

# The View

## The hypocrisy of the New Land League at Gorse Hill

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room home and surrounding 1.25 acres of land to be a "bog standard house", while his accomplice Tom Darcy told John Mooney of the Sunday Times that "the O'Donnells are no different to the hundreds of families around the country facing the same situation."

Only, the situation isn't the same.

Just over 136 years ago, Michael Davitt established the the Irish National Land League to fight the corner of poor tenant farmers seeking reductions in unfair rents and the opportunity to buy the land they worked.

Its foundation was a famous turning point for land ownership in this country, for while it was suppressed by the British Government of the day, the chain of events it set in motion resulted in most of its objectives being met by the early 1900s.

The significance of its role is such that the story of the Land League still holds a prominent place on the history curriculum in Irish schools, which has also done its part in keeping the name fresh in the memory.

So it was no surprise that the announcement of a newly-formed Land League piqued interest and raised eyebrows: Here was a group invoking the spirit of Davitt as it got behind beleaguered mortgage-holders saddled with negative equity and mounting arrears in the wake of the Celtic Tiger's ignominious collapse.

And whether or not you agreed with the group's ways and means, it was hard not to accept there was a sense of heartfelt honesty in what they were doing.

That was until last week, when the 'New Land League' found itself at the centre of the media vigil outside 'Gorse Hill' in the Dublin suburb of Killiney; home of solicitor Brian O'Donnell and his wife Mary Patricia, who are refusing to vacate the property after Bank of Ireland was granted a repossession order on the property as it seeks to recoup some of the €71.5 million it is owed in debt following the collapse of their property empire.

Taking centre stage, the group's leader Jerry Beades went toe-to-toe with Vincent Browne on the broadcaster's TV3 programme, where he rattled on about tenuous points of law before declaring the O'Donnells' palatial six-bed-

Far from being average homeowners, the O'Donnells had built up a €1 billion property portfolio during the boom years, but the couple and their companies racked up debts of some €900 million in order to acquire them. It was a high stakes game, the sort which typified the irresponsible borrowing culture among the movers and shakers during the heady days of the Celtic Tiger.

The thing is, though, if you play with fire you're liable to get burnt, and that's exactly what happened to the O'Donnells when the bottom fell out of the housing market.

Still, if they do end up being turfed out of Gorse Hill, they will still have their primary residence in England to fall back on. (Unlike most homeowners living in fear of the repo man's knock on the door, who are victims of circumstance rather than of their own design.)

Statistics published in the Irish Times earlier this week show that 77 civil bills were before Longford Circuit Court at the start of the year, lodged by banks seeking to repossess homes, while 23 had been granted in the last quarter of 2014, and last month it was revealed that one in every five mortgages in Longford is in arrears.

Meanwhile, Derek Scanlon of The Debt Clinic told the Longford Leader's Alan Walsh last week that "one of the worrying trends we see is the large number of people who are suffering from depression as a result of their financial difficulties."

These are people the 'New Land League' should be supporting, but alas its presence in places like Longford is comparatively low-key while the boys are busy defending a gambler in Killiney who rolled the dice and lost.

Michael Davitt must be turning in his grave.

# Far & Away

Longford emigrants talk about life far from home

Rachel Masterson from Longford town has just come home after spending the past four months in Germany

## "I remind myself I'm on a really big adventure"

**Where are you from?**  
I am from Longford town.

**Where do you live now?**  
I live in Dortmund, Germany.

**Why did you leave?**  
I was just finished my masters and wanted to travel a bit, this job came up in a travel company in Germany, they were looking for an Irish person for a digital Journalism job.

**What do you do?**  
I write the content for Holidayguru.ie, it is a travel blog that sends Irish people on cheap holidays all over the world. We source the flights and accommodation, then my job is to write all the information about why each holiday is a great one to go on, full flight and hotel details, and everything down to how you get from the airport to your hotel. It is a step by step guide for having a great holiday.

**What's the best thing about where you live now?**

Holidayguru is an international company with nearly 100 employees, my office is the most fun place to work. It is a mix of German, English, Spanish, French, Italian and I'm the only Irish. The company is amazing, we get a lot of freebies, unlimited free bottled water, fruit and even beer!! We can have a beer at our desk if we like. There are a lot of games here like fustball and a Wii. There is a company "Feel Good Manager" who always organises movie nights, fustball tournaments (with hot dogs included), bowling nights, etc. The company always throw all expenses-paid parties for us, too, it is pretty incredible. We get free German lessons through work too, which I'm pretty hopeless at.

Also, working in a travel company I find great bargains and have been able to travel easily and cheaply all over Europe. I even made it to Oktoberfest in Munich.

**When was the last time you were home?**  
I was home for my graduation in November and I got two weeks off at Christmas which were also spent in lovely Longford. Since Christmas I made it home twice but in sad circumstances, once to



Rachel Masterson from Longford pictured at a Borussia Dortmund game

see my Grandad, Noel McGeeney, and say goodbye to him for the last time and then I made it home again two weeks later for his funeral. I was lucky I got in the door with 20 minutes to spare before they closed the coffin. I would like to thank everyone in Longford for the overwhelming support they have shown my family in this sad time.

**What do you miss most about home?**  
I miss my friends and family an awful lot. Being the only Irish person here was really hard at the beginning as nobody really got the 'craic'. However, now that I've settled in, it's a lot better. I missed one of my best friends weddings because flights were too expensive to get back; that was really tough. In general I miss things like being able to jump on my bike and cycle around the Longford countryside, I'd be too nervous to cycle on my own here. Or when I see people at home going to concerts and to the pub

together and I wish I was there. I have to keep reminding myself I'm on my own really big adventure and it will all be there when I get back.

**What Irish product would you like to see stocked in your local shop?**

Taytos! I would love some. The crisps here aren't the same. I wouldn't say no to a Luigies in my town either, although it's probably good for the waistline that they're not.

**Should Irish emigrants be allowed to vote in Irish elections?**

Yes for sure. There should be an online system in place where you can get access with your PPS number.

**Any message for the folks at home?**  
I'm on the way home, save a seat in the Tally Ho for me!

Would you like to feature in Far & Away? Contact us at [newsroom@longford-leader.ie](mailto:newsroom@longford-leader.ie)