

FIGHT FOR PUBLIC HOUSING AND TENANTS RIGHTS

Housing crisis goes from bad to worse

On every measurement the housing crisis is getting worse. The number of people homeless and living in emergency accommodation stands at a record 15,378, an increase of 11% over the past year. The cost of renting increased by an average of 3.4

per cent in the first three months of 2025 taking the average rent to over €2,000 for the first time. The number of new house builds is declining and is projected to fall well short of the five-year target of 300,000 units. Judged on its own stated objectives the government's housing strategy failing badly.

Alternatives

Yet most of the alternative strategies proposed for housing share the assumptions that underpin the approach taken by successive governments. They accept that the housing crisis arises from a mismatch between supply and demand; that any

problems can be solved by the market; and that housing is largely the responsibility of the private sector. Within this framework the role of government is to incentivise banks, property developers and landlords to lend, build and lease. The proposals put forward by Sinn Fein, the trade unions and the parties of the Left - which focus on the notion of

"affordability" and centre around financial support for tenants and targets for "social" housing - are just tinkering around the edges.

Public housing

A real solution to the housing crisis starts with the complete rejection

of the privatised approach. Rather than trying to encourage banks, property developers and landlords with tax breaks and subsidies the government must take direct responsibility for house building and maintenance. Public housing, understood clearly as a category of housing that is not under private ownership or linked to private finance, must be massively expanded. Within this sector rent seeking and profit making must be eliminated to the fullest extent possible.



Raise the Roof rally in Dublin

That means housing built on public land by a state-owned construction company and financed by direct government expenditure. This will lead not only to the creation of public assets but also the generation of an income that will maintain them. Rather than being a drain, public housing pays for itself. Despite the claims of various commentators' public housing is not something unknown to Ireland. Tens of thousands of public homes were built in the state during the period spanning the 1930's up to the 1970's. In the 1960s and 1970s, one-third of all house completions were council houses. This was the situation up to the 1980's when the Irish government introduced its own version of Margaret Thatcher's "right to buy" scheme that converted homes into financial assets and dramatically reduced the stock of public housing.

Of course, the creation of a new generation of public housing will take time. That is why we also need immediate actions including the creation of new emergency accommodation, rent controls and the strengthening of tenants' rights.

Campaign

While the case for such measures is compelling, we have to recognise that there are powerful actors, from banks to property developers and landlords, who are invested in the status quo. The current government, which is beholden to these interests, will resist reforms. Any serious campaign around housing will inevitably place itself in opposition to the government and push for its replacement. ICTU's Raise the Roof lobby is just a cover for the complicity of the trade union leadership.

We need a powerful national housing campaign that links local grassroots struggles around evictions and vacant properties with a broader plan for housing. While it does not exist, we did get a glimpse of how such a

movement could come into existence during the occupation of Apollo House in 2017. This action hit on key issues such as vacant properties and the role of NAMA. It was practical, in that it got homeless people off the streets, and also political, in that it directly challenged the government's housing policy. Unfortunately, its potential was lost when, under pressure from the state and trade union leaders, the action was halted.

Class struggle

The struggle around housing is a class struggle. It's about which class of people in society a housing policy should serve; whether that is the working class or the capitalist class. We also need to recognise that there are attempts to disguise the real nature of the housing crisis by shifting the blame onto immigrants. This is coming not just from the far right but also from the government. As things deteriorate such rhetoric will be amplified. We already know what the consequences of this can be.

This is why there is such urgency for a working-class movement to take ownerships of the housing issue and to demonstrate through word and deed that there is an alternative to the failed status quo.

Online Discussion

Iran under attack as drive to global war accelerates

Speaker: Yassamine Mather
(Iranian socialist)

Tuesday 8th July 2025
19.00 London/Dublin
Zoom platform

scan to register



Title: Fight For Public Housing And Tenants Rights

Organisation: Socialist Democracy

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