Pride and Prejudice; a post modern Irish Dichotomy

Myths have been established throughout the ages to justify privilege and power.

Plato believed myths were necessary to preserve social order. In ‘The Republic’ he professed that every man was born with a certain type of metal mixed in with his soul. Gold, he inferred, was mixed with souls of natural leaders, silver with the souls of their soldiers and assistants, and bronze or iron in the souls of natural workers and according to the divine oracle, the city would be in ruin if ruled by one who did not possess gold in his soul (Martinez 2015).

In the midst of a global economic and info-technological revolution not witnessed in human history such myths permeate society with as much vigour as at any other time. This study will explore the the dominant neoliberal ideologies prevalent in Irish society, the imposition of austerity, financialised capitalism, attitudes to work and unemployment, and consider attitudes regarding the feasibility of a universal basic income and a shorter working week.

Literature Review

Gynnd experiment first

A much discussed study conducted by

Jobseekers with third level qualifications were 6 to 10 times more likely to source employment than those with Junior Certificate level of education in 2006 but by 2011 this disparity rose to 40 times for those with third-level certificates or diplomas and to 126 for those possessing a degree. This suggests an exceptional bias towards graduates post-recession (Bergin, Kelly et al, 2015). By 2011, long term unemployment had no discernible influence on gaining employment, which suggests that the import and indiscriminate occurence of LTU during this period removed the term of unemployment as a comprehensive indicator of quality to employers. Also noted was that by 2011 PLC qualifications provided no advantage over those who had attained Junior Certificate or lower levels of education (ibid).

“Intellectual and political debate on the distribution of wealth has long been based on an abundance of prejudice and a paucity of fact (Piketty 2013, p.2)”.

PIIGS was originally an acronym for Portugal, Iceland, Ireland , Greece and Spain, but for the purposes of this research we will discuss just those in the Eurozone. Iceland shall not be discussed.

Yanis Varoufakis (2016), who resigned as Greek minister for finance after

refusing to accept the Eurozone’s terms of loan agreement, describes the emergence of the Eurozone not as a mechanism to bring a shared prosperity but as a ‘pyramid scheme of debt’ with Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain at the bottom, noting the resurgence of racial extremism as an acerbic by-product of the imposition of austerity and debt over reform.

Through the framing of austerity as a sober, un-idealistic necessity to deal with government debt (Farnsworth, Irving, 2018), neo-austerity was packaged as the only possible path for Irish economic recovery.

The fiscal consolidation which ensued followed the course of least resistance, as Mercille (2014) states such programs usually do. The mechanism of choice is to create flexibility in the workforce by reducing wages and labour protections, and by privatising state assets. Increasing taxes is less favourable than cutting public spending. If taxes are increased, consumption taxes such as VAT are favoured over raising corporate taxes.

In situations where currency devaluation is not feasible, such as is Ireland's position due to membership of the eurozone, 'internal devaluation' has become the strategy of choice. This equates to high levels of unemployment which in turn lowerers wages (ibid).

By successfully employing strategies targeting the conditions of the majority of the population- particularly the most vulnerable- public opinion post crisis validated neoliberal warnings that welfare state expansion would end in disaster, based on the 'proof' of government deficits (Farnsworth., Irving. 2018).

The politically mediated relationship between labour and capital which labour fought for is eroding. Globalisation, deregulation, and financialisation have shifted an already precarious balance of power between labour and capital. In most OECD countries the wage share of GDP has declined through the detachment of wage gains from increased productivity (Fudge, 2017).