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**Recent behaviour by DCC CEO Owen Keegan shows lack of democracy**  
*Madeleine Johansson writes:*

The Chief Executive of Dublin City Council Owen Keegan has been heavily criticised recently because of a letter he sent to UCD Student's Union. In the letter he suggested that the student's union should provide student accommodation themselves if they are unhappy with the lack of, and sky-high prices of, student accommodation. Many people were outraged by the disgraceful tone of the letter and there was a protest outside Dublin City Council.

Owen Keegan comes from a privileged background and has spent most of his life working as a public sector bureaucrat. He is currently on a salary of over €175,000 per year and is responsible for most decisions made in Dublin City Council - from housing provision to planning. When he was Chief Executive of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council he oversaw the privatisation of bin services, the first in the country to do so.

The lack of democracy in our local authorities is shocking. Most decisions that impact local communities are made by the unelected officials headed up by the Chief Executive, not the locally and democratically elected county councillors.

The powers held by elected councillors have been gradually eroded over recent years.

In the councils there are what is known as "executive functions" i.e. decisions made by the management, and "reserved functions" i.e. decisions made by the local elected councillors.

The list of reserved functions has been constantly diminished to primarily include the passing of Annual Budgets, the election of the Mayor, planning decisions on council owned lands (Part 8) and the sell-off of land owned by the council (Section 183). Earlier this year the Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and Green government attempted to remove the Section 183 through their Land Development Agency Bill.

The role of county councillors has also been undermined by the continued privatisation of public services, or the creation of other unaccountable public bodies. Bin collections were privatised in 2011/12, Irish Water was set up in 2013 which removed water services from local authorities, the National Transport Authority oversees transport decisions and An Bord Pleanála now deal with most planning related issues. On top of this social housing provision is more and more moving away from councils to Approved Housing Bodies.

This lack of powers of elected representatives is not something new. We live in a society where most decisions are made by unelected people. This includes public officials and bureaucrats but also the management of big corporations. Decisions made by billionaires in boardrooms have as much impact on people's lives, if not more, than decisions made in local councils or parliaments.

The so called "democracy" in capitalist society is limited to voters going to vote for someone to represent them in the Dail or at county council level for a few years. Politicians can make all sorts of promises and then break them the moment they get elected.

We need a different kind of democracy where elected representatives can be re-called immediately by the people if they break promises. All elected representatives should be paid no more than the average worker's wage. We also need democracy in the private sphere, if ordinary workers made the decisions in the big corporations our society could be radically transformed. That is what we mean by a socialist society. There aren't many historical examples of such a radical change, but it existed in an embryonic form in the early years of Soviet Russia and elements of enhanced democracy can be found in revolutionary movements such as in Iran in 1979 and Chile in 1974.

Decisions about how we run society should be made by the people, not by unelected officials, millionaires and unaccountable politicians. If you agree you should join the Irelands largest Socialist movement – People Before Profit.

**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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