

Independent Thought – United Vision

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Building a New Politics

The transformation of politics in Ireland will not come about as the result of one major event; rather it will be a long, painstaking process of building from the very foundations of our society up through all levels to bring about change.

What started as a financial crisis with the ending of the housing and credit boom in 2008 has exposed a crisis in political life and in society in general. The political system that has developed in this state has shown itself to be devoid of principle and unable to reform itself for the benefit of citizens of this state.

All political parties espouse reform and the building of an equal society where all citizens can achieve their potential. However the reality has been that when they achieve political power they have betrayed the aspirations of the citizens that have voted them into power.

As Independents we agree to work together for the improvement of society with a vision of making the State more responsive to the needs of citizens. In agreeing to work together we believe that our common aims will ensure our cohesiveness thus eliminating the need for a 'whip system'.

What We Propose

We will seek to make politics work in partnership with citizens to demand reform of our State and build a society that provides for the needs of all citizens using principles of equality, human rights and respect for all, to achieve our goals.

Recognising that the principles set out herein will require a programme of change through all levels of society, leading to a more accountable, representative and efficient system of government where decisions are made at the level closest to the citizen, respecting their need to live and prosper in society.

In doing this we will work to the natural strengths of Irish society which lie at the local community level as evidenced by such institutions as the GAA, the Credit Union Movement, the Tidy Towns Associations to name just a few.

The values that are so evident in community development initiatives and social enterprises throughout the country can be utilised to build a movement that puts the citizen to the forefront of politics.

The Principles

Equality

We believe that Ireland can and must be a republic of equal citizens in which no one dominates and no one is dominated.

No one should enjoy impunity before the law or suffer discrimination under it.

Everyone should have access to the essentials of a dignified life.

Everyone should have, not just the right to participate fully in society, but the means to do so.

The guiding principle of public policy should be to reverse the trends towards the ever greater inequality and narrow the gaps between rich and poor.

Democracy

We wish to see a radical renewal of Irish democracy, based on the principle that citizens should be able to participate in a meaningful way in the decisions that affect their lives.

Renewal must start with the creation of genuine local democracy in which citizens can make active choices about the goals they set for their communities and the best use of their own resources.

From this reinvigorated local democracy can flow a national political system that is innovative, accountable and capable of mobilising the energies of the people.

Community

We believe that the best aspects of Irish life are to be found in the commitment, decency and practical achievements of our communities.

Ireland has some of the finest voluntary and community organisations in the world, yet has failed to translate their energies and abilities into a successful system of governance.

We are committed to protecting our community organisations from attack and to harness their energies for the common good.

Sustainability

We believe that Ireland must move beyond the toxic economies of boom and bust and commit itself decisively to economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Ireland has been left with a legacy of public, banking and private mortgage debt that is clearly unsustainable. We believe that public policy must insist on the obvious truth that Ireland cannot continue to pay for the private debts of rotten banks.

We believe that a just and pragmatic solution to the problems of unsustainable mortgage debt is essential to national recovery.

A modest prosperity must be the goal – not swings between the extremes of hyper-development and austerity. Long-term investment in the wellbeing of our children should replace short-term greed as a guiding principle.

The creation of good communities within an environment that is treasured and respected must replace private profit as the driver of development.

Solidarity

Through citizen involvement within the political system we will strive to achieve solidarity across all levels of the political spectrum – local, national and European. Solidarity is key if we are to rebuild trust in the political system.

"What is required is solidarity instead, a co-operative effort from a shared political perspective" – Jurgen Habermas ⁱ

Social solidarity must take priority and economic growth should be seen as a means to sustainable and equitable social development. ⁱⁱ

Human Rights

We will ensure that when government is implementing legislation and policy it is human rights and equality proofed only adopting policies and legislation that has the least negative impact on the most vulnerable citizens in society.

We will address Human Rights in all of its contexts – from the broad international issues to the most basic of human rights for those living in Ireland

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides for the protection of basic human rights such as access to adequate housing, education and health services and we will utilise these protections to ensure that every person feels secure in their access to such services.

Conclusion

We envisage that those subscribing to this charter will be people who have an understanding of the issues on the ground in communities throughout Ireland.

We anticipate that if the principles set out herein are embraced by those people subscribing to this charter then we can eliminate the 'middle man' phenomenon of Irish politics and rebuild trust and integrity in the political system.

As a group of independent individuals that come together to deliver an agreed programme that is based on equality, human rights and sustainability we can build a society and a nation that we can all be proud of; an Ireland that respects the needs of citizens and works to deliver for all members of our communities.

As a group we are of the opinion that people should be seen as not merely the subjects of legislation but rather as participants, who are actively involved in the governance of their own society. To quote Jürgen Habermas –

"The fundamental source of legitimacy is the collective judgement of the people." ⁱⁱⁱ

It is not acceptable for those in politics to make suppositions about the preferred choices of their fellow citizens instead we must integrate the views of those citizens who will ultimately live with the results of political policies.

We envisage a new, inclusive, way of practicing politics. If we know it you will know it – this will be our guiding mantra in all our activities. Rather than finding out about things after the event and being reactive, we believe that citizens must be fully aware of the who, what where and why's of the decision making process if they are to feel represented within the political system. We will ensure that citizens feel informed and represented at all levels in Irish politics.

There are a myriad of examples from across the globe where civil society engagement has been successful and has helped in overcoming times of difficulty – sometimes on a small local scale and often times on a nationwide scale.

In Brazil, for example, where examples such as the Port Allegre participative budgeting process has been hugely successful^{iv}, practitioners point out that the process has helped to overcome the lack of dialogue and trust between government and civil society^v.

In Columbia, the city of Medellín undertook a hugely successful programme – which remains in place- of creating its own development plan through citizen participation embodying social co-responsibility,

making all citizens major agents and participants in their governance thus bridging the gap between state and society.^{vi}

Closer to home, in Scotland, multiple formal and informal partnerships between local government units and civil society have been formed and the formal partnerships are funded by the Scottish government.

Collective decision making can also be a useful tool in increasing people's understanding of, and sympathy for, the needs of their fellow citizens thus creating a relationship of solidarity

"Public participation is not simply I had a voice and I told you what to do to fix that problem and went away. It is far more collaborative and inclusive and we all have some kind of a role or responsibility in implementing those solutions."^{vii}

ⁱ Lecture delivered by Professor Jurgen Habermas, April 2013. Available at <http://www.kuleuven.be/communicatie/evenementen/evenementen/jurgen-habermas/en/democracy-solidarity-and-the-european-crisis>

ⁱⁱ Kirby & Murphy (2011) Towards a Second Republic – Irish Politics after the Celtic Tiger. PlutoPress

ⁱⁱⁱ Gutmann & Thompson (2004) Why Deliberative Democracy. Princeton University Press.

^{iv} <http://www.unesco.org/most/southa13.htm>

^v Gutmann & Thompson (2004) Why Deliberative Democracy. Princeton University Press.

^{vi} Uran, O. (2010). Medellín Participatory Creativity in a Conflictive City.

^{vii} Gutmann & Thompson (2004) Why Deliberative Democracy. Princeton University Press.