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## **The Land Development Agency & the privatisation of public land**

*Madeleine Johansson writes about the sell-off of public land and the new NAMA*

The new Land Development Agency has been described by People Before Profit's Richard Boyd Barrett TD as "A trojan horse for the pillaging of the public land bank".

The LDA was originally proposed by Fine Gael's former Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy and set up in 2018. Now its remit is being extended and put into law. This was agreed as part of the Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and Green Programme for Government.

### **The sell-off of public land**

The agency will be established as an independent company with the power to take any publicly owned land to develop or sell as they see fit. The LDA will have the power to set up investment vehicles, or DACs, whose remit will be to develop specific pieces of public land with the power to sell the site.

The government claims that this will lead to the quick development of housing on these sites. However, there is no mention of social housing in the legislation and affordability is considered to be any amount below the median market price in an area. This means that social housing provision on these public sites could be as low as 10%.

Sites owned by local authorities could be taken from the councils by the LDA without any democratic control by elected representatives. This is a means to sell off land to private developers without interference by local councillors.

Recently councillors in Dublin City voted down a proposal to sell off public land at the Oscar Traynor site in favour of a fully social and affordable scheme. This would be impossible once the LDA is set up. Instead, the LDA, or the Minister for Housing, will decide the mix of housing on each site and will just sell this public land to private developers.

### **LDA - the new NAMA?**

The Chief Executive of the LDA is John Coleman, who was previously the Chief Financial Officer of NAMA. The other members of the senior team include 2 fellow NAMA members and Omar Bhamjee, who formerly worked at Denis O'Brien's Digicell.

The board of the LDA includes several top civil servants, Michael Stone (former president of the Construction Industry Federation), Timothy Bouchier-Hayes (adviser to a major construction firm) and Conn Murray (the Chief Executive of Limerick City Council).

The chairperson John Moran has previously worked for Zurich Capital Markets and he was the Secretary General in the Department of Finance. His company RHH International has been involved in extensive lobbying of public officials on behalf of transport company Uber, investment banking firm Nomura and energy company Synergy.

Minutes of the LDA Board meetings, which are available online, are heavily redacted and include many members declaring conflict of interests which are also redacted.

It would be naïve to think that these people have any interest in providing social and affordable housing for ordinary people. Instead, the Land Development Agency will be used to privatise public land and give yet another leg up to developers.

To the Golden Circle, housing is just a way to make profit regardless of how many suffer high rents, homelessness or mortgage arrears. But in a socialist society housing would be regarded as a basic human need provided by society for everyone. To get there though - we have a real fight on our hands.

**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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