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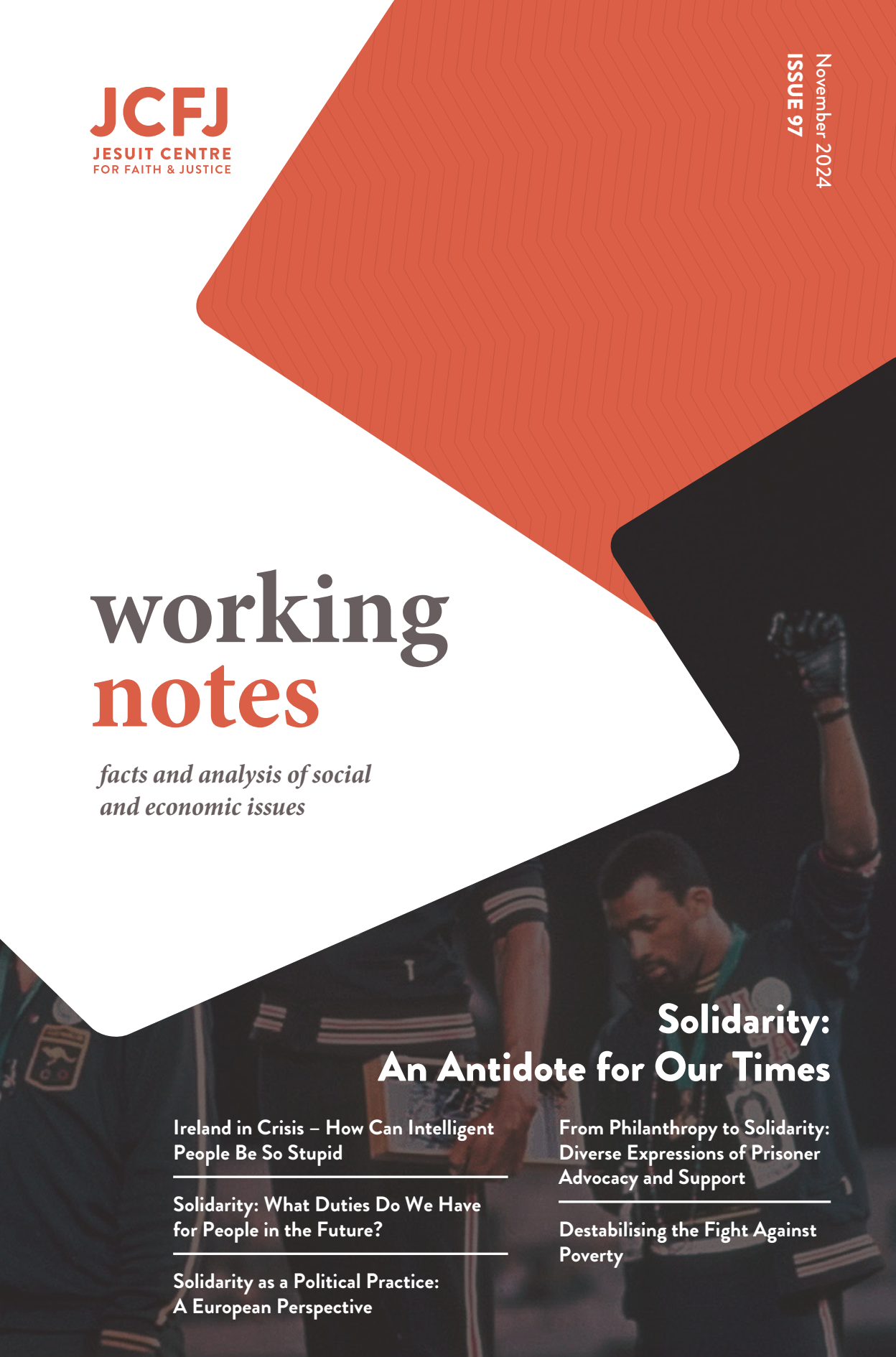

Solidarity: An Antidote for Our Times

Working Notes
Facts and analysis of social and economic issues
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Editorial

Keith Adams

Against the dark night sky at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, when Tommie Smith and John Carlos both gave the Black Power salute in the iconic photo, Australian sprinter Peter Norman is easy to miss. As the Star-Spangled Banner played in the thin air, the salute was a very public act of defiance in front of a watching world, highlighting racism and systemic segregation in the United States. Only as the details of the moments between the end of the race and the medal ceremony were revealed, does the significance of Norman's presence in solidarity with Smith and Carlos become apparent.

After the race finished, Smith and Carlos asked Norman if he believed in human rights and if he believed in God, to which he answered yes to both. Carlos remembers expecting to see fear in Norman's eyes; instead he saw love as Norman immediately joined the protest. Norman sought out a badge of the Olympic Project for Human Rights to wear on his left breast to show solidarity, and even suggested that Smith and Carlos share their gloves, as Carlos had forgotten his pair.[1]

1 'Mexico 1968: Peter Norman – Athletics and Black Power Salute', National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, accessed 13 November 2024, https://www.nfsa.gov.au/collection/curated/asset/95238-mexico-1968-peter-norman-athletics-and-black-power-salute.

Their paths diverged after the protest. Banned from the Olympics for life, Smith and Carlos returned to the United States as heroes of the civil rights movement,[2] while Norman returned to Australia as a pariah and ridiculed for his stand as Australia was experiencing paroxysms of racial strife. Despite running Olympic qualifying times for the 1972 games, Norman was not selected again. This effectively ended his career, despite producing the single greatest Australian sprinting performance. Solidarity has a cost.

This issue of *Working Notes* seeks to explore the concept of solidarity and how it could remedy many of the social ills in contemporary Ireland. We begin with a paper by Peter McVerry, SJ, a homelessness activist for over 50 years and JCFJ staff member, which he delivered at the Seán Mac Diarmada Summer School in 2023. In the provocatively titled "Ireland in Crisis – How Can Intelligent People Be So Stupid," McVerry diagnoses the "self-protective individualism" present in Ireland which reinforces the myth that the ideal person is "responsible for their own future without having to rely on anyone or anything else." This pursuit of security through wealth is not solely an individual pursuit as McVerry widens the scope of his critique to nation states and their treatment of migrants.

Combining these two spheres, McVerry argues strongly that the failure of centre-right and centre-left politicians to meet the basic needs of many people has created "fertile soil for the Far Right," with politicians then hardening their positions on borders and offering refuge. But a diagnosis alone will not suffice. McVerry prescribes solidarity as a vaccine which will prevent us from suffering the worst effects of "self-protective individualism." Drawing on Gospel parables, McVerry concludes that "[s]olidarity is rooted not in *my* distress at the pain of others, but in the objective reality of *their* distress. Solidarity is a commitment to alleviating the pain of others."

Following on, Meaghan Carmody, a Senior Sustainability Advisor for Business in the

Associated Press/Alamy Stock Photo

Community Ireland, proposes that solidarity is not only for the present but transcends time. In "Intergenerational Solidarity: What Duties Do We Have for People in the Future?" she contends that "our political systems should also seek to govern with future generations in mind." After providing a series of philosophical rationales and findings from neuroscience, Carmody deftly traces a chronology of global governance efforts for future generations which have emerged over half a century. Sharpening her focus down to domestic politics, she then outlines the differing future generations structures which have been developed in Hungary, Wales, and Finland. Lamenting the short-termism of contemporary Irish politics which "prioritise immediate gains over long-term sustainability," she proposes that the next government continue the groundbreaking work of Marc Ó Cathasaigh TD and create an Ombudsman or Commission for Future Generations.

After identifying the principle of solidarity as an "essentially contested concept," Cesare Sposetti, SJ, managing editor of *Aggiornamenti Sociali* in Milan, sidesteps the futile definitional task and, instead, outlines its current application, particularly in the context of European politics. What follows in

2 James Montague, 'The Third Man: The Forgotten Black Power Hero', CNN, 24 April 2012, https://www.cnn.com/2012/04/24/sport/olympics-norman-black-power/index.html.

"Solidarity as Political Practice: A European Perspective," is a skilful excavation of the origin of solidarity through sociology, political philosophy and Catholic Social Teaching. From considering *obligatio in solidum* in Roman Law to the activism of social movements in the 19th and 20th century, Sposetti notes that "Catholic reflection on the issue of solidarity developed quite late, even though its roots can be clearly found at the core of the Christian message itself." With echoes of the preceding papers, Sposetti identifies a movement of "desolidarisation" fostered by the modernisation process, leading to a hyper-individualism, but he finds hope in the intergenerational aspect of solidarity as younger generations find their voice.

Sharpening the focus to a particular group of people, Dr Cormac Behan of Maynooth University in "From Philanthropy to Solidarity: Diverse Expressions of Prisoner Advocacy and Support," details the individuals and organisations involved in advocacy and support for those in Irish prisons. After outlining early philanthropists and prison reformers, such as John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, Behan argues that the emergence of the category of "politically aligned" prisoners, particularly due to the conflict in Northern Ireland, led to the formation of wider support networks providing advocacy and support for "ordinary" prisoners. This "renewed interest in the plight of prisoners" led to the emergence of Portlaoise Prisoners Union and the Prisoners' Rights Organisation, which campaigned to improve substandard prison conditions.

Finally, in "Destabilising the Fight Against Poverty," Sofia Clifford Riordan and Noel Wardick of the Dublin City Community Co-op question the existence of solidarity and collaboration between the Government and the community, local development and voluntary sector, who are central to the State's response to alleviate the consequences of poverty. Through an in-depth analysis of "competitive tendering," drawing on practitioner experience, Clifford Riordan and Wardick warn that this approach, when compared to other social services, is a "destabilisation of the very ecosystem designed and endorsed by the State to tackle poverty." After outlining the job insecurity and pay disparity prevalent in the sector due to Government policy, the authors warn that if this destabilisation continues, anti-poverty networks will not be equipped to deal with the various crises which "will be compounded and exacerbated by the climate crisis."

On that night in 1968, Norman won a silver medal in a marquee race but it was his solidarity and the courage of his convictions to stand alongside his fellow athletes that has endured. When he died in 2006, Smith and Carlos were both pallbearers at his funeral. In a 2020 gathering, Pope Francis counseled his listeners that solidarity is vital for the healing of our interpersonal and social sicknesses, to the extent that "[t]here is no other way. Either we go ahead along the road of solidarity, or things will worsen."[3] Solidarity has a cost as we prioritise the needs of others and seek justice. As many of the social ills and policy failures in contemporary Ireland result from the primacy of the individual, solidarity may be the only antidote available to counteract this myth of self-sufficency.

3 Pope Francis, 'General Audience - Solidarity and the Virtue of Faith', Vatican, 2 September 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200902_udienza-generale.html.

Ireland in Crisis – How Can Intelligent People Be So Stupid

Peter McVerry SJ

Peter McVerry, SJ is a founding member of the Jesuit Centre for faith and justice and a Director of the Peter McVerry Trust, which provides a range of services to respond to homelessness. He has been a homelessness activist for over fifty years, since moving to Dublin's north inner-city in 1974.

[Paper delivered by Peter McVerry, SJ in 2023 at the Seán Mac Diarmada Summer School in Kiltyclogher, Co. Leitrim. The theme for the summer school was "Ireland's Place in a World in Crisis: Examining the cultural, economic, environmental, political and social effects of the global crisis on Ireland."]

VIEWS FROM ABOVE AND BELOW

Ireland is at a crossroads, indeed it is in crisis. But the cause of the crisis is not some external agency or force. The cause of the crisis is within.

There are two ways of looking at Ireland's economic fortunes. There is a view from the top and a view from the bottom.

Viewed from the top, Ireland is one of the most successful economies in Europe. It has effectively full employment,[1] households have record levels of savings,[2] its economy is forecast to grow by 4.9% this year (the highest in the European Union)[3], and it has a massive budget surplus which is growing year by year.[4]

But, viewed from the bottom, Ireland is a failing state. I often wonder why would a young person with a qualification stay in Ireland. They will never own their own home, they will be paying outrageous rents all their life for a place to live with no security of tenure, and they will have one of the highest costs of living in Europe.[5] While most of the very visible local authority tenements have been demolished, such as in the inner city of Dublin, the tenements are still with us, but now they exist in the private rented sector, hidden behind what appears to be very respectable house fronts. We have a housing system which grows more and more dysfunctional every year, a public hospital system which seems incapable of addressing long waiting lists for treatment, or people waiting on trolleys for days on end, and services such as schools, hospitals, child mental health, GPs – they all have great difficulty in recruiting and retaining personnel. The list goes on.

Credit: Hans Eiskonen on Unsplash

Whichever view of Ireland you have depends on where you are.

Imagine a person who lives in the top flat of a building. The alarm clock hits eight o'clock in the morning and he pulls back the curtains. The sun shines in. He looks out into the back garden and sees the freshly cut grass, the flowers swaying in the breeze and the birds jumping about the lawn looking for worms. He thinks, "It's a lovely day." There may also be someone living in the basement flat of the same building. Eight o'clock in the morning comes and they pull back the curtains. The sun can't get in. They look out into the back garden, but all they see is the whitewashed wall of the outside toilet. They can't see the grass or the flowers or the worms. They don't know whether it's a lovely day or not.

Here you have two people looking out into the same garden at the same time of the same day, but they have two totally different views. There is a view from the top and a view from the bottom. And in our society, there are two totally different views of what is going on in Ireland. (Indeed, there are more than two different views, but let's just keep the analogy simple.)

There is the view of someone who has a well-paid, permanent, pensionable job, who lives in a nice house in a nice part of town, whose family all have health in insurance, whose children are going to fee-paying schools and who will go on to third-level education and subsequently on to a well-paid, permanent, pensionable job and buy a nice house in a nice part of town. They believe Ireland is a wonderful place to live.

1 Eoin Burke-Kennedy, 'Jobless Numbers Rise to 4.2% but Ireland Remains Close to Full Employment', The Irish Times, 3 July 2024, https://www.irishtimes.com/business/2024/07/03/irish-unemployment-rises-marginally-to-42/.

2 Gill Stedman, 'Household Savings Rate Increases to 14.7%', RTE, 13 June 2024, https://www.rte.ie/news/business/2024/0613/1454560-household-savings-rate-increases-to-14-7/.

3 Naomi O'Leary, 'Irish Economic Growth Helps EU Narrowly Avoid Recession', The Irish Times, 13 February 2023, https://www.irishtimes.com/business/2023/02/13/eu-avoids-recession-as-forecasts-revised-up/.

4 Eleanor Butler, 'Ireland Is Running a Budget Surplus: Why Has It Been Warned to Stop Spending?', Euronews, 5 September 2024, https://www.euronews.com/business/2024/09/05/ireland-is-running-a-budget-surplus-why-has-it-been-warned-to-stop-spending.

5 Sean McCarthaigh, 'New Data Confirms Ireland to Be the Most Expensive Country in Europe for Household Goods', Irish Examiner, 21 June 2023, https://www.irishexaminer.com/business/economy/arid-41167393.html.

Then there is the view of someone who left school at 16 to get an unskilled, insecure job in order to help his unemployed parents financially, who lives in a disadvantaged neighbourhood which has a major drug problem. His parents want to move to a nicer part of town, but they know that's never going to happen. His grandfather is on a long waiting list for a hip replacement in the public health service. He thinks Ireland is a lousy place to live.

DECISIONS FROM ABOVE

The problem is not that there are two views. The problem is that all the decisions in our society, in the business world, the financial world, the political world, are made by the people with the view from the top and they have no idea of what the experience of those with the view from the bottom is like. And yet they make the decisions that affect those people at the bottom. Living in the top flat blinds you to the reality of life in the basement. Financial security blinds you to the reality of people who struggle to survive from week to week, or even day to day. Owning your own home blinds you to the reality of living in the insecurity of private rented accommodation and paying exorbitant rents. Having health insurance blinds you to the reality of people having to wait years for urgent surgery. I am not trying to give anyone a guilt trip, but to suggest that we all – and in particular, decision-makers – have to move out of our bubbles. We do this not by reading reports or watching prime time videos but by engaging with those in the basement.

My bubble was burst when I went to the inner city of Dublin. I grew up in a nice home. My parents were financially secure. I went to a fee-paying school and on to university. I thought Ireland was a wonderful place to live and grow up. That is until I went to the inner city of Dublin. There I was shocked by the conditions in which people were forced to live, in appalling tenement accommodation, with an unemployment rate of about 80%. Young people growing up there had no realistic prospect of ever getting a decent job, so they were leaving school at 12 years old and hanging around the streets all day long. Their parents were unemployed and couldn't give them any money, so they did a little robbing, until they got to 16 or 17, at which time they did a lot of robbing, and went to jail. For them, Ireland was an awful place to live and grow up. But what shocked me even more was that I had been living in Dublin for many years and was totally unaware of the conditions in which people in the inner city lived. Six years in the inner city radicalised me.

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Some people have no idea what I am talking about.

VIRUS OF SELF-PROTECTIVE INDIVIDUALISM

Let us go back to our house. The landlord decides he would like the tenants in the basement to have a nice view of the garden. So he decides to demolish the outside toilet and install a porch door so that the tenants can access the beautiful garden. Isn't that wonderful? However, now he tells the tenants in the basement that because he has made substantial improvements to their flat, he will have to increase their rent. They cannot afford to pay so the landlord gives them, very reluctantly of course, notice to quit.

Credit: iStock, 907650234

This is what the vulture funds did after the financial crash. They were invited in by the Government, so, like vultures flying over territories, they looked for what they call "undervalued properties" – homes where people were paying average or below-market-value rents. They purchase these people's rented homes and upgrade them, the cost of which is passed onto tenants, some of who cannot afford the rent increases. The result is that tenants are being pushed out of their homes – they fall into arrears and have an eviction process launched against them. The exemption given to vulture funds by government – they pay no tax on the rental income,[6] unlike Irish landlords who pay over 50% tax on their rental income, or capital gains tax on the sale of the properties – was a massive transfer of money from ordinary Irish people, many struggling financially, to very wealthy international funds.

The island of saints and scholars has become a land of buyers and sellers. How did we allow this to happen?

A destructive virus has corrupted our economy. It has become widely entrenched in our culture and mind-sets. It has even infiltrated into our churches and their spirituality. It has been incubating for many decades but it escaped during Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's time in office. It is called *self-protective individualism*.[7] This virus leads us to believe that our security and happiness depends on possessing more and more.

This *self-protective individualism* promotes the idea that I, and I alone, am responsible for my future. It tells us that we are self-interested actors who compete against each other for scarce resources. It tries to persuade us that the ideal person is the one who is independent, who can stand on their own two feet, who is responsible for their own future without having to rely on anyone or anything else. Self-sufficiency is the ideal state; dependency is seen as a weakness, a vulnerability which

"This self-protective individualism promotes the idea that I, and I alone, am responsible for my future. It tells us that we are self-interested actors who compete against each other for scarce resources.

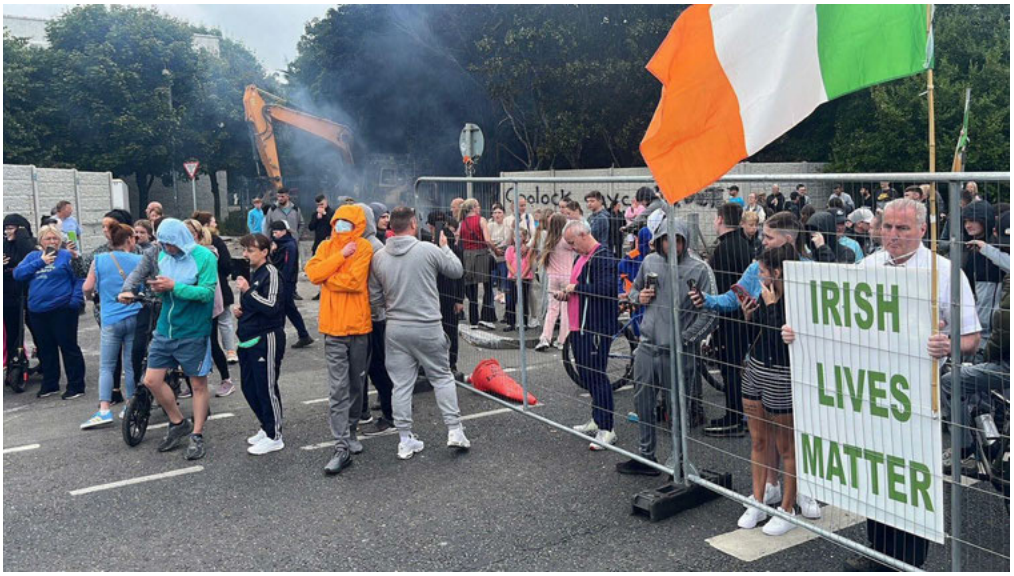
we have to overcome, if we are to be truly secure. And so we make our own future by striving to have enough financial resources to meet all our needs and have a little extra available for future emergencies, a rainy day fund. Our independence and security have come to depend on what we possess. The only true security we can rely on is financial security. Of course we all want enough. But enough is never enough. There is no ceiling. Enough is a meaningless term. We keep on trying to accumulate more and more, in the belief that the more we accumulate, the more independent and secure we will become. To seek to accumulate more and more is considered to be just common-sense, the responsible thing to do, we owe it to our families.

SELFISHNESS AS VIRTUE

A new form of selfishness—everyone for themselves—has mutated into a virtue. The constant fear of being made redundant and joining the ranks of the poor creates a ruthless competitiveness that seeks to secure and maintain every advantage possible. To do anything else is just foolishness. A concern for others and a solidarity with those who have fallen behind does not sit easily with this endless search for security. Capital accumulation takes priority over the common good. A person's right to make money takes priority over the needs of the larger community. Money has become the supreme value that all other values are measured by. Money is the new God – in money I trust. This became even more apparent in the few months leading up to the budget. With a massive tax surplus, the political parties competed with each other to offer more money to more groups in return for their votes. Fine Gael was first out of the trap with the promise of a €1,000 cut in income tax for middle income

6 Real Estate Investment Trusts are generally exempt from Corporation Tax on income from their property rental business only. See Revenue, 'Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs)', 7 June 2024, https://www.revenue.ie/en/companies-and-charities/financial-services/reit/index.aspx.

7 My colleague, Kevin Hargaden, has written about it at a scholarly level: Kevin Hargaden, *Theological Ethics in a Neoliberal Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).



Protestors at the former Crown Paints site in Coolock, North Dublin. Credit: PA images/Alamy Stock Photo

earners.[8] Some may believe that what I am saying is pure nonsense – and maybe it is. But maybe this virus has been so successful that it has so deeply infiltrated our mindsets that it is impossible to even imagine a coherent alternative. This is perhaps the reason why Irish people did not march, protest, or riot in any significant way at the austerity imposed in the years after the end of the Celtic Tiger. People, for the most part, accepted austerity because they believed that there was no alternative.

In the business world, maximising profit is the primary goal, often the only goal. Hotels have been sharply criticised for inflating their prices – they justify that by invoking the "market." Supermarkets have been accused of "greedflation,"[9] as food inflation was far in excess of general inflation. While all low and middle-income households in the country struggle to pay their energy bills, the energy companies are making massive, record profits. Land hoarding, which increases the cost of housing, is widespread. Institutional investors view residential properties, not as homes for people, but as opportunities to extract profits. The business person who can replace 500 workers with technology, thereby cutting costs, is lauded as a shrewd entrepreneur. A landlord who is not seeking the market rent for their property is just considered stupid. Rent caps are opposed by the owners of rental property as an interference in their right to maximise the profit they can make from their property. Now that the price of houses has almost reached its peak, landlords are selling their rented properties, and evicting the tenants, in order to maximise their value of their house. Many would say that to do anything else would be foolish. In business, everything becomes subordinate to making money.

NATIONS ARE NOT IMMUNE

Seeking financial security through accumulating more and more applies to nations as well as individuals and businesses. Just as individuals are involved in a competitive struggle with other individuals to secure as much of the available resources as they can, so too nations are involved in a competitive struggle with other nations to secure as much as they can. Hence, anything that would reduce our competitiveness, such as lifting workers out of poverty by introducing a living wage, is unthinkable. Our quality of life depends on continuously growing the nation's GDP. To fall into recession is to put at risk our quality of life. Economic progress

8 Double-income households earning more than €50,000 each with three children benefitted most from Budget 2025 as they will be better-off by more than €1,500 a year. See Conor Pope, 'Budget 2025: Who Stands to Benefit Most from Tax Changes and Cost-of-Living Measures?', The Irish Times, 1 October 2024, https://www.irishtimes.com/your-money/2024/10/01/budget-2025-who-stands-to-benefit-most-from-tax-changes-and-cost-of-living-measures/.

9 Phillip Inman, 'Greedflation: Corporate Profiteering "Significantly" Boosted Global Prices, Study Shows', *The Guardian*, 7 December 2023, sec. Business, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/07/greedflation-corporate-profiteering-boosted-global-prices-study.

has become the religion of the modern age. To challenge the goal of increasing GDP, year by year, is therefore considered naïve and foolish. Unlimited economic growth is the assumption, despite the fact that we know the planet's material resources are finite and its ability to act as a sink for our waste is limited.[10] Government policy is focused predominantly on increasing economic growth and managing budgets. The economic narrative is dominated by terms such as productivity, competitiveness and efficiency. Ireland's massive budget surpluses ensures Ireland's security, at least for the moment, in an insecure world. The world is on the edge of a precipice, it is time to put on our crash helmets, but all nations continue seeking maximum economic growth, in the vague hope that technology will save us.[11]

Building walls or fences or patrolling the seas to prevent immigrants from coming in to take our jobs, our housing, and our wealth is the focus of much policy in US, the UK, Poland, Hungary, and Italy. Such narrow forms of nationalism err in thinking that they can develop on their own, regardless of the ruinous impact on others – that, by closing their doors to others, their quality of life will be better protected. Immigrants are seen as threats who have nothing to offer. Wealthy nations believe that they have worked hard to build up their wealth (conveniently ignoring the effects of slavery and exploitation of the resources of countries that were colonised) and are rarely prepared to share their wealth with others.

REEMERGENCE OF THE FAR RIGHT

In Ireland, the anti-immigrant Far Right is a small but vocal minority.[12] However, we have seen, in other jurisdictions such as Poland, Hungary, Denmark, Austria and Sweden, how the Far Right can gain power and control the political agenda. In Spain, the *Vox* party exerts a deep influence on the political conversation.[13] In Germany, *Alternative für Deutschland* is now a major (and normalised) presence at Federal and Regional level.[14] In Italy, the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is of the *Fratelli d'Italia* party.[15] Turkey has just re-elected its autocratic President.[16] In France, Marine le Pen and her *National Rally* party scored their best ever results in last year's presidential and parliamentary elections.[17] In Ireland, they have little chance of taking power. But they don't even have to gain power. In Britain, a small Far Right minority have taken control of the Conservative party and the entire national discourse has lurched away from social democracy; in the US, a small Far Right minority have taken control of the Republican Party with devastating consequences.

The Far Right spread fear and hatred, using social media, especially TikTok, Twitter (under its new management), Telegram, Facebook, and You Tube, exploiting algorithms, which amplify toxic and manipulative content at scale and a dizzyingly rapid speed, fostering engagement via likes, shares and views. Whenever survey results can be tilted towards their narrative, it is a certainty that they will be exploited by the Far Right.[18] Disseminating false information can find a ready audience. Many people, especially young people, have come to believe – how can you blame them! – that the centre-right and centre-left politicians have failed to meet their basic needs, and that politicians are primarily interested in using their power and influence

10 In Doughnut Economics, Kate Raworth shifts the focus away from quarterly growth reports to how environmental sustainability can be addressed alongside social justice concerns. See Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist* (London: Random House Business, 2018).

11 Paul Burnell, Gemma Sherlock, and Ruth Comerford, 'Government Pledges Nearly £22bn for Carbon Capture Projects', BBC, 4 October 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cy4301n3771o.

12 Five Far Right councillors were elected in the 2024 local elections; including three independents and one from each of the Irish Freedom Party and the National Party. See Mick Clifford, 'Where to next for Far Right in Ireland?', Irish Examiner, 15 June 2024, https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/spotlight/arid-41416222.html.

13 Sandrine Morel, 'Spain's Vox Party Hosts Global Far Right Ahead of EU Elections', *Le Monde*, 20 May 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/05/20/spain-s-vox-party-holds-rally-in-hopes-of-bringing-together-far-right-ahead-of-eu-elections_6672039_4.html.

14 Paul Kirby and Jessica Parker, 'German Far Right AfD Hails "historic" Election Victory in East', BBC, Spetember 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn02w01xr2jo.

15 Jon Henley, 'Giorgia Meloni Has Emerged as a Kingmaker for the EU – but Will She Turn to Centre Right or Far Right?', The Observer, 2 June 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/02/giorgia-meloni-italy-far-right-prime-minister-eu.

16 Al Jazeera Staff, 'Turkey Election Run-off Results 2023 by the Numbers', Al Jazeera, 28 May 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/28/follow-the-vote-turkey-election-run-off-results-2023.

17 In the 2024 Parliament elections, National Rally and its allies received 33% of the national popular vote. See Angelique Chrisafis, 'Far-Right National Rally in Reach of Being Dominant French Party after Election First Round', The Guardian, 1 July 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/30/far-right-national-rally-in-reach-of-being-dominant-french-party-after-election-first-round.

18 As an example, the report that suggested that 75% of Irish people believe Ireland has taken in too many refugees. Michael Brennan, 'Three Quarters of People Think Ireland "Taking in Too Many Refugees"', Business Post, 28 May 2023, https://www.businesspost.ie/politics/three-quarters-of-people-think-ireland-taking-in-too-many-refugees/.

for their own personal gain. Young people were told that if they study hard, do well in school, go on to gain a qualification, then Irish society would take care of them. Now, they know their politicians will not deliver that deal. This is fertile soil for the Far Right. And with the advent of so-called AI, fake videos will proliferate promoting white supremacy, Islamophobia, anti-refugee rhetoric, climate denial and other anti-science views – whatever will advance the Far Right cause. Because they focus on the fears of people, these actors can lead communities to become more polarised, increasing distrust and looking for scapegoats to blame, and that can have a huge influence on government policy far in excess of their numbers.

PURSUIT OF WEALTH

This virus of *self-protective individualism* tries to persuade us that accumulating more and more ensures, not just our security, but also our happiness. Our deepest desires can be fulfilled through commodities. We all seek to have enough to be able to buy our own home, to have a car, to go on holidays to the sun, go out to restaurants, have nice clothes. As someone said, "Money doesn't bring happiness, but it sure allows you to look for it in more places."

The quality of life in Irish society is increasingly measured in purely economic terms. We are persuaded that the problems that exist – poverty, homelessness, inadequate public health care – can only be solved by increased economic activity, on the obvious grounds that we cannot spend what we do not have. However, in 1975 when Ireland had much less, we built 8,900 social houses. When we had a recession in the 1980s, we still built 6,500 social houses. And, in 2015, when we were much wealthier, we built 75 social houses.[19] In the poor Ireland of the 1970s there were about 1,000 homeless people in Ireland; in the much wealthier Ireland of 2024, there are over 14,000 registered homeless people[20]

"Young people were told that if they study hard, do well in school, go on to gain a qualification, then Irish society would take care of them. Now, they know their politicians will not deliver that deal. This is fertile soil for the Far Right.

and at least another 12,000 who are homeless but not registered. The problem is not poverty – we can no longer plead poverty. The problem is the pursuit of wealth in a way that destroys community, turns basic human needs like housing and food into commodities, abandons the common good to private interests, favours owners over workers, and distorts the human person into a marketable product, called the 'labour market'.

There is a direct connection between the pursuit of this individualised wealth along with the lauding of selfishness as a virture, and the failure to provide these basic facilities. And the link between that failure and the rise of the Far Right cannot be denied.

How can we allow this to happen? It happens because this virus of greed also makes us very judgemental. It persuades us that those who are financially secure are those who have been successful and they, rightly, enjoy the rewards of their hard work and self-sacrifice. They live in nice houses in nice areas and have a secure, comfortable lifestyle. They have proved themselves to be responsible and can be trusted. But there is a stigma attached to being poor or unemployed. They are seen as people who have failed, for one reason or another. They mostly live in poor housing, in deprived areas with few resources and they struggle to make ends meet. This sustains the ideology of meritocracy: Society should reward those who have proved they are capable and trustworthy, and all it can responsibly do is try to motivate those who have proved that they aren't. "Hand-ups, not hand-outs" is the way this ideology gets packaged. But that slogan obscures that the "supports" we offer are more conditional, more limited, and more ineffective than when our nation was an economic laggard.

19 Keith Adams et al., 'Tenant State of Mind: How Cost Rental Public Housing Can Reverse the State's Transformation to a Tenant' (Dublin: Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 2022), https://www.jcfj.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tenant-State-of-Mind-Web-1.pdf.

20 In August 2024, there were 14,486 people 'oficially' homeless in Ireland, including 4,419 children. See Imasha Costa, Cate McCurry, and Cillian Sherlock, 'New Record as Number of Homeless People in Ireland Reaches 14,486', Irish Examiner, 27 September 2024, https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41484685.html.

That story stems back to the 1980s. In the context of of rising inequality, unemployment, drugs, and poor local authority estate management, the challenges in large public housing estates were exploited to develop a stigmatising discourse that all social and public housing was a "failure." Social housing came to be seen as a form of housing for a lower class of citizen. And then it gradually became extinct.

At the same time, there is a huge crisis in the private rented sector. Most people becoming homeless today are being evicted from the private rented sector, as landlords exit the market in droves. We could retain a lot of landlords in the system and bring new landlords into the system by one simple move. All we have to do is scrap the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and revert to the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). In HAP, the local authority's responsibility is simply to pay the rent to the landlord. Our government has transferred the responsibility for selecting the tenant, managing the tenant, and, if necessary, evicting the tenant, to the landlord. In RAS, the landlord's responsibility is simply to make available a property to the local authority, a social housing unit. The local authority selects the tenant, manages the tenant and, if necessary, evicts the tenant, as it does with its own social housing estates. This is the local authority's job, not the landlord's. While I believe this could transform the private rented sector, and reduce the number becoming homeless, there isn't a hope in hell of the local authorities agreeing to this. Already, they transfer a lot of their newly acquired social housing units to the Approved Housing Bodies, another way of transferring responsibility for managing social housing, another, more subtle, form of privatisation. It is protective individualism on the institutional level!

We praise those charities who are helping the poor. This is understandable, but flawed. Consider instead that food kitchens, in this, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, are actually an obscenity. Instead, have become normalised and are generously supported by the public. To adapt a quotation from a South American Archbishop: when Br. Kevin feeds the poor, he is considered a saint; when he asks why are they poor, he is considered a left-wing troublesome cleric.[21] The St. Vincent de Paul are supporting record numbers of households in poverty in a country awash with money. But where is the outcry? Welfare projects, which meet certain urgent needs, should be considered merely temporary responses. When the number of homeless people passed 5,000, many years ago now, there was outrage. It was reported on the front pages of the media and on every news programme. But when the number passed 10,000, there was barely a whimper, except from charities working with homeless people, who were then disparagingly characterised by some in positions of authority as the "homeless industry."

"Solidarity derives not from our sense of generosity but from our sense of justice, from an acknowledgement that we are all united in our common humanity and the pain of others is our responsibility."

SOLIDARITY AS A VACCINE

What is happening in our world, and in our country, is a terminal spiritual disease. We worship money. But there is a vaccine. It will not prevent us from catching the virus of *self-protective individualism* but it will prevent us from suffering the worst effects of it. This vaccine is called solidarity. The Catholic Church in Ireland, as elsewhere, is a widely discredited institution. However, perhaps the values of the Gospel can challenge the unexamined, repetitious, conventional wisdom propogated by our leaders. At the core of the Gospel is this value of solidarity. Solidarity is rooted not in *my* distress at the pain of others, but in the objective reality of *their* distress. Solidarity is a commitment to alleviating the pain of others. Solidarity derives not from our sense of generosity but from our sense of justice, from an acknowledgement that we are all united in our common humanity and the pain of others is our responsibility.

21 Conor McCrave, "'Despair When I See How the Government Is Behaving": Brother Kevin Slams Government Housing Policy', TheJournal.ie, 8 December 2019, https://www.thejournal.ie/brother-kevin-criticised-the-government-over-housing-4923099-Dec2019/.

Credit: nappy at Unsplash

Half the parables in the Gospels are about the obscenity of accumulating wealth in the midst of poverty. The story of the farmer who had a bumper harvest, but found that his barns were not big enough to store all the food, decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones, so that he could live carefree for many years and eat, drink and make merry. This is a portrait of what our government considers a very prudent farmer. Jesus calls him a fool for not using his wealth to aid the hungry and poor who were living all around him.[22] When the workers stood in the market place, hoping to be chosen for a day's work – as workers on the docks used to have to do in Ireland – the vineyard owner arrived at 9am and agreed with the workers for a wage of one denarius – enough to feed their families for the day. He came again at midday to hire more workers, again early afternoon and again one hour before work was due to finish. When they came to get paid, everyone got one denarius. The workers who started work at 9am complained – the trade unions might have advised them go on strike - but Jesus praises the vineyard owner for wanting to make sure all his workers could feed their families.[23]

Jesus during his time on earth spent most of his time amongst the poor; the unwanted and marginalised were at the centre of his life. And, then, at the Last Supper he said: "Do this – do what I have done, sacrifice yourself for others – in memory of me."[24]

22 Luke 12:16-21.
23 Matthew 20:1-16.
24 Luke 22:19.

"Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people. Service means caring for the vulnerable members of our families and our society. In offering such service, we set aside our own wishes and desires, our pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable. Service always looks to the faces of those who are vulnerable, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, "suffers" that closeness and tries to help them.

When Jesus said, "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, welcome into the Kingdom of God,"[25] he was saying that our relationship with God depends on how we reach out to those in need, simply because they are in need. No matter what social, religious, or ethnic group they belong to, we encounter God in each of them. And refugees are amongst the most needy. It matters little whether the person in need was born in my country or elsewhere. Jesus' call to love is one that transcends all historical and cultural barriers. There is always a cost to reaching out to those in need, be it giving a few coins to a homeless person, a donation to a charity, or a few hours of voluntary work. But sometimes the cost will disturb our comfort zones, and then we remember that Jesus sacrificed everything for us.

Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people. Service means caring for the vulnerable members of our families and our society. In offering such service, we set aside our own wishes and desires, our pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable. Service always looks to the faces of those who are vulnerable, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, "suffers" that closeness and tries to help them.

25 Matthew 25:35, author's paraphrase.

Solidarity is a willingness to respond to the suffering of others with a love which is prepared to see my life changed, even radically, in order to bring change to the lives of those who suffer. It is a recognition that my concern for others is also, ultimately, a concern for myself; that in neglecting others, I am also diminishing myself. As the Nigerian proverb says: "If your neighbour is hungry, your chickens aren't safe". Or, to put it into an Irish context, "if a drug addict cannot access treatment, your property isn't safe."

The quality of life of those who are financially insecure depends just as much on their accessibility to basic services as on the income they receive. Access to secure housing, at a price they can afford, timely access to health care, access to quality education, to childcare, to good nursing homes for their elderly relatives where that is necessary – all this is important. We sometimes have discussions about a universal basic income, but we also need discussions about universal basic services. Have we forgotten, to adapt a phrase from the Gospel, that "the economy is for people, not people for the economy?"[26]

In Ireland, as in many other countries, some political parties have perfected the art of ignoring the poor and the needy. But suffering is the megaphone to shatter their deafness. The heart-breaking stories of people being evicted from their private rented accommodation, people who are elderly, or with disabilities or families with children and nowhere to go, can wake us up to the consequences of worshiping money. A society that seeks prosperity but turns it back on suffering is an unhealthy society. Several years ago, on the Joe Duffy programme, it was revealed that two women were diagnosed with cancer at the same time – one had private insurance, was treated straight away and her prognosis was very good; the other had a medical card and when she started treatment, many months later, was told that the cancer had spread and she had only a few months left to live. When the disparity is exposed clearly, everyone – even those at the top – can see how we all lose.

26 See Mark 2:27.

CONCLUSION

Our planet is hurtling towards disaster. The only thing that can save us is global solidarity. But Covid showed us that global solidarity is in short supply. The wealthier nations bought up most of the vaccines that became available[27] and refused to reveal the formula to poorer countries so that they could develop an affordable vaccine for themselves, in order to protect the profits of the pharmaceutical companies, even though they had developed the vaccine with substantial state investment. During Covid, the phrase "we are either all saved together or no one is saved" was repeated again and again, but it did not lead to a global solidarity.[28] And there is little sign of such global solidarity occurring. Countries are increasingly competing with each other for influence, power, resources, and market share. And within countries, including Ireland, vested interest groups are clamouring to ensure that they will not be unduly affected by the changes required. The Far Right will seek to exploit and amplify the fears of vested interests, divide them and make building solidarity much more difficult.

Mainstream political parties, mainstream media, and most shapers of public opinion continue to support economic policies and shape society's institutions in such a way as to continue to serve those who have power and wealth. Who benefits from higher house prices? Banks, the large institutional investment funds, and homeowners. Who is disadvantaged by higher house prices? Those first time buyers on limited incomes. Those who are stuck in rental limbo. We could reduce the price of housing by at least one-third, by enacting the Kenny Report.[29] The Kenny report, now 50 years old, proposed that we better control the price of building land. A house, now costing €450,000 could be reduced to €300,000, making home ownership much more widely available. But

27 M. Therese Lysaught, 'Vatican: It's Unjust (and Dangerous) for Wealthy Nations to Hoard the Covid Vaccine.', America: The Jesuit Review, 27 January 2021, https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2021/01/27/covid-vaccine-distribution-united-states-vatican-239797.

28 Kevin Hargaden, 'Beacon Controversy Reveals Irish Solidarity', *Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice* (blog), 29 March 2021, https://www.jcfj.ie/2021/03/29/beacon-controversy-reveals-irish-solidarity/.

29 Full copy of the Kenny Report is available on the JCFJ website, see Peter McVerry SJ, 'Housing Report from 1973 Could Have Prevented Current Crisis', Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, 28 July 2021, https://www.jcfj.ie/2021/07/28/housing-report-from-1973-could-have-prevented-current-crisis/.

the Kenny Report has never been discussed; it is not even mentioned, by the mainstream political parties, even those that purport to give priority to home ownership, as they know there would be an outcry from those who now own their homes and see the paper value of their asset being reduced.

Who benefits from increasing rents? Most landlords (we grant some are still struggling financially after the Global Financial Crash) and particularly the large institutional investment funds who now own tens of thousands of residential properties. When the then Minister of Housing, Simon Coveney, considered introducing a cap on rent increase, he proposed limiting the increase to the cost of living at the time, which was hovering around zero. But the large institutional investment funds had several meetings with the Minister and insisted that 4% was the minimum they would accept, if the government wanted them to continue investing. Who is disadvantaged by rising rents? Those on limited incomes.

Ireland is driving on a motorway in two cars, trying to reach the promised land, although

> “Mainstream political parties, mainstream media, and most shapers of public opinion continue to support economic policies and shape society’s institutions in such a way as to continue to serve those who have power and wealth.

the promised land, like the rainbow, moves ever further away the closer you think you are getting there. A small number of people are in the first car, a souped-up Mercedes, speeding down the motorway at 120 kph, occasionally breaking the law if there are no Gardai around, and driving at 150 kph. The rest are in the other car, a second-hand Ford Fiesta, which is chugging along at 100 kph. The distance separating the two cars is getting greater and greater. Those in the first car have no intention of slowing down to wait for those in the second car to catch up. No, they are focused on getting to the promised land as fast as they can. If we want to build a just and peaceful Ireland, we should get rid of the two cars and buy a bus.

Housing march in Dublin. Credit: Laura Hutton/Alamy Stock Photo

Intergenerational Solidarity: What Duties Do We Have for People in the Future?

Meaghan Carmody

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> *"…the reach of the present extends into the far future."*[1]
> Henry Shue

INTRODUCTION

Some truths bear repeating. First, we were all once the "future generations" ourselves, existing only as potential until the day we were conceived and born. Second, each of us will most likely, at some point, meet someone from the future—whether our children, nieces, nephews, or grandchildren. Third, the well-being of "future generations" relies on the world and society we shape in the here and now. Lastly, these future generations, whose futures hinge on today's political choices, have no vote.

By advocating for a solidarity that transcends time, this essay argues that future people deserve as much consideration as those alive today. In other words, we should strive to be good ancestors.[2] Extending this logic, our political systems should also seek to govern with future generations in mind.

The essay begins with a thought experiment and an outline of some philosophical rationales for intergenerational solidarity. It then discusses how certain temporal cognitive biases can hamper our ability to think beyond the present, followed by insights from contemporary philosophers on fostering long-term thinking. In the latter half of this piece, I provide a timeline of global governance efforts for future generations and highlight innovative examples of futures-governance worldwide. It concludes by reflecting on how Ireland's next government might embrace intergenerational solidarity and disrupt short-termism.

Ultimately, this essay contends that, despite human psychology and the short-term nature of political cycles, we can break from governance inertia and promote intergenerational solidarity, specifically through the creation of a Future Generations Commissioner.

"

We should strive to be good ancestors. Extending this logic, our political systems should also seek to govern with future generations in mind.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Imagine you are blessed with three children. If each of them has an average of 2.2 children, in 250 years, you would have approximately 50,000 descendants. That is an enormous web of people, all connected to you and living in a future yet unwritten—a span comparable to the time since the Industrial Revolution.

Now picture a grandchild or great-grandchild living in the 2080s. Visualise their face, their age. What kind of world do you wish for them? Most people envision a life with a secure home, a loving family, nutritious food, peace, and an education permitting secure work and financial stability. Now ask yourself: How do you want them to feel?

PHILOSOPHIES OF INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

That imagined descendant, however, is not yet alive and current political systems often overlook their needs. Should we, the "duty-bearers", extend solidarity to future generations—the "entitlement-bearers"?[3] If so, why?

A number of arguments exist to wrestle with this question. The first argument that can be offered is moral equality, which asserts that all individuals, regardless of *when* they exist, should be regarded as free and equal. Temporal location, like geographic location, is an arbitrary facet of identity and should not determine one's entitlements.[4] The second is the luck-egalitarian argument, where if we believe inequalities outside individual control are unjust, then the inequality of birth in a different *time* also merits redress.[5]

1 Henry Shue, 'High Stakes: Inertia or Transformation?', *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 40, no. 1 (2016): 63.

2 Roman Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor: How to Think Long Term in a Short Term World* (London: Random House, 2020).

3 Simon Caney, 'Climate Change and the Future: Discounting for Time, Wealth, and Risk', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 40, no. 2 (2009): 163–86.

4 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005).

5 Cécile Fabre, *Justice in a Changing World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).

A protest by Stop Climate Chaos in advance of the COP29 global climate conference, with Lady Justice covered in oil and holding scales to symbolise global injustice around the impacts of climate change. Credit: Mark Stedman

A third argument centres on "sufficientism", which claims that all people should have enough means (resources) in order to achieve the ends required for a life of dignity and agency.[6] Depriving future generations of these essentials cannot be justified. Lastly, the negative obligation argument holds that we have a duty not to cause harm that would not occur otherwise. If our actions today undermine future generations' well-being, we must uphold intergenerational solidarity and act responsibly.[7]

TEMPORAL COGNITIVE BIASES

Yet despite clear philosophical rationales for being good ancestors to those yet to come, we all know from lived experience that the capacity for imagining possible futures does not make those futures so. Our tendency to subordinate future satisfaction to current pleasure—the psychological term is temporal discounting—continuously serves us badly. From putting off that run, having that extra glass of wine despite an early start, or failing to squirrel away sufficient money into our pensions, the tension between the present and future is with us every day. Additionally, we tend to value immediate, though smaller, rewards more than long-term larger rewards with greater pay-off.[8]

Our brains, shaped by millennia of evolutionary forces, have not adapted to the rapid industrial and technological changes of recent centuries. We are often ensnared by what philosopher Roman Krznaric calls "the tyranny of the now"[9] or presentist thinking—a state exacerbated by media and technology that aggressively compete for our attention.

WAYS TO THINK LONG

If we are committed to being good ancestors and breaking free from the present bias that traps us, how can we cultivate a mindset that embraces long-term thinking?

In The Good Ancestor, Krznaric suggests several "ways to think long."[10] First, adopt a deep-time perspective, seeing ourselves as part of the vast continuum of time and the ecosystem. Deep-time thinking encourages us to consider the thousands of years it takes for an inch of soil to form or the millions for uranium-235 to decay. Engaging with ancient geology, going on "deep-time walks,"[11] or exploring resources like the Long Time Academy[12] can be practical ways to nurture this perspective.[13]

6 Campbell Brown, 'Priority or Sufficiency… or Both?', *Economics & Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2005): 199–220.

7 Shue, 'High Stakes'.

8 This is a curious phenomenon in neuroscience known as hyperbolic discounting. For more, see James E Mazur, 'The Effect of Delay and of Intervening Events on Reinforcement Value', *Quantitative Analyses of Behaviour* 5 (1987): 55–73.

9 Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor*, 5.

10 Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor*.

11 Explore the Climate Emergency via a transformative walking experience with Deep Time Walk, see 'Deep Time Walk - Explore Earth History and Geological Time', https://www.deeptimewalk.org/image/jpg. Or write a letter to your future self at 'Longpath', https://www.longpath.org.

12 See 'The Long Time Academy', n.d., https://www.thelongtimeacademy.com/home.

13 For more resources, check out The Long Time Project and the School of International Futures, 'The Long Time Project', 1 February 2023, https://www.thelongtimeproject.org; 'School of International Futures', School of International Futures, accessed 12 November 2024, https://soif.org.uk/.

Second, engage in cathedral thinking by embarking on ambitious projects that may not be completed within our lifetimes, such as those behind the Pyramids, Great Wall, or Notre Dame. Those who laid the keystones and foundations of these projects believed in a future they wouldn't witness, given the length of time construction took in those days. What legacy do we wish to leave for future generations?

Finally, adopt a legacy mindset. In 1888, a wealthy, traditionally successful man was reading what was supposed to be his brother's obituary in the newspaper. He suddenly realised that due to a mistake by the editor, the obituary he was reading was actually his own. It read "The Merchant of Death is Dead,"[14] and described how, as the inventor of dynamite, he had gained his wealth by helping people kill each other. Deeply troubled by this account of his legacy, the man decided to leave most of his fortune to fund awards for those whose work most benefited humanity. His name? Alfred Nobel, founder of the Nobel Prizes.

The story of Nobel's epiphany after reading his accidental obituary illustrates the power of contemplating one's legacy. He shifted his legacy from the Merchant of Death to that of a benefactor for humanity.

Humans often shy away from the fact of their own mortality, yet it is one of the few things we all have in common. Research into the psychology of leaving a legacy identifies three different kinds of legacy. The first category is the individualistic legacy, which benefits you. An example of this is making a philanthropic donation that bears your name, such as a building or a statue or, indeed, investing a prize after yourself. The second category is the relational legacy, which involves leaving something for someone you are related to. Bequeathing an inheritance is the obvious example. The final category is the collective legacy, which benefits whole groups, such as a university or society at large.[15] When we reflect on our impact, what do we want to leave society? What will our legacy be, and how can we become good ancestors?

TIMELINE OF INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Up to present day with data centres, airport expansions and intensive farming, economic actions which ignore environmental consequences have been the the norm. During the 1960s post-war economic boom, the push to increase food production led to widespread use of the insecticide DDT.[16] Scientist and author Rachel Carson chronicled the devastating effects of DDT on ecosystems in her book *Silent Spring*.[17] Carson's work sparked the environmental movement, inspiring the rise of groups like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth in the early 1970s. But her advocacy met fierce resistance, including from the American President Ronald Reagan, who viewed environmental protection as a threat to economic growth.

Shortly after *Silent Spring*'s publication, MIT scientists developed a computer model to project interactions among population growth, agricultural production, resource depletion, industrial output, and pollution. Their conclusions, published in *Limits to Growth*,[18] were sobering: Earth's resources likely cannot sustain current economic growth much beyond 2100, even with advanced technology. Predictably, their findings angered political leaders who saw them as a call to dismantle the economic status quo.

In the same year that *Limits to Growth* was published, 1972, the first-ever global conference on the environment took place in Stockholm. A decade later, the UN established the World Commission on Environment and Development, led by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, to examine the clash between human activity and environmental health. The Commission's

14 Evan Andrews, 'Did a Premature Obituary Inspire the Nobel Prize?', History, 23 July 2020, https://www.history.com/news/did-a-premature-obituary-inspire-the-nobel-prize.

15 Ella Saltmarshe, 'How To Stretch Time', The Long Time Academy, November 12, 2021, https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/part-two-how-to-stretch-time/id1589516917?i=1000541579750.

16 The common name for a organochloride known as dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane.

17 Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (London: Penguin Books London, 1962).

18 Donella H. Meadows et al., 'The Limits to Growth' (Rome: Club of Rome, 2 March 1972).

Credit: iStock, 875650490

1987 report, *Our Common Future*,[19] offered a groundbreaking definition of sustainable development: "[d]evelopment that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition continues to shape global policy today.

Five years later, in 1992, the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or "Earth Summit" was held in Rio de Janeiro,[20] where the first agenda for Environment and Development, known as Agenda 21, was developed and adopted. The Rio Summit was the largest environmental conference ever organised to that point, bringing together over 30,000 participants, including more than one hundred heads of state. The summit represented a major step forward, with international agreements made on climate change, forests, and biodiversity. Among the summit's outcomes were the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, Principles of Forest Management, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and Agenda 21, which required countries to draw up a national strategy of sustainable development. The summit also led to the establishment of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development.

19 World Commission on Environment and Development, 'Our Common Future' (Geneva: United Nations, October 1987), 37.

20 United Nations, 'United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992', United Nations, accessed 7 November 2024, https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992.

Over twenty years later, in 2015, all UN Member States adopted *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*,[21] which articulated 17 Sustainable Development Goals all directed towards meeting the definition of sustainable development:

> *We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations… We will implement the Agenda for the full benefit of all, for today's generation and for future generations.*[22]

Also in 2015, 193 UN Member States agreed to the UNFCCC Paris Agreement, which set the global community the challenge of holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and again explicitly articulated the value in terms of intergenerational equity:

> *Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.*[23]

In 2018, Mary Robinson's Foundation for Climate Justice proposed that "Global Guardians for Future Generations"[24] be

21 United Nations, 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (Geneva: United Nations, 2015), https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf.

22 United Nations, 5.

23 United Nations, 'United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Paris Agreement' (Geneva: United Nations, 2015), 2.

24 Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice, 'Global Guardians: A Voice for Future Generations' (Dublin: Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice, January 2018), https://www.mrfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Global-Guardians-A-Voice-for-Future-Generations-Position-Paper-2018.pdf.

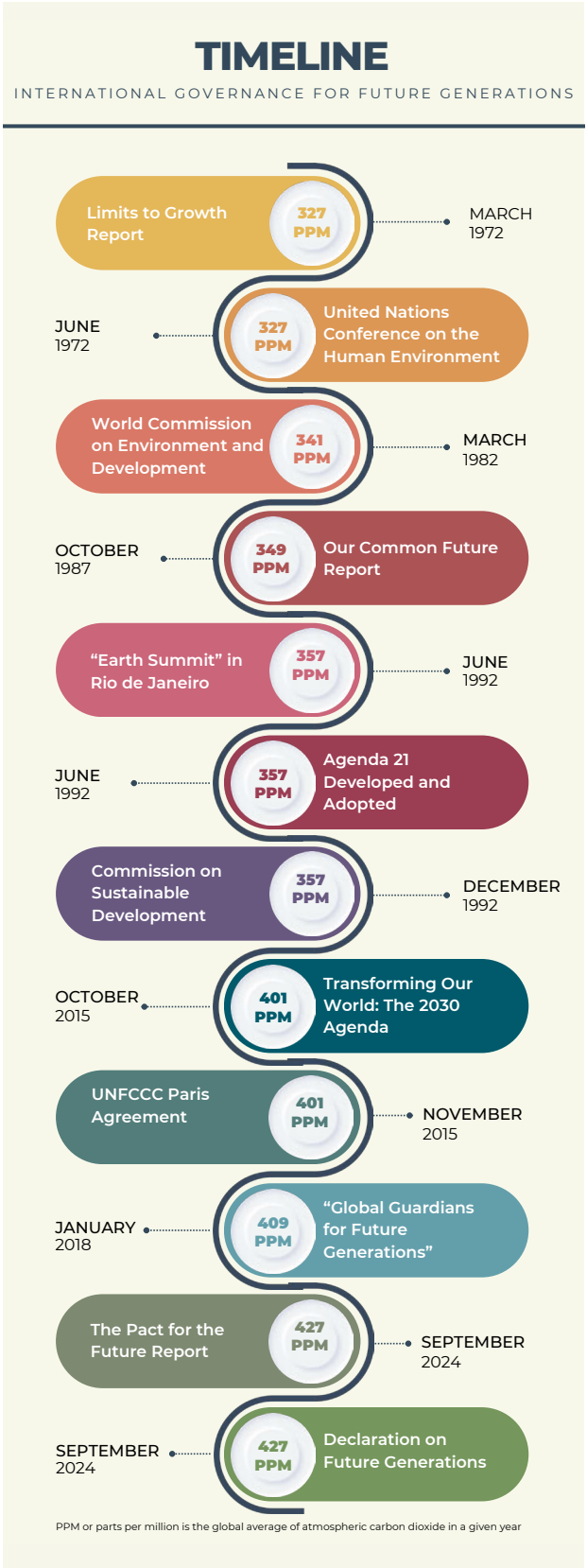

Figure 1: Timeline of International Governance for Future Generations

appointed by the Secretary General of the United Nations to provide a voice for future generations and to help achieve fairness between generations in the context of sustainable development. The Elders have since been established, counting Gro Harlem Brundtland as one of their members, and the group is currently chaired by Mary Robinson.

More recently, in September 2024, more than fifty years on from the first UN conference on the environment and the *Limits to Growth* report, the UN has adopted *The Pact for the Future*[25] which highlights the importance of coordinated global action to protect future generations from crises in health, war, climate and biodiversity breakdown, and recalcitrant challenges in the financial system which have led and continue to lead to inter- and intra-national poverty and inequality, and an annexed *Declaration on Future Generations*.[26]

INNOVATIVE GOVERNANCE FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Before the end of 2024, we will elect a new Government to serve a five-year term. From a deep time perspective, this is a pinprick on the calendar of human evolution, yet given our proximity to planetary boundaries and tipping points, those we elect will make decisions that will have ramifications for centuries to come. While short-term political cycles are meant to prevent prolonged rule by any single party, they often prioritise immediate gains over long-term sustainability. In this system, future generations—those with the most at stake—remain voiceless.

25 United Nations General Assembly, 'The Pact for the Future' (Geneva: United Nations, 20 September 2024), https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/109/2024/09/The-Pact-for-the-Future-final.pdf.

26 United Nations Summit of the Future, 'A Declaration on Future Generations', United Nations, accessed 6 November 2024, https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/declaration-on-future-generations.

Yet change is emerging. In recent years, multiple countries and regions have increasingly embraced political structures aimed at ensuring the welfare of future generations.

In Hungary, a Parliamentary Ombudsman for Future Generations monitors policies and legislative proposals to ensure they pose no irreversible threats to the environment.[27] Finland has a cross-party Committee for the Future,[28] which functions as a parliamentary think tank on long-term challenges, issuing a Government Future Report at least once per term. Since 2017, that Finnish Government's implementation of Agenda 2030 is also submitted to the Committee for the Future during each electoral term.

Wales offers a pioneering example. In 2015, it enacted the Well-being of Future Generations Act, embedding sustainability goals into its legislation and establishing a Future Generations Commissioner.[29] The Commissioner oversees public bodies, ensuring they make decisions benefiting both current and future citizens. The Act has influenced major shifts: two-thirds of the Welsh transport budget now supports public transit; a future-focused school curriculum emphasises resilience; and prosperity is measured not by GDP growth, but by fair, low-carbon jobs.

Indigenous cultures worldwide, however, have long understood the importance of intergenerational solidarity. For example, the Seventh Generation Principle, rooted in Haudenosaunee philosophy[30] dictates that decisions today should sustain the world for seven generations into the future. This ancient wisdom reminds us that sustainable thinking is not new—it's simply essential.

DISRUPTING GOVERNANCE INERTIA

How can Ireland's next Government overcome the inertia of short-term political cycles to effectively govern for future generations? In 2023, Green Party TD, Marc Ó Cathasaigh, introduced the Commission for Future Generations Bill,[31] which seeks to establish an independent body to assess the sustainability of government actions and provide guidance on policies impacting the future. Although it has passed the Second Stage debate, the bill will not advance further in this Government's term—a missed opportunity to make Ireland a global leader in safeguarding the welfare of future generations, as envisioned by former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar who wanted Ireland to be "the best country in the world to be a child."[32]

In 2024, Coalition 2030—a civil society coalition advocating for the Sustainable Development Goals—studied the feasibility of establishing a Future Generations Commissioner in Ireland.[33] Through interviews with civil servants, politicians, and civil society leaders, they found broad support for the role as a Future Generations Commissioner would align well with existing frameworks like the National Planning Framework and the Well-being Framework. Echoing this, the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action's 2023 report on biodiversity recommended the creation of an Ombudsman or Commission for Future Generations, empowered to defend long-term human and ecological well-being:

> *…the establishment of a new Ombudsman for Future Generations with the resources of an office, or a Future Generations Commission to protect the long-term interests of human and ecological well-being for current and future generations.*[34]

27 'Gyula Bándi', Network of Institutions and Leaders for Future Generations, accessed 6 November 2024, https://ourfuturegenerations.com/gyula-bandi/.

28 'Committee for the Future', Eduskunta Riksdagen, accessed 7 November 2024, https://www.eduskunta.fi:443/EN/valiokunnat/tulevaisuusvaliokunta/Pages/default.aspx.

29 'Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015', The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales - Comisiynydd Cenedlaethau'r Dyfydol Cymru, accessed 7 November 2024, https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/.

30 According to the Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., the first recorded concepts of the Seventh Generation Principle date back to the writing of The Great Law of Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Although the actual date is undetermined, differing dates place this writing at any date from 1142 to 1500 AD.

31 Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Commission for Future Generations Bill 2023 (Bill 8 of 2023)', 30 May 2024, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2023/8.

32 Grainne Ni Aodha, 'Taoiseach Leo Varadkar Aims to Reduce Wait for Child Healthcare and Assessments by 2025 | Irish Independent', Irish Independent, 26 December 2022, https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/taoiseach-leo-varadkar-aims-to-reduce-wait-for-child-healthcare-and-assessments-by-2025/42243755.html.

33 Audry Deane and Catherine Carty, 'A Call to Action for Future Generations: Taking Irish Leadership on Intergenerational Equity Forward' (Coalition 2030, September 2024), https://coalition2030.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/A-Call-to-Action-for-Future-Generations-Online-Version.pdf.

34 Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action, 'Report on the Examination of Recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly Report on Biodiversity Loss' (Dublin: Houses of the Oireachtas, December 2023), 44.

POLITICAL STRUCTURES – FUTURE GENERATIONS

Country	Structure	Responsibilities
	Parliamentary Ombudsman for Future Generations	• Monitors policies and legislative proposals from an environmental perspective
	Committee for the Future (cross-party)	• Parliamentary Think Tank on long-term challenges • Issues a Government Future Report once a term • Government's implementation of Agenda 2030 is submitted to the Committee each electoral term
	Future Generations Commissioner	• Oversees public bodies, ensuring they make decisions to benefit both current and future citizens

Figure 2: Political Structures for Future Generations

Such a role needs true independence to critically assess departmental decisions. The current Welsh Future Generations Commissioner is clear that the office acts as a mentor to public bodies, favouring collaboration over enforcement as "[t]he office uses the carrot more than the stick approach as this is where most collaboration and positive change happens."[35]

LONG-TERM THINKING AND HUMAN POTENTIAL

Martin Seligman and colleagues outlined how it is the unique human capacity for mental time travel that allows us to consider possible different outcomes, possible *futures*, and collaborate to make the ones we want to see manifest come to fruition.[36] In arboreal terms, Krznaric describes our capacity for long-term thinking as our "acorn brain,"[37] signposting to the trust in the future demonstrated by a tree-planter. We also have unparalleled capacity for planning, strategising, and collaborating. We have gone to the moon, developed quantum computing, and cured diseases that wiped out hundreds of thousands of our ancestors. We can, and are, evolving, and this must be matched by governance.

Across the globe, forward-thinking governance structures are emerging, giving substance to intergenerational solidarity. What started as a concept in 1972 has now sparked entire UN Summits, and ideas like Future Generations Commissioners and Parliamentary Committees are gaining ground. But the urgency is clear. Global emissions rose 1.3% in 2023, far outpacing the pre-COVID average of 0.8%, and the latest UNEP Emissions Gap Report warns that we are on track for between 2.6°C and 3.1°C of warming by 2100.[38]

Like a relay, our moment in history depends on how well we pass the baton. To "future" well, we must act with intent, ensuring each decision—personal and political—moves us

35 Deane and Carty, 'A Call to Action for Future Generations: Taking Irish Leadership on Intergenerational Equity Forward', 7.

36 Martin E. P. Seligman et al., *Homo Prospectus*, 1st edition (New York: OUP USA, 2016).

37 Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor*, 17.

38 United Nations Environment Programme, 'Emissions Gap Report 2023: Broken Record - Temperatures Hit New Highs, yet World Fails to Cut Emissions (Again)' (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2023).

Hurricane Florence from the International Space Station. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

toward sustainable outcomes. By establishing a Future Generations Commissioner, Ireland's next government could anchor intergenerational equity in policy, making a real, lasting commitment to those who will inherit this world.

REFLECTION FOR THE FUTURE

At the outset, I asked you to reflect on how you want your ancestor in the 2080s to feel. At the end of this piece, what is your answer? Psychologist Antonio Damasio's somatic marker hypothesis suggests that it's not enough to merely imagine a desired future; we must connect emotionally to it.[39] When we feel the stakes for future generations, we are driven to make better, bolder choices today.

Homo sapiens have existed for about 300,000 years, yet more people will likely live in the future than have ever lived in the past. Our existence today is owed to generations who cultivated food, built wonders, developed medicines, and invented tools. We do not remember their names, yet they've made this time the best era to be human. Now, it is our turn to become architects of the world to come. What legacy will we leave for those who follow? What do we want them to thank us for? As Krznaric reminds us, if we take seriously the human dignity of others, there is hope enough to counter any resignation:

> *We're in one of the most vulnerable positions that humanity has been in. But I don't think that our fate is preordained. I think that there's a good chance that we'll wake up fast enough if we could take seriously this idea that all people are created equal and that our lives matter just as much no matter where we are on the Earth or no matter when we live.*[40]

> Like a relay, our moment in history depends on how well we pass the baton.

39 A. R. Damasio, 'The Somatic Marker Hypothesis and the Possible Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences* 351, no. 1346 (1996): 1413–20.

40 Ella Saltmarshe, 'How We Got To NOW', The Long Time Academy, November 5, 2021, https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/part-one-how-we-got-to-now/id1589516917?i=1000540852008.

Solidarity as a Political Practice: A European Perspective

Cesare Sposetti SJ

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INTRODUCTION

"*Più Italia, meno Europa*" (More Italy, less Europe). This was one of the slogans adopted by the Italian far-right party *Lega* (the League) for the last European elections. Another one was "*Cambiamo l'Europa prima che lei cambi noi*" (Let's change Europe, before it changes us). *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy), the political party of the Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, adopted an apparently more moderate approach, but not too dissimilar in fact, stating "*L'Italia cambia l'Europa*" (Italy changes Europe). In these slogans, the particular, the nation State, takes priority: the European dimension can only play a role if it is functional and "useful" to the national level.

These are a few examples of the way some right-wing Italian political parties chose to present themselves for the last European elections. Considering the strong results obtained, particularly by Meloni's party, this strategy was effective.[1] As we know, right-wing parties obtained good results almost everywhere in the continent with very similar slogans and stances. Though different readings are possible concerning these results, the great success of these narratives is a matter of fact, and raises important questions concerning the future of the European Union.

Despite these parties and movements usually not openly favouring the dissolution of the European Union, it is clear that their vision regarding its future appears to be very different from that of the previous efforts of European integration, leaning on restoring a greater part of the power of the national States.[2] Many of the principles that guided the process of European integration appear then to be seriously challenged nowadays. Among them, we find especially the principle of solidarity.

When dealing with solidarity, we are aware of handling an "essentially contested concept," which "inevitably involve[s] endless disputes about [its] proper uses on the part of [its] users."[3] So, more than attempting to find a single universal definition of the concept (a rather impossible task), it appears more interesting and relevant to try to detect the current application of this principle, particularly in the context of European politics. Drawing on that, it will be interesting to trace back the origin of the concept in sociology, political philosophy, and in Catholic Social Teaching, and to try to see what perspectives solidarity can offer in the current European political context.

A EUROPEAN HISTORY

"Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity." This very famous quotation is taken from the declaration delivered by the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, in Paris on the 9th of May 1950. Considered by many one of the most important founding texts of the process of European integration,[4] it already highlights the central role of the principle of solidarity in this context. Schuman spoke of a particular kind of solidarity, called in the original French version *solidaritè de fait*. This concept was used in a very pragmatic sense, as a way to express the concrete steps that the European States were called to take in order to overcome the previous divisions and rivalries, in order to foster cooperation, especially in the field of the production of coal and steel,[5] and, more generally, in the economic domain.

The concept was then used in this way in the treaties of the first European communities, as a practical way to create common bases for economic development.[6] It was only with the *Treaty of Maastricht* (1992), which officially instituted the European Union, that the principle started to be used in a wider political sense. It was used for example in its

1 *Fratelli d'Italia* gained 28.8 per cent of total votes, securing the best performance among the Italian parties, though with only 49.7 per cent of the general voter turnout in the country. See 'Elezioni Europee 2024: I Risultati Elettorali e Le Analisi Post-Voto Di Ipsos', 18 July 2024, https://www.ipsos.com/it-it/elezioni-europee-2024-risultati-elettorali-analisi-post-voto-ipsos.

2 Giorgia Serughetti and Gilles Gressani, *L'Europa e La Sua Ombra. Un Continente Di Fronte Alla Responsabilità Del Futuro* (Milano: Bompiani, 2023), https://www.boa.unimib.it/handle/10281/430244.

3 W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', *Proceedings of the Aristolelian Society* 56, no. 1 (1956): 167–98.

4 Robert Schuman, 'Declaration of 9 May 1950', Fondation Robert Schuman, 9 May 1950, https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/declaration-of-9-may-1950.

5 Which was the object of the first European community, the European Coal and Steel Community, established in 1951.

6 Claudia Massarotti, 'Il Principio Di Solidarietà Nel Diritto Dell'Unione Europea' (Astrid, 2024), https://www.astrid-online.it/static/upload/d56b/d56b553f3d21d90c090b6090f7f91b07.pdf.

preamble in reference to history, cultures, and traditions of the different member States, and with reference to the foreign affairs of the European Union. The treaty moreover stated that the European Union "shall combat social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child" and that "[i]t shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States."[7] More specifically on political solidarity, it stated that:

> *[t]he Member States shall work together to enhance and develop their mutual political solidarity. They shall refrain from any action which is contrary to the interests of the Union or likely to impair its effectiveness as a cohesive force in international relations.*[8]

Further references to solidarity in the same treaty were related to border control and to the legislation concerning immigration and asylum.

The most important and extensive recognition of the principle of solidarity was finally included in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, signed in 2000, which became legally binding in all the Member States with the Treaty of Lisbon of 2009. Its preamble includes solidarity among the fundamental "indivisible, universal values" of the European Union, along with human dignity, freedom, and equality. The entire fourth chapter of the Charter is then dedicated to solidarity, with a particular focus on workers' rights, but also on health care, environmental protection, and consumer protection. Finally, article 222 of the current version of the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (2007) contains the so-called "solidarity clause," stating that "the Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster."

7 From art. 3 of the current Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union. See 'Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union', 2012, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.

8 From art.24, 'Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union'.

"And yet, it has been noted that using solidarity as a mere rhetorical strategy rarely worked.

In the current versions of the European treaties—among the different applications of the concept— we find intergenerational solidarity; solidarity between the States and the citizens; among the States themselves; between the States and the Union; and among the citizens themselves, while maintaining also the original attention to the economic and financial dimension.[9] This principle has also been particularly developed in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice.

Beyond these legal references, it is important to note how solidarity has been concretely used in the last decades in the European political discourse. If it was (and still is) quite common to make the bold claim that "[s]olidarity is part of how European society works and how Europe engages with the rest of the world,"[10] there is also a painful awareness that that solidarity is very often the "great absentee" of European politics.[11] Solidarity is often used then in the form of a "norm-based argument"[12] against nationalistic and sovereigntist discourses, meaning that, when facing most of the current continental social and political crises, the most common "mantra" of many European lawmakers and politicians has been that of the need of more European solidarity.[13]

And yet, it has been noted that using solidarity as a mere rhetorical strategy rarely worked. We can take into consideration the most recent crises which interested the European continent: the 2008 global financial crisis and its consequences with the Eurozone

9 Massarotti, 'Il Principio Di Solidarietà Nel Diritto Dell'Unione Europea', 9.

10 A 2008 statement by the European Commission, quoted in Malcolm Ross and Yuri Borgmann-Prebil, 'Promoting European Solidarity: Between Rhetoric and Reality', in *Promoting Solidarity in the European Union*, ed. Malcolm Ross and Yuri Borgmann-Prebil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

11 A 2017 statement of the former President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker: "[l]e grand absent Européen, c'est la solidarité", quoted in Andreas Grimmel, '"Le Grand Absent Européen": Solidarity in the Politics of European Integration', *Acta Politica* 56, no. 2 (2021): 243.

12 For instance, see Frank Schimmelfennig, 'The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union', *International Organization* 55, no. 1 (2001): 47–80.

13 Grimmel, '"Le Grand Absent Européen": Solidarity in the Politics of European Integration', 244.

Giorgia Meloni campaigning during Italian elections. Credit: Brad Sterling/Alamy Stock Photo

crisis in 2010; the so-called refugee crisis in 2015; Brexit in 2016; the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020; and the ongoing invasion of Ukraine. What can strike our attention is that these crises deeply affected the perception of European institutions in most of the European countries, with an increasing trend of disaffection and skepticism.[14] This can be particularly observed in Italy, one of the founding members of the European Union, traditionally characterised by high approval rates for the European institutions and for the process of political integration, and now appearing as a "former pro-European country."[15] Even if the response of the European institutions to the COVID-19 pandemic, and more recently the general welcoming attitude towards the Ukrainian refugees (at least in the first phases of the war), have showed that a practical and institutional European solidarity can still find its ways to emerge, it appears very clearly that other crises were and still are characterised by a great difficulty in finding shared solutions and in fostering an authentic sense of belonging and "togetherness" among the European peoples.[16]

A good question could be then if solidarity can mean something more than a legal inspiration or a wishful thought. Is there any element in the previous history of this concept that can give us other elements in order to face the current challenges of European politics?

FROM *OBLIGATIO IN SOLIDUM* TO POLITICAL SOLIDARITY

The origins of the concept of solidarity are usually linked to Roman law, where the expression *obligatio in solidum* indicated (and still indicates in the legal systems inspired by the Roman tradition) the unlimited liability of each member of a family or of a particular community to pay common debts. Within this scheme, the payment of one member of the community is able to settle the obligation for all the debtors.[17] Nonetheless, it was not earlier than the beginning of the 19th century when the principle was given a wider framework and started to be applied especially by some French thinkers in the context of morality, society, and politics, following the influence of the events of the French Revolution, particularly stemming from the ideal of "fraternity."[18]

14 For more, see Ester Di Napoli and Deborah Russo, 'Solidarity in the European Union in Times of Crisis: Towards 'European Solidarity', in *Solidarity as a Public Virtue? Law and Public Policies in the European Union*, ed. Veronica Federico and Christian Lahusen (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2018), 197–200.

15 Guido Formigoni, 'L'Europa Di Fronte a Un'Italia Fragile e Divisa', *Il Mulino*, no. 2 (2024): 101.

16 See Maurizio Ferrera, 'The European Union and Cross-National Solidarity: Safeguarding "Togetherness" in Hard Times', *Review of Social Economy* 81, no. 1 (2023): 105–29.

17 Kurt Bayertz, 'Four Uses of "Solidarity"', in *Solidarity*, ed. Kurt Bayertz (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 3.

18 For more, see Giovanni Magnani, 'Le Nuove Vie Della Solidarietà. Abbozzo Di Riflessione Teologica', *Aggiornamenti Sociali* 39, no. 7–8 (1988): 7–8; Eros Monti, 'Solidarietà', Dizionario di dottrina sociale della Chiesa, accessed 23 September 2024, https://www.dizionariodottrinasociale.it/Autori/Solidarieta.html; Jürgen Habermas, 'Democrazia, Solidarietà e La Crisi Europea', *Aggiornamenti Sociali* 1 (2014): 29.

Among the first philosophers and sociologists to use this term we find especially August Comte (1798-1857) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). Comte called *solidarité* a fundamental law able to explain and connect different social events, in the sense of highlighting the structural interdependence among them and, in a diachronic sense, among the different generations. Durkheim applied the concept particularly to his considerations regarding the division of labour, distinguishing between "mechanic" and "organic" solidarity: the first one was linked to a more traditional type of society, where communitarian, cultural, religious, and familial links would naturally bond the individuals; the second one, typical of more developed and organized societies, was characterized by a high level of social differentiation and a generalized division of labour, where the mutual support was not any more just a given, but was based rather on the interdependence and the active cooperation among the individuals. Other thinkers, like the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936) presented even more clearly the modernisation as a process of gradual and increasing "desolidarisation." According to this stance, facing a dynamic of increasing individualism, it appears more and more important to find and to favour what keeps us together as a society, which has not to be taken any more for granted.

Beyond this use of the concept of solidarity in the field of sociology, other common current uses of the term have been highlighted in the fields of moral philosophy, of social activism, and in the context of the birth and development of the so-called welfare State.[19] Concerning the use in moral philosophy, the concept is linked with the development of a universalistic understanding of morality, started already with the Greek philosophy, and even more developed with the advent of Christianity. The English philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) put it particularly in terms of a sort of "emotional link" binding all the human beings. Other philosophers in the 20th century gave it even a stronger and more determinant role, with the German philosopher Max Scheler (1874-1928) stating that the principle of solidarity "renders the entire moral world one big whole, in which each individual is 'co-responsible' for the actions and desires, the faults and merits of every other individual."[20] This means that egotism cannot be in any way a 'natural' characteristic of human beings, but just the mark of societies which are already internally sick or overcome by senility. This aspect recalls the Aristotelian tradition of humans as naturally political beings, made for a life in community with others. Nevertheless, solidarity has also sometimes been regarded as a characteristic of more closed communities, whose ties need to be strengthened in order to face a common enemy, as we particularly find in the thought of the German political philosopher Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), signalling the particular tension between universalism and group identity which still characterises the concept.[21]

This is even clearer in another use of it, linked to social activism, where the term "solidarity" is used especially, in a positive way, to express the common struggle and the commitment to mutual support of several categories of people claiming specific rights or rising specific issues: we can think about most of the social movements of the 19th and 20th century, including the labour movements, the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and, more recently, the LGBTQIA+ and environmental movements. This use clearly implies also a "negative" component, which is the common commitment against an opponent, usually coloured with strong moral and political ideals. In its extreme form, this form of solidarity has been equalled to a form of "class consciousness."[22]

Finally, the concept is widely used to justify a redistribution of financial resources implemented by the State in favour of materially needy individuals or groups.[23] This usage became particularly widespread with the development of the so-called welfare State. It has been noted though a certain difficulty

19 Bayertz, 'Four Uses of "Solidarity"', 5–26.

20 Bayertz, 6–7.

21 Giorgio Campanini, 'Il Fondamento Della Solidarietà', *Aggiornamenti Sociali* 12 (1998): 907.

22 Bayertz, 'Four Uses of "Solidarity"', 17, 20–21.

23 Bayertz, 21.

in using a morally loaded concept of solidarity in this context, considering that there is an important difference between a general moral commitment to the poor and the sick, which is voluntary and generally involves a personal relationship, and the State social services, which usually operate in a highly bureaucratised environment, are coerced from the donor and are usually anonymous.[24] Somebody has even suggested that in this case it would be more proper to use the concept of justice rather than that of solidarity.[25]

SOLIDARITY IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The Catholic reflection on the issue of solidarity developed quite late, even though its roots can be clearly found at the core of the Christian message itself.

The German Jesuit philosophers and theologians Heinrich Pesch (1854-1926), Oswald von Nell-Breuning (1890-1991) and Gustav Gundlach (1892-1963) were the first to reflect more systematically on solidarity, adjusting it into the Thomistic and neoscholastic framework which was mostly common in Catholic philosophy and theology particularly until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). These thinkers also wanted to ground solidarity on the dignity of the human person.[26] This attention was particularly developed by Catholic personalist philosophers like Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), who underlined how human beings are naturally bonded by feelings of fraternity, deriving from the awareness of being part of a single community and political body oriented to the common good. This orientation, in spite of all the challenges given by the egotistical urges that would naturally persist, builds the political community as a solidaristic reality, in which the pursuit of "civic friendship" would constitute the litmus test of an authentic social progress.[27]

Further developments in the reflection on solidarity in Catholic environments were fostered by an increasing use of the term in the social encyclicals of the Popes.[28] The earliest references are found implicitly in Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, focusing on the conditions of the working class. In Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931, we find its role mentioned as a component of a new social order that must be constructed, binding together the personal and communitarian aspect, fighting against totalitarianisms.[29] The term started to be openly used by Pius XII, who utilised it in the meaning given to it by personalist philosophers. But it was with John XXIII that the principle of solidarity started to be mentioned as one of the most important pillars of Catholic Social Teaching. In John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961) solidarity was given a wider perspective, embracing the entire global political community. The Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) referenced the principle, and gave it a clear theological connection to God's desire to be in full solidarity with humanity through the life and work of Jesus Christ,[30] who presents himself as a "Messiah in solidarity" with us.[31] Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) marked further important steps forward in presenting solidarity as an intrinsic element of human nature, not only as a fact, but also as a duty, and widened its application particularly to the persistent inequalities between developed and developing countries.

"The earliest references are found implicitly in Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum in 1891, focusing on the conditions of the working class.

24 In a similar sense, Habermas affirms that solidarity is a true political act, different from a simple act of moral altruism. See Habermas, 'Democrazia, Solidarietà e La Crisi Europea', 27.

25 Habermas, 24.

26 Magnani, 'Le Nuove Vie Della Solidarietà. Abbozzo Di Riflessione Teologica', 514.

27 Campanini, 'Il Fondamento Della Solidarietà', 907–8.

28 Monti, 'Solidarietà'.

29 Monti; Magnani, 'Le Nuove Vie Della Solidarietà. Abbozzo Di Riflessione Teologica', 515.

30 Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican, 7 December 1965), § 32.

31 Magnani, 'Le Nuove Vie Della Solidarietà. Abbozzo Di Riflessione Teologica', 518.

Credit: Markus Spiske at Unsplash

With John Paul II, the magisterial pronouncements on solidarity increased significantly. In his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* (1979) solidarity is presented as a principle which must inspire the effective search for appropriate institutions and mechanisms in order to promote human dignity; in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) we find one of the most well-known definitions of the principle, which emphasises also how it is a social virtue – the social and institutional expression of charity:

> *It is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world, in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category. When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a 'virtue', is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.*[32]

Finally, the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) traces the entire trajectory of magisterial reflection on solidarity, presenting it as a principle tending to direct social intervention, linked to that of subsidiarity (which aims to enable the so-called intermediate bodies of society, favouring then interdependence rather than centralisation)[33] and active in the world of labour, volunteering, of culture and education, and aiming to a global renewal of social order.[34]

32 Pope John Paul II, *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* (Vatican, 30 December 1987), § 38.

33 As Pope Benedict XVI put it in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Vatican, 29 June 2009): "The principle of subsidiarity must remain closely linked to the principle of solidarity and vice versa, since the former without the latter gives way to social privatism, while the latter without the former gives way to paternalist social assistance that is demeaning to those in need" (§ 58).

34 Monti, 'Solidarietà'.

In this way the principle has also been presented in the magisterial pronouncements of Benedict XVI and Francis, particularly with a more specific consideration of its role in taking care of the common home, with the awareness that "[e]very violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment, just as environmental deterioration in turn upsets relations in society,"[35] and with a particular attention to intergenerational solidarity.[36] Pope Francis, in his 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, has linked the term solidarity to "solidity", emphasising being "born of the consciousness that we are responsible for the fragility of others as we strive to build a common future."[37]

WHAT FUTURE FOR SOLIDARITY?

We live in a time of "polycrisis," as it has been very effectively described by the French philosopher Edgar Morin, in Europe as well as in the entire world. The ongoing wars at the gates of Europe, the end of the "world liberal order,"[38] the environmental crisis, the new migration trends, together with the lingering economic crisis and the declining birth rate form an *unicum* which has a deep impact in European politics. The most common political reaction to this, especially in the Western world, seems to be closure and "nostalgia" for an idealised past of solid national identities, against the disorder of a more globalised world. This longing for a clearer group identity against so many external threats is usually expressed in terms of contraposition, as a particular form of solidarity between members of a closed group. This is usually the narrative used by contemporary populist movements in the Western world, and commonly used by Italian and European right-wing parties.

And yet, if we look more carefully, we see how contemporary Western societies are nowadays deeply individualistic, following the aforementioned movement of "desolidarisation" fostered by the modernisation process. The electoral use of this pleas for "national(istic) solidarity" really looks more focused on fear and nostalgia rather than on a realistic consideration of the present and on openness towards the future. While it appears important to listen to the fears and discontent of the constituencies of these populist movements, this does not mean resignation in the search for other, more effective ways out from the current crises.

The consideration of the roots and the development of the reflection on solidarity in philosophy, sociology and Catholic Social Teaching, as well as looking on how its practice has developed in the context of the European integration process helps us to see how crucial this principle is, and at the same time how fragile it is, constantly at risk of becoming a simple and ineffective wishful thought. A good point seems actually to treasure the experience of the first steps of the European integration process, beginning again with forms of *solidaritè de fait*. All the aforementioned challenges of the current historical moment, can become an opportunity to raise the awareness that all this cannot be overcome just by the single countries alone. If international and communitarian law and politics still seem to be stuck, the growing urgency to face a global "complex crisis which is both social and environmental"[39] can lead us to find other paths of common action from below. A *ressourcement* of political solidarity is needed.

On the one hand, civil society and social activism, and especially the vitality of several youth movements[40] can play a crucial role in this, as we can see especially with environmental activism, but also with what students' and young people's movements have achieved in several parts of the world, in search of more freedom and of more democracy. What happened with the fall of

35 Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, § 51.

36 For instance, see Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (Vatican, 24 May 2015), § 162.

37 Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* (Vatican, 3 October 2020), § 115. In general, see § 114-117.

38 Drew Christiansen SJ and Jeff Steinberg, 'Governare Il Nuovo Disordine Globale', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 4063, 4 (2019): 16–29.

39 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, § 139.

40 Fridays for Future and The Good Lobby are examples of youth movements engaged in political formation at an international and European level, see 'Fridays for Future', https://fridaysforfuture.org/; 'The Good Lobby', https://www.thegoodlobby.eu/about-us/. At a local level in Italy, we have the Svolta project in Chieri (near Turin) and the Polis Politics group in Milan are two vibrant examples, see 'Svolta', https://www.svolta.eu/chi-siamo/; 'Polis Politics', https://www.linkedin.com/company/polis-politics/?originalSubdomain=it.

the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wazed, on 5th August 2024 is just the most recent example of this.[41] On the other hand, if we look at the European context, where young people are less numerous, the intergenerational aspect of solidarity appears to be more and more relevant. The young people themselves can find their ways to educate the older generations to a different way of looking and hoping for the future, while they can find ways to advocate for intergenerational solidarity within the European institutions, to create spaces where the voice of the current young generations and even of the future ones can be heard.[42]

The famous Italian priest and educator don Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967) said that politics is about realising that the problems and challenges of other people are our own problem, and that its main task is to face these challenges together.[43] Solidarity appears to be especially a matter of education and practice rather than a simple inspiration for legislative texts and political speeches.

Beyond the current global and European emergencies, we can ask ourselves what can be our contribution in changing the way of narrating the current times and the role of politics in all this, so that the attention to solidarity and "togetherness" can become more and more its ordinary way of proceeding, rather than its frustrated ideal.

"Solidarity appears to be especially a matter of education and practice rather than a simple inspiration for legislative texts and political speeches.

41 John Curtis, 'Bangladesh: The Fall of the Hasina Government', Research Briefing (London: House of Commons Library, 2024), https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-10096/CBP-10096.pdf.

42 Interestingly enough, Ursula von der Leyen, in her recent bid for re-election as President of the European Commission on July 18 2024, included in her political guidelines her intention to appoint a commissioner "whose responsibilities will include ensuring intergenerational fairness." For more, the Jesuit European Social Centre has written on the emergence of policymaking and advocacy with a mind towards future generations, see Jesuit European Social Centre, 'Portare la Voce delle Generazioni Future al Cuore dell'Europa', *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, no. 10 (October 2024): 559–66.

43 "Ho imparato che il problema degli altri è uguale al mio. Sortirne insieme è la politica, sortirne da soli è l'avarizia": See Scuola di Barbiana, *Lettera a Una Professoressa* (Firenze: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1967), 14.

From Philanthropy to Solidarity: Diverse Expressions of Prisoner Advocacy and Support

Cormac Behan

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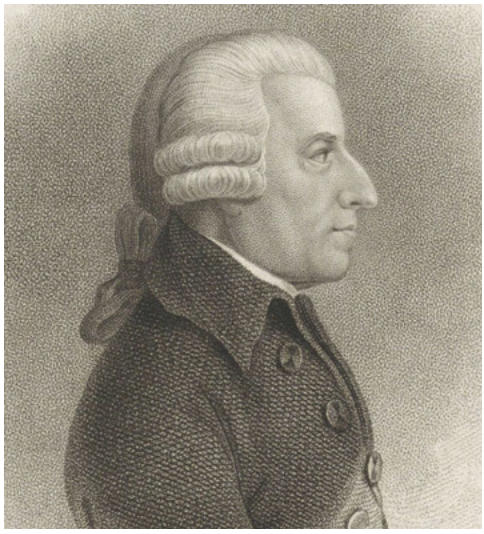
INTRODUCTION

As soon as the modern prison was established, concerns about the treatment of prisoners were expressed from many quarters. With a focus on Irish prisons and prisoners, this essay examines some of the people and organisations involved who conveyed compassion for the plight of prisoners, advocated for improved prison conditions, and supported penal reform. It begins by sketching out some early philanthropic and charitable endeavours. It then details support networks for people convicted of politically motivated activities before reviewing campaigns for improved conditions for those who were termed "ordinary" or "social" prisoners. The essay concludes with consideration of prisoners' advocacy organisations and support movements today.

Early advocates of reform were mainly inspired by religious belief, motivated by charitable and philanthropic endeavours. With the rise of physical force nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, prison conditions and the status of politically motivated prisoners in Britain and both jurisdictions in Ireland came under scrutiny. Although not as well researched, in the 1970s there were attempts to mobilise "ordinary" prisoners to improve what were generally accepted as deficient penal conditions. Contemporary groups concerned with the plight of prisoners range from charitable organisations with a social justice focus, to abolitionist movements based on allyship and solidarity. While punitive approaches to punishment ebb and flow, there have always been people and organisations who expressed and continue to show concern for the plight of prisoners.

"STOP DOING WRONG; LEARN TO DO RIGHT"

In the early years of the prison, religious faith and spiritual devotion were significant motivations in those promoting relief for prisoners. Opened in 1829, the Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia was designed with individual cells, as the "[t]otal solitude before God was supposed to effect a conversion of the criminal's moral sensibilities."[1] However, as soon as the modern prison was established, its limitations became apparent, and the optimism of its founders soon faded. Prison reform was necessary for prisoner reform.



Portrait of John Howard. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

John Howard (1726 – 1790), today considered one of the founders of the penal reform movement in the Global North, was a devout Baptist, who was partly driven by religious belief, but was primarily concerned with improvement in conditions for prisoners. After being appointed Sheriff of Bedford, England in 1773, Howard decided to educate himself by visiting prisons throughout England and Europe, including a trip to Ireland in 1775. He made several suggestions for reforming prisons, including classification of prisoners, inspection by magistrates, regular visits from clergy, and paying jailers.[2] At the time, many prisoners had to pay for their own imprisonment, and could be prevented from being released until they paid discharge fees. The objective of imprisonment was, he believed, not just punishment, but reform and rehabilitation too. In keeping with his Christian ethos, Howard believed that hard labour, religious instruction and a regime of what today would be considered solitary confinement would be successful in reforming prisoners.[3] In 1774, Howard was instrumental in persuading the British parliament to pass two bills: one

1 Muriel Schmid, '"The Eye of God": Religious Beliefs and Punishment in Early Nineteenth-Century Prison Reform', *Theology Today* 59, no. 4 (2003): 554.

2 Robert Alan Cooper, 'Ideas and Their Execution: English Prison Reform', *Eighteenth Century Studies* 10, no. 1 (1976): 73–93.

3 George Fisher, 'The Birth of the Prison Retold', *The Yale Law Journal* 104, no. 6 (1995): 1237.

Etching of Elizabeth Fry seated at a table surrounded by men and women prisoners listening to her. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

abolished discharge fees for prisoners, and the other established regulations for hygiene, such as regular cleaning and baths within prisons.[4]

In the 18th century, there was concern that deficiencies in inspection and oversight by local magistrates was partly responsible for shortcomings in prison conditions. In 1786, Jeremiah Fitzpatrick (1740 – 1810) was appointed a Prison Inspector for Ireland, and it became the first country in the Western World to have the post paid for by central government.[5] Fitzpatrick, "energetic, engaging, and of a philanthropic disposition,"[6] like many other critics of the prison was involved in various areas of social reform, around conditions in schools, convict ships, military hospitals and workhouses. In 1784, he published *An essay on gaol abuses* and six years later, *Thoughts on penitentiaries*. His obituary in *The Gentleman's Magazine* noted that he was "the zealous advocate of suffering Humanity in our Prisons and Hospitals, where his benevolence procured for him the appellation of a second Howard."[7]

Although born in Germany, and on a sojourn from London, George Frederick Handel (1685 – 1759) chose Dublin for the first public performance of Messiah in 1742. With the lyrics predominantly based on Bible verses, Messiah raised £400 (equivalent to approximately £102,000 today) for charitable causes. The money was used for "the relief of the prisoners in several gaols," Mercer's Hospital and the charitable infirmary on the Inns Quay.[8] Some of the £400 was used to free 142 men from debtors' prisons,[9] a fate Handel himself narrowly escaped as he was regularly in debt and had previously been declared bankrupt.

In the early 19th century, England "experienced an outpouring of social reform,"[10] with concerns about conditions in factories, hospitals, schools, and homelessness in urban areas. Inspired by her Quaker faith, Elizabeth Fry (1780 - 1845), the "leading female philanthropist of her generation,"[11] was active in many areas of social reform and charitable endeavours: to improve hospitals, asylums and workhouses, as well as campaigning for

4 Cooper, 'Ideas and Their Execution'.

5 Richard J. Butler, 'Rethinking the Origins of the British Prisons Act of 1835: Ireland and the Development of Central-Government Prison Inspection, 1820–1835', *The Historical Journal* 59, no. 3 (2016): 727.

6 C. J. Woods, 'Fitzpatrick, Sir Jeremiah', Dictionary of Irish Biography, 2009, https://www.dib.ie/biography/fitzpatrick-sir-jeremiah-a3236.

7 'Obituary, with Anecdotes, of Remarkable Persons', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Jan-Jun 1810, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081674461&seq=203&q1=Howard.8,6]]},"issued":{"date-parts":[["1810",6]]}}},"schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}

8 Paul Collins, 'Handel, George Frederick', Dictionary of Irish Biography, 2009, https://www.dib.ie/biography/handel-george-frederick-a3777.

9 Donald Burrows, 'In Handel's Shadow: Performances of Messiah in Dublin during the 1740s', *The Musical Times* 161, no. 1950 (2020): 9–20.

10 Leonard H. Roberts, 'John Howard, England's Great Prison Reformer: His Glimpse Into Hell', *Journal of Correctional Education* 36, no. 4 (1985): 136.

11 Robert Alan Cooper, 'Jeremy Bentham, Elizabeth Fry, and English Prison Reform', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42, no. 4 (1981): 682.

the abolition of the slave trade. In 1819, Fry opened a homeless shelter, and in 1824 established the Brighton District Visiting Society to provide help for the poor. She visited Ireland in 1823 to advocate for a female only prison, to be staffed with female officers.[12]

Fry had established the British Ladies' Society for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners in 1823. Under her guidance, "prison visiting became a fashionable pastime for respectable women."[13] Elizabeth Fry used to conduct Scripture readings in prison, and such was its popularity, tickets were issued to visitors to have "the honour of being present when she read Scripture to prisoners."[14] On her visit to Ireland in 1827 she chaired a meeting in Dublin of the newly formed Hibernian Ladies Society for Promoting the Improvement of Female Prisoners.[15] After campaigns for improvements in prison conditions by Fry and others, the Gaols Act 1823 was passed. Although it was only applicable in England and Wales, this Act hoped to create comparable and improved standards in prisons throughout the United Kingdom. It set out a system of classification: male and female prisoners were to be separated, with the latter to be guarded by female officers. It introduced regular visits to prisoners by chaplains. Regulations on health, hygiene, education and labour were introduced and alcohol was banned.[16]

Early Irish civil society organisations concerned with the treatment of prisoners included the Association for the Improvement of Prisons and of Prison Discipline in Ireland (AIPPD) which was established by Quakers and evangelical Anglicans in 1818.[17] Although only in existence for a brief period in the early 1800s, it influenced debates on the state of Irish prisons. The AIPPD campaigned for improvements in gaol design, education, employment and better conditions for female prisoners.[18]

Although more well known for her interest in education of girls and women, in particular the establishment of Alexandra College in Dublin 1866, the Quaker Anne Jellicoe (1823–1880) was concerned about the conditions of female prisoners.[19] She reported to a meeting of the National Association of Social Sciences in 1862 about her visit to Mountjoy Female Prison. She was positive about the influence of female staff and praised the 'mark' system, as the "prisoner is thus made aware how much her own welfare depends on her good conduct."[20] She continued:

> *… by placing a premium on qualities totally different from those which led her into crime, the system gradually accustoms the prisoner to the loosening of the moral swathing bands by which she was at first restrained, and by infiltrating, as it were, habits of industry, self-denial, and self-respect, without which no woman can be reclaimed, places her in circumstances to secure herself from a relapse into crime. To so comprehensive an aim is added the elevating influence of religion.*[21]

Although early advocates for the improvement of conditions were mainly engaged in charitable endeavours and sought legislative reform, they also believed that individual failing led to crime. While they expected improvements in the prison would provide better opportunities for reform, they also encouraged prisoners to heed the words of the prophet Isaiah, "stop doing wrong; learn to do right" (Isaiah 1:16-17 NIV). However, others who were troubled about

12 Anne Jellicoe, *Visit to the Female Convict Prison at Mountjoy, Dublin. Transactions of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science to the Social Science, London Meeting 1862* (London: John W. Parker, Son, & Bourn, 1863), 437.

13 Cooper, 'Jeremy Bentham, Elizabeth Fry, and English Prison Reform', 685.

14 Cooper, 684.

15 Joan Kavanagh, "From Vice to Virtue, from Idleness to Industry, from Profaneness to Practical Religion' Grangegorman Penitentiary', Royal Irish Academy, 6 March 2023, https://www.ria.ie/blog/from-vice-to-virtue-from-idleness-to-industry-from-profaneness-to-practical-religion-grangegorman-penitentiary/.

16 Harry Potter, *Shades of the Prison House: A History of Incarceration in the British Isles* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2019), 193.

17 Butler, 'Rethinking the Origins of the British Prisons Act of 1835'.

18 Butler, 730.

19 Susan M. Parkes, 'Jellicoe, Anne', Dictionary of Irish Biography, 2009, https://www.dib.ie/biography/jellicoe-anne-a4268.

20 Jellicoe, *Visit to Female Convict at Mountjoy*, 438-9. The 'mark' system was used in Ireland under William Crofton (1815-1897) who was Chairman of the Directors of Convict Prisons. Originally developed by Alexander Maconochie in the 1840s, Crofton's three stage system involved 'marks' being earned for good conduct and lost for disobedience and rule-breaking. Prisoners became eligible for release when they earned the required number of 'marks'. See Gerry McNally, 'James P. Organ, the "Irish System" and the Origins of Parole', *Irish Probation Journal* 16 (2019): 42–59.

21 Jellicoe, *Visit to the Female Convict Prison at Mountjoy*, 442.

the plight of prisoners had no such concerns. It was primarily politics, but sometimes humanitarianism that inspired these campaigners.

"A DIFFERENT CATEGORY TO THE ORDINARY"

Throughout the 19th and early 20th century, due to support for their cause, or prompted by humanitarian concerns, the plight of politically aligned prisoners attracted widespread political and public backing through amnesty campaigns, support networks, political movements and electoral contests.[22] In their refusal to be treated as criminals, prisoners convicted for physical force activities and their supporters demanded that they be treated differently to others convicted of "ordinary" crimes. Although rarely accepting of their penal regimes, by the 20th century, imprisonment was being used as "war by other means."[23] Periodically, prisons became contested spaces as external struggles permeated the prison walls, and battles inside the prison had ripples, even tidal waves, outside.

One of the earliest support groups for politically aligned prisoners came soon after the foundation of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1858. Established in 1869, the focus of the Amnesty Association was the release of Fenian prisoners, but it also campaigned on wider social and political issues, and became the "largest political mobilization of mass popular opinion in Ireland since the 1840s."[24] Nominally led by Isaac Butt, the leader of the Home Rule Party, it organised demonstrations with vast crowds, one in 1869 reportedly attracted 200,000 people.[25] Karl Marx expressed his support for the Amnesty Association. He criticised what he saw as the British government's hypocrisy in their calling for the release of politically aligned

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Periodically, prisons became contested spaces as external struggles permeated the prison walls, and battles inside the prison had ripples, even tidal waves, outside.

prisoners in Italy, and yet they were unwilling to undertake such a course of action in Britain.[26] In 1870, in a critique of the British government's treatment of Fenian prisoners, he mentioned Charles Kickham, John O'Leary and the particularly harsh regime under which Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa was held. He outlined the punitive conditions of their confinement:

> *The political prisoners are dragged from one prison to the next as if they were wild animals. They are forced to keep company with the vilest knaves; they are obliged to clean the pans used by these wretches, to wear the shirts and flannels which have previously been worn by these criminals, many of whom are suffering from the foulest diseases, and to wash in the same water. Before the arrival of the Fenians at Portland all the criminals were allowed to talk with their visitors. A visiting cage was installed for the Fenian prisoners. It consists of three compartments divided by partitions of thick iron bars; the jailer occupies the central compartment and the prisoner and his friends can only see each other through this double row of bars.*[27]

The Amnesty Association's campaign led to the release of many Fenian prisoners, with large welcoming home parties indicating popular support for their freedom.[28]

After being released half way through his 14-year sentence imposed in 1870, Michael Davitt (1846–1906) used his prison experience to campaign for penal reform.

22 See Seán McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners, 1848-1922: Theatres of War* (London: Routledge, 2003); Seán McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners, 1920-1962: Pilgrimage of Desolation* (London: Routledge, 2013); Seán McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners, 1960-2000: Braiding Rage and Sorrow* (London: Routledge, 2021).

23 McConville, *Irish Political Prisoners, 1848-1922*, 509.

24 Oliver Rafferty, *The Church, the State and the Fenian Threat 1861–75* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 121.

25 Owen McGee, 'Nolan, John ("Amnesty Nolan")', Dictionary of Irish Biography, 2009, https://www.dib.ie/biography/nolan-john-amnesty-nolan-a6220.

26 Karl Marx, 'On the Policy of the British Government with Respect to the Irish Prisoners', in *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, 2nd Russian, vol. 21, 50 vols (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1960), 407. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/iwma/documents/1869/irish-prisoners-speech.htm.

27 Karl Marx, 'The English Government and the Fenian Prisoners', in *Marx and Engels on Ireland* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1870/02/21.htm.

28 Donal McCartney, 'The Church and the Fenians', *University Review* 4, no. 3 (1967): 213.

H-block corridor at Maze Prison, Northern Ireland. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

While incarcerated, he wrote *Leaves from a Prison Diary; Or, Lectures to a 'Solitary' Audience,* which chronicled prison life and his reflections on penal reform. He was subsequently a member of the Humanitarian League's criminal law and prisons department, which "sought to humanize the conditions of prison life and to affirm that the true purpose of imprisonment was the reformation, not the mere punishment, of the offender."[29] He gave evidence to the Departmental Committee on Prisons (chaired by Herbert Gladstone) which published a seminal report in 1895, stating "prison treatment should have as its primary and concurrent objects deterrence and reformation."[30] It proposed, among other things, the abolition of hard labour machines, the reduction of time spent in separate confinement, and the development of education and training opportunities.[31] On his international tours, Davitt visited prisons in Australia and Honolulu. In 1898, as an MP, he became involved in the inspection of prisons, visiting institutions in Bedford, Birmingham and Bristol. Understandably, he showed particular interest in Portland and Dartmoor prisons, where he had previously been incarcerated.[32] Davitt was, however, "one of the very few, if not the only one, of the Fenians to show sympathy for the plight of ordinary criminals and to urge penal reform."[33]

In the period after the 1916 Easter Rising, the Irish National Aid Association and Volunteer Dependents Fund (INAAVDF) gave financial and practical support to prisoners, ex-prisoners, and their dependents and made "a significant contribution to the transformation of public opinion."[34] A mixture of popular and political support for their activities and humanitarian concerns for the people incarcerated led to the INAAVDF becoming "among the most effective instances of political welfarism in twentieth-century Ireland."[35]

29 Victor Bailey, 'English Prisons, Penal Culture, and the Abatement of Imprisonment, 1895–1922', *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 3 (1997): 306.

30 'Report from the Departmental Committee on Prisons and Minutes of Evidence (Gladstone Report)' (London: Departmental Committee on Prisons, 1895), 18.

31 'Report from the Departmental Committee on Prisons and Minutes of Evidence (Gladstone Report)'; See also, Martyn Housden, 'Oscar Wilde's Imprisonment and an Early Idea of "Banal Evil" ' or 'Two "Wasps" in the System. How Reverend W.D. Morrison and Oscar Wilde Challenged Penal Policy in Late Victorian England', *Forum Historiae Iuris*, 2006, https://forhistiur.net/2006-10-housden/.

32 Laurence Marley, *Michael Davitt: Freelance Radical and Frondeur* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 208.

33 Leon Radzinowicz and Roger Hood, 'The Status of Political Prisoner in England: The Struggle for Recognition', *Virginia Law Review* 65, no. 8 (1979): 1454.

34 Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, 'The Irish National Aid Association and the Radicalization of Public Opinion in Ireland, 1916–1918', *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 706. See also William Murphy, *Political Imprisonment and the Irish, 1912-1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

35 Nic Dháibhéid, 'The Irish National Aid Association and the Radicalization of Public Opinion in Ireland, 1916–1918', 729.

During the Civil War, despite the best efforts of the Free State government, the Women Prisoners' Defence League (WPDL) led by Charlotte Despard (1844–1939) and Maud Gonne MacBride (1866–1953) highlighted the conditions and treatment of Republican prisoners. Established in August 1922 by the mothers, wives and sisters of Republican Prisoners, the WPDL used the "emerging rhetoric of international law and prisoner rights."[36] In an attempt to embarrass the government, they petitioned international organisations including the Red Cross and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Despite many leaders of the new state having spent time in prison, few were interested in easing the plight of prisoners, especially as it would benefit their Civil War enemies. As Kevin O'Higgins informed the Dáil in November 1922, there "is not a member of this present Government who has not been in jail [...] We have had the benefit of personal experience and personal study of these problems."[37] However, he continued:

> *I think that everyone here would agree that we should aim at improvement and reform in the existing prison system. I think we would be unanimous in the view that a change and reform would be desirable. Personally, I can conceive nothing more brutalizing, and nothing more calculated to make a man rather a dangerous member of society, than the existing system. But one does not attempt sweeping reforms in a country situated as this country is at the moment.*[38]

Penal reform would have to wait.[39] With only sporadic and peripheral interest in penal affairs throughout the early decades of the state, the outbreak of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the subsequent rise in the number of prisoners led to renewed interest in the plight of prisoners, north and south, and in Britain.

During the 1970s, Official IRA prisoners had a support group called Saoirse. Provisional IRA prisoners had the Relatives Action Committee.[40] However, after the abolition of special category status in Northern Ireland in March 1976, prisons became a major battleground. The Provisional IRA and its allies rejected the British government's policy of criminalisation, demanded separation from other prisoners, and wanted to be treated as prisoners of war with all that entailed, both in the penal and political contexts.[41] Refusing to wear prison clothes led to the beginning of the 'Blanket' and 'No Wash' protests.[42]

Two years into their protest, Archbishop Tomás Ó Fiaich made a visit to Long Kesh Prison. He stated that the "authorities refused to admit that these prisoners were in a different category to the ordinary,"[43] and drew parallels with the penal experiences of the Fenians Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa and William O'Brien. He believed that "[n]o one could look on them as criminals. These boys are determined not to have criminal status imposed on them".[44] The conflict in Long Kesh entered a new phase with the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981, and the eventual death of ten prisoners.

Standing on an Anti-H-Block platform, and in support of political status, there was enough support among the voters of Fermanagh/South Tyrone to elect hunger striker Bobby Sands to Westminster in April 1981. Similarly, the Cavan/Monaghan and Louth constituencies returned hunger striker Kieran Doherty and Long Kesh prisoner Paddy Agnew respectively to the Dáil later that year, with hunger striker Joe McDonnell narrowly missing out on being elected in the Sligo/Leitrim constituency by 315 votes.[45]

36 Lia Brazil, 'Women Prisoners' Defence League', Mná 100, 2022, https://www.mna100.ie/centenary-moments/women-prisoners-defence-league/.

37 Kevin O'Higgins TD, 'General Prisons Board – Dáil Éireann (3rd Dáil)', Houses of the Oireachtas, 28 November 1922, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1922-11-28/27.

38 O'Higgins TD.

39 Cormac Behan, *Citizen Convicts: Prisoners, Politics and the Vote* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

40 'Political and Pressure Groups', Magill Magazine, 2 October 1977, https://magill.ie/archive/political-and-pressure-groups.

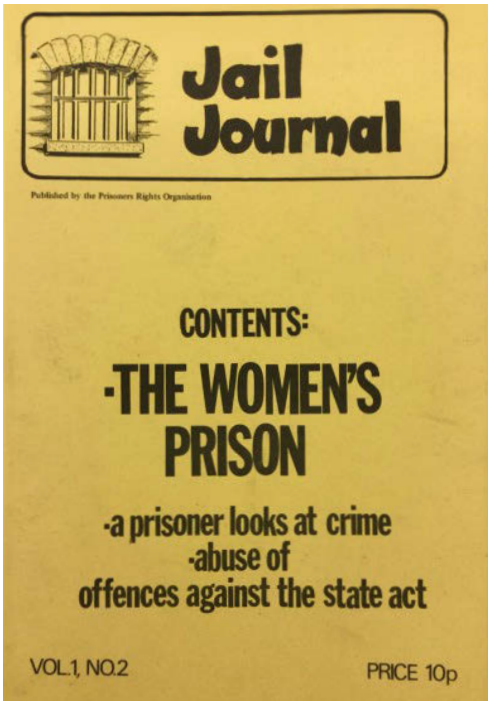
41 See Kieran McEvoy, *Paramilitary Imprisonment in Northern Ireland: Resistance, Management, and Release* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

42 David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The Story of the 1981 Hunger Strike* (London: Grafton, 1987).

43 Archbishop Tomas O'Fiaich, cited in David McKittrick, 'Archbishop Compares H-Block to Calcutta Slums", *Irish Times*, 2 August 1978, sec. 1 & 5.

44 Archbishop Tomas O'Fiaich, cited in McKittrick.

45 Beresford, *Ten Men Dead*.



Credit: Prisoners Rights Organisation

Although politically aligned prisoners have tended to gain the most amount of political, popular and academic interest there were other groups providing support and solidarity which were more focussed on prisoners' rights in general, and penal conditions for all prisoners.

"TO PRESERVE, PROTECT AND EXTEND THE RIGHTS OF PRISONERS"

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, "ordinary" or "social" prisoners and their allies campaigned for improvements in conditions in Irish prisons. Although emerging during a wave of grassroots prisoner organisations and support networks that sprung to life across many jurisdictions, including Scandinavia, Great Britain, France and the United States, the issues "ordinary" prisoners raised were primarily local.[46]

The conditions in Irish prisons during the 1970s and 1980s were laid bare in an investigation by the Prison Study Group – made up of academics and members of civil society – in 1973. The vast majority of prisoners had to "slop out";[47] they had to spend over 15 hours in their cell and there were limited productive out-of-cell activities. While there continued to be traditional prison industries, these were "menial" and did "not assist the prisoner's chances of employment on release."[48] It noted that prisoners still lived under the 1947 Prison Rules, an almost Victorian set of guidelines that were desperately in need of updating.

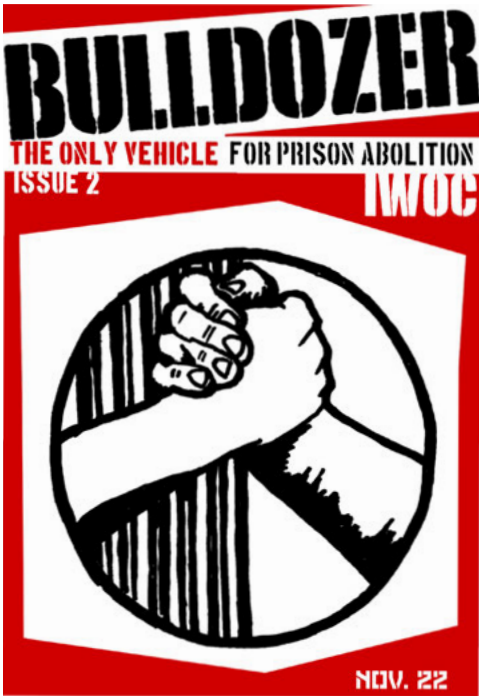
Discontent at the conditions of confinement, the standard of food, and the lack of recreational facilities prompted two sit-down protests in Portlaoise Prison over successive days in November 1972. These demonstrations were by ordinary or social prisoners and the Visiting Committee responded by imposing dietary punishment and loss of remission and privileges for ninety prisoners. Undeterred, the Portlaoise Prisoners Union (PPU) emerged because they felt "that the work done inside the prison was on a par with the work done on the outside."[49] The prisoners' demands included one third remission (under the 1947 Prison Rules, male prisoners were eligible for one quarter and female prisoners one third reduction of their sentence), a new parole board with an elected union member, improved visiting conditions, and educational facilities for all prisoners with special emphasis for those with literacy difficulties. The PPU wanted a skilled trades programme to be introduced and the current wage level of 10p a day to be increased to £10 a week. They demanded an end to censorship of mail, books, and newspapers and the immediate abolition of dietary punishment. Finally, the PPU called for reform of the Visiting Committee, because they had little faith in its impartiality. The PPU spread,

46 For Scandinavia, see Thomas Mathiesen, *The Politics of Abolition* (London: Martin Robertson, 1974); for Republic of Ireland, see Cormac Behan, '"We Are All Convicted Criminals"? Prisoners, Protest and Penal Politics in the Republic of Ireland', *Journal of Social History* 52, no. 1 (2018): 501–26; for Great Britain, see Cormac Behan, 'The Summer of Discontent: The British Prisoners Strike of 1972', in *The Emerald International Handbook of Activist Criminology*, ed. Victoria Canning, Greg Martin, and Steve Tombs (London: Emerald Publishing, 2023); for France, see Michael Welch, 'Counterveillance: How Foucault and the Groupe d'Information Sur Les Prisons Reversed the Optics', *Theoretical Criminology* 15, no. 3 (2011): 301–13; for United States, see C. Ronald Huff, 'Unionization behind the Walls', *Criminology* 12, no. 2 (1974): 175–93.

47 As a consequence of having no flushing toilet, slopping out is when prisoners empty the containers they use as toilets during the night in the cells where they sleep.

48 Prison Study Group, 'An Examination of the Irish Penal System' (Dublin: Prison Study Group, 1973), 89.

49 Prisoners' Rights Organisation, *Jail Journal*, 1, no.1, (n.d.), https://www.leftarchive.ie/publication/2503/.



Issue of Bulldozer zine. Credit: Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee Ireland

eventually calling itself the Prisoners Union. After the initial surge of activity, sporadic demonstrations occurred throughout the 1970s, usually sit-down strikes, refusal to attend work, and periodically, hunger strikes.[50]

In 1973 former prisoners who had been involved in the PPU and others interested in penal reform, called a public meeting to generate public support "to preserve, protect and extend the rights of prisoners, and seek the implementation of the 11 demands of the Portlaoise Prisoners Union."[51] At this meeting, the Prisoners' Rights Organisation (PRO) was established. It campaigned to improve what were generally considered substandard conditions in Irish prisons. It called for the "immediate implementation of a comprehensive system of penal reform in Irish jails."[52] It had an extensive list of demands, ranging from improvements in the provision of education and vocational training, to extended recreation facilities, and improved visiting conditions, with more regular visits. The PRO, echoing the demands of the Prisoners Union, insisted that prisoners should have the right to establish a union, with trade union rates of pay for prison work. They sought the right to vote in local and general elections and to join political parties.

The activities of PRO were broadly grouped into three categories: campaigning and activism, research into the penal system, and practical initiatives. Widening its remit beyond a critique of the prison system, members of the PRO became involved in issues such as campaigning against the new Criminal Justice Act 1984; they opposed the re-opening of Loughan House as a juvenile detention centre, condemning it as a children's prison, and supported the abolition of the death penalty. The PRO published the *Jail Journal*, which they claimed reached a circulation of up to 3,000 copies.[53] The organisation petered out in the mid-1980s. With the publication of the *Whitaker Report*, in 1985, it believed that had achieved its goal of highlighting the conditions in Irish prisons. Many of its earliest leaders went on to prominent positions in Irish life.[54]

"AN END TO STRUCTURAL INJUSTICE IN IRISH SOCIETY"

Contemporary organisations in what could be loosely called the charity sector tend to take a different approach to their charitable forebears. Social justice rather than charity alone informs their practice. Broadly categorised into campaigning and advocacy, and service provision, there is some cross-over. As its names suggests the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, provides information and support to Irish prisoners and their families outside Ireland. Established in 1985 by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference amid concerns about the treatment of Irish prisoners in British jails, it continues to deal with the unique challenges of Irish prisoners overseas facing "significant

50 Behan, Prisoners, Protests and Penal Politics'.

51 John Kearns, 'Prisoners' Rights', *Irish Press*, 7 July 1973.

52 'Jail Journal' 1, no. 1 (n.d.), See also Oisín Wall, '"Embarrassing the State": The "Ordinary" Prisoner Rights Movement in Ireland, 1972–6', *Journal of Contemporary History* 55, no. 2 (2019): 388–410.

53 Prisoners' Rights Organisation, 'Jail Journal' 1, no. 12 (n.d.), https://www.leftarchive.ie/publication/2503/.

54 Cormac Behan, '"Nothing to Say"? Prisoners and the Penal Past', in *Histories of Punishment and Social Control in Ireland: Perspectives from a Periphery*, ed. Lynsey Black, Louise Brangan, and Deirdre Healy (London: Emerald Publishing, 2022), 250.

difficulties, including dealing with an unfamiliar legal system, discrimination and language barriers."[55] Established in 1994, the Irish Penal Reform Trust campaigns for "a national penal policy which is just, humane, evidence-led, and uses prison as a last resort."[56] The Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice locates the prison and the plight of prisoners in a structural context. It argues that "[o]ur prisons function as warehouses filled with people on the periphery of and rejected by society. […] we can see that people in prison are among the most marginalised and vulnerable in the country". It believes that penal reform is tied in with "an end to structural injustice in Irish society."[57]

There are various organisations that continue the tradition of prisoner representation of the 1960s and 1970s, focussed more on solidarity and allyship amongst, and with, prisoners. They argue that people with experience of imprisonment should mould and lead the programme for penal change, with the support of allies outside. What distinguishes them is not just the searing critique of the penal system, but their rejection of penal reform campaigns and charitable endeavours, which they argue legitimises the existence of prisons by softening the pain of confinement.[58] One of the oldest prisoner solidarity movements is the Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) which had its genesis during the Tsarist Russian Empire supporting political prisoners and their families.[59] It has mainly an online presence here through Anarchist Black Cross Ireland. It organises an annual Week of Action with Anarchist Prisoners, a Radical Book fair and solidarity actions.[60] ABC has co-operated with the Incarcerated Workers Organising Committee (IWOC), a prisoner-led section of the International Workers of the World (IWW). Almost unique among trade unions internationally, article II of the IWW constitution explicitly welcomes prisoners, with law enforcement and prison officers barred.[61]

Established in the US, and now with branches worldwide, the IWOC aims to "support prisoners to organise and fight back against prison slavery and the prison system itself."[62] Prisoners who work, IWOC argues, "'have no rights to organise, no contracts, no pensions, no right to choose what they do."[63] It contends that there is a responsibility on wider social movements to support prisoners in their individual and collective struggles and seeks to "build class solidarity amongst members of the working class by connecting the struggle of people in prison, jails, and immigrant and juvenile detention centres to workers struggles locally and worldwide."[64] IWOC Ireland has an active and energetic online presence, with its own zine for prison abolition, *Bulldozer.* It is involved in various campaigns around education, health and employment, and supporting individual prisoners and their families.[65] With an emphasis on prisoners and ex-prisoners leading movements for penal change, ABC and IWOC question the use of imprisonment in the context of the struggle for social and political transformation.

CONCLUSION

With a focus primarily on Irish prisons and prisoners, this essay has examined campaigns for improvement in prison conditions and expressions of support for the plight of prisoners through philanthropy, charitable endeavours, allyship and solidarity. Some the concerns of early reformers are still with us today: overcrowding, prison regimes, deficiencies in monitoring and accountability, access to education and programmes, and support for people with mental health issues.

55 'About Us', Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas, accessed 7 August 2024, https://www.icpo.ie/about-us/.

56 'What We Do', Irish Penal Reform Trust, accessed 7 August 2024, https://www.iprt.ie/what-we-do/.

57 'Penal Policy', Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, accessed 7 August 2024, https://www.jcfj.ie/what-we-do/penal-policy/.

58 'Bristol Anarchist Black Cross, Prisoner Solidarity in the UK', *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* 20, no. 2 (2011): 173–75.

59 Colleen Hackett, 'Justice through Defiance: Political Prisoner Support Work and Infrastructures of Resistance', *Contemporary Justice Review* 18, no. 1 (2015): 68–75; Dana M. Williams, 'Contemporary Anarchist and Anarchistic Movements', *Sociology Compass* 12, no. 6 (2018): 1–17.

60 'Anarchist Black Cross Ireland', Anarchist Federation, accessed 7 August 2024, https://www.anarchistfederation.net/author/anarchist-black-cross-ireland/.

61 'Constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World', Industrial Workers of the World, accessed 7 August 2024, https://www.iww.org/constitution/.

62 'About', Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, accessed 7 August 2024, https://incarceratedworkers.org/about.

63 'About', Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee.

64 'About', Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee.

65 IWOC, *Bulldozer.* https://www.onebigunion.ie/bulldozer.

While some of the proposals from early critics may seem archaic, quaint, or at times problematic to today's reformers, they were driven by a desire for remodelled prisons, which they believed would provide the space to allow prisoners to repent and reform. Using their position as pillars of the establishment many advocated for legislative changes to improve penal conditions, including modifications in regime, classification of prisoners, and government inspection. Although campaigns highlighting the plight of prisoners have rarely been mass movements, the conditions for politically motivated prisoners were one of the exceptions. Based on a mixture of political and humanitarian principles, as the sight of prisoners during the 'Blanket' and 'No Wash' protest was beamed to the world outside, the H-Block campaign captured the imagination, and attracted a wave of support from wider society beyond traditional campaigners.

Although there have been a number of movements for "ordinary" prisoners since the 1960s and 1970s few have gained the level of support in Ireland or internationally, or have had as much penal or political impact as prisoners' rights organisations of the 1970s.[66] Today's charitable bodies and prisoner solidarity organisations are not mass movements. However, they recognise that punishment is not distributed equally and prisons across the globe house some of the most marginalised sections of society. While no longer focussed on saving souls, contemporary charitable organisations tend to highlight a social justice agenda rather than the philanthropy of earlier times. The ABC and IWOC provide solidarity and allyship, give voice to prisoners, and provide a powerful critique of the penal system.

Almost 20 years ago, Cavadino and Dignan wrote: "[a]s icy winds of punitive law and order ideology seemingly sweep the globe, we need to hold fast to the recognition that things can be done differently to the dictates of the current gurus of penal fashion."[67] As with all fashion, penal modes change. When the icy winds meet the warm glow of compassion and solidarity, it is important to bear in mind that while advocates for punitive approaches are not new, there is a long and rich tradition of resistance to this ideology. As this essay has shown there were, and are, many who still believe that things can, and indeed should be done differently.

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While no longer focussed on saving souls, contemporary charitable organisations tend to highlight a social justice agenda rather than the philanthropy of earlier times. The ABC and IWOC provide solidarity and allyship, give voice to prisoners, and provide a powerful critique of the penal system.

66 Joel Charbit, 'Mobilisation of Prisoners, Trade Union Strategy (Interview)', les Utopiques, 2018, https://www.lesutopiques.org/mobilisations-de-prisonnier%c2%b7es-strategie-syndicale-entretien-avec-joel-charbit/.

67 Michael Cavadino and James Dignan, *Penal Systems: A Comparative Approach* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2006), 4.

Destabilising the Fight Against Poverty

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INTRODUCTION

Many people in Ireland live in poverty. This daily reality for countless households is evident by the large network of organisations—statutory, community, and voluntary—that seek to alleviate poverty and its pernicious effects. These organisations target an array of demographics and focus on ameliorating its specific symptoms such as unemployment or low educational attainment. It is a complex ecosystem requiring collaboration and partnership if common goals are to be achieved and progressively realised.

Collaboration and partnership are not easily achieved given the multiplicity of organisations, structures and institutions; the ever-evolving nature of the challenges; the changing environment in which they operate; and the effort and skilled leadership that is required for efficacy. However, collaboration and partnership are possible and should be aspired to, given that success in creating a more just society—where poverty and deprivation are eliminated—needs this partnership to function well.

This essay is written in a spirit of solidarity with all that seek to work towards these goals. It is in this spirit that we identify obstacles to effective collaboration which frustrate and hinder the fulfilment of our shared aims. After a brief outline of the historical and contemporary relationship between the State and the community, local development and voluntary (CLDV) sector, this paper will outline how, in practice, the policies governing the relationship between the State and the CLDV sector are antithetical to the values and principles required; respect, collaboration and subsidiarity. We will focus specifically on the experience of the community development sector in the areas of competitive tendering processes, job security, and pay disparity. In conclusion, we will outline necessary and feasible steps towards true collaboration and partnership.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE AND CLDV SECTOR

Historically, the State and the CLDV sector have worked together in a hybrid system to provide health and social care services. The State's minimal involvement originated with the introduction of the Poor Relief (Ireland) Act in 1851 and expanded with the Health Act of 1953.[1] Throughout this time and until present day, the CLDV sector has been vital in meeting the acute needs of people not being met by the State, often those most vulnerable and marginalised.[2] This is acknowledged by Government in the 2019 strategy *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*,[3] which, for example, states that services such as the wrap-around supports provided by community development organisations to the long-term unemployed, would be nearly impossible for the State to replicate.

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In practice, the policies governing the relationship between the State and the CLDV sector are antithetical to the values and principles required; respect, collaboration and subsidiarity.

A core facet of CLDV organisations is their ability and willingness to respond quickly to emerging needs. It is clear the Government understands that both the State and the CLDV sector are essential to achieving our shared aims for a flourishing society, providing complementary services and supports to communities, with the difference in our structures facilitating reciprocity. However, despite this recognition in the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*, the nature of the relationship between the State and the CLDV sector is impeding the realisation of this potential for complimentary modes of working.

The 2022 publication of the *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary*

1 For a fuller account of this period in the emergence of social policy, see Chapter 1 of Fiona Dukelow and Mairéad Considine, *Irish Social Policy: A Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Bristol: Policy Press, 2017).

2 TASC and The Wheel, 'The Future of Public Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector: Working on the Cheap - Assessing the Need for Pay Restoration to Ensure Sustainable Services' (Dublin: The Wheel, June 2023).

3 Department of Rural and Community Development, 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland, 2019-2024' (Dublin: Government of Ireland, 2019).

Queue for a soup kitchen in Dublin. Credit: PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo

Sector document[4] is a welcome action taken by Government as part of the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities* commitments. This document is crucial for the direction of our shared work. Without an articulation of the values and principles required, we cannot hope to achieve our shared aims. However, there are a number of key facets of the relationship between the State and the CLDV sector that will prevent the realisation of these values and principles and, as a consequence, the fulfilment of the government's vision to "create vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, empowered and self-determining communities that support the social, cultural and economic well-being of all members,"[5] if they remain unaddressed. In our experience, this is most evident in the competitive tendering process for local organisations and the job security and pay disparity experienced by CLDV staff.

COMPETITIVE TENDERING

The competitive tendering process for programmes such as the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)—the primary community development programme in Ireland—is irreconcilable with the ethos of respect, partnership, trust, and collaboration. It embeds an inequity and a power imbalance in every aspect of the relationship between the Contracting Authority (the State)[6] and the Framework Member such as local development companies (LDCs),[7] with the former delineating the terms of the latter's work and holding the power to decide their fate. The primary outcome of competitive tendering is the destabilisation of the very ecosystem designed and endorsed by the State to tackle poverty.

While there was consultation with LDCs around the design of SICAP since the completion of its first iteration in 2017, the development of the programme is still indisputably top-down, with the State deciding on the target groups, objectives, local priority

4 Department of Rural and Community Development, 'Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector' (Dublin: Government of Ireland, June 2022).

5 Department of Rural and Community Development, 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities', 10.

6 A Contracting Authority is a public body that is awarding a contract for goods, services or works. This may include individual Government Departments or Offices; local or regional authority; any public body, commercial and non-commercial State bodies, and private entities which are subsidised 50% or more by a public body, when awarding contracts for goods, services or works.

7 Local Development Companies are multi-sectoral partnerships that deliver community and rural development, labour market activation, social inclusion, climate action and social enterprise services.

In supporting disadvantaged individuals and communities, LDCs are not-for-profit, volunteer-led organisations who provide a national service through locally-based services. Their ethos is bottom-up, taking a holistic view of the individual and the community.

> The primary outcome of competitive tendering is the destabilisation of the very ecosystem designed and endorsed by the State to tackle poverty.

groups and reporting requirements. It is not a process whereby the State and the LDCs collaboratively work towards an agreed programme of work based on their shared but diverging knowledge and understanding of communities. Destabilising competitive tendering processes are imposed on LDCs without meaningful input, despite their years of experiences and often decades of working on the frontline with and alongside affected communities.

Competitive tendering creates an environment wrought with instability and insecurity as staff at LDCs are forced into a position whereby they must not only reapply for their jobs, but compete for them. Organisations are forced to justify their existence at the end of each arbitrarily imposed funding cycle. While SICAP's funding is currently a five-year cycle, with the possibility of a one-year extension, most grant funding cycles are only 12 months in duration which is very disruptive and destabilising. It is worth noting that, under SICAP, all implementers have received additional funding called SICAP New Arrivals, specifically to address the refugee (both Ukrainian and International Protection) crisis. Despite falling under SICAP, this funding is only approved on a 12-month basis with funding allocations only being confirmed at year's end. This indicates an obliviousness to the delicate hybrid ecosystem and the impact such policies have on its stability and effectiveness. Furthermore, it disregards the tireless work of LDC staff in providing for the evolving needs of people and grappling with community cohesion in the context of the poly-crises faced. The lingering effects of the pandemic; endemic poverty; the cost-of-living crisis; the housing crisis; the climate crisis; international commitments to refugees; and the rise of the Far Right to name a few.

Credit: Alexander Grey at Unsplash

A key question remains as to why the hybrid relationship of State and anti-poverty bodies can not be permanent. With a market-based model to provide social goods, and a neoliberal State which will always create marginalised groups or exclusion zones, poverty will always be with us. The Government does not fund other key providers of social services such as schools and hospitals on an annual grant basis or even multi annual basis with the threat that funding could be pulled at any time. Why not have LDCs as permanent partners of the State (which we are anyway) and then monitor and inspect our work using relegatory mechanisms similar to school and hospitals?

LDC staff are at the forefront of the many crises within our society, and while the State declares its ostensible appreciation, the competitive tendering process betrays any gratitude. While we do not doubt the dedication of our colleagues in Government departments, statutory agencies, and local authorities in the fight against poverty, they

> The Government does not fund other key providers of social services such as schools and hospitals on an annual grant basis or even multi annual basis with the threat that funding could be pulled at any time.

are part of a process which destabilises this goal through the clearly inequitable treatment of their "partners" in this mission. The inequality sown into the relationship as a consequence of competitive tendering severs trust between the State and the CLDV sector. This is clearly not conducive to collaboration, nor to partnership. A destabilised ecosystem risks becoming a failed ecosystem.

Competitive tendering is widely used as a process by which the Government determines to which company/organisation it awards contracts for the provision of services and delivery of projects. On the surface it may appear to be a prudent way of ensuring value for money and accountability, crucial for the expenditure of taxpayer money. However, we must apply a critical lens and interrogate the efficacy of such processes across contracts as heterogeneous as SICAP and those awarded for the delivery of construction projects such as the new Children's Hospital. As outlined above, the CLDV sector has a long and unique history of working alongside the State in a hybrid system, one largely designed and determined by the State. Does this entwined history of mutual dependence and the social value of their goals not call for a different form of funding arrangement than a critical infrastructure project undertaken by an international company? Prior to the introduction of this public procurement process, funding was provided via grants. Were there issues with this system that preceded the introduction of the tendering process in 2015? Relatedly, has there been any investigation into whether public procurement has given rise to greater efficiency, accountability and, more importantly, better services and outcomes in terms of stated aims?

The SICAP tendering process is an arduous undertaking for the 48 LDCs around the country, demanding hundreds of hours of work to be dedicated to its completion per LDC. Moreover, we must also consider the hours spent by the lead Government department, local authority officials, Pobal,[8] external evaluators and private consultants as part of the public procurement process. All these hours add up to an enormous cost to the taxpayer. Yet, has there been a cost benefit analysis conducted to justify this method? It is important to note that LDCs are not given additional resources during the tendering period, therefore their usual front-facing work must be side-lined, inevitably to the detriment of the individuals, households and communities supported by the LDC. It is important to ask the question, is the imposition of public procurement processes, in the context of social inclusion and poverty eradication, evidence based? Or is it the result of blind and unquestioning allegiance to neoliberal economic ideology?[9]

As recipients of taxpayer money, we must be held accountable for the work we do. However, we would argue that the competitive tendering process is a wholly inappropriate way of ascertaining the social value generated by LDCs. The tender is comparable to a written exam, with marks allocated to each section (of which there were seven in the most recent SICAP tender, each with several subsections) and minimum scores required in each to 'pass.' No part of the public procurement process involves an in-person review of the work carried out by LDCs. No recipients of our services are consulted to evaluate the effectiveness of the work carried out. The nature of community development work is such that many of its impacts do not fit easily in a spreadsheet, as we are dealing with human beings.

A written document cannot capture the confidence that completing a local community education course in Arts, Drama or Stained Glass Making can ignite in a person, nor the connection that a weekly coffee morning can foster, nor the true meaning that such things can have on the quality of someone's life and the ripple effects within the wider community. It fails to portray the reality of the work in all its successes and failures. Competitive tendering forces LDCs into a position whereby they must convince faceless evaluators hired by the State of their worthiness as opposed to opening a dialogue around what is working, what is not and

8 Pobal works on behalf of Government to support communities and local agencies toward achieving social inclusion and development.

9 Ireland fully embraced neoliberalism by the late 1980s, as a means of structuring its economy, government and society, and the Irish political elites have been unwavering in their adherence to neoliberal doctrine since then. For a fuller account of neoliberal governance, ideology and "evidence-based" policymaking, see Keith Adams, 'In Evidence We Trust', *Working Notes* 33, no. 85 (2019), https://www.jcfj.ie/article/in-evidence-we-trust/.

why. The time spent on tendering could be used to conduct a real examination of our collective work, aimed at ensuring the accountability of the State and LDCs with communities leading the process. Would this not be a more honest and impactful way of gauging value for money and accountability? Humans have a tendency to accept senselessness once systematised. Acceptance of systems, of course, allows society to function smoothly and helps avoid anarchy. But blind adherence to processes that do not serve the intended end must be challenged.

In *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*, the Government states that a medium-term objective is to "review the current national practice in relation to the commissioning model and develop a model reflecting a collaborative, partnership and whole-of-government ethos and prioritising societal value and community need."[10] This objective is crucial and the Government must prioritise it as a matter of urgency. Moreover, in redesigning the model, to do so in true partnership and in the spirit of listening.

JOB INSECURITY AND PAY DISPARITY

Job insecurity and pay disparity are both intimately linked to the existing funding model. When hired in the community development sector, contracts state that one's position is *subject to funding*. The reality of one's precarious position becomes increasingly unnerving as the end of the funding cycle approaches with this uncertainty and instability having a hugely demoralising effect on staff and colleagues.

The typical 3% annual increases in SICAP funding, which are not guaranteed,[11] does not typically keep pace with inflation. Inflation was over 8% in 2022.[12] Combined inflation in 2021, 2022, and 2023 was 16.5%.[13] Funding increases do not cover rising programme costs and overhead costs, let alone pay increases. A report conducted by TASC and The Wheel confirms this stagnation of wages in the sector, featuring an example of a Section 39[14] worker whose salary increased by only 2% across 14 years during which time inflation increased by 17%.[15] The result is that workers in the CLDV sector are getting poorer year on year.

Both job insecurity and diminishing pay are in stark contrast to the conditions of our counterparts in the anti-poverty ecosystem who are employed in the civil and public sector. In January 2024, the Government agreed to a new collective pay agreement for the public service.[16] The pay agreement provides for increases of 10.25% over a two and a half year period, with those on lowest incomes receiving up to 17.3% over the lifetime of the pay agreement. This is not to chide our civil and public service colleagues. Job security that enables individuals to make life and financial decisions should always be welcomed. Incremental pay increases that acknowledge the value of individuals' experience and dedication to their work are appropriate. What we are asking, is whether the same is deserved by workers in the CLDV sector? Is it not these workers who comprise half of the hybrid-system designed to fight poverty in this country?

What these disparities between the conditions in the CLDV sector and the public sector indicate is a fundamental inequality in how we value and respect the work. Far from the government's aim of achieving "a strengthened partnership between Government and the community and voluntary sector,"[17] strife is mounting. This is observable in the 2023 vote by Section 39 workers (voluntary, not-for-profit employees in healthcare) to strike indefinitely, contesting the discrepancy in their conditions of employment

10 Department of Rural and Community Development, 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities', 27.

11 Increases in SICAP funding are not stated in the tender at the beginning, with LDCs only being notified of increases for the following year, if any, at the end of the given year when budgetary and programme decisions may have already been made.

12 Irish Local Development Network, 'Budget 2023: Protecting Communities & Promoting Social Inclusion' (Limerick: Irish Local Development Network, July 2022).

13 Central Statistics Office, 'Consumer Price Index December 2023', January 2024, https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpi/consumerpriceindexdecember2023/.

14 Under the provisions of the Health Act 2004, the Health Service Executive may enter into agreements with and provide funding to voluntary agencies (section 38 and 39 organisations) to deliver services on its behalf.

15 TASC and The Wheel, 'The Future of Public Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector'.

16 Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Minister Donohoe Welcomes Proposals on a New Collective Pay Agreement for the Public Service', Government of Ireland, 26 January 2024, https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/93217-minister-donohoe-welcomes-proposals-on-a-new-collective-pay-agreement-for-the-public-service/.

17 Department of Rural and Community Development, 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities', 12.

in comparison to Section 38 (HSE) workers.[18] This was the manifestation of frustrations that have been bubbling for years as a result of workers toiling with lip service as their only thanks. Can a meaningful hybrid system predicated on such inequity endure? This leads to the bigger question of whether a network based on inequity can be fairly expected to positively impact societal inequity.

The Government states that "the community and voluntary sector is critical to a healthy, just and prosperous society in Ireland."[19] In that case, the health of our society is in peril. The CLDV sector is experiencing an acute recruitment and retention crisis fuelled by job insecurity and pay disparity during a time when demand for not-for-profit services is growing and becoming more complex.[20] Rather than a harmonious, collaborative and impactful environment underpinned by parity of esteem, the hybrid ecosystem is fractured and damaged.

TOWARDS TRUE COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities offers hope for the future of the CLDV sector, for its relationship to the State and for the attainability of our shared aims. Objective One, to "strengthen and develop participative approaches to the development of public policy and programming underpinned by an autonomous community and voluntary infrastructure,"[21] has the opportunity to be transformative if we can find meaningful ways of implementing it. "Autonomous" speaks to the independence of the CLDV sector and their distinctive insights into where policies and programmes are failing, where they could be adjusted, better implemented, or transformed to achieve our objectives.

An autonomous CLDV sector has the potential to encourage the flourishing of our civil society,

"Rather than a harmonious, collaborative and impactful environment underpinned by parity of esteem, the hybrid ecosystem is fractured and damaged.

contributing to the enhancement of our democracy. For this to be realised, methods of harnessing this potential must be developed and effectuated. An action listed towards the fulfilment of objective one is the establishment of a "Civic Forum for formal dialogue between the sector and local and central government." If objective one is to be accomplished, we must go further than a Civic Forum.

For true partnership in the co-creation of programmes and public policy, comprehensive structures and issue-based working groups must be established, with experts from the CLDV sector, the State and community members appointed to them. Status equality and mutual respect must be foundational, requiring a culture which enforces this. Reducing the material inequalities between workers will be necessary to achieve this. Creating an environment where the CLDV sector operates in a perpetual state of uncertainty, instability, and anxiety is contrary to the Government's *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*. Moreover, weight must be given to recommendations made and where implementation is not possible, reasonable justifications must be given. For democracy to be participative and deliberative, input from civil society must be valued and acted upon assuming actions are practical and logical.

While this paper has focused on the CLDV sector and the State as the key components of the hybrid ecosystem, there is another component which must be given primacy: the communities facing poverty, the "targets" of programmes and policies. No programme or policy is credible, nor are their aims achievable without inclusion of those impacted. Again, the Government recognises this vital component in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*, with actions 1.1 and 3.7 providing a roadmap for the inclusion of the community voice in decisions that affect them.

18 Muiris O'Cearbhaill, 'Health and Community Workers to Strike "indefinitely" from 17 October over Staffing Concerns', TheJournal.ie, 25 September 2023, https://www.thejournal.ie/workers-volunteer-community-sector-strike-6177851-Sep2023/.

19 Department of Rural and Community Development, 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities', 8.

20 TASC and The Wheel, 'The Future of Public Service Delivery by the Community & Voluntary Sector'.

21 Department of Rural and Community Development, 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities', 24.

Action 1.1
Develop and sustain national, regional and local structures and policies that facilitate and promote meaningful engagement of marginalised communities.

Action 3.7
Provide public information and education programmes to enable people, particularly those from marginalised communities, to engage in national and local democratic processes.

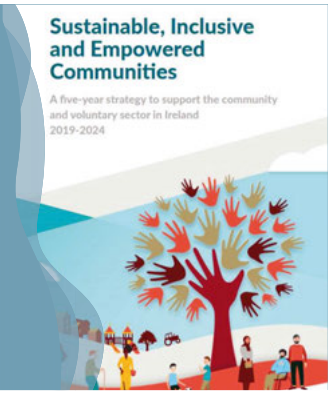


Figure 1: Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities

The CLDV sector can work with the State and communities to build the programmes and processes referred to in action 3.7, tailoring them so that they are relevant to local contexts and could potentially play a part in their delivery. For this to provide a basis for engagement in national and local democratic processes, the fulfilment of action 1.1 must be occur simultaneously so that individuals and communities have avenues through which their concerns can be addressed, and their ideas fostered and initiated. Without the simultaneous development of these structures, there will be a greater loss of faith in democracy, and we risk further disenfranchising marginalised communities and providing an opening for Far Right actors.[22]

CONCLUSION

Albert Einstein is famously attributed with describing insanity as "doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." He may have had a different issue in mind but this quote is an apt representation of the current state of affairs in the fight against poverty. Last year, poverty increased at a time when the Irish State has more available spending than ever before.[23] This fact requires all actors that are involved in the fight against poverty to take a moment to reflect. We cannot continue to operate as we currently have and reasonably expect to overcome the challenges that persist.

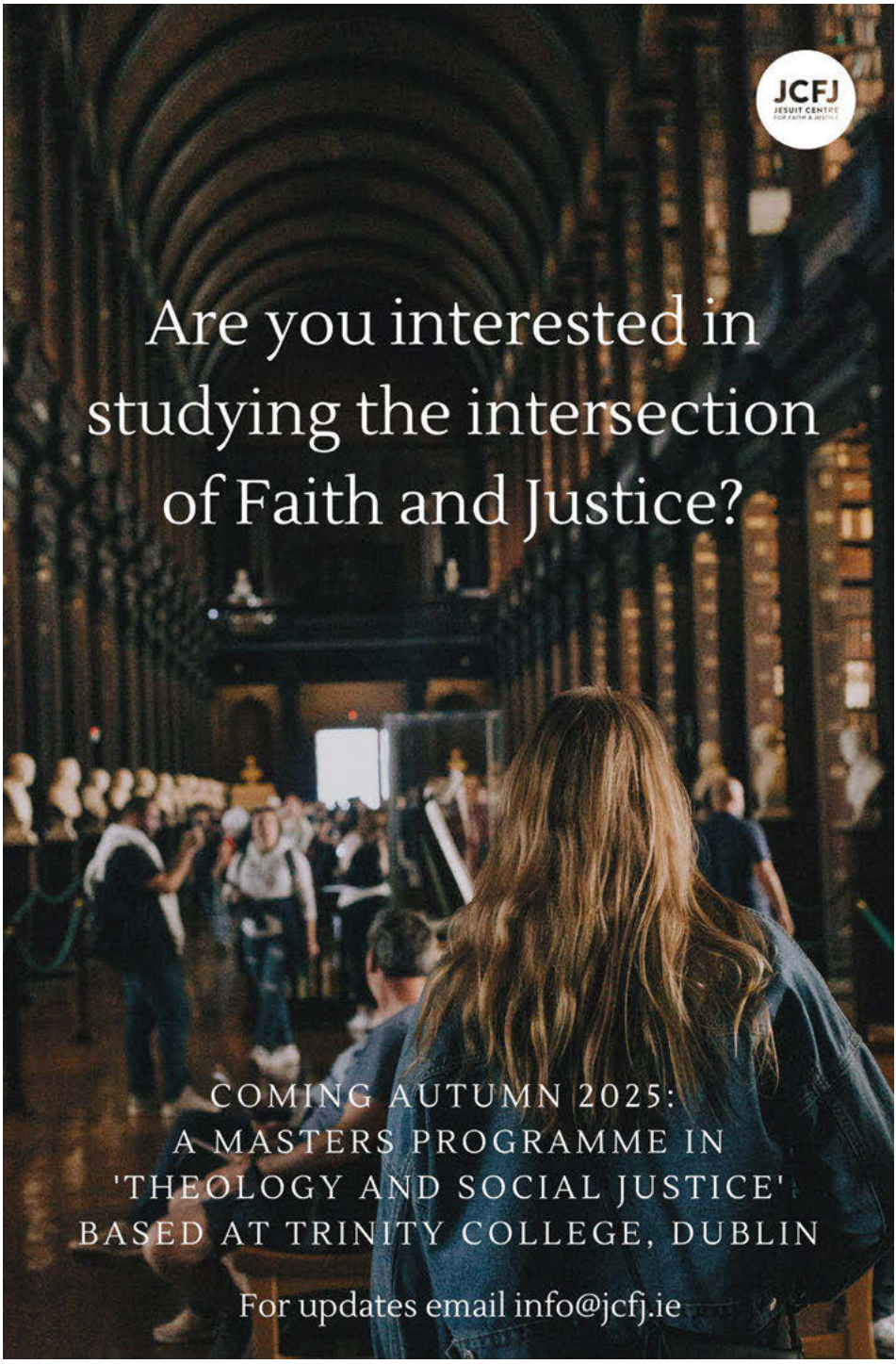
> Unity is increasingly vital as this fractured system will not hold up to future pressures alongside the present destabilisation.

Looking to the future, the poly-crises we face will be compounded and exacerbated by the climate crisis and the far-reaching disorder it will cause. Our systems, characterised by instability as elucidated above, are not equipped to deal with these realities. Creating greater equality between the State and the CLDV sector is by no means a panacea. However, it will help quell the division and create the environment in which cooperation and collaboration can prosper. Upon mending this relationship and deciding to nurture rather than destabilise the hybrid system, we can begin to build more participative and deliberative forms of fighting poverty. In partnership, we can draw on our collective experience and knowledge to formulate solutions to the issues we currently face and those unknown that lie ahead.

Unity is increasingly vital as this fractured system will not hold up to future pressures alongside the present destabilisation. A stable community, local development and community sector with secure, long-term funding and staff with job security and equitable pay progression would be a clear sign from future Governments that the eradication of poverty is a priority. To not do so, would sentence many to lives of poverty in one of Europe's wealthiest countries.

22 Sofia Clifford Riordan and Noel Wardick, 'Reading the City Centre Riots: Thoughts, Feelings and Reactions of the Dublin Community Co-Op', *Working Notes* 38, no. 95 (2024): 5–14.

23 Central Statistics Office, 'Poverty Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) 2022' (CSO, 22 February 2023), https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2022/poverty/.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