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## **Bessborough – The horrors of church rule exposed.**

***Margaret O'Regan writes about one of the many "Mother and baby homes"***

Between 1922 and 1998, the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary ran Bessborough as a Mother and Baby Home in Cork.

The Report of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation has shown that 923 children in the so called "care" of those who ran Bessborough died. This Commission confirmed the burial place of just 64 of these children.

The Cork Survivors and Supporters Alliance (CSSA) have requested, on numerous occasions, that a thorough examination of the site be conducted – these sites should be treated like a crime scene and investigated as such.

Cork County Council recently rejected a planning application for the site. MWB Two Ltd, a property developer, had applied to build 258 residential units and a creche over the site. The crimes of the present – housing policies that favour landlords, developers and vultures – covering over the crimes of the past.

An oral hearing is now being conducted by An Bord Pleanála on the application by the same developer, under the fast-track strategic housing development (SHD) process. This time for 179 of these units in 3 building blocks, with heights ranging from 5 to 7 storeys.

MWB Two Ltd has argued that it is "highly unlikely" that the land in question contains a burial ground, though it does not rule it out. It is not for them to declare an investigation is unwarranted – they only care about profit, not justice for victims and survivors of Church abuse.

The developer claimed that the children were buried in an adjoining graveyard for nuns. However, John Clarkin, a mapping expert with Ordnance Survey Ireland gave evidence at the hearing. He confirmed the OS trace map from 1949/50 as accurate – where a separate children's burial ground is indicated.

He said "It's more than a burial ground, it's a children's burial ground."

The usual practice would be to have an "angels' plot" – unconsecrated ground - where these children would be buried. These children were viewed by the religious orders as being worthless (except for those sold and trafficked abroad) simply because they were born to unmarried mothers.

While the CSSA is not opposed to a development in Bessborough, they have referred to the present plan as

“an abhorrent act of desecration”. They are seeking the maintenance, preservation and memorialisation of the children's burial ground on the site.

The selling off of the land itself is controversial. The sale price for the sale of the 3.7 acres concerned in this development to MWB Two Ltd remains unknown. We can get an idea of the value as in June 2020, one of the properties in Bessborough was sold for €6.85 million.

Religious orders are hoarding land banks, making a fortune from property deals. The vile Woods deal saw these orders get away without paying compensation. Combined with the legacy of orders owning our schools and hospitals means that the taxpayer is often footing the bill with the criminal religious orders contributing nothing.

Most of these Mother and Baby Homes were built through local monetary contributions from residents in each area. They were then used to incarcerate and abuse mothers and babies, the scars of which remain to this day. To then profit from all this is hardly in keeping with the “charitable” nature of what the nuns and church purportedly stand for is it?

The carpenter’s son who threw the bankers out of the temple is a story long forgotten by the religious orders in Ireland. A mass grave in Donnybrook Dublin was only found because the Sisters Of Charity had gambled on the stock market, lost and then put the land up for sale.

The institutions of the Irish State are a product of the hijacking of the revolutionary movement during the Irish War of Independence by conservative upper-class men. They exiled women from public spaces and ignored women’s contribution to society. Equally if the voices groups like CSSA are side-lined in favour of business interests, we will be repeating history.

In the past, the government has passed legislation overnight before. The Goodman Act was passed by Charles Haughey during a Summer to save the beef baron and they moved quickly to bail out bankers. Legislation needs to be enacted to take all the properties of these institutions, who were involved in mother and baby homes and orphanages, into public ownership without compensation.

But that means tearing up the Constitution of DeValera and McQuaid. It’s up to us, the people, to write a new Socialist one. We will have our say.

**The RED Network (incorporating Rebel Telly) are a network of radical socialists within the political party People Before Profit, a 32-county people power movement on the island of Ireland.**

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