

A graphic of several white puzzle pieces arranged in a grid pattern, overlapping the text 'THE FLOURISHING SOCIETY'.

THE FLOURISHING SOCIETY

**Visioning a New Civic
Republic and Building a
Republican Society and State**

– Fergus O’Ferrall

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Visioning a New Civic Republic and Building a Republican Society and State

Introduction

The set of profound crises that the Irish state and society are undergoing have led many to search for a new public philosophy.¹ Many are critical of the public thinking which led to the deep economic recession in Ireland and which has, indeed, endangered the very viability and independence of the Irish State. As a people we face into a decade when attempts must be made to address, or to adjust to, the harsh implications of a unique set of political, economic, social and cultural crises. However, if we continue on our present development pathway in Ireland this may become a ‘lost decade’ of emigration, economic under-performance, and erosion of confidence in the efficacy of the political system. To avoid this fate we require a new vision. We need to develop clear and effective steps to build a genuinely republican society and state. We, the people, are confronted with an historic opportunity to reconstitute, restructure and to rethink our failed political and economic systems.² The challenge is to place Irish society on an entirely new path of development.

As a people we need a renovation of political consciousness embracing a new understanding of politics, economics and our social and cultural life. Without doubt, we are engaged in a definitive ‘battle of ideas’ as to how the crises may be understood and, more importantly, how they may be resolved. We need an alternative vision and a new narrative if we are to address our future together: a vision imbued with democratic and republican ideals that would herald a renaissance of Irish society – one that will expand the freedom, equality and fulfilment of every person and ensure the common good of all. We need to envision a communal and humane culture being developed in contrast to the individualistic, consumerist culture which has predominated in Ireland: a vision where citizens see themselves primarily as living in interdependence in communities, where bonds of family and community life are strengthened, where the values that underpin an egalitarian society are honoured and are actually lived out at all levels of society. We need to build a public understanding that egalitarianism facilitates the best outcomes with regard to economic and social well-being. Such a vision is a *civic republican vision*. We need to set out on the national journey to build a fully republican society and design our public institutions appropriately to serve citizens in this society. The critical steps on the journey towards a new Irish Civic Republic are emerging, however falteringly, in the public debates which have followed the recent massive policy failures. The first step is to develop a consensus around an appropriate vision. Subsequent steps will involve mobilisation around actions in many spheres of public life to create a new kind of Republic as we approach the first centenary of Irish independence. Citizens are fundamentally responsible for the collective values and choices which result in the ‘way things are’ and for taking steps towards the ‘way things ought to be’. If we keep doing what we have been doing we will keep getting what we have been getting. The civic republican hope for a better future is inspired by the inherent human potential to learn and exercise a collective power to build the world anew.

Without vision the people perish

Building a public consensus around a new vision of our future is vital: a vision which commands widespread agreement will provide a beacon for our collective endeavour. It will provide the necessary motivation for citizens as they confront the extremely grave challenges now and in future years. A vision, if articulated in an inspiring fashion, will communicate to people where, as a political community, we are going - a sense of purpose and destiny is a key component of a healthy society. A vision will frame the agreed norms and values which are essential to govern our political and social behaviour as we move towards its realisation. A vision provides a basis for better public understanding of the kind of Irish state we need to develop as we pursue urgent reform of our public institutions. Without such a vision we simply cannot flourish as a society. Vision is essential; however, we also need to be realistic and aware of the difficulties of scripting a comprehensive vision for Irish society at the present time when so many people are disillusioned, disenchanted and disengaged from the public sphere. Centralisation, corporatism, clientalism, and corruption have greatly eroded citizenship in Ireland. Yet we dare not underestimate the power of an exciting and alternative public narrative embodying an inspiring vision of an expansive future to kindle a ‘new citizenship’ in Ireland.

The new civic republic: a vision for the ‘flourishing society’

The key question we need to ask is: “what would Irish politics look like if promoting *every* person’s well-being was the main aim of our society and of our public institutions?” The short answer is that such a politics would look like *civic republicanism*.³ This political philosophy is based upon long expressed political wisdom about human flourishing in classical political thought as well as in the more recent and remarkable revival of civic republican theory. It is based, in addition, upon a growing volume of empirical evidence about the conditions which promote human well-being.⁴ *We need the rigour of a coherent and systematic political philosophy to govern our vision.* We need to base our actions upon empirical evidence rather than an eclectic mix of aspirations which are bound to lead to confusion and failure.

The key concepts in civic republicanism are *freedom, equality and solidarity*. Each of these concepts requires to be expressed clearly and to be widely understood by citizens. Civic republican freedom is understood as *freedom from domination* in a society which places the common good at the centre of all public life. This definition contrasts sharply with the liberal idea of freedom defined as freedom from interference by the State or by others. Critical policy and practical implications arise from whichever definition of freedom we adopt: to take just one pertinent example freedom from interference is perfectly compatible with our ‘two-tier’ health system whereas freedom as non-domination is not: a single tier universal health system is a *sine qua non* in a genuinely republican society as it positively eliminates the dominance of wealth in determining access by citizens to medical care. The civic republican definition of freedom would radically transform our approaches to the well-being of every citizen and would seek to eliminate the oppressive elements which dominate so many lives at present. Other examples of fundamental policy shifts might easily be given in respect of gender or children as to the implications of whichever definition of freedom we adopt. Civic republicans down the centuries

have designed public institutions to empower citizens to exercise collective direction over their lives and destiny: institutions which prevent domination by external or internal forces and which are equipped to counter corrupt interests which undermine the common good. The civic republic rests upon the sovereign power of citizens through public and accountable processes to ensure abuse of power by vested interests is identified and punished. The ‘*common good*’ is a crucial concept in civic republican thought: *it consists primarily of having the social systems, institutions, and environments on which we all depend work in a manner that benefits all people*. The ‘common good’ does not just happen: it requires the co-operative efforts of citizens to create and sustain it. The ‘common good’ involves the sum total of social and economic conditions which facilitate people, either as communities or as individuals, to attain human fulfilment and human flourishing more fully and more easily. Collectively citizens have to combat tendencies, such as greed and selfishness, which undercut their ability to evoke a sustained and widespread commitment to the ‘common good’. Specific republican understandings of equality and solidarity will be specified in the analysis which follows. The clarity of our vision of the new Civic Republic depends upon clarity about the specifically civic republican definitions of freedom, equality, and solidarity.

The civic republic – key requirements

The new civic republic in Ireland will require both institutional ‘hardware’ and intellectual ‘software’ to succeed. In brief the key requirements are:

- well-designed central and local political and judicial institutions with sufficient checks and balances to ensure accountable and effective public governance in the service of the common good
- the rule of law as made by such institutions to prevent the exercise of arbitrary rule or will by any person or group with a potential to dominate others – freedom under the law
- active citizenship exercising civic virtues, based upon lifelong citizen education and participation at all levels, to ensure effective public deliberation and governance committed to the common good
- commitment to equality to ensure that all citizens are equal by taking effective action to ensure that the accumulation of wealth does not give rise to socio-economic inequalities which in turn undermine political equality

At the core of these fundamental requirements is a profound respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each person and an equal regard for the rights and responsibilities of each person within the political community. A civic republic so constituted develops *over time* a fully civic republican society and way of life. As the Task Force on Active Citizenship stated: without

“ the practice of civic virtue and without active participation by citizens in the life of the community, the institutions of democracy, the market, the State- civil society as a whole- cannot operate in a sustainable way.”

The challenge for Irish citizens involves a *re-moralisation of the public sphere* around core values such as solidarity, social justice, public service and the common good, inclusiveness, community

building and sustainability. The equal moral worth of every person needs to be asserted in the context of the distribution of resources **and** in the context of how power is distributed and used in Irish society and, in particular, in our political and economic arrangements. Irish citizens will find their security and fulfilment from living out these values rather than in the ‘rat race’ of selfish, individualistic material pursuits.

It needs to be emphasised that a key dimension of a ‘flourishing society’ will be the sense of agency citizens acquire and develop – the sense of empowerment which they will experience in economic and social relationships and in the public sphere. Our State ultimately stands or falls on the nature and quality of the citizenship which it nurtures and evokes. We have to re-imagine Irish citizenship and what it ought to mean not only for our politics but in all the key domains of living: community and neighbourhoods, education, healthcare and cultural life. This involves a recovery of these domains from the ‘market mindset’: such areas must be understood as public areas where we *co-produce* public goods and where we need to act in an inter-dependent way in such *co-production* of goods which contribute to the ‘common good’. Civic republicans may easily embrace the concept of ‘development as freedom’ as described by Amartya Sen.⁵ The inherent individual human agency, which we share, is inescapably qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to us. There is, as Sen has stressed, a deep complementarity between individual agency and social arrangements. Development consists of the removal of the various types of ‘unfreedoms’ that leave people with little scope to exercise reasoned agency. Our *political* constructs may either limit or expand human capabilities. A civic republican society will be dedicated to ending domination and dependency and will focus upon fostering human capabilities and the substantial freedoms of citizens, political, economic and social. The current Irish State suffers from massive citizen ‘capability deprivation’ and, as a result, we have widespread dysfunction and failures on a massive scale across most areas of public life.⁶ The devolution of power is a critical element in building the new civic republic accompanied by widespread public deliberative fora in all areas of public life. We face the challenge of reviving a moribund political system **and** the challenge of the inculcation in our citizenry of a new civic and public morality.

Human well-being – the goal of the civic republic

The civic republic when fully constituted and made effective is the optimum answer to the age old question of how people should live together so that all may flourish. The civic republic seeks to promote ‘the flourishing society’: a society where citizens are happy, healthy, capacitated and engaged together upon the human enterprise of developing the good life. This requires a key focus upon ‘public happiness’ and the highest levels of well-being for all. The goals of the civic republic are rooted in what has become known as ‘*civic humanism*’ - a tradition of thought stemming from Renaissance and Classical times which is opposed to acquisitive individualism. It is associated with the broad republican stream of thought from the seventeenth century. Civic humanism embraces patterns of society, economy and politics which cohere in a culture which is liberating, civilising and progressive. In brief, civic humanism represents the pattern of cultural consciousness that informs civic republicanism and is manifested particularly in the ideals and

practice of participatory citizenship. It is a way of everyday life which refuses to see life as the pursuit of individual, selfish, and, for the most part, acquisitive private undertakings. Civic humanism sees the fulfilling life as one which brings to fruition the potentiality intrinsic to human beings in the context of our participation with others in the public sphere and for the common good. It is notable that civic humanism, as experienced for example in Renaissance Florence, or in the early American Republic, emerged as a response to major crises, historical moments of disorder that gives scope to the formative activity of a new beginning. *Now surely is such a time in Ireland.*

A recent NESC Report sets out a clear understanding of well-being which is consistent with a civic republican perspective:

“... a person’s well-being relates to their physical, social and mental state. It requires that basic needs are met, that people have a sense of purpose, that they feel able to achieve important goals, to participate in society and to live lives they value and have reason to value.

*People’s well-being is enhanced by conditions that include financial and personal security, meaningful and rewarding work, supportive personal relationships, strong and inclusive communities, good health, and a healthy and attractive environment, and values of democracy and social justice”.*⁷

Successful societies put equality and well-being at their heart

One great contemporary political and economic debate in Western societies is between those who see the prime objective of politics as that of maximising the *quantity of things*: gross domestic product, corporate profits, competitive profits, and quantitative targets as the main goal of policy- as against those who see the core political enterprise as the achievement of a certain *quality of life*: sustainable growth, corporate social responsibility, flourishing and rounded human lives, and safe, vibrant local communities. A key political struggle in Ireland is between conservative defenders of the status quo who are committed to the ‘old quantitative economics’ and radical reformers seeking qualitative goals. The ideology which underpins the hitherto predominant economic model, based upon a view of human beings as mainly selfish maximizers of their individual interests, has led us into a massive political, economic and social crisis. We urgently need a more rounded and accurate concept of what it is to be human in our economic thinking: we need a different political economy for a ‘civic republic’. Civic republicanism, freshly articulated for the twenty-first century, enables us to envision and build a framework for creating a more equal and socially just Ireland. Many Irish political elements are still stuck in the old paradigm of ‘quantity’ and economic growth per se (as understood by classical or neoliberal economists) as measures of success whilst, actually, our people yearn for a better quality of life for themselves and coming generations. As Professor Kathleen Lynch has put it:

“We have a choice: we can either create a highly unequal and polarised society with a minority of very wealthy people, a sizeable body of secure middle class people and a rising number of poor and vulnerable people. Or we can create an egalitarian society, where no one will be destitute, where there will be high quality health care and excellent education for all age groups; where each will have a safe and secure home,

where there is a well resourced welfare system based upon a concept of rights rather than discretion and charity; where there is an accessible and affordable public transport system and proper supports for both the care of children, and of older and other vulnerable people. We can create a society where women and men are equal to each other in all walks of life, not just in the economy but in sharing the responsibility for caring, in participating in politics and in defining what is of value in the cultural sphere.”⁸

Empirical evidence clearly shows that societies which are most successful across economic, political and social outcomes put human well-being and equality at the centre of their public policies: the most unequal EU countries are the most economically insecure. If Ireland is to develop a successful and sustainable society in the twenty-first century then a new political consciousness must be evoked based upon freedom, equality and solidarity. The mindset fixated alone upon ‘the market’ has led to massive economic, political and policy failures. Civic republicanism sees the social market economy within *the prior delineation of the public realm; indeed the sustainability of a successful economy depends upon the moral framework in the political order.*

Professor Kathleen Lynch and her colleagues in the Equality Studies Centre at University College, Dublin have set out in a persuasive manner a framework for understanding how the concepts of equality, and those associated closely with equality such as freedom and solidarity, imply radical challenges to existing structures in a predominantly capitalist economy.⁹ Their impressive analysis is, I would argue, powerfully supported by a civic republican public philosophy as the underpinning of the participatory democracy which they advocate as required by an egalitarian society.

Putting equality of condition as the key aspiration of our political objectives will challenge fundamentally the current social structures in Ireland, and particularly structures of domination and oppression which replicate inequalities in successive generations. The Irish middle classes – at least powerful and entrenched elements in the professional and middle classes who have benefited greatly from the dismal populist politics of the Irish State – will not easily be persuaded that their real interests will be served in a civic republican dispensation.¹⁰

Drinking from our own wells to create the new narrative

The ‘battle of ideas’ about Ireland’s future is a struggle for **political power** and for **people power** to be wielded in such a way that we create an emancipatory politics and society. Those who desire a new civic republican politics are not without significant resources for the struggle: it is vital to recall that the norms and values of civic republicanism are embedded in the foundation liberation experiences of the Irish people since the eighteenth century.

The Irish State is democratic but has not developed as civic republic. Past Irish nationalist and liberation struggles are not well endowed with detailed expositions as to the social and economic order that is implied by republicanism. However, authentically *civic republican* ideas were never totally eclipsed in Ireland since the eighteenth century. There is, indeed, a very rich civic republican heritage in our history which will prove a vital resource in meeting the challenging task of reconstituting, restructuring and rethinking our state and society.¹¹ The challenge is to

freshly articulate civic republicanism as the most relevant and apposite public philosophy as our State approaches the centenary of independence. Indeed it might become an appropriate centennial goal to build upon our existing democratic framework a new civic republic by 2022. The decade ahead ought to become an exciting developmental journey of citizen engagement and public deliberation. In other words, let us use what might otherwise be a ‘lost decade’ to ensure we never face such a profound existential set of crises again. As the major reform processes are embarked upon in response to our vision of the ‘flourishing society’ what Irish citizens learn on this journey will help create and sustain the new political culture which is needed to underpin the civic republic in the longer term.

Civic republicanism and public policies

Public policies will not of themselves effect the revolution in our political culture which will be required to move from a managerial, centralised, controlling State, which has long been pervaded by a defective neo-liberal orthodoxy, towards a new participative, empowering and enabling civic republican State. However, the choices we make about which policies to pursue and especially how they are formulated and implemented will be formative in shaping an emerging culture and developing political and social relationships over time. We need to be able to identify the key strategic ‘battlegrounds’ where public opinion may be formed as to the civic republican norms and values involved in the issues at stake. Therefore, for example, we need immediately to mark well the implications for national and local government of what is known from research and evidence about putting *well-being* at the centre of public policies. The following five areas of public policy become such ‘battlegrounds’ for civic republicans:

- ❖ **Measuring what matters** – we need to agree a detailed set of annual national and local well-being accounts and have them placed at the heart of all policy-making and evaluation. What gets measured gets done: we need a ‘balanced scorecard’ which measures the following key areas: wealth creation capacity, infrastructure, quality of life and social justice, and public service including the degree to which our institutions are ethical, competent and accountable.
- ❖ **Developing a convincing new sustainable economic model** - we need to build on the emerging re-invention of the discipline of *political economy* to spell out how a new civic economy will be developed [starting from where we are now] so that every person will have a fulfilling and purposeful life and have their needs met in this new model.
- ❖ **Creating an education system that promotes human flourishing** – we need a democratic system [which is experienced by learners as formative of their citizenship] that promotes lifelong educational opportunities from early childhood to old age and which seeks to develop citizen capabilities and competences as well as creativity and social entrepreneurship.
- ❖ **Focussing upon health in all public policies towards population health** – we need to develop a ‘health in all policies’ approach to public policy making in order to address the social determinants of health and to end the stark health inequalities in Irish society.
- ❖ **Strengthening civil society and active citizenship** – a strong, vibrant and independent civil society is essential to a civic republican society and is the principal vehicle for maximising

human well-being and public happiness; there is a key link between well-being and democratic involvement that has implications for public service - people must be involved in the design and delivery of the services required and the concept of ‘co-production’ of desired outcomes is vital in this regard.¹² Civil society organisations must be encouraged to contest public policies, to undertake their own policy analysis and to have the opportunities to advocate for policy change including hearings in the Oireachtas. The public service and Government must be constantly challenged in regard to the evidence-base for all policies.

Building the civic republic – thinking through ‘equality of what?’

The complex agenda of transformation which is required to build the new civic republic may be analysed under political, economic and social headings. However, it must be remembered that there are major interconnections between all public policies, and that the very structure of our traditional governmental departments militates against effective outcomes when judged by the coherence required by an integrating public philosophy such as civic republicanism. Professor Kathleen Lynch and her colleagues have developed a framework for promoting ‘equality of condition’ across our key social systems: *economic, political, cultural and affective* and such a framework is vital for thinking through how all major institutions and structures impact on people and on particular groups. This framework also underlines how these social systems are completely interwoven.¹³ The key dimensions of resources, respect and recognition, power and love, care and solidarity apply across all our social systems. To take an example: an important system for generating equality and inequality is our cultural system, which is concerned with the production, transmission and legitimation of cultural practices and products, including various forms of symbolic representation and communication. The ‘celebrity’ culture and the promotion of vested and corporate interests by News International and Fox News illustrate the dangers which arise from the dominance of privately owned for-profit media which display little or no acquaintance with journalistic values or ethics. The crucial importance for civic republican society of an independent public service and not-for-profit media is apparent: who controls our media and whose interests are served by our media pose stark challenges for our future well-being. The cultural system in place is especially important in relation to social standing and status and hence is a crucial domain for civic republicanism. To cite another example, very briefly, inequality in the affective domain is particularly detrimental for women and children and it undercuts drastically our prospects of an egalitarian society.

Political Reform

A recent expert analysis by the late Peter Mair of Ireland’s political system demonstrates that Ireland compares very poorly as an effective democracy with other countries in Europe.¹⁴ We have a citizenry which is disengaged and passive, and a passive ‘political class’; there is a lack of innovation and a lack of room for new ideas and new political styles. We have a “moribund politics and a moribund political culture”. The political system has largely given over control over policy making and policy design to the civil service: unusually in Ireland we have allocated to “the bureaucracy the role of principal initiator and designer of policy rather than simply the

executor of policy”. Historically much was delegated to the institutions of the Catholic Church in regard to social policy, social welfare, health and education. Political parties absolved themselves of responsibility for governing or policy-making: often Government representatives speak as if they were in opposition to any given policy situation or outcome for which they have formal responsibility. Therefore, it is no surprise that the State, in recent years, “*effectively passed responsibility for policy making in the financial sector to the banks and the big business lobbies.*” This analysis has profound implications. There has been developed in Ireland “*a political world which has ceded much of its control to other organisations and groups, and which has become autonomous and self-contained, rarely connecting in any meaningful sense to a life outside itself. Politics in these circumstances becomes an end in itself, and becomes a contest that is played for its own benefit and that of its players. It is not something that requires engagement with or mobilisation of the citizenry at large - that happens at a much more personalistic and local level by the parish pump – and hence it encourages passivity*”.¹⁵ In other words, politics is not something whose success or failure is measured in terms of policy performance or output. We have a polity which, in the late Peter Mair’s words, is “*demobilised as well as demoralized*”. We have had ‘pork-barrel politics’ and ‘showtime’ election campaigns.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to prepare a new Constitution for Ireland. This need is evident because of the ambiguity about the nature of State in relation to civic republicanism and because of the radical changes which have taken place in Irish society over the last century. We need a **Constitution for a Civic Republic** which will be short and provide the underpinning for the norms, values and public institutions of a twenty-first century republic. A Constitutional Convention will be necessary to prepare for the new Constitution and it ought to be composed of legal, political and civil society representatives and obtain advice from the most effective republican and constitutional expertise in the world. It ought to be convened under an *international chair (we do need external facilitation such as Senator George Mitchell provided in Northern Ireland)*. It should be requested to furnish a draft new Constitution over a period of two years. The first year should involve a **major public deliberative process** throughout Ireland building perhaps upon the consultative methodology of the Forum on Europe. This will provide an important element in the process of re-engaging the Irish people in a renewal of politics. Some of the key areas the Constitutional Convention will have to examine include:

- Oireachtas Reform – Dail and Seanad: composition and role of Government and restoration of Parliament’s ability to hold the Executive to account and to undertake effective enquiries
- The European Union and the Irish State
- The role of political parties
- The ‘common good’ versus the role of private property
- The Courts and judiciary
- Local Government and local taxation: the chronic centralisation of the Irish State must be changed to ensure devolution of power to local government
- Public Service – constitutional basis for independence from politics and to protect values
- The new relationship with Northern Ireland and North/South co-operation and convergence upon agreed areas

Economic Policy

*The development of a sustainable new economic model requires a radical approach based upon the concept of ‘res publica’: the task of the State ought to be to organise economic, social and cultural activities so that all our citizens have opportunities to contribute to developing ‘the flourishing society’ – the concept of ‘unemployment’, as such, must become redundant. There are always constructive roles for every citizen to be fulfilled in our society and it is a failure of both imagination and organisation that imposes ‘unemployment’ on hundreds of thousands of our citizens. In the challenge of creating a more equal society, seeking to ensure more equal incomes is as important as seeking to have effective redistribution of income and wealth through taxation policies. It has to be recognised that building a new and viable economy from the present very difficult situation will be the task of a generation or more. It is important, however, to begin this historic task upon the right principles and not upon false hopes of ‘restoration’ or ‘recovery’ of the failed neo-liberal model. We must seek to learn from the work of notable world economists, such as Joseph Stiglitz, who are seeking to restore the civic humanist and moral basis to the analyses and practice of the discipline of *political economy* in the wake of the discipline of economics largely being captive to a failed ideology of unfettered and unrestrained market forces since the 1970s.*

The new economic model will need to be built upon a tax-driven fiscal consolidation strategy, combined with an effective strategy of public investment so that over the next decade Ireland achieves more balanced budgets. The strategy must be built upon fairness in burden-sharing with those with the most resources bearing the biggest share of the adjustment. It will need to identify the ‘pillars of growth’ for the new civic economy in such areas as indigenous resources such as new tourism products, new green food products, services and new technology, and new commercial opportunities in domains like education, and health and well-being. The new model for the Irish economy of the future will need to be much more diversified than the failed models in the past. In many of these areas Ireland has competitive advantages but they are very underdeveloped at present. Ireland faces the challenge of how to create sustainable competitive advantage to ensure success in the future and we must realise the potential of resources that are truly unique to Ireland. One stimulating analysis points to our social and cultural capital: our sense of place and identity, combined with science and research as key resources.¹⁶ It is the creative capacities of Irish citizens in a learning society that will be fundamental to the new economic paradigm:

“A society is more than an economy. The contemporary obsession with achieving maximum GNP growth as the overriding policy target is likely to be counterproductive. A learning society is one where shared meaning, a sustainable culture, a common sense of purpose, a service ethic and social relationships intertwine. The health of a society depends on how (or if) people feel about each other, care about the world and believe in some kind of common purpose. Real progress can only come from shared prosperity, so large disparities in income or perceived inequalities in opportunity for advancement do not foster an innovative culture.....In reality, a complex relationship exists between national well-being, a successful society, research, innovation, productivity and competitiveness. The ‘qualities’ of the country, exemplified in its unique cultural, social and natural environments, constitute the crucial elements in Ireland’s economic base, innovation strategy and international competitiveness.”¹⁷

There is an imperative to develop our environment in accordance with the highest standards of planning and protection. Our environment underpins an innovative strategy to build economic success upon a ‘green’ and sustainable basis. It is the basis for energy policy for the future and for sustainable tourism.

Social Policy

In a civic republic the principles of solidarity, equity and universal provision must underpin social policies. Here, particularly the civic republican value of solidarity is vital: solidarity is about recognising the bonds of interdependence between human beings. When practised it is a key moral and civic virtue, but it is developed from a recognition of the social reality that human beings are mutually dependent on each other for their well-being and care. There is an intimate connection between solidarity and the common good, solidarity and the fair distribution of resources and between solidarity and equality between citizens. As a civic virtue it is expressed as a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. In the key domains of life solidarity will be the essential hall-mark of a civic republic. Therefore, for example, in education and healthcare universal access based upon ability to benefit or need ought to be provided throughout life without means testing their availability. Social protection and welfare policies ought to have social solidarity as the central concern. This civic republican approach is seen as essential to living the ‘flourishing life’ and as the basis for facilitating each citizen’s participation, upon equal terms in the social and political life of the nation. The rights of minorities, such as ethnic minorities, must be guaranteed on an equal basis with other citizens. An absolute commitment to gender equality in every sphere of life must be a distinctive mark of a civic republic.

Conclusion

We face a major ideological struggle to engage the Irish people and to enable citizens to embrace a new public philosophy. The barriers include the predominance of a now discredited neo-liberal discourse in the mindsets of those who shape public policies and the weaknesses so apparent in our State institutions. **We must combat this discourse by thinking differently.** There is a marked anti-intellectualism in our political culture and an absence of discussion and understanding of political ideas amongst the general public: often, indeed, the rule of fear and dependency eliminates any possibility of contestation or dissent. This facilitates those with a vested interest in the status quo to impose upon and to dominate the majority of the people. We need to name the sicknesses at the heart of our polity. We need the moral courage ‘to call people out’ in respect of their ideological stances which are often cleverly concealed with populist or ready mantras such ‘there is no alternative’. Freedom to say what we think is not sufficient in the present circumstances: we need to use that freedom to think through for ourselves what is now being said by defenders of the failed status quo on our behalf. We must ensure that we have the words to name our world critically and to articulate new aspirations. People need public deliberative forums for this to develop, and civil society organisations are vital in empowering citizens in this

regard. Many people, given inspirational leadership, will share the civic republican vision and we must have the moral courage to give such leadership.

The new Civic Republic of Ireland will, I believe, stand for a great and generous experiment in human well-being and happiness. It will be founded upon an educated and intellectually vibrant citizenry imbued with civic virtues and dedicated to the common good. It will develop a society where every person will be enabled to exercise the whole range of their human capacities and live rewarding and fulfilling lives as part of an energetic and humane political community.

Notes

¹ There are a number of publications, official and unofficial, analysing the crises in Ireland in the last number of years; however more credence might be given to those which analysed the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom before the economic crash after 2007 for example Peadar Kirby’s The Celtic Tiger in Distress in 2002 and rewritten and published as Celtic Tiger in Collapse Explaining the Weakness of the Irish Model (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

² See the important contributions by Niamh Hardiman ‘The Impact of the Crisis on the Irish Political System’ at the Symposium on Resolving Ireland’s Fiscal Crisis held by the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, 29 November 2009 and Kathleen Lynch ‘From a Neo-Liberal to an Egalitarian State: Imagining a Different Future’ TASC 2010 Annual Lecture , 17 June 2010.

³ On civic republicanism as a political philosophy and some Irish commentary on Irish Republic and republicanism see the following key works:

Philip Pettit Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government (Oxford, 1997); Iseult Honahan Civic Republicanism (London, 2002); Republicanism in Ireland Confronting Theories and Traditions ed. Iseult Honahan (Manchester, 2008); The Republic ed. Mary Jones (Thomas Davis Lecture Series, RTE/Mercier Press, 2005); The Republican Ideal ed. with introduction by Norman Porter (Belfast, 1998); Republicanism in Modern Ireland ed. Fearghal McGarry (UCD Press, 2003); Republicanism in Theory and Practice eds. I. Honahan and J.Jennings (London, 2006); see also Ivana Bacik ‘Is Ireland really a Republic?’ Philip Monaghan Lecture, UCC, 19 November, 2009.

⁴ See in particular in respect of the core civic republican concept of equality and the empirical evidence as to why more equal societies have better social outcomes R. Wilkinson & K. Pickett The Spirit Level Why Equality is Better for Everyone (Penguin Books, London 2010; first published Allen Lane, London 2009; M. Marmot The Status Syndrome: How Social Standing Affects Our Health and Longevity (New York,2004) and R. Wilkinson The Impact of Inequality: How to Make Sick Societies Healthier (New York, 2005).

⁵ See A. Sen Development as Freedom (Oxford, 1999); see also F. O’Ferrall ‘Civic Republican Citizenship and Voluntary Action’ The Republic A Journal of Contemporary and Historical Debate No. 2, Spring/Summer 2001,pp.126-137 for a brief treatment of the place of voluntary action in civic republican theory from Aristotle to Arendt.

⁶ I have attempted to analyse the effects of ‘capability deprivation’ in respect of healthcare in F.O’Ferrall, ‘The Erosion of Citizenship in the Irish Republic: The Case of Healthcare Reform’ The Irish Review No.40-41, Winter 2009 pp 155-170.

⁷ Well-Being Matters A Social Report for Ireland 2 Volumes (NESC, Dublin, 2009)

⁸ See Kathleen Lynch TASC 2010 Annual Lecture op. cit.

⁹ See John Baker, Kathleen Lynch, Sara Cantillon, and Judy Walsh, **Equality: From Theory To Action**, Second Edition (Palgrave Macmillan,Basingstoke,2009) and Kathleen Lynch, John Baker and Maureen Lyons, **Affective Equality Love Care and Injustice** (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009).

¹⁰ See Diarmaid Ferriter ‘The Stupid Propaganda of the Calamity Mongers’? The Middle Class and Irish Politics, 1945-97’ in Politics, Society and The Middle Class in Modern Ireland ed. Fintan Lane (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010) pp.271-288; the recent RTE Series ‘The Limits of Liberty’ exposed how those with power in independent Ireland governed bereft of any civic republican imperatives; see also Mark Mc Nally ‘Sean O’Faolain’s Discourse of ‘the betrayal of the Republic’ in mid-twentieth century Ireland’ in Republicanism in Theory and Practice op. cit. pp79-93.

¹¹ See Philip Pettit’s important essay ‘The Tree of Liberty Republicanism American, French and Irish’ in Field Day Review 1 , 2005, pp 29-41; and Fergus O’Ferrall ‘A Prophet of a Coming Time’ : Daniel O’Connell, Civic Republicanism and twenty-first century Ireland’ in An Dragún Dian Dónall Ó Conaill Eigse na Brídeoige 2005 ed. S. Mac an tSíthigh (Baile Átha Cliath, 2005) pp 43-62 and David Dwan The Great Community Culture and Nationalism in Ireland (Field Day, Dublin, 2008) for civic republican aspects of Young Ireland movement.

¹² See the important Final Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland , Making Good Society published by the CarnegieUK Trust March 2010; www.futuresforcivilsociety.org.

¹³ See John Baker, Kathleen Lynch, Sara Cantillon, and Judy Walsh Equality: From Theory to Action Second Edition (Palgrave Macmillan,Basingstoke,2009) and Kathleen Lynch TASC 2010 Annual Lecture op. cit; see

also Kathleen Lynch, John Baker and Maureen Lyons Affective Equality Love, Care and Injustice. (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2009).

¹⁴ See Peter Mair ‘Paradoxes and problems of modern Irish politics’ Paper at 2010 MacGill Summer School on Reforming The Republic, 20th July 2010; the late Peter Mair developed his critique in his last paper to the 2011 MacGill Summer School shortly before his death on 15 August, 2011 see Peter Mair, ‘We must move from regarding State as enemy and oppressor’, **The Irish Times**, 20 August, 2011.

¹⁵ Ibid for quotations

¹⁶ See Finbarr Bradley and James J. Kennelly **Capitalising on Culture Competing on Difference Innovation, Learning and Sense of Place in a Globalising Ireland** (Blackhall Publishing, Dublin , 2008)

¹⁷ Ibid, pp 302 - 303