, similar to the LUAS
 - Single decker, multi-carriage vehicles with multiple entrances to allow for quick boarding
 - The segregation of the corridor from traffic to prevent its use by drivers
 - The removal of taxis from Bus Lanes. An exception to this will be taxis carrying a passenger who holds a disability parking permit, or a passenger aged 80 years or older. Taxis carrying such passengers will display a window sign for easy monitoring.

2. Free public transport - for those who ditch the car

- The Workers' Party supports free public transport. However, we believe that, as it is introduced, it should be used as a tool to reduce car ownership across the city. Over time, this can move towards universal free public transport. We support the extension of the free travel pass to all one-parent households, and free public transport for all adults who do not own a car, and their under-18 dependents.

3. Public money for public solutions - not private subsidies

- **No private corporate involvement in public transport.** All routes should be funded publicly - not through costly PPPs - and run by state-owned companies with trade union representation on the management and board.
- **An end to subsidies for electric cars,** which only benefits those who can afford costly vehicles. Public financing should be used to fund transport options which are equally available to all. Tax breaks and subsidies for expensive consumer goods benefit the wealthy disproportionately. As a principle, our transport system should be built up through public investment in infrastructure, education, and ending harmful practices - not tax breaks. Tax breaks as incentives are right-wing policy tools which reduce the public budget, and favour the wealthy.

4. Create space for non-car transport

- All the investment in the world will not change the fact that there is only limited space on our roads and, currently, they are at capacity. It is not credible to support increases in buses and trams, without supporting a reduction in the numbers of cars on our roads - whether driving or parked. We support:
 - A dedicated Public Transport bus lane on the M50, for orbital routes operating on an expanded public bus network
 - The gradual introduction of a car-free zone from Parnell Sq to Grafton St, Capel St to Gardiner St, and George's St to Westland Row, with permits for those with mobility limits. This could be trialled with 'Car Free Sundays.'
 - Wherever necessary, the removal of on-street city centre parking to make way for segregated bicycle lanes.
 - An urban congestion charge.

5. Make Dublin pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly

- As well as the high profile – and expensive – infrastructure development, there are plenty of inexpensive measures that can make Dublin a better city for pedestrians and cyclists. These include:
 - Ensuring pedestrian crossings have timing schedules which favour pedestrians
 - The removal of the vast majority of bollards taking up pedestrian space
 - Moving street furniture relating to car parking and road traffic (meters, signs) onto the road (through the removal of parking spaces). Why should pedestrian space be sacrificed?
 - The removal of commercial advertising sandwich boards from public property
 - The introduction within the city council's planning department of a 'school transport liaison officer,' with responsibility for working with schools to make small changes that help more children walk and cycle to school.

4. Dramatically reduce commercial road traffic

- Commercial road traffic - HGVs, delivery vans - has a very detrimental effect on quality of life in urban centres. It adds enormously to congestion, road damage and noise. We propose the establishment of a national haulage company, with decent, unionised employment, responsible for considering how to reduce the impact of freight, delivery, construction and heavy goods vehicles in our cities. In Dublin, one initial project should be the establishment of freight trains on the LUAS system, something already in operation in Dresden and St. Étienne.

Tax corporations and landlords to fund public services

In the EU-15 countries, grants from central government account for a little over half of all government spending. In Ireland it's 95%. Unless we change this, increases in local government responsibility would be meaningless as they would have very little ability to actually do anything.

One of the present sources of revenue for local government is taxes and tariffs. Commercial rates should be a significant source of income but as of 2016 local authorities were owed €340m in unpaid rates. Another source of funding is the Local Property Tax. At present, 80% is retained in the local authority and the remaining 20% redistributed to other areas with lower tax bases. This is a completely blunt tax that pays no heed to ability to pay and should be abolished.

In Austria, however, around 90% of the revenue of municipalities and states comes from shared federal government taxes. This ensures continuity from year to year. Tax revenues are distributed to each individual state based on population, combined with a fixed ratio, rather than by the local revenue base. States and municipalities also levy their own taxes (e.g. on property, second homes, pets, tourism, etc.). The states also have access to the Austrian Federal Financing Agency.

Funding from central government needs to be combined with new revenue raising capacities for local government. These new taxes should be aimed at the wealthiest sections of society. In Dublin, we want to introduce new taxation measures aimed at the giant corporations, developers, and landlords, who make huge profits from our city, using our infrastructure and our people, but don't pay an adequate share of tax, if any at all.

Local government should also engage in commercial activities, including waste services, gardening and landscaping services, building and development, training on energy management, recruitment, and health and safety.

Our proposals

1.) Local government should be funded in part through a block grant from the Exchequer.

- This should be primarily funded through ring-fenced taxes that impact on local areas (betting, alcohol, tobacco, emissions, plastic bags, etc.), collected by the Revenue Commissioners and distributed based on population and need.

2.) However, and to ensure an element of political independence from central government, efforts should be made to identify autonomous sources of

funding also. These should be aimed primarily at the corporations, developers, and landlords who profit from our city but don't pay their way.

These new taxes and revenue raising measures could include:

- A 'Landlord's tax' in which large landlords owning 2+ properties pay commercial rates on those properties
- The elimination of rebates on commercial rates for owners of vacant commercial properties and the enforcement of the charge of interest on non-payment of commercial rates (as currently provided by law).
- A local income tax for those earning €70,000+, feasible now that the property tax is collected by Revenue
- A local corporation tax, in which corporations with a turnover above a certain defined threshold
- A mansion transaction tax, levied as a percentage of the sale of homes sold at above €1million, or office and commercial space above an agreed defined threshold
- A bed tax, payable by tourists staying in hotels, has the potential to raise €100 million nationally, with most of that revenue in Dublin, if levied at a rate of €5 / night - typical in other European capital cities.

The Workers' Party wants to build a new Republic.

A Republic that is run in the interest of the great majority of people: the working class.

We want to take power away from the class that has run this so-called Republic into the ground and profited from it at the time. The bankers, developers, landlords and the cosy political establishment who line their own pockets at the expense of working class people.

We want an Ireland which can work for everyone and where everyone can work.

To do this we need our own party – a party that wants to win power for the working class – one that goes beyond slogans and has a plan for how to achieve a better life for all.

With your help, The Workers' Party can be that party.

If you want a Republic that guarantees the right to a home, to a living-wage job, and to quality healthcare, you'll have to fight for it.

Join the Workers' Party. Build a new Republic – a democratic, secular and socialist Ireland.

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