

Evening Echo

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Twenty-three households at Leaside apartments given notice to quit

The plight of 23 households at the Leaside apartment complex in Cork city who have been served with notices to quit was raised in the Dáil by Cork Solidarity Deputy Mick Barry.

He said the new owner, Lugas Capital, does not attempt to hide its support for “social cleansing”. Its website boasted: "On acquiring buildings, we completely refurbish them to a high standard, before re-letting with a focus on attracting young professional tenants."

“Sherry FitzGerald reckons this approach could increase rental income at Leaside apartments by €300,000 a year,” he said. “Lugas Capital is the Irish manager for the Larea Fa Fund Li DAC which is ultimately owned by Bain Capital. Bain Capital, founded by former US Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney, mentioned more than once in the Paradise Papers, is one of the largest vulture funds on the planet.”

Deputy Barry said residents who live in this apartment complex include many young families with kids going to local schools. “One of them has received a notice to quit for 20 December,” he said. “Another has received a notice to quit for 30 December. One of them had a notice to quit sellotaped to their front door. Threshold reports that up and down the country profiteering landlords are using substantial refurbishment as the excuse to get rid of tenants, hike rents and get new tenants in.”

He asked Taoiseach Leo Varadkar if he would ensure his Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government does not just address this loophole, but closes it in such a way that the residents of Leaside apartments and others like them are fully protected.

In response, the Taoiseach said the Minister has committed to changing or clarifying the rules around substantial refurbishment so they are not abused by landlords and they do not misuse this as a mechanism to evict people after carrying out minor refurbishments and increasing rents. “The Minister intends, if not this week then next week, to clarify exactly what substantial refurbishment means,” he said.

“With landlords in general, it is particularly cruel to seek to give somebody a notice to quit or an eviction notice in the run-up to Christmas,” he said. “I absolutely condemn that. At the very least, if the apartment block genuinely needs refurbishment, I am sure it could be left until the new year and the people living there could be given adequate and reasonable time to find new homes.”

Parts of Cork City without mobile phone coverage

A number of areas in Cork City including Maryborough Hill, Douglas and an area west of Carrigrohane have little or no mobile coverage, Cork East Labour Deputy Seán Sherlock told the Dáil.

Speaking during Question Time, he said he wished to draw the attention of the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment that in large swathes of the country, people cannot get mobile telephone coverage. “I want to speak for those people,” he said. “I have specific questions about the work of the mobile phone task force. Will the Minister outline when the task force met? How many officials in the Departments are working on the task force? When can people who do not have coverage expect to have coverage? What are the timelines? When can we expect delivery of a 100% rate of penetration for 3G coverage in the country.”

In reply, Minister Denis Naughten said in July 2016, he established a task force to identify immediate solutions to broadband and mobile telephone coverage deficits and to investigate how better services could be provided to consumers prior to the full build and roll-out of the network planned under the national broadband plan State intervention phase.

“The task force worked with key stakeholders to produce the December 2016 report which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the deficits,” he said. “The report is available on my Department’s website.”

Part of the problem has been the phenomenal increase in mobile data, he said. “That is why we released the 3.6 GHz band spectrum. It provides an 86% increase in capacity throughout the mobile telephone networks. This allows for more data to be carried and improves the quality of mobile data and mobile telephone coverage as well.”

McGrath introduces legislation to block banks’ power of veto

New legislation to remove the veto power from the banks when it comes to mortgage arrears cases involving the family home and to empower an independent office to make the final decision was introduced in the Dáil by Fianna Fáil’s Finance Spokesman Michael McGrath.

In 2012, he said when the original personal insolvency legislation was passed, this was touted as a game-changer for personal insolvency in Ireland. “Where the family home was involved, an independent Personal Insolvency Practitioner, PIP, would propose a personal insolvency arrangement, PIA, and this, in theory, would offer the best prospect of protecting the family home,” he said.

At the time he said Fianna Fáil pointed to a fundamental flaw in the legislation. By offering the lender an effective veto over any proposed solution, the legislation clearly placed the power in the hands of the lender. “The bank veto, along with the banks’ unwillingness to co-operate fully, ensured this new system was going to be long and cumbersome, and this has proven to be the case,” he said. “Some 40% of all applications for a PIA have either been vetoed or the protective order has expired. Recently, the head of the Insolvency Service of Ireland, ISI, informed the Justice Committee that many lenders are not fully co-operating with this process.”

In September of this year Deputy McGrath said the Dublin Circuit Court made a crucial decision that has thrown the entire personal insolvency system into further turmoil, he said.

Under section 115A of the 2015 Act, it was decided that the debtor had no legal authority to appeal a bank veto in the courts and that appeals had to be taken in the name of the PIP.

Once again, as has been the case with this Government from day one, the balance of power has been shifted even further towards the lender.

Government committed to the plight of the undocumented Irish

The Government remains committed to achieving relief for the undocumented and to facilitating greater pathways for legal migration to the United States, the minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney told the Dáil. Ireland's diplomatic representatives in the US are availing of all opportunities to raise the immigration issue in their contacts with the US authorities, he said, including the prospects for immigration reform and the situation of the undocumented, as is the Government's special envoy to Congress on the undocumented, Deputy John Deasy.

“We do not, however, underestimate the size of the challenge,” he said. “This policy area has been a deeply divisive issue within the US political system for decades with pronounced disagreement, even within the same political parties, on the best way to deal with an issue which directly affects over 11 million people. The Government has consistently engaged with both parties in a bipartisan way to address our longstanding concerns and this continues to be our approach.”