

Armed police used in illegal evictions in Dublin, Ireland

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Gerard Doyle is a homeless father of two, living with his partner in emergency accommodation in Dublin for nine months. His Facebook video posts while fending off an illegal eviction attempt by armed gardai (police) called by the landlord of his homeless hostel have been viewed thousands of times.

The first video clip records Doyle and his partner trying to calm down gardai and prevent the armed unit from breaking down the door of his flat. The second clip shows Doyle explaining the bullying tactics of his landlord and Dublin City Council.

Ten years after the collapse of Lehman Brothers and an Irish-based property bubble triggered the greatest financial crisis in Irish history, housing conditions are becoming desperate for large numbers of workers and young people.

Demonstrations have taken place in Dublin and towns and cities across Ireland against unaffordable housing. Thousands of mostly young protesters blocked O'Connell Bridge in Dublin for over an hour on September 22 in one of several demonstrations that began in a number of locations and converged on the city centre.

Demonstrators carried placards with slogans such as "Student homes, not student loans," "Less cardboard, more homes" and "Public housing, not landlord state." Smaller protests also took place around the country.

Over the summer, other groups, such as the Dublin Central Housing Action group and Take Back the City, have occupied properties to highlight the grotesque levels of empty properties scattered around the country amid a deepening housing emergency.

In the week before the Dublin protest, vanloads of gardai from the Public Order Unit broke into a property in North Frederick Street, Dublin. Six people from the Take Back the City group were removed and arrested.

A squad of gardai wearing balaclavas boarded up the building. When approached by the *Irish Times*, they refused to give their names.

According to figures published by the *daft.ie* property website, the median deposit for first-time buyers in Dublin has reached €54,389, while average monthly rents are an astronomical €1,936. Average salaries in Dublin are €36,919, or €3,076 per month, meaning that nearly two thirds of an average salary would be required to rent an average dwelling and anyone below this salary figure has little or no chance of doing so.

While a software engineer might expect to earn €43,011, the living wage is a minimal €11.90 per hour. Someone earning this wage would need to work 162 hours monthly, or 37.5 hours weekly, just to pay an average rent. They would have nothing at all left over. Someone on the minimum wage of €9.55 an hour would have to work 46.7 hours and spend 100 percent of their wages on rent to keep a roof over their head.

Across the Republic of Ireland, average rents are at an all-time high of €1,304. The price of new rental contracts rose 12.4 percent last year and are now 27 percent above the peak of the pre-crash Celtic Tiger boom.

The consequences, as well as brutally squeezed living standards, have included an inevitable rise in homelessness, evictions, mortgage and rent arrears along with all the associated stresses.

In August, mother of six Margaret Cash, from Tallaght, Dublin, was forced to sleep in a Garda station because she had been unable to retain the emergency accommodation she had been forced into only days previously. The landlord of her emergency flat forced her out to make way for students. She had moved into emergency accommodation last September when the private house she had been renting was repossessed.

This month, Dublin City Council sought to remove Claire Elliot and her three children from a vacant house they had been occupying for a fortnight. Elliot had been on the waiting list for social housing since 2008. She was evicted from her private rented flat because the landlord was selling the property and she was forced into hotels and B&Bs, miles away from her children's schools. The city council told the High Court that they expect her to live in an emergency hub for three years. She described the hubs to the *Irish Times*: "You're in a room with bunk beds, barely any room for a cot. People are arguing, taking each other's food--arguing over the washing machines, arguing over the kids. They're stressful places."

In all, 700 families became homeless in Dublin alone in the first seven months of 2018; and in total, 9,891 people were in emergency accommodation, including 3,867 children. These figures represent a 21 percent increase in one year for adults and a 30 percent increase for children.

Regional figures show the same pattern. In Limerick, the number of homeless children increased 120 percent in a year, from 80 to 176. In counties Kildare, Meath and Wicklow the figure increased 98 percent. In Galway, Mayo and Roscommon child homelessness rose 77 percent. In Cork, some 1,400 people used Cork Simon's homelessness service, an increase of 18 percent to 2017, while the numbers of long term homeless grew by 10 percent.

While living conditions for workers are becoming impossible, the Irish bourgeoisie is desperately trying to maintain the most permissive and friendly environment for some of the world's largest corporations. Just over a week before the housing protests, the Irish Department of Finance announced the US tech giant Apple, the world's largest company by market capitalisation and one of two worth over \$1 trillion, had completed the transfer of €14.3 billion into an escrow account run by the Irish government.

The transfer arose out of a 2016 European Commission (EC) ruling, following a three-year investigation, which found that Apple had effectively paid just 1 percent tax on its European profits in 2003. Even this low figure had diminished to the vanishingly low 0.005 percent by 2014, through use of a variant of the "Double Irish" tax dodge employed by many US-based finance and tech outfits. Tax swindling on a

massive scale remains the basis for much of the Irish economy.

The EC ruling expressed rapidly deepening transatlantic inter-imperialist tensions, which imperil the entire business model of the Irish economy. The EC demanded that Ireland collect the money, deemed state aid, from Apple. But the Irish government has no intention of touching the money. To maintain the country as a low-tax platform in the eurozone and the EU, the government transferred the money into a secure account and came into conflict with the EC over delays in collecting the sum. Legal action in the European courts is expected to continue for years.

For comparison, the Irish Exchequer has collected €32.4 billion in 2018 to date. Of this, income tax, largely from workers, amounted to €13 billion while VAT on retail sales, also mostly from the working class, accrued €9.4 billion. Corporation tax from companies that include Apple, Microsoft, Dell, Google and Oracle generated a mere €4.4 billion. The money the government refuses to collect from Apple is more than the country's entire annual income tax take and almost as much as the entire 2017 health budget, €14.6 billion, for a nation of 4.7 million people.



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