



LABOUR LEFT

No. 8 MAY 1986

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REALIGNMENT IN IRISH POLITICS



The Socialist Challenge

LABOUR LEFT'S SUBMISSION TO THE LABOUR PARTY'S COMMISSION ON ELECTORAL STRATEGY

REALIGNMENT OF IRISH POLITICS

Dear Reader,

On behalf of the Labour Left Collective I am pleased to present Labour Left's Submission to the Labour Party Commission on Electoral Strategy. This is the culmination of nine months of work and widespread discussion among the broad Left of the Labour Party and constitutes a detailed, concrete strategy for all socialists and progressives to rally behind in order to create an independent, socialist Labour Party.

It is immediately apparent from a reading of the Commission's brief that no single submission can hope to cover all the areas under examination. What we have attempted to do is elaborate general principles and provide illustrations, not so much as hard proposals, as examples of how the principle can be applied. This is especially the case in the areas of trade union and corporate links, political education, financing and public relations.

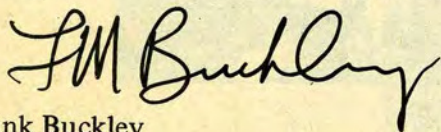
In other areas we have put forward specific propositions around which the principle would be unfulfilled. This is the case in the areas of electoral strategy, party democracy, organisation and policy making. Taken together the submission aims to clearly put forward a Left critique and programme, one which can unite all sections of the Labour Party and activists outside the Party.

The main contention of the submission is quite simple: by pursuing an independent, socialist strategy that unequivocally champions a politics of working men and women Labour can, in a period of 15-20 years, be on the verge of precipitating a left/right divide in Irish politics. This has long been the goal of progressives (and even conservatives). To realign political competition in Ireland must become the overriding objective of Labour and socialists. Unless this occurs, socialism will remain off the agenda.

Electoral strategies are only one aspect of a Party's work in building a mass following. It must be predicated on a political programme that actively seeks to unite all sections of the working class and progressives in a broad alternative alliance to the present conservative front of the two (now three) right wing parties. In this context, it becomes even more imperative that the Party constitute an independent, democratic and campaigning organisation to bring about that unity and cohesion.

A pall of defeat hangs over not only the Labour Party but the entire Left. This is not surprising. The state of the Left remains conditioned on the fortunes of Labour. With the Party in conservative alignment for the last 16 years – ever since it rejected the New Republic strategy in 1970 – demoralised, without direction or leadership, the Left has been deprived of the major vehicle for radical change in society. The result has been the steady marginalisation of Labour, the fragmentation of the Left among competing alternative parties and independents, and the non-participation of activists in progressive politics. With the rise of the Progressive Democrats political activity is dominated exclusively by the Right.

This need not be the case. Certainly we are not pessimistic. We present this programme as a statement of optimism, a passionate belief in the potential of a socialist party that refuses to cooperate with conservatism. We call on all Labour members to join with our programme and recreate a socialist option for Ireland. We call on all socialists, radicals and trade unionists to join the Labour Party on the basis of this programme. It will be a long, difficult task. That's why it's all the more important to begin that work now.



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CONSERVATIVE ELECTORAL CONSENSUS

Misleading descriptions of Irish politics abound: its 'ideology free', 'people aren't interested in policies', 'there's no class basis for political competition'. Such descriptions attempt to rationalise both FF's popularity, and Labour's lack of support, among the working class (e.g. 'the working class are conservative'). This may suit ideologists of the Right (and apologists of Labour's minority status) but it covers up the real causes for Labour's marginalisation.

In this section we will highlight the development of the conservative electoral consensus — a process which has effectively subordinated the overwhelming section of the Irish people into two great conservative camps. This has not occurred because Irish people are somehow 'conservative' or because Labour hasn't 'put its message across'. It is the result of past failings, mistakes and wrong options taken up by the Left.

The Non Emergence of Labour

The myth that Connolly and Larkin

'founded' the Labour Party should be laid to rest. A resolution to this effect was passed at the 1912 Clonmel ITUC Congress but whatever the intention and hopes of the two trade union leaders, no organisation, not even a manifesto, existed before 1918 and it did not contest an election until 1920. It was essentially 'a head without a body' with the trade union leadership organising from above with no grass roots activists or organic connection between their political and industrial work. A party bears the mark of its origins and this is especially the case with Labour. Its origins as a truly trade union party is unique in politics, but it developed without a central organisational structure, broken up into random, decentralised groupings (e.g. 'flags of convenience') with no cohesive identity or national impact.

A 'rural' Labour Party plays another part of this traditional historiography, with its origins in the Land and Labour League struggles. A more direct relationship between Labour

and its historical roots in rural Munster and Leinster, however, was the identification of trade union and political activities stemming from the struggles in setting up rural union structures, often among casual labour. The identification of popular industrial struggles and the Party was high and accounts for Labour support outside the major urban areas.

The industrial organisation of urban workers carried out before the formation of the Labour Party meant a lack of identification between the Party and popular industrial struggles. This was exacerbated by splits throughout the '20s between Larkanites, supported by the Dublin Trades Council, and the official Labour Party, supported by the ITGWU and the O'Brien leadership. So while the urban working class was heavily unionised Dublin was, outside of Connacht/Ulster, Labour's weakest region.

The running Larkin-O'Brien dispute led directly to the split in 1944 when the Larkanites joined the Labour Party and O'Brien, having failed to

Table 1.1 Labour vote by Region 1923-1982 (N)

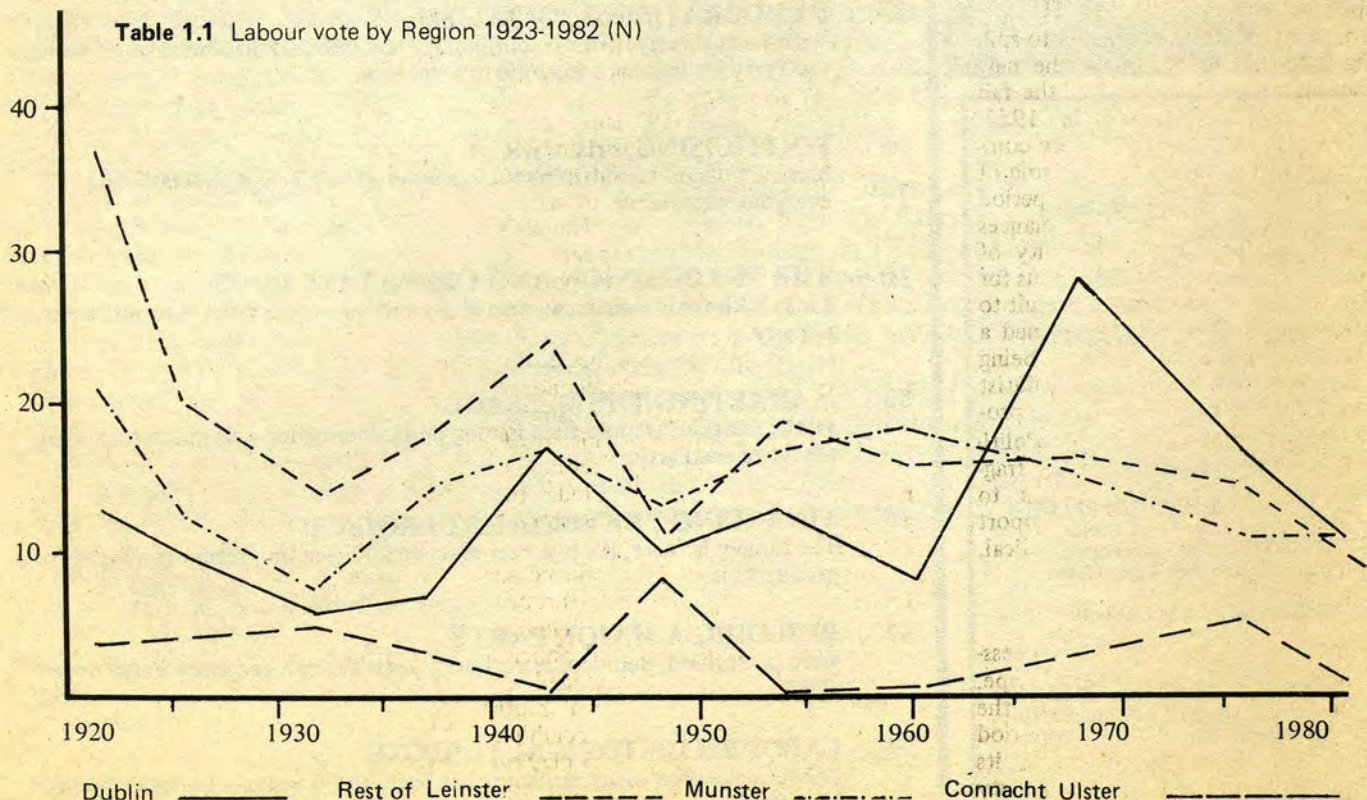
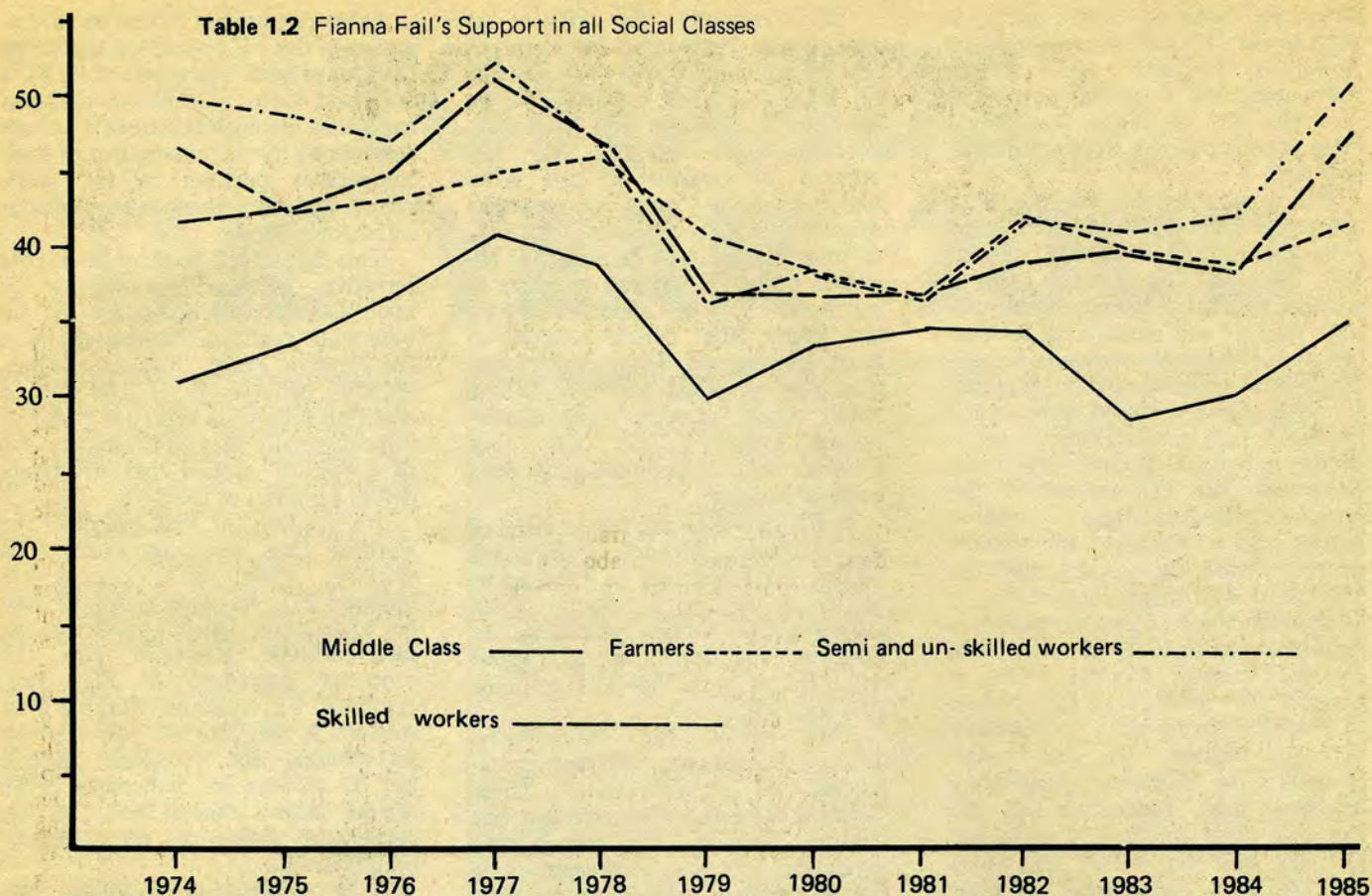


Table 1.2 Fianna Fail's Support in all Social Classes



have them expelled, withdrew ITGWU support. Even when they eventually re-united, the dispute continued within the trade union movement until, in the face of a modernising capitalist economy the ICTU v formed in 1960 and continued to spill over into the Party up to the new consensus that emerged after the fall of the second coalition in 1957.

These debilitating splits were combined with the much disputed role of Labour during the Civil War period when long term political allegiances were being formed. The inability of Labour to pose an alternative focus for political competition is not difficult to understand: it consistently spurned a socialist critique of society being content with mildly reformist welfarist measures with demands for public projects to relieve unemployment. Politically divided, organisationally fragmented, it found itself unable to compete for working class support with the emergence of a more radical, populist party.

The Hegemony of Fianna Fail

Fianna Fail is one of the most successful political parties in modern Europe. Never having fallen below 40% of the vote and in power 75% of the period since 1932 its success is due to its unique ability to win over a majority from all social classes — farmers, middle and working class — establishing

a broad class alliance, which FF has been able to turn into a national project (see Table 1.2). It may be fashionable to deride FF's success as owing to clientelism, patronage, and a conservatism which has found popular support among a conservative people. But these cover over the concrete reasons for FF's success:

- in the 1930's FF launched a protectionist industrialisation programme aimed at self-sufficiency. Based on the development of native capital it incorporated Labour's welfarist programme. Through this programme FF was able to portray itself as the Party of national reconstruction.

- in the late 1950's FF began the modernisation of the Irish economy by opening the country to foreign capital and investment. This overturned their previous economic nationalism and precipitated the growth of the '60s. FF was portrayed as the party of modernisation.

- in the late '70s FF produced an interventionist programme through pump-priming the economy. Though it involved no developmental policies or structural reform it provided an expansionist alternative to a more austere, less interventionist coalition programme. It was still able to play on themes of national development and modernisation, whatever its failures.

Bound up with these programmes

has been the monopolisation of the symbols of Irish nationhood through both its strident claims on the North and its social project: the restoration of the Irish language and an autonomous Irish identity through identification with a popular, i.e. catholic, ethos.

FF's national project cannot be isolated from its economic project. The construction of an autonomous social identity was inextricably intertwined with the construction of an independent national economy. FF has posed the question of 'nationhood' beyond the confines of the North, into every sphere of political society. Through this dynamic interplay of social, economic and national issues FF has become not so much a national party as a national movement.

This movement has won over the working class for concrete reasons. The Party of industrialisation, economic reconstruction, welfare reform, national identity: whatever the success of failure or an absolute scale, political competition is not absolute. It is dependent on the opposing parties and groupings vying for power.

Fine Gael's Conservative Critique

Fine Gael was born of the most conservative elements in Irish politics; Cumann na nGael, whom Labour had opposed for the first five years of the

state, the National Centre Party, a centre-right 'liberal' party, and the Blueshirts, Ireland's native fascist movement. As Cosgrave put it, it was 'the sort of people you would bring together if you were going tiger hunting'.

FG has historically engaged in a conservative critique of FF's national project. During the 1930s it attacked FF's economic programme from a laissez-faire platform, championing the large farmers and commercial sectors. In the 1950's it pursued austere economics involving public expenditure cutbacks and import levies which produced high unemployment and a decline in national productivity. In the '70s and '80s FG assimilated the critique of the New Right – a general cutting back of the state, the idolatry of the private entrepreneur and the advancement of private interests.

This has been complemented by a failure to construct an alternative national project. In the 1930s it opposed FF's removal of the symbols of foreign sovereignty, periodically pursuing ruthless 'law and order' crusades. Its economic programme favoured large landholders and the financial class which had economic interests with the British link. Since the '50s FG's nationalism has been derivative, a residual reflection of FF's nationalist posturings with the latter emphasising sovereignty and the former wielding a vague two communities theory. These rhetorical emphases are sounded within a conservative nationalist consensus.

Rival Projects

Both parties represent rival tendencies of a conservative project. Both uphold the private sector and profit as the precondition for industrial advancement and wealth creation. Both to varying degrees reflect conservative ideologies (e.g. the Church), opposed to democratic demands of the vast majority of people (e.g. extension of the welfare state, industrial democracy, state led planning and investment). This does not mean they are identical. Their political styles and ideological emphasis differ. Whether the distinction, though, is between a promotional role of the state for the private sector, or a more unreconstructed capitalist society is largely immaterial. It's a difference of degree.

This all embracing consensus produces a strange political vocabulary. FG has called itself, 'a national party' in contrast to 'sectional parties such as Labour', 'a middle of the road party, neither left nor right', 'a party of the radical centre'(?). One FG TD called himself left of centre since he believed in taking risks in business.

FF is variously, 'the party of the nation', the 'workers' political party', 'the real Labour Party', 'pragmatists of the centre', ad nauseam. Given consensus, you can call yourselves anything, even socialist; FF has claimed the mantle of the internationale: 'the party of practical socialism' and 'we are the bolsheviks of Ireland'. Not to be outdone, FG has staked claim: 'we are all socialists in our heart'. Even a Labour TD during last year's NDC debate referred to Sean Lemass and Todd Andrews as 'the most practical socialists of our time'. When 'socialists' call conservatives socialists, not only does socialism take a hammering, so does political language.

Is FF or FG to the left or right of one another? Without a left/right divide the question is meaningless though it aspires to validity when analysing FG's liberal posturings. In justifying coalition, many in Labour claim FG is more liberal (i.e. more left) than FF.

This makes the fundamental mistake of confusing different articulations of conservatism. These different currents are not absolute, but relative. Support for church/state separation, divorce, contraception is not inconsistent with a conservative project and in Ireland this is all the more so, given its authoritarian political culture. Indeed, this type of liberalism reinforces the conservative consensus by posing itself as 'progressive'. It gives the illusion of an alternative where none exists.

More importantly, though, FG's claim to liberalism is untenable. No doubt currents exist, but this is the case in FF, among its support in urban middle classes. A party's politics cannot be deduced from comments of a few parliamentarians. Survey opinion polls show that the difference between FF and FG supporters on classically liberal issues like divorce and contraception are marginal, not substantial. If a few percentage points is the difference between a liberal and conservative party, we're not talking much difference.

The Conservative Electoral Consensus

The predominance of FF and the fragmentation of opposition parties in which none can, alone, form a majority government has produced a predominant party system in which FF vs. primarily FG. The possibility of Governments alternating is a fundamental prerequisite of democratic competition. But this only occurs when opposition parties align to replace FF as in 1948-1957 and 1973 to the present. When there was no alliance (1932-1948 and 1957-1973) FF enjoyed uninterrupted rule.

Labour's problem is that its participation in this FF opposition alignment has always been overwhelmed by FG's dominant status. FG/Labour coalitions have little ideological rationale but are determined by the imperatives of their competitive position in the party system and the prerequisite of democratic competition.

This in effect establishes a conservative electoral consensus: a majority conservative party vs. an unnatural coalition dominated by a conservative party. Ironically, when Labour believes it is choosing a coalition option, in reality it is not. It is mechanically obeying the imperatives of a political system that effectively denies a politics of the Left.

It's not that the Irish people or the working class are conservative. The working class have consistently opposed FG. Its support for FF can be understood when considering its interventionist strategies into the economy compared to FG's programmes. FF solidified working class support in the '30s not only through its national and economic project, but its support for democracy (FG's original leader, General Duffy, and its corporatist influence were suspect on this issue).

This conservative consensus has locked political competition into two great conservative camps. And since 1957 the size of the two parties combined have been growing, capturing over 80% of the popular vote. The logical conclusion of this consensus would be to alternate governments between conservative parties (the emergence of the Progressive Democrats may achieve just this). The irony is that Labour's alignment strategy with FG over the last 16 years may effectively exclude Labour from any future government.

This is not some iron law of Irish politics. FF is not fated to always maintain working class support, FG is not destined to provide the alternative to FF. Whenever Labour followed a strategy of non-alignment with conservatism – during the '30s to early '40s and again in the '60s – it won over increasing support from the working class. Whenever it engaged in conservative alignment with FG it lost its that support. Working men and women in either their support of an independent Labour party or their rejection of FG (and any party aligned with them) have shown they will take the progressive option when provided. Many have rationalised Labour's minority status: small industrial base, strong church influence, an irredentist conservative population. All these attempts to explain Labour's failure have failed for that failure is, ultimately, Labour's own.

TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000

Ireland has been experiencing dramatic changes in its population and labour force over the last decades. While this is interesting from an academic perspective, it will have repercussions for all political parties. Labour will have to account for these changes not only in its electoral strategy, but in its organisational structures if it is to be a major force by the next century which is now less than 15 years away.

Move to the Cities and the East

Ireland has experienced a steady migration from the rural to urban/town areas. With only 28% of the population living in towns at the beginning of this century, it now stands at over 57% and is projected to reach nearly 2/3 within the next two decades. This growth has been concentrated primarily in Dublin and other urban areas – Cork, Limerick and Galway as well as large town areas (see Table 2.1)

However, this figure is understated. The census definition of a 'town' is a settlement of 1500 or above. In many cases, the town's boundary is narrowly defined. Many people work, shop, drink and 'live' in a town yet reside just outside the legal boundaries and so technically live in the 'rural' area. This is especially so in areas around Dublin which have been effectively suburbanised but do not constitute towns as such (e.g. North Kildare, North Wicklow). This effect is also present in rapidly growing large town areas.

Alongside this rural/urban migration has been a shift to the Eastern Region – Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow. From less than 20% of the population in 1901 this region has grown to a level that in two to three decades between 45-50% of country will be residing there with Dublin making up 3/4 of that area. The political effects of this are evident. In a couple of decades 45-50% of Dail seats will be elected from these four counties. For a socialist party, whose natural constituency lies in the urban areas, it is imperative that the focus of electoral and organisational strategy lie in Dublin and its surrounding regions.

Table 2.1 Percentage Distribution of Population Increase by type of District, 1961-1981.

	Actual Increase 1961-1981	% of Increase
Dublin	284,832	45.6%
Other Urban Areas (4)	87,472	14.0
Large Towns (14)	112,350	18.0
Intermediate Towns (57)	126,715	20.3
Small Towns (105)	17,429	2.8
Country/Villages	- 3,734	- 0.7
TOTAL	625,064	

Note: Total population increased by 22.2% between 1961-1981

Labour Force

Over the next decade 16,000 will enter the labour force annually posing a number of economic and political challenges. This is exacerbated by the long term decline in agricultural employment. Over the last 40 years agricultural employment has been reduced by 2/3, with Industrial and Service employment increasing dramatically (see Table 2.2). While most people are employed in the Services sector, this doesn't include the unemployed, most of whom come from the industrial sector.

Futurologists tell us fewer will be employed in the industrial or manufacturing sectors due to labour-displacing technologies. However, there is no evidence to support this. European countries with a high degree of technological development experience low levels of unemployment. Technology displaces labour in some sectors, increases it in others, but it does not create permanent unemployment. With 50% of non-agricultural workforce and over 40% of the unemployed already living in the Eastern region the future looks east.

The age structure of both the urban/rural population and economic

sectors will exacerbate the above trends. 54% of the population is presently under the age of 25 and while the average age will increase in the future, the highest decile group remains the 0-9 age group. Well into the 21st century Ireland will still have the youngest population in Europe.

This age structure is not evenly spread, however. Nearly a 1/3 of the rural population is over the age of 44 while in urban/town areas it is under 25%. Further, in the agricultural sector 55% are aged over 44 while in other sectors it is under a quarter. The contrast is becoming quite striking: an aging, declining rural sector with a young growing urban/town sector.

Another factor is the economic participation by women, which has the potential of becoming a major issue. While the female participation rate increased from 20% to 27% in the last 15 years this still remains well below EEC levels. A recent survey quoted in the ICTU report, 'Women in the Workforce' indicated that 54% of Homecare workers (i.e. housewives) would take a job if they had the opportunity. This runs to over 300,000 women who now do not

appear on the official unemployment register. That this issue remains off the agenda reflects the lack of political organisation among women. Any socialist programme will have to afford a major platform for youth and women's demand for economic participation, a major condition for equality and emancipation in society.

Class Structure

Bring together all the sociologists of the Left and there will be little agreement on questions of class composition and definition. This is because 'class' cannot be reduced to a statistical chart, but is an interlocking complex of political, ideological and historical factors.

We do not intend to provide an all inclusive definition of class. It would be so abstract as to not tell us much. It is important, however, that we construct some working analysis of working class, without such an analysis its strategies and programmes will be aspirational with little substance.

This would further help us avoid popular misunderstandings about class, and the working class in particular. The comment 'the working class is now becoming middle class', is one example. Factors such as education, income, social activities are all relevant but these are consequences and reinforcements of class structure, not determining elements.

The easiest way to illustrate class composition is to describe the occupational status of the workforce. This

is only one element but it's the most accessible and certainly one of the key elements in any comprehensive definition (see Table 2.3).

— Farmers: presently account for 12% of the workforce, including farmers and working relatives, managers etc. The majority are small farmers who in traditional socialist ideology have been seen as potential allies with their working class counterparts. While Farmers numbers will decline this shouldn't mean that as a political force they will recede, due to their hegemony of rural Ireland and their economic organisation (e.g. the IFA).

— the Working Class: the largest class in Ireland, making up over 60%, 50% being manual workers. We have categorised the working class into four sections. Agricultural and Clerical workers are self-explanatory, the latter made up of primarily typists, clerks and general office workers.

Productive workers includes those classified in the census under producers, makers and repairers covering a wide range of occupations from miners, linesman, plumbers, carpenters, weavers, millers, compositors, bricklayers, crane operators, unskilled workers, and hundreds of others. Service workers are made up of waitresses, hospital porters, office cleaners, beauticians, barmen, salespersons, etc.

The distinction between service and productive workers is sometimes academic. Bus drivers are considered

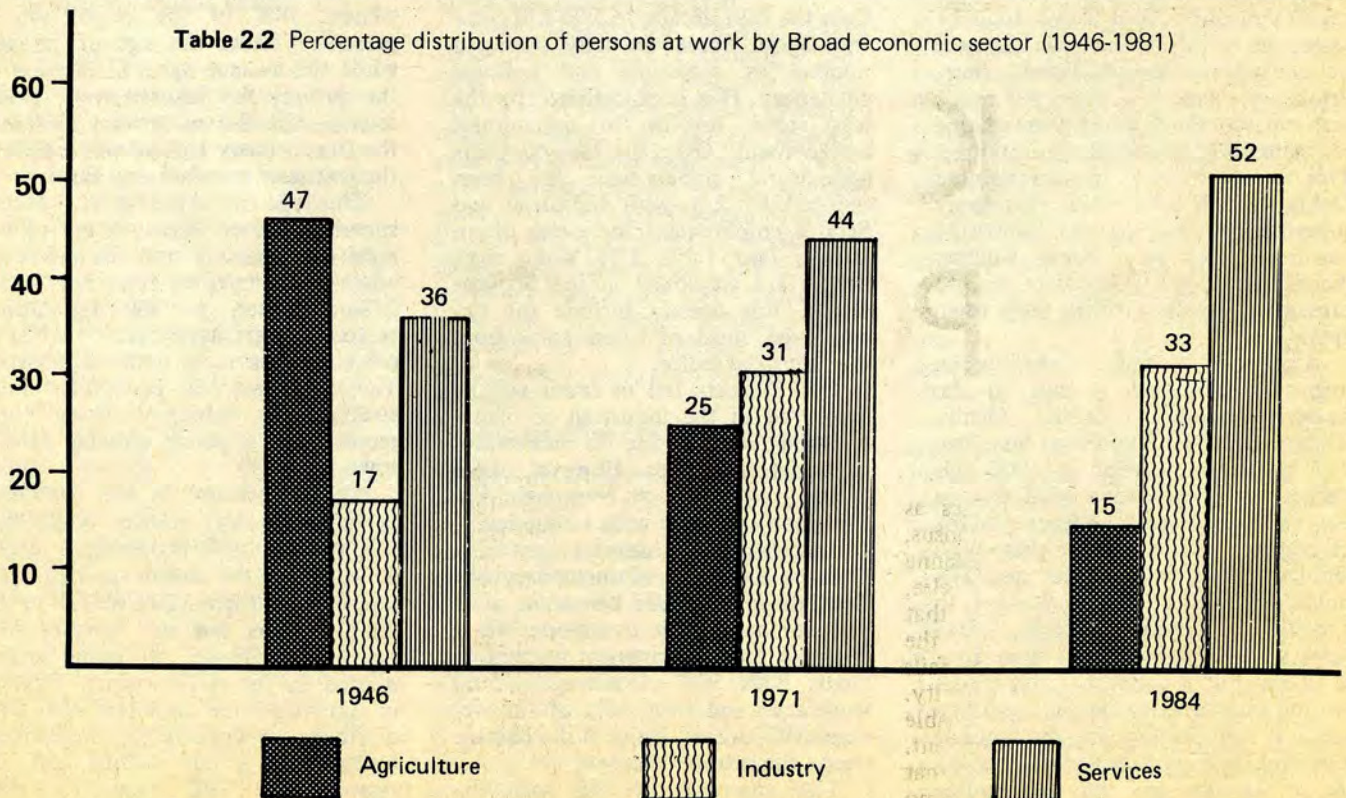
'service' if they are transport people, and 'productive' if transporting commercial goods. Similarly, with warehousemen and packers. For our illustration, all transport and warehouse workers are categorised as productive. Either way, a lorry driver is a lorry driver and still remains part of the broad working class.

— The Middle Class: makes up approximately 23% of the workforce and is fragmented into a number of categories. In the Intermediate section lower professionals (teachers, nurses, draughtsmen, technicians, etc.) along with small owners of capital make up the largest grouping with salaried employees — insurance agents, airline pilots, ships' officers, etc. making up the rest.

The upper class, the traditional elites in society, make up only a small percentage of the workforce. Higher professionals include barristers, doctors, clergy, judges, etc. while the owners and executive managers of large capital (including executive civil service) make up only 3% of the population.

Two points are obvious. The working class is the largest section of society and growing. Between 1971-1981 the number of employed status and unemployed increased by 207,500 — the majority of whom are working class. The number of employer, self-employed and assisting relatives decreased by 47,000. As more people leave the rural areas in search of jobs this class will continue to grow,

Table 2.2 Percentage distribution of persons at work by Broad economic sector (1946-1981)



repeating the process that many European countries underwent in the last century.

Secondly, while technically many people are categorised as middle class, daily experience defies this categorisation. A small shopkeeper in a working class area, with social relations and economic prosperity defined by that community, may well find his politics so defined. Similarly, with lower professionals (nurses, etc.) employed in the public sector, who would identify with a political programme committed to the public sector.

Political Conclusions

Let's draw together the disparate bits of information:

(1) The primary task is to win over and unite the working class within a political programme bearing in mind the differentials (e.g. occupational, educational, social). Success or failure for a socialist party is totally conditioned on this. To achieve this objective is to incorporate nearly 2/3 of society within its programme. A secondary task is to make links within those progressive sections of the middle class to broaden out an alliance against conservatism.

(2) Any organisational strategy must be rooted in the urban/town areas of the country, where the working class live. This would facilitate the concentration of Party resources in the younger, growing areas of the country. A major part of this con-

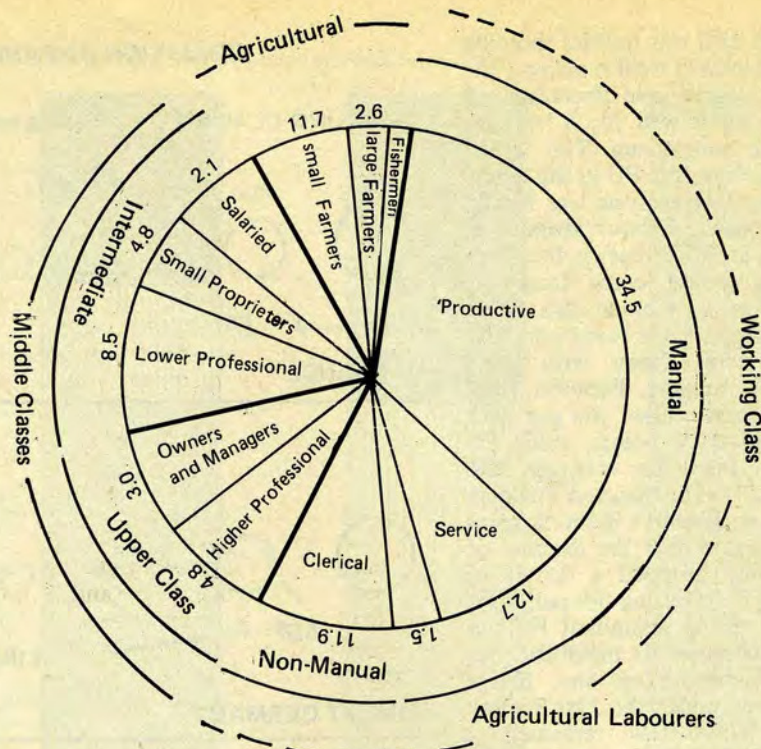


Table 2.3 Class composition of Irish Workforce 1981

centration would be in the Eastern Region and Dublin in particular.

(3) Any political programme must directly appeal to young people's and women's demands for economic participation and equality. Such a programme would put a strong emphasis on the industrial and public sectors.

(4) In the future, the broad alliances of the conservative parties, especially FF, will become strained.

The traditional triad of farmers, middle class and working class will become less relevant with the diminution of the farmers' classes. Both conservative parties will have to compete for more working class support. To do this however will begin to alienate their own conservative support. It is these tensions and contradictions that Labour will have to exploit.

REALIGNING IRISH POLITICS

1. PAST FAILURES

We have described Irish politics as a conservative electoral consensus, dominated by a single Party, Fianna Fail, who takes on everyone else, primarily Fine Gael. It is not that Labour is confronted with the coalition dilemma only when FF fails to achieve a parliamentary majority. It is that FF is the only party capable of forming a majority Government. When voters don't deliver that majority, a vacuum appears which no

other party can fill. So Labour does its 'national duty' not realising its duty is to fill space, whether in Government or not. For Labour does not oppose the conservative electoral consensus, only FF.

A predominant tradition in Labour has been to fatalistically accept the rules of the game, convincing itself that these rules are unchanging constants. But at various times the Party has attempted to change or break these rules. In recent times this

occurred in the '60s, with a polarisation strategy, and then in the '70s, with a balance of power strategy. Neither succeeded, either in breaking through the consensus, or in achieving their stated short term objectives.

The Almost New Republic: Polarisation

In the 1960s Labour pursued a strategy of polarisation — no coalition, no minority support for either conservative party. This strategy was directed specifically at FG which was considered redundant, a party of 'ranchers and bankers', a political dinosaur. Labour would overtake FG as the main political opposition. The conservative elements of FG would merge with FF transforming it into an amalgamated 'Tory Party'. Irish politics would then polarise into a Labour/Fianna Fail divide.

There was much to recommend this analysis. In 1957 FG's support had fallen to a quarter of the vote, it seemed unable to project a cohesive political programme or identity except as a more reactionary FF. The

rationale of civil war politics receding with the Lemass-O'Neill meetings, the growing prosperity and liberalism, all seemed to augur well for a leftward shift in the mainstream. This would leave an anachronistic FG in the lurch.

However, this analysis was flawed from the outset. Labour assumed it would gain at FG's expense but since its support would come from the working class, how could this affect FG? FG's support was based primarily in the farmers' classes with some middle class support. Between 1957 and 1969 Labour closed the gap with FG by only 0.4% points, while FG actually increased its vote by 30% with the addition of Clann na Tualman support. Even Labour's dramatic gains in Dublin was not at the expense of FG who only dropped a couple of percentage points during this period.

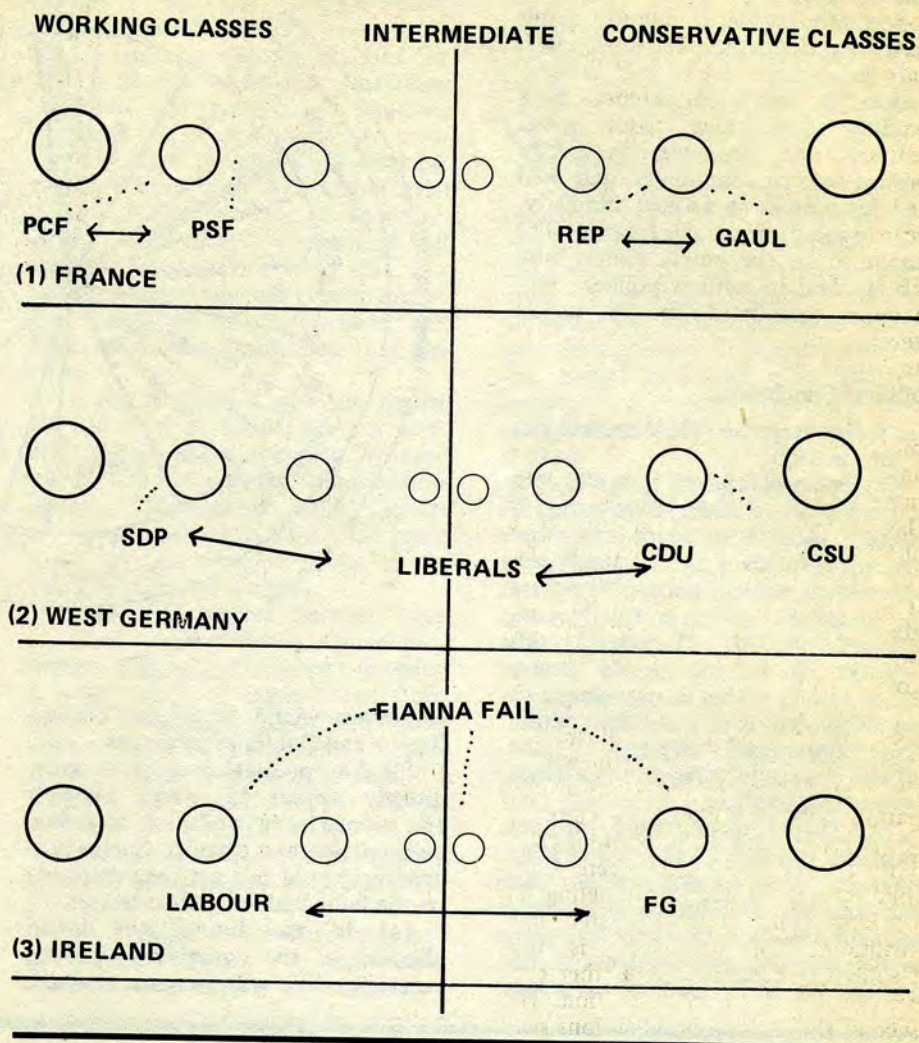
Far from being redundant FG was beginning to renew its historical project by incorporating the liberal middle classes under the Just Society grouping. While this remained a fringe, it allowed FG to broaden out from its farmer base and set the foundations for its own 'modernisation' in the late 1970s.

A second flaw in this strategy was the assumption that FF would easily be transformed from its populist, broad class 'national' project with deep roots in the working class to a class based conservative party. This was a fundamental misreading of FF's essence. Indeed, the red smear campaign showed FF was more conscious of the vulnerability of its working class support than Labour.

Labour received its highest vote in all social classes, with nearly one-third of working class support in the country. It became the second largest party in Dublin driving Fianna Fail to its lowest levels since 1954. It narrowed the gap nationally between itself and Fianna Fail by over 25%. However, this was not anticipated by Labour strategists. It assumed that they would take on FF only after FG had exited. Therefore, the parliamentary strategy of polarisation could not deal with a situation in which FF continued to retain power. When FG grew, when FF remained in power, Labour had thought it failed.

Another factor was the failure to anticipate the inevitable consequences of its strategy — the loss of FG transfers (which is inevitable in any realignment strategy) and the shift in the Party's regional base. Both of these were exaggerated in the wake of the '69 election. Had FG and Labour transferred at the 1973 level Labour would have only won two more seats. Labour's vote outside Dublin increased from 9.9% to 13.3% since 1957, dropping by only 1% point from 1965.

COALITION ARRANGEMENTS: 3 EXAMPLES



To what extent the loss in seats in rural constituencies were due to FF's boundary revisions (e.g. Cork), sitting TDs not running (e.g. Kerry South, Kildare, Tipperary North), Red smearing, primitive organisational structures, etc. will continue to provoke disagreement, much of it now quite academic.

The real failure lay not in the election returns, but in an inflexible strategy of anti-coalition/minority government support. It could not cope with FF's predominant status, nor with FG's continued presence in political competition. The irony was that while Labour made its greatest gains among the working class, the young and the urban it was not able to exploit this. Labour had read it wrong from the start.

The Balance of Power: Alignment Commenced

By 1970 Labour's failure to overtake FG and FF's continued rule suggested that Labour could not break through the consensus until it confronted the reality of FF's predominance. It was

now FF, not FG, that was the enemy that had to be undone:

— FF's predominance comes from its ability to form single party governments. To deny them this opportunity would undermine their dominance, exposing their internal contradictions: a right wing party with extensive working class support. It would then start to disintegrate.

— this could occur if Labour entered into Coalition with FG. If this national coalition won two elections in a row, the destabilisation of FF would take effect.

— in the ensuing fall-out Labour would hold the balance of power and, like the West German Liberal Party, determine which government would be installed. This breakthrough in the electoral consensus would enable Labour to become a major party.

While this showed a greater understanding of FF's role in maintaining the conservative consensus, it begged a number of questions. Why should FF's internal contradictions be exposed in opposition? More likely, these would appear in Government. Nor did it explain how the balance of

power would ensure Labour's ascendancy. It could as easily result in copperfastening its minority role (just like the West German Liberal Party).

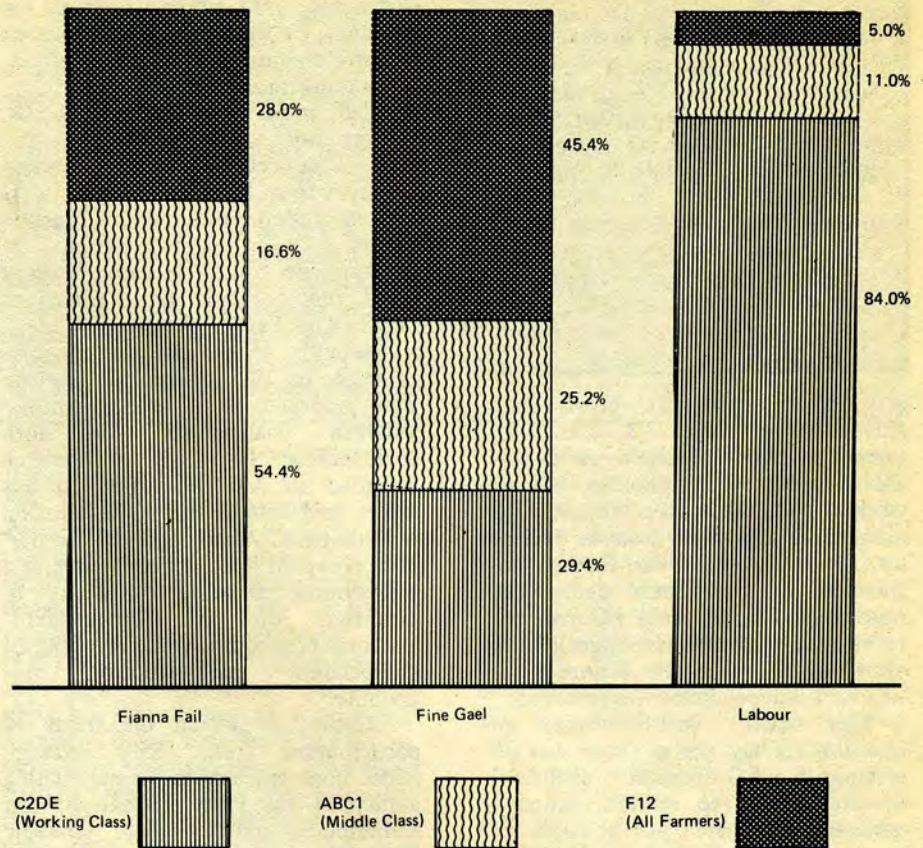
Like the 60s, Labour's new strategy produced a number of unintended consequences. To deprive FF of power indefinitely would necessitate an alliance with other parties to achieve that task. That meant FG. Labour's determination to undermine FF resulted in a formal alliance with a Party that only a few years previously it had considered 'redundant' and was bent on removing from the political scene.

There's nothing sacrosanct or profane about coalition. Coalitions and minority governments are the norm in European democracies. But in these countries there is usually a choice of different coalition partners (e.g. Italy, Belgium). In Ireland, there is no choice, it is FF versus everyone else. That's why coalition isn't an option, it only provides a non FF government.

Secondly, coalitions follow traditional patterns. The illustration shows two classical arrangements. In the first, Left/Right coalitions involve parties sharing support in common social bases, such as the working class. This occurs in France where Communists and Socialists, competing for working class support, enter into coalitions. The corollary is that Gaullists, republicans, and other conservatives coalesce in opposition. The second shows Centrist coalitions such as West Germany where the Liberals sometimes join the Social Democrats, sometimes the Conservative Parties, depending on the political 'mainstream' and the benefits (e.g. seats, popularity) that accrue to them.

Of course, coalition formations are more complex, dependent on the historical and social conditions unique to each country. In Norway, parties representing workers, small farmers and fishermen go into coalition while next door in Sweden, small farmers

Table 3.1 Social Class Composition of Political Parties (1970)



Note: this and the following tables use the polling categories A, B, C1, C2 etc. It should be noted that the 'middle-class' category includes large sections of the non-manual working class (typists, clerks, salespersons, etc.). The incongruity can be seen when typists and cashiers are put in the same category as owners of large businesses, consultant doctors, etc.

have their Party in opposition to socialists. In Italy, the Communists proposed a controversial coalition with Christian Democrats (the Historical Compromise), controversial because it broke with traditional patterns.

In Ireland, however, FG/Labour coalition is not an option among other coalition options. Neither can it be described as a Left/Right or a centrist coalition. It brings together mutually antagonistic support bases (see Table 3.1). FG's support was made up of the conservative sections

while Labour's support was almost exclusively working class. There was little in common to suggest alliance except that neither party was FF and neither could form its own government. Coalition between Labour and FG was a parliamentary, not a political or ideological, coalition.

The linkage of FG's and Labour's support bases produced an alternative broad class alliance to FF's (see Table 3.2). Political competition was developing into a contest of two similar alliances - similar in support bases and, so, similar in political programmes to maintain the alliances. Labour's strategy to undermine FF meant that it, together with FG, would become like the enemy it sought to eliminate.

This effectively fragmented the working class and progressives between two similar alliances, in which socialists were not the dominant force. All it did was substitute FF's brand of all class politics with another variety. Political competition no longer offered alternative political programmes only alternative interpretations.

This begged a fundamental question - why were two parties necessary to

Table 3.2 Social Class Support for Fianna Fail and Coalition Parties (1970)

	Fianna Fail	Fine Gael/Labour Alliance *
Middle Class	45%	42% (14)
Working Class	42%	44% (30)
Farmers	42	43 (3)

* Labour share in parenthesis

Table 3.3 Labour's share of Coalition votes and seats 1954-1982 (N)

	SEATS	VOTES
1954	27.5%	27.4%
1973	26.0%	28.1%
1981	18.8%	21.3%
1982 (N)	18.6%	19.3%

provide an alternative broad class alliance (see Table 3.3 and 3.4). Labour became subsumed under this alliance with FG siphoning off its working and middle class support. This marginalisation which became evident by the early '80s was further entrenched by FG's social democratic posturings. But primarily FG managed to assimilate Labour ideologically and electorally because the rationale for Labour's independence was removed.

This wasn't lost because of Coalition policy per se (such as inevitable in a FG-dominated coalition) or the failure to market Labour's performance. There's just no room for a party of the Left in broad class politics. When working men and women tire of FF's policies they vote coalition. When sick of coalition they return to FF. Or they vote for alternative Left parties. Or independents. Or they stop voting. The 1970's strategy started off by trying to break FF. Instead, they increased their support. It tried to provide Labour with a balance of power. Instead it marginalised them. At its core it tried to break the electoral consensus. Instead, it ended up by reinforcing it.

Years of Equivocation: Alignment Confirmed

The 1977 defeat could have brought a re-examination of Labour's strategy. Certainly something had gone wrong. FF had increased its vote in 1973 and instead of being denied a second term, it was elected with its largest majority ever in 1977. Labour's vote had fallen by nearly a third in two elections and was nowhere near holding the balance of power. There was, however, no reassessment, no special Conference convened, no Commission, no party-wide discussion. Labour entered into a period of almost permanent decline (see Table 3.5).

What emerged was a Special Conference procedure to determine whether Labour should participate in Government in the event of no party obtaining an overall majority. The Party Leader would meet with other

Leaders and report back to a Special Conference with either a proposal for coalition, minority government support or opposition. This, in effect, was a non-strategy.

First, unlike the early '70s and '60s, it was not to break through the electoral consensus. Instead, it marked a retreat from these considerations. It had no criteria upon which participation or non-participation in Government could be based, except upon the outcome of negotiations between the Party Leaders.

Secondly, it was essentially a compromise. In 1970 Special Conference was proposed as a 'middle-ground' between coalitionists and anti-coalitionists. In 1979 Conference accepted an A.C. resolution to this effect and fought the 1981 election on this basis. Again, in 1982 Conference accepted Special Conference as a compromise allowing the Party to campaign on an 'independent' electoral programme while rejecting an independent parliamentary programme.

Thirdly, it shifted the focus of participation from Party strategy (since none existed) to the negotiating ability of the Party Leader. Special Conferences didn't debate strategic options - none were placed before it. They didn't even debate the Joint Programme. Delegates were handed the Programme minutes before the Conference began. There could be no Party-wide discussion on the programmatic contents, not to mention the strategic implications. Special Conference votes were not votes on

the joint programme but of confidence in the Party Leader.

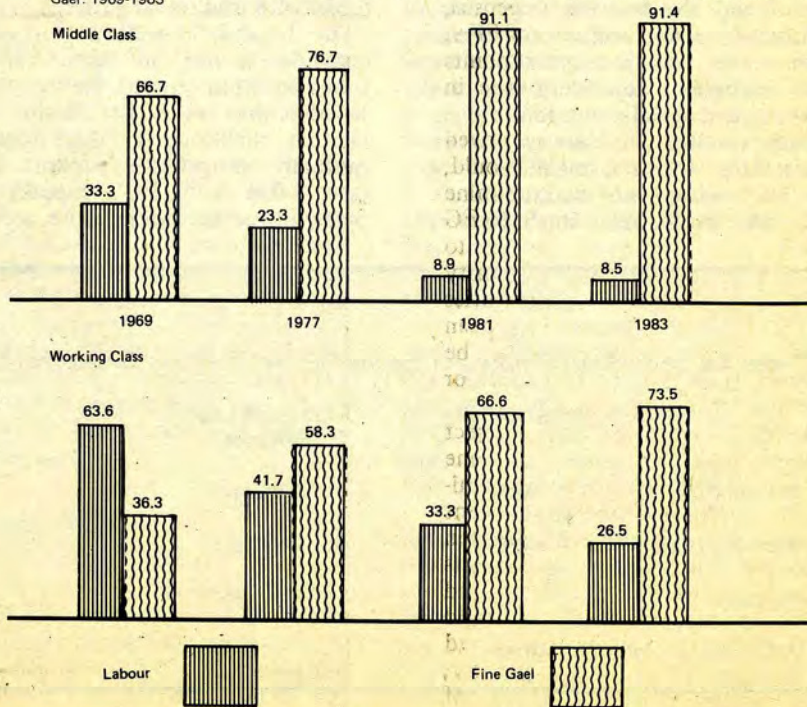
Inertia had set in. The Party continued to follow a balance of power strategy that was discredited. The Party lost support in all social classes and in the 1980s fell to below 10% of the vote in three elections. The failure to elect one MEP in 1984 and the dramatic decline in the local elections, in urban and rural areas, presages further decline for the Party in the future.

In the end, running on an independent programme proved to be a chimera for it maintained parliamentary alliance. The Party sought solace in dubious arguments: it wanted to participate in power, it wanted to be relevant, it wanted to preserve democracy, it wanted to keep FF out. But these were rationalisations to cover up the lack of strategic initiative and leadership. The previous two decades saw attempts, no matter how ill-conceived, to break the electoral consensus that has dominated Irish politics since 1932. By the 1980s Labour had failed to break that consensus, failed to become a major party of the urban/town areas, failed to win over the working class from FF. Labour was right back where it had started in 1957.

II: TOWARDS A NEW CONSENSUS

What is interesting is not so much the differences of the '60s and '70s strategies but the similarities. In

Table 3.4 Percentage Distribution of Coalition Support among Social Classes between Labour and Fine Gael: 1969-1983





The only time Labour pursued a MGS strategy was during the period 1932-1943 and while we should be wary in drawing parallels, the results are interesting. Starting in 1932, with only 7.7% of the vote and 7 seats. Labour either supported a minority FF government, opposed them or abstained in the setting up of a government. During this period Labour doubled its vote and tripled its Dail representation. In Dublin it jumped from two to 12 Corporation seats and made its highest ever vote in Cork. At the same time FF dropped to its lowest vote ever.

During this period Labour attacked FF from a Left position, while socialist activists from the Republican Congress and other Left groupings entered the Party, including Jim Larkin. It changed its constitution to support 'a Worker's Republic', though it backed down in the face of Church opposition. It all ended with a split resulting from inter-union rivalry, parliamentary strategy and 'a red scare'. It's purely hypothetical to imagine what might have happened, but the similarities between then and now, nearly 40 years on, are worth thinking about.

opposed ways they realised that until the rules of the game were changed Labour would be doomed to minority status. They ignored the effects of social class support on the two conservative parties. They both misread the historical content of FF's political character. This led them into strategies based on the assumption that FG, then FF would disintegrate.

Divisions and recriminations took place on a number of rhetorical levels but running through most arguments was an inexact understanding of the complex processes Labour has to confront in a conservative consensus. It's not that the arguments didn't have validity. They did, each addressing different areas of a larger canvass. Any future strategy must incorporate what was positive in previous strategies and transcend them.

Synthesis

We must return to the premise of both strategies, that Labour cannot advance until it breaks the electoral consensus, the predominant party system of FF v. everyone else. The following points can be gleaned from the critique in the previous section.

(1) FF must be permanently deprived of a majority government. This would, as the '70's strategy had it, undermine its dominance. This must apply to FG as well, as they come closer to majority status. To deny majority governments would bring Irish politics into line with most European countries. Governments would be composed of either coalitions or minority government supports.

(2) Labour must unequivocally reject conservative alliances to keep any one Party from office permanently. Similarly, Labour must avoid entanglement in contradictory alliances i.e. coalition arrangements. Such arrangements inevitably violate Left/Right and Centrist norms. Further, it could further assimilate Labour into broad class politics. But most importantly, it would deny the very foundation of

Labour's strategy: the realignment of the political parties.

(3) FF will neither become a 'Tory' Party or disintegrate in the short term. Our goal should be to make them too small to form a government, but this doesn't mean they will vanish or explode into competing factions.

(4) Likewise an early merger between the two conservative parties is unlikely. Fifty years of competition between these two parties have established innumerable ideological barriers which will not be easily overcome. For socialists those barriers may only be symbolic. But that symbolism has its own self-perpetuating logic.

(5) Socialist opposition — an un-reconstructed return to 1969 — should be discarded as a strategic principle. It cannot resolve a situation where a) FF continues to hold majority power, as in 1969 or b) where the conservative parties refuse to merge. In either case, it could be Labour that is blamed for continuous

FF rule or continuing instability, thus alienating the electorate and allowing either conservative party to form a majority government. However, this does not mean that socialist opposition cannot be used tactically.

(6) Labour's short-term aim is to continually hold the balance of power. What it does with that power will determine the success or failure of its long-term strategy of forcing a realignment.

To summarise then:

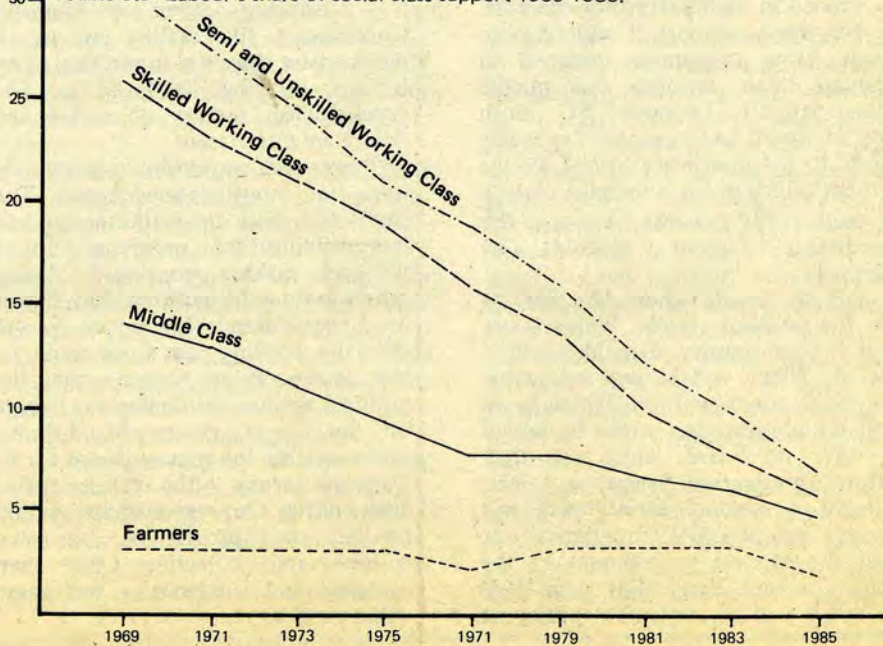
— Realignment on a Left/Right basis must become the long-term and concrete strategy for the Party.

— Any alignment with either FF or FG must be rejected from the outset. This includes coalition with conservative parties as a minority partner.

— Labour's short term aim is to hold a continual balance of power by depriving either party a majority government.

This synthesises the positive elements of the '60s and '70s strategy. It follows the '60s road insofar as it

Table 3.5 Labour's share of social class support 1969-1985.



seeks to avoid both alignment and contradictions in coalition arrangements. However, it accepts both the theoretical premises of the 70s strategy that FF must be deprived of dominant status and the strategic goal of holding the balance of power. This in effect means that Labour would be pursuing a strategy of Minority Government Support.

Minority Government as a Weapon

Holding the balance of power assumes a party knows what it wants to achieve. Our objective is to realign Irish politics. The balance of power is at all times subsumed to this overriding goal. Not that there aren't other considerations. But Minority Government Support (MGS) should be seen first and foremost as a weapon that Labour uses to drive the conservative parties closer and closer together.

How can it be done? Both parties contain contradictory support groups which in normal circumstances would be politically opposed. What do farmers and urban workers have in common regarding taxation, state investment in the economy, and social expenditure? Nothing, except they support FF. What do social progressives and reactionaries have in common? Nothing, except they support FG. It's these contradictions that Labour should be exacerbating rather than reinforcing.

This can be done by forcing them to compete for MGS from Labour and driving them into conservative opposition with one another. Having deprived conservative parties of a majority government they will have to appeal to Labour to establish a Government. Labour can then develop programmes to alienate the alliances contained in each party. For example, if FF wants support it will have to agree to a programme designed to alienate their farmers and middle class support. Likewise, FG. Both parties would be in danger of exposing itself to a conservative attack by the other ('selling out to a socialist party'). If neither Party wants to accept the conditions Labour withholds its support.

Labour would then be able to set the political agenda. Which issues will it give priority to, which will it let sit. Which will be just acceptable for MGS, which will not. Which issues will the conservative parties be forced to take on board, which can they afford (in electoral terms) to reject. Clearly a socialist society will not emerge out of a MGS programme nor will the support programmes be the same for each Party. But then MGS is not a tool to implement policy, it

is a weapon to fragment the conservative parties.

Minority Government: Making Space for Socialism

Previous strategies limited Labour's room for manoeuvre by either straight-jacketing it into socialist opposition or coalition with FG. MGS would extend options open to Labour, while furthering the objective of realignment. In MGS Labour could either:

- (1) support FF minority government
- (2) support FG minority government
- (3) withhold support from either party if neither accepts a Labour programme

Such future scenarios may also include a PD presence pursuing opposing parliamentary strategies. In all events Labour will be determining who will form the next Government and on what basis, if any.

MGS has, in the past, been called coalition by another name, or responsibility without power. However, these objections have little foundation:

— MGS creates an open, public, antagonistic relationship with the Government Party, unfettered by collective responsibility or secrecy. Coalition implies a cohesiveness that permits of cooperative political and economic management of society.

— under MGS, the Party does not sacrifice its organisational and parliamentary independence. It can still mount campaigns in the Oireachtas and the public. MGS allows Labour to maintain its distinctive identity and its opposition to conservatism and an electoral competition that pretends FF and FG are ideologically opposed.

— bringing down a Minority Government, like setting one up, is much easier since the supporting party is not bringing itself down. The psychological factors of defeat and failure are not present.

Power and responsibility are widely used but rarely defined terms. The Party has been in coalition, holding 'responsibility' for a programme not of its own making, continually losing power among the working class. Power for Labour means the power to win over the working class from conservative parties. Power means setting the political agenda, fashioning the debate on our terms. Power, for Labour, means setting the preconditions for its own ascendancy — the realignment of Irish politics. Our responsibility should be our own programme, our own actions and objectives, our own mistakes and successes — not some other party's.

MGS does not mean that Labour actively seeks to support conservatives in government. Labour had rejected coalition with conservatism and is constructing its own independent, alternative programme. The problem is what does Labour do when conservatives can't make a majority and won't align. It's up to them. If they want Labour's support they must seek it out. If no programme can be agreed, if it is not in Labour's strategic interest to support a government at that time, if it will not advance the Labour Movement, then Labour will not assent. MGS does not force Labour into any option but, instead, provides them with a number of options. The 1930s is instructive when Labour opposed, supported and abstained on the formation of FF Governments. MGS allows the Party to survive the maelstrom of conservative politics while making the space necessary for a socialist breakthrough.

Coalition of the Left

Labour is to blame for the fragmentation of the Left. In 1969 there were no alternative Left parties and independents because none were needed. By the process of alignment, Labour vacated this role. It is only natural that the void be filled. The Socialist Labour Party, the Democratic Socialist Party, Socialist Party of Ireland, the Workers' Party, independents — all are or were there because Labour wasn't. Whatever support they have, at one time it was Labour's.

We can't rewrite history. In time, Labour's strategy of socialist realignment will remove the rationale for alternative Left parties. Not only voters but activists, and potential candidates will return or seek accommodation with Labour. However, in the medium term alternative parties and independents will remain. Labour should, therefore, attempt to construct a United Left Programme under which all socialists can cooperate. There are three aims in this:

- (1) We are attempting to create a Left/Right Divide and should align ourselves with socialists who support this objective. It would be self-defeating to pursue socialist alignment while opposing other socialist parties.
- (2) MGS will require difficult tactical decisions which different parties and individuals will disagree on. Conservatives will attempt to exploit this. By securing a united Left front Labour will be able to concentrate its energies on parties of the Right.
- (3) To begin a process of assimilation. The more Labour takes the lead as the major socialist party the more support it will obtain. Minority parties will be forced to follow or be driven into

extreme, unpopular positions. If all parties are following the same road, support will naturally gravitate to the larger party (e.g. FG/Labour coalition).

This Unity is already present in voting transfers between Labour and other socialist parties/independents (see Table 3.6). Significantly, transfers to Labour increased despite Labour's continued conservative alignment. That nearly as many Labour voters transfer to socialists is interesting in that Labour openly discourages such transfers given its coalition strategy.

A united socialist front could take many forms: agreement to recommend transfers, a formal pre-election and post-election pact, institutional structures to facilitate continuous consultations and dialogue. Such arrangements can only be determined by the prevailing conditions. But clearly, Labour would give an immediate and radical impetus to realignment if it is Labour that initiates this process of socialist unity.

That a major broad Left Party along with more avowedly socialist alternatives can exist and even cooperate in a major bloc would signify a maturing of Irish politics. Through a diversity of anti-conservative platforms the political centre could slowly be shifted to the Left. Labour's task is to fragment and divide the conservative alliances. A pre-condition is to stop the fragmentation and competition within the Left.

Nightmare Scenario

The entry of the Progressive Democrats into political competition will complicate future strategies. The extent and longevity of PD support cannot be determined. It's important that we grasp the concrete reasons for PD's emergence.

It would be shallow to see PD as merely an anti-Haughey grouping. This no doubt was the catalyst. But within FF, ever since the days of Lemass, a grouping has emerged with roots in the urban middle class, who have rejected the populism of FF's all class alliance and their rhetorical nationalism. In many respects they have a greater similarity with certain sections of FG.

PD's initial rhetoric regarding massive tax reductions for the middle class, its propagating the virtues of profit and 'free' enterprise, its belated social liberalism firmly place its ideology within the New Right — a concrete link with sections of FG. That opinion polls show support coming more from FG indicates this relationship.

For Labour it's not just a matter of

Table 3.6 Transfers from Other Socialist Parties to Labour 1981 and 1982 (N)

	FF	FG	L/OSP	O	NT*
1981	16.5	17.5	38.4	15.9	10.9
1982N	17.8	12.4	52.6	3.7	13.5
Transfers from Labour to Other Socialist Parties/Independents 1982 (N)					
1982N	14.8	42.7	34.6	2.4	6.5

* NT: non-transferable

watching conservatives do battle from the sidelines. For PD's potential strength could produce two nightmare scenarios for Labour:

(1) PD could establish a firm enough root in the middle class that would allow it to shift support between coalition or minority FF/FG governments. The conservative consensus would have reached its logical conclusion. Alternating governments will not need Labour's participation, being made up of interchanging conservative parties. FG, who for so long fed off of Labour in alignment, has indicated in no uncertain terms, that it would ditch Labour and the present leadership for more convivial partners.

(2) In the subsequent election PD and either FF or FG would be unable to form a government. Labour would be the obvious choice as a third coalition partner, probably with FG/PD. This would, in short, be disastrous. Not only would Labour be swallowed up ideologically and electorally it would pose an historical option for elements who pursue coalitionism without regard to its affects on progressive politics: Labour could engage in periodic coalitions with a PLP deprived of its urban content. Labour's rationale would be sealed within a conservative critique, confined to its historical roots in Leinster/Munster removing it as a factor in the rapidly changing Ireland of the future. Labour would exist but not in any recognisable form.

Neither scenario sets preconditions for a socialist ascendancy: locked into perpetual minority status (for alternating right wing coalitions presume a small Labour Party) or completely marginalised in the conservative consensus. The entry of PD has clouded the political landscape but it has confirmed the foregoing analysis (this submission was written before PD's formation) with amazing accuracy:

— the contradictory alliances within FF and FG could not be contained. PD drawing support from the middle classes, represents a distinct articulation of conservatism freed from FF populism and FG's more reactionary

elements and its relationship with Labour.

— depriving any conservative party (or parties) is still paramount for Labour ascendancy. This will still force Labour to confront the situation of what happens when no party forms a majority.

— the objective of winning over the working class from primarily FF will still guide MGS options in the future.

Whether PD dies a natural death providing a conduit for FF support to ultimately link up with FG (e.g. Clann na Tualman) or to re-enter back into FF as may happen with Blaney's sect; whether it will find a permanent place providing a more cohesive channel for conservatism is yet to be determined. It may be in Labour's interest to remove them (by engaging in tactical socialist opposition, forcing continued elections and depriving PD any rationale) or it may attempt to use PD in its MGS strategy to deprive FF or FG of continued majorities. This will require a party leadership and strategies that know what they are about and how to go about it, determined not to allow itself to be sidetracked from realigning Irish politics.

Which Party to Support

Which Party does Labour support? As in socialist unity a similar process of assimilation will be at work in MGS. In the early '70s, it was assumed that working class support could be won over from a FF in opposition. Instead, they regained that support. This is because the best time to win support from a Party is when it's in Government — when it visibly fails to satisfy the disparate social groups it attempts to maintain. If no conservative party can satisfy the working class and progressives then they will lose that support. Labour's aim is to be in a position to exploit conservative failures.

Labour would be intent on assimilating FF's working class support. To exploit their failures requires Labour to support FF minority government and bring them down on progressive

issues which can't be done while they comfort in the rhetoric of opposition. FF would confront a number of tactical problems: having gained Labour's MGS it will be exposed on its Right by FG and PD. If Labour brings the Government down, the working class won't be attracted to FG (they're engaged in conservative opposition) nor will they remain with FF since it couldn't or wouldn't deliver. Labour who has been campaigning on these issues, in Parliament, the media and the public, will gain that support.

MGS for FG is a more difficult matter. FG does not have significant working class support. There would be a danger that FF would be able to recoup its traditional support in opposition as it did in the '70s and '80s. MGS for FG could result in the alignment process in which FF was able to periodically recoup its all class support.

With PD haunting the corridors of Cabinet the situation is complicated further. Any Government involving them would incorporate extremely right wing policies. However, pragmatism may prevail and they may be content to link their middle class support between either main conservative party to participate. This could either continue the contradictions of FF's own alliance or reinforce FG's conservative critique. Any relationship with PD could involve too many compromises for Labour.

However, Labour must not align to any party. Repeatedly, supporting FF, just like FG, would defeat this principle. Therefore, while FF is the primary target of MGS, Labour must construct programmes that can show up the conservative parties' similarities through periodically switching support to the Party that offers the most for the Labour movement. Labour will be manoeuvring itself in the medium term to freely alternate without fear of losing its working class support.

There are no strict rules to follow. Much depends on the issues involved, the organisational strength of Labour, the support programmes, the relative strengths of the conservative parties etc. The object is to continually hold the balance of power showing up the similarity of the two parties (as voting patterns on many local councils do) and their unwillingness to act on popular issues. In this way realignment will be pushed on to the agenda.

Conclusion

We have shown how MGS, through holding the balance of power, could destabilise and transform political

competition. But no one should be under any illusions. MGS is the most difficult of electoral and Parliamentary options. The Government will be trying to break Labour, blaming it for the country's problems. The opposition conservative party will attempt to drive a wedge between Labour and the Government on its own terms. Even if cooperating, other Left Parties will attempt to exploit the situation.

Labour will have to avoid being pushed into MGS against its will. When does it decide to support a conservative party? When does it precipitate another election? What type of programme does it offer? What compromises does it make? When does it bring down the Government? On what issues? How does it avoid toppling Government after Government which may alienate the electorate and be portrayed as irresponsible?

There are no pre-packaged answers. But it is vital that Labour spells out its intentions aims and tactics to avoid confusing people which conservatives will exploit. For Labour will be breaking the 'rules', destabilising consensus, realigning the parties, attracting both progressive support and hysterical conservative opposition. MGS is political life in the fast lane requiring a Party and a Leadership with the maximum in political acumen and nerve. The risks are high but, then, so are the stakes. One thing is certain — Irish politics won't be the same.

III: MAKING REALIGNMENT A REALITY

Realignment has an apocalyptic sound to it. We shy away from it as we do utopian blueprints. If, however, we

understand it as a dynamic, ongoing transformation rather than a once off event, we will come closer to the reality. Realignment, then, can become a concrete strategy rather than an abstraction.

In the first instance, it does not mean the realignment of political parties. Realignment must occur first in the social classes with the working class and progressives aligning to a Left party, while conservative sections align behind parties of the Right. Political parties will only reflect and react to this in the latter stages.

How this will occur is a speculative exercise. Will there be two conservative parties, three, fragment further, unable to maintain their contradictory alliances? Will the major parties slowly change their social support composition and, so, their political programmes? Or contain their present alliances, albeit in smaller numbers? Will a real party of the centre emerge, or a 'social democratic' breakaway, with which Labour could cooperate.

Whatever develops will be conditioned by Labour's support among the working class and, at a secondary level, the progressive middle and farmers classes. This slow ascension, which may not be readily evident from election tables (since, like 1969, it may necessitate a transformation of Labour's historical support bases) will bring these forces into play. But the fundamental criteria will be Labour's strength among the working classes.

Winner Take What?

Political competition has the look of a three-ring circus fight. FF and FG fight it out for the middle and farmers

Table 3.7 Percentage Swings by Constituency

The following table shows the percentage swings, averaged over five elections, necessary for the Left to achieve a full quota (swings are the average over five elections).

0 — 1.0	1.0 — 2.0
Cork East	Dublin North Central
Dublin North East	Dublin South
Galway West	Waterford
Wexford	Dublin Central (2)
2.0 — 3.0	3.0 — 4.0
Dublin North	Longford/Westmeath
Dublin South Central (2)	Dun Laoire (2)
Dublin North West (2)	Carlow/Kilkenny (2)
Dublin South West (2)	Cork North Central (2)
Dublin West (2)	Cork South Central (2)
Limerick East (2)	Galway East
Clare	Donegal South West
Sligo/Leitrim	Cork North West
Laois/Offaly	Meath (2)
Wicklow (2)	Kildare (2)
	Cavan/Monaghan

classes, FF and Labour do battle over the working class, recently FG and Labour contest over significant sections of the working class and progressive middle class support while Labour contends with alternative parties of the Left.

What can we expect with Labour's strategy and the demographic changes occurring:

— FF will be assaulted on three fronts: the reduction of the farmers' class as previously described; a struggle with Labour over a growing working class; and a continuing fight with FG over the middle classes.

— FG will be fighting with FF over a smaller farmers' class; continuing contest with FF over the middle classes; and a struggle with Labour over working class support it has assimilated during the alignment period, as well as progressive middle class support.

— again, PD could potentially further complicate this competition, by drawing off middle class (primarily urban) support from both FF and FG and making certain inroads into FG's larger farmer support.

A number of demographic factors are working in Labour's favour. The Farmers classes (small and large) are declining in numbers, though, politically they will remain strong for some time. The natural seat of a socialist party's strength, the urban/town areas will continue to grow. The population structure will remain young over the next few decades. While the working class will continue to expand, this expansion will be measured more and more by the unemployed and marginalised. Labour will have to actively target those areas and sections of the population it seeks to win over to secure realignment.

Targeting the Vote

To say we should be strong in Dublin, Cork and large town areas is to state the obvious. A more exact approach is needed. For example, if Labour received the same proportion of social class support in the last election as it did in 1969, it would've had over 22% nationally. Future electoral strategies will have to incorporate a broad range of demographic and political factors (urban/rural ratios, socio-economic categories, age breakdown, etc.). This assumes the Party knows what information it requires, can accumulate and analyse it, and then incorporate it into an electoral strategy.

For example in Meath the population has been shifting towards the East/South-East in the last 20 years, as part of the suburbanisation process. Including the Navan district, nearly two-thirds of Meath will be soon living

in these areas which, being the youngest sections, will continue to expand. With the rapid growth in the urban/town areas of the county (189% increase in two decades) a rudimentary outline appears. Taking socio-economic factors to identify working class concentration, past electoral performances and organisational activity, we can construct a composite picture of Meath. With candidates, branches and politics, in young, growing, working class areas of Meath we can make future electoral gains.

'Minority Government is a weapon to fragment the conservative parties'

Our strategy will also locate conservative strongholds in working class areas. We could then target these areas, electorally and organisationally in some priority, all the more important since it is from FF we seek working class support. Given a party with limited resources, pursuing a realignment strategy based on social class support, it's all the more necessary to maximise those resources.

All this will be academic without the ability to implement that strategy. This means far-reaching changes in how the Party functions and we will address this in the following sections. But the days when local Party units emerge, close down, and operate without any central planning, without any relationship to a national strategy will have to end, if we are to get on with the work of transforming political competition.

Knocking on the Door

At what point does realignment become a reality? When Labour makes it its strategy, renouncing conservative alignment. When Labour actually believes in it. But there are psychological barriers parties are conscious of. Will FF fall below 40%? Will FG become the largest party. Sometimes there's no reason why numbers or plateaus themselves should be significant. Let's take a hypothesis: Labour obtains 25% of the vote resulting in 41 out of 166 seats (some of these may be other socialist seats). This would constitute a major bloc, capable of denying either party a majority government, and holding out for a conservative coalition. Once such a coalition occurs the consensus will finally be broken. But is 25% a realistic goal?

In 1982 (N) Socialist parties and independents received 13.4% of the vote — in a period when Labour was in

conservative alignment, when voter participation was declining among the working class, when socialist parties were competing rather than cooperating. To reach 25% would mean an increase of 11.6% of the vote, the election of a further 21 socialist seats. Are there any historical precedents for this growth.

— Between 1933 and 1943 Labour increased its vote from 5.7% to 15.7% from 7 to 17 seats (in a period when the total number of seats declined from 153 to 138). This meant an average swing of 3.3% of the vote in each of the three elections. This was in a period when FF was not yet considered a conservative, establishment party.

— Between 1957 and 1969 Labour increased from 9.1 — 17.0% during three elections representing a swing of 2.6 in each election. In Dublin it increased from 8.1 to 28.3%, a phenomenal 6.7% swing, jumping from one to ten deputies. Many claim the numbers were illusory. However, we've cited the real failures of this period and getting votes was not one of them. Also, Labour was strongest in among 18-21 age group who couldn't vote then. One thing is certain, many would prefer the illusory increase of votes in the '60s than the real losses sustained in the last few years.

The historical precedents are there. Once an MGS strategy is adopted we might expect four to five elections in a 15 year period. During that period Labour would need a 11.6% increase in the vote, meaning an average of 2.3% swing in each election. This is lower than in either the '60s or the '30s. In the table below we give an indication of what swings in each constituency are needed to gain a seat (see Table 3.7).

The number of Dail seats and constituencies may change. Labour will be concentrating its vote to maximise its gain in seats (5% will mean a seat in Dublin/North Central, not Roscommon). This does not account for any temporary setbacks or starting from a lower base than in 1982. And while Labour should establish a national presence in all constituencies this is neither necessary in a realignment strategy nor probable in the short/medium term. The point is that 25% is realisable in the medium term, and at that stage Labour will be on the verge of precipitating a fundamental transformation in political competition.

Voter Participation

The decline in people voting has been steady and while this cannot be broken down by social class, evidence from other countries shows that voter

participation is lower among the working class. This has serious consequences for a socialist party.

Starting at a low point in 1957, voter participation steadily increased throughout the '60s, peaking at 1973 (when the voting age was lowered) and declined ever since. The trends in Dublin are even more of a contrast (see Table 3.8).

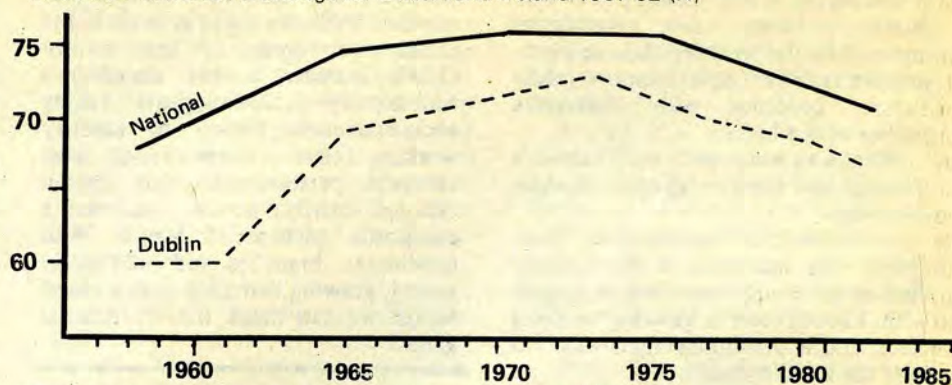
Two interpretations can be advanced: first, participation paralleled the general increase/decrease in economic prosperity, with non-participation reflecting the depressing effects of recessions. Or secondly, the graph follows the Labour strategies of anti-coalitionism/FG alignment. While we should be cautious in drawing any cause-effect relationship, it's interesting that working class participation increased as Labour was gaining strength in this section, declining as they drifted away from Labour. If there is no alternative on offer to the working class, it shouldn't be surprising that many opt out (in many working class areas in Dublin, voter participation is as low as 25%).

The Party should take account of this in future electoral and organisational strategies. A rise in voter participation (and voting patterns during the '60s indicated that those returning to vote, voted Labour) could become a major source of support especially since those not voting are inclined to be young, working class and alienated from the conservative electoral consensus.

Transfers

It has been said many Labour seats are dependent on transfer support from conservative parties — notably FG. Certainly any socialist strategy will

Table 3.8 Turnout Percentage for Dublin and Ireland 1957-82 (N)



alienate non-Left transfer support. But in the last election FG transfers played little role in getting Labour deputies elected. It's FG who have been the main beneficiaries of Labour transfers and by their strength, and Labour's decline, they have surpassed Labour candidates waiting for the transfers to elect them.

To the extent Labour is dependent upon conservative transfers, it is Labour's own doing — a reflection in the decline in first preferences. In 1969 11 constituencies electing labour deputies achieved a full quota while in the last election only two constituencies reached this mark. In 1982 (N) the combined Left vote, however, achieved full quotas in 11 constituencies.

Labour will have to prepare for the loss of conservative transfers, having to rely more and more on its own strength. There's very little a socialist party can do about this. But in the long term it should be welcomed, for conservative transfers will become rarer as Labour succeeds in realigning politics on a left/right basis.

Political parties will only reflect the realignment process in the later stages. For instance, FF traditionally returns deputies with support from different sections — urban TDs with working class support, rural TDs with farmers, TDs with middle class. Labour's MGS strategy is designed to exploit those tensions. Working class support for Labour's programme will not disintegrate FF, just result in fewer TDs elected with working class support. When the Parliamentary parties no longer reflect traditional support bases realignment will become inevitable.

For realignment will not occur until conservatives demand a consolidation to defend or advance their own interests against an opposing one. That opposing interest is the interest of the majority of Irish people — the working class and progressives in society. Today, that interest finds itself politically and ideologically fragmented between two broad class alliances. We have outlined a strategy that can break through those alliances. What Labour will need is a programme that can unite an alternative alliance.

A NEW MAJORITY

Labour will be mobilising an alternative alliance of working class and progressives voters. This will be rooted first and foremost in the manual working class which makes up over 50% of the population. The 'traditional' working class, industrial and service manual workers have always been the mass core of any labour or socialist party. Labour in the future. This class will play the major role in an alternative socialist alliance or there will be no alternative.

Clerical workers — white-collar or 'new' working class — comprise a small but rapidly growing sector of the workforce. While the census doesn't give a breakdown by administrative grades the overwhelming majority are made up of clerks, typists and general office workers with lower and middle supervisory and general office workers with lower and middle supervisory and general office workers with lower and middle supervisory personnel making up a tiny fraction.

To incorporate this section will require overcoming the traditional separation of 'office' and 'shop-floor', manual and non-manual workers.

To broaden this alliance Labour will create links with progressives in the middle class. This should not be confused with the 'liberal' middle class. Liberalism, as stated before, is a distinct articulation of conservatism and while socialists and liberals will find common ground on many issues, especially in an authoritarian culture, cohabitation will always be temporary and limited.

The progressive middle class, however, are those that positively align themselves with a socialist programme. For example, lower professionals working in the public sector, may well support a programme emphasising the development and extension of this sector. In this way Labour can build more lasting relationships with pro-

gressives, though this will be limited to a minority within the middle class.

Related to this task of mobilising an alternative alliance Labour will be developing concrete policies to be used in MGS. In the former, the Party mobilises people around a democratic socialist programme that poses radically alternative social and economic relationships. In the latter, it develops programmatic initiatives around popular issues laying the groundwork for Labour's realignment strategy. The two processes cannot be separated. Socialist blueprints are impractical in MGS just as programmatic reforms will not mobilise an alternative alliance. An excellent example is the ICTU's 'Confronting the Jobs Crisis' which provides a concrete progressive programme — without resorting to abstractions (or even mentioning 'socialism').

For this alternative alliance will not be socialist in the first instance. Socialism is not on the agenda and no amount of 'socialist' policy making will put it there. This alliance will, at first, be anti-conservative, led by socialists towards a realignment of Irish politics. It is this irrevocable break-up of conservative consensus that can place socialism on the agenda. What follows is neither a political programme or a series of policy options. Rather we outline broad thematic approaches. Policies and programmes can only be worked out through the collective experience of the Labour Movement itself.

Institutionalising Full Employment

The Left's not only losing the argument on full employment, we're not even putting forward the case. The Right have successfully depicted unemployment as a natural phenomenon, a universal or European reality, beyond the solution of individual governments. The political fall-out of this ideological victory has created a climate in which mass unemployment is not only considered inevitable but even acceptable.

Mass unemployment is not an inevitability in modern economics but the consequence of particular policies pursued by individual governments. The European experience is instructive: countries with relatively low levels of unemployment are characterised by a high level of direct state intervention into the economy. This can take the form of macro-economic planning, cooption of the private sector into planning agreements, expansive fiscal and monetary policies, active labour market policies (e.g. public works, comprehensive (re)training programmes) investment planning combined with state control

over banking policies and a high level of public enterprise. Sweden, Austria, Norway and, to some extent, Finland are examples (Table 4.1).

Countries with high levels of unemployment are those that consistently cut back on the public sector, relying instead on private interests and 'free' market forces. This is combined with tight fiscal policies and a general rolling back of the state. Britain, the Netherlands, and more recently Belgium, France and West Germany are examples of this. Unfortunately both FF and Coalition governments, by relying on the private sector, have also taken up this unemployment option.

Table 4.1 Percentage of Labour Force Unemployed in 13 European Countries in 1984

High	
Ireland	17.6
Belgium	14.0
Netherlands	14.0
Great Britain	13.2
Denmark	10.3
Italy	10.1
Medium	
France	9.8
Germany	7.4
Finland	6.1
Low	
Austria	4.2
Sweden	3.1
Norway	3.0
Switzerland	1.1

The major political task facing Labour is to convince the working class that unemployment is not inevitable, that a national road to full employment is possible and realisable. If Labour, with the trade union movement, cannot win this ideological struggle, the working class will become resigned to unemployment and, so, lost to an alternative economic programme.

Related to this is tax equity. The Right have successfully separated tax equity from the performance of the economy at large while equating it with tax reductions. In this way, they can continue their attacks on state expenditure while ignoring the effect of unemployment on taxation policy or regressive state subsidies to business sectors.

Labour must link tax reform with unemployment, because the real cause behind the country's fiscal problems is not the size of the state but the lack of production and exploitation of national resources. Unemployment policies inevitably result in high tax levels. Labour must also link tax equity with a radical expansion of the

tax base — corporate, capital, farmers and wealth tax, which would result in real equity, and regressive state subsidies to the middle and business classes (e.g. private education, inefficient agricultural sectors, etc.) By linking tax, unemployment and the role of state in the economy, the Left can overturn the Right's arguments on the economy.

Power and Economic Democracy

Arguments over employment, public expenditure, the public sector mask more fundamental struggles: with whom does power lie. Whether it's the working class using the state to ensure job security, to publicly consume health, transport and education services, to realise a participatory standard of living and plan the economy and society according to their needs; or whether a few will continue to own most of the wealth in society, maintaining their own interests in a 'free' economy, living off the work of the majority at the expense of the nation; though it's never mentioned in election manifestos and on public platforms, politics is ultimately about power.

The Left has traditionally relied on nationalised ownership, the public sector and the welfare state to transfer power from the minority to the majority. However, these traditional approaches are under retreat in Ireland and Europe. Part of the reason lies in the failure of classical reformism to resolve fundamental problems within capitalism. Another is the ideological attack (e.g. Thatcherism, the New Right in Ireland) which has equated socialism with inefficiency, bureaucratic statism and an erosion of individual freedom. The Left must take account of the alienation that many feel from the state sector. This counter-offensive must involve reconstructing traditional socialist approaches.

This means redefining the welfare state in terms of equality rather than 'a safety net' or 'looking after the needy'. Services such as housing, transport, health, education, leisure, community care services, etc. are an expansion of social choices and life patterns to everyone and not just to those who can afford to purchase them privately. The crux is whether working men and women can democratically decide to purchase public goods and service or whether they will be left to the vagaries of the marketplace and the 'poor man's sector'.

Socialisation of power in the economy must be posed in terms of democracy. Nationalisation, public ownership do not necessarily extend

democratic control by workers. It is the relations of capital and labour within the firm, sector and society that is the issue. Industrial democracy, the labour-managed sector and consumer participation in production can rework the issues of public ownership. It is through the integration of all sectors through state-led planning combined with institutionalised participation by the trade unions in all areas of production, investment and marketing that the gradual socialisation of economic and political power can be realised.

Thirdly, Labour must define the reform of state apparatuses in terms of popular participation and control. Whether it be democratic control of education, popularising the criminal justice system, consumer councils in the public sector and freedom of information Labour must project democracy beyond the ballot box, into a continual and deeply-layered series of institutional relationships.

Through such a programme Labour can mount a counter-offensive to the ideologies of the Right, through themes of democracy, power, participation and equality. Socialists can turn the debate towards the fundamental question of politics — who has the power to control and direct society.

The National Question

Raise the national question in a party meeting and people will run away, form a hundred splits or launch into platitudes. The first step is to actually confront the issue, and not just through resolutions and positioning. This will involve a full debate on all positions, in all the complexities that have historically divided socialists.

We cannot attempt that here. The divisions, however, between those who seriously pursue a united socialist Ireland can be broadly generalised in two, seemingly mutually exclusive premises:

(1) the major obstacle to unity is the continuing claim to sovereignty by Britain which results in the maintenance of the border by British imperialism, in whose interest lies the continued division of Ireland and, so, the Irish working class.

(2) the major obstacle to unity is the ideological/political opposition of the protestant working class which is independent of the British presence in Ireland.

In the first, Labour should lead an anti-imperialist coalition against the British presence in the North. This places sovereignty and the declaration of intention to withdraw high on the agenda thereby eschewing any 'internal settlement'. In the second,

working class unity is the precondition for advancement on the constitutional question, making a democratic assembly in which the working class can find its own autonomous voice in the North a priority.

This does not exhaust all the arguments, premises and analyses. The Northern issue defies such generalisations. It is within these two premises, however, that Labour must find either a synthesis between, or consensus on. Otherwise, the Left will continually suffer divisions and dispute, denying socialists a united voice in the Northern debate.

'An alternative alliance will be built on the working class or it will not be built at all'

While these divisions shouldn't be underestimated there is common agreement on issues from which a consensus can emerge:

— a socialist Ireland will only be built by the Irish working class, protestant and catholic, north and south.

— this new Ireland will not be an extension of the South or the North, but a negation of the existing states

— it can only be brought about by the democratic process

— a socialist Ireland will be neutral

— the complete secularisation of all Irish institutions

— the commitment to human rights and opposition to repressive state practices north and south of the border

Labour must define the Northern issue as FF has, in terms of nationhood and the Irish people, involving a complex of national identity, socio-economic autonomy and its role in world affairs. Labour can then oppose the conservative nationalist consensus (green and orange) with an alternative reconstruction of the Irish nation. Just as FF has defined Ireland in Gaelic, catholic and parochial anti-Brit terms, socialists, by uniting working class and progressives throughout the island, can redefine 'Ireland' to accommodate all traditions, nationalist and non-nationalist, catholic and protestant, incorporating and transcending them. This can enable Labour to directly intervene in the North, politically and organisationally, building a socialist presence within the Northern counties. To disengage the working class from FF's nationalist alliance is to likewise disengage the working class from conservative unionist alliances.

Progressive Interest Issues

It's understandable that socialists are

suspicious of a liberal agenda. Before it was popular, socialists were campaigning on social issues (divorce, contraception, etc.) and only when they began to win over public opinion did liberals start proclaiming crusades, taking credit for positions most of them had previously opposed. Even today, socialists campaign on issues like the Criminal Justice Act, travellers rights and secularisation of schools while liberals are noticeable by their absence.

This shouldn't dilute our commitment to radical social reform, just make us dubious about the ephemeral temperament of Irish liberalism. Separating the 'economic' from the 'social' allows sections of the Right to pose as other than conservative ('liberal on social issues'). They in fact cannot be so separated. Feminism not only addresses the immediate socio-economic position of women, it offers a critique of hierarchal relations within a capitalist society. The mindless and wasteful pursuit of private profit wreaks havoc on the environment just as much as in the workplace. Issues of civil liberties and travellers' rights concern a plurality of opportunities and life patterns, paralleling issues of a participatory public economy. Within this perspective progressive critiques can enrich traditional socialist thought, providing a common programme for radicals from all traditions.

Linking progressive issues within a socialist programme is imperative since many cannot be reduced to ideological or class considerations (you don't have to be a socialist to want peace). Labour could then reach people who are not or do not consider themselves to be working class or socialist, forging a common ground that could facilitate a more lasting unity, led by socialists. For judging on past performance, it will only be socialists who will stand by the hard issues of social reform and freedom.

Europe and Peace

Just like the North, there are sharp divisions over Ireland's role in Europe with conflicting arguments over sovereignty, neutrality and imperialism. Discussion on issues of European integration and cooperation at times takes place at highly abstract levels. However, two points can help work through these entangled and complex issues:

(1) by distinguishing between the EEC, the treaty of Rome and a truly European community (which by definition includes East and West) the debate can be conducted in precise rather than rhetorical terms. This would avoid romanticising Europe and

confusing it with an exclusive Western Europeanism.

(2) following through the implications of a non-negotiable neutrality by vigorously campaigning for the removal of all foreign troops, the dismantling of military alliances and economic dependency with the US and the USSR, the removal of all nuclear weapons and the creation of a neutral Europe. Through such a campaign, a better understanding of European cooperation (rather than facilitating American foreign policy) and a real identity of common interests, East and West, may emerge.

By unequivocally championing neutrality, breaking with the Atlanticism of the two conservative parties and campaigning for political, economic and military non-alignment, Labour can not only promote an alternative role for Ireland in the world, but can begin to work through the complexities of the emerging European debate.

Rural Ireland

For too long socialists have accepted the conservative definition of rural politics. This may suit the IFA but unless Labour is content to abandon

a large section of people to a no-go area it must challenge this. Poor access to inadequate services such as health, transport and education, lack of housing and basic amenities, the absence of integrated regional planning and direct investment into rural economy, growing levels of unemployment, the isolation of the aged and poor — it is these issues which conservatives ignore when championing rural Ireland.

By linking the failure of the market economy in urban and rural society Labour can participate in the rural debate. Such policies would include radical reform of land tenure, cooption of private agriculture into planning agreements, regional industrialisation and state led planning in all sectors of the rural economy. It is time Labour put this argument.

It's time, too, Labour put its politics to rural Ireland. We have ghettoised ourselves, saying rural Ireland does not want to hear about socialism, social reform, democratic planning. So we don't put the argument. When irredentist conservatism wins out we just say they don't want to hear us. However, the anti-amendment campaign is a case in

point: Where the AAC established groups in rural areas, canvassed people, held meetings and campaigned directly, the no vote was higher than in similar areas where no campaign was held. That's the way it is with people, constantly being open to ideas, reason and dialogue. To begin to put the arguments is to begin to change people's view of society and economy.

These programmatic themes are transitional not socialist. Socialism cannot be put onto the agenda until a realignment in Irish politics occurs. This realignment, itself, must become a major theme in Labour's programme — that there is no fundamental difference between parties of the Right. The MGS strategy is designed not to implement, but to lay the groundwork for socialist ascendancy. Socialism is not a once off day after next achievement but a complex, dynamic transformation which is already at work and which will take a long time to come, if ever. Tomorrow, though, is conjectural. Here and now we work, we articulate, we campaign.

ACTIVATING A CAMPAIGNING PARTY

The word 'organisation' is something of a convenience. It is something others have when they're successful, something we don't have when we fail. Convenient or not, it misses the point — successes and failure are political. Many make the mistake of analysing 'policies' on one hand and 'organisation' on the other, assuming the two can be separated, forgetting the subject under discussion is 'political organisation'.

Labour's ability to organise an alternative socialist alliance is non-existent. Its organisation is composed of fragmented local units, traditionally geared to the election canvass, the raising of funds and the propagating of candidates through clinic casework. Within these electoralist parameters, the Party fails to achieve the level of organisation, membership and financing it claims it needs to become a major party.

The Party has become a victim of

its own practices and prejudices. By confusing political organisation with electoral machinery it ignores the political essence of its organisation. 'Organisation', then, becomes a way to elect candidates but as Labour has discovered, fewer and fewer get elected. When the organisation breaks down so does the politics. What gets lost is that the politics broke down in the first place.

Towards a Campaigning Party

Politics is about actively changing people's view of society and economy, actively winning them over to socialism. Putting forward arguments, speaking with people, involving them in that socialism whether on the factory floor, the office, the housing estates, the trade union and Party branches, the public meeting, the doorstep and the polling booth — that's how campaigning politics wins

people over. It's not an electoral activity, it's constant activity. This may be a cliché, but it's true: at elections you don't win votes, you collect them.

Bringing people to socialism and socialism to people; there is much talk about a campaigning, socialist party but there's no tradition of this in Labour. There are many ways in which this can be done:

— propaganda work: bringing political information whether of local or national importance, to people's homes and workplaces

— organising work: organising people and 'public opinion' around a hundred different issues that affect everyday lives whether it be a factory closure, demands for local services, human rights, tax reform or jobs

— cooperative work with progressive interest groups/trade unions: assisting, supplementing or initiating solidarity action with workers' and progressive groups outside of the Party.

This is the work the Party should be about, constantly working with people in their areas of activity. The tools an activist can use are almost limitless:

— composing and distributing leaflets, newsletters and local press and media releases

— calling of public meetings, using other forums, organising delegations

and groups to public officials

- use of surveys, comprehensive advice centres, recruitment drives

- supporting or organising pickets/direct action, raising funds for progressive causes

- coordinating political work with local representatives, candidates and Party officials

- petitioning, gathering signatures, organising media events

- use of branch/constituency meetings to liaise with local progressive groups.

Many branches and activists, presently, carry out such work. But insofar as it is isolated and not part of any national strategy, they have only limited effects, if any. The nature and character of the Party doesn't admit a campaigning activism, members are not organised into this work, resources and training are not provided, the politics isn't there. Activism outside of electioneering and resolution mongering has a free lance character.

Party membership

The member is the Party's most valuable asset. Only through its membership can the Party actively win people over, put the arguments, organise the campaigns, bring socialism to people.

The programme of a campaigning party brings members into active contact with people. This means something more than just leafletting and fund-raising. Many factors affect this type of activism: organisational structures, finance, training and education, but more importantly motivation - giving members the sense that their local work, integrated into a national strategy, is a vital element in constructing a socialist party and society.

In many respects, however, Party membership differs little from FF/FG's which is used primarily for canvassing, fund-raising, and providing clinic casework information to local representatives. Of course, this is necessary but elections and clinics reflect people's view of society. Labour's task is to change that view. Electoral, financial and organisational success is conditioned on this political success.

Political work cannot be confined to the Party alone. Activists must take their politics, their skills, their sense of purpose into related areas, into trade union activity, progressive campaigns (e.g. CND, Divorce Action Group, Anti-Apartheid), and local groups (e.g. unemployment groups, tenants associations). Socialist activity is about linking all activity together so that people can be won over to progressive politics through many fronts.

The total effect is to develop a political climate conducive to a socialist ascendancy.

Building an Active Practice

Activity breeds activity. Party members are not lacking in initiative, unwilling to campaign on issues and policies. Ask them what the Party should be doing and the list would be endless. But then, so are the obstacles: too few numbers, too little money, fragmented organisational structures, no Party assistance, direction or motivation. Members are left in their branches to do what they can.

The Party should actively assist in the planning and implementation of political activity, at local and national levels:

- publish a comprehensive 'Activists Handbook', a complete how-to guide for activists providing detailed guidelines to campaigning activities

- a regular bulletin be circulated (e.g. the British Labour Party's 'Labour Organiser') to supplement and update the Handbook. Members could exchange ideas and projects, successes and failures through this regular publication.

- organisational workshops held throughout the Party for activists. These would cover all aspects of organisation from leafletting fund-raising, organising local campaigns and conducting an election.

Through publications, workshops and centralised strategy development the Party could slowly imbue its membership with an activist, campaigning character. The commitment and combined expertise is there. What is needed is a central initiative, and structures conducive to a campaigning activism.

II: THE BRANCH STRUCTURE

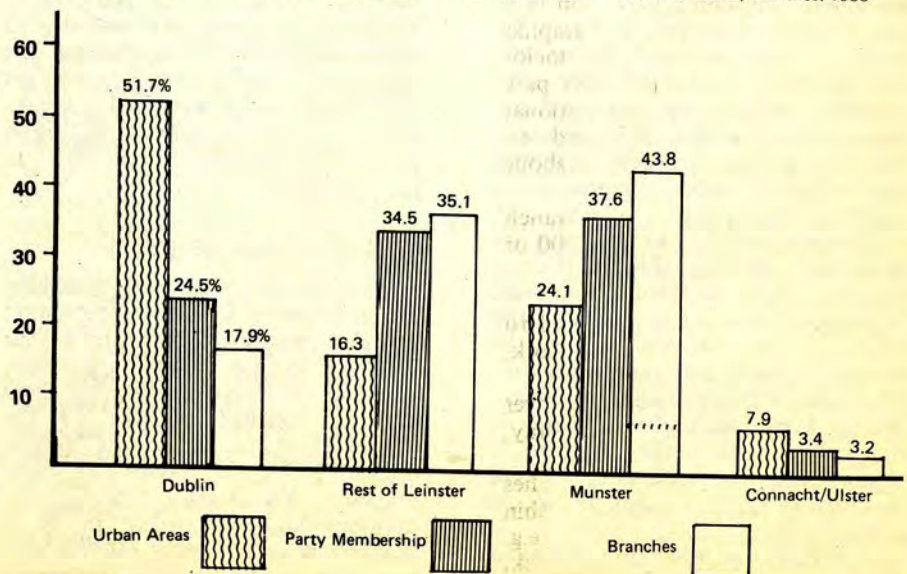
The fundamental unit of the Party is the Branch. This is where members meet, the source of political activity and discussion and where the decision making process begins (e.g. Conference and selection Convention delegates). There has been criticism of the branch structure but much of this is misdirected. It's been said that branches (i.e. the rank and file) have too much power, inhibiting coordination within the Party. It's not the power that branches possess, however, but their fragmentation and decentralisation.

These criticisms equate the powers of the branch with the branch themselves. If branches are created and maintained for electoralist reasons, to provide votes at Selection conventions, to maintain a base for candidates then it's not the branch that has power, it is the process of manipulation that has. The branch is merely a formality and the branch structure is reduced to aggregate units of convenience.

Such criticisms further presume that the Party takes its branch structure seriously. There is no direct relationship between Head Office and branches, no monitoring of branch performance, no planning, no resources provided. The branch only comes into contact with the national Party through Head Office circulars.

In the final analysis power in any democratic organisation must rise from the membership itself which is composed of local units in which members can participate. However it's broken down there will be grass roots units. Whether they are called branches, CLP sub units or whatever, they must allow for democratic participation, planning and

Table 5.1 Percentage Distribution of Urban Areas, Party membership and Party Branches by Province, 1985



efficiency. The question is not of power but what kind of structures, for what purpose, to what end.

Winning the Urban/Town areas

Labour must actively win over the working class and this will be won or lost in the urban/town areas. This is where the working class live, these are the fastest growing, youngest areas of the country. If Labour is not firmly rooted in these areas then the decades will pass it by.

CLP membership records (the Party does not release branch membership) show the extreme disparity of membership throughout the Party (see Table 5.1). Not only are urban areas severely under-represented, there are more branches and members in Kerry and Kildare than in all of Dublin. Membership is heavily concentrated in TD constituencies (nearly 70%). This reflects the Party's historical roots in rural Munster and Leinster. Soon nearly half of Dail deputies will be elected from the four eastern counties. The contrast between the past and the future could hardly be sharper.

The branch structure should reflect the logic of present and future trends. A campaigning membership must be concentrated in the growing urban/town areas. Such a restructuring would necessitate a reorganisation of branch numbers along an urban/town geography with larger branch sizes (in some CLPs average branch membership is under nine). This would enable direct linkage between the Party and its membership.

Towns are defined as 1500 people or more. As noted earlier this underestimates the real size. Further there are smaller 'towns' which have a high concentration of working class (e.g. industrial towns) and some are growing at a rate that will quickly bring them into the census definition of a town. So while population is a key criteria, future demographic trends, occupational and socio-economic categories along with past election returns and organisational presence should also be used to determine suitable areas for Labour branches.

Let's take an example of a branch structure rooted in towns of 1000 or more (see Table 5.2):

- one branch per town
- multi branch areas confined to larger urban areas (e.g. Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway)
- potential multi-branch areas over 15,000 (e.g. Dundalk, Drogheda, Bray, Tralee, etc.)

In multi-branch areas, branches should be situated, if possible, within traditional community areas (e.g. Dublin: branches sited in Kilbarrack,

Table 5.2 Proposed Branch Structure



Crumlin, Ringsend, Blanchardstown, etc.) whose membership would be primarily but not necessarily living in those areas. In many urban branches nearly all the members don't live in the branch or even constituency area.

The contrast with the present structure is striking (e.g. in Kildare there are more branches than in all of Cork). How much is due to geographical considerations, internal competition between potential candidates, a clientelist conception of branch activity is difficult to say. It has developed randomly with many branches rarely meeting, averaging between five and ten members, having no contact with Head Office. This makes activism of any sort impossible.

In our hypothetical structure branches would number between 275 and 325 depending on the breakdown in urban CLPs with less than this total at first since in many areas the Party is not organised (e.g. most of

Connacht/Ulster). The purpose is not to cover every square mile with a branch, only the urban/town areas for these are the critical areas in Labour's realignment strategy. Political activity will require direct liaison with Head Office, larger branches to sustain activity and work in larger population areas to maximise the resources of the Party.

Support Groups

This doesn't mean active branches would be eliminated because they don't fit some abstract criteria. The Party must foster activity wherever it can. However, certain proposals (e.g. equal representation, financial - see following sections) will have the effect of rationalising branches if they exist for reasons other than to promote Party activity.

Another problem, though, is the failure to distinguish between supporters and activists. A supporter is one who wishes to help the Party or local candidate by election canvassing, contributions, or by providing local information to the representative. The supporter may not be interested in taking on the political and financial responsibilities of Party membership.

Several local units maintain a list of supporters who, though not members, assist at elections, national collection, etc. There is no way at present to incorporate supporters into the Party except as members. This creates a dual-type membership - activist orientated and support orientated. It's not that 'supporters' are paper members. They are doing what they had only intended to do and, in many cases, this is all there is to party activity. The fault lies in a failure to define activity which makes it impossible to exploit membership effectively.

The 1985 Conference created an associate membership category. While not operative, it's undoubtedly con-

The visit of President Reagan offered a unique opportunity for Labour to campaign on its international policy and provide solidarity to the victims of American foreign policy. A Campaign could have been organised in cooperation with the trade unions to:

- provide transport for activists from around the country to protest points organised at every stop off point for Reagan
- leaflets, posters
- resolutions opposing the visit before local authorities and both houses of the Oireachtas
- abstention (or walkouts) by all Party members from Reagan events

Not only would Labour have captured the national attention, the international press/media would have reported in detail on mass organised protests by socialists in Ireland. As it was - though many activists including the Party Chairperson and several Labour representatives, actively showed their solidarity and internationalism - Labour was identified with promoting the visit through the welcome accorded him by the Party Leadership. Campaigning not only means activity, it means having one's politics right.

cerned with this distinction – to formally incorporate ‘supporters’ into the Party. This category could be organised into ‘Labour Support Groups’ (LSG). These would act as a second organisational tier for local units – providing canvassing cover at election time (and national Collection) where no formal branch exists or where one exists, but the supporters don’t want to become active members. It can also be used for propaganda, fund-raising and recruitment.

CLPs should be given responsibility for maintaining a network of supporters through, for example, annual newsletters, socials, and notice of special events while Head Office could utilise these lists for propaganda and fund-raising efforts. In many respects LSG would act as many branches do, meeting annually, operating as an electoral/funding element of the CLP organisation.

As such LSGs should be kept informal with no membership fees or financial duties imposed since they would not be party members. By formally linking supporters to CLPs this would extend Labour’s influence beyond its membership proper, providing another lever in its organisational strategy. With an activist party membership, rooted in the urban/town areas, buttressed by support groups in rural and urban areas, it only remains to discuss how this streamlined, rationalised branch structure can be coordinated to common sets of political goals.

THE ORGANISATION UNIT

We are attempting to substitute an electoralist, ad hoc membership with an active campaigning one, a party rooted historically in rural Munster and Leinster with one rooted in the growing urban/town areas, replacing fragmented and decentralised structures with more centralised ones. This will neither be easy or painless.

It must begin with a greatly expanded Head Office/A.C. apparatus. There is no staff exclusively concerned with organisational work with local units. While there are national officers (Honorary Organiser, Director of Elections) their voluntary nature cannot fulfil the roles suggested by their title. The A.C./Head Office apparatus cannot monitor branch/CLP performance, nor provide resources or training in organisation. It cannot coordinate the rank and file within the branch structure nor with other Party units (e.g. PLP, LWNC, etc.). In short, it cannot fulfil an organisational role. What’s ironic is that the A.C. has the executive power to fulfil these functions.

The Dunnes Store Strike saw sporadic, uncoordinated Labour activity:

- The Dublin Regional Council organised mass pickets on Saturday afternoons which were sparsely attended
- a few local units organised sympathetic protests outside local Dunnes Stores (Dublin South East, Meath)
- Labour Youth organised, with IDATU, a concert benefit for the strike fund

A more comprehensive campaign directed by the Party centrally would have made greater impact, mobilised more activists, identified the Party with the goals of the strike and pushed the issue of Apartheid on the agenda:

- collections by all local units (e.g. pub collections) for the strike fund
- sympathetic protests throughout the country
- leaflets and posters identifying Labour with the issue
- motions placed before local authorities, the Dail and Senate by Labour representatives
- a high media profile by Labour spokespersons at the local and national levels

In this way Labour would have gained immense publicity for the strikers, the party’s position on Apartheid and rights of workers, and for the politics of campaigning socialism.

The first step is the creation of an Organisation Unit within Head Office, headed by a full-time Organisation Secretary. This position would be directly responsible to the General Secretary, vested with executive functions outlined in the Constitution (e.g. inspection of branch records, right to call and attend branch/constituency meetings etc.). It would eventually be expanded to include full-time regional organisers/agents (e.g. Dublin, Cork, the West, etc.).

The Unit would be responsible for the following areas:

Coordinate Branch/Constituency Activity: to initiate and coordinate political activity among the membership at the branch and CLP level, and coordinate activities between local units and the A.C. For instance, constituency cooperation is very rare, even within regional councils. It’s impossible to implement national activity from the A.C. throughout the Party (e.g. the Food Subsidies campaign in 1978).

This would include monitoring the performance of local units. Making branches/local units directly accountable to Head Office will bring the membership into closer liaison with the Party and allow the Party to determine the effectiveness of its own organisation in all areas of activity.

Administering the Campaign Fund: As the Unit would be the centre of campaign coordination, an organisation fund would be established (see Finance), not only for election expenses but for local units to carry out continuous political activity in their areas (e.g. publication of newsletters, leaflets, local campaign projects). Branches could submit work projects to the Organisation Unit for funding.

This would be part of a general strategy to centralise election financing, allowing the Party to target financial assistance, relieving the local membership from the greater part of raising its own campaigning funds. A re-evaluation of election expenditure should be undertaken. Studies continually show up the waste in most election expenditure and the minimal impact it has on voting behaviour. By incorporating election funds in a general organisation fund, the Party could exploit the truism that one pound spent between elections is worth five spent during elections.

Rationalising the Branch Structure: to coordinate and maintain restructuring, along the lines outlined above. This would involve amalgamation of branches, establishment of LSG, and the creation of new branches. This will take a high degree of cooperation between Head Office and the local units. There is presently no initiative possible in recruitment and branch establishment from Head Office. The unit will be taking a leading role using trade union and progressive interest group links, especially since it may be beyond the capacity of local units to establish branches and recruit members where no organisation exists.

Compiling Election/Demographic Material: Accumulating and analysing information to facilitate concrete long term planning. Not only would this be invaluable for local units in their own work, it would assist the A.C. in determining candidate strategy, resource targetting, branch establishment etc. This would provide a national overview in which the Party can identify those section and areas of the electorate it wishes to reach directly.

Publishing and Training: to publish organisational manuals, (Activists' Handbook, a 'Labour Organiser' Bulletin) and complementary manuals as well as conducting workshops throughout the CLPs to provide training in organisational skills, from running to a branch to implementing a work programme.

Membership: to centralise Party membership. Applicants would receive a 'New Members' Guide' to familiarise them with the Party's structures, history and political programme, participating in the Party for six months before being entitled to voting rights or incurring financial duties. If the applicant then applies for membership at this stage, this will be processed through Head Office (this occurs to

some extent already — new members cannot be candidates, selection convention or conference delegates for six months). This will help prevent manipulation of branch membership.

Periodic surveys could be undertaken to analyse the membership's composition (e.g. sex, age, occupation, etc.). Shortcomings in membership could be remedied through recruitment campaigns directed towards young people, women, trade unionists, etc.

The Party can no longer afford its parochial structures inherited from a

less ambitious period. The logic of organisation is towards centralisation — there's nothing intrinsically good or bad about this. But if the centre acts without the information, the strategy, the politics and the accountability to the Party then all these efforts will be stillborn.

If the members are to be accountable to the Party, the Party will have to be accountable to them, neither can be viewed in isolation. Branches, by being integrated into a national structure, can be freed from localistic manipulation. However, if this is to be replaced by a more centralised manipulation things may change but they will remain the same. For the essence of campaigning activism is democratic participation.

DEMOCRATISING SOCIALISM

Between constitutional prose and everyday practice there are a number of units involved in the decision making process: Conference, A.C., PLP, Party Leader, Sub-Committees, Regional and Divisional Councils, Constituencies, branches, etc. Make a flow chart of these and one begins to appreciate abstract expressionism.

There are three elements which any organisation must incorporate to provide a coherent and democratic decision-making process: authority, legitimacy and accountability.

— there must be one ultimate authority. Otherwise competing centres of authority arise making conflict inevitable (e.g. ultimate authority formally rests with Conference — as we will see, this is not the case).

— the processes by which authority is delegated must accurately reflect that authority i.e. it must legitimise the delegation of authority.

— those vested with authority must be accountable for that authority.

Authority, legitimacy, accountability — without these, an organisation is not only inviting conflict, the word 'democratic' remains just that — a word. Confrontations arise as much from ignoring these principles as from disagreements over political ends. Not only does it create contradictions between democratic rhetoric and everyday manipulation, it makes consensus impossible as the decision-making process itself is discredited. In this section we can only highlight the main areas of decision-making (though

they reach down into the branches

Equal Representation

At several levels — Conference, Selection Convention, Constituency Council — Party members are not equally represented. At its most extreme there's no certainty the majority view prevail whereas more commonly it can lead to abuse of branch structure causing factionalism and debilitation.

Unequal representation is most apparent at Selection Conventions and Constituency Councils. Branches regardless of size have four delegates. Branches of eight members are allotted as many delegates as a 23 member branch (in reality over 3 times as much voting strength). This can result in a number of undemocratic decisions (see Box).

This situation also exists at the Constituency Council level. Majority rule is a basic democratic condition but it's not so under present rules. This promotes factionalism far more than strongly held views. The first candidate needn't engage in debate or dia-

logue with comrades from the larger branches. Selection is guaranteed, the majority view being irrelevant. This can lead to alienation and frustration among those who rightly feel the rules preclude democratic decisions. Competition is no longer political or ideological, it's organisational, with branches' only value being their votes for selection.

A similar process works at Conference. Branches with five members are represented on the same basis as branches of fourteen. The smaller branch has three times as much voting strength as the larger one. As there are approximately 80 branches below a membership of ten (which can only exist in non-urban areas) this artificial weighting can be significant. Such rules bring the legitimacy of decisions and the delegation of authority into serious question.

Accountability and Authority

The Constitution reads, 'Conference shall have ultimate control in the Labour Party'. However, this is not the case in two main areas:

— the Leader and Deputy Leader

There are six branches in the West Central Constituency. Branches A, B and C have eight members each and support the first candidate. Branches D and E have 18 and 26 members respectively and support the second candidate unanimously. At the Selection Convention the first Candidate wins by 12 votes to 8 though clearly the second candidate had the support of 65% of the membership. If there had been equal representation (e.g. one delegate per five members) the second candidate would have been selected by 6-3, reflecting the majority accurately.

of the Party are not elected or 'authorised' by Conference. This power resides in the Dail Labour Party. The Constitution does not even refer to a Party Leader (mentioning only the Leader of the Labour Party in Dail Eireann).

— Conference elects only half the A.C. Nearly 25% is selected by the PLP (in practice, the Party Leader) with the remainder made up of the LWNC, Labour Youth and LTUG representatives. While this attempts to ensure that a broad cross section sits on the A.C., it in effect means the A.C. may not necessarily reflect the Party membership at large.

Neither the Party Leadership nor a great section of the A.C. derive their authority and, so, cannot be strictly accountable to the Party as a whole. Members cannot place people in, or remove them, from key executive positions. Such positions derive their authority from particular party units (e.g. Labour Youth, PLP, etc). Competing centres of authority are established, fragmenting accountability and authority within the Party. There is in practice, no ultimate control, no single authority.

Democratic Decision-making

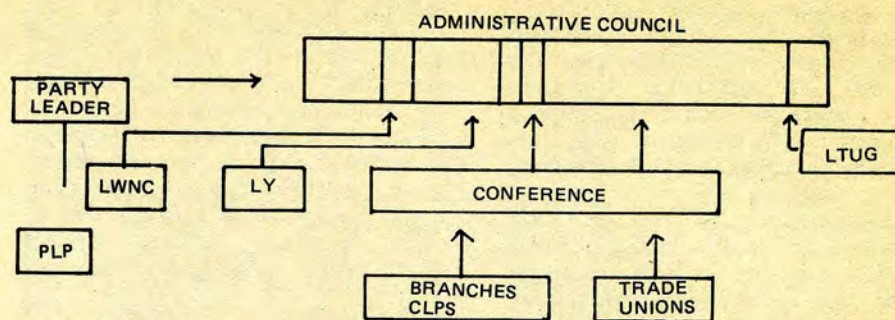
It's more than just a matter of flow charts. Democracy is a radicalising process. It actively involves people in their environment providing them the means and power to fulfil their own ends, whether in a political party or society. A more direct democracy replaces the traditional, remote relationship of 'leaders' and 'led', with one of partnership. Without this people cannot create their own ends. For Labour and its programme of democratic, participatory socialism, it's all the more important that it acts out this programme. Otherwise, it's just so much rhetoric.

Popular Selection Of Party Leader: when all the arguments are made the one that remains unanswerable is that the leader of an organisation should be elected by members of that organisation. The advantages to the Party Leader, the members and the Party are:

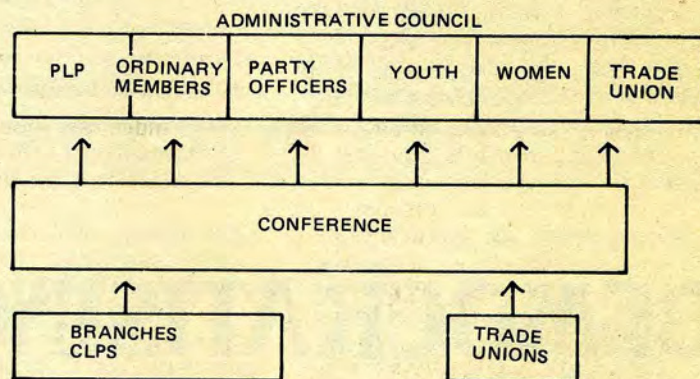
- popular selection would increase the Leader's authority within the Party, for it would come not from a small unit but from the entire Party.
- the membership would exercise control and accountability over the type of Leadership it wants.
- it would create a direct relationship and interaction between the leadership and membership. The remoteness that presently exists would be eliminated.

There are a number of methods to select the Leader: postal ballot of the

membership or by Conference, with elections held every year, three years or after each general election. The PLP or just Dail members could be eligible. Each option has its own policy implications.



PRESENT EXECUTIVE STRUCTURE: COMPETING SOURCES OF AUTHORITY



PROPOSED DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE: CONFERENCE AS AUTHORITY

membership or by Conference, with elections held every year, three years or after each general election. The PLP or just Dail members could be eligible. Each option has its own policy implications.

A Democratic Administrative Council: Any executive structure must combine two elements: it must derive its authority and be accountable to the membership while ensuring a representative cross section of members (e.g. women, youth, trade unionists etc.). In the first instance, the A.C. must be elected by Conference as a whole. This would give substance to the phrase 'ultimate control'. To ensure a broad cross section election should be done on a panel basis (as many socialist parties and trade unions do). There could be six panels:

- Party Officers' Panel
- PLP Panel
- Ordinary members Panel
- Trade Union Panel
- Women's Panel
- Youth Panel

Each panel would be assigned X amount of seats (e.g. Women's Panel: 4 seats). A.C. nominations would come from the different sections of the Party (e.g. Trade unions would nominate the Trade Union panel, branches nominate the Ordinary Members Panel, etc.). The full Conference would elect the full A.C.

from the panels. This would provide for full election of the A.C. by Conference while ensuring a broadly representative one. For instance, if the Women's Panel is four seats, there will be at least four women on the A.C. Of course women can be elected from all the other panels. The Panel system does not restrict different groups, it only ensures a minimum of their representation.

Equal Representation: legitimising the election processes in the Party is relatively straightforward. All Party members should be represented at Conference, Selection Convention and Constituency on a strictly equal basis. A simple formula would be one delegate for every five members.

These three reforms — popular selection of Party and Deputy Leader, democratic election of the A.C., and equal representation — would be an enormous step in democratising the Party and remove the fragmentation in the decision making process.

Conference

It's debatable whether National Conference is capable of fulfilling its role as the ultimate authority in the Party. Branches submit policy proposals on pieces of paper, debates are limited to a few minutes per motion. Conference

Hall is regularly three-quarters empty except for A.C. elections, the Party Leaders' Address and the 'crucial' vote. The social agenda takes precedent over the formal one while there's a revolving door character to Conference — no sooner is one over than planning for the next commences. At times, one would forget the 'ultimate authority' is in session.

This can be partly explained in the yearly nature of Conference. There's a danger the Party becomes a victim of events, reacting to current issues without a long-term perspective. Conference becomes separate yearly tests, flash points where the great issues are fought out on the larger stage. This results in a lack of continuity. This can be seen in the A.C.: no sooner is one elected, orientates itself, commences work, then it is uprooted by another election.

It is proposed that Conference be held every two years. This would allow for longer sittings (4-5 days rather than two) and increase the gravity of each conference. A number of benefits could accrue:

- sitting A.C.s would have the time to develop, implement and oversee strategy, rather than on an ad hoc basis

- it would facilitate the longer, more involved policy formation process outlined in the next section

- the Party could devote more resources into Conference (subsidised transport and accommodation, organised fringe events, etc.)

- in the years when Conference is not sitting, regional, youth and women conferences could provide forums for activists at these levels.

In a Bi-Annual Conference certain rules, (e.g. the three year exclusion rule, which is now applied inconsistently) would be redundant while to extend democratic control the Standing Orders Committee should be vested with the powers of the Conference Arrangements Committee in setting the agenda. Further the Party should create a more work-oriented environment for Conference (trade union conferences conduct annual meetings along table rather than theatre-style seating arrangements).

Consideration should be given to holding a Constituency Delegate Conference in the non-Conference years. This smaller Conference would have authority to oversee all decisions made at the previous National Conference, hear progress reports, and be empowered to ensure that all Conference decisions are carried out. This would create continuity between Conferences and allow Constituencies to play a larger role in implementing Party decisions.

These Conference proposals should

not be introduced until recommendations regarding branch structure, membership, finances and decision-making have been implemented. The intention is to vest Conference with the authority it aspires to and not provide an opportunity to avoid the rank and file. Labour Party Conference should be a well-planned, major event of the Left. The Party should encourage the attendance of Irish and international fraternal parties, progressive interest groups and all trade unions. Conference can then become a week of work, debate, festivities, education and fraternity.

Selection Convention

All candidates should be selected eighteen months before the anticipated election in national and local contests. This would enable the Party to publicise its policies and candidates at an early stage. As referred to earlier Selection Conventions should be based on equal representation of members. Another option would be to permit all members in the constituency/ward to vote. This is the logical extension of

**'for a democratic socialist Party
it's all the more important that
it acts out its democracy'**

direct democracy. However this may not be feasible for geographically large constituencies. A further improvement would be a formal process whereby candidates could be questioned by the delegates (as is done before selection conventions in the British Labour Party).

However, the selection of a candidate is only the first step. A Candidate Development Programme should be established. This might include workshops, seminars and meetings to familiarise candidates with Party policy. It might also include a regular Bulletin keeping candidates up to date on issues of particular concern such as transport, education, health, regional and local issues. Such a programme would assist candidates in presentation, public relations and organisation. There's little gain in having radical candidates if they, or the Party, are unable to present that radicalness in an engaging manner.

An Autonomous Executive

While the Administrative Council is the executive authority of the Party if has been criticised for being unable to fulfil this role. Much of this we analysed as flowing from competing centres of authority. Restoring authority and

accountability to the Party through Conference and, so, the A.C., would begin to redress this problem. There are, though, many reforms that could consolidate the A.C.'s executive authority:

- the A.C. appoints the negotiating team in all matters of parliamentary options (e.g. minority government, etc.) and this team reports to the A.C. itself and any Special Conference deemed necessary.

- A.C. meetings be lengthened to one and a half days per month (as is the practice of many trade unions) or correspondingly one day fortnightly. The present two hours a month ensures that the A.C. is merely a talking shop.

- minutes of A.C. meetings be circulated to branches to increase communication between the executive and the rank and file.

- the A.C. appoint participating observers to Party units (LWNC, Labour Youth, the PLP) to integrate the executive with Party units.

It has been suggested that the size of the A.C. makes for inefficient meetings. While a reduction would streamline meeting the problem doesn't lie in the number of participants but in their authority. Seat allotments within the Panels should retain their present ratios, with an increase for Trade unionists, women and youth in percentage terms. Further reductions could occur in non-voting members of the A.C. (e.g. the Party Officers could assume the present role of the trustees).

Establishing an autonomous A.C. is part of a general process in opening up knowledge to all party and A.C. members. Information such as the composition of branches, branch secretaries names, etc. should be open information for any branch. A.C. members should likewise have open access to all information regarding the Party. Democratising information is a precondition for democratising the Party itself.

These democratic reforms would transform Labour into a uniquely participatory party. It would streamline the cluttered decision-making process while bringing executive positions into a direct interaction with the membership. Alone, though, these measures will not produce a democratic party. This requires a politicised membership. The Left talks of politicising issues in society, but if members are not politicised how can we take our politics to people? How can we win them over to socialism?

POLITICISING THE PARTY

I. POLICY MAKING

Who makes Party policy? The Party Leader, the PLP, the A.C., Conference? Because of the contradictory decision process it's difficult to know. There are numerous examples: the Party unequivocally opposed water rates at two conferences and yet were stuck defending them at the local election. In 1984 Conference unanimously instructed the PLP to oppose the passage of the Criminal Justice Bill. Only weeks later the PLP (except some Labour Senators) broke Party policy and supported the Bill. The situation is always aggravated when Labour participates with FG. Conference makes policy on taxation, employment and social issues, but these are functionally useless given Labour's alignment in Cabinet.

It's not that the 'PLP doesn't follow party policy', the problems are more deeply entrenched. First, policies become redundant given the Party's conservative alignment: in Government because minority status makes implementation impossible, in opposition because Labour is only waiting to return Government. Secondly, policy making is not institutionalised. It lacks popular structures through which decisions can be taken except for Conference, which is only one authority among many. Thirdly, the Party is not policy conscious. It doesn't publish or circulate Conference policy. There are no programmes to familiarise members with policy. Policy documents are more the results of individual efforts, which are, then, left in Head Office with no PR campaign or back up publicity.

Policy making becomes an occupation for the ideologically committed. The Party makes no effort to actively involve the membership. Without these efforts the relevance of policy making is removed. In the following sections we will attempt to redress this. this.

Party Spokesperson

Along with the Party Leader the Party Spokesperson is potentially the most important position for articulating Party policy. The Spokesperson puts the arguments in the press/media, responds to immediate issues, and

carries the brief over the long term. If candidates are the personalisation of the Party, the Spokesperson is the personalisation of policy. The Party Spokesperson should play a major role in policy development, and though policy will be made by the Party itself, there is no doubt that each spokesperson will put his or her individual stamp to its emphasis and presentation.

Given this position's significant influence over the direction and emphasis of policy development it is crucial that spokespersons be directly accountable to the Party and its authority through Conference. This would entail some form of popular selection and could take many forms.

The spokespersons (the Shadow Cabinet in parliamentary parlance) could be elected *en bloc* by Conference, with the portfolios allocated amongst them. Or major portfolios, such as Finance, Justice, Foreign Policy, would be elected by the Conference itself. Whatever method is used the criteria is that the Party decides who leads the development and presentation of Party policy.

Minor portfolios (e.g. Gaeltacht, Fisheries etc.) could be filled by the A.C. Consideration should be given to appointing parliamentary candidates as well as PLP members. Not only would this provide invaluable publicity to candidates it would widen the pool of expertise available to the Party.

Policy Committees: Active Policy Making

Policy committees, chaired by the Spokesperson, should be the cornerstone of policy making, sitting throughout the year, in continual contact with the membership and with the resources necessary to conduct their work. Policy committees have produced excellent work but this has been due to the energy of a few. Setting up a committee, telling them to draw up a policy, reporting to Conference where policies are discussed for a few minutes is not going to make policy making relevant to the mass of members.

Policy Committees can play a vital role in bringing together different sections of the Labour Movement in not only the composition of the Committees, but in the process of policy making. Committee member-

ship should ensure the participation of the affiliated trade unions, PLP, women, youth and ordinary members. Active policy making would involve members deeply in the process, create policy links with trade unions and progressive groups outside the Party and enhance widespread dissemination of policy and debate. To achieve this a five stage process is proposed:

(1) All Party branches, trade unions and progressive issue groups would be circulated with the policy objectives of the Committee (e.g. taxation, criminal justice) requesting submissions, comments, ideas, etc. These submissions would be non-binding, merely giving an indication of what issues figure prominently among activists on the ground.

(2) The committee would prepare a comprehensive draft outline covering the major proposals and analysis in abbreviated form. It would then circulate this outline to all the branches, trade unions and issue groups.

(3) Branches and trade unions would make formal amendments, addendums, deletions at this stage (similar to Conference procedure) to the Committee based on the outline.

(4) The Committee would consider each amendment and accept, amend or reject them. Notice of Committee decision would be sent to each branch with an explanation. Interest groups would likewise be encouraged to make amendments.

(5) Having completed this amendment process the Policy Committee would then draft a comprehensive policy document, incorporating the accepted branch amendments, for submission to Conference. At this stage, the present Conference amendment process would begin. The final draft as approved by Conference would then become the Party policy.

This process would have the following effects:

□ through the Committee's composition a cohesiveness in policy development can be established between trade unionists, the PLP and ordinary members

— Party members and trade unions can directly intervene in the policy developmental stage, rather than waiting for unveiling at Conference either through policy documents or motions.

□ it would familiarise members with policies at an early stage of development. This would create a policy consciousness which cannot be done during one weekend at Conference.

□ it would invite progressive groups (e.g. Anti-Apartheid, Prisoners' Rights

Organisation, etc.) into the policy process, a unique act for any political party. This would help create strong links and dialogue between the Party and progressive activists in all issues.

No policy process can address issues as they arise from day to day. Rather, it provides broad parameters within which issues can be approached. Through this process these parameters would be deeply ingrained into the Party. When statements are made by spokespersons and the Party, they will be made and assessed within a democratically decided framework.

II: POLITICAL EDUCATION

How does one learn about politics in the Labour Party? One doesn't. This not only inhibits policy making it defeats the Party's fundamental objectives. Winning people over to socialism involves a number of educational processes: how a capitalist society exploits working men and women, how the conservative parties champion this type of society and the radical alternative socialism presents. In any circumstances it would not be an easy task, challenging the traditional political culture. If Party members are themselves unsure of the issues, strategies and ideas involved, how can the Party succeed?

Political education is not a luxury, a 'ghetto for theorists' but an indispensable weapon in the Party's political strategy. Political education, though, should not be isolated from Party activity (in which case it does become ghettoised) but rather integrated into everyday practice. This can be done through:

(1) campaigning activities: the best education in activity itself. Not just in organisational skills (e.g. composing leaflets, organising meetings) but in learning the issues and arguments and being able to present them in a simple, direct manner.

(2) the policy making process: this provides an excellent opportunity to intervene with seminars, workshops, publications regarding the policies currently undergoing development.

(3) formal educational activities.

Publications

The lack of an official publication leaves a major gap in propaganda and education. Party publications have failed in the past but this is understandable when one reviews the contents and editorial policies. The last venture, with some exceptions, read like a series of speeches or press statements. They wouldn't interest even the most hardened activists, not to mention a wider audience.

An official publication would fulfil three purposes:

– supplement debate and discussion within the Party itself

– propagandise a socialist critique of society to a wider audience

– establish the Labour Party as the leading forum for socialist debate and analysis

The danger of such a publication becoming a mouthpiece of the Party or the leadership must be avoided if past failures are not to be repeated. The publication should be operated as

**'while in conservative alignment
policy making becomes
redundant'**

a non-profit commercial cooperative of Party members who would elect its own editorial board and appoint the editor with official Party input. The European Socialist group has expressed interest in funding such a venture and the Party could contribute with start-up capital and in-kind contributions (office space, secretarial staff, ect.) Trade unions could participate in financing and editorial input. The cooperative would have to be run along commercial lines with professional marketing, advertising and distribution strategies.

The Party will want to expand its propaganda initiatives, through popular works on current issues. Policy documents make for dry readings. An example of more popular and successful works would be the Socialist Economist Group's pamphlets, 'Jobs and Wages' and 'Jobs and Borrowing', or the Women's Publishing Cooperative's 'Who Owns Ireland – Who Owns You'. Political pamphlets do not have to be turgid, but can be wittily written and layed out so as to be accessible to non-experts. The scope for such publications are considerable.

Policy and Education

The policy making process can make political education more relevant to members. For example, a Special Committee chaired by the finance Spokesperson is drafting a comprehensive Alternative Economic Strategy. The Party would not only liaise with trade unions and progressive groups, but would supplement the policy process with seminars and workshops throughout the Party dealing with specific aspects of the AES (e.g. taxation, the role of the public sector, democratic planning).

Being held alongside the Committee work and branch amendment stage 'education' would be all that more relevant. Seminars/workshops would not only enhance a greater under-

standing of socialist policy, it would give members the analytical skills necessary to engage in informed debate. An education programme would not just 'instruct' members but would give them the ability to confidently present the arguments in their local activities. A further aid in promoting informed debate would be the publication of information papers – short, informal documents on the current policy subject. These could be cheaply produced and circulated widely among the membership.

Formal Activities

A number of educational projects could be implemented over the medium term (and exploited for public relations value):

– a regular annual summer school, modelled on schools currently operating (e.g. Merrimam, etc.). This would bring together socialists, trade unionists, speakers from fraternal parties in a social and educational forum. With trade union participation the Left could set its own intellectual agenda.

– apart from the policy process, a full programme of seminars/workshops would be planned with special emphasis on particular or regional subjects. For instance, issues relating to Dublin, Cork, rural areas, the West or for women, youth, trade unionists, covering topics that are not usually included in general programmes (e.g. small farmers, gay rights).

– correspondance courses could be developed along the lines of European socialist parties and trade unions. This would be especially valuable for members living in remote areas or those who find it difficult to attend meetings such as single parents, etc. Correspondance courses could again be operated in association with trade unions and cover a variety of topics (Labour history, economics, feminism, etc.)

– actively encourage members' involvement in progressive forums of education and debate. The Irish Labour Historical Society is one example, the People's College another. The Party would keep members informed of these activities. This would again create links with progressive groups and initiatives.

These type of activities can remove the schoolroom connotations of political education. By offering a broad choice of programmes members can determine the best opportunity by which they can learn, debate and participate.

Study Circles

Another project worth considering is a Study Circle programme based on

the Swedish Social Democratic Party experience. It works like this:

(1) Local constituency units elect each year a Studies Committee. This committee is not only responsible for setting up their own workshops for local officers and activists, they are required to draw up a studies programme for the year.

(2) The programme is taken up by study circles made up of five to ten people, meeting fortnightly, organised by the Studies Committee.

(3) The Party provides the course material for the studies groups.

The Swedish Party has 30 full-time Studies Agents working with constituency groups. This type of programme may be, initially, too ambitious for the Party. But bringing small groups together outside of formal meetings to discuss issues in which they have a mutual interest is certainly worth experimenting with. A smaller intimate environment could appeal to those who shy away from individual study and large seminars. Participants could determine their own areas of study, workload, time and place without any constraints.

THE UNIT

The Party cannot engage in policy discussions, cannot campaign on those policies, without engaging in political education. Presently, only the barest minimum is devoted to these two areas. Because of the integrated nature of this work we propose that a general Unit be established — an Internal Development Unit — which would incorporate all research and education activities within the Party.

That they cannot be so separated can be seen in the interlocking aspects of this work. Research resources will have to be devoted in the following areas:

'Political Education is not a luxury but an indispensable weapon in political strategy'

— for the PLP, not only for Party Spokesperson to conduct their brief efficiently, but for backbenchers to broaden out parliamentary activism.

— for the policy committees. Each policy committee should work with an appointed research officer to ensure that information is both provided and disseminated.

— for Labour Groups on local authorities which are usually ignored. Apart from notable exception, councillors' work is made up of clinic casework. With research and public relations resources devoted exclusively to Local Labour Groups could be built another arena of campaigning and activism.

— the Organisation Unit's responsibility for demographic and electoral data will require substantial research work. Coordinating political activity will require major policy research on not only the contents of information (e.g. National Campaign on Jobs) but the most effective way to present this information.

Similarly political education will be integrated into:

— the policy making process during the debate of policy amendments and composition

— at the local level, where socialism has rarely been applied in a theoretical or campaigning way. This will require a long educative process in the fundamentals of municipal and local socialism.

— in the development of national and regional campaigns. If activists are to carry out political work presumes

that they are familiar with the political arguments.

— going beyond a functional role of support in specific activity, to permeate all aspects of activity.

This Internal Development Unit, headed by a Secretary accountable to the General Secretary (in similar fashion to the Organisation Unit), with the appropriate executive functions, would be given an equal standing with other proposed Head Office units. The Unit would be allocated an annual budget from central funds with research and educational officers employed. The expansion of this unit would be phased in over a number of years with provisional accommodations reached between the Party and Leinster House staff to fill out research/educational work.

This Unit would accommodate all the activities outlined in the previous two sections. More importantly, being placed within a Head Office structure, under the executive management of a Secretary, it would be able to liaise more effectively with other units (e.g. Organisation, Public Relations) and the units of the Party's branch structure.

Politicising the Party is the beginning of the long work of politicising society, creating layers of consciousness among the members who will take their understanding of socialism into areas they are active in — the workplace, the schools, progressive community groups, etc. A Party that takes political education seriously is one that takes politics seriously and likewise will have its politics taken seriously.

THE TRADE UNION AND CORPORATE LINK

If we can understand electoral strategy, as one part of Labour's offensive, the political programme as another, organisation strategy as a third aspect, we can appreciate the role of corporate bodies as comprising a fourth front. This is especially the case with trade unions, with which the Party has a special relationship. Unfortunately we will only be able to highlight the major areas and put forward suggestions to advance the

debate as to how corporate bodies can be incorporated into a broader socialist strategy. Labour Left will be dealing with these issues in greater detail at a later date.

1. THE TRADE UNION CONNECTION

The Labour Party was created as the result of an initiative of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in 1912. From the period 1918 to

1930, it operated as a single organisation which combined political and industrial functions in a unique way in the Labour Movement of the world. The two bodies (the ITUC and the Irish Labour Party) separated in 1930 to form two autonomous sections. This separation was brought about to develop the Labour Party politically. At that time the Party still retained the Affiliation of the larger unions. Since then, there have been periods when two of the major unions disaffiliated.

These rifts were healed in the 1960s, with the amalgamation of the two trade union federations. Presently, 15 unions are affiliated to the Party, 8 of which have UK Head Offices. While this represents less than a quarter of the unions affiliated to the

ICTU, it accounts for over two-thirds of all trade unionists affiliated. However, while these 15 unions together affiliated 284,772 to Congress they only affiliated 174,500 to the Party.

Political Questions

The original promoters of a Labour Party understood that the struggle for socialism needed a theory, a policy and a programme which would express the immediate interests of the working class as well as the struggle for socialism. They saw a Labour Party as an alliance of socialists and trade unionists with both elements fulfilling their functions in partnership.

Why don't trade unions exercise their political leadership directly instead of entrusting it in large measure to the Parliamentary Labour Party? The answer to this lies in the essential character of trade unions. Trade unions are not political parties even though they are ceaselessly involved in political questions at every level up to and including negotiations with Government.

The main political question facing trade unions are job creation and unemployment, industrial and wage policy in the public and private sector, labour legislation etc. The most comprehensive statement is the ICTU policy document 'Confronting the Jobs Crisis'. The major characteristic of the trade union movement in practice is its reactive and defensive in character. The main political expression of this is its reliance on the Labour Party but since the Party takes up a conservative electoralist view of society, the trade unions have had little impact in political organisation.

One of the most important exceptions was the trade union campaign for tax equity which mobilised hundreds of thousands of trade unionists through protest strikes for essentially political demands. This showed the capacity of the trade unions to destabilise and immobilise large sections of society but it also showed its inability to politicise their members to draw the necessary conclusions. This was to be expected, however, given Labour's lack of support (one parliamentarian openly criticised the marches in the Dail).

The validity of the Link

In some Party circles the validity of trade union links had been raised. Since trade unions don't give money, don't give their members support, what's in it for Labour? Such comments show little understanding of the nature of such links. Trade unions cannot 'deliver' their members support in elections. There are all-inclusive

The LWNC published an excellent document on the plight of contract cleaning women, written by A.C. member Maeve Carbin. In only a few months a number of industrial disputes broke out with cleaning women in the front line. The most publicised was the UCD dispute. However, the Party did nothing to support these women. Instead, an ultra-Left group whose relevance to working class politics is non-existent, intervened by assisting in solidarity pickets and fund-raising for the striking women. This should have been done by the Party and the LWNC in cooperation with the trade unions. Solidarity protests, fund-raising, propaganda, activity at all levels to provide the women involved with real assistance and solidarity in their struggle. By Labour showing support for people, people will return that support. The lesson here is to write a report, and then go out and make it relevant to the people themselves.

organisations of all workers irrespective of political outlook. This attitude makes the curious assumption that trade unions are somehow brokers in votes. The question should read, why don't workers vote Labour? This has been considered in detail - trade unionists have historically supported Labour on an independent, socialist programme. Labour must actively win trade unionists over through its politics, it cannot expect to have them 'delivered'.

The link is more than just an organisational connection. It enables the Labour Movement to integrate two potentially mass bases. For the Party, this link enables it to campaign exclusively among the working class. For trade unionists, this integration provides them with a political instrument to carry their workplace struggles throughout society.

This is all the more imperative since Labour's base will be founded in the manual working class. It is here that men and women are organised around the fundamental antagonisms of a market society - between those who own/manage capital and those who produce the wealth for that capital. The Party is in a better position to exploit this organisation for political purposes. To discard the links with the trade unions is not only to undermine the very rationale of a 'Labour Party', it is to throw away its most valuable weapon, indeed its only one, to organise an alternative alliance rooted in the working class.

Building from the Base

Presently, trade union links are manifested in affiliation fees, the Labour and Trade Union Group (LTUG), two reserved seats at the A.C., and union delegations at Conference. This represents only a fraction of the organisational integration possible, being a type of affiliation 'at the top'.

First, the LTUG's role should be expanded to incorporate a wider representative base (presently it's made up of two members from each affiliated union). This group would become the primary organiser of a

number of activities:

- recruitment of trade union activists, branch officials, shop stewards, etc. into the Party

- the affiliation of other trade unions

- help ensure the election of party members to leading positions from branch to executive officials throughout the Labour movement

Secondly, links between all sections of the Party should be established from the A.C. to local units. Affiliation to regional, divisional and constituency councils (even large rural branches) should be explored. This would also include affiliation between the women's and youth sections of the trade union movement and the Party.

Another area to be considered is the development of workplace or industrial branches. Some have existed in the past (e.g. Guinness Brewery). However, there are obvious problems in alternatives to trade union structures. The British Labour Party experience will be worth following as they only two years ago provided for workplace branches. In any event, some type of structures, formal or informal, should be developed in cooperation with trade unions to bring together party members in the workplace and trade unions in order to engage in political and industrial activity on behalf of the Party (other parties do this: FF, the Workers' Party and the CPI).

Thirdly, affiliated unions could begin report backs to trade union branches on the Labour Party, such as Conference, the A.C., any affiliated councils, policy statements and documents, etc.

Throughout this submission we have identified areas where the Party and Trade Unions could establish real working links:

- in the policy making process, by bringing in trade unions, even down to the branches, into submission and amendment stages

- in political education, in the form of courses, summer schools, workshops, etc.

- in developing campaigns. For

example a National Campaign on Jobs would obviously require much trade union input from the executive down to the shopfloor levels with policy development, publications, talks, videos, meetings, protests and other political activity.

Trade union and party links is not just a matter of formal, constitutional connections, but continuous, co-operative activity, linked by a mutual vision of socialist practice and policy. The more trade unionists become active in the Party and Party members become active in their trade unions, the more these links will take on the reality of two wings of the Labour Movement.

Financing and Trade Unions

Criticisms regarding the level of trade union contributions have been voiced. Much of the explanation relates to a simple question of conserving funds. Trade unions have suffered recently through loss of members. Further, unions must justify such expenses to their members. If the overwhelming majority of trade unionists do not vote Labour, the Party can hardly expect their unions to contribute in large quantities.

At the end of the day, the reasons are political. If the trade union and political wings of the movement are alienated from one another, then financial and organisational links will suffer. Throughout this submission we have attempted to redress this problem — by basing the political and organisational programme of the Party firmly among the working class.

Concrete financial proposals will have to account for the practices of each union. Much could revolve around the Political Levy which, in practice, most trade union members pay (since it is operated on a contract out basis). The Party could negotiate with trade unions as to the percentage of the levy to accrue to the Party. Unions would be allotted a proportional amount of delegates to National Conference based on the number of members paying the levy. This would also involve increasing participation among trade unionists. Anyone paying the Levy, regardless of whether he/she is a party member, should by right be allowed to represent the union at any Party meeting (Conference, constituency delegation, etc.) and to participate in joint union-Party activities (political education programmes). In this way the Party and trade unions would have a deep interest in campaigning among trade unionists to pay the political levy and participate.

Renewing the Links

There has been too much emphasis

on a low key approach to the affiliations of trade unions. This is understandable in a situation which finds Labour in perpetual alignment with FG, locked into a programme antagonistic to trade unionists and the working class. A fundamental precondition in restoring a proper relationship between the Party and the trade union movement is the socialist independence of Labour.

'there's too much trade union socialism and too little socialist trade unionism'

This renewed relationship must recognise that trade unions, however militant their industrial policies, are reactive with inevitable defensive characteristics and cannot provide an answer to the problems faced by trade unionists. If the Labour Party disappeared the trade union movement would have to invent another vehicle for its political expression. Renewing these fundamental links will not be an easy task, though. The Party has been discredited among trade unionists, it does not present itself as their political vehicle. There has been far too much emphasis on trade union members passively supporting the Party during general elections. The Labour Movement has suffered from too much trade union socialism and too little socialist trade unionism. In effect the Party should be about socialising the day to day struggle of the trade union movement.

II. WOMEN AND YOUTH

Two other important areas of political activity lies among women and young people. We have outlined in previous sections the political challenge that will be mounted by the demands of women and young people for economic participation and equality. While we, again, can only sketch out a tentative analysis in these areas, there should be a heightened debate as to how to create a campaigning presence in these critical areas.

1. Organising Women

It is difficult to conclude that the Party takes seriously the role of women in the Party or understands the potential of this section in creating an alternative alliance. The Party's membership reflects a male dominated organisation, with only four women on the A.C. and one in the PLP. There are no full-time officers devoted to the women's section nor is there central financing.

The Labour Women's National Council has succeeded recently in

taking a higher media profile and providing a consultative role to the PLP on 'women's issues'. It has to operate, however, under the handicap of raising its own funds and relying on voluntary work. The problems in the political organisation of women goes further than financing and personnel. The lack of a grass roots campaigning tradition permeates all Party structures.

The Women's Council, while integrated at higher levels within the Party (e.g. the A.C.), is not integrated at the rank and file. CLP's nominate delegations to the Women's Conference who elect an executive and A.C. members. This executive is the place of work in the Council. Since, however, the Council is not organised into local constituency groups, no campaigning work occurs at this level (there are some exceptions to this — e.g. Wexford). In this regard, the Party has no presence 'on the ground'. With no formal working relationship with women's trade union groups, this lack of presence is also manifest in crucial trade union activities.

There is also the danger that a corporate group exists only to 'produce' votes for the Party and not to politicise the terrain in which they operate (a fundamental precondition to winning support for socialism). It becomes another outlet to propagate an electoralist programme. In this regard, the requirement that women be members of the Party could be a drawback for a campaigning socialist women's group.

There are a number of ways to approach the construction of a campaigning feminist socialism. It could be patterned on the more traditional lines of being a strictly party group but organised locally, with formal links with women's trade union groups. Or it can develop into an independent organisation of working class and progressive feminists that would actually be a corporate body, affiliated to the Labour Party, but without the requirement that members be Party members. Such a grouping would then be able to construct active alliances among different progressive traditions, trade unionists and independent feminist groupings, linked with the Party and led by socialists. The group's rationale would be to campaign rather than consult or electioneer.

The Party's feminist commitment cannot be a window dressing exercise (e.g. Fine Gael), but can only be realised by actively campaigning on issues which are central to women in society and economy, whether in the office, shopfloor, the home, the courtroom or health centres. If the Party demands that women, or anybody, come to it at the polling booth without first having gone to them at

their places of struggle, then there will be a lot of lonely people. A socialist women's organisation, based on mass participation by women will be one of the most important organisational challenges the Party will face in the future.

Organising Youth

The Party's youth section presents special problems. Allegations that a secret inner party is in control of the youth section have been raised at times with little evidence to substantiate. These criticisms however turn attention away from the real problems of youth and the Party. Presently, less than 8% of membership is under the age of 26 (approx. 400). The Party has less than 50 members in university branches. From a high of nearly 30% support among the under 24 age grouping in 1969, the Party has dropped to a level of about 5% in recent polls. Whatever about the internal politics of Labour Youth, the real issue is the total lack of credibility the Party has among young people.

While there is considerable discussion about future of Labour Youth, there are a number of principles discussed in the women's section that can be applied:

- that the future organisational structures will have to ensure a campaigning presence in areas of youth activity (e.g. workplace, housing estates, RTC's and VEC's, etc.). In this regards it matters little the form that youth structures take but the content of their activity.

- that consideration be given to building a broad based socialist youth section that would act as a corporate body. Moves towards an independent

section (e.g. LWNC) would come about with Party involvement and management.

- that the youth organisation build working links with young trade unionists in affiliated unions.

The Party can't expect to shape young people into an abstract view of what they think youth are. If it wants radical people it will have to provide a programme and an organisation that both expresses that radicalism and allows people build on their own awareness of socialism. This awareness is not a cerebral construct, a playing with images or rhetoric, but an activity. Youth are not canvassing fodder, an abstract among a pool of potential voters. Whether the awareness is manifested in demands for jobs, educational facilities, public services, popular democracy, it is always concrete. If the Party wants active young radicals it will have to be actively radical.

Labour has lost much ground. Once they begin supporting a party, people tend to stay with that party over a lifetime. Winning them over becomes difficult as habit sets in. In the late '60s Labour's support among young people was rapidly increasing but this was thrown overboard with a FG alignment strategy. Today, young people don't support Labour for the simple reason that that it is meaningless. If they support coalition governments they're more likely to join FG. If they want something different, something that challenges the conditions in society that has brought unemployment, poverty and emigration they will support a socialist party. The Party should be honest with itself. If it wishes to continue a strategy of con-

servative alignment then it should openly abandon the hope of constructing an active mass youth section and the support of another generation.

III. THE CORPORATE UNIT

We propose the establishment of a Corporate Unit within the Party, with a Secretary vested with executive functions, accountable to the General Secretary. This full-time position would be responsible for the development of not only trade union liaison, but the women and youth sections as well. While the development of this unit would take place over the long-term the Party should be working towards a situation where the corporate groups each have full-time officers/agents:

- a trade union officer: an active trade unionist to be employed to liaison and work with the LTUG and the affiliated trade unions

- a woman's officer: to work with the Labour Women's National Council

- a youth officer: to work with the Labour Youth section

These positions, with annually allotted budgets from central funds would carry out the work of these groups, creating greater organisational cohesion between the corporate bodies and the Party.

The Party should actively seek out corporate affiliations among a number of progressive groupings, whether social interest groups, unemployment groups, etc. While the short-term potential of this is limited given the fragmentation of the Left, as Labour develops as the major political force of the Left it should be prepared to develop as many links outside the Party as possible.

MARKETING THE MESSAGE

A narrow view of public relations permeates the Party. Armed with the perennial press/media statement, 'getting good press' (and RTE) is the beginning and end of public relations. Even within this limit there is no developed concept of a press office (indeed, there is none - there's just one press officer). Statements are released in reaction to events, information is given of decisions taken. There is nothing to suggest a broader role for marketing the Party or socialism.

The previous sections continually

imply a broader concept of marketing. Local activity, direct contact with people, summer schools, seminars, publications, policy making - all have marketing implications. What the Party, the local branch does or doesn't do implies relating to the public. Without an integrated approach, the image emerging will be diffused, contradictory and uncoordinated.

A party that seeks to appeal to women, young people, the broader working class will have to adopt symbols and a style appealing to these

groups. Advertising and image is not a substitute for concert programmes and visions, but it can facilitate putting those programmes across in an attractive and direct way. The GLC Campaign against Abolition showed that billboards and posters presenting the image of Thatcher closing down the GLC was worth a thousand resolutions, leaflets or inches of newspace in the Daily Telegraph. In the following sections we will touch on a few aspects of marketing.

The Local Message

Branches traditionally use newsletters and leaflets to put across the message locally. However, the inconsistency in quality, content, style and presentation results in excellent work in some areas, makeshift work in others. These methods are still invaluable in putting the Party's message across but such ventures only arise where the

money, motivation and local expertise exists.

The Party should establish a comprehensive alternative news network at the grass-roots level (a daily newspaper does this at the national level). Newsletters, newsheets and leaflets can provide local socialist perspectives in a way a conventional press cannot. This will require a more coordinated approach to publications. The Party should assist branches/CLP's in:

- advising on content, layout, design, and distribution
- providing material, graphs, logos, etc.

- purchasing its own printing press to publish material at a nominal rate, guaranteeing quality and presentation

- keeping an inventory of all local publications for reference

The Party should publish stocks of policy leaflets. Being produced centrally would be cheaper, ensuring uniform propaganda and style. For example, the party could publish leaflets on taxes, unemployment, old age pensions, small farmers etc. Instead of local activists having to compose, design and publish their own leaflets, they could just order from a catalogue of publications. This catalogue could include other forms of propagandas (e.g. political posters).

High Tech

Computers affect every aspect of communication (this submission was produced on a computer). The Party presently is reequipping the computer system for its membership and financial records. However, computers are more than just record keepers. They can:

- provide branches/CLP's computer space to automate polling lists for direct mail targeting as presently being done in some Dublin CLP's

- produce cheap copy for internal publications (e.g. information papers as part of the policy process)

- compiling and analysing demographic and electoral data referred to in the Organisation Section.

The biggest potential lies in networking trade union lists, party membership, professional and trades lists, letter writers to newspapers, progressive interest groups, cross-referencing in a multitude of ways to establish a progressive network throughout the country, facilitating direct contact and communication. The National Women and Computing Network in the US is an example of this, containing interests of over 60,000 women on file so that women with mutual interests can be put into

contact with each other in their locales.

For example, the Party publishes a policy statement on construction and publishes a small foldover leaflet. Instead of gathering dust in a Head Office cupboard, through its computing network the Party could direct target construction and related workers with the leaflets. This exercise could be repeated throughout a number of issues.

The Party should embrace all technological developments. One example is videos. In content and production quality this medium should be exploited to the full. Like policy documents, though, there is a danger that if outlets are not found, they will be wasted. Use in homes, meetings, workplaces, linking promotion to campaigning - the Party will have to develop an active promotional approach to not only video, but all visual and audio propaganda.

Creative Marketing

Creative campaigning techniques have recently been employed by progressive activists. In Britain, the CND's shadow project during the 40th Anniversary of Hiroshima is an example, where shadows were sprayed on streets and buildings as a graphic illustration of radioactive incineration. Imagistic techniques can be employed in a number of ways. In London, the GLC erected a huge billboard which had only numbers, changing monthly - the number of unemployed. This had a greater effect than a hundred condemnations.

In this respect the medium can be the message. In France the Communist Party hosts an annual festival, complete with films, dances, music, industrial exhibitions, political debate, childrens' entertainment, etc. marking it as a popular festival as well as a political statement. Again, the British CND took over Manchester City Centre on Saturday with mimes, street theatre and singers on every streetcorner - all on themes of war and peace. These do not replace the arguments involved but they are not intended to. The emphasis is on recreating traditional approaches of direct contact with people in order to compete with the 'establishment' case.

Co-ordinating the Relations

A Public Relations Unit should be established with an executive Secretary who would act as the chief PRO for the Party with full-time PRO's employed. This unit would be responsible

for public relations development at all levels of the Party:

- liaising with local units in establishing an alternative propaganda network

- publishing standard policy leaflets

- training volunteer PRO's in local units for CLP or election campaigns

- coordinating public relations for campaign work conducted by other Units (e.g. National Collection under the Finance Unit)

- providing input into the Candidate Development Programmes on presentation and marketing

- developing press/media relations with the Provincial and alternative press (e.g. trade union press, etc.)

- providing assistance to local representatives' relations with the media

The work of this Unit cannot be viewed in isolation. Marketing and public relations are an integral aspect of all Party's activities. For instance, an Annual Summer School has an educational, social and public relations angle. The development of this unit will be long term, determined by priorities in the Party's organisation. For instance, if regional coordinators working out of regional office are employed, a local PRO may be employed as well (a Munster PRO).

Public Relations must go beyond the proverbial press release. Even within press relations, the lack of any national contact with the provincial or alternative press is a major gap in Labour's PR. The employment of PRO's who would be specifically assigned areas of work (local representatives, PLP, provincial press, etc.) would begin to redress this omission. And while many of the above examples may seem ambitious or even curious, without using imaginative and populist styles how can we win an audience for socialism.

Pierce the hype and the cliché remains valid: to market effectively there has to be something worth marketing. It's not enough to say get Labour's message across if that message is not clearly and unequivocally a politics of the working class and progressives. Nothing can replace concrete programmes and policies, nothing can sell the lack of it. Socialists have deep suspicions of 'image', marketing, etc. It sounds like selling a bar of soap. But advertising, images, style cannot sell a bad product, even in politics. True, it can distort and deceive but this shouldn't prevent socialists from exploiting its own product in the most effective and creative way possible. It just means we should be exposing the shoddy product of the Right.

FINANCING

THE SOCIALIST PROJECT

Organisers, research officers, publications, election fund: this submission assumes not only political will and imagination, it assumes money. If this issue cannot be resolved the objectives in this or in any other submission won't be resolved.

Labour's finances are, if anything, going in the opposite direction. Income has remained static in real terms since 1980 (+0.2%) while annual expenditure has fallen by nearly 20%. Though the Party has managed a surplus in the last three years up until 1985 this went to pay off debts incurred in the early '80s. Even in 1985, with a surplus to go towards an election fund, this was only achieved through the income of two lotteries that managed to arrive in the same year. Without this administrative fluke, Party income would have fallen to the lowest in years.

This doesn't include branch/CLP accounts. As local units are not required to lodge accounts with Head Office a total account of Party Finances is not possible. It would probably tell a grim story. In one constituency, the CLP is indebted by nearly £30,000 and while this is an extreme, other CLPs are plagued by substantial debts or lack of funds. Clearly, these are problems which won't go away by selling more raffle tickets or holding more socials.

Socialist parties will always have financial problems, which conservative parties with corporate and wealthy supporters won't. But there are reasons peculiar to Labour preventing it from accumulating sufficient income. The Party's small membership is a limiting factor and if they are not politically motivated, the work and sacrifice necessary will not be forthcoming.

The central fault, however, lies in the Party's decentralised structures. It's not that the money isn't there (though it's not in the quantity we need). Members pay branch subscriptions, membership fees, election and Collection levies, buy lottery tickets, spend money at socials. Branches, constituencies, candidates, the LWNC, Labour Youth, Head Office all compete for funds from the same pool that hasn't been getting any bigger.

The lack of a centralised financial administration means funds cannot be directed into areas of priority nor can long-term financial planning be undertaken. This situation would be-

come critical in any ambitious organisational restructuring. Would the Party employ a research officer, or a regional organiser, increase the election fund, mount campaigns, publish a series of policy documents? And how could the Party make future estimates for the expansion of its organisation. The situation becomes close to absurd when one CLP can lease office premises while next door the CLP can't afford postage to send out notices for meetings. Planning and the ability to direct income into specific areas is not possible under present conditions.

Membership Fees

Membership fees are derisively low. Some branch subscriptions are twice the amount of annual membership fees. Presently, it costs 11 pence a week (waged) or 4 pence a week (unwaged) to be a Party member. There is a fundamental issue here. If people pay fees to their trade union to advance their industrial interests, people should pay, likewise, to have their political interests advanced.

There is strong evidence suggesting abuse of the waged/unwaged differential in membership fees. Between 1984 and 1985, when waged fees increased, over a thousand members changed their status to unwaged. There is something peculiar where the Dublin membership is 2/3 waged whereas in Munster and Leinster the situation is nearly the reverse (in some constituencies the unwaged category makes up nearly 80%). The situation is further complicated in being practically impossible to monitor.

It's proposed that a flat rate membership fee be levied regardless of employment status, at increased levels

(see Table 10.1). Fees levied at 15 pence weekly, increasing to 20 pence within five years, would bring a 103%-170% increase of revenue from this source. This wouldn't mean unemployed would pay out this increase (and, so, discourage people from joining). We will return to branch financing later.

Representatives' Contributions

The PLP pay voluntary contributions which in 1985 amounted to 2.3% of their total salaries (excluding ministerial salaries and expenses). The PLP are the only Labour representatives to contribute some of their office salaries to the Party.

It is proposed that Party members be levied 10% of income derived from elected office, at local and national levels (see table 10.2). Members elected through the work of the Party should be expected to make a return to the Party (in the WP, TDs hand over their salaries to the Party and receive an income close to the average industrial wage).

While some would claim this levy penal it would not necessarily involve PLP representatives sacrificing more personal income. The PLP is allotted nearly a quarter million pounds annually from Leinster House, from which part of the contributions would come. In any event representatives already make substantial contributions at the local level through CLPs and election costs. All this levy does is redirect those contributions into the Central fund. Lastly, the increase to the Party is significant (nearly £40,000). In instituting this levy the Party will be ensuring that the ranks of the PLP and Councillor groups will swell in the future.

National Collection

National Collection is collected neither nationally nor from the public. Increasingly, funds are raised by levying members, raffles and socials. There is no annual public campaign organised at a national level. This neglect of National Collection has resulted in revenue decreasing by over a third in real terms since 1980.

We can draw lessons from the FF Annual Collections of the 1930s. FF devoted substantial organisational efforts to its collection with each cumann required to do a church-gate annually. This revitalised the rank and file organisation every year. Collection returns were analysed as a measure of

Table 10.1 Membership Fees

Weekly Subscription	Yearly level	Total Revenue
Present		£22,457
10 pence	5.20	28,595
15 pence	7.80	42,892
20 pence	10.40	57,190
25 pence	13.00	71,487

Table 10.2 Representatives Contributions

	Present	Proposed
PLP members	9556	34,840
Councillors	none	12,000 (est.)

local vitality and public support (useful in days before survey opinion polls), showing up organisational weaknesses that could be addressed before election day. It reinforced the bond between its supporters by giving FF voters a financial interest in the Party. This was a major reason for FF's early dynamic grass-roots organisation and to this day it remains a major source of revenue, raising over half a million pounds in 1983.

A campaigning collection (see Box) can raise substantial revenue and provide a direct propaganda outlet. The Party can reinvigorate its canvassing machine, measure local support and activity, while directly appealing to the public. Mobilising financial support from working men and women is inextricably intertwined with mobilising their political support.

It's difficult, though, to estimate potential revenue. Many local units still organise public collection and even with the lack of central planning and the low level of political support, amounts received are considerable. However, if the working class don't vote Labour they won't finance it. If the 1986 targets were equivalent to 1980 in real terms it would be £42,705. While we propose National Collection becoming a major revenue source in the medium term, replacing the present ad hoc non-politicised collection will not be done overnight.

Subscriptions

Voluntary contributions, usually through monthly standing orders, once played a substantial role in Party funds (over 15% of total revenue in 1980) but has fallen by over ¼ in real terms since then. It's not through lack of willingness or commitment. One Dublin constituency receives nearly £1000 in standing orders yearly, nearly 50% of the Party's 1985 total.

The Party should campaign for monthly subscriptions, putting the case directly at branch/CLP meetings, personally soliciting waged members rather than posting the ephemeral circular. Such contributions will not be forthcoming without constant exhortation (something constituencies do already). Were subscriptions targeted at the 1980 level in real terms the Party would receive nearly £23,000 annually representing less than 7% of members contributing £5 monthly. Past practice shows that the commitment is there if given the political motivation and organisational commitment.

Another source is the Party Leader's allowance. With Labour out of Government the revenue to the Party

Every year the two weeks leading up to May Day would be established as the National Collection period. A special section on Collection drives would be included in the 'Activists Handbook' and included in organisational workshops.

Branches would conduct their collection activities around the May Day theme:

- door to door collection
- church gate and pub crawl collections
- street corner and shopping centre collections
- cooperation with local trades council in developing May Day activities (e.g. marches, socials, etc.)

The Party would provide leaflets to be distributed during collection, posters, and advertisements in the national, provincial and trade union press. The Finance Officer would be given executive powers to organise the collection. Targets would be set for branches/constituencies as in the past.

The aim of the Collection would be to take fund-raising directly to working people once a year, develop working links with local trade unionists through May Day activities and politicise May Day to what it should be: a socialist, Labour day.

will increase from £22,500 to over £50,000.

Table 10.3 shows that the above proposals would bring revenue to nearly a quarter of a million pounds annually. This would employ 12 staff - Party Secretaries, officers, organisers and secretarial staff - at increased wages, provide over £15,000 in Organisation/Election Fund annually and budget allocations of an average of £5,000 for the other units, while taking into account an increase of 35% in Office overheads. This would also include repayments on a massive £50,000 loan for capital investment into the Party: printing press, computers, office refurbishment, etc.

This doesn't allow for a number of future developments - fewer representatives in the short term, elections in rapid succession, etc. But most importantly, the above does not account for membership increase. For example, if membership increased at a conservative 5% per annum (less than the 1985 increase) over the next ten years this would mean nearly 10,000 members whose fees alone would bring in over £100,000. This doesn't include the extra lottery tickets sold, national collection collected, subscriptions contributed, representatives elected. The surest way to build finances is through an expanded membership and political activity.

Financing the Branch

The Branch/CLP is the primary source of revenue (membership fees, branch affiliation, national collection). With increased flat-rate membership fees the British Labour Party practice is instructive. The local unit pays the membership fees while throughout the year they may levy members through subscriptions. In many branches members do not pay fees, it being paid out of branch funds collected through general fund-raising. Under this type

of system, branches would be responsible for membership but could determine how the fees would be collected from the members. This practice already exists in many Labour branches here (see Table 10.4).

Reform of the National Lottery could provide a considerable income for branches/CLPs. In the first two years the lottery has been a disappointment, selling only 50% of the national quota, netting approximately £12,000 for the Party on each occasion.

Table 10.3 Projected Income from Proposals

	1985	Proposed
Membership Fees	£22,457	£42,892
PLP/Councillors Contributions	9,556	48,840
National Collection	23,418	42,820
Party Leader's Allowance *	22,794	58,000
	78,225	192,552

* Party Leader's Allowance increases when party is not in Government.

Branch organisation, motivation and the small return for local units (33% of receipts) are the limiting factors in what is essentially a voluntary effort (Conference and selection convention votes do not depend on lottery returns).

It is proposed that branches retain all ticket receipts, except a small percentage (e.g. 10%) to cover the administration of the Lottery. In this way a CLP that sold 1,500 tickets would retain £1,350 rather than the present £500 (in three years this would amount to an extra £2,500). This would not only assist local units in paying their Party fees but also build up their own funds. By retaining most of the receipts, members would have a realisable interest in selling more. A centralised financial administration

could, also, organise more ambitious national lotteries and draws (e.g. running monthly draws as in FG).

Financial Unit

The employment of a full-time Finance Secretary (distinct from the elected National Treasurer) and the creation of a Finance Unit should be a priority. Responsibilities for organising National Collection, Subscription campaigns, all financial aspects of the Party, would be vested in this Unit with the necessary executive powers. This would also include monitoring local Party accounts, providing assistance through fund-raising manuals, workshop training and direct liaison. The financial relationship between branches, CLPs and the Party will need detailed study and may change from one area to another (urban CLPs may be more centralised than larger, rural ones). Long-term financial planning would be a major part of this position.

The Party will have to expand its horizons. Trade unions, direct postal solicitation, international labour organisations, fraternal socialist parties in the SI, Irish-Americans (what progressives there may be) — all these sources will have to be professionally tapped which a full-time Financial

Table 10.4 Sample Cash Flow for Local Units — Yearly Account James Connolly Branch

27 Members (10 unwaged)

Income		Expenditure	
Monthly Subscriptions	£264.00	Membership Fees	£210.60
— £1.00 per month			
— .50 unwaged			
National Collection	£195.00	Collection Fees	£205.00
National Lottery	£194.00	Affiliation Fees	£25.00
General Fund Raising	£100.00		
	£753.00		£440.60
Balance:	£312.40		

Membership Fees: .15p per member per week
 Collection Fees: assessment based on average collection target per member
 Lottery Income: Branch sells 8 tickets per member

Unit could do. The day when TDs kept local party funds in their own account will have to end. The Party now has powers (e.g. to levy impose special levies on the Party units and hold them accountable for funds) to begin this work. With a centralised financial administration the Party can begin to make the challenge that it has foregone through lack of political organisation and will.

We have only provided an outline among any number of proposals that could be implemented. It shows that

the financing is there but it will mean a radical break from the parochialism inherent in present practice. But what if the responsibilities are too onerous? This presumes that a few pence a week, a few nights collecting, a few tickets to sell, the minimal in organisation is beyond the commitment and work of socialists. If so then let's be honest now and put aside our ambitions. Then we can continue to march under the banner of a 9% (8%? 7%?) party with all the responsibilities that doesn't put on us.

BUILDING A MAJOR PARTY

We can now take an overview of the organisational proposals. Firstly, the integrity of National Conference would be established with the Administrative Council, Party Leadership and Party Spokesperson all being directly elected and, so, accountable to the Party. By lengthening the sessions of Conference to four-five days, more time can be devoted to policy discussion and strategy while the proposed integrated policy making would create a membership more conscious of policy debates. The adoption of equal representation would legitimise the delegation of authority in the Party.

Secondly, the Party should consider changing the name of the Administrative Council to the National Executive Council (NEC). Alongside strengthening the autonomy of the A.C. through direct Head Office liaison with the branch structure, the appointment of members on to major units (e.g. PLP, LWNC) and other measures, this name change would clearly mark

this body as the highest executive level within the Party, second to the Conference.

The A.C. sub-committees would come under some reform. Under the new policy making proposals, separate for example, policy committees would be established under the Chairpersonship of the Party Spokesperson. Under this arrangement, the A.C. Policy Sub-committee would play very little role except, possibly, as an overseeing body for all policy committee work.

Intermediate Decision-Making Bodies

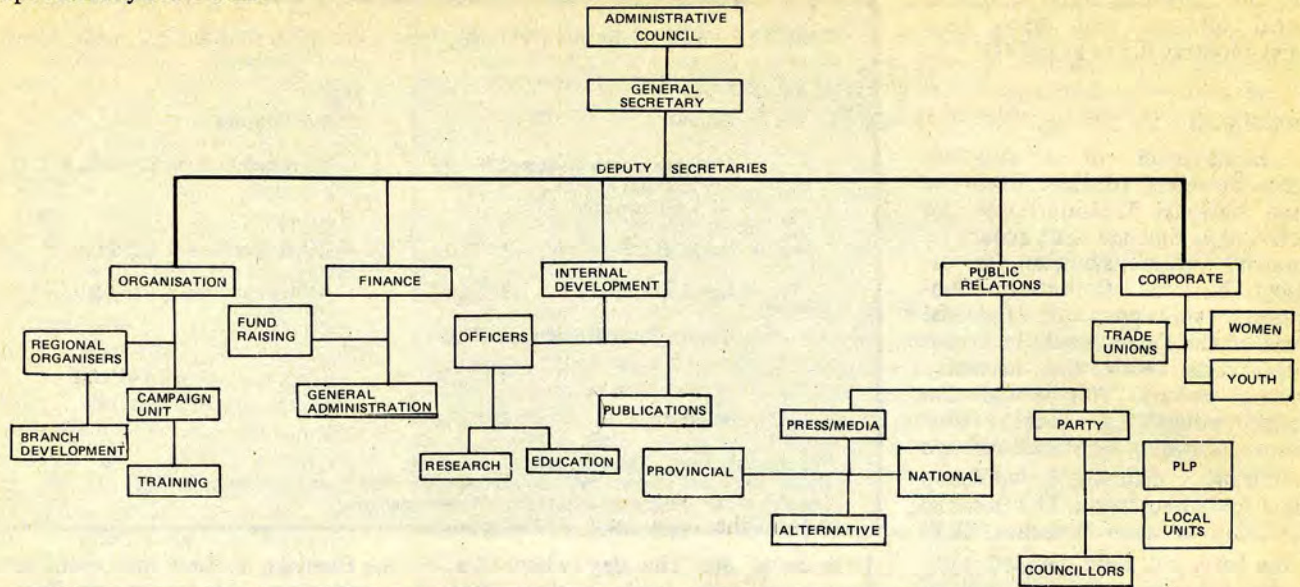
There is the danger of a proliferation of 'consultative bodies' which has the aspirations of providing linkage within the Party but instead usually mean one more meeting to attend, cosmetic exercises since they have no direct bearing on decision-making. They usually end up being talking shops or forums to transmit decisions from the top, hardly a consultative process.

Proposals to limit the A.C. to a

small executive with a larger consultative tier is an example (this was proposed at the 1980 Conference). This not only confuses the executive's efficiency with its size (we pointed out the real sources of inefficiency previously), it tacks on a 'consultative' body which has the appearance of participation but no substance. It flies in the face of democratic decision making.

The Council of Treasurers' experience bears this out. Originally designed to provide constituencies with an input into financial decisions, it has met infrequently, has no formal input into the A.C. and as a consequence is poorly attended. Its future is questionable. Likewise with the Constituency Organisers — a post designed to provide a direct organisational linkage with Head Office, with informal meetings of Organisers with the General Secretary. Consultative bodies are rarely useful forums and cannot substitute for direct access into decision making.

Proposed Party Flow Chart



The relationship between CLPs and branches also results in much rhetoric and few concrete proposals. Centralisation of functions into larger bodies is necessary to effect more efficient coordination. A distinction, though, between democratic participation and implementation of decisions should be made. It's the latter which strengthens the CLPs. Centralising National Collection and Lottery income within the CLP would provide resources for greater political activity. CLPs could play a major role in the suggested Constituency Delegate Conference in safeguarding Conference decisions. New relations between CLPs and branches will have to take into account past practice, geographical considerations, the presence of divisional and regional councils, etc. Any new relationships should ensure direct liaison between the rank and file and Head Office, and greater democratic participation by individual members.

Head Office

The General Secretary is the chief executive officer of the Party — accountable to the Administrative Council and the National Conference. This is not an administrative position. H/She is empowered to implement all decisions made by these bodies and is ultimately accountable to these bodies. We have proposed the development of Units, which would, in turn, be accountable to the General Secretary: (see flow chart).

Organisation: Unit Secretary, regional coordinators, secretarial staff

Finance: Unit Secretary, incorporating both financial and administrative staff

Internal Development: Unit Secretary, with research and education

officers, publishing resources

Corporate: Unit Secretary, officers for trade union liaison, youth, women

Public Relations: Unit Secretary, PROs for specific units (PLP, CLPs, local Government representatives).

The Chart outlines the flow of functions under our proposals. The Unit Secretaries, along with the General Secretary would comprise an organisational executive. Being situated within a Head Office apparatus would allow for coordination of these Units works. As we outlined earlier, each of these units' functions would supplement others (Organisation Unit needing research and publicity resources, etc.). These units would also work with specific A.C. sub-committees (e.g. Organisation Secretary with the Organisation Subcommittee).

This is only one of many outlines. In the final analysis it matters not how many units or sections there are, how many positions, how they are organised. We present this outline as flowing naturally from the proposals. Other proposals for internal development, finance, organisation may reveal different structures.

Implementation

A first step in implementing a democratic participation is the adoption of a new Party Constitution. The present Constitution is a patch-work of years of revision, amendment, and deletion. As a consequence a number of irrelevancies and anomalies appear. A new Constitution should be a short document, confining itself to establishing the rules of decision-making. There are many subjects which are not appropriate for inclusion — dates for national collection, affiliations, etc. These inevitably change in accordance to

organisational capacity. By taking necessary steps, which are technically unconstitutional, only brings the Constitution itself into disrepute.

The constitution and relevant standing orders should be widely disseminated to enhance an awareness of decision making in the Party. A further protection of constitutional authority would be the appointment by the A.C. of an office that all members could appeal to regarding constitutional matters. The present position of the Party Legal Agent could facilitate this type of ombudsman role.

Decision making and organisational structures cannot be implemented at once (financial restrictions alone would prevent an overnight development). This can only be implemented through a slow evolution over a period of ten to fifteen years with finances permitting. Priorities will have to be set. The Organisation and Finance positions should be given first priority with the entire range of organisational proposals commencing as soon as possible. Trade union liaison, political education, policy formation, extensive publications will determine, just as much as they are conditioned on, financial and organisational success.

The structures and positions are already present in embryonic form. The party employs a PRO and a research officer, voluntary organisational positions exist. There's a Head Office in which most space is not fully utilised. The basement could facilitate a printing press, social hall, offices. It's all there ready to be developed. The next step is the political will and the determination to build, not just an aggregate group of TDs, but an independent socialist organisation.

LABOUR'S HISTORICAL PURPOSE

Labour faces a number of critical options. It can continue to work strategies of conservative alignment, failed electoralist and clientelist practices, denying working men and women a progressive politics. It can continue to bring itself to a point of irredeemable irrelevancy.

Or it can embrace another programme. Labour can make an open, public self-criticism, pointing out why they went wrong in the past and explaining what lessons they have drawn. Labour can make a clean sweep, rejecting its past parochialism, substituting it with a politics that unapologetically champions the Labour Movement and socialism.

In these matters there should be no complacency. Labour's past has been marked by too many defeats but never has it been so discredited among trade unionists, progressives and working people. The past fifteen years of coalitionism has brought into serious question the Party's commitment to socialism. Members lay claim to socialism but the strategies and practices have distorted the vocabulary out of all recognition. 'Socialism' becomes another word used at party meetings, mere print on a piece of paper. Labour's 'socialism' is not only debatable but intangible. It always exists somewhere else rather than here and now.

There are alternatives. Labour is not forever trapped in an iron law of minority status. There has always been alternatives. Whenever Labour pursued an independent programme, it won growing support among the working class, among progressives. Whenever it cut these developments short, whenever it opted for conservative alignment, it lost that support. The lesson is easy and, at the same time, so seemingly difficult. Labour runs from its past and, so, from its future.

In the Submission we have outlined such alternatives. They are not the only ones. There are as many as there are activists willing to engage in the creative process of determining an independent, socialist future. There are, however, principles upon which there can be little dispute:

— the unequivocal rejection of coalition and alignment with con-

servative parties.

— the construction of a political and organisational programme rooted primarily in the working class.

— the democratisation of Party procedures.

— the development of an independent socialist organisation that rejects roles of the Party as a PLP support group.

— creation of real trade union links through joint activities, organisational links between the rank and files, and a strong coordinating agency between the two movements.

How these principles are applied can only be determined by practice. If the Party does not accept that its leadership should be popularly selected by the Party itself, what's the use in debating the form. This submission has been concerned with principles and content, providing illustrations to show how they might look in practice. If the Commission does nothing else but commit the Party to these principles it will have charted for socialists an expanding, progressive future.

The despair over Labour's future takes varied and insipid forms. Many consign Labour's ascendancy to some far-off future, to oblivion. This relieves the conscience of many, reconciling the defeatism of alignment with the refusal to entertain strategies that might challenge the passivity of coalition politics. It has certain carthartic benefits: Labour can blame the working class, the civil war, Fianna Fail, economic development — can blame everything and everybody else. It's a false catharsis, however. Labour ends up parodying the very politics it has for so long done little to advance.

Then why has Labour survived? Political scientists have contended with the riddle of Labour's continued existence. Political, structural, and historical models are trotted out but the one point that can be neither empirically established or verified. For all its mistakes, indecisions, lost opportunities and at times plain opportunism, Labour still encapsulates the unrealised potential of an alternative politics, somehow playing out a

hidden dialectic of hope. Labour cannot be explained so much by its past as by its future. It periodically fossilises, renews itself, waiting, continually waiting, on the will of activists to construct an alternative majority in Irish society. Labour is always more than the totality of the 'Labour Party' itself.

What is the purpose of this Labour that transcends its own self-imposed limitations? To inaugurate the socialist transformation of society? To form a majority government? To speak in slogans is to invite incredulity. Socialism will only be defined through the collective practice of the Labour Movement itself. Labour's historical purpose is to commence that definition throughout Irish society. Programmatically, we have posed the challenge of realigning Irish politics, the construction of an organisation, a campaigning membership, an active process of winning people over to that definition. Details will be considered, options will be canvassed but where socialists disagree, let it be on how to build that socialism, how to speak its name, not on whether we should do it at all.

Some might call our programme too ambitious, not appropriate at this time. We reject this defeatism. Socialism does not wait for times or circumstances, it creates them. That new majority we aim towards is already emerging without purpose or direction. It can barely be glimpsed through electoral returns and scholarly comment. But it is there, in the Ballymun towers and the sprawling estates of Mahon and Tallaght; in the offices and factories where people wonder if there will be work tomorrow or the day after; where families face a poverty of choices — meat on the table, a pair of children's shoes or the ESB bill. In the travelling sites and sheltered homes, the hospital wards and schoolrooms, wherever people come together, asking whether the future will be their's or somewhere else; that's where the new majority already exists.

Even then men and women come together in trade unions and associations, in anger and protests, struggling to confront a crisis not of their making. Or they come together in dole queues and the emigration boats. A whole network of despair and alienation, confusion and defiance is emerging and it waits, waiting to be organised, waiting for a politics that it can call its own. After nearly 75 years Labour has the opportunity to bring together socialists, trade unionists and progressives and, once again, begin again. It is time that Labour comes home.

**AMALGAMATED TRANSPORT
AND GENERAL WORKERS UNION**

***“The Irish
working class are
the incorruptible
inheritors of
Ireland’s
greatness”***

— JAMES CONNOLLY



ON BEHALF OF THE IRISH REGIONAL COMMITTEE

JOHN FREEMAN, REGIONAL SECRETARY

Title: Realignment in Irish Politics: The Socialist Challenge

Organisation: Labour Left

Date: 1986

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