

Ireland and the Privatization of Water: Anti-Water Charge Campaigners' Victory

By [Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin](#)

Global Research, August 05, 2015

Region: [Europe](#)

Anti-water charge campaigners had a major moral victory over government plans to make the people pay for the financial crisis when Eurostat determined that Irish Water had failed the Market Corporation Test. [1] One reason given was that "sales must cover at least 50pc of production costs. "This is further amplified by the high number of households not paying their bills," Eurostat said." [2] It is estimated that "57 percent of the people are refusing to pay the water charges" and that of the 43 percent who did pay, many were intimidated by landlords or solicitors collecting for the state on the sale of a house. [3] The main irony of this tax is that it was not imposed by the EU:

In 2000, after 10 years of negotiations, the Water Framework Directive was finally agreed by EU member states. It was reported at the time that: "A compromise package on the legislation was agreed giving Ireland a derogation from a requirement to meter water. The directive allows member states to opt out of this obligation if it conflicts with national practice." [4]

Irish politicians chose to impose this tax and they are not giving up yet. Michael Noonan, Minister of Finance, has already stated that he is going ahead with Government budget plans despite the Eurostat decision. [5] Irish Water's constant changing of the charges in the face of determined opposition "diminished the prospect of the company being self-sufficient and this is likely to have been a key factor in the Eurostat ruling. [6] According to The Irish Times:

Asked why people should continue to pay for a utility which was financed through central funds, Mr Varadkar [Minister for Health] said it was "incumbent on Government ministers and Irish Water themselves to continue to make the case as to why this is actually a good idea". [7]

However, now protest itself is to be limited with the passing of the Civil Debt Bill which allows "unpaid water bills to be deducted from wages and welfare payments." [8] Therefore, there will not be any embarrassing imprisonings in the months before the next election due early next year. Especially as next year, 2016, is the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising, the precursor to the Ireland's War of Independence and limited freedom from colonialism.

All this government pressure to extract more income from an increasingly unwilling populace is coming at a time when exports reached their highest level in the history of the state. The CSO [Central Statistics Office] showed that in April Ireland exported €9.4 billion worth of goods internationally. [9] The low rate of corporation tax is makes Ireland a popular

place for multinationals. The state broadcaster, RTE, has declared that “Ireland will be the fastest growing economy in the European Union this year, according to the European Commission’s autumn economic forecast. The Irish growth rate is expected to be 4.6%, compared to an EU average of 1.3% and a euro zone average of 0.8%.” [10] According to one website:

Exports remain the primary engine for Ireland’s growth. The country is one of the biggest exporters of pharmaceuticals in the world (28 percent of total exports). Others include: organic chemicals (21 percent), data processing equipment and software (12 percent) and food (8 percent). The European Union accounts for 60 percent of total exports. Main export partners are: United States (23 percent), United Kingdom (16 percent), Belgium (14 percent), Germany (7 percent), France (5 percent) and Switzerland (4 percent). [11]

Despite all this growth, reports earlier in the year showed that state services are coming under increasing pressure for more funds. A&E overcrowding was at a near-record high and that “January was the worst month for emergency department overcrowding since the Government came to power, and the second-worst month ever, according to an analysis of trolley figures by The Irish Times.” [12]

In late January of this year it was also reported that “a record 382,000 people are waiting for a hospital outpatient appointment, according to the latest figures from the Health Service Executive.” [13] There has been a huge increase in homelessness with “some 1,122 children and 2,185 people over the age of 18 were living in emergency accommodation in week up to the end of June 28th.” [14] A recent report shows pressure on rent supplement rates too:

Rents in Dublin have been climbing fast. In the 12 months to March, rents increased by 9 per cent for houses and by 11 per cent for apartments. Renting a house in Dublin now costs, on average, €1,325 a month and an apartment €1,205. As rents have soared, rent supplement rates have remained unchanged. [15]

The water charges boycott harks back to the Irish invention of the boycott in 1880 when tenants refused to cooperate with Captain Charles Boycott after he obtained eviction notices against eleven tenants for failure to pay their rent. According to History Ireland:

Boycott now found himself in a very difficult situation, as he had horses, cattle, sheep and poultry to look after and crops to get in with very few helpers. Three of his staff refused to leave—Johnny Meany, a groom and former jockey, Judy, the cook, and Harriet, a parlour maid—and he had four guests staying at the time, a teenage niece, two teenage nephews and his niece’s fiancé. They carried on as best they could, rising at 4am, with the men being escorted everywhere by armed police, but by night fences and gates were broken, trees and hedges felled and crops stolen or ruined. [16]

Maintaining the boycott of water charges is the key strategy of the Anti Austerity Alliance who state: “The boycott is the key weapon we have now. If the level of the boycott for the second bill increases it will be the final nail in the coffin of the Irish Water and the Fine Gael/Labour government.” [17]

Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin is an 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/>.

Notes

- [1] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/eurostat-irish-water-ruling-a-minor-setback--says-varadkar-1.2303275>
- [2] <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/five-reasons-why-irish-water-failed-a-crucial--eu-test-31410448.html>
- [3] <http://www.peoplebeforeprofit.ie/node/1313>
- [4] <http://www.independent.ie/opinion/columnists/colette-browne/eu-rules-did-not--compel-ireland-to-bring-in-water-charges-our-politicians-chose-to-do-it-31425023.html>
- [5] <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/five-reasons-why-irish-water-failed-a-crucial--eu-test-31410448.html>
- [6] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/irish-water-must-stay-on-state-balance--sheet-eu-says-1.2299128>
- [7] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/eurostat-irish-water-ruling-a-minor-setback--says-varadkar-1.2303275>
- [8] <http://www.newstalk.com/Laws-allowing-unpaid-water-bills-to-be-taken-from-wages-and--welfare-payments-passed-by-Seanad>
- [9] http://www.the42.ie/ireland-exports-stuff-items-goods-value-money-2162809-Jun2015/?r_dir_d=1
- [10] <http://www.rte.ie/news/business/2014/1104/656805-eu-growth-forecasts/>
- [11] <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/ireland/exports>
- [12] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/a-e-overcrowding-at-near-record-high-data--shows-1.2091199>
- [13] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/hse-figures-show-lengthening-hospital-waiting--lists-1.2083227>
- [14] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/dublin-homeless-services-left-18-5--million-short-1.2275569>
- [15] <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/why-are-there-more-than-1-000--homeless-children-in-dublin-1.2273119>
- [16] <http://www.historyireland.com/18th-19th-century-history/captain-boycott-man-and-myth/>
- [17] <http://antiausterityalliance.ie/2015/07/eurostat-test-a-victory-for-anti-water-charge--campaigners-government-now-in-crisis/>

[**Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page**](#)

[**Become a Member of Global Research**](#)

Articles by: [Caoimhghin Ó
Croidheáin](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.
For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca