

# TROUBLING IRELAND

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**Mental Health? – Mental System**  
Brian O'Boyle

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*In June 2013, Dominic Kiernan presented himself at one of Ireland's premier hospitals in need of assistance. He had struggled with manic depression all of his adult life and having found himself in a particularly dark place, he reached out for support. Instead of being immediately admitted, Dominic was turned away. The mental health unit was starved of resources and the doctors couldn't find him so much as a trolley. Dominic begged, but to no avail. Four days later, not knowing what to do, he made a serious attempt on his own life, before calling an ambulance in a panic. This time he was admitted, but only for quick repairs that left the underlying mental health problems completely untreated. Four days later Dominic tragically took his own life.*

### **Introduction**

This story is hard to read, but it is extremely important as a symbol of the cancer at the heart of Irish society. Whenever resources are needed to rebuild a bank, to welcome a queen or a war-mongering president, no expense is ever spared. These are considered important events by the Irish establishment and they must be met with generous amounts of tax-payers money. Whenever a child needs a hot meal or a resource teacher, whenever a woman needs a couple of nights in a refuge centre; whenever a vulnerable person needs a home help visit these are things that they should and must now do without.

### **People's Needs**

People's needs have rapidly become surplus to requirements in the Ireland of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Almost €64 billion has been found to meet the insatiable demands of the Irish bankers and yet increasingly it becomes clear that human welfare is a luxury the country can no longer afford. Saving Irish capitalism has become all important. Regardless of the human costs, the Irish elites have set their course and are not for shifting. Success requires a return to the 'markets' and the mark of this success is respect from the vultures that wrecked the global economy in 2008. Meanwhile ordinary people must suffer the consequences. Six austerity budgets have decimated the fabric of the Irish welfare system. To date more than €8 billion has been cut from essential services at the behest of the Troika (the IMF, the ECB and the EU) and their Irish supporters (Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour). More than €2 billion has been cut from health spending alone and within the sector; few areas have suffered more than mental health provision.

### **'Mental' Priorities**

When the banks are broken politicians sit into the night drafting legislation to transfer money from citizens to financiers. When the minds of citizens are broken the 'powers that be' are determined to ignore it. Periodically we hear government ministers bemoaning the high walled institutions that once housed Ireland's 'undesirables'. Enda Kenny denounces the barbarity of the Magdalene Laundries, James Reilly denounces the psychiatric institutions that once doubled up as 'quasi-prisons' and all the while the narrative is one of a far more caring and inclusive society. Today's establishment politicians aren't lock people up behind physical structures. Instead they leave them locked behind their own anxieties and mental tortures.

### **Human Casualties**

According to one extensive study published in the *Lancet*, mental ill health and substance abuse now account for 23% of all diseases worldwide. This is more than HIV/Aids, TB or Diabetes and it shows the levels of distress suffered by people the world over. Even during the so called 'Celtic Tiger' more than 280,000 Irish people suffered with on-going depression. Today this number has skyrocketed with as many as 400,000 people now suffering some form of mental illness. According to the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Pfizer Health Index Study, 90% of respondents believe the recession is causing havoc with people's mental health and emotional well-being. Depression, anxiety and general mental illness have all increased substantially with 1/3 of respondents registering divisions within their own family ¼ experiencing relationship problems and 60% registering the fact that they know someone who has been affected. This is an epidemic caused in large part by the alienation of capitalist society, the brutality of unemployment and the terrorism of the bankers and their government enforcers. Everyday almost 200,000 people are terrorized in their own homes for the crime of falling behind in their mortgage repayments.

### **Mental System**

In a society based on human well-being, mental health would have to be taken extremely seriously. Human development cannot occur without it and any government worth its salt would be willing to find resources to improve it. In a system based on private profit mental health is simply not important. Wage labourers can work away in quiet discomfort and the stigma attached traps sufferers when they are at their most vulnerable. Despite the recent upsurge in mental illness, almost 40% of respondents to a recent pole in the *Irish Independent* equated seeking help with personal failure. Almost 60% said they would discriminate against hiring someone with mental illness and 30% said they wouldn't accept someone with mental illness as a close friend. All of this makes the need for a government mental health strategy more important than ever. Yet just when citizens are in desperate need of support, the government is sweeping the problem under the carpet. Last year Health Minister, James Reilly, promised €35 million to hire 477 mental health professionals. As of July 2013 not one of these positions had been filled and at least one suicide prevention officer has resigned in protest at the lack of resources. In the last six years Irish people have become all too familiar with the crisis in the banking system. Now it is time to address the crisis in the hearts and minds of the Irish population.