

Dear Comrades,

In light of the current review of the party constitution, the production of a new party programme and the debate generated by this process, we as individual members of the party wish to make our contribution to this on-going development.

We feel that the best manner in which we can put forward our views is through compiling a substantial submission in which we analyse the present condition of the party and advocate a broad direction for the future. We stress that we do not see our submission as a ready made "line" indeed, this would be impossible since we do not agree ourselves on all matters of theory or indeed policy, but we do agree on our desire to see the Workers' Party developing as a mass, campaigning socialist party.

Since our submission will not be completed until late October at the earliest we forward for your consideration a summary of the main ideas contained. We would be grateful if you would advise us as to the manner in which we can put our final submission to the leadership and membership of the party.

We would point out that this summary contains the main concepts of our submission but most of the detail is missing.

FOR A MASS CAMPAIGNING SOCIALIST PARTY

In a nutshell, we argue that we need to develop the potential role of our party so that it becomes the instrument through which ordinary people transform society. This, we believe, faces us with two major tasks.

- (a) To clearly outline our long term goal: that there is a real alternative to capitalism: a fully democratised society where ordinary people have maximum control over all aspects of life whether economic, social or political. In other words, socialism!
- (b) To link this long term goal in a realistic manner with our present day practise. This will require changing, strengthening or developing our structures, organisation and activities as the need arises.

We outline below the main ideas contained in our submission grouped in "the chapters" we have divided the document into.

INTRODUCTION: THE PARTY AT A CROSSROADS

The party is now at a crossroads. We successfully moved from nationalism to socialism. Now we must clearly assert exactly what we mean by socialism and relate that to our practise.

Our present situation holds both dangers and opportunities: We do not argue for either pessimism or optimism just sober assessment. We did make gains during the 80s but by no means did we come close to becoming a mass party capable of mobilising workers to change society.

The main danger we face at the moment is a gradual inadvertant drift into becoming a simple electoral machine along classic social democratic lines. The development can only lead in one direction: the spectre of the party joining a coalition which only strengthens the hegemony of the wealthy elite in society and finally the disappearance of the party as a separate entity. There is no need for two social democratic parties in Ireland.

However, we are convinced that the Workers' Party is the only organisation that has the potential of being that democratic and revolutionary force

needed to transform society. We have, after all a strong campaigning tradition stretching back to the 1960's even though this has been neglected in recent years. Most importantly the members of the Workers' Party from the branch up to the CEC undoubtedly are firmly committed to the possibility of constructing a clear alternative to capitalism. The problem arises in linking this to our present day activities.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THEORY:

Theory is not the preserve of academics nor a domain for those who like intellectual games. In the final analysis it dictates practise. There is a problem with the Workers' Party in this context in that while we have termed ourselves a Marxist Party in the broadest sense, we have neglected theory much to our detriment. This is illustrated in the following manner:

- * The extent to which we tackle different problems, policy questions etc. they arise rather than from any clear theoretical perspective.
- * The lack of any major analysis of the structure of Irish society today, by the party.
- * The very patchy provision of internal education and debate.

It is important that theory does not become an area of debate for a small section of enthusiasts with the rest of the membership ignoring it in favour of 'practical activity'.

CLASS IN IRELAND:

Unlike some socialists who seem to have abandoned the notion of class politics, we still see the question of class as central to our politics. How could it be otherwise when we see the reality of class rule in our society. Having stated that we must add 3 provisos.

- * Class is not the only dychotomy which divides society. People identify with their sex, nationality, region, lifestyle etc. and this must be taken into account.
- * Secondly the working class is not one undifferentiated mass but a large and complex social grouping containing many groups and also contradictions and different interests.
- * The concept of hegemony is crucial for any party seeking to transform society. We must see that the elite controls society through many channels and we must not confine our 'struggle' to the purely electoral and ignore the economic, cultural, communications spheres.

The above points have major implications not just of a theoretical nature but also in dictating our activities.

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Our present position is not unique. Socialists throughout the world face the same problems and we would do well to consider their experiences.

- * Clearly the crisis of the 'socialist' states has undermined completely the view of socialism as a command economy and one party state. It has also raised serious questions about the methods aims and structures of communist parties in Western as well as Eastern Europe. Serious problems can now be seen with the leninist model of the party.

* It would be a grievous mistake to see the Social Democratic model as a real alternative. This is not to deny the achievements of Social Democratic governments in the past nor to take an ultra-leftist view of the necessity for reforms. The crucial question is what type of reforms: top-down reforms which stabilise capitalism or bottom up reforms which push frontiers of democracy forward as the wealthy retreat.

It must be stated that Social Democracy has failed. One needs only to look at the ugly spectacle of Gonzales in Spain efficiently implementing the agenda of the right and abandoning any attempt to give working people the economic/social power he promised.

* There is a real alternative developing: this is not in any sense a new international but a broad sweep of parties, TUs social movements which see a socialist and democratic transformation of society carried out by the mass of ordinary people as possible. In W. Europe this view is held by as diverse a collection of forces as the left wing of many Social Democratic parties, the socialist wing of the Green parties, sections of the C.P.s (left wing of the PCI) and closer to home, the democratic left in the British Labour Party especially the ILP.

In Eastern Europe there is a growing new left arguing for an alternative to both the failed old system as well as the new monster of rampant capitalism. This left is found both within existing CPs (especially the PDS in Germany) but also outside: All-Russian Socialist Party and Left Unity (GDR). Outside of Europe, the Brazilian Workers' Party is an outstanding example of a mass peoples party committed to a vision of a truly democratic socialist future and combining the skills and views of Marxists, radical christians, left environmentalists, Trade Unionists etc leading to massive electoral gains as well as mobilising millions.

There is a new left rising out of the ashes of the old and we should not ignore this.

SOCIALISM TODAY

This brings us to the core question: What do we mean by socialism today? Obviously we must necessarily address this in general terms but some basic principles can be outlined.

* Socialists aspire to the transformation of society by ordinary people (not on their behalf). It may seem a bit obvious but it needs to be stated again that socialists believe an alternative to capitalism is possible in all spheres of society. If one does not see the possibility of an end to capitalism in the long term, one can hardly term oneself a socialist.

* DEMOCRACY: We believe that a socialist society is a truly democratic society. This means not only the radical democratisation of the political but economic and cultural spheres also.

* SOCIALISED ECONOMY: We see a socialised economy as the basis of socialism. The working people must own and control the economic sphere. How this is achieved can vary although various forms of popular social ownership seem to be the ideal structure (varying from workers co-ops and democratic state companies to self employment). As to the vexed question of the market we see the market mechanism as continuing to exist but too often the word is synonymous with capitalist economic relations and 'market socialism' only a cover for reformed capitalism.

* CLASS We still see the key obstacle to socialist transformation as the wealthy class which controls society today. Conversely, we see the working class in its broadest sense as the vehicle of transformation. We do not hold a simplistic view of the nature of that class nor do we accept the current fashion of dismissing the traditional working class as irrelevant. Class is still the key dichotomy in capitalist society.

* MARXISM: As already stated, we view Marxism as a tradition which broadly speaking informs our analysis of society. Marx's analysis of capitalism and subsequent works which cover such a wide range of spheres are still of immense value. We do not of course dismiss other 'schools' of socialist thought from which we can learn much.

* WOMEN: We cannot see socialism only in terms of the end of class rule. Women suffer a specific oppression from men which transcends class. Patriarchy must be a target of ours as much as capitalism (of course there are close linkages)

* ENVIRONMENT: Socialists traditionally viewed the question of the earth's environment as one of control. Once the mechanism was in the hands of the people unlimited exploitation of natural resources was possible. We now know this was simply untrue and the protection and careful development of our planet's environment is essential. However, capitalism is the main culprit of the drama again and a clear linkage must be made by the left.

These are just a few extremely brief and underdeveloped ideas which hopefully give a flavour of what socialism means to us. The most crucial factor of all now arises. What are the practical implications for our party if we align our theory with practise?

THE MASS CAMPAIGNING SOCIALIST PARTY: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.

Political practise must not only reflect our ideological viewpoint, it must prefigure the type of society we wish to create. You cannot achieve real democracy through undemocratic activities. You cannot achieve equality by elitist means, nor destroy dependency by making people dependent on you. This does not mean that there will not always be contradictions between the final goal and present activity but a practise leading in totally opposite direction to long term aims is a recipe for disaster.

1. Practise

Firstly, we must look at our political practise: the day to day activities we engage in:

* CAMPAIGNING This we feel is the key to our future. We must make campaigning our major political activity but we must be specific about what we mean. Campaigning should mobilise ordinary people, should empower them and indeed reveal the contradictory nature of our society. We must not see campaigns simply as a means of gaining electoral support although without doubt campaigns do have the beneficial effect of increasing electoral support. We can show through campaigning that it is possible for ordinary people to have and demand real control over their lives.

* ELECTIONS It is an unfortunate fact that the Workers' Party is in some ways falling into the trap of becoming an electoral machine. Everything becomes subordinated to the goal of electoral success. Indeed it becomes a goal in itself.

We must break from this dependence and pursue a clear dual strategy: campaigning on the ground to empower ordinary people and for bottom up reforms and at the same time firmly link this with the struggle to gain increased electoral success at a local and national level. We must stress the point in no way do we oppose electoral activity, it is its present domination to the exclusion of campaigning that we question. A mass campaigning party would be electorally successful but this success would be based on a firm foundation.

* CLIENTELISM: We must first recognise that clientelism is an inescapable fact of Irish political life. To cease holding Advice Centres would at this stage be political suicide. This should not prevent us from frankly analysing what we are doing. We are creating a new dependency amongst ordinary people. This relates negatively to our goal of helping working people to help transform our CAB's to becoming centres of empowerment and agitation rather than a more honest form of clientelism, for example, by using issues that arise frequently in CAB's to build campaigns.

* RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS:

We cannot now view peoples organisations in a parasitic manner as bodies to be infiltrated. We win people to socialism and the party in particular, by the example of our activities as open members of our party. The idea of top down infiltration by capturing key positions rather than winning superiority in an organisation by mobilising the rank and file is a serious mistake. You cannot impose progressive ideas from above. We should struggle openly at all levels for progress taking into account the domination of TUs and indeed many peoples organisations by conservative forces (which should prevent us from having too rosy a picture of these organisations as they exist today).

* POLICY The area that broadly comes under the heading of policy whether we mean election manifesto, policy documents or position papers on various issues also require close scrutiny. This is best illustrated by taking two controversial examples

(a) Economic Policy: While advocating realistic economic policies, suited for present conditions, which could bring about real improvement in the quality of life we should always relate these to the long term goal of a democratised and socialised economy. This contrasts markedly with the acceptance of the classic social democratic corporatist model of a market economy where state, capitalist and trade union co-operate to maintain stability in other words which reinforce hegemony of the elite despite the real concessions they must make in the process. As already pointed out this model has failed even in Sweden recently.

(b) International policy: One can have an international policy based on a clear, uncomplicated set of socialist principles which would naturally include the relationship being of advantage to the party. We must however, judge the government organisations we contact on the basis of their actions. Do they work for the benefit of their own people? Are they democratic? Do they seriously breach our standards of behaviour? We, of all parties, should be aware of the danger of taking organisations which claim to be progressive at their word without any critical study of their activities.

It should be clear that policy as well as practise must be also dictated by principle in a flexible and non doctrinaire manner.

2. Structure and Organisation

Secondly, we must discuss the implications of the acceptance of the above theory in relation to the structure and organisation of the party. We realise that much of our present structure grew out of the exceptionally difficult circumstances our party had to face particularly in the 1970's and that there should be no mad rush to discard all. That said, we do feel that the party needs to bring our structure and organisation more in line with our long term goal. Our party is certainly not a collapsing bureaucratic state but we could do with a dose of democratisation. It should also be pointed out that in our view even the present structures are under-utilised and need revitalising as much as changing.

On the vexed question of democratic centralism we feel that the principle of democratic decision making and unity of action is still the most desirable form of organisation but that the missing link in our party has been the continuity of democratic debate in between Ard Fheis. There must be a constant process of democratic discussion in the party and we welcome therefore the present upsurge of such activity linked to the current review of constitution.

Again, we cannot cover areas of structure and organisation exhaustively, so we will deal only with some of the major areas of debate:

* ARD FHEIS: The Annual Conference for too long has been a set piece; a show case of unity for media coverage rather than a serious forum for debate by the membership. Obviously there are time constraints but we think some major improvements could be made. For example, A workshop format would facilitate participation by the ordinary member.

The compilation of the Clar/Agenda should be carried out in a manner that does not lead to its domination by long repetitive motions from CEC or Party committees which simply restate policy. Also controversial motions should not be buried in vague composites as has sometimes happened.

* CEC Elections for this crucial body should be by proportional representation. All candidates should be required to state in advance why they feel they should be elected. ie. produce a statement of 100 words giving their priorities.

Seats should be reserved for women and youth (these seats could be filled by electoral college system ie all party members voting to fill 'womens seats' so choice of candidates even for reserved seats)

While the CEC is the highest decision making body in the party when key issues such as voting for or against a new government or participating in some non-party electoral campaign arise, the decision should be up to the party members organised in regional meetings such as that held to decide on the candidate for the last Euro Election in Dublin.

* MEMBERSHIP: Clearly if we are to build a mass party we must change our membership requirements. Presently the proportion of Workers' Party members to supporters is outlandish although many of our supporters are both active and politicised. Now we do not favour a situation such as exists in the British Labour party, where you pay up and you're in with full voting rights ie. a catch all party with a majority of activists on the left but the majority of inactive membership being as conservative as any member of a right wing party. We need to become a mass party made up of conscious socialists. We put forward some proposals which might facilitate this.

- (a) To turn our supporters into members we should
- Drop probationary membership (though hold on to the two year position of responsibility rule)
 - Have one standard introductory 'talk' to be given on an individual basis.
 - Simplify the application and registration process.
- (b) To make sure we hold on to members we should not overburden them as long as they are involved in at least one practical activity on a regular basis we should be satisfied
- Hold meetings at times and venues that in as much as possible suit the requirements of all members not just the male 9-5 worker.
- (c) To ensure members are developing their politics we should
- Make a minimum attendance of branch meetings a compulsory condition of membership.
 - Make a minimum attendance of educational meetings compulsory.
 - Ensure an effective education programme is developed by the party.
- (d) Members should be encouraged to participate in campaigning activity within their own communities and indeed to initiate such activity.

Finally, we must keep in mind that the best recruiting agent for the party is a good example. If ordinary people see us in their communities fighting alongside them, not just for them, they will join us in increasing numbers!

* ROLE OF PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES: At present an increasingly unbearable burden of work is being noisted on our public representatives. All issues are simply passed over to the T.D. or councillor to be raised by them, while at the same time they try to tackle advice cases flooding in. The party must as already stated reassert its campaigning role thereby lightening the burden on public representatives. The public representatives in turn must use their positions to highlight these campaigns. Public representatives should not be afraid of extra-parliamentary activity nor should they confine the raising of issues to the council or Dail chambers.

* WOMEN : It is not good enough to denounce sexism and promote equality politically. The party must put its own house in order first. The party must be a friendly environment for women to participate in.

A few suggestions:

- Reserved elected seats for women at all levels.
- Womens groups or committees at local level - this would not marginalise womens issues, but takes on board the fact that many women simply cannot participate in open discussion in mixed meetings.
- The rearrangement of meeting times and venues to suit women who care for children.
- Perhaps most importantly is the need for male members of the party to face up to and challenge their own sexism.

* YOUTH: Although Workers' Party Youth is a separate organisation it is under the political direction of the party. Too often 'the youth' is at worst ignored or at best briefly indulged. The party must give priority to developing and expanding our youth movement. The party should become more attractive to young people. This means active involvement in areas of concern to young people - low pay, emigration, music business etc.

CONCLUSION

We stated initially that we do not offer an instant line. Indeed in this brief summary, we offer no more than the broadest of outlines of a theory and practise which would make our party a mass campaigning socialist party. We have only constructed the bones, obviously the details are another days work. We must state however, that the alternatives are grim. To retreat into dogmatic purism, would culminate in the living death of the CPI or the cult-like lunacy of the ultra-left. To go down the road of social democracy would mean the eventual disappearance of any reason for a separate existence from the Labour Party.

What is at stake therefore is the survival of the party: either we carve out a distinct niche for ourselves in Irish politics and from there, expand so as to fulfill our stated goal of transforming society or else we face a terminal decline.

But we do not put forward our viewpoint with only the organisational survival of the Workers' Party in mind. We are all in the party because, warts and all, it is truly the only organisation which exists today which can facilitate the liberation of the ordinary working people of our country. It's decline or worse still disappearance would be a disaster for that class. We need to change and review our policies and practise all the time but now more than ever we need a solid basis on which we can build the mass party we all desire. We can still go back to the words of Billy MacMillen to encapsulate our most basic principles, "Stand with the people to educate, agitate, organise and fight, so that the people may go forward in dignity and consciousness to the final success: Ownership of their resources, control of their own destinies."

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Title: Document submitted to the debate on the Constitution of the Workers' Party

Organisation: Workers' Party

Author: Colm Breathnach, Fearghal Ross

Date: 1990

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