

Irish government are trying to stop Apple giving Ireland 19 billion in owed taxes — how's that for 'looking after our own?'

Andrew Flood

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How many could we house, educate and care for with 19 billion? The Irish government is currently furiously fighting the European Union to prevent Apple paying us back taxes it owes us. There has been a lot of 'concern' about government plans to spend 48 million looking after 4000 people fleeing warfare in Syria and Iraq. The government and the media defend there 'our own' is first — the super rich in Ireland and elsewhere!

19 billion is such a vast sum of money its hard to imagine. For comparison purposes let's write it out in millions instead. It's 19,000 million. That number puts the lie to any idea we have to make a choice between aiding refugees or homeless people already here — we can do both. All we have to do in fact is NOT take a case to the European Court of Justice to block the repayment. Simply by not acting enough money to shelter as many as 1.6 million people will be come in, that's how many 19 billion would cover. At a stroke we could look after every person with housing needs, abolish hospital waiting lists and end over crowding in schools.

That instead the government is trying to take a case to the European Court of Justice to block such a payment. Consider how the Irish Times phases the issue on its business page "*In a worst-case scenario, Apple may face a \$19 billion bill*". Yes their worst case scenario is that Apple would pay us 19 billion. The Irish business community want to look after 'their own' by making sure Apple pays as little as possible, as late as possible.

There is fantastic spontaneous grass roots solidarity emerging across Ireland to get aid to refugees in Europe and to welcome those that arrive here. Many of the people who organise this are known to us as homelessness organisers, single parent organisers etc. The 'what about our own' crowd are not only inventing a conflict that doesn't exist, they are also people with little or no record of such work. A simple exercise is to click through to the Facebook profiles of the people leaving such toxic comments on newspaper reports and look for any evidence of activity helping the homeless before this last week. We've done just this with dozens of people and not found no evidence of help yet. Not a single one.

We are sure many homeless campaigners are rightly cynical about a government that has claimed to have had no available resources suddenly discovering enough for 4,000. But no one

with experience of working in housing struggles can be under the illusion that in late August the government was about to act on homelessness and has instead diverted those funds. This is the moment to demand all in need of housing are housed, not to play a divide and rule game to determine the most deserving among the desperate.

Those who have suddenly found a concern for 'our own' in the last week are inventing a problem that does not exist — we are not short of wealth. Our government is desperately trying to prevent 19 billion euro coming in. The solution to homelessness is not to pretend the government was about to provide homes for all last week and has now diverted that money — who could believe that. It's to demand that the case to prevent Apple paying its tax is dropped and the potential 19,000 million is used to solve everyone's housing crisis. It is to demand that the 300,000 boarded up homes in the country are brought back into use. It's to demand that the ability of Denis O'Brien and the Irish super rich to avoid tax by spending half the year outside the country is ended.

The is a wealthy country well able to look after everyone, unfortunately we are ruled by a gang who consider 'our own' to be bankers, developers and landlords. We insist that Solidarity knows no borders.

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