

AUSTERITY and its **ALTERNATIVES**



Who are they listening to?

Influential voices in Ireland's Economic Policy-Making

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Introduction

- **What we mean by 'they'**
 - The 'they' are policy makers – in particular politicians, and especially cabinet members.
 - Of course, there are other agents like civil servants, special / political advisers and particularly in the case of a small state like Ireland the EU, IMF and other governments.
- **Listening**
 - We're clearly focussed on the ideas, ideologies and discourses that influence policy more than the interests per se.



Themselves

- Irish Cabinet ministers especially in the period 2007-2012 were drawn from a very narrow range of higher education institutions – in fact in this period their higher education was more elitist than the UK cabinet (Feeney, Hogan & O'Rourke, R&R: Table 1)
- In the past a lot of politicians were lawyers and teachers – recent trends not so clear.



Media

- Evidence of neoliberal work been done in chat and talk shows (O'Rourke & Hogan, 2013) .
- The dominance of neoliberalism in discourses of enterprise, privatisation and the economy in general (Phelan, 2007a&b O'Rourke, 2010; Mercille, 2014)
- Large & seemingly increased role of economists in the media
 - Out of 75 articles written by outside writers (non-journalists) in three top quality Irish newspapers during the period 2008-2012 concerning Irish budgets 35 (47%) are economists or working in the financial sector (Mercille, 2014, p.291).
 - Evidence for increase is impressionistic (e.g. Allen, 2012). We agree with this impression but some more evidence would be good.



Think Tanks & Lobbyists

- Recent *Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015* means 2016 will be the first calendar year in which information arising from that Act will be available on the activity of lobbyists in Ireland.
- Think tanks, at least in the sense of ones that are ones that tend to be explicit about the particular perspective and are comparable with think tanks in other developed countries are relatively new in Ireland.
- Will the growth of think tanks in Ireland mean an increased role of economics experts in the policy discourse.



Examples

www.hiberniaforum.ie: 'Ireland's free market think tank'.

- Launched October, 2015.
- Dedicated to free market, individual liberty and responsible & prudent Government
- More journalists than economists
- Links with Property Rights Alliance & World Taxpayers Association

www.lonainstitute.ie: 'promotes the place of marriage & religion in society'.

- Company founded 2006.
- Law, medics and theologians
- Some economic commentary – e.g. childcare.



Examples

www.NERI.ie: 'Research for new economic policies'.

- Active since 2011.
- Part of Trade Union related Research Institutes.

www.publicpolicy.ie: 'Independent thinking on Public Choices'

- Company founded in 2011.
- Dominated by economists, stresses evidence.

www.socialjustice.ie 'working to build a just society'

- Company founded in 2010
- Works with Caritas Europe.
- Economics and Spirituality

www.tasc.ie: 'Think-tank for action on social change'.

- Company founded in 2001.
- Works with FEPS

Economics Experts

- Economics Experts versus Experts on the Economy
- Background of neoliberal politicians attacking mainstream economics experts during Irish boom (O'Rourke & Hogan, 2013).
- Media – prominence of economists noted above
- Move to increase the number of economists in the Department of Finance and increase 'engagement with other economic analysts both inside and outside the Government sector' (Wright, 2010, p.34).



Economics Experts continued

- The two Governors of the Central Bank appointed since the 2009 have been economics experts.
 - 'It could be a very long time before another bookish ex-Department of Finance mandarin gets to run the Central Bank again.' (Irish Independent, 2011)
- Irish Fiscal Advisory Council – chaired, made up of and largely staffed by economics experts. Institutionalized / 'constitutionalized' (McBride, 2016) in the Fiscal Responsibility Act (2012) and Ministers & Secretaries Amendment Act (2013).
- Need for further research on role of economics experts & neoliberalisms, elite formation concentration and economics experts in media



Conclusions

- The increase role of economics experts in media, governments departments, Independent government agencies & think-tanks.
- Economics expertise versus experts on the economy.
- We know that economics and neoliberalism overlap but to what extent is this case in Ireland and elsewhere.
- Need to understand more how economics experts are providing their expertise (Fitzgerald & O'Rourke, 2016; Maesse, 2015 ; O'Rourke & Hogan, 2013).



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