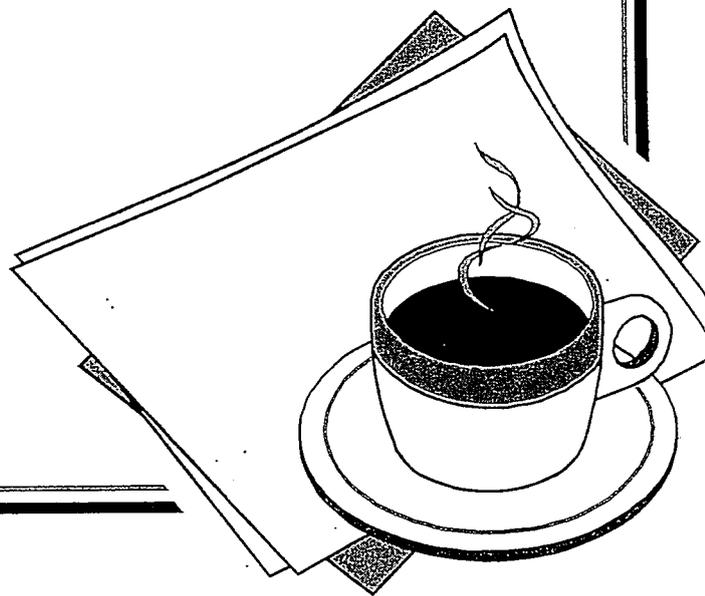


# The Coffee Circle Papers

Papers and responses from  
the series of political forums  
organised during 1998  
by Democratic Left



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# FOREWORD

by PROINSIAS DE ROSSA

In late 1997, a number of Democratic Left members came together to organise a series of 'Coffee Circles'. These were informal gatherings, held first in Bewley's Oriental Café, in Dublin's Grafton Street, on Sunday mornings. In March 1998, when Bewley's closed for refurbishment, we moved around the corner to Mao's Café and, in the Summer, the last two 'Coffee Circles' were held in the former Dock Offices – now The Harbourmaster – in the heart of the International Financial Services Centre.

The idea was to provide a comfortable, congenial setting for discussing uncomfortable, contentious issues. Issues and problems that socialists everywhere, not just in Dublin, were grappling with and seeking to resolve. They included some very fundamental issues for socialists facing into the 21st century. Like what relevance the concept of socialism has nowadays; what power the Left exerted, even in government, to really change capitalism and the way it works; what links we have with other socialists, in other parts of the world and what help we can give each other. Also: what common interests do we have with other progressive movements and organisations in Ireland and elsewhere – the environmental lobby and the women's movement, for example.

In other words, we sought to discuss where exactly socialists stand at the end of the 20th century. And, if there were to be a 'historic compromise' between nationalism and unionism, involving the British and the Irish governments, would this fundamentally alter the face of Irish politics – and what would be the implications for all of us in Ireland?

When the idea of providing an informal forum for discussion of such issues was suggested by Rosheen Callender at a Democratic Left Executive meeting in November 1997, the response was enthusiastic. It was a time for re-evaluation, re-appraisal, taking stock. We had come through a period of 'PGD' – Post Government Disorder, as someone called it – and it was time to move on. Some of

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us had felt very positive about our two years in government. We felt we had worked hard, co-operated well with the other parties – Labour and Fine Gael – that made up the ‘Rainbow’, achieved many important goals and should be readying ourselves for an early return to government so as to finish reforms we had started and begin new ones. Others felt negative about that period, believing, for various reasons, that it had been bad for the development of Democratic Left. But we were all agreed that some serious, structured debate was needed, to clear our minds and focus our eyes on the shape of socialism in the 21st century.

The ‘Coffee Circles’ began in January and ended in July 1998. We had intended to publish the papers, together with summaries of each discussion, ‘immediately’, ie, by September 1998, when a new series of debates was planned to start. However, a few other developments intervened... Most of the ‘Coffee Circle’ organisers were by then involved, directly or indirectly, in the discussions about the need for a new political formation on the Left – discussions with the Labour Party and discussions within Democratic Left itself. So publication was delayed, initially until early 1999 and then, when the European and local elections began to loom large, until later in the year. But the issues discussed are still relevant and I am confident that many people who were unable to attend those Sunday-morning sessions in 1998 will welcome the opportunity to read the papers now, and get a flavour of the debate that they provoked.

My thanks are due to all the speakers and respondents for taking the time and trouble to prepare such stimulating papers; to the rapporteurs who took on the almost impossible job of summarising the lively debates that followed, to the team who organised the ‘Coffee Circles’, including Rosheen Callender, Des Geraghty, Triona Dooney, Seamus Murphy and Brid Nolan; to Rosheen Callender who edited and arranged the material for publication; to Kay Lynch and Vincent Quinn who ensured its publication; and to Triona Dooney and others who have said they will help to organise a new series of discussions on relevant issues later this year.

## Proinsias De Rossa, TD and MEP

Leader of Democratic Left, March 1992 to January 1999

President of The Labour Party from January 24th 1999.

# ONE

## CRUNCH TIME FOR SOCIALIST POLITICS

### Some Clarity on Fundamentals

Our Values, Visions and Ethical Foundations

What Democratic Socialism Means Today

The Market: Malleable Monster or Uncontrollable Menace?

Synopsis of paper by Dávid Jacobson,

Lecturer in Economics, Dublin City University

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Response by Feargus O'Raghallaigh,

Financial Journalist

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Summary of discussion by Mary Maher,

Journalist and NUJ Member

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The Facilitator of this discussion was Paula Clancy, a Business Research Consultant and member of Democratic Left.

# One: Crunch Time for Socialist Politics

## Synopsis of the paper presented by David Jacobson

In 1993 I wrote a pamphlet on Socialism and Social Democracy. It was published by Democratic Left as a discussion document. In that pamphlet, I constructed an argument in favour of drawing a distinction between socialism and social democracy. Rather than using the term socialism, I referred to democratic socialism so as to distinguish it clearly from any association with the political and economic regimes that had prevailed in the Soviet-type systems.

What I would like to do here is to restate this argument in as clear, bold and perhaps controversial terms as I can; and to add a few thoughts arising from a number of additional ideas that have been expressed since then.

In essence what I argued in the 1993 pamphlet was that the demise of the Soviet type economies was not evidence of the "victory" of capitalism. There were, and I believe still are, two main reasons for this.

The first is that there continue to be serious problems in capitalism. They make a long list, including instability, inequity, poverty and environmental degradation.

This is not to say that there is a ready example of a modern society in which these problems have been solved; which brings me to my second reason for rejecting the argument that we are in a 'post-socialist' era, one in which socialism is vanquished and capitalism the victor. Socialism is not what existed in the Soviet-type economies. These systems may have had elements of socialism, but they had as many elements of capitalism; they were arguably, state capitalist systems.

An issue that I developed in some detail in the 1993 pamphlet was that among the most successful forms of organisation of production within current capitalism are some that at best contradict what are considered to be the core values – even the fundamental tenets – of capitalism. These tenets include individualism, capital

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accumulation and the driving force of competition. For example, 'Industrial districts', first noted in Italy in the 1970s, are locations in which a large number of small firms within the same industry 'flexibly specialise', through trust and co-operation, to produce high-quality goods. Though certainly not the dominant form of organisation of production – nor likely to become so, in the foreseeable future – these 'industrial districts' and similar hybrid forms of governance in manufacturing and service sectors give clues as to what is wrong with the present system and what should be sought in the alternative.

Among the characteristics of 'industrial districts' is that they are socially cohesive. There may be plenty of opportunities for the heads of different small firms to compete ruthlessly with one another, perhaps even to drive each other out of business, but this rarely happens. It does not happen because there is a milieu, arising from social and professional identity, that makes such activity frowned upon, and because the way in which the district evolves means that most of the firms need one another. None could produce the final good without all the others. The people who own and work in the firms are often related to one another, they are of the same religion, they have the same training, they are members of the same political party. Finally, and most importantly, there is a form of local governance, in which a municipal authority is often key in the provision of joint marketing activities, and finance for such developments as new technologies.

It is as if, at a very local level, the people are as interested in the long-run survival of their community as in their individual returns from economic activity. It is unlikely that they think in these terms, though. It is more likely that this long-run survival of the community is seen as the best way of enhancing individual returns. Those individual returns in fact include the survival of the community, but the long termism inherent in this kind of perspective is also best for economic success of the local industry in global competition. Localism, if this is correct, is an ideal way of succeeding in an increasing global economy.

Why might this embryonic, hybrid, organisational form provide solutions to the problems of capitalism? In a word, "stakeholding". With each firm requiring the continued existence of the others, they all have a stake in each other's future. Their entire community's prosperity depends on their success in their economic activities. The community has a stake in the business. This encourages quality and discourages instability, disruption, even crime. They all live in the area around the firms so they have stake in the maintenance of a clean, healthy environment.

A recent contributor to the stakeholder view is Will Hutton, editor of *The Observer* and cogent political economist. In his book, *The State We're In*, he argues that the short-termist demands of the financial system for immediate, high profits and the

political system that lies behind and supports this financial system, are the key problems of the British economy. He does not argue for the removal of markets, but it is, he says, the function of the state to govern markets in the interests of economy and society.

Accordingg to Hutton, decision-making for Britain is overly centralised, secretive, arrogant. There is inadequate concern for the interests of the different groups and views that make up civil society. The Thatcherite legacy of diminished control by the state over the activities of firms has resulted in a crisis of low wages, insecurity, declining cities, affecting many across class lines.

All this is, moreover, not uniquely British. The global deregulation movement has similar effects in other countries and across countries. The orthodox economic and political philosophy of success from unfettered market power is Hutton's key target. The exponents of this philosophy are unlikely to roll over quietly and surrender, but there are hard questions in his book about current British and global capitalism to which their theories cannot provide answers. The stakeholder view which he espouses is, he argues, the best way to build the new institutions of a truly democratic society in which men and women can shape the world they live in.

Hutton's attack on the primacy of markets is a clue to how it fits in this discussion of socialism and social democracy. It is, of course, a definitional issue. But in its present state, what is generally taken as a social democratic system is one in which there are no qualitative differences to liberal democracy. It is a question of degree of "correction" by the state. In social democracy there is likely to be higher taxation of the wealthy, more redistribution, more public health services, higher unemployment benefit. There is little evidence of fundamental difference at the level of governance of markets, or of individual firms.

Democratic socialism, on the other hand, would see markets themselves subjugated to the interests of society. This is not to say that this is an argument for some kind of orthodox Marxist post-capitalism in which somehow all will survive and prosper on the basis of a moneyless, marketless economy in which there is a consensus as to what each should receive (according to need) and what each should provide (according to ability). On the contrary, markets will continue, and where appropriate, will provide mechanisms for determining production and distribution. If there is a qualitative difference between social democracy and democratic socialism, it is in the willingness to determine where and when such "free" markets are not appropriate, where it is in the social interest for them to be controlled.

J K Galbraith, in his recent book *The Culture of Contentment*, suggests why it is unlikely that such radical results will be forthcoming. Writing about America, but

with resonance for other western democracies, he argues that the relatively well-off, the rich and the very rich, together with the state, all believe that the system they live in is the best it can be. They believe that the poor are lazy, that the rich are rich on merit. The relatively deprived are inactive because they are marginalised. (He calls them a marginalised underclass.) Hutton's views on the role of the state in controlling markets are an echo of those of Galbraith: that the Federal state's acceptance of anti-intervention and laissez-faire doctrine has given free rein to the self-destructive tendencies of modern capitalism. Galbraith is clearly unsure as to whether the resultant declines can be arrested, much less reversed.

What is clear is that, for progress towards this reversal, an alternative to market capitalism must be sought. As I argued in the 1993 DL pamphlet, the alternative is a process of improvement of the social, economic and political systems underlying social democracy. According to the American socialist economist Tom Weiskopf, this process leads to a democracy which is "truer and deeper" than that in the "most democratic of capitalist societies... - one that enables people more fully to exercise control over their own economic fate".

Another academic analyst, Barry Hindess - who long ago rejected orthodox Marxism, but has continued to espouse socialism - adds a positive note:

"The concern to bring significant aspects of economic activity under some kind of social control is a response to the presence of free markets as major components of economic life. The particular interests that identify themselves with that concern and the labels they attach to it may change as social conditions change, as will the programmes they put forward in its name, the concern itself will be with us for the foreseeable future".

What seemed to follow in my 1993 discussion paper was that because capitalism has not defeated socialism, because capitalism continues to provide us with huge and intractable problems, and because there continue to be cogent arguments in favour of socialist alternatives, there was a basis for the continued existence of Democratic Left as a political party to the left of the Labour Party in Ireland. The two books discussed here, both published since 1993, have provided further grist to that mill, in my view. Unless there is evidence of a transformation of the Labour Party from social democratic to democratic socialist, there is, if anything, all the more reason today for the continued pursuit of socialist ends by an independent political party. If it is not Democratic Left, it is quite likely that some other party will fill the gap.

## Response to David Jacobson's paper by Feargus O'Raghallaigh

*Note: The format of these 'Candid Coffee Circle' meetings was supposed to be as follows: a 20 minute paper, followed by a 10 minute response, and an hour-long discussion; with coffee on tap and punctuated by a short break and inputs or guidance by the facilitator. In all cases, the respondent was supposed to have sight of the initial paper beforehand, in order to provide a considered response.*

*Unfortunately, in this first case, the 'respondent' had no opportunity to prepare a considered response as he had not received the actual paper in advance. He had been given some verbal briefing on its expected contents and had prepared some notes on this basis. He amended these notes, as appropriate, in the course of the main speaker's presentation; and wrote them up afterwards, adding some footnotes and references.*

*This should be borne in mind when reading his paper.*

*In most subsequent 'Coffee Circles', the respondent did in fact have the main presentation, though not necessarily in its final form, in advance of the meeting.*

The following is based on remarks that I made at the Democratic Left discussion forum, New Century Socialism: Crunch time for socialist politics, held in Bewley's of Grafton Street on Sunday, 25 January 1998.

The idea of the meeting was, to quote from the programme for the meeting, "to have a full and frank review, in a friendly and informal atmosphere, of our core values as democratic socialists to the key issues confronting us as a politically influential organisation of the left." The meeting was the first of four such events scheduled through to March.

I was invited to formally respond to the presentation by David Jacobson to the forum. The format of the proceedings was the Jacobson presentation, my own response and then discussion/questions from the floor.

What follows is essentially put together from notes prepared before and during the Jacobson presentation. I have also referred to notes that I took of responses from the floor discussion at the end of the proceedings. However I do not reproduce those notes. I have taken this opportunity to tidy up my notes and also make the presentation as coherent as possible. This has involved extending my discussion and elaborating on my notes, including the incorporation of some footnotes. As to the quotations from the *Communist Manifesto* in the footnotes, the edition that I have used is that printed in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected works* - in one volume. Lawrence and Wishart (1970).

I had a certain difficulty with this event. How do you 'respond' to a paper when you have not actually seen it beforehand?

In the end, I decided to use the old tactic of 'get your retaliation in first' or alternatively, the Brian Lénihan school of replies: 'Before I answer your question, I would just like to say ...'

From this starting point, I decided that my response might be summarised as 'Why I am a communist and not a democratic socialist.'

If I might explain: it seems to me that Marx and Engels took ownership of the term communist at a certain stage of the nineteenth century and in a particular context. If you want to put a date on this, say February 1848 with the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*. That year 1848, was also 'the year of revolutions' and the *Manifesto* was written very much in the context of the political upheavals then occurring in Europe.

The term 'communist' predated these events, but it did not have anything like the same, precise meaning that Marx and Engels vested in the word as adopted by them in the *Manifesto*. The *Manifesto* gives some space to going through these other definitions.

Why did the authors of the *Manifesto* adopt this term, 'communist'? Why did they not, for example, use the word 'socialist' or some variant of it?<sup>1</sup>

The reason was that they wanted to oppose themselves to all forms of socialism and socialists as they saw them spread across the European political landscape of 1848. Marx and Engels were, in this sense, anti-socialist.

Before I go any further, I should say that I tend to agree with the Karl Korsch view of Marx's thinking as set out in, for example, an essay of his entitled 'Why I am a Marxist'. In that essay, Korsch writes about *Capital* and, drawing on his own introduction to an edition of *Capital* published in Berlin in 1932, comments that "all of the propositions contained in this work, and especially those concerning

'Primitive Accumulation' as treated in the last chapter of the book, represent only an historical outline of the rise and development of capitalism in Western Europe and 'have universal validity beyond that only in the same way in which every thorough empirical knowledge of natural and historical form applies to more than the individual case considered.'"

In other words, as Korsch remarks, "all of the propositions of Marxism, including those that are apparently general, are specific." The authors of the Manifesto had concrete political objectives and these, and how they were framed, were based on an understanding of the circumstances and conditions in which they operated as they saw them and understood them to be.

It is interesting to look at how the authors of the Manifesto outline their communist project and their opposition to socialism. But it is interesting also how they describe the bourgeoisie because the communist project and the description of the bourgeoisie are related.

The bourgeoisie are not simply a class made or created by its ownership and control of capital.

If I might give an example: the essential difference between Michael Smurfit and me is not the clear-cut one – that he is a capitalist and that I am not. The essential difference is that, as an individual capitalist he has entered into and combines with, other capitalists to function politically, which is to say establish capital's sway over the State – control over it. It is this aspect to capitalist behaviour – the political aspect – that makes capitalists into a class – the bourgeoisie.

Going on from this, the existence of the proletariat does not make it a class. For example, I might vote Fianna Fail or even Progressive Democrat. The object of communists is to make the proletariat into a class: make it think and act politically as a class in its own interest (which is to say through its Party). The Manifesto deals repeatedly with this objective and the difficulties in the way of its achievement<sup>2</sup>.

Does the notion of a proletariat and the project of creating a working class still have validity? Clearly, I think that they do. The conception of a proletariat makes absolute sense to me and the project of creating a working class; to me also makes sense. My conception of politics is one of class politics. From this vantage point then, the rest of Marx's project and his description of it arises. This is set out in some detail in the Manifesto, at the beginning of Part II – Proletarians and Communists.

"In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?"

"The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties.

"They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole.

"They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.

"The Communists are distinguished from other working-class parties by this only: 1. In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, they point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat, independently of all nationality. 2. In the various stages of development which the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie has to pass through, they always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.

"The Communists, therefore, are on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country ... on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great masses of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.

"The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat.

"The theoretical conclusions of the Communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer.

"They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from historical movements going on under our very eyes."

To me, this outline describes a project for a Communist and a party of the left that proposes to be a leading party, a true political representative organisation of the working class.

The context for all of this today in Ireland is to my mind what in the Manifesto is described as the "modern political representative State." I think that the concept is a critical one still in the world of today.

The notion in the Manifesto is of the modern political representative state as a bourgeois construct, a model for the organisation of the state that ensured for capital, "exclusive political sway". This sway, which is about creating the space within which the market can flourish, is secured through a number of critical reforms to the state. In particular they include extension of the franchise and parliamentarianism, the development of the law and the rule of law (including critically the common law and the law of contract), the professionalisation of the Civil Service, the modern

system of Party, and the development of meritocratic rules and culture. All of this is necessary from the point of view of giving the market, the system of capital, the space to grow, develop and expand.

All of this was very much the reform agenda of nineteenth century British politics – as described in for example Trollope's novels of society (in particular the Palliser cycle). What it did do and what it has established is a state form within which capital flourishes and dominates a political superstructure that works in its interest, but within the system of law and an open society. This is also a framework (or model) that I think allows us to understand modern British (imperial) history; modern bourgeois nationalism (for example in Germany or Ireland) with its emphasis on national development, national economy and organic society; and deviations from the 'model' such as fascism and nazism.

But the modern representative state does also allow for the working class to come into existence. The extension of the franchise, freedom of political action, meritocracy, the system of national and international markets creates a framework within which the proletariat also may assert itself and develop politically (which is to say into a class).

In this context (or from this perspective) it is vital to keep to the fore the Marx/Engels view of the 'communist party' as set out in the Manifesto. Which is why I have problems with the term 'democratic socialism'. To me it has certain connotations, not the least being an attempt to get away from the word 'communist'.

The 'democratic' part of the term seems to me to signify a commitment to the democratic, parliamentary mode of politics (the 'electorate' and 'electoral appeal') to the exclusion or downplay of agitational activity (old fashioned protest); establishing roots in civil society; and encouraging the development and growth of civil society.

The 'socialism' part of it to me amounts to the adoption of a term (or set of terms if one includes the related 'social democracy') with which people are as comfortable today as they were in the nineteenth century. It also to my mind tends to be associated programmatically with demands that are ameliorative (or palliative?) and may even be anti-working class in such areas as taxation, education and town versus country.

Having said all of this I would stress that I do not believe that my position is one that requires me to maintain my purity and distance from practical politics. I do believe in an agenda that has central to it getting back into government – if, realistically, this is within a coalition framework or context. But more than that, I believe that the agenda for coalition needs to be coherent and implementation of a programme will take time. This I would stress is not the same as saying the agenda and its pursuit is

'long-term'. My own view of coalition, given my little experience of it, is that it is a framework for political progress and also one that calls for calculation.

In all of this am I having my cake and eating it, calling myself communist but being a carpet bagging compromiser? I do not think so because in the end, my project remains the delimiting and ending of private property, capital.

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## Notes

1 The issue is actually dealt with by Engels in his Preface to the German edition of 1890 of the Manifesto. Despite the currency achieved by Marxist thought within the socialist movement by the end of the nineteenth century, when the Manifesto first appeared, Engels writes, "we could not have called it a socialist manifesto. In 1847 two kinds of people were considered Socialists. On the one hand were the adherents of the various Utopian systems... On the other, the manifold types of social quacks who wanted to eliminate social abuses through various universal panaceas and all kinds of patchwork, without hurting capital and profit in the least. Socialism in 1847 signified a bourgeois movement, communism and working class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at least, quite respectable, whereas communism was the very opposite".

The polarisation promoted by the authors of the Manifest was, in other words, politically calculated and highly conscious, based on an understanding of the context of the day and with a view to achieving a political objective, creating a working class and a party.

2 For example, on workers' isolated and individual battles, the Manifesto talks of the role of the improved communications and ensuing increased contact between different communities of workers: "It was just this contact that was needed to centralise the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one national struggle between classes. But every class struggle is a political struggle..."

"This organisation of the proletarians into a class and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between workers themselves".

In the discussion of Proletarians and Communists, the Manifesto states that "The immediate aim of the Communists is the same as that of all the other proletarian parties: formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat."

## Summary of discussion

by Mary Maher

The discussion which followed the opening presentation and response ran for more than two hours; among the dominant themes were the need to focus on what was happening now at grass roots level, the need to come to terms with the market economy as socialists, the role of Democratic Left and the importance of seeing Democratic Left's role on any issue in the light of its essential purpose.

### *Living in the present*

Several speakers were critical of a reliance on past analyses, pointing to the need to respond to the issues in the present. One described both the presentation and the response as "pessimistic", saying that in fact there was abundant evidence of people making positive advances in their own worlds that challenged capitalism – the eco-warriors in Wicklow and the Ryanair strikers in their stand for union recognition were immediate examples of people involved in struggles for what mattered to them. We must take them as our starting point.

Those who had to work in the real world had to deal with people's real concerns. There was no shortage of such concerns. Capitalism had been hugely successful in Ireland – but as a result, the gap of inequality was not closing but growing.

A number of contributors also pointed to the phenomenal transformation of local communities over the past ten to twenty years. It was traditional received wisdom that the working-class communities were ghettoised and marginalised; that people were apolitical, impossible to organise or enthuse. However, the truth was that there was nothing as exciting anywhere on the political scene as the struggle in these communities.

People were no longer voiceless. There had been a startling rise in the numbers of articulate community leaders. Community activism, partly due to issues such as drugs, was now a real force for change. Unless political leadership was provided, some alternative would fill the vacuum.

Another speaker commented that ten years ago if there was a protest in the community, "we would have organised it." Now it was being organised within the community by local community activists. There was also a cautious note from a speaker who said that community activism was not a united force nor community leaders a single breed; they included many strands of conflicting opinion.

#### *Economy and Market Forces*

While it was a comforting idea to want a society which was not dictated by the market, one speaker said, the fact was that we lived at the end of a century which had demonstrated that the market was a necessary part of democracy. The latter half of this century had seen a shift in the control of power to the extent that one individual could now make a contribution to a political party which would outweigh the contribution of thousands. The issue was how to achieve real democratic control of the market.

It was noted that economic changes had been such that the left-wing parties now had to take account of a totally new situation. With a consumer driven market, privatisation and contract work, more and more workers were "petty commodity producers". Another speaker said that as a self-employed person he believed that capitalism could be wedded to socialism. The issue was to do what was best for most people.

Another contributor argued that the issue was not the abolition of the market and a collapse back into totalitarianism, but to provide something better.

In the view of one speaker, Democratic Left had been "incredibly influential" in government, encouraging changes to a more modern, secular society. But it had not exercised real power. Influence and power were not the same thing. The challenge to the market could not come from mere influence - as, for instance, the successful challenge to the prohibition on divorce had - it must come from a position of power. The question now on the agenda was how to mobilise a turnaround to achieve on the economic front what had been achieved in the social front?

The view that Democratic Left had exercised some influence, but not real power was disputed by the Party Leader, who said Democratic Left had in fact forced decisions on the distribution of resources which would not otherwise have been taken. However, because of 'collective responsibility' and the need for cohesion within government, such decisions could not be attributed to particular parties or individuals, so had not been widely recognised, even within the Party itself.

#### *The Role of Democratic Left*

There was some criticism of inertia within Democratic Left. One speaker said he had

attempted to promote support for a march to Geneva, planned for the following June to protest internationally at child labour in underdeveloped countries. He felt strongly that "if socialism means anything, this is what it means." But there had been no positive response from the Party Head Office.

While there seemed to be a consensus that Democratic Left should refocus on issues in the community and in other localised struggles, it was also stressed that communal politics were only a base and starting point. The issue was not whether we should be organising or agitating, but for what purpose? We do not give support willy-nilly for the market, any more than we do for state ownership. Sinn Féin, which was visibly active at local community level, was seen as an anti-establishment force merely because of its local activism, not because its purpose was widely supported. Were the national issues at Sinn Féin's core to be resolved, their support would evaporate. Our main purpose, on the other hand, should be central to all our actions and decisions.

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