

Ireland: The Devastating Social Impact of Economic Austerity Measures

Targeting young families, the elderly and the sick, as the government slashes child benefits, triples prescription charges and rubber-stamps controversial property tax.

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Another political party is selflessly sacrificing itself to the 'preying' mantis of the Irish establishment. We are seeing the Labour Party (in coalition with the conservative Fine Gael) being slowly ingested before our eyes as they struggle to justify their support for the recent right wing austerity budget to an increasingly angry populace.

Even the usually calm and collected silver tongues of the party are starting to get nervous. The last political victim of the establishment mantis was the [Green Party](#) who were coaxed into a coalition by the establishment's [Fianna Fáil](#) party in 2007. The angry public had its revenge in the 2011 election when the Greens lost all their seats in the Dáil (Parliament) and Fianna Fáil itself succumbed to exhaustion and had its own meltdown after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy.

There were demonstrations and [scuffles](#) with Gardaí during the budget debate (5/12/2012) and more recently (7/12/2012) a group of about 250 [carers and their families](#) protested outside Leinster House against the cut of €325 to the annual €1,700 respite care grant announced in Wednesday's Budget.

According to author and campaigner Paddy Doyle:

"There's no question or doubt about it that any vulnerable group, be they elderly, be they carers - the few I've met here are exhausted. You can see it in their faces that they're just worn out. They're saving the State a fortune," he added.

The campaign group [Social Justice Ireland](#) director, Fr Seán Healy, said that for the second year in a row the Government had perpetrated a transfer of wealth from the poor to the prosperous. He noted that:

"Budget 2012 saw 40 per cent of the population on lowest incomes take a far higher proportionate 'hit' than the richest 10 per cent. Budget 2013 continues this process."

And it looks like some people won't be just reading Dickens this Christmas but will be experiencing a Dickensian one as well. According to the president of [St Vincent de Paul](#), Geoff Meagher, there are families that "are choosing to go without heating their homes as they struggle to afford the basics." He also said that:

"It's not just this budget, it's the result of a cumulative effect of tough budgets that

have happened in the past few years. They are pushed into poverty when they cannot afford the basics such as food, heating and education, with fuel being the first thing to go as it is usually most expensive.”

Anger is growing at a [budget](#) which is targeting young families, the elderly and the sick, as the government slashes child benefits, triples prescription charges and rubber-stamps the hugely-controversial property tax. What is [galling](#) many people in Ireland is that this is all being facilitated by a Labour Party which according to one of the tenets of its [Principles](#) states: “Equality implies reorganising society with the specific object of creating a more equal distribution of wealth and power, and not just opportunities for individuals to become powerful or wealthy.” Under another Principle it is stated that “the spirit of Community places Labour on the side of the oppressed.” However, it is beginning to look like if these austerity measures continue much longer, the community is going to place Labour on the side of the unemployed.

Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin is a prominent Irish artist who has exhibited widely around Ireland. His work consists of paintings based on cityscapes of Dublin, Irish history and geopolitical themes (<http://gaelart.net/>). His blog of critical writing based on cinema, art and politics along with research on a database of Realist and Social Realist art from around the world can be viewed country by country at <http://gaelart.blogspot.ie/>.

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