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THE WORKERS PARTY OF IRELAND

The Socialist Perspective on Northern Ireland
and The Anglo-Irish Agreement



Foreword

The Workers Party of Ireland is a democratic socialist party organised in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. Our objective is to win state power for the working class and thereby establish a democratic, secular, socialist, unitary state — a Republic.

The Party for a variety of reasons, political, ideological and philosophical, national and international, evolved from Sinn Fein. In 1977 the suffix The Workers' Party was added to Sinn Fein and in 1982 Sinn Fein was dropped by the unanimous vote of the Party's annual congress. The roots of The Workers' Party are therefore deep in the political history of modern Ireland.

Ideologically we trace our origins to the principles of the French Revolution as brought to Ireland by the United Irishmen; Liberty, Equality, Fraternity became the struggle of the men of no property to unify Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter for a sovereign, independent Ireland.

That progressive strand of republicanism allied itself with emergent European socialist thought in the 19th Century and strengthened that relationship in the 20th Century, although for many years it shared an uneasy relationship with sectarian Roman Catholic nationalism.

The establishment of The Workers' Party was in actual fact the culmination of a long struggle between reactionary and progressive forces within the Republican Movement. Ireland's first socialist party, with roots deep in the revolutionary historical struggle of the Irish people, finally was created.

The Party has elected public representatives in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. There are two members in the Republic's parliament (Dail) and local government representatives in Belfast, Cork, Craigavon, Dublin, Donegal, Downpatrick, Galway, Kildare, Kilkenny, Waterford, in fact in all the main urban centres and many rural areas.

The Party's share of the vote is roughly 4%, although obviously this is considerably higher in many constituencies.

**The Executive Political Committee
The Workers' Party of Ireland
November 1986**

Introduction

On November 15 1985 the British Prime Minister Mrs. Margaret Thatcher MP and the Taoiseach of the Irish Republic Dr. Garret Fitzgerald met at Hillsborough, Co. Down, Northern Ireland and signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Its stated purposes were the promotion of peace, reconciliation, co-operation and the combatting of terrorism.

Key articles guaranteed the status of Northern Ireland, indicated a commitment to Democratic Devolved Government and consideration of a Bill of Rights for the province. It was on this basis that The Workers' Party of Ireland gave their reluctant and critical support to the Agreement.

After twelve months in operation we are grievously disappointed that there have been no forward moves on the central political issues of Devolved Government and a Bill of Rights. Our Party therefore addresses the entire British Labour Movement and seeks your support for our ten point programme.

We fully agree with the following section of a speech delivered by Peter Archer QC, MP, Chief Opposition Spokesperson on Northern Ireland (Cambridge, October 15, 1986). "But there is need for a sense of urgency. No-one expected the Agreement to produce a comprehensive solution to all the problems of Ireland, but the whole purpose was to discuss practical ways of improving daily life.

"Northern Ireland portfolios have become the Siberia of the Thatcher Government. And we have to supply the vision and the energy which is lacking from official sources. When the baton changes hands, we will already be in top gear. **The solution to the problems of Ireland cannot be imposed from London. They must be worked out and agreed by those who have to operate them.** (emphasis added). But we can encourage and persuade people in Northern Ireland to approach the task with fresh hope."

At the time of the Agreement

The Workers' Party of Ireland having agreed at our Political Committee to support the Anglo-Irish Agreement outlined the Party's position in the Dail (Irish Parliament) and at a Press Conference in Belfast.

The following extracts are from the Dail speech by Tomas Mac Giolla, TD, President of The Workers' Party:

"The Workers' Party is the only party represented in this House, which is also organised in Northern Ireland. During the past 16 years our members in the North have had to deal on a daily basis

with the problems of sectarianism, bigotry, terrorism and repressive legislation. This has given us a particular insight into the nature of the problem in Northern Ireland, which is not available to other Dail parties. **My comments here today therefore reflect not just the opinions of The Workers' Party members in the South, but also those in the North who have struggled for years to bring about unity between Catholic and Protestant workers.**

"I fear that many of the mistakes made in the lead up to, and in the operation of the Forum have been repeated in this agreement. The greatest and most serious weakness of it is that it is an external agreement, and not an internal agreement. It is an agreement between London and Dublin, but unfortunately not between the Shankill and the Falls. **No attempt appears to have been made to involve the political representatives of the Unionist community in Northern Ireland in this process at all. Indeed they appear to have been deliberately excluded, and treated in an offensive manner.** The SDLP, as I understand it, were briefed regularly by the Coalition government on the progress of the talks. No point was conceded, no agreement was made, without the consent of the SDLP leader, John Hume. In many respects it looked as if our government were conducting negotiations on behalf of the SDLP.

The Unionists on the other hand were deliberately kept in the dark. No attempt was made to brief them, to keep them in touch with the general progress of the negotiations, or to attempt to reassure them that they were not being pushed against their will into an all Ireland Republic.

Their treatment, and indeed that given to the Alliance Party on Friday, appeared to add insult to injury. The fact that they were denied any information on this Agreement and were offered a briefing only late on Friday afternoon, after the press conference was over, was deliberately offensive, and hardly designed to encourage a sympathetic reception for the Agreement. **For almost 50 years Nationalists were excluded from the political process in Northern Ireland. Have we learned nothing? Are we now trying to exclude the Unionists from the political process?**

The real danger now is that having been treated in this manner, the Unionists will retreat further back into their trenches, and that the differences within Northern Ireland will be actually accentuated by this Agreement.

"I was particularly disappointed at the dismissive attitude expressed in the Agreement to the concept of a Bill of Rights. This was a fundamental demand of the Civil Rights Movement, it remains a major objective for all democrats in Northern Ireland, and it is something for which there is substantial support within both communities in Northern Ireland. Despite this, the Agreement

resolves only to discuss “the advantages and disadvantages of” a Bill of Rights of some sort for Northern Ireland. As far as I can see, this is the only proposal which is intended to discuss the “advantages and disadvantages of”, and I think that it clearly shows that the British Government is determined to resist it to the end.

We support the clear declaration of both governments in favour of devolved government, just as we support the declared commitment of both governments to civil and human rights. But just as we doubt the ability of either government to deliver on the civil rights issues, so also we doubt their ability to get any measure of agreement on devolved government. This is becoming more evident daily. The exclusion of Unionists from the discussions over the past few years and the deliberately insulting manner in which they were totally ignored before the document was published leaves little room for negotiation, let alone agreement on devolved government.

In addition the experience of the Northern Ireland Assembly does not augur well for the future. The Northern Ireland Assembly was far from a perfect proposal, but it had far more potential than this Agreement. ***The Assembly was sabotaged by the SDLP for its own narrow political reasons. The SDLP refused to sit in the Assembly with representatives of Unionist opinion and its boycott was unconditionally supported by Fianna Fail and the Coalition parties.***

The persistent refusal of the SDLP, with the encouragement of the other Forum parties, to enter into political dialogue and compromise within Northern Ireland, is possibly the single greatest obstacle to progress. ***The SDLP has about 18% of the vote in Northern Ireland. This gives them no right to attempt to exercise a veto on progress, no more than the Unionist majority gives them a right to veto moves towards democracy and civil rights.***

The Workers' Party long term goal is the establishment of a democratic secular, socialist, unitary state — a Republic. It is our belief that the interests of the working class can best be served in such a state. The Republic would have strict separation of church and state, would guarantee civil and religious liberties for all and would represent the class interests of the working class on this island.

To achieve this we must win the support of the majority of the working class in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland. It cannot be achieved by coercion or by subterfuge. The working class must want it or demand it. Our party also recognises that progress towards that goal depends on a multiplicity of other factors, both national and international, and therefore stresses the immediate need for the establishment of democratic politics in

Northern Ireland and the strengthening of the democratic institutions in the Republic.

We recognise and accept that our objective is a long term one. But if it is to be achieved the realities of the present situation must be faced. The existence of the two states, North and South is a reality and they cannot be bombed out of existence or wished out of existence. The historical, cultural and religious divisions which have given rise to the present situation, including the terror gangs, also cannot be ignored.

The Workers' Party is neither ignorantly optimistic nor cynically pessimistic about the possibility of political development in Northern Ireland. The very real problems which must be tackled within the community however, demand total commitment from all democratic forces, irrespective of competing ideologies.

No account of the current situation can ignore the following problems: intensified religious sectarianism, massive and growing unemployment, reduced but ongoing terrorism, the militarisation of certain geographical urban and rural areas, the continuation of extraordinary legal powers and the absence of a major political forum.

In this situation therefore, the need for local democratic government must surely commend itself to all democratic political parties as the continued political vacuum is only in the interests of those favouring complete integration with Britain or the forces of terrorism. These anti-democratic forces recognise that their total defeat will come ultimately through the determined exercise of local democratic power.

The Workers' Party believes that the demilitarisation of Northern Ireland society is a critical component in the struggle for peace, democracy and the creation of new viable political institutions.

The right to life, to a job, to a home, to peace, are fundamental human rights which the state must promote and defend to the best of its ability. Northern Ireland has suffered terrorism for fifteen years. It is vital that not only should terrorism be defeated, but that we should learn in the process lessons which will enable us to build a strong democracy.

We have stressed a number of aspects of this struggle in the past but they are worth reiterating. The elimination of terrorism and the establishment of the rule of law must be considered a priority for all the democratic parties.

There can be no ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’ on this issue.

The state and all its institutions must be bound by the rule of law. To depart from that principle is not only to demean the state and its servants, it is to place the state on the same plane as the terrorist.

Unfortunately, statements are made by some politicians in the North which carry the message that it is regrettable that the security forces and the police service are bound by the rule of law. They bear a grievous responsibility in providing terrorist organisations with just the sort of excuse which helps sustain them in sections of the community. This document seems to accept this proposition.

However, the Agreement between the two governments talks of "a commitment to a society in Northern Ireland free from discrimination and intolerance" and "a rejection of any attempt to promote political objectives by violence". If there is any prospect, however remote that it could achieve this, and particularly that it could lead to a reduction in the level of support for paramilitaries and their obscene terror campaigns, then there is obviously some case for supporting it.

We must accept also that these are the only proposals on the political table at the moment. While they are so seriously flawed they might lead to violence, but the consequences of a rejection of it by the House could be even more horrific.

The elimination of terrorism and the restoration of peace is seen by The Workers' Party as a priority. Without peace there can be no democracy or political progress. Our decision on how to vote on this Agreement was ultimately based on the question of whether it would help to eliminate terrorism and restore peace. While the grounds for optimism in this regard were fairly slim, nevertheless they existed. ***On the other hand were this Agreement to be rejected by the Dail it would be seen as a major boost to the Provos and a mandate by the majority of people's representatives for a continuation, and indeed an escalation, of terrorist activities. In these circumstances, we have come to the conclusion that the lesser of two evils would be to reluctantly vote for the Agreement.***

But I want to impress upon the Taoiseach and the government and on Mrs. Thatcher and the British government the urgent necessity of trying to undo some of the damage that has been done. Unionists need to be reassured that they are not being sold out. The most effective reassurance that could be given to them would be the establishment in Northern Ireland of democratic devolved government. The Coalition has delivered for John Hume and the SDLP. The Taoiseach must now put it up to the SDLP. Tell them publicly to go into the Assembly and to enter into unconditional negotiations with the parties already represented there — the Official Unionists, the DUP and the Alliance — on proposals for the establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland.

This Agreement can only have meaning if it leads to peace and the beginning of political dialogue in Northern Ireland. If it replaces

alienation of Nationalists with alienation of Unionists then the position will be worse than before. Therefore the process of political dialogue must commence with the greatest possible speed. The forum already exists in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Now is the time to use it."

(The Assembly was closed in July 1986).

**FROM THE BELFAST PRESS CONFERENCE
OF THE PARTY'S NORTHERN IRELAND REGIONAL EXECUTIVE**

Today in the Dail The Workers' Party will cast our votes in favour of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

We wish to set out here in Belfast our profound criticisms of the Agreement, our reasons for voting the way we are about to, our concerns for the future of this society, and as always, our concern in particular for the future of our class.

Furthermore we wish to place on record our total opposition to any suggestion that this Anglo-Irish Agreement in any way opens the door to joint sovereignty. Should that ever become the case we will withdraw our support.

The Workers' Party is also seriously concerned with Section C (a) "The advantages and disadvantages of a Bill of Rights in some form in Northern Ireland". Such wording offers little hope for a strong Bill of Rights as demanded by all parties in Northern Ireland and we find it ridiculous that John Hume should endeavour to present this document as a continuation of the Civil Rights struggle. We would point out in passing that the record of the present Coalition government in the Republic on Civil Rights is tawdry. Like Democratic Devolved Government, the Bill of Rights is an issue around which all democratic parties and organisations must unite to demand action from this new Conference.

Let us now turn to Article 10 (a), dealing with economic and social development.

We can only describe this section as an insult to the intelligence of any worker, employed or unemployed, throughout Ireland, or, indeed, Britain. Thatcher has presided over the destruction of the British economy and the longest dole queues since the '30s.

FitzGerald has gone down the same monetarist road and the economy of the Republic is literally coming apart. Are they going to do an economic U-turn? Or are they hoping for goodies from Reagan? And let us ask carefully and concretely, at what price? Is this Island to become a base for Pershing and Cruise missiles?

We also wish to expose the hypocrisy of the DUP and the OUP as they now hurl abuse at Mrs. Thatcher. Isn't this the same lady they supported while she decimated our workforce, slashed the National Health Service, cut the Education service to ribbons, while all the

while enabling her slick capitalist friends to make fortunes on the stock market? Now Paisley, Molyneux, Smith and Robinson want the Northern Ireland working class to follow them down a dark road which, at the end, can only lead to bitter suffering and anguish for our class.

The Workers' Party clearly states that these loudmouthed former close allies of Mrs. Thatcher never had, and never will have, our class interests at heart.

Why, then, is The Workers' Party extremely reluctantly voting in favour of this Agreement? We do so because our programme is based on our slogan Peace, Work, Democracy and Class Politics.

We do not expect job creation from Thatcher, and we know that we will have to continue the struggle for Democracy. But as a Party we demand Peace and we believe that the majority on this island demand Peace. This is what the Anglo-Irish Agreement must deliver in the first instance.

A Critical Situation

The Workers' Party of Ireland has stressed that politics in Northern Ireland were and are deeply influenced by sectarian religious sentiments. It is often hard for people in Britain to understand that a modern largely urban, industrial society has still strong medieval characteristics and that politically it is the forces of reactionary Nationalism and Unionism which virtually maintain these vicious features.

It also has to be recognised that there are no magic wands, no instant recipes, no startling innovations which can change Northern Ireland overnight.

We also stress that our recent history has been dominated by terrorism, masquerading as either a freedom struggle or defence of faith and fatherland.

The Workers' Party of Ireland however identifies terrorism as a totally destructive element operating in the interest of capitalism and imperialism and specifically in Northern Ireland against the interests of the working class.

No account of the current situation can ignore the following problems: intensified religious sectarianism, massive and growing unemployment, reduced but ongoing terrorism, the militarisation of certain geographical urban and rural areas, the continuation of extraordinary legal powers and the absence of a major political forum.

Coupled with these factors is increasing alienation from local political concepts not only among the youthful section of the population but across a broad section of opinion. It is clear that the

growing political vacuum will only be filled by increased violence on a scale surpassing the destruction and murder of the past 17 years or by determined successful efforts to establish democratic political structures in Northern Ireland.

At the moment it is reasonable to state that since the signing of the Agreement there has been a sharp downturn in the political situation throughout Northern Ireland. In recent months there have been a series of brutal sectarian murders and there is widespread fear in the community that the violence could escalate to an unprecedented level. A fear which The Workers' Party has highlighted constantly since early this year.

There can be no doubt that the promotion of a "civil war" situation is the fundamental objective of the Provisionals and The Workers' Party is taking every possible step to frustrate them in this malign objective.

However, the Provisional position is reinforced by the triumphalist abstentionism of the SDLP, and the often repeated statement from various members of their leadership that the "Unionist boil must be lanced".

At the same time the SDLP make a mockery of potential all-party talks by insisting that they are ready to talk at any time and adding that their 'bottom-line' is well known, that is, power sharing.

Of the other Northern Ireland parties Alliance have suffered somewhat from their support for the Agreement but only an election will tell to what extent. They remain anxious to promote talks and must therefore be considered overall a positive factor in the situation.

The two major Unionist parties, the OUP and DUP remain, as far as can be established, firmly committed to opposing the Anglo-Irish Agreement. At times there have been rumours of efforts by the British Government to enable talks-about-talks. But these have either been deliberately frustrated or else the Northern Ireland "backwoodsmen" have tightened their grip on the Unionist leadership.

The gravity of the situation therefore should not be underestimated.

The Workers' Party of Ireland hopes for a British Labour Government

The Workers' Party of Ireland have sent the following statement to the National Executive of the British Labour Party for their consideration. However we feel that it represents a genuine socialist position around which all sections of the British Labour Movement could unite. We ask you to give it your most critical consideration.

Preamble

The Workers' Party of Ireland having concluded widespread talks with many people in various walks of life throughout Northern Ireland — politicians, trade unionists, industrialists and clerics, wish to place the following Ten Point Programme before the National Executive Committee of the British Labour Party for your urgent consideration.

The proposals are designed to secure the Political, Economic and Social Revitalisation of Northern Ireland.

We cannot overstate the grave situation which our people face. In a period of economic crisis we are also threatened by the serious possibility of an outbreak of widespread violence and murder on an unprecedented scale due to the actions of fascist terrorists, demagogic sectarian politicians and the absence of central democratic political institutions. The Workers' Party of Ireland looks forward to working closely with the next British Labour Government in not only securing the aims we have outlined but also to strengthening the relationships between our respective parties and the British and Irish working class in the struggle for Peace, Democracy, Freedom and Socialism.

Ten Point Programme

1. Support for placing the Anglo-Irish Agreement in cold storage in order to enable all Party talks to take place in Northern Ireland;
2. The removal of the Maryfield Secretariat to an uncontentious location to further aid such talks;
3. Support for the establishment of a Democratic Devolved Government either as a result of such talks or as an end product of The Workers' Party proposals for a Democratic Convention comprising all constitutional political parties and democratic organisations working in Northern Ireland.
4. Support for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.
5. Support for The Workers' Party proposal for an All Party Jobs Conference in Northern Ireland; **that the next British Labour Government would give critical priority to;**
6. The declaration of an Economic Emergency in Northern Ireland;
7. The implementation of The Workers' Party Plan for Economic Recovery in Northern Ireland;
8. The establishment of a committee to plan the Integration of Education in Northern Ireland;
9. The complete elimination of fascist terrorism in Northern Ireland and
10. The introduction of a planned approach to the total demilitarisation of Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

The Workers' Party of Ireland seeks the closest possible co-operation with the British Labour Movement in the promotion of the concepts of Peace, Work, Democracy and Class Politics.

We have outlined our long term goal, a democratic, secular, socialist, unitary state — a Republic. We are convinced that this can only be achieved through a democratic class struggle which will defeat all reactionary forces both in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

We are anxious to discuss our proposals with any section of the British Labour Movement seriously concerned to bring about peace and progress in Ireland.

For further information write to:

**The General Secretary, The Workers' Party of Ireland,
30, Gardiner Place, Dublin 1
or
6, Springfield Road, Belfast 12, Northern Ireland.**

GLOSSARY

Alliance Party: A liberal social democratic party founded initially on a "non-sectarian" platform. Welcomed and supports the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Its voters tend to be lower middle and middle class Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Coalition: The present Government in the Republic is made up of the conservative Fine Gael and Labour parties. As regards Northern Ireland they hold a more or less common viewpoint arising from their participation in the Forum (see below).

Fianna Fail: The largest party in the Republic. Strongly pro-American it is also crudely populist and opportunist. Former leading members such as Neil Blaney (Donegal) played a significant role in the founding of the Provisionals. Very Nationalistic.

Forum: The lengthy deliberations by the Nationalist grouping of parties which produced the Forum Report originally rejected by Mrs. Thatcher and now said to be the basis of the Anglo Irish Agreement due to American influence.

OUP/DUP: The Official Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party are Northern Ireland's protestant parties. The former would be more liberal in attitude and their present anti-Agreement pact would probably break down if there was a perceptible shift in the attitudes of the British and Irish governments.

Paisley, Molyneaux, Smith, Robinson: Dr. Paisley is leader of the DUP and Peter Robinson his deputy. James Molyneaux is leader of the OUP and Martin Smyth MP (OUP) is head of the Orange Order.

Provisionals: Founded by a combination of right wing Nationalists, bitter sectarian Roman Catholics and ultra leftists, they have been responsible for most of the terrorist violence in Northern Ireland ranging from the Kingsmill massacre of 10 protestant workmen to the slaughter of individual members of the Police Force and ordinary citizens with whom they disagreed or held to be "guilty of some crime".

SDLP: Northern Ireland's Roman Catholic party essentially Nationalist although they are members of the Socialist International. Their present main strategy is to see "the Unionist boil lanced" and possibly to win another two seats at Westminster.

Shankill & Falls: Two districts in Belfast. The former is a Protestant working class ghetto, the latter Roman Catholic.

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