

**SPECIAL
EDITION**

THE
WEALTH
OF
THE
NATION

**THE NECESSITY
OF
SOCIAL DEMOCRACY**

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DEDICATION

In memory of Phyllis McGhee, who accepted the past, altered the present, anticipated the future, never looked back, or around to see what everybody else was doing, but did what had to be done and moved on looking for more work

This pamphlet contains material from papers delivered at the Workers Party Summer School, Belfast, 1988; and at an education seminar in Buswell's Hotel, November 1989.

FOREWORD

This critique of the political economy of socialism shows how errors in economics ended up as errors in ethics, in the abuse of personal and political freedom, and in the collapse of six communist states in 1989.

Some socialists have reacted to these events as some patients do when faced with a diagnosis of terminal illness — by denial and deception. But the continuing crisis of socialism calls for more than cosmetic changes such as prefixing 'democracy' to socialism.

This pamphlet argues that the word 'socialism' is now a brake on progress. It proposes a return to the revolutionary roots of social democracy and a commitment to 'revolutionary reformism', defined as reformist struggle conducted with revolutionary zeal for democratic ends — not in parliament only, but in all spheres of civil society.

Social democracy, in this sense, offers a third way between conservative and careerist, between discredited state socialism and so called 'democratic socialism' which is too often a code for leftist labourism, and which for all its 'red' rhetoric treats the party member not as a person at the hub of history, but as a cog in a constituency machine.

This critique marries Marxist theory to democratic politics and sets out a strategy for struggle within — and on behalf of — a democratic pluralist political system where ideas will be the only acceptable currency of change.

Eamonn Smullen,
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INTRODUCTION

"It is now the time for individuals"

Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
"Address to the People" December 1989.

This is a personal view. There can be no other kind. A person cannot speak like a collective without lying. One of the many lessons of 1989.

Before 1989 socialists always said "we" never "I". This suppression of self, more fitting for Poor Clares than followers of the self-confident Karl Marx, led to a self satisfied and self-imposed silence in socialist parties with members surrendering themselves to a higher power — with almost sado-masochistic relish in some cases.

Silence and suppression of self killed socialism.

This polemic has one main theme: that the individual person — not the crowd, collective or class — is the subject and object and the whole point of history.

The person is the point of politics.

Socialism put down the person. But if the person is put down so is private conscience.

Criticism is then left to collectives like the "party". But the collectives, the communist parties in Eastern Europe, did not criticise in the crunch, were cowards in the crunch, and so socialism became corrupt and complaisant and died.

All for want of plain speaking.

This critique may not be correct. That is for you to debate and decide. But you should insist on the debate being conducted in plain language without dogmatic jargon.

Simplicity is a duty to democracy.

A POLITICAL PROGNOSIS

This paper puts three points: First: that socialism, as we understand it, is dead. Second: that socialism committed suicide by neglecting three principles: the primacy of the person over the collective, the dominance of dialectics over dogma, and the principal place of politics in historical change. Third: that socialist values, but not socialism, can rise from the ashes as a democratic political idea, which can complete the Marxist project to move man kind from the "realm of necessity to the realm of freedom".

That idea is called social democracy.

What is Social democracy? Social democracy is socialism shorn of its static statist structures so that it becomes once again a theory and practice of social change, a praxis in which democracy (the working class) and civil society (not the state) are the agents of change and the state is the instrument and not the master of civil society.

Social democracy in each society has a specific project.

In Ireland that project is to find a democratic solution to the National Question. Part of that solution is a policy of peace and plenty for the people of the two states on the island. A policy of public intervention.

Socialism cannot carry out this project.

THE DEATH OF SOCIALISM

"His theory, insofar as I can understand it, seems to discount the testimony of human experience....."

Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*.

Is socialism dead as a dogma?

If we say "no" then everything 's fine. Just ignore the fact that almost every communist part in Eastern and Western Europe is changing its name and politics.

If you think it is not dead, just badly injured, and will be up again on the third day, perhaps you should join the St. John's Ambulance Brigade? Why not stick a "democratic socialist" tag on it's toe? Or be brave and go for the more aggressive "socialist democracy" label: (Very popular this year with small parties far from power sir).

But if you are the kind of socialist who hates messing around when change is necessary then please read on.

Is socialism dead? Yes or no?

Yes. Sorry for your trouble. Yours and mine. Because no more than you do I like church bells ringing out to celebrate the end of communism. But there it is. Dead as doornails. Five socialist states are no more.*

No wonder socialists are in shock.

Some people can't face a death. Elvis lives. Lennon lives. You can see socialists like that, giving the corpse cardiac shocks from the portable "democracy" resuscitator, hoping it will sit up and speak like a democrat.

It might. But who'll believe it? Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia outlined the problem in October 1989.

"In my country for ages now the word socialism has been no more than an incantation, that should be avoided if one does not wish to appear suspect."

Havel is saying that you can't use the word "socialist" any more in his country. Even if you are a socialist. This should be easy for us to understand. Would we use the word "Republican" to describe ourselves in public? Not now. But remember the rearward attempt to hang on to it on the grounds that "real republicans" were not sectarians? Until a river of Protestant blood forced us to dump

*Romania, a family dictatorship, rather than a one party socialist state is outside the scope of this analysis.

the dirty word "Republican" like nuclear waste. A century from now it will still be toxic.

Socialism is a sick word. And we are not immune from the fall-out in Ireland. Who knows what more there is to come? And we can guess what use our political enemies will make of the socialist smear in future.

Let me make a suggestion about the word socialism. Walk away from it. Start again. But this time let's not be infallible. Let's just do our best this time.

Social democracy is a chance to do our best.

In 1989 socialism broke down like a car on a level crossing. The train is coming fast. What do we do?

First we must figure out what is wrong with the car. Second we must fix it. Third if we can't fix it we don't start pushing it. We get out and dump it.

Let's open the bonnet .

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Socialism died in 1989. The capitalist media tried to pretend it had been killed by democracy, by which they mean capitalism. But in fact it committed suicide.

Socialism in the Warsaw Pact countries had been sick for a long time. It had lost the will to live. But in the end most communists went with credit. For the first time in history a ruling class with the military means to stay in power walked away to die. Across five socialist states, five great communist parties, all with armies and police forces available to crush dissent did not do so but stepped away 1920, the Nazi attack of 1939-45 and the Cold War of 1946-1989, this system which had survived at the cost of twenty million lives and beaten all foes became sick and stagnant because it could not meet the need of its own people for personal and political freedom, for that democracy which was the whole meaning of the French Revolution whose bicentenary was the year 1989.

Mikhail Gorbachev lit the fire that melted the ice. He called his torches *perestroika* and *glasnost*. They still burn even though icy winds blow. Gorbachev's steely strength comes from his cold certainty that socialism is dead, struck down by two diseases: a toxic dose of economic dogma and a wasting illness caused by a lack of the fresh air and energetic exercise supplied by a pluralist system. In short, parliamentary democracy. And no matter if *perestroika* is put on the long finger or Gorbachev purged, the clock is set for modernisation and sooner rather than later social democracy will be the proper name for *perestroika* in the Soviet Union.

Socialism never had a chance. In 1920 the Soviet State was forced by civil war to take over the whole of civil society. War allowed no space for Marx's vision of socialism as a transition from late capitalist society to a self governing commune where civil society would carry

out most functions and the "state would wither away". The Soviet Union was driven by Allied invasion instead to an extreme statist version of socialist economics which put a premium on state ownership at the expense of any other forms of public control, almost abolished the free market, and centralised all economic and political institutions. This pushed the people back. Civil society contracted as the state expanded. People became passive as they were cut off from control as producers, given duties as soldiers and ignored as citizens. Consumption was a critical criterion of this servitude because there was so little choice, no free market and continual shortages. Consumer choice, with all its contradictions, is one of the cornerstones of civil society.

In that period the only economic experiment that worked was Lenin's NEP. Today it would be called a blueprint for social democracy. The tragedy was not to keep it.

But hindsight is smug sight. Given the backwardness of Russia, the invasion of the infant Soviet Republic by the Imperialist powers; given the need to industrialise at speed, first to fight the Allied Imperialist powers and later Hitler's fascists, given the imperatives of ideology, imperialism and industrialisation it is hard to see from their viewpoint how Lenin and Stalin could have acted otherwise. Even aside from Stalin's personality, his cruel collectivisations and paranoiac purges, even still there would have been suffering on a colossal scale once the Soviet Union decided to defend socialism. And what else could it do since socialism was the point of all of it. Given the Allied and the Nazi attempt to batter the shaky Soviet state back into barbarism, the only choice open to Lenin in 1920, as to Stalin from 1936 onwards, facing Hitler, was to drag on and discipline or surrender socialism and their country to an evil enemy and sink to the level of a slave state.

What would any of us do in these circumstances? Faced with a similar choice in Ireland the Free State Government resorted to state terror in 1922.

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To explain is not to excuse. The fatal flaw was not in the execution, but in the enterprise itself. Socialism came too soon. Stalin was product of all this.

Stalin had seen two German invasions of Russia. Was it any wonder that from 1946 he strung a steel necklace of puppet socialist states all across Eastern Europe to face a Germany whose war criminals were being put on to the Atomic payroll of the Allied Powers? Should we be surprised that Stalin wanted an insurance policy against any future threat from a Germany that had twice cost the Soviet Union millions of lives, as well as the material means of creating a civilised society? Who could deny that even today there is a fear of a united Germany among social democrats and liberals?

Socialism survived the war. But it had suffered severe mental and emotional damage. In 1946 it stamped out of

the Soviet Union wearing the rigid mask of Stalin, speaking a zombie jargon, brutalised by war — and was given a hero's welcome in the West and imposed on Warsaw Pact countries as the model for all systems.

The Communist Parties became cages. Discipline was all, discussion was to a supplied script and party hacks were valued more than independent individuals whose clear conscience could have exposed corruption.

People like John Peet.

Peet was a young Englishman who had fought alongside former I.R.A. men in the International Brigade in Spain when he was 20 years of age. In 1949, still only 34, he was head of Reuter's desk in Berlin when he went to a meeting of the German People's Council which was to set up the GDR. What he saw reminds us of the calibre of communists at the time:

*"The members of the People's Council who filled the hall — about 400 delegates — looked thin and overworked; and though they had put on their best suits for the occasion, many of the suits were headbare. For this was a meeting of the Activists of the First Hour, men and women who had tackled the task of putting the country on its feet almost before the guns fell silent, and for many of those present there had scarcely been a pause to take breath since they emerged from the concentration camps and prisons."**

Concentration camps and prisons. No wonder John Peet admired these activists. A year later, on June 12 1950, he became a newspaper legend by filing a final report on his own defection to the GDR. *"By John Peet, Reuter's Correspondent, Berlin, June 12 - Reuter's Chief Correspondent in Berlin, 34 year old John Peet, today made a public declaration that 'he could no longer serve the Anglo-American war-mongers'"*. Then Peet crossed into East Germany where he lived and worked until his death in 1988. In all that time, far from home, John Peet, unlike the millions of Germans among whom he lived, never ceased to fight for democracy and free speech, inside and outside the party. He was too courteous to speculate whether his obstinacy was due to the fact that he was English and not German. But his communist credo and prophetic insight are captured by the last entry of his diary written in 1985.

"I do not think it is unfair to describe society in the GDR in some ways with a Victorian family. Father wishes only the best for his household. Many of his decisions are wise, but whether they are wise or not, his family has to conform without argument..... As I write I can look out of the window my comfortable flat in the centre of East Berlin at the side wall, less than a hundred yards away, of a huge building which houses the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of the GDR. All important decision on the life of the country are taken here. I believe many of these decisions are wise. But they are arrived at without

any public discussions of the pro's and con's, and without any proper channel for dissent to be registered Karl Marx said his favourite motto was 'De Omnibus Dubitandum' - doubt everything. The GDR ruling motto would appear to be just the opposite: 'Father knows best.'"

And he had a final mordant question:

"In the 1930's when party members were mystified by events in the Soviet Union they were often assuaged by the glib phrase that you could not make an omelette without breaking eggs. In later years the broken eggs have become more numerous. But where is the omelette?"

John Peet's testimony reminds us — we can't be reminded too often — of the power of the person, the power of private conscience. Without this John Peet's socialism began to die. At first only its citizens noticed. Communism became a queue. By 1986 the Warsaw Pact countries' socialism was in a coma, brain dead and kept alive only by the Soviet Union's millions of troops, the most expensive life support machine on earth.

Until in 1986 Gorbachev switched it off.

And in that one dialectical gesture of genius he threw a switch that killed socialism, galvanised social democracy and gave capitalism a long-term lethal shock.

This is not whistling past the graveyard. In December 1989, at the end of the epic events that saw five socialist states collapse, the European Attitudes Survey of the *Guardian* newspaper showed that social democracy was now the most popular choice among European voters — a shift so recent that it is not yet reflected in the number of seats held in the European Parliament.

Modern history will date from Gorbachev's Revolution of 1989, even as Gorbachev looked back to Lenin's revolution of 1917, and Lenin looked back to the French Revolution. 1789 to 1989. Two hundred years that shook the world. How privileged we were to have seen the end of that great epoch. To see in 1989 the full flowering of the democratic forces that hurled feudalism from the face of the earth in 1789!

Gorbachev is great the people of the world said.

The "left" were the last group in Ireland to grasp the significance of Gorbachev. Some thought he would go away. Some hoped he would be put away. Still do.

No matter his work is done. Socialist economics are dead. Socialism without democracy is dead. Socialism without the person, the self is dead. Poor Clare socialism is dead. Go-be-the-wall socialism is dead.

*John Peet "The Long Engagement".

But Marxism is not dead. As long as capitalism lives Marxism will survive as its critique. Marxism is manacled to capitalism and will live as long as capitalism but as a criticism, and not as politics.

But to survive it must dump socialist economics.

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Let us go back a bit to go forward with Gorbachev.

What is Marxism? Let us accept the classic definition that it is a rope of three strands: German philosophy, French politics and English economics.

The first two of these are in good order. From German Hegelian philosophy we get dialectics. The Workers Party survived on its good grasp of dialectics. As Tomás Mac Giolla said in 1988, "freedom is the recognition of the necessity to change". Dialectics must never be dumped because they are built into the human project. So is French politics. From the French Revolution, we get the central concept of democracy conceived as personal and political freedom. Democracy is demonstrably the hope of humanity and here to stay.

But the third strand of rope is rotten.

That's English economics. More noose than rope it slowly strangled the socialist states over 70 years, still chokes the Labour Parties of Britain and Ireland, and almost stifled the Euro-communist project some years back. The old rotting rope would have dragged us all back to drown — if Gorbachev had not stepped in and cut the rope with a surgeon's stroke.

Consider the dogmatic core of socialist theory:

Labour is the sole source of value. The proletariat will get poorer and poorer and be driven to revolution and socialism. Even in capitalist states it will be alienated and estranged. The socialist state will abolish poverty by public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. A centrally planned economy will deliver goods and services to the consumers more efficiently than the wasteful free market system. The crises of capitalism will be more frequent deeper and wider and end in the terminal collapse of the capitalist system.

Every one of these dogmas is demonstrably wrong.

Labour could not be the sole source of value or empirically we would find that societies with a labour surplus would be the richest, when in fact they are the poorest. The proletariat did not get poorer and the only time it was driven to revolution was in 1989 when it pulled down a system of socialist states. And alienation is merely a patronising middle class myth as work is the greatest source of satisfaction in society. The proofs poured in. Socialist ownership led straight to stagnation. Command economies could never meet consumer demand. The free market allocated goods and services better than any

mechanism devised by socialism. Societies with a culture of work, like Germany and Japan proved superior to any command systems. As for crises it became clear that once capitalism was 90% of any national economy the damage done by a crisis was confined, even internationally, as we saw in the stock exchange panics of 1989.

What's wrong with socialism? Ask the workers.

They wonder why if everybody gets the same anybody should work harder. They wonder how we will all manage without a market. They wonder above all how we plan to manage without the energy of entrepreneurs.

What's wrong with socialism? Ask them again.

They tell you that they fear socialism will take their freedom. They fear the steely state that gives them security from the cradle to the grave. They hate the notion of being watched and worried from above. They hate the stupid idea that we can manage without markets. They hate the whole stagnant prospect of constant centralisation, of markets mediated to the point of being meaningless, of closed shops for trade unions, of trammels on technology. They don't believe in the politics of begrudgery. They admire people like Smurfit, Goodman, Tony O'Reilly. Only Trots think otherwise. They do not believe that full employment would eliminate the lumpen proletariat, now called an under class, and distrust that class as much as Marx. They back the British Labour Party's new welfare policy that says people must either be in work or training but not maintained as a class of mendicants — but wonder why it took so long to reach that commonsense conclusion.

Not what you want to hear? Tough. This is a democracy. Listen to the people.

People will tell you what they think: that we are not born equal, that 'equality' cannot be imposed without making life a misery for the majority, but that while life will never be equal it ought to be fair; that class and money must never stand in the way of merit; that poverty and ill-health must never cost a citizen a moment's concern because of the certainty that society will provide; that those who work hard should be rewarded by any standards you like, and that entrepreneurs are as necessary as dockers or dentists. No, let's be straight about it. Entrepreneurs are more necessary.

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We can all hear if we listen.

Proinsias De Rossa's Ardfeis speech of April 1989 improved our hearing. But we must listen harder. We still seem to be saying "hah?" to some key questions, a habit we picked up from hanging around too much with some stone deaf parties of the 'left' in Ireland.

What is this 'Left' we hang round with?

To the public the word 'Left' means someone who is deaf.

Someone walking around with an ideological Walkman. All 'Left' manifestos talk about state ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange — all the worse when masked as "workers control". And all 'Left' circles think socialism is more important than democracy — judging by the short shrift given to Protestant perspectives. In short: if we hang around in 'Left' circles we hang around with Trots who are soft on Provos at some level or another. Provism is alive and well, and always was, on the left wing of the British and Irish Labour Parties.

Could we call our kids in off the street?

Hanging around the left is damaging our party at every level. Our 'Left' image is damaging electorally because the public hate the word 'left' even more than socialism; it has all the bad economic vibes of socialism plus the fads and fashions associated with the looney left. Also our 'Left' connections create conformism among new members, because not even Fianna Fail is as conformist as the 'Left', a place populated by people in a state, addictive personalities looking for 'the line' whose greatest fear is to be caught late in taking up whatever 'line' is currently in season.

Alienation, environment and international affairs are the three main left 'lines' that cut us off from people, from real life, and of course from votes.

Alienation is very popular among the academic socialists and sees workers as alienated, blitzed by advertising, caught in a consumer cage against whose bars they beat like rats. Politically it takes the form of whinging about advertising and lotteries and anything people like doing; and pushing 'workshops' and making things with plasticine in place of proper capitalist ways of making things with computers and being paid for it. This is arrogant academic nonsense and profoundly patronising to the citizens of a modern democracy.

Environmental theory is the one that costs most votes because it ends up in such cul-de-sacs as a soft policy on crime and a hard line on spending money on 'social' schemes of doubtful value. Basically it discounts genetics, blames 'society' for every problem and plays down any personal responsibility for our actions. This is part of socialism's contempt for the person and ends up logically in the Nazi defence "I only obeyed orders".

Marxism is a materialist theory. Genetics has as good a claim to be a materialist theory as environment. People have more practical objections however. Why, for example, would two sisters reared with the same chances end up, one in the Provos and the other one with the Workers Party? Why do you find "travellers" from cramped caravans honest about money and accountants like Russell Murphy willing to embezzle their best friends? At the end of this environmental cul-de-sac we can see a typical Left crime policy "The Criminal as Victim of Capitalism". This can easily give us cop-out policy on crime of the "Let's have more Community Workers and

less Cops" variety, which is a policy on criminals and not on crime, and which shows profound moral ambivalence on spongers/terrorists/drug pushers/criminals. Marx and Engels had no such ambivalence. They saw criminals as potential police touts, and lumpen-proletarian Robin Hoods as robbing hoods. Crime comes in many forms and some of them are of social origin, but crimes against the person are evil and should not be condoned.

The third 'Left' dogma that bothers the public is the mission to save the world. My impression is that a good number of members share my unease on some of our supportive stands in international politics, not because we are against solidarity but because we do not want to end up supporting people who might stand up as the provos of their society. The SWAPO revelations of internal repressions left a very nasty taste. So do aspects of Anti-Apartheid that attack all Afrikaner efforts to change. We should not accept 'Left' lines on these matters, but ask our own questions. Some questions that come to mind: Should we have a harder line against 'necklace' killings given our own problems with Provo terror in Northern Ireland? What can we do to help liberal Afrikaners to develop progressive politics given our support any progressive moves in Unionist circles? In short can we stop jumping to our feet shouting solidarity slogans led by 'left' cheerleaders until we have worked out an independent and democratic - as distinct from socialist - position on this as well as every other question?

Given these views you may ask, as a Fianna Fail T.D. once did, "Jasus, are ye a socialist at all?" The answer is "No". I dislike this term almost as much as the word 'Left' with its connotations of a closed mind.

I am a Marxist. Marxism to me is, first and foremost, a moral system. When it is not moral I do not believe in it. I believe broadly in Marx's idea of historical materialism which means, simply, history viewed dialectically from a material standpoint. I believe in class struggle — but that in a democracy it may not be a decisive element if social democracy is successfully pursuing a system of advance based on merit. And we must be adamant that lumpen proletarian underclasses thrown up by capitalism are not made the subject of romantic crusades as if such groups were the historic 'proletariat' of Karl Marx's vision. I do not believe the material base determines history, but neither in my view did Marx — I think he wrote in a deterministic style to frighten the bourgeoisie — a deterministic style is good for morale as readers if the *Industrial Revolution* will remember. I believe strongly in Hegelian dialectics as applied to political struggle. This is a dialectic document — that is I expect the consensus will emerge from conflict on these issues. I never believed in state ownership of industry but I do believe in forms of public ownership. I believe that nothing is determined except death and change. I do not think 'socialism' is worth the shedding of one drop of Protestant blood. I believe that the person and private conscience are the two great levers of history. So for me personal freedom is political, and politics is the pursuit of personal freedom.

I am as much a Protestant as a Marxist in that regard.



What went wrong with 'the socialist' dream?

Why did socialism in Eastern Europe not lead to a higher form of society? How did a system that set out with such a high ideal of humanity end up so inhuman? Was it the theory? Or man? The answer, as usual, is dialectical. The problem was Marx's theory of man.

Man is a creature of need in a field of scarcity.

That was Marx's basic view of the historical project of humanity. Man would have to overcome Nature and Capitalism to reach the Realm of Freedom. This theory assumed that man would act according to reason.

Which may not be a correct assumption to say the least.

There are basically two views of human history. Call them the Limitless Vision and the Limited View. Where these two theories differ is in their view of the perfectibility of man. The Limitless Vision says man is infinitely perfectible and can create a paradise on earth. The Limited View says man is flawed and can create a hell on earth if not kept under control.

This simplification cuts a few corners but nevertheless the struggle between Limitless Vision and Limited View is a constant and recognisable conflict in modern history and can be broken down into names: Plato versus Aristotle. Whig versus Tory, Robespierre versus Edmund Burke and indeed Lenin versus Stalin.

The Limitless Vision starts with Plato's *Republic* — which in passing we should point out is a place that badly needed a reform movement — and stretches through visionaries like Robespierre and Lenin to Utopian communists like Castro in our own day. But there are dictators and dictators and Hitler and Stalin can't be put in the same pot. You could survive in the Soviet Union if you conformed. But a Jew died no matter how badly he wanted to join the Nazis. Stalin, as his toughest critic Isaac Deutscher pointed out, cannot be judged a reactionary because his vision was progressive in aim although cruel in execution, whereas Hitler left nothing behind. A revolutionary like Lenin, no matter how harsh, commands respect as well as revulsion. We sense the grim grandeur of his bleak vision of mankind's march to the New Jerusalem, the City of God, to the Realm of Freedom where man is perfect and at peace.

It's a vision to die for. People still die for it.

The Limited View has no such grandeur. It walks, indeed trudges, where others ride on a white horse. But it's a steady walk, starting with Aristotle and ending with Edmund Burke, and moving on to the future at a snail's pace. The Limited View says man is fallible and flawed. Since that is so his political projects will be flawed too.

Best to settle for something less. Like capitalism and democracy, defined as lots for some and a little for all.

It's a theory to live with, not for. Living without a vision is like living without hope for humanity. Dead.

Which of these two views is true? Both of them. That's if you think dialectically and not dogmatically. It is perfectly plain that since the beginning of recorded history man has insisted on acting against his own best interests. It is the right most frequently exercised by the human race. Christians call it original sin. Communists call it anti-socialist behaviour. Call it messing if you like. But whatever we call it we can't pretend man is perfect. Otherwise we Marxists would not be having so much trouble right now, and listening to Edmund Burke saying "I told you so".

Edmund Burke, our greatest political genius, the man who flatly told the electors of Bristol that just because they had elected him did not mean they owned his conscience or voice, put the big question succinctly at the time of the French Revolution:

"How can man, who is not himself perfect, make a perfect revolution?"

No answer yet. Asinine answers used to be plentiful. At a Writers' Congress in Moscow in the 1950's, the French Communist writer, Malraux, listening to another interminable harangue promising universal happiness in a future workers paradise, suddenly said, "*What about a child run over by a tram car?*" There was a stunned silence. But dogmatists are as resourceful as theologians and one such jumped up to give the party line to thunderous applause: "*in a perfect planned socialist transport system there will be no accidents...*".

Except, we might add, accidents caused by the train of history running over the stalled socialist car.

The dialectical truth is that we don't know how perfectible man is until we are perfecting so to speak. We learn by doing. Perfectibility is not a final state but a process. What we do know is that humanity throughout history has insisted on a Limitless Vision by night and a Limited View by day so to speak. Which explains the guilty uproar in the Senate recently when Professor John A. Murphy pointed out that in this century nothing in the West could surpass the shining vision of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

Commonsense compels a dialectical synthesis of limitless and limited. Chances are that it will look something like social democracy. And that politics is about searching for paradise on earth with questions instead of stars in our eyes.

But when we get there remember only young children like dormitories, adult persons prefer single rooms or double rooms. Because adults are persons.

THE PRIMACY OF THE PERSON

Politics are about the person. And politics are always personal. And when they are not they are inhuman.

Three more lessons from 1989.

Socialism said that politics was about the collective, about society, about the proletariat, about any number greater than one. And in 1989 the people of Europe, for the second time in two hundred years told us that was not so, and that politics is always about the person.

The individual person is the whole point of history. This is the message from the French and Russian revolutions. In 1789 the people of France told princes that from now on history would be about the freedom of the individual person and not just a history of nobles. Two hundred years later in, 1989, the people of Eastern Europe told the party the very same thing.

People won't tell us a third time.

The passion for personal freedom is the greatest of all political passions. It drove the French Revolution of 1789 to cut the head from kings, and it drove the Gorbachev revolution of 1989 to cut the ground from under the feet of dogmatists. The passion for democracy is the passion for the sense of personal liberty at the heart of democracy. And that personal liberty is about the sense of self.

We may not be immortal. But we feel immortal. We feel, each of us, that there will never be another like us. That is the feeling of every man and woman born on this earth and it is a feeling so universal, so timeless and so full of truth that we must respect it.

1989. The year we were told to respect the self.

Revolutionaries who suppress self in the name of the revolution are certain to repress and resent the sign of self in others; socialists who think little of themselves are likely to think a lot less of others; socialists who give up their own right to speak in the name of history are likely to lock up others who exercise that right and who make them guilty.



Persons are the beginning and the end of politics.

This is view of people on the street and is completely correct. The source of all political authority is the personal conscience of each citizen counted one by one. This view is still a sin on 'the left' where the cult of the collective is fine but not the cult of personality, which is only a person speaking the truth as that person sees it. The cult of the personality in practice is aimed at 'political' leaders because politics is suspect on the left. This is another dreary dogma that cuts off from real life.

Gorbachev gets no personal credit in 'left' circles. His reforms were first greeted with suspicion and then described — so as to deprive him of any personal credit — as 'objectively necessary'.

It's like saying somebody should go downstairs and see what the noise is.

Yes, but who?

Gorbachev was the one who got out of bed.

Why do socialists play up the collective and play down the role of the person? Some observers believe it is a craving for the certainties of religion. The collective is infallible, persons are poor, messy creatures, so let us worship the collective!

When are we going to live in the real world?

People in pubs and out in the street know that Gorbachev the person is central to change. That his personality is central to change. That if he was a grey and grim zombie like Brezhnev nobody would listen to him.

The notion that politics can be conducted without personalities is confined to Left parties and make the public very uneasy. How can politics have an existence somewhere 'out there' independent of human beings? This is the notion Marx spent his life trying to fight. There is nothing 'out there' without people. The medium is literally the message and there is no message without the messenger. Who is the message. If you're still in doubt ask yourself this. Suppose Brezhnev had thought of Glasnost first? Yes indeed. Milos Janka summed it all up as an old style Marxist:

"Let us hope Gorbachev lives a long time"

Private conscience, not the collective, caused Milos Janka and his wife Charlotte to stand up first to Franco, then Hitler and finally Hoenacker.

The party member is a person first and last.

The Workers' Party must remain a place where people are asked to create a party line before they are asked to accept one. Nothing could stand against us if to the present democratic structures we should add this principle: that we value criticism as much as discipline and personal conscience above all.

Gorbachev will hopefully make Protestants of us yet.

DIALECTICS NOT DOGMA

What are dialectics? Well, not being a dogmatist let me give you an example instead of a lecture.

Back in 1976 the Provos, Trots, and Labour Lefties were paralysing a flexible response to IDA industrialisation

with anti-British and 'anti-imperialist' slogans. The Research Section of the Party set out to solve this and other practical problems.

One of the Research Section's ground rules was to avoid the academic habit of raising problems and avoiding solutions. The Research Section never once posed a theoretical problem to which it did not offer a practical, that is to say, political solution. So to solve this problem we posed a question in our book *the Irish Industrial Revolution* as follows:

Q: *Are we for or against the IDA's policy?*

A: *Yes.*

That's a dialectical reply. It meant that at one and the same time we were *for* industrialisation, trade unions, progress in provincial towns and *against* pollution, exploitation, fly-by-night factories. All at the same time. None of our ordinary members had any trouble grasping the political point.

Dialectics is about change through conflict. In any field of study we see a dialectical method. Biology: not anatomy but evolution. Physics: not statics but dynamics. Politics: not structure but process. Or think about life. From our birth we are both growing up and beginning to die. That's dialectics.

But Marxist dialectics are seldom taught in socialist parties. What's taught is a made-up dogma called Dialectical Materialism, a phrase Marx never used. The very phrase Dialectical Materialism—the capitals are always left in by dogmatist teachers to awe people—is meant to beat the brain into submission to some iron law. Marx's own method was called historical materialism—we can leave out the capitals because are learning and not worshipping—which simply meant history studied from the economic base to the political top, but dialectically, that is taking in all the contradictions of classes and feuds and factions.

The way dogmatists go about 'analysing' a political situation is so ridiculous as to invite caricature. First instead of a detailed analysis of the situation there is a detailed exposition of the dogma it seems to fit. Second having outlined the iron economic dogmas that will 'inevitably' lead to blah, blah, the dogmatists go home, set the alarm and go to bed knowing that these iron laws will be still working away while they are asleep. Third the alarm goes off when it's the revolution.

That is not how Karl Marx went about his work.

Read the short book "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon" and we can see how he bores into the facts of a situation, poking dialectically to see what patterns it makes and what's really going on. It's a work of art.

Marx sets out with no dogmatic laws, merely a general framework of mind in which the 'material' is given much weight—but not coercive weight. First he examines each

event minutely in it's material base seeking out economic and class configurations. Secondly he works up through each layer of politics, society and culture looking in each for what he calls the 'specificity' of the situation, right down to the colour of uniforms worn if they cast light on politics, until he has a complete picture—not a still frame but a moving picture, in constant flow and flux, and in that mass of swirling shapes he tries to find the main current that will lead him to the source and solution of the political problem posed by the picture. Politics and not economics largely determine the solution just as economics and not politics largely determines the problem. That in essence in Marx's own method.

Gorbachev, who is a social democrat in politics is a Marxist in method, a master of dialectics. He does not start with dogma but with the 'specific' position of the people. He has a feel for the flux of daily life and its flow. That flow is the real life of the people. You cannot command it to come to you by dogma. If you want to sit down by the Waters of Babylon you will have to move to the Waters of Babylon.

That move is called politics.

THE PRINCIPAL PLACE OF POLITICS

Politics is the rule of states and peoples.

Proinsias De Rossa in pursuit of political progress subordinated economic dogma to political need at the Ardfheis of 1989. Thirteen years before the *Irish Industrial Revolution* had done the same thing. Both departures were abused by dogmatists, and both brought enormous political benefit to the party.

Henry Patterson in his major new study "*The Politics of Illusion — Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland*" notes the positive aspects of the first departure, "*The IIR was the first major documentary evidence that a part of the 'republican tradition' was willing to accept popular opinion when it violated a central tenet of republican faith*".

What a pity that Ellen Hazelkorn and Paul Sweeney missed the significance of the second departure by what Patterson calls their 'critical' response to the De Rossa speech in *Making Sense* (July 1989). A pity that Hazelkorn and Sweeney can't see that in the same way as the IIR violated 'republican' dogma to make political progress in 1976, so too does De Rossa in 1989 violate socialist dogma to the same end.

Will this violation lead to 'opportunism'? This question is always put by people who have their mind made up that the answer is 'yes'. What they really fear is that it will lead to opportunities. Which they don't really want. Because socialist parties as well as attracting the salt of the earth, also get a small quota of losers who were so small they hoped we would never really get into power and just wanted somewhere to discuss socialism as a Wonderful Idea.

Socialism is not someplace 'out there'. Socialism only exists if politics can give it life. Politics has the principal place in the process of historical change.

Marx and Engels were politicians.



Marx and Engels wrote a lot. It is very easy to twist what they said. Not so easy to twist what they did.

What did Marx and Engels do when faced with a practical political situation? Well, the answer to that is well documented but not very well known on the left because it does not suit dogmatic socialists to have it known. The Paris Commune of 1870 was the biggest political test of the theories of Marx and Engels.

The Paris Commune sought their advice. Their answers were prompt, to the point, and political.

First, Marx advised the Commune against an up-rising on the grounds that it would be a "desperate folly". Second, he suggested no socialist rhetoric but urged the Commune to push a democratic line, "Let them calmly and resolutely improve the opportunities of the Republican liberty". Third, he hammered home the democratic point by closing his letter with the phrase "Vive la Republique".

But if Marx and Engels were such democrats what are we to make of phrases like 'dictatorship of the proletariat'? Like many another phrase it is always taken out of context. Engels in his draft for the Communist Manifesto declared that communism "will inaugurate a democratic constitution and thereby directly or indirectly the political rule of the proletariat". The Communist Manifesto itself kept the democratic spirit of this by saying that "the first step in the revolution" was "to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class, to win the battle for democracy". When Marx uses the phrase "dictatorship of the proletariat" it seems reasonable to assume it is in that democratic context.

For Engels, who had more practical experience of politics and lived to see the rise of social democratic parties, the phrase had a particular and precise meaning. 'The democratic republic' he explained 'is the specific form of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. (Selected correspondence P486).

And it is Engels who spells out what he means by 'dictatorship of the proletariat' "Do you want to know what this dictatorship looks like? Look at the Paris Commune. That was Dictatorship of the proletariat"

So let's look at the Paris Commune.

Surely if 'dictatorship of the proletariat' means what dogmatists and CIA men think it means, we will see Marx advocating 'socialist' measures by the Paris Commune. But Marx does not do any such thing. He stresses instead all the democratic demands with obvious approval. Here

are the policies of the Commune, with his comments in quotes.

1. Universal Suffrage.

"The Commune was formed by municipal councillors, chosen by universal suffrage..... nothing could be more foreign to the spirit of the commune than to supercede universal suffrage by hierarchic investiture."

(Which means the Commune should not set up any kind of undemocratic rule).

2. An Open Society.

"The Commune did not pretend to infallibility.... the invariable attribute of Governments of the old stamp. It published all its doings and sayings, it initiated the public into all it's shortcomings".

(Do we hear that from Marx? Not to be infallible? To publish the truth? To let people in on the fact that we may not be completely perfect?).

3. Freedom of Religion and Separation of Church and State.

"the pay of the priest ... should only depend on the spontaneous action of the parishoners' religious instincts"

(Note the tolerant tone towards religion.)

So much for 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and 'socialist demands'. Faced with a revolutionary situation the founder of communism urges democratic, that is hegemonic, demands and not socialist slogans of state control. And why? For purely political reasons.

The Paris Commune, Marx agreed, should be a democratic republic with capitalist economic structures, ruled over by a socialist party with democratic demands.

Sounds very like social democracy. Sounds very like common sense. Sounds like the policies pushed by Proinsias De Rossa at the Ardfeis in 1989.

Political commentators agree that, from the Ardfeis speech in April 1989 to his triumphant topping of the poll in Dublin in July of that year, Proinsias De Rossa played every card in the political pack with cool and courage, never looking back, never seeking cover.

When he headed the poll in Dublin he stood high on a heap of dead dogma. But democracy was alive and well. Dogmatists still can't seem to make the connection between dumping out old dogmas and political progress.

Commentators in the newspapers were surprised both at the content of De Rossa's speech and the lack of adverse reaction to it in the party. Apart from the cool response by Hazelkorn and Sweeney already mentioned, most members recognise the real advantages of the new realism.

Also they were well prepared for pragmatic policies.

From 1974-1979 the Research Section in a dozen pamphlets had carved out an original theory of irish political economy which rejected state socialist economics, the

politics of 'national' labour and the whole mess of Republican socialism that lives on the left of Labour.

These pamphlets were path-breaking for three reasons. Firstly these policies were not nationalist. From the *Great Irish Oil and Gas Robbery* (1974) to the *Land for the People* (1979) we attacked the national bourgeoisie, protectionism and 'Buy Irish' campaigns, thus parting company with the green 'left' and going on to build our strong European image. Second we were never 'nationalisers'. State ownership was rejected in the *Public Service and the Profit Makers* (1975) and the *Public Servants for the the Public Sector* (1976) in favour of the idea of independent commercial state companies like Aer Lingus and Bord na Mona. Third: politics came first and last. From the *Irish Industrial Revolution* (1976) to *Come on the Taxpayers* (1978) to *Land for the People* (1979) each and every pamphlet had a political point that took priority over socialist economic dogmas current at the time. The point of the *Irish Industrial Revolution*, the first class-based critique of Irish history since James Connolly's "Labour in Irish History", was not so much to set out a policy of industrialisation as to make a complete critique of Irish nationalism with the object of cutting the ground from under the Provos and the parties of the National bourgeoisie who all shared the same green spectacles. The point of *Come on the Taxpayers* was not so much to set out a policy of tax reform as to build city and class consciousness among PAYE workers so as to challenge the dominant ideology that the farmers were the 'backbone of the country' — a policy which paid dividends in the tax marches of 1979. The point of *Land for the People* was not so much to set out a sensible leasing policy (not nationalisation) as to strip away the sentimental veils which allowed the rural bourgeoisie to dominate political life with reactionary values.

This was virgin soil upturned in the 1970's. Today these policies are conventional wisdom. But in the 1970's they were revolutionary and were bitterly opposed, inside and outside the party. But it was these policies which boosted our party into the lead in progressive politics. This is how Henry Patterson sees it:

"At the same time as the IIR decisively shifted the focus of radical aspiration to the working class, it challenged the fundamental assumptions about Ireland's domination by 'British Imperialism'" (Politics of Illusion).

By 1979 the Workers Party was the major party of progressive trade unionists and especially white collar workers. The best and brightest joined our party. The scene was set for the big political push that followed.

The General Election of 1989 was a product of that work.

So *Making Sense* (Summer 1989) makes little sense when, along with their reservation about De Rossa's speech, Paul Sweeney and Ellen Hazelkorn explain the rise of the party in the 1970's solely in terms of the fact that Labour was in coalition.

This is to downgrade the work done by the Party and by the members and the Research Section of the Economic Affairs Department to carve out a leading role for our party — and does not accord with the perception of a professional historian like Henry Patterson who offers a more dialectical view: *"The dominant role which Sinn Fein, through its Research Section, played in mobilisation of a left critique of the Coalition's response to the economic crisis, allowed it to attract substantial numbers of disillusioned Labour Party supporters"* (Politics of Illusion).

The fact is that the first call for a switch in socialist economic policies was made in a paper delivered by me as a member of the Research Section in July 1988 at the Workers Party Summer School in Belfast, which was the first draft of the document you are reading now. Further, I wrote to Proinsias De Rossa in May 1989 withdrawing any sections in part two of the IIR which could be interpreted as advocating any form of state ownership as distinct from public political control. That is the correct Marxist response to changing circumstances.

The critical section of Proinsias De Rossa's speech was the distinction made between state ownership and public control. Public control, when exercised at a remove — through workers shares, commercial public companies etc. — preserves the democratic principle and extends the power of civil society in the way Marx envisaged.

But even if Marx did not approve we would have to define our politics as democratic political control over a market economy. Because that's what the people want.

By 'people' I mean no populist hold-all. What is meant is the democratic majority, 'those who work by hand and brain' and who in Gramsci's view are 'hegemonic' in society.



We are all adults now. We don't need guard dogmas.

There is no socialist parent up there who can send us to bed for breaking a socialist rule laid down by dogmatists. The only rule is that what we do must benefit the majority right now, without doing any long term damage to it — such as encouraging inflation — and must democratise and not drag back the society we work in.

Politics is what the party does to protect the people.

THE NECESSITY FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

"If you could say what the shouts mean it might be the makings of an answer."

Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman*

Freedom is the recognition of necessity, says Marx.

Freedom comes from recognising social democracy is a necessity just now. Freedom comes from recognising that we must change, not just cosmetically, but as completely as the handful of men who walked away from their past and founded our party.

Proinsias De Rossa's speech of April 1989 anticipated the events of Autumn 1989. In street parlance it saved our ass. We went into a General Election with no dogmas dragging us down. And we reaped the benefits.

Social democracy proved a winner.

Because, make no mistake, we fought this election on social democratic economics. Some people in our party still cling to the comforting notion that our election policies were 'socialist'. They were no such thing. We fought the election on social democratic policies. And made a massive breakthrough. People who cannot connect the two things need a brain surgeon.

Socialism would not have won us this election. And it will certainly lose us the next election if we let it. But if we are sane people and not dogmatists we will not let it do any such thing.

Even the Communist Party of the GDR showed the door to dogmatists and invited social democracy in. That done it's ready to go into politics. Where it can do something practical for the workers. And about time too!

★ ★ ★

Socialism is a word that will soon be unusable.

In Leipzig last November a New Forum speaker from the GDR told a crowd that there was little to choose between Stalin's Palace of Culture and the garish American Marriott Hotel. The crowd was sympathetic. "There must be a third way for our socialist homeland!" The crowd laughed at him cynically, not because they were for the hotel but because he had used the word 'socialism'. As Martin Kettle of the *Guardian* reported (17 November) 'any mention of socialism, however democratic is immediately tainted by associations'.

We do not know how much more dirt is to come. Nobody is saying that we should stop using the word 'socialist' overnight. What I am saying is that slowly and steadily the word will become as unusable as the word 'republican' became in our circles, although we tried to hang on to it for a long time. Too long in fact. Since it is going to hurt best make it a quick divorce and get it over with.

The most dynamic parties in Europe are doing that: changing names and constitutions to take social democracy on board. The Italian Communist Party (PCI), the most creative in Europe, is dropping the word 'communist' and changing to social democracy in order to keep its commanding lead over the Socialists. The PCI keeps close links with another creative party the SPD which is the largest in Europe, and far to the left of what we used

to know as social democracy of the American-approved brand. Swedish social democracy is far to the left by our standards and commands 43% of the vote in a society which if it is not socialist in the dogmatic sense would suit any Irish worker down to the spotless ground. And some changes came before the events in eastern Europe. The Spanish Communists subsumed themselves into a United Left coalition which promptly doubled its vote and may soon hold the balance of power. The British Labour Party is of course the real success story following a total revision of its policies by Kinnock and Gould who met the three perfectly rational public demands - to purge the Trots, to remain armed in an armed world and to stop the Unions bullying the public and the Labour Party, and faced up to the crucial role of television in modern democracy by putting a professional communicator and committed social democrat, Peter Mandelstam, in charge of their image. With a tough line on Trots, dole spongers and closed shops the Labour Party looks set to seize the hegemonic position.

Those who don't change collapse. The French Communist Party (PCF) tried the Ken Livingstone line that what people wanted was 'real socialism'. That's what George Marchis offered the electorate, denouncing reformer Charles Fiterman as a 'social democratic traitor'. The P.C.F.'s share of the vote dropped from 20% (1978) to its present shaky 7% from which will certainly go down. So any theological rearguard action to separate the public's perception of 'tainted' socialism from 'real' socialism will cut no ice, either in Marxist philosophy or at the polls. Explaining how we are really democratic socialists is like talking about 'real' republicans or 'real' Catholics. The political fact of life is that Fianna Fail & Co. will fight the next election on Rumania if Spring will lend them the smears.

Not that this problem seems to bother some dogmatists I met at Buswell's Hotel, one of whom when asked wasn't it true De Rossa's speech saved our bacon, replied, "So I see they say in the papers". That sums up dogmatism for me: the refusal to face the facts of political life, the contempt for 'bourgeois' newspapers, the Poor Clare tone of 'not being of this world'. Where the workers are. Reading newspapers.

And voting for De Rossa and democracy.

★ ★ ★

Gorbachev is a Social Democrat.

Gorbachev has been pushing hard on *perestroika*. Right now his long-term aims are clear and backed by the best elements in his society. He wants a society where the state steps aside so that the public principle can step in, wants markets large and small, wants rapid technological change pushed by the trade unions, wants entrepreneurs to be given the red banner of Lenin, wants mendicants who can work to be confined to monasteries, wants a market economy mediated by an educated social democracy. In short he wants social democracy.

Gorbachev is out of step with the Irish Left.

Gorbachev is trying to stimulate a market, the Irish Left wants to abolish it. Gorbachev wants to dismantle the state apparatus, Irish socialists want to extend it. Gorbachev thinks democracy more important than socialism; Irish socialists think socialism is all and that democracy is a merely a slogan of "all peace-loving peoples".

The Workers Party is, thankfully, out of step with the Irish Left.

Let me make a prediction. Unless we break cleanly and completely with the politics of the Irish left as we broke with nationalism, we will remain a minority party. Our association with the 'Left' is doing us subliminal but severe damage which will soon be mortal. As a person who deals with media my impression is that the word 'Left' is as attractive as the word 'AIDS'.

We have got to get off the treadmill of socialism versus democracy, of 'left' versus social democracy. We have to go back to our real communist roots, to the dialectics of democracy.

THE DIALECTICS OF DEMOCRACY

The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle for democracy.

(The Communist Manifesto)

Karl Marx was a democrat. He was a democrat because he was a revolutionary. And he was a reformist because he was a democrat. All at the same time.

Modern Marxist scholarship has restored the concept of democracy to its proper place at the centre of Marxism, a concept which dominated debate in the communist and socialist parties until the Russian Revolution, and a debate which has been resumed again with fresh force thanks to the cogent and creative contribution of Anton Gramsci who, must rank with Marx and Lenin as a truly original thinker, the philosopher of revolutionary reformism in the era of modern democracy.

The notion of a revolutionary social democracy may seem a contradiction. That it should seem so is part of the dead legacy of dogmatism. But a dialectical view — and in Marxism there is no other — shows immediately that reform and revolution are not two choices but two strands of the dialectical rope of political struggle.

The phrase, 'social democracy' is used by me throughout this critique in the sense that Marx and Engels, and indeed Jaurès and Gramsci, would understand it, not as a state or form of government but as a political process, a dynamic of struggle, a carrying on of the communist ideal in the daily life of democracy.

What is holding up political advance by democratic and workers parties across Europe right now is the failure to

make a synthesis of the theoretical work on democracy from Marx to Gramsci, and the lessons from the practice of progressive parties since the turn of the century.

A synthesis of democracy, reform and revolution.

This vast area is not something I can take on board in a political document whose purpose is to pursue the points raised by Proinsias De Rossa. But I propose to return to it soon. However it is possible to make a start.

Democracy, revolution and reform are one.

The dialectics of democracy revolution and reform make a coherent synthesis from Marx to Gramsci, a synthesis interrupted by Lenin, albeit with some misgivings, because of the special undemocratic conditions in Russia. And with disastrous results.

Karl Marx was a democrat. Every sentence he wrote on the prospects for revolution or reform is postulated on the prior existence of democratic state, not as a static structure of course, but as a dynamic state where the workers struggle to extend democracy on a daily basis. Democracy to him was a revolutionary principle. The leading scholar of Marx's theory of revolution Hal Draper points out that Marx's politics could be defined as '*the complete democratisation of society not merely of its political reforms*' (His italics). We saw this synthesis of reform and revolution in his Commune views.

Engels, too, was clear that democracy was the basis of socialism, was not only its foundation, but its method, the spirit that must infuse it. 'Democracy has become the proletarian principle, the principle of the masses. The masses may be more or less clear about this, the only correct meaning of democracy, but all have at least an obscure feeling that social equality of rights is implicit in democracy.' Note the 'equality of rights'. Democracy for Marx and Engels is not a personal equality but a formal state of equality of opportunity in law and in life that must take absolute precedence.

So much for democracy. What of reform and revolution?

Nothing could be more sectarian than to counterpoint reform and revolution. Capital from beginning to end never uses the word 'socialism'. The casual reader could go from cover to cover and think it is a text book on economics and social development. There is a lot about factory legislation. There is a lot that would be called reformist by a Trotskyite. That is because for Marx reformism was a revolutionary activity that had to be carried on within the perspective of revolution. And revolution was not a sudden seizure of power, but the transformation of the democratic state to such a point of democratic development that the transition to communism would be painless so developed would be the organs of civil society, that civil society that is so important in the works of Gramsci. Because civil society lives with and within the bourgeois society in the democratic state, Gramsci rightly sees the task of a mass democratic party

as being to fight a 'war of position' whose object is to hasten the revolutionary transformation to a higher state.

So the struggle is for democracy, reform and revolution is one dialectical strategy. Each of the three needs the other.

The actions of Lech Walesa show what happens when one of these strands is missing. Because he was a reformist and not a revolutionary he fought for better wages and then for capitalism. But not being a real democrat he took the factories from the workers and handed them over to capitalism instead of managing them dramatically in a way that would extend democracy.

The biggest mistake of Western communism was to counterpose reform to revolution. A moment's thought suffices to show how stupid that idea is. *No progressive party can hold that support of the democratic majority without policies of reform. But no progressive party can survive without sinking into opportunism unless it has a revolutionary perspective.* Once again we must stress that by revolution we do not mean a physical uprising — although these too have their place in the protection of democracy as we saw in Eastern Europe — we mean the point where the prospect of reform reaches the level where the revolutionary transformation to communism to the self-governing civil society can be carried out without bloodshed, or indeed enormous trauma. It may best be described as similar to the revolution which forced Western society to accept the equality of women, a process that was not violent but was physical, not only parliamentary but extra parliamentary, a reformist and revolutionary dialectic that is at once completed and hardly begun.

Social democracy then, must be defined by us as a continuation of the long tradition of reformist struggle by European progressive parties and at the same time as part of the historic revolutionary struggle to move society forward towards the communist ideal of a civil society.

Social democracy in this sense is not a choice between reform and revolution, it is a choice both of reform and revolution. And it holds out no comfort for politicians around the left who think social democracy means putting on a suit and getting on "Questions & Answers", or who see the Workers Party as a machine for putting them in Dail Eireann. Nor can social-democratic politics be seen in exclusively parliamentary terms. One has only to think of the Peace Movement against the war in Vietnam, the Civil Rights struggle in the North, or the PAYE tax marches to see the range of political struggles open within the democratic system.

Social democracy for us subsumes the socialist project, becomes the political description we give to the Marxist synthesis of reformist and revolutionary struggle in the context of a democratic state, but a struggle never conducted in such a way as to damage the democratic principle, never in such a way as to destroy the state.

Social democracy, in this perspective, is a political process in which reform is conducted in a revolutionary spirit and revolution is conducted with a reformist restraint so as to keep the fabric of democracy intact.

The historic goal of that process is freedom. Freedom of the person in a civil society where, in the immortal words of the Communist Manifesto, 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'.

But there is, apart from revolutionary project a reformist 'right now' project. When the two can be fused we have revolutionary social democracy in action. That fused project in Ireland we call the National Question.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The National Question is the conscience of our party. It keeps us honest.

Some people who hang around the Irish Left can't see this. They wish the National Question would go away and let them get on with 'socialism'. But socialism needs the unity of workers. And, given Protestant fears, that unity depends on a democratic solution.

The National Question is *the* Democratic Question.

The Workers Party is constituted by the Democratic Question. The Democratic Question is our dialectical destiny. We define it and are defined by it.

Our party was not born in a conflict about socialism. Our party was born in a conflict about democracy. About the right of Protestants to their Northern State.

The solution to the Democratic Question, the marriage of true minds, lies like all good marriages in the careful cultivation of the sense of self of the other.

We must not only tolerate, we must cultivate our two cultures. We must respect each others right to privacy. We must learn to love each other in increments.

When we defend the separate Protestant identity we show respect for all identities. When we defend Unionist rights — so difficult to defend down here — we defend all other minority rights from women to the poor in society.

The Democratic Question is like a steel thread in the national coat and when we pull out comes all that is reactionary, repressive and rotten in our society.

The Democratic Question gives us hegemony as Gramsci would see it. Hegemonic is holding the support of the great majority with a political project of concern to all so that project and party merge in the public mind.

Peace is that project.

Proinsias De Rossa made an important speech at the Ardfeis in 1988. But that speech will be dated when his Dail speech of 24 November 1989 still matters. See how he gets the hegemonic grip over the others:

"No one political party will marginalise terrorism by itself. It is up to each of us, in this House, to develop and promote means of strengthening the democratic culture. The demands for peace and democracy are the primary demands of people in these islands....."

CONCLUSION

"So comrades come rally now and the last fight let us face..." (The Internationale)

A spectre is haunting Europe. The spectre of Social democracy, child of socialism and democracy.

Social democracy is socialism purged and purified. We cannot shirk this cleansing procedure which must be conducted in three dialectical stages: by criticising, by annulling, by transcending. We must criticise all aspects of our heritage without any cover-ups; we must annul what is wrong and we must transcend what is left and step up on dead dogmas to catch sight of the future.

The future is social democracy.

What is Social Democracy?

Social democracy can be defined as the struggle for socialist values in a democratic society with a market economy; a process of progressive advances rather than static state of arrival; a permanent puncturing of private greed by principles of public good — the Marxist theory of social change married to social democratic politics, the historic struggle to move mankind to the realm of freedom.

But with the person at the centre of history

Why not call this process democratic socialism?

You may — if you have all the hours of the day to explain the fine print of how your socialism differs from the 'socialism' which is such a dirty word in many parts of Europe. You may — if you don't care about the consequences of the dirt that can be thrown by the capitalist media, and, indeed, some of our erstwhile 'Left' allies. You may — if you can explain to the voter on the doorstep why, if you care not for state ownership any more, you don't call what you now believe in by its proper name — social democracy. In short, you may go on calling social democracy 'democratic socialism' if you have the honesty to admit that, shorn of that state ownership as a dogma it might as well be called social democracy and its you, and not the voter, that needs the phrase — much as a child needs a comforter.

Democratic Socialism is a soother for infantile disorders. Social democracy, in today's terms, is politics for adults.

What is the goal of social democracy?

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

What is its project in Ireland?

It must be a project that makes sense to our people and makes sense of our peoples' history. It must be democratic, which is not merely a matter of addition but a dialogue between party and people that respects human and minority rights. It must be hegemonic, that is it must subsume and subordinate other projects to it.

The National Question is that project.

What is the National Question?

The National Question, in today's terms, can only be defined as the Democratic National Question. This has three aspects: it means supporting the democratic right of the Northern Unionists to decide their own political destiny, defeating the Catholic sectarian campaign of the Provo IRA to set up a one-party state, and uniting all the progressive forces on the island in pursuit of peace and plenty in the context of a social-democratic Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals.

What is the task of social democracy in Europe?

To complete the democratic tasks of the French revolution with all the humanistic insights that have been so hard won by the sacrifices of countless socialists and communists — the individual men and women who struggled heroically to make history, who were cruelly betrayed, but who will not have lived in vain if this generation of democrats completes the tasks of social democracy so well commenced by Mikhail Gorbachev and the Communist Party and people of the Soviet Union.

What can we salvage from the struggle?

Socialist values, the public principle, Marxist dialectics, the crusade against capitalist exploitation, the critique of capitalist values.

What can we not salvage?

Socialist economics. State ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The labour theory of value. The command economy. Single party states. The myth that we can manage without a market. And the word 'socialism'.

Are economic dogmas all we need dump?

No. We can carry too much 'left' luggage. The public perceives us to be wrong on a whole range of issues. Criminals are not victims of oppression. Alienation is a patronising myth of middle class academics. Entrepreneurs are not evil. Et cetera.

Won't we lose our identity as a party of the left?

Hopefully. The tag of being a part of the Irish left is the single greatest drag on our progress.

What about "Left Unity"?

What about it? What has it to do with us? We have

nothing in common with the Labour Party's nationalising policies and green politics, with the collection of clapped out clichés carried around by the 'left'. We don't agree on the National Question. We don't agree any longer on what constitutes socialism. So what is the point of an alliance? The transfer of votes in a few marginal areas cannot hold the party to ransom when it needs to make a breakthrough at a national level.

Then why so much talk about Left Unity?

The public never talk about it. They hate the words 'left unity' almost as much as the words 'armed struggle'. The few among us who go on about it come from a "Labour Left" tradition, have defective vision, get lonely and want to phone home. Hence 'left unity'.

What kind of identity will we have on our own?

The same as now. We are a mass party of democracy, social justice and peace. That's not a bad start.

Where should we stand, left or left-centre?

We should never be standing anywhere. We should be moving always. Dialectics, remember?

Are you dodging the question?

No. We should move up to midfield as a mass party of social democracy and take as much left, liberal left of centre space as possible, recognising that the Labour vote will come to us eventually, and faster if it looks like we can take office. We should remind ourselves that coalition depends, and is not a principle.

What should the Workers Party change?

The party has a fine democratic name. Since the Ardfeis

it has fine social-democratic policies. What it needs now is to stop going along with them and start living them. And spend time cultivating the person, the individual talent of every member. There is no need to change our name or our present policies. Only ourselves.

What do people really want?

Their demands are dialectical. They want capitalism but controlled for the public good. They want democracy to be a dialogue and not just a majority rule riding rough shod over the individual person. They want social democracy most days; but some days they want to conscript dole spongers, and other days they want to see an old time socialist soaking of the fat cats. They want secure jobs but they also like a sudden shake-up. They want a free market, except sometimes they don't. And they want us to do what has to be done without nagging them about contradictions. Open it. Close it. That's when Margaret Thatcher and Des O'Malley and Alan Dukes jump and shout that it's not really a free market if you keep interfering like that, and it's just socialism by another name Mr. Speaker!

And is it?

Yes and no. Dialectics, remember? What its called now is social democracy. And it's here to stay. Because it is what people want. People want a lot. They want the state to leave them alone. Then the frying pan goes on fire. Now they want the state to send the fire brigade. Yesterday.

People want the sun, moon and stars.

And sooner or later that is what people will get.

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Organisation: Workers' Party

Author: Eoghan Harris

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