



THE WORKERS PARTY

PEACE WORK DEMOCRACY
CLASS POLITICS

Presidential Address

**Ard Fheis/Annual
Delegate Conference
1990**

***The Workers' Party
of Ireland
Annual Conference
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**Proinsias De Rossa
T D M.E.P.**

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**by
Proinsias De Rossa. T.D.,M.E.P.,
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Comrades, friends and international guests, welcome to the Ard Fheis (Annual Conference) of the Workers' Party of Ireland. Tonight comrades I have good news and I have bad news. Good news for you and bad news for them.

The good news is that socialism lives; it lives in the hearts of millions of people. It lives as the hope of millions for a better life. To misquote Marx, It is the sigh of the oppressed, the soul of soulless conditions, the heart of a heartless world, .

The bad news is for those who are rushing to bury socialism - There is no corpse for their coffin.

But my intention tonight is not to comfort you with soothing phrases. My intention is to challenge you to greater effort and commitment in a proud cause.

I, no more than anyone else, predicted this time last year that the year ahead of us then would turn out to be so remarkable.

The Berlin wall fell and suddenly the iron curtain of tanks and missiles is redundant.

But before even those extraordinary events took place we notched up our own historic achievements of 7 seats in the Dail, and a seat in the European Parliament.

In my speech at last years' Ard Fheis I urged you to look searchingly at some sacred cows. I know I shocked you with some of the things I said about socialism.

I asked you to debate these questions and you took me at my word. The debate so far has been a brilliant display of people grappling intelligently with immense and complex issues and arriving at conclusions which give new meaning and depth to socialism, creating a new political agenda to take us into the 21st century.

That speech has itself been subject to a degree of sensational reinterpretation in the afterglow of developments in the East. There are those who argue that unless the Workers' Party ditches key elements of our socialist values we will be condemned to a marginal role in Irish politics. We are told that it was only my speech that brought about the conditions of our electoral victories last year. To believe that would be self-delusion. It is a denial of your work and dedication and reduces people generally to the role of passive uncritical consumers of the latest sensation, incapable of making intelligent choices.

It was your dedication and commitment over many years that brought us our victories. They are the end product of hundreds of local achievements by ordinary members, friends and supporters who have cast their lot with us in the battle for a better future. Our strength lies with you and your work with the people. Our strength is in the respect the people have for our party and its integrity.

Socialists of course are optimists. We tend to see the bottle as half full rather than half empty. We can see the marvellous opportunities to give new meaning and substance to our struggles.

Socialism lives, despite Stalinism and despite Thatcherism. Its an ideal that cannot be defeated because it is an idea that is central to the human experience; an aspiration to justice, to freedom from oppression and exploitation. It has flowered in the darkest hours of history in every part of the world. There is no need deeper, no desire stronger than that that cries out for a just world, a world that is based on respect for human values, for equity, co-operation and sharing among citizens. In every society, under every form of repression, the seed of this idea

has taken root, again and again, and struggled forth into the light of day.

The expression of that idea remains a commitment to socialist politics.

Can the would-be gravediggers of socialism - Bush, Thatcher, and let us not forget our own Mr Haughey, parading at the moment across the world stage in his borrowed presidential robes - can they truly imagine that their petty vulgar views of the world have prevailed? - A world where greed is God.

Like all the political barbarians before them, the seedy carpetbaggers now swarming across the face of eastern Europe are hunting for their own advantage. They have no grasp of what has gone before, no idea of the massive suffering and sacrifice of millions, the colossal efforts of each age in turn to push one step closer to human liberation.

It is true that the collapse of the communist regimes, the radical reassessment of Soviet society, and of Soviet history has dealt a mortal blow to those individuals and parties who gave blind uncritical support to the eastern bloc. It is a valid criticism of my Party that we did not more publicly criticise the defects we saw in Communist countries. But it would be totally unprincipled to join the chorus that uses the collapse of Communist regimes to assist those who are trying to deny the need for an alternative to the inhuman capitalist system, which treats the labour of human beings and the resources of the world as the raw material for profit and power.

Many of the socialist arguments against private capitalism remain as powerful in 1990 as they were a century ago. For instance most of the advanced capitalist countries continue to be class-divided societies with extreme inequalities of wealth and power, while the rest of the world remains impoverished and also bears the burden of a crippling debt to the advanced capitalist countries.

The big risk, however, of our current preoccupation is that as the continent of Europe enters a period of political change, unprecedented since the First World War, we will turn inwards towards a greater European chauvinism which turns its back on the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. If already inadequate amounts of Third World aid are depleted to meet the needs of the states in Eastern Europe the 'new dawn' in Europe will come to represent one more nightmare for the majority of people on this planet. Aid and development for the Third World have to be at the centre of the concerns of a broadly progressive European politics. For we must realise what demonstrates most powerfully the conflict between uncontrolled market forces and a decent and sustainable existence for all the people of the world is the treadmill of low prices for primary commodities, massive indebtedness, and poverty and disease for the peoples of Third World States.

No, Socialism is not dead.

What has died is pseudo-socialism, pseudo because it lacked the essential component of democracy; Stalinism is dead. Systems imposed on unwilling people who have never been consulted are dead too and anyone who feels that type of pseudo-socialism can be revived by its pretending to be something else for a while and re-emerging from the ashes like a phoenix, is dead from the neck up.

What we have seen happening in Eastern Europe has been an upsurge of the popular will. We have seen the people take power from the entrenched and corrupt bureaucrats who thought that there could be socialism without democracy; who thought that they knew better than the people what was good for them. What we have been privileged to witness is the birth of a realisation by ordinary working people that they are the real possessors of power if they use it.

It is not just Eastern Europe that has seen great political change in the past year. Nowhere has the change been more dramatic or more welcome than in South Africa. It is now clear that we are witnessing the beginning of the end of the vile and detested

apartheid system. Nelson Mandela is free from his conventional prison. Soon he and his people will be free from the prison of apartheid.

For all their flaws the much criticised Eastern European regimes proved more responsive to popular pressure than many of the states that trumpet their support for the values of the free market. South Africa is, of course, a free market, which has not prevented but in fact is part of the appalling oppression of the vast majority of the people there. Tens of thousands of people have been jailed or killed in Central America by regimes - particularly that in El Salvador - which tolerate no dissent and who are lavishly financed and supported by the U.S. The one beacon of hope for the oppressed in that region, the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, a brave experiment which was massively popular, and which brought significant improvements to the social and economic conditions of Nicaragua was, we know, brought to the verge of collapse by massive military and economic pressure of the United States. The Sandinista government has shown its democratic credentials by handing over power to its opponents.

The United States has also continued to give virtually unqualified support to the Israeli government, and continues to provide the finance and equipment which are being used to oppress the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. More than 700 Palestinian civilians have been killed by Israeli security forces - yet this has received little attention in the most Western countries.

We must not allow our pre-occupation with events in Eastern Europe to blind us of the need to continue to support the just demands of oppressed people in many different parts of the world for freedom and justice.

The people who fought in the East against corrupt politics and for a decent standard of living with equality of opportunities are the same sort of people who in Ireland look in revulsion at the corruption of our planning system by Finanna Fail's section 4s.

Those who opposed the imposition of a single ideology; those who went out on the streets and demanded political pluralism, are the same sort of people who are fighting for pluralism and democracy in Irish society.

The lesson for our age is that Socialism, if it is to succeed, must have democracy as its essence; must base itself first of all on the primary needs of human beings - the need for peace, security, a caring society, and a careful economy. It must have as its primary aim the development of forms of production which no longer regards human beings and the world merely as raw materials to be exploited and no longer fills needs only if there is a profit in it for some one.

In Haughey's Ireland, as in Thatcher's Britain, healthcare is now regarded as a commodity. If you don't have the money you don't get the service; if you do have the money you can have all the treatment you want, and in the lap of luxury too.

Education is now regarded as a commodity. This means that if you have the money you can buy the best education for your children. It means if you don't have the money your children will get a barely adequate education and they will remain poor unless they are lucky or brilliant.

Treating these essential services as commodities, leads inevitably to permanent disadvantage; this is something the marketeers can live with; it is something we socialists can not.

When the market is not under democratic control, it inevitably controls political life. It will dictate to people how they live, their access to learning, to health care and to culture. There are many every day examples of political or popular issues being turned into mere marketable commodities. The most recent example is the 'greening' of business. The advertising agencies have discovered that for business "Green is Good"; so every possible product and retail outlet is being presented in the greenest possible light. Even British Nuclear Fuels, the operators of the deadly dangerous Sellafield Plant, have spent

£20 million advertising nuclear energy as the green alternative to global warming and the greenhouse effect.

In every supermarket, the shelves are stacked with products for which spurious claims are made - about preservatives, artificial colourings - and CFCs. What is needed urgently is a statutory system of environmental labelling, so that the consumer can be sure that claims of environmental friendship are not bogus.

Bogus green labelling of course is not confined to the supermarket shelf. It is also to be found in political life. Mr Haughey and Padraig Flynn have now found a new green flag to wrap around their jaded politics.

While Fianna Fail councillors are abusing their powers to rezone and destroy green belts, and while 21 actions are being taken by the European Community against the Irish Government for failure to implement EC Directives and regulations on the environment, our Taoiseach is marketing himself as the Green President of Europe. A clear case of bogus labelling.

Every time this Government has been faced with a choice of protecting the environment or looking after their propertied friends, they have followed their traditional Fianna Fail instincts and betrayed the environment and the people.

Despite all their artificial hype about the environment it has been the Workers' Party, often acting alone, which has exposed the government's hypocrisy on the issue.

Everybody says it is a scandal that taxpayers money should be used to compensate property speculators who are refused planning permission. But when it came to a vote to abolish planning compensation, the Workers' Party stood alone in the Dail.

When this government caved in to the demands of the IFA to weaken the Water Pollution Bill, it was the Workers' Party which cried halt! It was we who exposed the deficiencies in the

Derelict Sites Bill. It was we who pointed out the defects in the Building Control Bill. It was we who forced the Dail Debate on the allegations of corruption in the planning system in Dublin. At European level, we have established that for all their talk the government and the other major parties have failed to make an international issue of Sellafield, or to raise our worries about the Irish Sea being used as a playground for nuclear submarines.

Any independent examination of the Dail record, or Council minutes or anywhere the Workers' Party is organised and active, will show that on a whole range of environmental issues, from the Greenland White-fronted Goose, to our architectural heritage, it is the Workers' Party which is giving the political lead, advancing reasoned and well informed argument, as an integral part of our socialist political philosophy.

We know that the resources of the world are not infinite. If they are not conserved and renewed, life itself on this planet will be threatened. And, if they are not fairly distributed then our fellow humans die of hunger.

We insist that you can not address environmental issues without taking account of social and economic issues, and those who attempt to do so are dishonest and are as phoney as some of our Government Ministers. You can not halt the destruction of the South American rain forest, or the land of Africa, without addressing the problem of Third World poverty and development. The conservation and renewal of resources, goes hand in hand with the distribution of resources.

And, closer to home, Dublin's smog can not be solved simply by Pdraig Flynn's imperious command to the poor "Let them burn coalite". The Workers' Party supports the ban on smoky coal, but that can only be achieved in the short term by providing conversion grants for smokeless fuel systems and by subsidising low smoke fuels. But we must also seriously address the question of energy conservation.

The point I am making is that any strategy for the environment which takes a narrow or single-issue approach will fail. People are part of the environment and it is by recognising this fact that the Workers' Party position distinguishes itself from other parties. We say the environment is where we live, where we work, and where we play. Our concern is not confined to Green-label issues. Homelessness, overcrowding in family homes, neighbourhood and community facilities; in short the quality of life is on our environmental agenda.

Everybody is rightly outraged at the local authorities discharging raw sewage into our rivers and seas. But we are also outraged that 3,000 local authority houses are still without an indoor toilet, that 8,000 have no bathroom, and that many of our elderly people are living in damp, dilapidated, badly maintained houses. When we consider the issue of global warming and climate change, we should not forget what it is like to spend a winter's night in a caravan or in an old house with rotten windows and doors.

Unemployment and emigration are environmental issues, and anybody who is in any doubt should examine what lack of jobs and emigration can do to the social environment of urban communities, and has done to rural villages. Those who suggest therefore, that economic development and the provision of employment are without exception enemies of the environment, are pursuing an agenda which is ultimately as selfish as the industrialist who destroys the environment for personal gain.

The Workers' Party believes in the concept of sustainable economic development, whereby resources are used and renewed, not for greed and gain, but to provide the means to live for all people. In a nutshell Irish economic policy must be grounded in good environmental practice. It makes good economic and environmental sense to develop Ireland as a European Centre for good clean and organically produced food, and as the prime location for environment friendly industry.

NORTHERN IRELAND

It is obvious to everyone that there is sharp contrast between the pace of events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and the rigidity of ideologies and mentalities in Northern Ireland.

But we need to be careful about what we make of this contrast. It is pure opportunism for Mr Haughey to use developments in Eastern Europe, as he did in his recent Ard Fheis speech, to score points against Unionist paralysis. In the aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision in the McGimpsey case, which established in the minds of many unionists that the Irish government have a 'legal imperative' to pursue the destruction of the Northern Ireland state, Mr Haughey's complacent refusal to contemplate the necessary constitutional changes to withdraw the territorial claim on Northern Ireland in fact demonstrates a corresponding nationalist paralysis. It also demonstrates the hollowness of his verbal glasnost and perestroika in relation to Northern Ireland.

Some Unionist politicians of course also invoke "people power" to justify their own unwillingness to reassess the value of the policy of simply saying 'no' to everything. They are encouraged no doubt by the leader of the SDLP who continues to skilfully use the rhetoric of Europeanism to dress up a traditional nationalist agenda. John Hume is prepared to talk to what he calls his "Protestant fellow Irishmen". But his own perception of them is a remarkably narrow one which consistently refuses to call them British and excludes most of their affiliations to the other island.

Recently, Mr Haughey's famous "Open Door" to the Protestant people of this island was found to be tightly locked when it was put to the test. This year 1990 is the 300th anniversary of a most significant event in the history of the Protestant people here - the victory of King William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne. A committee to commemorate this event sought help from the Taoiseach over the past year and had been repeatedly snubbed.

But the political implications of the Taoiseach's attitudes, and of the hostile attitude of Fianna Fail and even some Labour public representative in the Louth and Meath area to the commeration, is of far greater significance. We are constantly told by nationalists and particularly by Mr Haughey how "both traditions and both cultures in our island" will be respected in a United Ireland. Can we blame the Protestant people if they become increasingly cynical of such remarks when they see the tiny minority of Protestants in the South treated in such a shameful and hostile manner. One wonders could Fianna Fail really accept a United Ireland?

It is clear that the nationalist parties in the Republic and the SDLP in Northern Ireland, who signed the Report of the New Ireland Forum still need to go much further down the road of harsh and self-critical reassessment of Ireland's nationalist and catholic political culture. That is why the issue of Articles 2 and 3 is so important. Nobody is suggesting that the repeal of these articles would bring about a significant change in Unionist attitudes or that the Provos would be influenced by such a change. These articles should go as a matter of basic good neighbourliness and for the health of our political system in the South which has lived too long with the self-deceptions of De Valera's constitution.

It is my view that all democrats in the Republic must now cooperate in securing the deletion of these Articles. Their claim is fundamentally undemocratic, and it is clear that they have become an obstacle to democratic political progress in Northern Ireland. Surely it is time that the people of the Republic acknowledged, with good will and honour, that it is the people of Northern Ireland, working together, who must define their own political agenda, and their own constitutional position? We must give those who believe in democratic politics the political space they need to develop political structures which respect all the legitimate aspirations of the people of Northern Ireland.

What I am to argueing for is the need to look at the politics and political culture of the Republic from which Articles 2 and 3 are derived. What do they imply about the way we think? What

we are saying in Articles 2 and 3 is that there is unfinished business. That what started in 1916 has not been completed, and that we want to extend the sovereignty of this State - to cover Northern Ireland.

We must seriously ask ourselves as a people what is the basis for such an approach to the politics of this island? Surely we recognise that the economic, social and political conditions which exist today in Ireland, in Britain and in Europe are not the same as those which existed in 1916. It is not good enough for nationalists simply to refer to the Forum Report and say they will be generous to Protestants in a united Ireland, when all the evidence points in the other direction.

The Forum did not address the fundamental question of why we are demanding in our constitution a united Ireland which in turn gives sustenance to people like the Provos to murder, maim, and destroy.

It is high time that we questioned the Nationalist position, before the 'dance macabre' starts next year on the 75th anniversary of 1916. We must clear our minds for the compromises which are necessary if people are to live and work in peace with each other on these islands. Whatever denials or denunciations we may make, the most potent weapon the Provos have, apart from their capacity to murder and destroy, is their appeal to Nationalist myths and culture which state: "We are only finishing the unfinished business of 1916", and which in turn causes so much confusion among ordinary people who abhor what the Provisionals are doing.

It is also the firm belief of The Workers' Party that there is an urgent need to bring about integrated education immediately. Such progress is vital if the scourge of sectarianism is not to be further entrenched in yet another generation of Northern Ireland school-children. Implementing such a policy will not be easy. The physical segregation of people into Catholic and Protestant geographical areas is certainly an obstacle. Nevertheless, there are large sections of the population which have not been driven into ghettos based on religion, where a

policy of integrated education could help ensure that schoolchildren are not inculcated with religious apartheid.

We must now give new thinking a chance, or we will continue to be confronted in the nineties with the traditional catchcries and postures which condemn us to be the puppets of those who can organise gruesome murders.

The aspiration of our party, the unity of the people of this island in their common struggle for a better life, has a far better prospect of succeeding if we can remove all barriers which cause insecurity, inflame a siege mentality, and which threaten the democratic rights of Northern society.

The rights the Workers' Party claims for Northern Ireland are to peace, and devolved government, and to full and participative democracy. This and other strategies can ultimately break down sectarian divisions, facilitate new political alignments and unite the entire civilised community against terrorism and murder.

At this point in our history, it is the common cause of people which must take precedence over territorial imperatives. We, all of us, must break loose from the outdated stranglehold of narrow sectarian nationalism with its old-fashioned notions of geographical jurisdictions and so called national territories. We must prepare for a world in which tolerance and pluralism and the power of democracy are the dominant values.

EXTRADITION

The other key aspect of Articles 2 and 3 and recent Supreme Court decisions is that relating to extradition. I contend that the ambivalence regarding extradition represented by Fianna Fail in the main, though not exclusively so, links back into the confused thinking about Irish unity.

Let me put the Workers' Party position on the line. Those who kill, maim, and destroy, by bomb or bullet and claim to be doing it to achieve a united Ireland have no mandate from the people of the Republic or from the people of Northern Ireland, and should

be extradited to face trial whether or not they can sustain a claim to political motivation. It is for us the people, through our elected representatives, to legislate to ensure that there are no Bolt Holes. Our extradition laws must be amended without delay, not only to allay the suspicions and fears of people in Northern Ireland, but also to restore the self-respect of people in the Republic of Ireland. There are more than enough safeguards built into our laws to protect the rights of the innocent. We must stop the self deception and face the reality of the cancer in our body politic represented by the Provo IRA.

Ni hionnann an naisiunachas agus naisuintacht.

Ta naisuintoiri fe leith ag iarraidh a chur i gceill nach bhfuil meas ag Pairti na nOibri i gcultur gaelach, sa teanga gaelach agus ceol na hEireann os rud e gur dhultaigh muid an dunmharu an foreigeann agus an naisuineachas cung ata thaobh thiar de meon na naisiuntori seo.

Cuireann se fearg orm an breag seo a chloisteail, nach Eireannaigh ceart muid, na einne eile muna naontaionn muid le polaitaiocht an naisuinachais. Caithfear a ra fresin co laidir agus is feidir, nach ga gaeillge bheith ar do chumas chun go mbeadh tu i do Eireannaich.

Ar ndoigh, ta droch stad ar an Gailge, agust ta droch-mheas ag a lan ar ceoil, cultur agus cluichi Gaelacha mar go bhfuil siad ro-ceangailte le naisiunachas.

Ag an bpointe seo, agus muid ag druidim i dtreo aos nua agus Eorap aontaithe, caithfidh muid beim nua a chur ar chuire gne de chultur an phobal agus ni amhain ar an gne gaelach. Caithfidh an beim bheith bunaithe ar eagsulacht seachas an dearcadh cung coimeadach. Mar shampla beidh muid uilig ag suil le bua ag foirean Jackie Charlton san Iodail i gceann miosa, agus ardaionn se an ceist nach bhfuil se in am don Cumann Luthcleas Gaeil Pairc an Chrocaigh agus pairceanna eile a chur ar fail do cluichi sacair. Ma ta siad oiriunach do Michael Jackson agus Prince

(agus ta) cen fath nach ligfidh do leitheid Packie Bonner agus Ronnie Whelan imirt orthu?

DEMOCRACY, WORK AND INCOME

The WP has for some years advocated a policy which would provide people with a guaranteed minimum income. Our commitment to the idea stems from our conviction that work and income must be re-distributed on a democratic basis. We see the guaranteed income as a means of effecting such a redistribution, of freeing talents that are now either wasting or emigrating.

The ideological opposition to this is enormous; it is rooted in the negative, puritanical view that human nature is feckless and wicked, and that even a base level of financial security will result in a society of lotus-eating idlers. Curiously it seems this belief only applies to the poor.

The entire history of human endeavour and civilisation has proved otherwise. Work - whether well or badly paid, or not paid at all - is central and necessary to most people's lives; much of society's most important work is undertaken voluntarily and enthusiastically. Just look at how half of the human race, the women of this world, whose social and domestic work is unpaid. In Ireland, for instance, successive generations have emigrated in droves in search of work. The instinct to work, to put our hands and minds to tasks, to learn skills and apply them, to solve problems, to produce and to accomplish, is a central part of what we are.

It is one of the great unnoticed facts of real life, in this country and elsewhere, that there is no way our society could survive without the services of 10s of thousands of people who give their time, their energy, their imagination and ingenuity to the work that needs to be done around them.

This has surprisingly little to do with pay or resources. The Minister for Health knows well that the only reason that hospitals and health care services he has starved so ruthlessly of funds are ticking over at all is because the workers in these

services give more, and then more again, of their care and their skills to meet the increasing demands upon them.

The Minister for Education knows that the educational system has been cynically weighted in favour of the children of an elite. But the governing parties of each day shirk from confronting the vested interests that dictate that some of our children shall be cherished with an education and the rest shall be denied.

And what of the other, unpaid services government rely on? The manner in which the people with handicaps in our society have been deprived of funds that would even provide them with shelter, let alone the help and training they need to play a role in the community, is nothing short of criminal. The overwhelming and often impossible task of providing adequate care for the handicapped has been callously left to parents already overburdened, and to the voluntary groups whose members work selflessly for what we have come to describe as "causes".

Is "cause" the correct word for any human need? Why should these people or the rape victims, the battered and deserted wives, the people who cannot pay lawyers to assist them to secure their rights be regarded as objects of charity rather than citizens whose rights have been violated?

Yet year after year as the Budget approaches, we must witness the frantic begging by statutory and voluntary organisations for the miserable allotment of money that keeps a few low paid workers staffing the services. None of these services could survive at all without the unseen army of volunteers who give of themselves and their time, pounding on doors raising funds.

We have only to look at any community across Ireland to see the same phenomenon in action, every day. It is the commitment of people that keeps the schools equipped, that runs community games, opens community centres, organises the sports and recreation and leisure facilities, looks after the elderly, the handicapped. Without these people, our streets would be in chaos. Yet what power have they? They must go, cap in hand, to

ask for decisions, assemble their petitions and organise their deputations, and then wait for the wheels of bureaucracy to crank into action, wait for a dictatorial "yes" or "no" - and like as not, accept humbly and gratefully considerably less than what they need, which drives them out again onto the merry-go-round of fund raising.

We are seeking a new form of democracy. We are approaching the end of the first century in history that has seen the idea of democracy implemented on a wide scale. We have only recently marked the bicentenary of the French revolution which gave us the principles of that form of government which would provide not only equality for all citizens, but liberty, in the spirit of mutual trust, and sharing and co-operation, in the spirit of fraternity.

Society is still in an experimental stage with this idea, and it is not surprising that the forms that have evolved to date have now been found wanting. This hardly means that democracy has failed, but people everywhere are drawing the conclusion that they want more than a token formula of consultation, more than a system that allows no expression of will apart from the occasional vote in restricted circumstances.

The concept of participative democracy is based on the principle that people must be given power to make decisions and implement them at all levels of society. Control must no longer be in the hands of the few in the elite corps in government, it must be placed in the hands of those who actually make this country work.

We want real and meaningful democracy which gives people power in politics, in economics, in their community, at home and at work. Which gives real choices and real involvement. Which caters for the individual and strengthens the community, which supports individuality and personal rights; and which scorns individualism and personal greed. Which makes co-operation more important than competition and takes us beyond the need to exploit each other in our economic and social affairs.

INDUSTRIAL POLICY

It is one of the great ironies of Irish politics that the most significant obstacle to socialism in Ireland is the abject failure of native Irish capitalism. The mass of the Irish working class have historically emigrated, lived in poverty or were fortunate enough to work in the public service or in recent decades in the multi-national sector. The wasteland of native industry is populated for the most part by speculators, gombeen men and various other chancers. Their failure has been of monumental proportions. It is another irony of Irish life that this class of would-be entrepreneurs have survived only in a cocoon of grants, subsidies, tax breaks and aid from state agencies and who view the free market with as much, if not more, trepidation than they view socialism.

This brings me to the subject of the commercial state sector in Ireland which has to be a primary component in our efforts to realise economic prosperity. Viewed historically the development of state industry in Ireland represents yet another irony. Most state enterprises were set up to provide a service which the private sector was incapable or unwilling to provide or as in the case of transport, or the more recent example of Dublin Gas, to bail out private shareholders, and to protect them from market forces. As soon as these enterprises resume profitability under public ownership some pretence will be found for giving them back to the speculators. This, according to Mr Haughey and Mr O'Malley, is a pragmatic approach uncluttered by ideology. And that is the final irony. They will look after their wealthy friends at all costs. And so it is left to us to provide a rational analysis of the state sector and to plot an economically coherent strategy for the development of public enterprises.

They should be kept in public ownership, both for the future stream of profits (which is seldom mentioned) and for their economic developmental role. It is important to realise that we are not just talking about mere money, but about important tools for the future development of the Irish economy. To allow some of the leading public enterprises to be sold off, inevitably

to foreign control, in spite of verbal "guarantees", is illogical. This is particularly true of 'Irish Life' which is the largest investor in the state, after the state itself, and which has more shares in all the companies on the Irish stock exchange than any other enterprise and could control most of these companies if it so desired. Think of the economic power which will be given away if this company is privatised.

Democracy must flourish within these enterprises and not just for its own sake but in pursuit of the goal of economic growth. There must be in these companies a genuine form of partnership between government workers, and management in the service of the community. This process of participation will create as much trauma for managers unwilling to relinquish a monopoly on decision making as it will for trade unions who have traditionally clung to reactive and defensive positions.

The essence of socialism is not consultation but democratic participation. The objective of socialism is co-operations not conflict. This is the democratic model which must be developed first in the publicly owned companies and later in the wider industrial sector as a necessary requirement for growth and as model of public control and social partnership which will in time supercede the conservative models of state ownership and control. Workers and their representatives must also become more innovative in asserting control over economic affairs. To this end workers must demand that they have more control over their pension funds which comprise a large segment of investment funding in the economy and where the potential exists for new and more sophisticated forms of social ownership of the means of production.

The state sector has to be the catalyst for economic growth and must be allowed the freedom to expand and develop and must be permitted by the political establishment to take risks. In order to develop, state enterprises must first develop linkages with other allied industrial sectors. They must become dynamic. They must become assertive. Ultimately the technologically advanced companies in public ownership must become producers and not just consumers of technology. They must

become the national champions. The reality is that they are the only candidates for this role.

WOMEN

There is a lot of lip service paid to women in Irish society, ranging from the patronising to the glib.

It is true that sexist attitudes and language has become increasingly unacceptable, although I detect a cynicism amongst women that its just a trendy fad, and a smokescreen to hide the stark facts about how women are really treated.

And what are these stark facts? 2% of FAS apprentices are women; women control 10% of all income, while doing 90% of unpaid work; 30% of all Irish women live in poverty; women get on average 40% less in their pay packet than men; 70% of women are dependent on the state for an income.

Our society continues to tolerate a situation where £600 a week can be spent to keep a young woman in prison while our government refuses to fund remedial teaching when she is in school, provide work for her when she leaves school or give her unemployment assistance when she can't get work. And her misery is not relieved one iota by the knowledge that the state will address her as Ms instead of Mrs or Miss. It is time the gloves were taken off in the struggle for the dignity of women.

There is a struggle to be fought specifically for the rights of women, but this must be done in tandem with the battle to liberate from poverty, ignorance and degradation, every person, every man, every woman, and every child.

Such a struggle, in order to be successful, and in order to be able to hold gains made, must be linked closely to a struggle for democracy in the real sense; a democracy that gives power to people about how they live, and where they live, how they work, and where they work, power in the local schools, and control of the local health and community services.

LOCAL DEMOCRACY.

That of course is the kind of local democracy which central government does not intend to allow us. The fundamentally anti democratic decision to postpone yet again the local elections, allegedly to review local government structures is a cynical exercise in political gamesmanship. It is also a device to enable Fianna Fail controlled councils clear the backlog of rezoning for their speculator friends.

Whatever structures are proposed by the governments' review committee you can be certain of one thing, central government will not allow people to have real power, real participation in local government.

1992

Depending on your politics you can see 1992 and the Single European Act as the end of the world or as the dawn of a new European civilisation. I take neither the apocalyptic nor the utopian view but I do see it as our chance to start a new life in Europe instead of living on charity. The objective of a single market in 1992 is part of the ongoing process of powerful forces in western Europe preparing to catch up and to compete with the USA and Japan. That process of course is not happening in a vacuum. There are many contending industrial and financial interests in the member states battling to protect this or that privilege, this or that market segment.

There are 2 main areas where we need to exert influence to ensure that the Irish people are partners in Europe and not the 'down at heel' relations. The first concern again has to be democracy - the necessity to ensure that the social constraints on capital, such as they are at member state level, are maintained and strengthened at European level. Hence the necessity for a social charter of citizens rights, and the need to enhance the powers of the European Parliament. There has been so much gobbledegook and double talk about this issue that it is necessary for some straight talk now. The Irish government has sold out on the social charter, and despite the best efforts of our group in Europe, the Left Unity Group, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament has compromised on this issue also.

But it is still possible to recover the ground lost providing all the progressive parties and social organisations in Europe develop a strategy of political and trade union action to ensure a real social dimension is developed in the community.

The second area concerns European political union, and foreign policy generally. The Workers' Party is favourably disposed in principle to a federal Europe. But the political context of such an arrangement has yet to be debated in Ireland. The current president of the European Council, Mr Haughey, declares quite brazenly that he is speeding up European Political Union, while only 2 months ago he refused to allow the Dail establish a foreign affairs committee which would address that important issue amongst others, and would ensure that we are not led by the nose.

I am quite certain that the Union Mr Haughey would accept would not be acceptable to me or my party, and we represent a sizable proportion of the Irish electorate. But what is totally unacceptable is his refusal to lay his governments proposals before the Irish parliament to have them discussed, agreed or amended if necessary.

If his remarks about Irish neutrality being no longer relevant to the Europe of today are anything to go by, I am quite certain that we have cause to be seriously concerned.

That does not mean that Irish neutrality must be wrapped in cotton wool and labelled 'untouchable'. We have enough 'untouchable dogmas' without adding to them. What is needed is a national debate about how Irish neutrality can be of value in today's Europe; about how an alliance of neutral and non-aligned states could influence the creation of a non nuclear Europe; how the redundant Warsaw and NATO Alliances can be stood down; how the iron curtain of tanks and missiles can be dismantled; how a united Germany can also be neutral and demilitarised as a step on the road to a neutral demilitarised Europe.

The opportunity is there for us, as the only neutral country in the European Community at present, to lead in a new direction

instead of falling into step with the frightened and bewildered generals who have lost an enemy and are desperately trying to find new ones. More specifically we should ensure that Ireland is associated with the group of neutral and non-aligned states, when the Helsinki II Conference takes place later this year.

JOBS/ECONOMY

Miracles in Ireland, even minor ones, it seems are confined to stone statues and phenomenal profits. But while our phantom statues at least gave birth to some work in tourism, the soaring profits of business and industry seem destined to be barren. I daresay the £2,000 million extracted from the Irish economy by the multi-nationals and sent home to their parents in the past year will create some work for our emigrants albeit in Germany and the USA.

The real Irish miracle however is that the conservative parties in Ireland still retain so much support amongst working people and their families.

We have entered the 1990s with almost a quarter of a million unemployed and more people emigrating than at any time since the disastrous 1950s. What work does exist is increasingly part-time, temporary, casual or seasonal.

But this is not new nor is it new to hear the decendants of William Martin Murphy claim that a guaranteed minimum wage would put them out of business. The crisis in Irish employment has been a recurrent crisis ever since the turn of the century. The most remarkable statistic is that there are now fewer people at work in Ireland than there was when the state was founded in 1922. This however is not a miracle, it is the child of the marriage of gombeen business and parish pump politics, which has failed to provide us with a civic or a national sense, and which, with few exceptions sniggers at the idea of excellence in industry, science and the arts, preferring instead to fiddle the taxman.

The Workers' Party insists that it is not sufficient to plead that Ireland is a small country, that it lacks resources, or that it is

a helpless victim of international circumstances. There are many other small European economies which were less developed than Ireland at the beginning of the century but which now enjoy standards of living and levels of employment which are the envy of the world. The record of Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark provides decisive proof that the notion of a small prosperous economy is by no means a pipe-dream as the 21st century beckons. It is time to stop whinging about visas in Boston and social services in Camden town, and get down to creating jobs at home.

The Workers' Party will shortly launch a new industrial policy, which is currently at discussion stage, as our contribution to the urgent problem of job creation. It will be a radical new departure and will be based on the existence of a mixed economy, with a massive reallocation of the nations resources, financial, organisational and institutional. It will require able and courageous political leadership with a breath of vision which has hitherto been absent from government's and industry's approaches to this problem. It will require a partnership of public and private enterprise, implementation of industrial democracy and the development of a European industrial policy which would assist peripheral regions to develop indigenous industry instead of depending on mobile investment as a main plank of development.

CONCLUSION

Our commitment to socialism is not based on the attraction of an abstract Utopia. We are socialists because we believe that socialism offers the best hope of meeting the economic, social and cultural needs of humanity.

It is inconceivable that when we can produce more food we should throw it away; that when we can run factories without debasing workers we should debase them; that when we have found the leisure time to be more creative in we should turn ourselves into mindless junkies; that when we have learnt to master nature, we should not let nature put out its thousand

blooms; that when we have reached the summit of individual freedom we should not be working for the common good.

It is inconceivable for us socialists that we should now fail when we have it within our grasp to harness all the great and simple things that make us human: loyalty, solidarity, camaraderie, to make life good for all the people on our planet.

As Socialists our party must find practical ways of resolving contemporary problems

- * How can those who sell their labour control the processes of production?
- * How do we reconcile development with the environment?
- * How do we achieve a modern secular democracy in Ireland?
- * How do we restructure the relationship between the developed and the developing countries?
- * How do we resolve the acute contradiction between the Nation-State and growing internationalism?
- * How do we achieve full equality and dignity for women?

These are the major areas of work for Socialists in our contemporary world. Most people will nod approval that these are indeed areas that deserve our attention. To tackle them we will be taking on the most powerful vested interests in the world.

Since we first had a TD elected to the Dail nine years ago, The Workers' Party has brought a new dimension to Irish politics - probably the first genuine breath of political fresh air to sweep the corridors of Leinster House since the foundation of the State. We have demonstrated our unqualified commitment to working people in this country, not just by resolutely opposing the appalling policies of successive governments, but by offering clear political alternatives in almost every area.

And our support has grown. In every election since 1981, we have increased our share of the vote. The people have responded to our policies because they recognise that we are not prisoners of the past but that the future is our priority.

Together we have built the foundations of a great party that has made truly great strides in a remarkably short period. We must continue our work to develop our party and our policies, so that people in every city, town and village will have an opportunity to join us and work with us.

Providing we continue to apply the dedication we have shown in the last ten years, we can change for ever the face of Irish politics, sweep aside the civil war divisions and offer the people of this island a challenging role in creating a modern Ireland.

Title: Presidential Address
Organisation: Workers' Party
Author: Proinsias De Rossa
Date: 1990

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