

FIGHT FOR PUBLIC HOUSING – NOW!

The current crisis in housing is not a bug in the system, it is by design. The state has no interest in resolving this crisis, for a basic reason — profit. The state is attempting to push Irish society from a mixed system, where public housing was used to help those who could not live unsupported in the private rental sector, to a unitary system where the landlord is king.

It is not that the state can do nothing to solve the housing crisis — the hands off approach is part of a conscious effort.

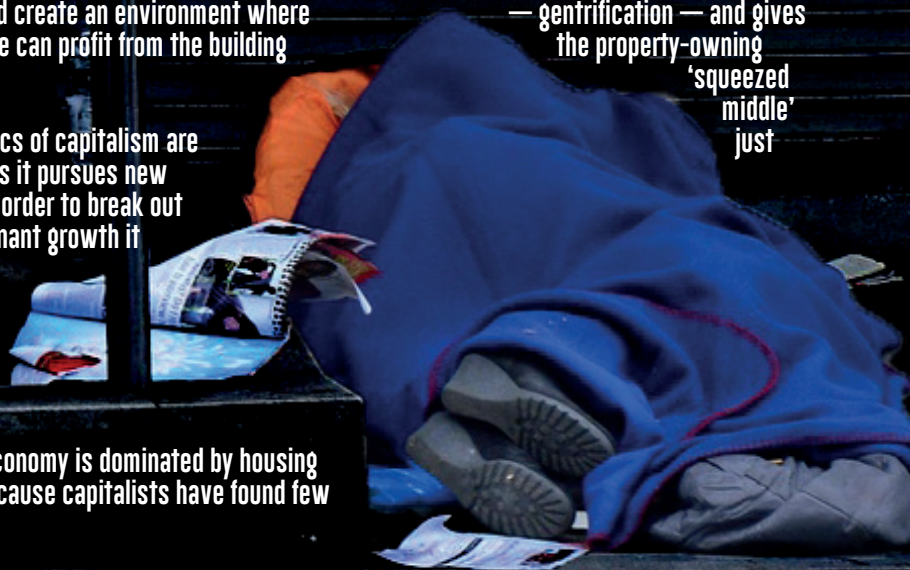
The obvious solution is to build more houses, while the government's solution is to try and create an environment where more people can profit from the building of houses.

The dynamics of capitalism are adjusting as it pursues new markets in order to break out of the stagnant growth it has been trapped in over the past thirty years. The Irish economy is dominated by housing bubbles because capitalists have found few

other ways of making reliable profits, with very little industry in the Irish economy and “services” failing to make up the gap; a consequence of the falling rate of profit, leading to a search for secure investments — such as housing.

Before 2008, who had ever heard of a house falling in value? And now we're back, at peak prices, due to government policy that won't ever let you go out of pocket for long. Who wouldn't take a bet where you can't lose?

The housing crisis dispossesses those who do not own property, forcing them to move from potentially lucrative housing — gentrification — and gives the property-owning ‘squeezed middle’ just



enough to buy their allegiance, while funnelling enormous quantities of money into the pockets of capitalists.

Working people in Ireland are not alone facing a future of precarious employment, this is now being combined with widespread precarious housing — making all aspects of working people's lives one of constant stress and pressure.

Since its inception the Irish state has been hostile to the public provision of housing, previously preferring to encourage home ownership. However, because of the crises in capitalism, the rental market is now viewed as the major profit-producing sector. Furthermore, the private provision of accommodation to rent for public tenants is now viewed as having a potential for profit.

The state has never had a real interest in preserving the public housing sector, let alone developing it. But the ability to earn super-normal profit from the rental market has supercharged this effect.

The government has embarked on a scheme of subsidies for the private rental market through HAP, RAS, and leasing.

It has also sought to attract housing associations, REITs and transnational corporations into the rental sector by means of tax incentives — and by artificially inflating rents in the private sector through not investing in public housing.

The state is moving towards a unitary private rental sector, aiming to totally replace public housing.

It will subsidise the profits of private speculators by paying the difference between the contribution of tenants on low incomes and the commercial rent. It is already directing people who would ordinarily be public housing tenants into the private sector.

So far the response of the left has been a defensive one, allowing the state to set the battle lines and then seeking to challenge it on its own terms. This has resulted in a piecemeal defence of services, each service being defended either when a crisis hits or when the people themselves take the initiative.

We need a campaign to defend and extend the provision of widespread public housing. Only through tackling the very core of the landlord class and its interests can we build a society where housing is a right, not a commodity.

We must fight for public housing; publicly built, publicly owned and rented to the citizens, as a right, on an ability to pay basis. Nothing less is acceptable.

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