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How do we break the Golden Circle?

James O'Toole writes about left government and what needs to come next.

You know who they are. The entitled elite – billionaires, bankers and bought politicians. All together they make up the ruling class in Ireland – but most people know them as the 'Golden Circle'.

When we talk about neo-liberalism – the running down of public services to justify selling them off to private profiteers – it's the Golden Circle that this neo-liberal strategy serves. It fills their pockets. It's no conspiracy theory to point to the fact that billionaires Larry Goodman and Denis O'Brien made millions from the private hospital Covid deal.

But it's also no conspiracy to point out that this isn't a one off – it's an ongoing and systematic problem. When a scandal breaks people openly call for the head of the individuals involved – and rightly so, who wouldn't like to see a few jailed bankers?

But to overthrow the Golden Circle and end the corruption once and for all we need to go beyond occasional outrage to developing a strategy that will work and will be permanent.

The vast majority of people in working class areas across the country want to see a Sinn Féin led government elected, to challenge the entitled elite and improve life for working class people. Such a government would represent a huge step forward and would rattle the Golden Circle by kicking out their servants in the landlord parties of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

But, the Golden Circle aren't stupid. They won't allow themselves to be taken down so easily and they've had a century of rule to perfect a machine to protect their interests. The billionaires don't have to directly control the Dáil to be the dominant force in Irish society.

The working class Italian socialist Antonio Gramsci explained that the wealthy bosses maintain their power in two ways – firstly they try to manufacture consent. The people who own the companies generally own the media companies. They put out a line that presents no alternative to their rule.

Even the state run media in Ireland is often more conservative when covering strikes or questioning corrupt politicians than the private media is. RTÉ is part of the establishment mechanisms of control. From the compliant media to Church control of schools the ruling class drown society in a flood of their ideas.

But when ideas aren't enough they have a second mechanism of control – force. We're taught that the state is neutral, that it stands above the battle of rich and poor, but the state was built by the wealthy to defend their wealth and power.

When Debenhams workers staged effective pickets to stop scabs from removing stock the Gardaí were there to act as a private security force to defend the company's profit margins. They did the same to the Thomas Cook workers.

They'll say that they are defending the law – but the laws are written by members of the elite and favour the elite. Why is it that 95% of women in Irish prisons are there for petty crimes? We live in a society that imprisons a homeless woman for stealing nappies but allows bankers to walk free. The problem isn't with individual judges – it's too frequent to come down to individuals.

The problem is the nature of the Irish state...

When a Sinn Féin government is elected the rich will turn on them using their media, they will use the courts to declare progressive legislation 'unconstitutional', they will threaten to move millions out of the country and scare the government into submission.

But even before they employ all the weapons at their disposal the Golden Circle have a front line of defence built into the very DNA of how a government functions. When a party is elected to government they present their manifesto to the senior civil servants who then help to translate it into a programme for government.

These top civil servants are drawn from the elite and are fully committed to maintaining the functioning of Irish capitalism – in other words, they will not accept a manifesto that goes beyond the confines of tax haven Ireland and servicing the billionaires and vulture funds. Most parties fall at this first hurdle and draw up a compromised programme for government.

The Golden Circle maintain their power. After a few initial crumbs thrown to keep working people happy the elected government coalesces with the ruling class and is persuaded to act in their interests. Radicals are tamed and become shameful ghosts of their former selves – just look at the career of any Labour Party minister.

The Sinn Féin support base wants real change, but the manifesto produced by the leading circles of the party tries to keep both workers and bosses happy. You have to pick a side. You can't keep both the Golden Circle and the working majority happy.

After 100 years of corruption and abuse by the elite the working class in Ireland need to debate strategies for change that look reality in the eye, that won't be rolled back by the wealthy as soon as we've taken our eyes off the ball.

We want to see a left government because it will upset the establishment and weaken their servants in Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. But to remove the power of the Golden Circle involves recognising exactly where that power lies and setting out to permanently challenge it.

It will take a massive people power rebellion – like the water charges but more sustained and linked to the striking power of organised workers – to remove the Golden Circle. Anything other than the path of rebellion is a dream.

“Long is the way and hard that out of hell leads up to light!”

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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