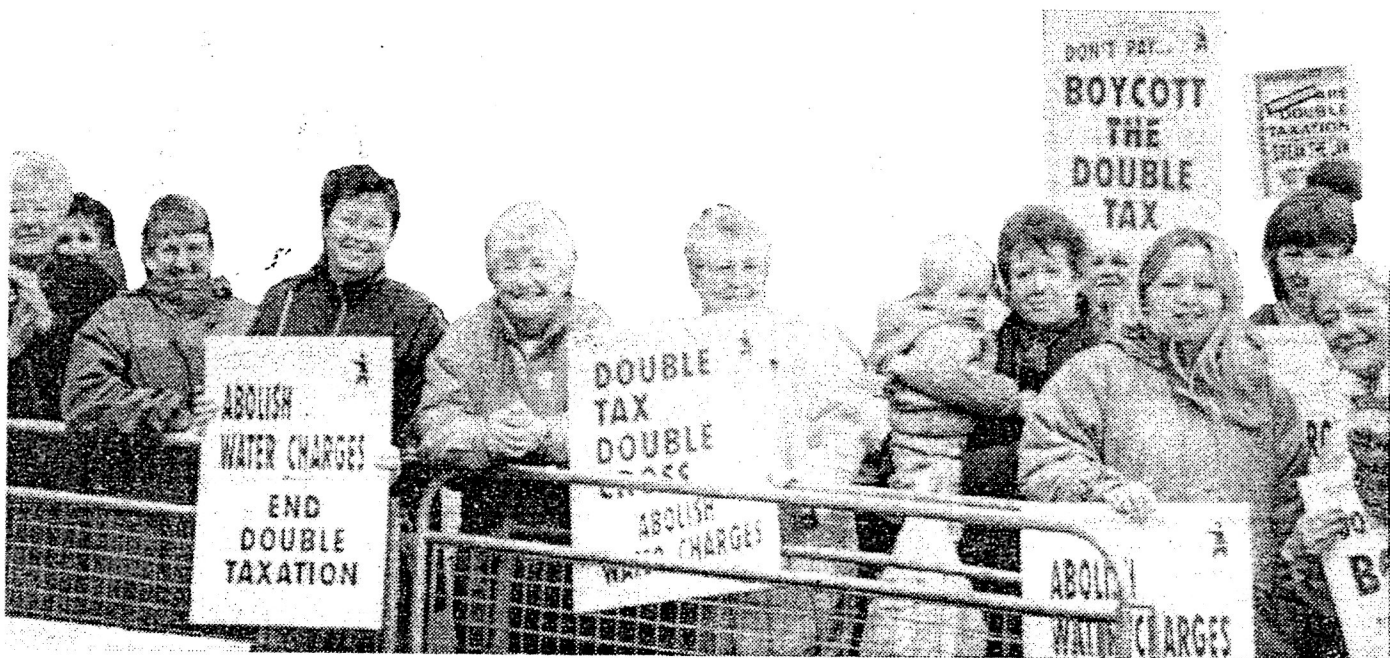


WOMEN

& Socialist Politics



One of the most notable and important features of social struggle in Ireland in recent years is the increasing radicalisation of women.

Women have been to the forefront in defending their communities against the heroin plague and are playing an increasing role in trade unions, most clearly seen in the Dunnes Stores' strikes.

The Socialist Party seeks to be the voice of these fighters who will play a crucial role in the struggle for a new society based on the needs of people rather than profit, thereby laying the basis for genuine equality between women and men. But what about the "liberal agenda"? The winning of the right to distribute information on abortion, the right to divorce, and more broadly the ending of the Catholic Church's veto on social legislation are undoubtedly important gains.

Social change

However, it needs to be emphasised again that these changes were more the product of broader social change impacting the attitudes and struggles of

working class people rather than of the enlightened intervention of middle class intellectuals.

The most important point though is that while change has occurred, it is still far short of producing anything remotely approaching equality for women. Nor has the political establishment of the "Celtic tiger" any perspective for how to achieve the fundamental changes which are needed.

Women's rights

We believe the struggle for women's rights should be part of the overall struggle for change in our society. It is the bosses system which benefits from the oppression of women.

The state saves millions from the unpaid work of women in the home: the rearing of the next generation, the care of the elderly, the sick and the young, all undertaken by the sweat of women's labour.

There are huge financial gains to the state by keeping women chained to the home. Also by encouraging sexist attitudes to women, women can be paid lower wages, which in turn is used to

keep down all workers' wages.

The division of the sexes is not natural. It is maintained by the role of the education system, the media, the courts, the church and the state. If we accept that womens' oppression comes from the way society is organised, then ultimately the struggle for womens' liberation must be a struggle against the system.

Socialism

While fighting for every defence of the gains won by women in the past and for every advance in the present situation, our struggle will continue until we fundamentally change society, to a socialist society where all oppression is ended.

This is the only way we can guarantee full equality for women and begin to speak of relations between men and women based on mutual respect and understanding.

We believe these are not just aspirations, they are worth fighting for and can be achieved. As the great Irish socialist, James Connolly said; "There are none so fitted to break the chains as those who wear them."

For progressive social legislation

It is now nearly six years since the 'X' case and the only significant development has been the 'C' case, in which we saw the appalling spectacle of a 13 year old rape victim being forced through the courts and a media circus before she could travel to Britain for an abortion.

The parties of the current coalition government and the last have completely avoided their responsibility to legislate on foot of the 'X' case because that decision would make the option of abortion available to women with crisis pregnancies.

The situation now exists in the Dail that anti abortion T.D.s hold the balance of power and there is talk of holding yet another referendum, with the intention of reversing the 'X' judgment by nullifying the possibility of abortion if the mother's life is threatened.

Hypocrisy

The Socialist Party opposes the hypocrisy of the current position and calls on the government to recognise that the 5,000 Irish women who are travelling to Britain each year for abortions have a right to full medical care and support in their own country.

Instead of exporting the problem of crisis pregnancies, a free, safe and legal abortion service should be available, in addition to other support services, to ensure the right of pregnant women to make fully informed and freely chosen decisions on their pregnancies.

As an immediate measure there has to be legislation to implement the Supreme Court judgement in the 'X' case.

Any abortion service, even if limited initially to women who fall within the 'threatened suicide' category, must be set up within the public health service.

There must be adequate medical and financial support so that the delays which are too often associated with the health service are not a further element of distress for women in crisis, who are by the very nature of that crisis, subject to strict limitation of time. The service must include professional counselling during the pregnancy, and an appropriate follow up service for whatever decision is made by the woman with regard to her pregnancy.

Right to choose

The standard of education in sexuality, contraception and relationships in Ireland has improved considerably in recent years, but it is still inadequate, and too often it is resisted by the forces of reaction, who claim that abortion is being used as an alternative to contraception, which they also opposed.

The same forces are determined to bring about another referendum in an effort to pull back the significant 'X' decision. The Fianna Fail / Progressive Democrat Coalition has deferred any serious attempt to deal with the issue as urgently as it deserves by setting up a Working Party to draw up a Green Paper, for publication in June 1998.

The Socialist Party will be making a submission to the Working Party, arguing for the provision of at least the limited abortion service allowed by the 'X' judgement, with the long term aim of legislation to provide for a full abortion service, fully funded and regulated within the public health service, which would give women the right to choose how they deal with this profoundly personal issue.

The Netherlands allows abortion free of charge until the 28th week, yet, because it provides freely available contraception and an innovative youth counseling service, it has the lowest abortion rate in the West.



Where The Socialist Party Stands

- ★ For legislation to give effect to the 'X' case judgement.
- ★ Remove the constitutional ban on abortion.
- ★ Full family planning information and counselling to be provided free of charge through the health service.
- ★ No to exporting our problems abroad. For the provision of abortion in Ireland through the health service.
- ★ No restrictions on the availability of safe, proved contraception devices to be provided at low cost through the health service.
- ★ For non-religious based sex education in the schools.
- ★ For increased state support for single parents.
- ★ Complete the separation of Church and State.
- ★ For the repeal of all repressive legislation in relation to the family and sexual relations.

No to violence against women

According to the international organisation, Worldwatch, violence against women is the biggest violation of human rights internationally.

The United States government has stated that domestic violence is the single biggest killer of American women; eight women are killed every day by their partners. Twenty seven million are battered annually with five million suffering serious injury.

In Britain 45% of all murders are of spouses or partners and 80% are committed by males. Ireland is no different. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of women murdered in recent years. A shocking 92% of rape victims knew their attackers.

What is even more disgusting than these bald statistics is the response of "official" society to this situation. Victims of rape are often put on trial by the courts, the police called out to a home to sort out a violent situation usually adopt a low key, sort it out among yourselves attitude. The judicial system is prejudiced against women, with elderly male judges making outrageous, insensitive and ignorant observations.

The establishment political parties have done nothing but pay lip service; they have never taken any serious measures or put up the necessary funding to tackle the problem. About £3 million a year is given to refuges for battered women and their children. This compares with the £20 million given to the GAA in this year's budget.

Meanwhile, 1,000 women, in fear of their lives, could not find refuge in Dublin last year due to a shortage of space in the existing overcrowded and under funded refuges.



Where The Socialist Party Stands



★ *Change the law and court procedures to protect the victims of violence.*

★ *For the provision of emergency financial support and state counselling services to help those suffering from domestic violence or other violence, to build new lives.*

★ *For community policing policy with democratic control and involvement of the community to tackle the problem of crime, drug abuse and violence against women.*

★ *For the removal of judges who display bias, insensitivity or complacency when dealing with cases of violence against women or minorities.*

Other Socialist Party policies

★ *On the heroin crisis*

The Socialist Party supports democratic community action in tackling crime and the heroin crisis.

For immediate treatment facilities and maintenance programmes for all heroin addicts who require them.

For the state and local authorities to work with and implement the policies and policing priorities advocated by the communities.

★ *On health*

For a properly funded public health care system to put an end to waiting lists.

No to a two tier health service.

End the profiteering in health care.

For free and comprehensive health care, with clinics in all areas to provide primary medical services.

★ *On education*

Reduce the pupil/teacher ratio, for a maximum class size of twenty.

For a free education system: all materials, books, uniforms, school trips to be provided free to all students.

For democratic control of schools, through elected school boards involving students, teachers and parents.

Full and free access, with equal opportunity, to all levels of education. For a living grant for all third level students.

For the full social and economic liberation of women

Almost twenty five years after the introduction of Equal Pay legislation women only earn two-thirds of the average male wage. The gap between male and female earnings in Ireland is among the highest in the world.

It is higher than in so called third world countries like India, where attitudes to women are supposedly less progressive than in Ireland.

Ireland and Britain are the only two countries without some form of minimum wage. Low pay is rampant in the Celtic tiger. The gap between the low paid and the higher paid is second only to that of the United States among "developed" countries.

The Celtic tiger boom has been a boom for the rich at the expense of working people. The share of national income which goes to wages has fallen dramatically over the last ten years while profits have boomed.

While it is claimed that 1,000 new jobs a week are being created, two out of every three of these jobs are part time and undoubtedly, low paid.

Three out of every four part time workers in the Irish economy are women. Women workers in general are the most exploited section of the workforce.

Under these conditions, women have become much more militant in demanding justice in the workplace. For every man that joins a trade union today, two women do so.

However the struggle against low pay and poor working conditions should be a joint struggle between men and women.

What is needed is a fighting trade union movement which bases itself on mobilising its members to struggle on the issues which concern them.

The policy of so called "Social Partnership" has meant an acceptance of low wage increases and attacks on conditions, full time jobs and workers' rights in general.



Where The Socialist Party Stands

- ★ For the trade unions to fight to make equal pay a reality.
- ★ For a state funded creche place for every child.
- ★ For a guaranteed job for all women.
- ★ No to discrimination in employment or promotional opportunities against women.
- ★ For a minimum wage of £150 per week take home pay to combat the scandal of low pay.
- ★ Eliminate sexual harassment in the workplaces.
- ★ For a campaign against all forms of chauvinism in the media and advertising.
- ★ To end the sexist stereotyping in the schools.
- ★ For the trade unions, the left parties, community organisations and women's groups to unite in a campaign to reverse the cuts in health, education and social welfare.

Join the Socialist Party

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I would like more information.....

Name _____

Address / Tel: _____

Please fill out and return to Socialist Party P.O. Box 3434, Dublin 8

The Socialist Party stands for a truly secular, democratic and socialist society.

The Socialist Party stands for taking economic power out of the hands of the bankers, speculators and wealthy industrialists and transferring it to those who do the work and create the wealth, working class people.

We stand for public ownership and democratic socialist planning of the key areas of economic activity.

Title: Women Socialist Politics

Organisation: Socialist Party

Date: 1998

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