

Dec./Jan 1983

**GRAFTON**

**If General  
Elections  
could really  
change anything,  
they'd make  
them illegal.**

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**INSIDE** Tax reform  
Voices from Finglas

Politics in Waterford  
Unions and the Media

Election reports and analysis

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# EDITORIAL STATEMENT

**W**hat kind of people are producing *Gralton*? What kind of people will read it? We think the answer to these two questions is the same: those interested in discussing the realities of Irish society and the methods of radically changing it; those who feel that no existing publication or organisation is at present providing a forum within which the experiences, victories and defeats of the past decade can be assessed and learned from.

**W**e hope *Gralton* can become that forum. Our aim is to promote debate and discussion centering around a number of broad positions:

- \* that capitalism is not a force for progress and has to be replaced by Socialism
- \* that Socialism consists essentially of people controlling their own lives in the workplace and the community
- \* that such a change of system goes far deeper than anything that can be achieved through parliamentary methods alone
- \* that real change cannot be brought about through the actions of any small elite group, whether guerilla army or state bureaucracy, but requires the action of masses of people acting consciously together to establish their own power
- \* that none of this change can be achieved solely in an Irish context

**B**ut *Gralton* will not be simply discussing ideas. We also aim to give practical support to the struggles and movements of the day by providing information, commentary and factual analysis of service to trade unionists, feminists, socialists, political and local activists – and by opening our columns to those actively involved even if we do not share their political viewpoint. We believe there is a close link between the experience of activity and the development of ideas and we shall always be seeking to strengthen it.

**T**he Editorial Board of *Gralton* reflects who we believe to be our audience: individual socialists and activists in a wide variety of left-wing movements. Some of us are members of left organisations, more are not. Among us there are differences of tradition, political bias, interests – even some sharp disagreements on major political issues. But we all share a basic political approach and method: that of looking towards and participating in the struggles and movements of the working class and all the oppressed and exploited sections of society.

**B**elieving that the successful mobilisation of people is itself a political gain contributing far more to real change than the mere existence of a political party, *Gralton* will be independent, broad-based and non-sectarian in all its coverage. Independent, because only freedom from the control or dominance of any organisation can produce the kind of open, self-questioning exploration and exchange of ideas that is necessary. And this is partly a recognition that none

of the existing groups contain the full answer themselves – although some individuals may consider certain organisations closer than most.

**G***ralton* will not be handing down any firm “line” Our articles are the responsibility of the authors alone. We welcome articles from currents and organisations of the left by way of contribution to the debate, but we are not a “heavy theoretical journal” so they will have to be written in ordinary English and priority will be given to articles from whatever source which raise real questions or which provide useful information. Sexist terminology will be cut.

**I**f *Gralton* is to succeed in its aim of providing a forum for debate, discussion and analysis then the widest possible number of people involved with the magazine the better. To facilitate this, the overall direction and control of the magazine is being vested in a body called *Gralton* Co-Operative Society Ltd., consisting of all individual readers who are in broad agreement with the aims of the magazine as outlined above and are committed enough to the project to take out a Supporters Subscription. The Editorial Board will be accountable to the group and in future will be elected from it. We hope as many readers as possible will identify with the magazine in this way – and by writing for it and selling it – and thereby help to make *Gralton* as relevant as possible to the advance of the left in Ireland.

## EDITORIAL BOARD

*Dermot Boucher* ● *Paul Brennan* ● *John Cane* ● *Mary Cummins* ● *Des Derwin* ● *John Goodwillie* ● *Nora Hamill* ● *Jeff Kallen* ● *Molly Kallen* ● *Pete Nash* ● *Tom O'Connor* ● *Brian Trench*.

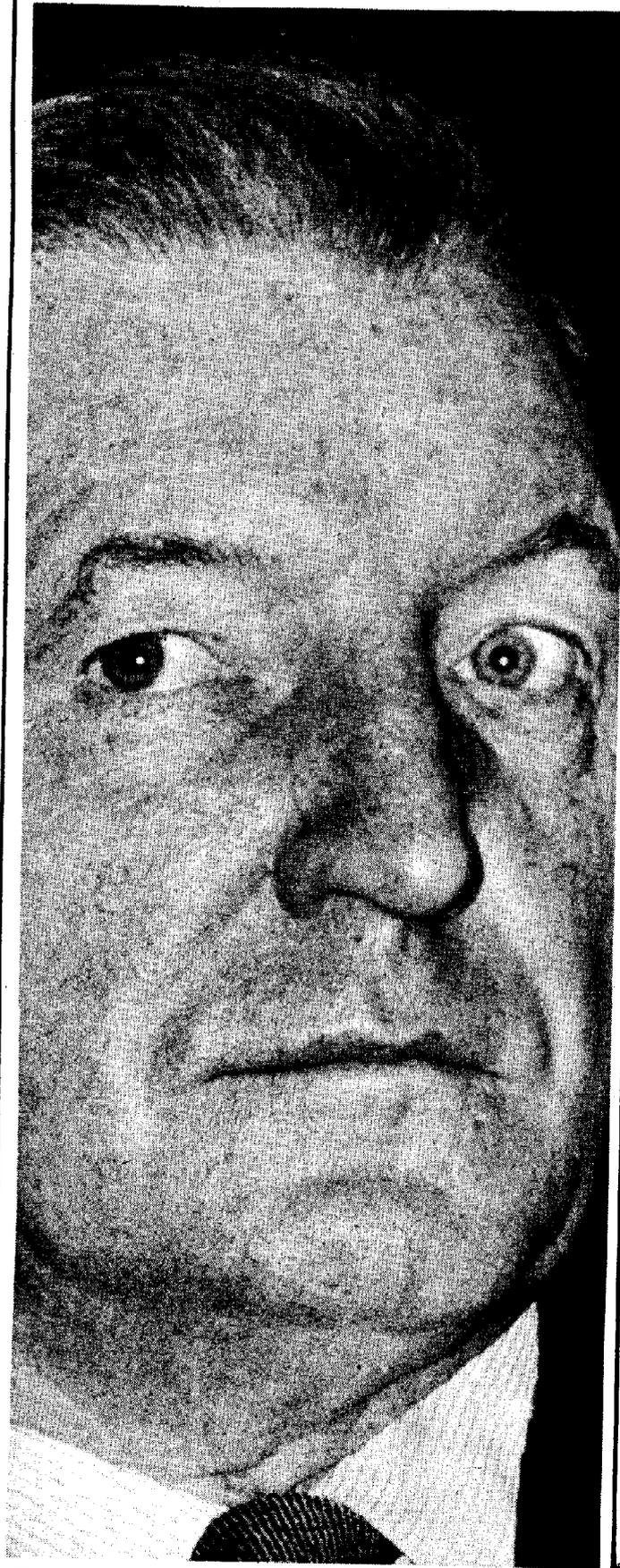
## JIM GRALTON



**JIM GRALTON** is the only person to have been deported from the 26 Counties for political activity. Gralton was not prosecuted for any criminal offence. His offence was to have helped give the poor, the landless and the unemployed of County Leitrim the confidence to fight for themselves.

In the early Thirties, Gralton devoted himself to establishing a social hall for the people of Gowel, Leitrim. For this heinous crime he was denounced from the pulpits and the hall was eventually burned down. Finally, in 1933, the De Valera government succeeded in deporting him — despite a vigorous campaign on his behalf waged by left wing trade unionists and republicans, unemployed activists and local supporters.

*Gralton's* name represents a challenge to established authority, a call for people to take their fate into their own hands and an imaginative application of socialist ideas in a difficult environment. For all that, and more, he deserves to be remembered. That's why this magazine is named after him.



Derek Speirs (Report)



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# Ballots and Bullets

## JOAN KELLY assesses the impact of Sinn Féin's success in the Assembly Elections on the anti-imperialist movement in the North.

Republican drinking clubs in West Belfast reverberated with the sound of victory celebrations after the votes were counted on October 21st. While Republicans were joyous over the massive vote achieved by Sinn Féin candidates in the Assembly elections, the British media and politicians went hysterical. "A vote for violence," "Prior's Folly" screamed the headlines.

The fact that 35% of the nationalist population in the North elected 5 Sinn Féiners was just too much to take in Britain and in the South. But rather than "a vote for violence" that election vote was a resounding rejection of the British presence in the North.

It is unfortunate that this enormous propaganda victory was to be so short lived. For by Friday, while votes were still electing Sinn Féin winners, the IRA had gone to work again with its usual bad timing. The kidnapping and murder of UDR man Cochrane followed by the horrific torture and murder of Joe Donegan immediately took the heat off Prior and the Brits. The politicians and the press were more than happy to get back to ranting about the "terrorists" and to forget about the embarrassing vote.

For that vote was important. The factors that lie behind it won't be dismissed as easily as Prior would like. Behind that vote is 60 years of oppression under the Northern state, and 13 years of bitter struggle against the British army and all the horrors of internment, raids and deaths. That bitterness was heightened by the hunger strike deaths and the continuing deaths by plastic bullets this year. Sinn Féin's running in this election gave an opportunity to nationalists to

voice their opposition to Britain, and in particular, to the new Assembly, which is seen as potentially a return to the old Stormont regime. 29% of the total vote went to parties opposed to the Assembly. 35% of the nationalists voted for Sinn Féin whom they could count on to boycott the Assembly.

But what scared the Brits most was the fact that the vote showed that people really do support the IRA. The problem for the Brits is that they believe their own propaganda. Remember the claims — "the IRA are just a few terrorists," etc. Well, the system they love best — democratic elections — has proven them terribly wrong. No matter how they attempt to explain away the vote, it was clearly a previously untapped Republican vote. Usually republicans, particularly in urban areas, don't come out to vote. This time they did. There is little evidence that it was a "youth" vote. The election workers were very young, but there was no evidence of increased registration of the youth this year. Also, Sinn Féin probably did not take much support from the SDLP. Their vote is quite separate and more middle class. 17% of Sinn Féin preferences went to the SDLP. But only 6% of SDLP preferences went to Sinn Féin. It seems clear then that the Assembly election has given legitimacy to the military struggle of the IRA and has, as well, given public recognition to Sinn Féin's claim to be the leaders of the anti-imperialist movement.

During the Assembly election campaign there were few alternatives for nationalists who wanted to show their clear opposition to Britain. The IRSP,

who called for an election boycott, carried out a beserk military campaign during the final week of the election. They could have plunged us into civil war if their bombs had killed their intended victims. The Irish Independence Party did run a boycott campaign and probably hurt the SDLP vote in Mid-Ulster. The Peoples' Democracy ran a half-hearted campaign. Their two candidates got a combined 422 votes. The Communist Party had a decent platform, — combining economic, social and repression issues, like plastic bullets. Their two candidates did little campaigning and got few votes.

The Workers' Party ran 13 candidates, blamed "violence" for all the North's problems, and fully supported the new Assembly. They got 2.7% of the total vote and no seats. The Newtownabbey Labour Party got 560 votes in South Antrim. For a time they had joined with Paddy Devlin in the United Labour Party running on economic and social issues only, avoiding the question of imperialism and repression.

The tremendous vote for Sinn Féin candidates was encouraging after a year of severe defeat for the anti-imperialist movement. With the ending of the hunger strike and the subsequent dismantling of the mass movement we can take heart from the stand taken by nationalists, but we must raise serious questions about Sinn Féin tactics and leadership in the anti-imperialist movement.

Sinn Féin's entry into this particular election was more the result of internal Sinn Féin politics than a will to rebuild a strong, united opposition to British imperialism. The Assembly elections presented an excellent opportunity to bring together again the elements of the H-Block campaign in a united opposition to a new Stormont. That possibility took second place to the Provos' desire to displace the SDLP as the "leaders of the nationalist people". It also took second place to the need to win the political argument inside Sinn Féin. Supporters of the "Armalite and the Ballot" policy had to defeat the hard line militarists and abstentionists who still form a majority in the movement.

The political potential for electoral politics became clear during the 1979 European Election when Bernadette McAliskey got 34,000 votes on the H-Block issue in spite of a Sinn Féin boycott campaign. The southern hunger strike votes and the victories in the two Fermanagh/South Tyrone elections helped win the arguments about going political. The internal struggle helps explain the reversion to militarism while the votes were still being counted. The movement opportunistically curtailed military operations during the election campaign, but it was obviously necessary

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VOTING PATTERN IN THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS					
Party	Seats	Votes (000's)	Share (%)	Const. contested	Aver. Vote per const. (000's)
Official Unionists	26	188.3	29.8	12	15.7
DUP	21	145.5	23.0	12	12.1
Other	2	36.3	5.6	10	3.6
Pro-Unionists	10	58.9	9.3	12	4.9
Alliance	10	17.2	2.7	10	1.7
Workers' Party	1	138.9	18.8	12	9.9
SDLP		64.2	10.2	7	9.2
Sinn Féin		3.4	0.6	5	0.7
Other anti-unionists					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>632.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>—</b>

to let "the boys and girls" have a go afterwards just to prove the leadership meant it when they said "an armalite and a ballot box."

Because the leadership of the anti-imperialist movement is still dominated by militarism, the lost opportunities are many. There has been, as yet, no united opposition to the imposition of the Assembly. The chance to further discredit Prior and the British government was missed by that untimely act of militarism. Immediately after the elections, Prior was under pressure to invite SF representatives to talks. This does not mean SF should have or would have gone to such meetings, but it would have been a great humiliation for the British to have to admit that one-third of the population here were refusing to go along with the new Assembly. Now Thatcher is easily able to ignore that nationalist vote. She already seems to be moving to agreement on a return to a loyalist-dominated Stormont regime.

We must also question what the Provos mean by "going political". By all indications it means *electoral* politics only. The dismantling of the hunger strike support movement was very much

Sinn Féin's responsibility. The decision to concentrate on electoral campaigns was at the expense of maintaining a broad front in order to build on the achievements of the hunger strike campaign. It has also been a move away from methods that help build the confidence of workers to carry on the struggle. The mass marches, open meetings, workplace organising have been dropped.

Since the hunger strike campaign, Sinn Féin has not been active in any area except election campaigns. Elections can be tactically useful, but they can only be an adjunct to the real world of politics which is not in the ballot box. By their own admission at the recent Ard Fheis, their trade union and education areas are weak, and youth work a "non-starter". This is a disastrous admission when we remember the exciting involvement of workers and young people in the hunger strike campaign and then look at the problems of unemployment and low wages that workers and youth face now.

Since the decision to go into politics, Sinn Féin has shown no inclination to become actively involved in the struggles of workers in the North. The issues are

there. Workers are fighting back. Militant campaigns can be built. Whether the issue is plastic bullets, the health workers strike, unemployment, poverty and debts, the De Lorean closure, the Eastwood strike, leadership is not coming from Sinn Féin. All those struggles are part of the fight against imperialism and the methods to win must be the activity of workers themselves. Sinn Féin merely asks, "vote for us and support the military struggle"

There is a common point in those two methods. Both military and electoral politics can be used to displace the self-activity of workers. They can be used to discourage workers from organising and building *themselves*. During the campaign Gerry Adams promised to open constituency clinics if they won seats. But clinics are not enough. These elections can still be used in a positive way. The numbers openly opposed to British rule are a boost to the confidence of the movement. The fight can now be taken into the communities and the workplaces to help people organise to struggle against *all* the horrors we experience under this rotten system of capitalism.



Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams: Sinn Féin victors in the Assembly elections.

# ANTI-AMENDMENT NEWS . . .

## But some are more equal than others

MARY GORDON reviews the situation facing the Anti-Amendment Campaign after the publication of the proposed text giving equal rights to the "unborn" and the mother.



Derek Speirs (Report)

When the Anti-Amendment Campaign was formed in April to oppose the proposal to amend the Constitution, we didn't know exactly what we were opposing. Our arguments, therefore, had to be based on what the proponents of the amendment said they wanted it to contain. Now that the text has been published our situation is pretty much the same: we still don't know exactly what it is we are opposing.

The amendment, as worded, is so vague and imprecise that it could mean almost anything. But one thing is certain — it will have to be interpreted in the courts. Now, it was in order to prevent the courts determining the legal position on abortion that the amendment was proposed in the first place. To that extent the text represents a measure of success for the Anti-Amendment Campaign.

So where does that leave the campaign now? Unfortunately, it makes our task more, rather than less, difficult. The wording is very clever. In the same tradition as our family planning legislation it purports to satisfy its campaigners (in this case PLAC) without quite delivering the goods. Or does it deliver the goods? The amendment could be interpreted to allow abortion for

therapeutic reasons, if not now at least at some future date. But an examination of the text reveals more likely interpretations that would have very grave consequences.

Firstly, the term "unborn" could be judged to mean from fertilisation which would make I.U.D.s and many types of contraceptive pill illegal. Secondly, the phrase "as far as practicable" (which in Irish — the prevailing language — is translated as "as far as possible") could be taken to indicate any means of preventing an Irish woman from terminating her pregnancy; by perhaps, denying her the right to travel abroad. Thirdly, because "the mother" has only the same right to life as "the unborn" there is nothing to indicate which should be saved in the case of there being a conflict between their lives. Fourthly, a mother's health, wellbeing or sanity could never be considered more valuable than the life of the foetus and so abortion after rape or if the foetus is grossly malformed could not be legalised.

If any of the above interpretations sound far-fetched consider that it would only take an injunction by a third party (literally anyone) to risk such rulings coming from the courts. There is no

shortage of third parties prepared to do this.

But perhaps the most insidious element of this proposal, which even the vagueness of the text cannot conceal, is the equation of the woman's right to life with that of a foetus. Once a woman becomes pregnant her right to defend her life becomes circumscribed. She actually loses the right she previously had as a citizen under Article 41. It could make Ireland a very unsafe place for pregnant women.

In view of this, the glee with which Haughey and FitzGerald hailed the text of the amendment is nauseating. They don't care about its implications as long as they've found a formula that isn't embarrassingly sectarian. But their opportunism in using it as an election gimmick was ably matched by Dick Spring's cop-out reason for opposing it. Spring actually managed to suggest that the text was objectionable because it might possibly liberalise the abortion law. The Workers' Party response was determined by electoralism as that of the other parties: it was their hope that by keeping silent they might not lose any votes. All this means that there is no chance now of the referendum being called off.

The success of the Anti-Amendment Campaign demonstration in November indicates that the majority of people who

### THE PROPOSED TEXT OF THE AMENDMENT

"The state acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and as far as practicable, by its laws, to defend and vindicate that right"

opposed the amendment at the beginning are as committed in their opposition after the publication of the text. Most ordinary people don't think that women have no more value than a foetus, or that a woman who has cancer should have to postpone treatment for 9 months, or that a rape victim should have to carry a pregnancy to term. The Pro-Amendment lobby have argued their case as if women were totally irrelevant to the issue. But most people are not as anti-abortion as the fanatics in SPUC or as uncaring in their attitude to women. This amendment can still be defeated at the polls if its implications are clearly argued.

# .. AND VIEWS

*The Anti-Amendment campaign confronts some of the fundamental issues of Irish society which will persist long after the proposed amendment is (hopefully) defeated. This article is one interpretation of some of these basic issues. It argues that the pro-amendment position goes further than any specific legal question, and that its assumptions are incompatible with socialism but essential to capitalism.*

Voluntary interruption of pregnancy is one of the oldest medical practices. Philosophies through history have professed many different opinions of it. No 'major' religion, including the Catholic church, has maintained an unchanging and unanimous position on the issue. The current official Catholic stand, for example, dates only from 1869. Since organised religion relies on the material base of society, the changing relations of society have always managed to change the doctrines of religions.

Ireland today is in a very small minority of countries, sharing with Malta the most restrictive laws in Europe concerning abortion. Of 140 countries surveyed in 1980, only five have more restrictive laws than Ireland, while the vast majority authorise abortion under some circumstances, if not with perfect freedom. Considering that Europe, China, India, the US, and USSR are among the more liberal communities regarding abortion, for most of the world's population, the question raised in the Irish amendment is not an issue.

The existing socialist countries have policies in keeping with their concern for public health and freedom from pre-Revolutionary social structures. Thus abortion was legalised in 1920 in the Soviet Union, and starting in 1955, the various Eastern European countries enacted laws incorporating legal abortion within the general medical scheme. Through the 1950s and 60s medical interpretation of pregnancy was common in these countries, partly because no reliable contraceptive was freely available to all social classes. The education and facilities necessary for many forms of contraception require a stronger educational and economic base than the pre-Revolutionary order could have allowed. Similarly, only radical changes in Irish educational, medical and social institutions will make contraception genuinely available to all social classes here.

In the Soviet Union, 58 per cent of the professional class is women. As the Eastern European countries have stressed the equality of women in the working place, women have chosen to have few

children, and to develop their careers however they can. Birth control and abortion are thus tools in the development of equality of economic relations. The Eastern European and Soviet approach is not feminist in the sense that feminism is taken as an issue apart from the overall fight for democracy. Rather, the position is materialist — based on the way people in society make their livings and the relations they enter into to do so.

A socialist view of the state must recognise that the state is a secular entity. Even if the Irish amendment satisfied the heads of the major religions, it is not religious interests that a state exists to protect: social welfare can be guaranteed by democratic principles within a socialist society, without respect to the existence of any religion.

Capitalism (including our present Irish version of it) requires that each worker not have control over his or her production. You have to give what you produce to someone else, who gives you enough in return that he or she can still get a profit from yet another person — maybe you. Additionally, groups of workers must be divided among themselves, lest they unite against the system as a whole. Denying a woman the capacity to choose whether or not to have children directly prejudices her status in the marketplace: it restricts her ability to advance and control her material life. This sort of freedom is taken for granted by men, whether married or not, but expressly denied to women in the pro-amendment ideology. This ideology is doubly vicious, then, both in attacking women's material freedom and in suggesting to men that capitalism serves them better than socialist democracy.

Capitalist society also uses issues like the current amendment to evade the material basis of its own laws. Most law protects private property interests, yet the laws which ordinary people have offered to them as subjects for debate never touch these fundamental interests. When are we allowed, say, a referendum on the 'morality' of private banking in view of Biblical

strictures on money-lending? Conservative publicity uses a well defined rhetoric, with phrases like 'unborn child,' 'pro-life,' 'let the people choose,' and even the emotionally charged word 'abortion,' that frames the argument in its own terms rather than allow for fundamental debate. Progressive groups are thus forced into being reactionaries, defending against the anti-democratic onslaught, rather than leading in social criticism.

Jerome Kummer has said that anti-abortionists 'identify with the foetus' and are therefore rejecting the idea of their mothers getting rid of them. The emotional fervour of the anti-choice forces may thus stem from a personal alienation from the family structure rather than from a professed moral view. The 'concern for the unborn' becomes a concern for oneself — in strictly economic terms, and as a response to the inadequacies of a family structure based on a system that offers no material security to its members.

The pro-amendment campaign is not simply a legal, religious, or anti-feminist venture. It is more

basically a ploy to further restrict the access to power of one half of the population, and in so doing restrict the economic power of the rest of the working part of society as well. But it is only a small part in a much bigger machine. Issues of the type represented by the amendment will continue to arise within capitalism, as they result from the conflict between the majority's desire to keep things as they are.

It is part of capitalism's success that even when some of its projects are defeated (such as the Vietnam war), the nature of the opposition (as in the American anti-war movement) is so limited that the system itself is never questioned or shaken. The fight against the amendment is necessarily a fight against an overriding social structure which will always bring back similar legislation. The anti-amendment struggle can become an important step in establishing an Ireland which is secular, democratic, and open to all its members — a socialist Ireland.

JEFF KALLEN

Happy future  
or NONE

?



# Pregnant teachers under attack

Attacks on the right of women to work are increasing. MOLLY O'DUFFY replies.

Gay Byrne has looked, De Valera-like, into his soul and decided that pregnant teachers shouldn't be let loose near children, nor should they be allowed to take maternity leave. Many of his listeners and even two senators have joined in this chorus of horror at the chaos which pregnant teachers bring to our schools.

This attack, which hits out at all women likely to become pregnant, is as hypocritical as it is hysterical. Fertile women are the backbone of teaching. Without them schools would be like Hamlet without the Prince. We have been told, indeed, that school is the natural place for women — women are maternal, and more suited to teaching than men, who have more important things to think about than children. Just not maternal enough to be allowed to have children of their own, it seems.

The list of complaints against pregnant teachers is not short. They boil down to: They are ratty. They are immodest. They take too much sick leave. There are too many different substitutes while they are out on maternity leave. They refuse to have their babies during the holidays. These complaints are all answered by the simple assertion that married women, like everyone else, have a right to work and a right to bear children. This principle, enshrined in the EEC-sponsored equality legislation of 1976, has obviously not been accepted by a large section of the Irish people. The tirade is quite simply a direct attack on the right of married women to work. It is strange but not surprising that an attack on that

right should begin with an attack on married women teachers.

Teaching is a job which because of the relatively short number of hours spent in the classroom and the accessibility of the workplace is very suited to married women who have childrearing responsibilities. They have, in short, the kind of working conditions which many women workers in other jobs would aspire to. They are also a highly visible category of workers; one which the vast majority of the population has an opinion about. They are easy to isolate and identify and whip up emotional feelings about.

One thing is sure, however. The attack will not stop at teachers. Already the pressure is on other categories of married women workers who are seen as having a cushy time of it. (No one challenges the right to work of pregnant contract cleaners). Women bank clerks are now being given miraculously quick transfers to Donegal or Kerry once they become engaged; if they refuse the transfer they are pressurised into taking on part-time work rather than sticking to their full-time job.

A married woman has always known her right to work is tenuous. It becomes particularly clear once she is unemployed. She is often refused unemployment benefit if she has children as she is deemed 'unavailable for work'; if she receives it, it is for a lesser amount and a shorter period than her male counterpart. All this in spite of the fact that she has paid the same PRSI contributions as him. She has never been seen as an unemployed worker seeking work, which

obviously implies that work is her privilege, not her right.

Now that the recession is biting, married women workers will find themselves being turned into a scapegoat for youth unemployment. Fine Gael was responsible for a survey on unemployment recently which asked the leading question: "Do you think that married women should be allowed to work given the high level of youth unemployment?" If a constitutional party like Fine Gael should incite people to answer a question in a way which is inconsistent with the law, it is no wonder that employers approach women workers in the same prejudiced way.

Every woman has a right to work,

just as she has a right to control her own fertility. Without either of these she cannot be an independent person who decides how she is going to live her life. Both these rights, though by no means achieved, are under attack at the moment. The chances are that many of those on the phone to Gaybo are pro-amendment. The message is clear: having children is a woman's vocation, but one which she must carry out behind the closed doors and without impinging on the rest of the world. It is an ideology which is attempting a comeback before it finally loses its following. We must fight it wherever it appears, whether in the Pro-Amendment Campaign or on the Gay Byrne Hour.

## Monetarist Madness

The Central Bank Quarterly Bulletin is free. End of the good news. The Bank is the Government's agent for controlling the commercial and merchant banks and is not a normal bank as we know it. Through its ability to regulate the lending activities of the commercial banks, it has a major effect on economic activity in the country. Little wonder that the major political parties are calling for cuts in public expenditure when this vital agency and economic adviser continually harps on about the need for monetarist policies in virtually every issue of its quarterly bulletin.

The recently released Autumn '82 Bulletin contains a summary of the 1982 Annual Report of the infamous International Monetary Fund (IMF), that source of many a monetarist cut. The IMF's clearly stated primary objective is the reduction of inflation and it actually calls for efforts in this direction *as opposed* to efforts to increase employment. Its approach is pure classical economics: reduce inflation by reducing demand by reducing wages and to hell if this results in more unemployment. The Report also tells the story of the combined budget deficit of the "non-oil developing countries" soaring from \$39 billion in 1978 to \$100 billion in 1981. No wonder the IMF fears the whole world capitalist system collapsing like a house of cards if some of these countries default on the payment of interest to the Western Banks.

At home, our own dear Central Bank predicts a fall in employment of 6,000 this year and more next year. It shows that wages increased at a rate lower than the rate of

inflation in '81 and '82 — in other words we took a cut in our living standards, as if we didn't know. And yet the Bank calls for *more* cuts in real wages. Soon we won't be able to buy goods made in Ireland with such low wages. So who will buy? The famous "world trade", says the Bank. Yet they admit that international trade is expected to remain at depressed levels for the next year or two. It doesn't quite fit.

As advised previously by the Bank, the Government tried to reduce the budget deficit by cutting expenditure and maintaining revenue at present levels. The Fianna Fáil Government managed to cut expenditure all right, but with wage cuts and the recession in trade, it was not able to collect the anticipated revenue from PAYE, and VAT. Thus, instead of falling to the planned £679 million, the deficit rose to £959 million. Ye gods, is there no end to this madness? But don't falter now, says the Bank to our noble Government — whoever you are — you must cut public expenditure until the budget is balanced... until there isn't a taxpayer left in the country, with the lot of us on the dole. Yes, there is no end to this madness — under capitalism.

So be sure to put your name on the mailing list for the next free instalment of monetarist nightmares, sorry, the Central Bank Bulletin.

(P.S. The Bulletin contains useful statistics and is actually free. It can be obtained from the Central Bank of Ireland, P.O. Box 559, Dame St., Dublin 2).

TOM O'CONNOR

## Central Bank Reports



Derek Speirs (Report)

# MEDIA BASHING

**BRIAN TRENCH, a member of the NUJ, argues that trade unionists need to develop more positive ways of influencing the media.**

One of the easiest ways out of a hole in a speech given to any labour movement meeting — when the audience's attention is drifting, or you've forgotten what you wanted to say next — is to take a swipe at "the media". In the right circumstances, it will get the kind of approving response which no similar swipe at "the politicians", "the church", "the civil servants" would.

But the right circumstances for achieving that response are fairly narrowly defined. Within a restricted focus, the trade union movement perceives "the media" as a single bloc, hostile to working people. That focus takes in industrial disputes and a limited range of other trade union affairs.

When delegates to trade union conferences denounce the power of the press, radio and TV and demand controls on their scope to influence people, it is nearly always because of dissatisfaction about the coverage of some industrial matter or, at a stretch, some economic issue.

The thrust of these denunciations is often contradictory. On the one hand, trade unionists want more reporting of their immediate concerns. (How often have I, as a journalist, had strikers come to me with complaints that they can't get the papers to report their dispute!) On the other hand, they want the reporting done quite differently — and, in some instances, held back altogether.

The perennial conference clamour that the media need to be held in check has now been moved on to a somewhat more sophisticated level with the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union's call for the establishment of a National Press Council. Since adopting a detailed resolution along those lines at their annual conference last May, the ITGWU has sought responses to its proposals from other trade unions representing media workers.

Previous such calls have come from sources with much less credibility and have been far less thoroughly thought out. As Minister for Justice, both Paddy Cooney and Jim Mitchell made tough-sounding speeches proposing that a Press Council be set up. The repressive

intention was perfectly clear, if only in the tone of their remarks and in the record they set in matters of democratic freedoms generally.

The ITGWU has been careful to balance the need for easy access to information and freedom of expression against the case for a complaints procedure allowing members of the public to check abuses, distortions, misrepresentations. The fact that the demand is being made by a trade union which includes RTE technical staff and print workers among its membership makes this latest proposal quite different from the ill-tempered rantings of some previous advocates of a Press Council.

Before considering the details, however, it is worth looking a bit more closely at why there should be such widespread resentment of the media in trade union circles and what strange forms it takes.

According to ICTU president, Paddy Cardiff, writing in a recently published book on industrial relations\*, "there is vast scope for improved media performance in the area of industrial relations coverage". Cardiff claims that it sometimes seems there is "a conspiracy to obscure the truth and misrepresent ordinary workers and the trade union movement". He goes on to charge the media with being "irresponsible" and to advocate that standards and guidelines be established for industrial relations reporting.

On this basis, Mr Cardiff feels justified in demanding that a "Media Council, with specific responsibilities for media coverage of industrial relations" be set up. But it has already become apparent even in his very brief lead-up to that demand that Paddy Cardiff would have little or no worry on this score if the media would only take their line from the trade union officials. He is concerned that they sometimes get information from unofficial sources and he is outraged that the media have given currency to the notion of "sweetheart deals".

"Any collective agreement that is entered into by a trade union will withstand critical scrutiny," he says. That claim is worth examining some other place, some other time. But the general implication that the unions can do no wrong and that anything other than the official line is unreliable represents an arrogant dismissal not merely of journalists' ability to assess things for themselves but also of the "ordinary workers" for whom Paddy Cardiff was claiming to speak.

Mr Cardiff's own union, the Federated Workers' Union of Ireland, provides a shining example to the trade union movement: it issues very few public statements via the press, does not publish a union paper or magazine and until very recently only admitted one chosen journalist to its annual conferences.

There is an overwhelming case that newspapers, in particular, frequently demonstrate a persistent bias against strikers. They often highlight details of salaries or conditions, or of the impact of a service dispute on "the public" (always presented as something quite different from, and opposed to, that large section of the population which is represented directly or indirectly by the trade union movement) to undermine disputes.

But the case against the press is that much weaker if it comes from a trade union which is, at best, reticent in dealing with the press on its own account. Irish trade unions are particularly bad at handling relations with the media — just as they are, in general, poor at keeping their own members informed of things going on within the unions. Only the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union has an official with specific responsibility for handling press relations. It is also the only union — one thing hinges on the other — which produces a union paper which is at all readable or regular.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions must be the only organisation of its kind in Western Europe which does not have a press officer and from which the

little that emanates by way of policy statement or reaction to events has in all instances to be approved by the General Secretary. The unions here are bad at explaining themselves to the press (and through the press to the wider public) for the same kind of reasons they are bad at spreading information among their members and giving them more influence over the union.

It used to be one of the late Michael Mullen's catch-cries that the unions should be given time on radio and TV into which they would put what they chose. On the strength of the union publications and union spokespersons we already know, these would be certainly more boring programmes than anything even RTE has dreamed up.

More to the point, such half-hour slots would do nothing to counteract the ideological bias of the media. The variety which the range of papers and of TV and radio channels appears to offer disguises a more fundamental unanimity between them. The common strands in their respective methods of selecting and presenting the news, of choosing personalities and personal situations to highlight, of picking themes to be developed in drama or serial form, all derive from a single cluster of ideas which reflect and sustain the status quo.

Of course, the variety which the competition between different publishing and broadcasting organisations makes inevitable must also mean that many individual manifestations in the media can be provocative, educational, stimulating, even subversive. There is no conspiracy at the centre of it all (no more than there is a conspiracy to misrepresent the unions in industrial disputes). There doesn't need to be, as long as the dominant values of the society can be reflected and reproduced in the media without it being obvious to most people that this is what is going on.

The jibes which we hear leading trade unionists make about the media rarely seem to be informed by any such overall view. They don't spring to the defence of women against abuses in the media — in news stories, in the language journalists use and in advertising. They didn't protest when *The Irish Times* recently headlined that a gay youth group was getting a grant from the Dublin VEC (there were no headlines for the Catholic Boy Scouts, or for the Opus Dei-run clubs which receive grants from the same source).

The journalists' union, the NUJ, has campaigned most strongly against the

media's cultivation of sex and race stereotypes. Unhappily, the resistance among the NUJ's members to efforts to establish proper standards is nearly as strong as the indifference of the rest of the trade union movement.

On the strength of the declared obligations it imposes upon members to be fair and accurate in reporting, to allow any aggrieved person the right of reply, and to outlaw any encouragement of sexual and racial discrimination the NUJ has felt justified in staying out of the British Press Council for the last two years.

This organisation was set up by representatives of the newspaper industry to hear and adjudicate on complaints against the press. In 1980, the NUJ removed its members from the Council, saying it was an irrelevant, slow-moving body weighted in favour of the newspaper proprietors and dealing largely with trivial matters.

But that experience is not a sufficient answer to the case which the ITGWU is making. And it now weighs much less heavily in the balance than it once did, given that the British Press Council has begun to change its ways partly in response to the NUJ's criticisms. It is still the case, however, that the complaints which it rules on generally concern insignificant reports and often not even the substance of those reports, but some detail of presentation. Unfavourable rulings by the Press Council have never deterred newspapers from continuing to indulge their bias and to use methods such as "cheque book journalism" — meaning the payment of informants.

The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union has proposed something with a wider brief, insisting that a National Press Council would be a watchdog for free collection of information and freedom of expression as well as a complaints body for the readers. The resolution passed last May suggests that a Press Council would "monitor and review developments likely to restrict the supply of information of public interest and importance."

The central purpose of such a body, it seems, would be to allow readers offended by something in the press to seek redress by a means which is less expensive and cumbersome than the courts. (Neither of these drawbacks have deterred Irish people from taking more libel actions per head of population than anywhere else but the United States.) But there is every reason to expect that a tripartite body, representing publishers, media workers and "appropriate community interests" would be a talking shop producing only the most bland of agreed decisions. That tends to be the experience of such tripartite bodies.

It is difficult to imagine such a body getting really tough with the many public bodies which go to considerable lengths

to block access to information about their doings. Trade unionists sitting on the boards of semi-state companies, health boards, education boards, prison visiting committees are no more helpful to members of the press and public inquiring about them than are their counterparts from business and the professions.

The concentration of ownership and control of newspapers, the monopoly in broadcasting, the many judicial and legal constraints, the internalised censorship, the pressures from advertisers and the dominant ideologies, as reflected in news values, all operate to limit massively what the press reports on and colour how it does it. Is it possible to imagine a tripartite body, including the owners and editors of newspapers, really getting to grips with these blockages?

The trade union movement needs to set its sights a bit lower — and a bit closer to home — if it is to give a lead to the very necessary efforts to make the press more accountable. The NUJ has not yet managed to get across to any but a tiny portion of fellow trade unionists that it sets high professional standards as a condition of membership. For instance, journalists are supposed to grant the right of reply promptly to anybody who wishes to correct any significant misrepresentation.

The NUJ, as part of the trade union movement, should be publicising this and the other provisions of its Code of Conduct. It should also make its policy statements on sex and race reporting more widely known. (The NUJ, too, is frequently ineffective in communicating its views and attitudes to the outside world.) It is now open to any member of the public, who can persuade a NUJ member of their belief that the Code of Conduct has been breached to take an action under the union's disciplinary rules.

The trade unions could set up media monitoring groups at local level through the trades councils and at national level through the ICTU to test the resentment about "the media" in general and to channel the frustration that many media workers experience dealing professionally with the rest of the labour movement. On the basis of that kind of experiment and with a surer knowledge of all of the visible and invisible barriers to journalists exercising their trade, there might be some hope that a National Press Council could be shaped to extend simultaneously the freedom and the responsiveness of the press.

\*Reform of Industrial Relations. Edited by Hugh Pollock. (See review in this issue).

# POLITICS IN WATERFORD

**EMMET O'CONNOR traces the decline of the Labour Party and the rise of the Workers' Party in a city bearing the full brunt of recession.**

## INTRODUCTION

It is ironic that the only constituency in southern Ireland to defeat a Sinn Féin candidate in 1918 should be one of the first to grant Dáil representation to a successor body in 1982. The irony is historical only. In Waterford, this success has come at Labour's expense and appears to confirm the general pattern of rapid advance for the Workers' Party (WP) in constituencies where once effective labour organisation has crumbled and considerably slower progress elsewhere. However, if Labour decline is a pre-condition of WP triumph, there are also other factors to note; such as the superiority of WP organisation and the party's response to the impact of recession at local level.

## LABOUR'S VICES

Labour representation in Waterford has been intermittent. Since 1922 only three deputies have been returned for the party; Nicholas Phelan (1922-23), Jack Butler (1922-27), and Tom Kyne (1948-69, 1973-77). All have hailed from the county, where the bedrock of electoral support has been situated. The defeat of the ITGWU in the 1923 farm strike wiped out party organisation in County Waterford. In June 1922, Labour topped the poll with 31.3 per cent of the vote, and took two out of five seats. In September 1927, it was too weak to field a candidate.

Since the 1920s, Labour organisation has been beset by three vices; localism, clientelism, and personalism. All parties in Waterford are plagued by friction between county and city members. For Labour, bipolarity, with Waterford and Dungarvan as the two main core areas, has proved an obstacle to party cohesion. The reconstruction of political support by Tom Kyne incorporated these weaknesses into the structure of the constituency machine.

In 1942, Kyne was appointed honorary party organiser for Waterford. As an ATGWU official from Dungarvan, his residence and work gave him the credentials and contacts to establish a firm support base in the county. Since 1926, he had worked to rebuild trade unionism in the area after the 1923 collapse. Wherever a strong union section was set up, the nucleus of a political branch was created. Like many rural Labour deputies, Kyne

regarded the county council workers as his staunchest supporters. Kyne built up a formidable electoral following based on case work and he was proud of the service he gave to his constituents. He estimated that 1,500 of his votes were personal. After 1948, Labour became increasingly reliant on this reputation. Moreover, Kyne seemed to be the only man who could mobilise both county and city support. On Kyne's retirement in 1977, the Labour candidate Frank King campaigned under the slogan "Kyne supports King". In 1981, the party nominated Billy Kyne, Tom's son.

Whilst clientelism and personalism are mutually reinforcing, an excess of the latter is detrimental to party interests and it led to defeat in 1969, when Labour opted to field two candidates in the constituency. Kyne had consistently opposed this in Waterford on the grounds that it would split the vote. In the event, the vote was split evenly between Kyne and Tom Brennan, a city based candidate. The transfers did not work satisfactorily and Kyne narrowly lost the seat. Labour was hoisted on its own petard. Retrospectively, it can be seen that Head Office committed a serious error in presuming that a largely personality-based machine could be transformed into a tightly disciplined structure so rapidly. With the loss of the Dáil seat, party organisation, especially in the county, began to decay. Although Kyne was re-elected in 1973, the vote continued to fall; from 21.5 per cent in 1969 to 16.0 per cent in 1973, to 6.3 per cent in 1977 and 3.7 per cent in 1981.

## DIVISION IN THE CITY

In the early 1970s, Labour was confronted with the problem of generational change. Personalism usually creates succession problems. During the 1950s and 1960s John Griffin appeared to represent a natural successor to Kyne, but his retirement from politics in 1967 created a vacuum that was never filled. In the city branches, activists grappled with the challenge of revamping party appeal to keep in step with the changing character of the Labour movement. The party in Waterford has always been staffed by a committed handful for whom politics was an extension of their work as trade unionists. In the 1960s, this relationship between what an older generation would recognise as the two wings of the movement was beginning to break down. The longstanding electoral



*Waterford still wants work . . .*

weakness of Labour has camouflaged the degree to which its support, especially in the provinces, was reliant on a particular version of class consciousness. Economic change in the 1960s was destroying old notions of class allegiance. A more concise and forthright ideological appeal was necessary to counter the blurring of social distinctions by consumerism.

Briefly it looked as if Labour would succeed in redefining its relevance to Irish society. From 1966 to 1969 party membership nationally increased from 9,100 to 15,300 and the number of branches expanded from 372 to 540. Reflecting this trend membership in Waterford city rose from 20 in 1965 to a peak of 40 in 1968. These levels were still fairly low but the absence of a locally based TD had always been a handicap in this regard. Labour now surfaced as a focal point of socialist activity and discussion. On the verge of the 1970s it seemed as if prospects were brighter than at any time since the big swing to left during the Emergency.

The ephemeral character of this achievement was illustrated in the rise and fall of the Waterford Labour Youth Group (WLYG). The group was founded in March 1970 with 25 members, 17 of them still at school. None had ever been in the party before and were reluctant to join but keen to assist with political work. As Labour did not have a youth section, the WLYG was given associate status for the time being. Over the next eleven months the WLYG organised political agitation including lectures and protests, distributed literature and undertook political and social work. Membership rose to 50, but in October 1970 friction developed with senior party figures over a proposal to picket the opening of the Light Opera Festival by the Minister for Justice in protest against the Criminal Justice Bill. The party's decision to drop the veto on coalition in December 1970 further exacerbated tensions.

Matters came to a climax in February 1971 when Head Office demanded that the anomalous position of the

WLYG be rectified; the group must join the party or disband. Unanimously it chose the latter, and reformed as the Waterford Socialist Movement. This decision was probably influenced by the vain efforts of Brendan Scott and others to regroup the left in the Socialist Labour Alliance.

Following the demise of the Alliance the Waterford Socialist Movement liaised with the Young Socialists and in 1972 it was absorbed into the Socialist Workers' Movement. These events constituted a double blow to Labour. Not only had it lost a generation of activists, but it was the unwitting midwife in the birth of a rival focus on socialism in Waterford. Significantly, none of the old WLYG members drifted into Sinn Féin. A new tendency had emerged which offered an alternative to 'ward socialism'. The growth of the Socialist Workers' Movement, at one stage it had 40 members in Waterford constituting half of its national total, detracted from Labour by siphoning off potential recruits who found Sinn Féin's authoritarian style unattractive.

A final attempt to rally radical opinion in the party was made in 1972 when local anti-coalitionists tried to form a support group for the Liaison Committee. Its failure to get off the ground marked the eclipse of Labour as a coherent force for socialism in the city. By the mid 1970s active membership had fallen to under 15. In the Municipal elections the Labour vote fell from 18.1 per cent in 1967 to 15.3 per cent in 1974, to 11.6 per cent in 1979. Furthermore, votes were now canvassed and won almost entirely on a personal basis with little semblance of a party effort.

#### THE WORKERS' PARTY

The rise of the WP could be understood in purely functionalist terms. A more efficient electoral

machine replaces an outdated one. A party primarily orientated to the urban, industrial workforce supplants an older body geared to the slow, measured step of the roadman and the farm hand. The former emphasis on redress through face to face contact, on developing a personal loyalty to the deputy, is modified by more bureaucratic conventions and the requirements of faceless party organisation. Labour's limp catch cries and cosy appeals are rendered obsolete by crisp sloganizing and ready-made rhetoric. The techniques of mobilising the vote, clientelism and localism remain unimpaired. This is not to deny the extent to which the success of the WP indicates a shift in class attitudes, but the transition can be interpreted largely within the very specific context of local politics.

The WP has always had a presence in Waterford. In 1961 it contested the general election polling 2.3 per cent of the vote. As a left-wing party it became active in 1967, setting up a citizens' advice bureau and campaigning on social issues such as housing' land speculation, and ground rents. However, the party's fondness for structuring agitation around single issues campaigns not overly connected with it kept its public profile at a low level. By 1972 Sinn Féin was better known for its stand on resources and the EEC and the annual Republican parade to Ballygunner, than for pretensions when Sinn Féin won 10.3 per cent of the vote and Paddy Gallagher secured a seat on the Corporation.

The initial breakthrough for the party was due to its case work and professionalism. The WP has become adept at handling housing complaints, the staple fare of left-wing urban clientelism, and has established strong support in the new working class estates to the west of the city. Care is taken to identify constituency service with the party rather than individuals, and all queries are dealt with centrally. From an electoral point of view the nature and character of WP organisation is superior to that of Labour. As a cadre-type party, which does not seek mass membership but admits only those prepared to work seriously for the cause, it has an immediate advantage over the more easy going Labour branch. By 1978 the WP had 30 full members in Waterford together with 100 associate members. It had moved residence from a small office on the Quay to more spacious premises in Barrack St. In addition to its clinics, it kept in touch with constituents through sales of the *United Irishman* (360 copies per month) and the *Irish People* (700 copies per week). In 1982 it appointed Cllr. Davy Walsh as a full-time agent.

### IMAGERY OF DECLINE

During the mid 1970s political issues in Waterford came to be determined by the recession. The most remarkable feature of debate on the economy was the increasingly local focus of analysis. The WP locked into this trend and added to popular acceptance of the myths it produced. Localism not only gave the WP a convenient stick with which to beat the conservative politicians, but legitimised its anti-establishment message. It also laid the party open to charges of opportunism and criticism that it was failing to offer a radical alternative.

In any period of rapid industrial growth or decline, particularly if such development is regulated by or mediated through government agencies, regional competition arises from placement. Industrialisation in the 1930s saw a scramble for factories among towns and this was repeated in the 1960s. The role of the trades council in this process increased significantly throughout the next decade as rising unemployment made job creation urgent. Together with representatives of business, the IDA, and the constituency's TDs, the trades council participated in a series of Mayoral development committees formed to devise ways of making the area more attractive to investors. The net result of this was twofold; it accorded top priority to unemployment, and it incorporated the trade union movement within a localist, conservative consensus that understood the recession in terms of state neglect and the inadequacy of infrastructure for industry. The trades council could define the political issues, but commercial opinion was dictating the response.

Toward the end of the decade an elaborate imagery of decline had been assembled which, in its coherence and political import, was possibly unrivalled elsewhere. Since the 1973 oil crisis unemployment had doubled and stood at 1,483 in 1976. Redundancies were threatening to become a flashpoint. From 1971 to 1977, 18 companies had closed down with a loss of 1,430 jobs. Waterford industrial estate had a closure rate running at twice the



Waterford workers march against the closure of the Paper Mills in 1978.

Derek Speits (Report)

national average. The impending shut down of the National Board and Paper Mills spurred the trades council into action. On 8 September 1978, 15000 workers demonstrated against unemployment. The theme of the march was "Waterford wants work"; the slogan "Waterford workers want work" was rejected. At the demonstration trade union spokesmen stressed the need for government aid to improve infrastructure.

The political consequences of localism was to put the spotlight on Waterford's elected representatives who were seen to be both quiet and inefficient. During the protest against redundancies in September 1978, marchers sang "we have four dummies in the Dáil tra la la la la" (to the tune of 'Brown girl in the ring'). In the previous month the *Munster Express* featured a discussion on the question of whether Waterford suffered from its lack of representation in the cabinet. The President of the trades council voiced a widely held opinion: "I believe that over the years Waterford has been made into a second class city. People in the corridors of power think we are just a village down the country . . . If we had someone representing us at Ministerial level far more would have been done for Waterford". (25 August 1978).

Obviously the WP had nothing to gain by pushing the argument about ministerial representation, but it did cash in on the imagery by interpreting economic decline in localist terms. In the 1979 Municipal elections the party campaigned in blue and white, the Waterford colours. Election advertisements included a picture of its Euro candidate, Michael Dunphy, against a backdrop of Redmond Bridge, by now the chief symbol of the city's neglect and decay. An election poster for 1981 read "Shhh four TDs sleeping. Wake them up. Vote SFWP". The feeling that politics needed a jolt was a powerful factor in ensuring the WP's success in February 1982.

Since then, deputy Gallagher has predicted that "the Government will be paying 'a fair bit of attention' to Waterford" and attributed action on the long awaited reconstruction of Redmond bridge to his election. On 9 May 1982 he told the *Sunday Press*; "There is an attitude of mind which permeates through all strata of society locally and that attitude is that the city is a backwater in national terms. Based on our work during the past 15 years and on the fact that we have made a major breakthrough Waterford people I believe will now begin to emerge from the feeling of being some sort of second class citizen (sic)".

### PROBLEMS AHEAD

Continued advance for the WP in Waterford is threatened by difficulties in two areas. First, problems have arisen with the presentation of policy. Concentration on electoralism has led to opportunist stratagems. In 1981 the party condemned Waterford County Council for cutting its annual budget. Yet, WP councillors on the Corporation opposed a Labour proposal to reject the annual estimates in protest against cut-backs. The WP argued that failure to pass the estimates would lead to the dissolution of the Corporation and thereby deprive the working class of political representation. A bizarre

incident occurred during the February 1982 general election campaign. A press photo of a picket outside WP headquarters calling on the party to *support* laid-off

"... we have  
made a  
major  
breakthrough"

**Paddy Gallagher**



Clover Meats employees was adjusted to read "SFWP supports Clover Workers". These tactics have not enhanced the party's image.

More seriously, differences can be discerned between the official line in Dáil Éireann as presented in prepared scripts outlining doctrinaire analysis of the national economy, and the local approach with its vote catching appeal to concern about the city's neglect. The Tony Gregory deal has not been helpful and causing some popular misgivings that Gallagher is not an independent. The WP are attempting to counter diminishing returns from localism by raising their profile on class issues such as unemployment and housing and intensifying clientelism. Recently a spokesman claimed the party was handling 700 housing complaints each week. However, it now faces growing competition from Labour which has improved membership and organisation since the nadir of the 1981 general election. Labour stands to the left of the WP on some issues and may yet recover its former pre-eminence in socialist agitation.

### CONCLUSION

The growth of the WP in Waterford has not generated the same radical atmosphere that accompanied Labour's advance in the late 1960s. The party has tended to be guarded on policy matters and has contributed little to socialist debate. Emphasis on clientelism and the importance of Labour's prior *demise* appear away from old-type leftist tactics, but Gallagher's back seat style owes something to his own shyness and inarticulateness. It may not prove a consistent aspect of party strategy. The Waterford experience suggests a regional variation in approach that partly explains the WP's uneven electoral advance. The party has consciously tailored its appeal to suit the specific mythology of decline resulting from the recession. However, there is evidence that as the value of the localist stratagem fades, greater stress will be placed on policy.

*Editorial Note:* This article was written prior to the November 1982 Election.

# THE STATE OF THE LEFT

DERMOT BOUCHER takes a critical look at the state of the major Left parties after the election.

## ELECTION ANALYSIS

On the 21st October, Mr. Thomas MacGiolla issued a statement to the effect that "the Workers' Party does not at the moment foresee any issue arising in Dáil Éireann over the next few weeks that might bring down the Government". The next day the Labour Conference opened in Galway setting in motion a train of events culminating in the Government's election defeat exactly five weeks later. To coin a phrase, a weekend is a very long time in politics — and a month is an eternity. In the aftermath of a bitter campaign, and a traumatic period in politics generally, it is time to re-assess the various parties of the Left — their policies, performance and potential.

Labour, of course, had the benefit of a Conference at which the apprehensive delegates gratefully retreated from the brink of self-destruction. They debated Coalition, the National Question, the Abortion Refrendum, and Constitutional changes in relation to private property — and in every case funked the final fatal decision, usually referring back motions to the incoming Administrative Council. They at least passed a resolution calling on "all sections of the Party to campaign against all public spending cuts and the right-wing strategy of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, and for nationalisation of banks, financial institutions, major industries and natural resources . . ." Splendid sentiments, which doubtless will figure prominently in the programme of the next Government.

Naturally it was the Coalition issue which dominated the Conference. The "hard Left", with Militant filling the old Liaison of the Left role, mustered about 15% of the vote for their anti-coalition amendment, approximately the same as at the 1976 Limerick Conference. The misleadingly titled "compromise" amendment, which differed from the O'Leary position only in the manner in which the post-election coalition decision would be taken, was pushed through by an unholy alliance of the straw-grasping Left, the demoralised Centre, some of the unions, and those such as Frank Cluskey and Barry Desmond who used the opportunity to inflict a moral wound on their long-time rival Michael O'Leary. It will be left to Gaiety 2 in Limerick to establish the true level of support for the principled Left and for "socialist opposition".

And so to the hustings. First let's examine those little-read but oft-quoted hostages to fortune, the party manifestos. The 3,500 word document "Where Labour stands" was a classic curate's egg. On the positive side it repeated some of Labour's better policies, and continually stressed the Party's opposition to the conservative policies of "the two main parties". Unfortunately, it soon spoiled the effect through vagueness, equivocation and cliché-ridden wording. To quote some examples: Labour seeks "democratic ownership of the banking system" — does this mean nationalisation, and if so why not say so? Worker Democracy is to include "share participation by workers": does this mean the radical policies advocated in Sweden and Denmark, or the discredited profit-sharing schemes prevalent in the U.S., and encouraged in this year's Budget? Ground rents are to be "terminated" — with or without compensation?

While highlighting the land re-zoning issue, there is no specific reference to the Kenny Report (itself only a half-solution), which at least is consistent with the inaction and indecision of the Party Conference, of the majority of Labour members of Dublin County Council, and Jimmy Tully's reign at the Department of the Environment. There is no mention of such crucial topics as election strategy, abortion, and the phasing out of the Budget current deficit, while natural resources and women receive at best a passing mention. Such omissions were hardly accidental, e.g., phasing out the current deficit in six years, which could only be achieved through major public expenditure cuts.

On the vital topic of job creation, Labour condemns the "private sector approach of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael", but its own proposals are firmly based in the conventional mixed economy, with an obsessive reliance on quangos like the National Development Corporation, Youth Employment Agency, National Planning Board, etc. Interestingly, Labour now claims to favour "free collective

bargaining between workers and employers"; is this a belated repudiation of centralised pay bargaining and public sector pay deals?

While naturally overlapping considerably with Labour's programme, the Workers' Party document is much longer, much more specific, and distinctly more radical. Perhaps this is because Tomas MacGiolla, unlike Dick Spring, will not have to negotiate a Government with Dr. FitzGerald? (Would a WP/FG policy deal result in a Garret and Stick approach?) By way of contrast, while Labour hopes to raise £200 million from capital taxation, (though ominously there is no specific commitment to reintroduce the Wealth Tax), the W.P. target is £300 million. Again, the W.P. paper contains a detailed criticism of the recent report from the Taxation Commission, which Spring apparently favours. W.P. opposes clerical control of schools and hospitals, but it, too, ignores the thorny question of abortion. Oddly enough, considering De Rossa's sand on the issue, it doesn't mention ground rents, while other notable omissions are agriculture and industrial democracy. Perhaps it's unfair to expect hastily-compiled programmes to be comprehensive.

The penultimate section of both documents refers briefly and cautiously to "Northern Ireland". Predictably, the W.P. stresses its opposition to sectarian politics, and makes no mention of a British dimension. Predictably, too, Labour waffles on about "aspirations to unity", "positive dialogue between the Irish and British Government" etc. Imperialism, from whatever source, doesn't rate a mention. Both programmes conclude with Foreign Affairs. Labour, incredibly, makes no statement about nuclear disarmament (though unlike W.P. it specifically rules out nuclear power, now a dead issue), while W.P. ignores the EEC. Labour has nothing to say either about Poland and Solidarity, which, perhaps surprisingly to some, obtains a strong endorsement from the Workers' Party.

Despite their meagre resources, and the media's obsession with the two major parties and their leaders, the Left

parties fought reasonably satisfactory campaigns. Labour's effort was dominated by its new leader, whose Jeckyll and Hyde performance defied description. On the one hand we had young Mr. Spring, the Red Rose of Tralee, forceful, serious-minded, oozing integrity, adhering to the letter if not the spirit of his Conference decisions. On the other hand we had Tricky Dick, the Kerryman lawyer tying himself and his listeners in verbal knots. Thus in the 48 hours before polling day he declared that yes, he would talk to Mr. Haughey, no, he would not (this in the same interview), yes he would talk but not about forming a Government, and finally "wait and see".

to witness Labour Left-wingers gritting their teeth and collaborating in this cruel and cynical deception of the long-suffering electorate.

By contrast, the Workers' Party, once the darlings of the media because of their repudiation of provoism, now became the Left-wing wreckers who should not be allowed to destabilise governments, even those of Charlie Haughey. In some respects the W.P. campaign contained faint echoes of Labour in 1969. Certainly they fought many more constituencies, in a much more professional way, substantially increased their vote — and ended up with fewer Dáil seats. A familiar tale indeed!

McLoughlin, Jimmy Tully's successor in Meath, and of Frank Prendergast, the circumstances of whose election in East Limerick must surely bring a blush of shame to the cheeks of all but the most brazen of Labour right-wingers. Thus, the Parliamentary Party, like the Administrative Council a few weeks earlier, has moved even further to the right. Significantly, well-known anti-coalitionists like Pat Carroll, Jane Dillon Byrne, and Billy Moroney in Wexford, were denied nominations, like the ghost of Noel past was finally exorcised in Dublin North Central. Labour is now poised in the brink of coalition calamity like a lemming on a cliff-top. Of course



**"The Workers' Party, once the darlings of the media because of their repudiation of provoism, now became the Left-wing wreckers who should not be allowed to destabilise governments"**

Derek Speirs (Report)

On abortion he declared himself to be "unequivocally opposed", but had "reservations" about the wording. Was it too strong? Or too weak? He never explained, but at least the Bishop of Limerick gave him the benefit of the doubt.

Labour, he proclaimed, was now independent. Supporters would give their preferences to candidates nearest in policy to their own: but — nudge nudge, wink wink — this turned out in practice to be the comrades of Fine Gael. Labour workers in the key rural marginals responded instinctively. Coalition is dead, long live coalition. One edition of the *Irish Press*, of all papers, carried three separate pictures of Labour leaders contaminating happily with Dr. FitzGerald. How did Dick Spring get away with this shabby charade? Personal skill certainly together with public sympathy for a young man in poor health landed with a most unenviable job. Equally important, perhaps, the media, anxious to be rid of Charles Haughey, and knowing Spring to be sound on coalition, afforded the new leader a remarkably easy passage. How sad it was

Despite an unprecedented recession, an unpopular government, and 350,000 extra voters, the three parties of the Left, together with assorted independents, polled fewer first preferences than did Labour alone in the miraculous year of 1969. Frankly, it was a pathetic result with little encouragement for anyone on the Left. Overall the Left returned one fewer deputy than in February, and despite the overdue advent of Tomas MacGiolla, the quality of the representatives declined even more than the quantity. Labour's share of the poll declined once again in Dublin, and in 14 constituencies nationwide. The D.S.P. polled 90 votes less than the SLP in June 1981, with, one assumes, similar terminal consequences. As for the McAliskey fiasco in Dublin North Central, the less said the better.

Where stands the Left, then, as the 24th Dáil convenes? For Labour the reality is the absence of Michael D. Higgins, the only real anti-coalitionist in the Parliamentary Party, and the arrival of Michael Bell, the ex-Fianna Fáil councillor from Drogheda, of Frank

they should reject both coalition and the equally unsatisfactory perspective of supporting a minority government. They should instead chose socialist opposition, forming the alliance of the Left proposed by MacGiolla, and supported with somewhat less enthusiasm by Kemmy, Higgins and Gregory. Ironically such an alliance would have increased the Left's Dáil representation in the recent election by between 3 and 5 seats.

Events will shortly establish how many Labour Left-wingers are capable of breaking from the coalition herd, seeking instead a bleak socialist salvation in the political wilderness. Doubtless the W.P. will continue its long and tortuous march to parliamentary success after four years of coalition hairshirts in Dublin and elsewhere. But for the fringe groups, the hurlers in the ditch, and above all the Labour Left, the moment of truth has arrived. The choice is stark and unavoidable. If we chose to leap with the Labour lemmings and smash ourselves on the rock of coalition capitalism, we can expect scant sympathy and understanding from an angry working class.

# HOLDING OUR OWN



Derek Speirs (Report)

Three elections in 18 months. Bourgeois democracy-watchers have never had it so good. Yet you will search the papers and learned journals in vain for a proper analysis of how the *Left* as a whole is performing electorally. JOHN CANE attempts to fill the gap for *Graltor* readers.

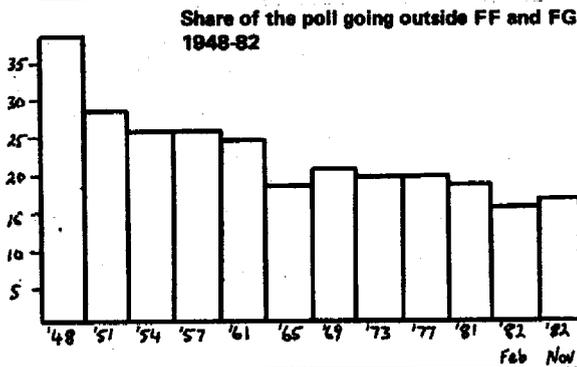
If you ever reach the end of this article, your head will be reeling from a veritable orgy of facts and figures. Whatever you do, don't despair. Just hold onto one single fact at all costs: THE

LEFT VOTE HAS INCREASED. Not *gone down*, or even *stayed the same*. Increased, gone up. It hasn't happened since 1969, it may never happen again. Remember it and marvel.

**THE RIGHT**

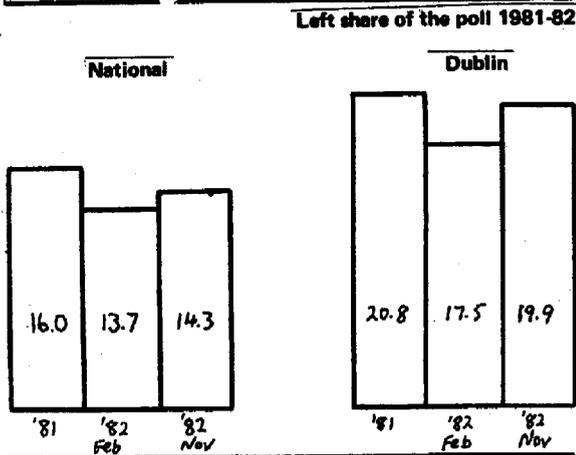
Of course, before we proclaim "The Black End of the Eighties will be Socialist", we need to get this remarkable feat into some kind of perspective. The mould of Irish politics has hardly yet been broken... or cracked. Maybe a little dented. That mould is the hegemony of the two big capitalist parties; Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Whatever the relative strengths of these parties *vis-a-vis* each other, they still command the loyalties of almost 17 voters out of every 20. Back in the 1948 Election, that proportion was only 12 out of every 20. Since then, with the exception of a small hiccup in 1969, they have relentlessly increased their hold over the population, election after election. Until November 1982. Their 84.4% share of the vote is *down* on February. Only by the tiniest of margins; 0.1 percentage points. But down nevertheless. (See Chart No. 1).

**CHART No. 1**



Actually, the Left has done somewhat better this election than that tiny 0.1 percentage point increase would suggest. The electoral Right in Ireland is not made up solely of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Every election sees its share of independent chancers taking the field... and some of them are right wingers. "Law and Order" community candidates, "Greener than thou" ex-Fianna Fáilers, people with a beef about some weird thing or other. Anyways, the point is that this election they polled badly taking only 1.3% of the total vote. In February, they took 1.7%. So that's another 0.4 percentage points gained by the Left this election over last.

**CHART No.2**



**THE LEFT**

The increase in the Left vote this election is then, small but not, in the terms of the left, insignificant. 241,436 people voted Left this election: an increase of 12½ thousand on

February but still almost 34 thousand less than in 1981. The corner may have been turned but there is still a long road to travel. Chart No. 2 shows the Left vote in terms of share of the total poll over the last three elections both nationally and for Dublin, traditionally more fertile ground for the Left. Though Dublin holds no monopoly. Only 4 out of the "top ten" Left voting constituencies this election are to be found in the Dublin area. Personal votes for a good few individual Labour TDs always contrive to give the impression that the sleepy hamlets of Kerry and Wicklow harbour hordes of closet reds dedicated to overthrowing the system through the ballot box. (See Chart No. 3).

**CHART No. 3**

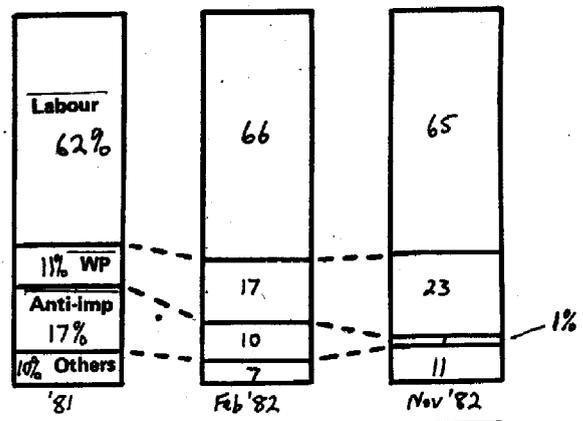
Constituencies with the highest Left share of the poll Nov. 1982

1. Dublin SW 29%	6. Kerry South 26%
2. Kerry North 29%	7. Dublin SC 23%
3. Dublin NW 28%	8. Tipp. North 22%
4. Wicklow 28%	9. Waterford 21%
5. Dublin Cent 26%	10. Cork NC 21%

It is as well to point out at this stage that the definition of "Left" used in this analysis is somewhat generous by objective standards. Waterford readers will recoil in horror to find "Judas" Brennan included. Finglas readers will be doubtful about the socialist credentials of community activists McGuire and Mitchell, Bernadette will disagree with Jim Kemmy and Jim Kemmy with Bernadette, the Ecology party will be puzzled to find themselves on our side of the fence. But what the hell, why not be generous? In some way or other all these people and groups are *not of the Right*. They all receive votes from people looking for some kind of alternative, as usually shown by their transfer patterns. Besides it bumps up our sides figures a bit. for a breakdown of how different elements of the Left have been doing against each other, see Chart No. 4.

**CHART No. 4**

Percentages of the Left poll 1981-82





*The politics of The Empty Chair: the lack of ideological differences between FF and FG meant that they had to make a personality fight of the election. FitzGerald's refusal to shake hands with Haughey and get a picture taken at RTE, made bigger headlines than their threatened 25% increase in bus fares.*

### THE LABOUR PARTY

No-one would disagree that the Labour Party outside Limerick is part of the Left . . . would they? Surely not in this election anyway. Standing on an "independent socialist" ticket. This is not the place to argue the validity of that claim but we can note that certainly *something* different has happened; the Labour Party has increased its vote. The seemingly inexorable decline from the heady days of 1969 has been arrested. 158,000 voted Labour this election, an increase of 6,000 on February. Labour share of the poll is now 9.4%. In Dublin, it's higher at 10.5% but, against the national trend, it continued to fall reflecting the success of the Workers' Party in

replacing Labour in working class Dublin constituencies. In 1969, Labour's share of the Dublin vote was 28.3% returning 10 TDs, now it's a little more than a third of that level returning only 4 TDs. (See Chart No. 5).

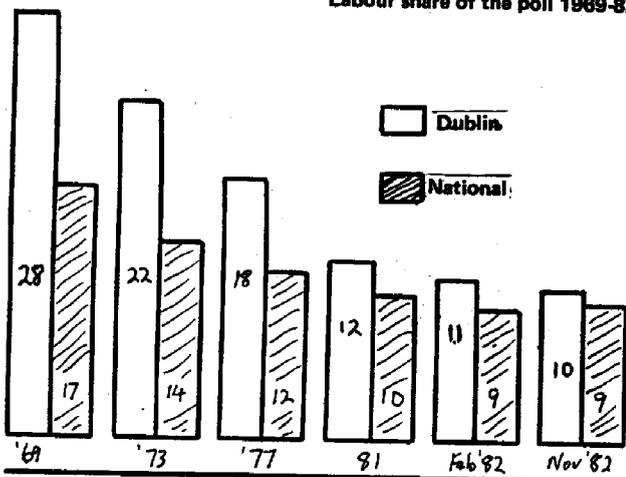
Labour's advance this election has been not only limited but uneven. In fact, fully 16 of the 35 constituencies that Labour contested this election (one less than in February) recorded a *drop* in the Labour share of the poll. Large drops too in such key constituencies as Dublin Central, where Jimmy Somers failed to retake born-again O'Leary's seat; Dublin West, where dizzying changes of candidates have failed to stop the McGiolla steamroller; Dun Laoghaire, where arch ring-winger Barry Desmond just crept in on the last count; and Galway West where something went tragically wrong for Michael D. Higgins and lost the party their *only* principled anti-coalition TD.

Some successes too of course. Big increases were recorded in Louth, where Michael Bell has finally exorcised the ghost of the H-Block vote; Meath, where the local organisation has sorted itself out to reclaim Jimmy Tully's traditional vote; Limerick East, of which the *more* said about the better but not here; Dublin North Central, where Flor O'Mahony is picking up the vestiges of Noel Brown's empire.

Patterns, trends in all this? Pro versus anti-coalition? The Spring Factor? Differential response to socio-economic dynamics? Your guess is as good as mine. There is a school of thought that holds that Labour votes in Ireland are *almost* entirely explainable in terms of how well the local organisation services the punters coupled with the "charisma" of the candidate. I subscribe to it.

CHART No. 5

Labour share of the poll 1969-82



### THE WORKERS' PARTY

The Workers' Party may ultimately be no different in kind to the Labour Party, but there is no doubt that, at the moment, it is perceived to be so by many working class voters. The continued increase in voters for the party is therefore to be welcomed. The increase in the WP's vote this election is not only larger than that of Labour's (almost 17,000 as compared to

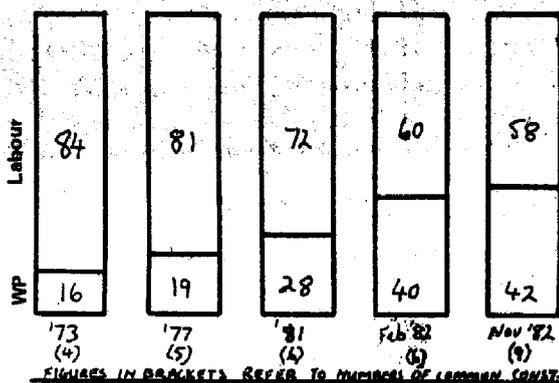
6,000) but also more consistent. It's share of the vote in the 20 constituencies contested this election was 6.4%. When WP first entered the electoral arena in 1973, that share (in 10 constituencies) was 5.0%. Not dramatic growth, but steady.

WP extended it's organisation into 6 new constituencies this election (dropping one, Cavan-Monaghan) and almost half of the 17,000 increase came in this way. Kerry South and Wexford proved hardly worth the bother but shares of between 2.7 and 6.3% were achieved in Cork South Central (Noel Power), Dublin North Central (Padraig Yeats), Dublin South West (Pat Rabbitte, ITGWU official and ex-USI President). There were a few reverses. Dublin South East continues to slip, Louth is by this time almost a write off and, of course, Joe Sherlock in Cork East and Paddy Gallagher in Waterford lost their seats. Local factors contributed in both cases, but then, once in "power", local factors are the name of the game — for WP as anyone else.

But just as 3 TDs last time was not the unqualified breakthrough for the party that was claimed, so 2 TDs this time is no great disaster. Certainly, the big increases registered by De Rossa in Dublin North West and McGiolla in Dublin West appear to make their seats pretty secure. But it's the steady gains in places like Dublin North East, Dublin Central, Cork North Central, Dublin South Central, Wicklow and a few more places that will decide whether or not the dream of replacing Labour ever reaches realistic proportions. Because it spread itself wider this time, the WP advance on Labour in common constituencies contested was checked on a national basis, but in Dublin it continues to the point where almost as many vote WP as Labour where they both stand. (See Chart No. 6).

**CHART No. 6**

Percentages of the combined Labour-WP poll in Dublin common constituencies 1973-82



Finally, that vexed question of transfers between the two major Left parties. Whatever Labour leaders may at times decide about calls for transfers to the Right, they have never instructed their flock to transfer left. As the WP moves towards seats in more and more constituencies, that policy is producing results that will increasingly rankle. An analysis of 9 recorded instances, over the last three elections, of Labour transfers showed 63% going Right (overwhelmingly Fine Gael, of course) and only 37% to WP or non-transferable. In 20 recorded instances of the other way around, WP transferred 60% Labour or non-transferable. The figure speak for themselves.

#### OTHER LEFT

Labour and WP between them constituted 88% of the Left vote at this election. But 88 ain't 100. There's the anti-imperialist, small party and independent lefts to consider. It may be the minor league but there are some successes here too this time around . . . and the inevitable failures.

There was, of course, really no anti-imperialist presence in this election as such. In 1981, H-Block candidates took 46,925

votes and two TDs were elected. In February, the hunger strike over, Sinn Féin and others saw that vote more than halved and the seats both lost. This time, Sinn Féin, despite their recent successes in the Assembly elections, decided against standing. The wisdom of that decision in relation to the border counties, is debatable but in regards to further south, they were probably right. PD-sponsored, Bernadette McAliskey re-fought Dublin North Central but recorded a big drop in votes to 1,023 in the face of a revitalised Labour Party and WP intervention. Jim Lane of the IRSP was the only other anti-imperialist candidate. This time he switched south of the river to Cork South Central but with little success, though pipping the DSP candidate in the same constituency must have proved some consolation.

Two new parties entered the electoral fray this November: the Democratic Socialist Party and the Ecology Party. The latter I confess to knowing little about. They say they are "neither of the right or the left". A likely story. Their transfers went more Left than those of the Labour Party, though that's not very difficult. Their 7 candidates, standing mainly in non-working class constituencies, pulled in 3,716 votes with a 1.3% average share — Owen Casey in Cork South Central dong best with 2.6%. It's strictly also-ran stuff but maybe the West German Greens started off like this.

The DSP also put up 7 for the TV time. Not exactly a new grouping this with Jim Kemmy going in Limerick since 1977 and sporadic forays in previous elections by the now-merged Socialist Party of Ireland. Kemmy of course lost his seat this time with a hefty drop in votes of 2,377. The Labour Limerick Mafia strike again but we can expect Big Jim back in the continuing saga. Meanwhile, his party has failed to dispel the one-man-band image in this election. Only John De Courcy Ireland in Dun Laoghaire, got over a 1% share — a far cry from Eamonn O'Brien's 6% for the SPI in 1977 in Ballymun. In addition, Michel Conaghan's Dublin West vote at 476 was down on his By-election vote there in May. Together the DSP polled 7,012 or 2.1% on average.

The Communist Party only stood Johnny Montgomery in Dublin West this time out, though Declan Bree went up again as an Independent Socialist in Sligo-Leitrim. Both did well. Montgomery's vote has gone 202, 222 and 259 in the last three elections. Bree's has gone even better: 934, 1,035, 1,832. It's now a respectable 3.9%, well ahead of Labour.

Space only for brief mentions of some of the non-party left candidates. Tony Gregory, in the absence of a strong Labour challenge, pushed his vote up by 1,500 plus in Dublin Central to easily retain his seat. The "deal" helped of course this time, the probable lack of one will hinder next but the seat should still be there. Tony's recent successes obviously spurred Francis McGuire and Paddy Mitchell to attempt similar feats in Finglas this time out. It was not to be. With De Rossa sweeping all before him, they received 74 and 243 votes respectively.

Single-issue left candidates this time out included two unemployed activists: People's Marcher Terry Moroney in Waterford got 285 after a rushed campaign and Sean Thompson in Kildare got 149. These are roughly the same kind of votes as Corr and Broggy in Dublin in February. Unemployed activists have not yet found the electoral knack. Not exactly a single-issue campaigner by any means, Liz Noonan stood on the Lesbian Feminist ticket for the third time in a row in Dublin South East. Her votes have gone: 373, 309 and 340. Best surprise of this election was, without a doubt, the very creditable 581 (1.5%) recorded by Traveller's Rights campaigner, Nan Joyce, in Dublin South West. When you consider all the aggro in Tallaght over sites and the fact that 90% of travellers aren't even registered to vote, that's a great result — especially as she beat the combined vote of the two so-called community candidates who were prominent in the anti-traveller agitation there.

Nan Joyce did well. The Left didn't do at all badly. There's too much cynicism around. So, the Government always wins. So, if general elections really changed anything, maybe they would make them illegal. Meanwhile maybe, just maybe, something is stirring in the woods. We live in hope.

# DOORSTEPPING FOR TONY

**NORA HAMILL canvassed for Tony Gregory. These are her impressions of the issues on the doorsteps.**

**T**here's something about canvassing on a bleak November evening that tends to bring home the realities of the recession to you in a particularly vivid way. The wind and rain lash your face and any other unprotected part of the anatomy and you begin to appreciate the state the country is in. You almost long for "strong stable government", just so you could sit in by a warm fire (whatever other sacrifices have to be made to pay for it) and leave those obstreperous garden gates shut the way their owners want.

On the one hand you curse those gates and long driveways in the posh end of Cabra. On the other, you bemoan the endless gloomy flights of stairs in the warrens of O'Devenney Gardens or Sheriffer. Why can't everyone live in those terraced houses with civilised doors that open on to the street, if only for the convenience of hard-pressed canvassers.

I was canvassing for Tony Gregory, the candidate that lefties love to hate. The only hostility I encountered, however, was in the posh end of Cabra and similar areas. Or put another way, the warmth of the reaction seemed to be in inverse proportion to the size of the house. Though on particularly bad evenings you felt that someone in the house with the two Mercedes parked outside might just give you a preference out of sympathy. At least it was a short campaign.

I was canvassing in good company. Tony himself was surprised by the numbers who regularly turned up. Before his election in February he was not widely known and the canvassers in 1981 and last time were a fairly small group drawn from the base he had built up through years of work in his own area. This time the core was still there. They just didn't have to stretch themselves so far. The majority of

canvassers were still Inner City people but there were many more who had no connection with the area. I met a lot of old acquaintances from diverse campaigns who had decided Gregory, whatever his shortcomings, deserved support.

There was a time, right at the start, when Tony and the other organisers almost didn't know what to do with so many people, so that we overlapped a bit. When that was sorted out, areas were covered in record time. People who had never canvassed before discovered they had a talent for it.

**O**n the doorstep we found a lot of people are disillusioned, cynical, apathetic. They know one thing — their standard of living is not going to improve, whatever government gets in. A section of those who support Gregory view him as a welcome alternative to voting Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or indeed, a coalition-orientated Labour Party. One man who described himself as "taking more than a passing interest in politics" said, "I'm not going to vote. I'm fed up with the lot of them". When he noticed the leaflet he

## WHAT THE RIGHT WANTS

This election was different. Austerity politics has gained such currency that both Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael fought the election on platforms of spending cuts and reduced standards of living instead of some of the usual promises of "the sun, moon and stars". Here's a reminder of some of the measures we can now expect.

### FIANNA FÁIL

The ruling party went to the country with its proposed attacks in black and white in the 'The Way Forward' and even in legislative detail in the published Book of Estimates. Between both documents they propose:

**Wage cuts:** public sector pay increases of 5% per year to 1986; general pay increases of 10½% annual average until 1987; profits to rise by annual average of 23.3% in the same period. 'The Way Forward' itself estimates inflation for 1983 at 10-13%.

**Unemployment:** a reduction of 4,000 in the number employed in the public service by 1986; the acceptance of 27,000 job losses in general next year; no fall in unemployment until 1985; only 17,000 less unemployed by 1987; phasing out of clerical assistants and caretakers in schools; one-third reduction in unemployment benefit for short-time workers; pay-related benefit for recently redundant workers cut from 40% to 30% of pay for first six months, and to 20% for remaining nine months; all unemployed under 25 must register with Manpower; CIE to open discussions with unions on redundancies.

**Health cuts:** in addition to barbarous cuts already underway "a special investigation team to go into local authorities and the Health Boards to investigate their administration and finances".

**Social Welfare cuts:** ceiling for disability benefit to be cut from 100% to 80% of weekly earnings; an end to tax rebates bringing

welfare recipients over previous earnings while at work; welfare estimates for '83 down 2% before inflation.

**Tax:** £160m in *additional* taxation; existing tax rates and structures remain the same; extra indirect taxation and VAT; the Commission on Taxation report will be studied (not necessarily implemented).

**Educational cuts:** free post-primary school transport ended; post-primary schools pupil-teacher ratio *increased*; remedial teachers restricted to large national schools.

**Also proposed:** a 25% increase in CIE fares from January and increased charges for water supply and rubbish collection.

While *total* expenditure is to be cut drastically between now and 1986, the cuts are to be borne by current expenditure (mainly pay and social services). *Capital* expenditure would actually grow in volume to an 8% increase in 1986. Much of this spending goes in hand-outs to capitalists. Also, concurrent with these cuts the Book of Estimates sets aside £1,600m (an increase of 14.8%) for *servicing* the debt to Irish and international moneylenders. Finally, a quote from 'The Way Forward': "Jobs are lost because goods and services can no longer be produced and sold *profitably*." At least they're honest about that!

### FINE GAEL

Fine Gael had no major objections to the Fianna Fáil plan for cuts and lower living standards, although they provided far less



had second thoughts. "Oh him, I'd forgotten about him. Maybe I will vote after all". Incidentally, he was also of the opinion that "they should put Garret in a home."

Predictably enough, on the doorstep, it was rarely "issues" as such that concerned people but rather their own personal problems. These in turn could be seen as a microcosm of the "state of the nation". I could only agree impotently with a man made redundant a year ago — "wish he could get me a job". It seemed inappropriate to talk about the ultimate solution lying in a socialist system. Somehow, in the face of what has been more than a financial body-blow, the jargon sticks in your throat. Another

unemployed man's answer was not to vote — "nobody did nothing for me, he didn't get a job for me". I did argue here but I don't think I won a convert.

I expected to, and did, encounter criticism of the Gregory Deal and his continued support for Fianna Fáil throughout the period of the last government. However it turned out not to be based on objections to specific votes or an abhorrence in principle (Garret-style) of "deals". No, it was that he supported Charlie Haughey and that was the finish for the individuals concerned. The antagonism to Haughey was very much personality rather than policy-based. One man, who would still, he said, give

Gregory his number one, disapproved of his support for Fianna Fáil and proceeded to list the virtues of coalition governments for the working-man! Michael O'Leary, he said, had given us an extra bank holiday among other things, so he wasn't as bad as people made out. Another man gave warning that Haughey would chew Gregory up and spit him out given half the chance, as "he had done to so many others".

One woman had worked out the solution to youth unemployment and wanted me to "tell Tony". She reckoned the age for the retirement pension should be lowered to 60 to open up vacancies. Another man wanted me to tell Tony to go after the rich who still get children's allowances and no-one was talking about cutting that. It made a change from "can he get me a telephone".

There was the deserted wife whose allowance had been reduced because they claimed, wrongly, her husband had come back. He had, to give her hassle for a short period, and a report by a vindictive neighbour was sufficient basis for the benefit to be reduced. She's been to everyone, she said. There was the old lady who hadn't yet received any fuel vouchers and had to borrow money to buy coal, and many others with the sort of problems that shouldn't need the intervention of a T.D. but seem to in this country.

Finally, I stood outside two polling stations on November 24th. One was the well-off district of Drumcondra. The other was in the working-class areas behind Dorset Street. The contrast in reception between the two served to emphasise where Gregory gets his support. In the first it was luke-warm, in the second wholehearted. Their perception in the latter was based on the conclusion that, with a host of well-known T.D.s representing them for years, "he is the only one who ever did anything for us."

gorey details. In government they would do much the same. (Remember the VAT on children's clothes and shoes?). In fact they based their campaign very much on FF's 'credibility' in carrying through the onslaught, with a vague 'social justice' gloss slapped on.

Launching their campaign Garret FitzGerald "promised that the fall in living standards, which is implicit in the programme of both parties and which in his view will continue for at least the next year or two, will be allowed to hurt the least privileged sections of the community". He spelt out neither what he meant by the "least privileged" nor how FG would protect them.

**Wage cuts:** on the same occasion, Garret FitzGerald said that FG would seek to negotiate lower increases in private sector pay than those set out in FF's economic plan. He said that FF's 5% increase for public sector workers was "not that far wrong".

**Health cuts:** FG's Economic Policy states: "FG will implement necessary expenditure cuts in such a way as to relieve the least

well-off from the adverse effect of these cuts, and to spread the burden equitably between people at the various income levels. Where charges for services have to be introduced, provision will be made, where possible, to relate those to means". How ambiguous and vague can you get?!

**Social Welfare cuts:** "Taxation will be applied to unemployment benefit, disability benefit and pay-related benefit." Cases where after-tax income goes as high as work-income will not be allowed. "Increases in Unemployment and Disability Benefit Rate will, in a given year, not exceed the increase in industrial earnings in the previous year."

**Taxation:** 2FG will "sympathetically examine" (not implement) the Commission on Taxation Report.

**Unemployment:** FG envisage that employment would start to increase significantly — in 1986!

COMPILED BY DES DERWIN

# TAX REFORM: THE FORGOTTEN CAMPAIGN

The Left has had curiously little to say on the issue of tax reform since the great PAYE marches. Yet the fundamental problems remain. The publication last July of the *First Report of the Commission on Taxation* provides an opportunity to re-open the debate. PAT CARROLL takes a look at the background to the report, whilst JOAN BURTON provides a detailed critique of its recommendations.

Derek Speirs (Report)



## The Left still needs a clear policy

A recent opinion poll ranked tax reform third, behind unemployment and inflation, in a list of "topics of public concern". So, although the PAYE marches and PRSI work stoppages are fast-fading memories, it is clear that the issue of tax reform is going to remain one of the key political problems of the 80s.

Whilst the left and the trade union movement are in favour of tax reform, there has been no clear consensus as to what this implies. The failure to develop a coherent strategy in relation to tax reform can be seen in the response to date to the *First Report of the Commission on Taxation*, which has been largely ignored by the labour and trade union movement.

Government Commissions are, of course, notorious as a device for postponing decisions on a delicate topic. The *Commission on Taxation* is a good case in point. It was appointed in the wake of the giant trade union-sponsored tax marches and its membership spanned the usual mixture of business, farmer, union and legal interests. The ICTU nominated its General Secretary, Donal Nevin, and its then President, Dan Murphy to the 11 person Commission. It is surprising, indeed amazing, that the trade union movement left their representatives with virtually no back-up:

there was no detailed policy submission from the ICTU and only 10 out of about 150 documents sent as evidence to the Commission came from trade union sources.

This absence of policy shows the uncertainty and indecision within the labour movement on the issue of tax reform. The pressure for change is certainly there but it has a kind of guilty ambiguity: that it is inconsistent to plead at once for both tax relief for workers and also higher public expenditure. More significantly, the trade union movement is extremely cautious on the question of tax exemptions for private industry.

Public expenditure is almost a perjorative expression in current political language. Wide cuts are mooted in education, health and welfare to the extent that the Left is reluctant to take up the offensive on tax reform lest it be used as an excuse for even more extensive cuts. But in fact, it is the private sector of industry that is the major single beneficiary of State spending as well as gaining the biggest advantages from the Irish tax code. The October 1982 issue of *Irish Business* lists the numerous cash handouts that prop up private enterprise in Ireland. These handouts amount to no less than £2,500 million, while tax

incentives cost a further £245 million.

In this context, the two delegates representing the hundreds of thousands of marching PAYE workers (who caused the Commission to be set up in the first place) were left in a weak position right from the start. Firstly, as a small numerical minority and secondly, lacking a united coherent policy from their unions to back them up. By contrast, business interests flooded the Commission with submissions and were forcefully represented by Mr. Donal Carroll of the Bank of Ireland and Carroll Industries. Interestingly, the main business interests signed the Report with no reservations or Minority Report.

It is difficult to see how any Government can accept the Commission's Report as the "all or nothing" package that its members have presented it as. Clearly this was a device to obtain as large a measure of consensus as possible but no Minister of Finance will be bound to this. In fact, the lethargy of Irish public administration is such that the Report may simply be quietly put on the shelf. Certainly, recent Dáils have been incapable of enacting any sort of far-reaching legislation and the enactment of this Report would definitely stretch any Government without a secure

majority well beyond its limits.

Two recent examples illustrate this. Both Coalition Minister Bruton and Fianna Fáil Minister McSharry proposed the modification of tax relief on interest payments in 1982. They attempted to limit relief to a maximum rate of 35% for house loans and to abolish it for all other loans. Certainly a sensible and proper measure because those buying expensive luxury houses were getting an effective subsidy of up to £50 per week, while others were getting similar relief for the purchase through bank loans of luxury items like yachts, videos or stocks and shares. By June 1982, McSharry had to abandon the reform because of the incapacity of the Revenue Commissioners to actually implement it. If so simple a change immobilises the Revenue authorities, one can't imagine how they would go about collecting the expenditure surtax proposed by the Commission.

Another example is the original package of Capital and Wealth taxes initiated by the Coalition in 1974. Between the White Paper and the final Tax Act, there was such a long list of changes and concessions to weaken the impact of the reforms, that when Fianna

Fáil abolished them in 1977, they barely contributed £27 million.

**T**hese two cases point up the reality of Irish politics. Vested interests, especially those representing business, have always got their way. For example, the present personal taxation code is progressive on the surface. In reality, it has so many reliefs and concessions built into it over the years that the amount of income actually taxed progressively is enormously reduced. For instance, someone with an income of £30,000 should pay an effective tax rate of 43% if there were only personal allowances. In fact, the actual rate of tax is only 22% when interest relief, retirement annuity, life assurance and other concessions are included. It is flying in the face of historical experience to believe that Governments will resist pressures to diminish proposals such as the expenditure surtax proposed by the Commission as an alternative to a progressive direct tax code.

This Report is merely the first in a series which the Commission proposes to issue dealing with all aspects of our taxation system. But the indication from this first

Report is that the Commission has no magic remedies for our tax problems. Inevitably, the Commission reflects the balance of force represented on it and also inevitably, the conservative bias in Irish society. Real tax reform — the fair sharing of the tax burden among all sections of the community, the redistribution of wealth through the tax system — will only come about when the labour movement has the industrial muscle and the political will and representation to deliver it. Commission reports are no substitute for the hard political decisions and conflicts which real tax reform would involve.

It would, however, be a pity if the deficiencies, and some outrageous proposals, of the Commission's Report resulted merely in the continuation of the status. That, unfortunately, is the danger in outright rejection of the Report. The labour and trade union movement has to do a lot of work to sort out its ideas in this area. To date, precious little has been evident from this source and the field is occupied entirely by business interests. For that neglect, workers' paypackets and the Welfare State are paying a high price.

**PAT CARROLL**

## In search of "equity, efficiency and simplicity"

*The First Report of the Commission on Taxation*, covering "Direct Taxation", recommends perhaps the most far-reaching package of changes ever suggested in the Irish tax system. The Report considers the present system of direct taxation in Ireland as "inequitable", "complicated" and "distorting economic decisions in many ways". It proposes a new system which will have as its essential qualities: "equity, efficiency and simplicity".

The Commission merely makes recommendations, at no stage does it outline the likely effect of its proposals in terms either of revenue collection or its effect on individual taxpayers. The failure to back up the report with figures is a serious weakness and makes an evaluation of its likely effects very difficult. This may be one reason why the report has received so little attention to date.

Nevertheless, this report is important whether or not all of its recommendations are accepted — and the Commission itself argues that it is an all or nothing package. Its findings are likely to have a major impact on any future debate on taxation. Already Fine Gael, in particular John Bruton, have come out largely in favour of the proposals — not to mention the warm welcome which most of the report

has received from the business community.

### SUMMARY

**T**he major recommendations of the report are itemised elsewhere in this article (see Table 1), but, broadly, the thrust of the report is to widen the definition of income to bring not just wages, salaries and profits into the income tax net, but also realised capital gains, gifts, inheritances, lump sum receipts and other windfalls. The Commission proposes the abandonment of the current progressive tax system, i.e., the higher your income, the more tax you pay, and instead proposes its replacement by a new flat rate tax somewhat lower than the present standard rate of 35p. This new flat rate would, of course, be charged on all income included in the new and much more comprehensive definition of income as outlined above.

The Commission advocates major reforms within the PAYE system by proposing the abolition of the present system of personal allowances such as mortgage relief, which significantly

reduce the tax base and benefit the better-off, and advocates instead a tax credit system. In relation to other income — profits, interest, capital gains, gifts and inheritances — the Commission recommends that such income be indexed for the effects of inflation in line with changes in the consumer price index and the inflation-adjusted income to be taxed at the new flat rate of income tax.

The Commission does not see the income tax system as a primary mechanism of redistribution, hence the abandonment of the progressive tax structure and the Commission's strong opposition to a wealth tax. However, in order to compensate somewhat, the Commission advocates the introduction of a new expenditure tax which they expect will apply to a small group of high income tax payers.

In relation to PRSI, the Commission recommends the abolition of the present system and instead proposes the introduction of a flat rate social security tax levied on all income. In other words, the effect of this would be to abolish employers' PRSI contributions and replace them by a tax (at a suggested rate of 5%) on profits — where available. But social security tax would not be payable on all capital gains, gifts and



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inheritances.

Because no actual costings or figures are given, calculating the effect of these proposals on different groups of income earners is extremely difficult. However, the likely effect is to produce some reform within the PAYE sector without producing any great increase in the amount of tax raised from other sectors; in particular the corporate sector, the self-employed and the wealthy in general. In fact, as is argued later, it is possible that contributions from the better off might actually be reduced.

The Commission argues that its package of proposals should be seen as an all or nothing change in the system. The labour movement should be sceptical of this attempt to force all of the package, good or bad, on the Irish people. Certainly the proposals for reform within the PAYE sector are broadly acceptable and are to be welcomed. However, the changes introduced in respect of company taxation, the taxation of interest, the taxation of the self-employed and capital taxation — which would probably lead to the collection of less tax from these sources — make large sections of the report totally unacceptable. Added to the refusal to consider a wealth tax, all this makes the report a first statement on the reform of the tax system rather than the last word.

## PERSONAL TAXATION

The current tax structure and PAYE code significantly benefit the better off by making allowances for expenditure on such things as houses, life assurance pensions and even, if arranged, the payment of private school fees. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that, for example, owner/occupiers buying their houses with building society loans receive greater subsidies from the exchequer than those who rent houses from local authorities. A married couple, for instance,

on the top rate of 55%, buying an expensive house, will receive a subsidy of £4,800 in tax allowances or £2,304 in tax savings. Compare this with a Corporation tenant who has to pay a full differential rent calculated on all his or her income and receives no tax allowance.

Thus, while at the moment we have a notionally progressive system, the better off, by borrowing for house purchase and investing in pension schemes, can effectively reduce their tax bill considerably. This erosion of the tax base must simply be ended. The Commission's proposal for the abolition of the myriad of allowances which favour the better off are therefore to be welcomed. Replacing the present allowances by personal tax credits should restore some degree of equity within the PAYE system and should also make that system far simpler to operate and understand.

## ABOLITION OF PROGRESSIVE TAX STRUCTURE

But as a *quid pro quo* for abolishing the allowance system, the Commission has recommended the abolition of the progressive tax system and advocated that all income be now taxed at a new rate which is rumoured to be about 30%. Thus while higher income earners will lose some of their allowances, they will now be charged a lower rate of tax. The Commission has argued that the current system is only notionally progressive. That hardly seems a worthwhile reason for abandoning the concept.

Fundamental to a concept of equity in taxation should be the notion that a) the poor should pay no tax and b) the better off, because of their capacity to do so, should contribute progressively more as their income rises. Only in this way can the burden of sacrifices required of the community to meet our current and future needs in relation to housing, education, job creation be equitably

shared.

The Commission's notion of equity implies a tax system which is neutral between one taxpayer and another. In this respect, it is interesting to look at the Commission's definition of the direct tax base as being "the amount which a person could spend in a particular period while maintaining the value of his (sic) capital intact in terms of general purchasing power". In other words, if we take two taxpayers: A has large capital assets and his income arises from interest. B, on the other hand, has no assets and her income is from short-term security benefits. A will pay no tax under the Commission's system except in the unlikely event that the rate of interest goes above the rate of inflation. B, who has no capital base to maintain, will pay tax on her social security benefits in excess of her basic tax credits. By any standards this is blatantly unfair but it's where the Commission's proposals lead.

## THE NEW EXPENDITURE TAX

As a method of returning some degree of progressivity to the income tax system, the Commission proposes a new expenditure tax. The tax is to be confined to "a relatively small number of taxpayers at the top scale of income and wealth." But we are not told either the rate of the tax or the threshold at which it would apply. The new tax would apply to personal consumption spending but not saving and saving is broadly defined to include investment, house purchase, and perhaps even the purchase of consumer durables.

The objections to the tax are many. Firstly, the tax would be difficult and expensive to administer and unless the services of the revenue commissioners were enormously expanded, there is good reason to suppose that the tax would be evaded by the failure of individuals to

make returns. Secondly, the tax as described gives enormous scope for avoidance. If you could show that, rather than using your disposable income for personal consumption, you saved it, then you would be exempt from tax. And what are savings? The purchase of a large house, land as a speculative gamble for its rezoning potential, shares in a company owning a racehorse? All of these "investments" would appear to qualify as savings under the proposed method of assessing the tax. It is an open invitation to accountants to exercise their ingenuity on behalf of their clients and help them avoid tax.

Finally, it is difficult to believe that the yield from the proposed expenditure tax would in any way offset the loss of tax from the higher tax bands — estimated at over £100 million in 1981. The question even then arises: how would the loss of revenue be made up? — by the imposition of higher rates of indirect tax which would of course affect the poor most or by cuts in government expenditure? Both are equally unacceptable to the labour movement.

## TAXATION OF COMPANIES AND THE SELF-EMPLOYED

**T**he most disappointing sections of the report are undoubtedly those dealing with company taxation and the taxation of the unemployed. Here we might reasonably have expected urgent recommendations to reduce the amount of evasion and avoidance. Instead we find that the likely effect of the proposals would be actually to reduce taxation on profits. The commission has obviously decided to accept en bloc almost all of the recommendations by the various employer bodies and the accountancy profession. Those PAYE marchers who hoped that tax reform meant the payment of more tax by the banks, the self-employed and profitable companies such as Cement Roadstone are in for a rude awakening.

Company taxation is likely to be reduced in a number of ways. Firstly, we have a straightforward reduction in the rate from 50% for companies and a top rate of 55% for individuals to the new standard rate rumoured to be about 30%. In other words, a reduction of 40% in the rate of tax on profits. Secondly, it is recommended that profits be charged to tax on the basis of inflation—adjusted accounts. The Commission recommends a modified form of current cost

accounting with accounts being adjusted in line with changes in the consumer price index. The introduction of current cost accounts has been resisted both here and in the UK on the grounds that it would lead to a substantial fall in profits assessable for tax and that the measurement of profits on a current cost basis is far less objective than the present system of historic cost basis.

The Commission fails to give examples of the effect on reported company profit of their proposed changes but an idea of the effect can be gleaned from an examination of the accounts of a number of Irish companies that have published current cost accounts.

The effect in all cases is to substantially reduce taxable profits. Whilst there are differences between current cost and the inflation adjustment suggested by the Commission, there is no reason to believe that there would be other than a dramatic fall in profit assessable for tax.

The Commission's proposal to replace employer's PRSI contributions by a levy on profits of about 5% should also substantially benefit the employers. Obviously the levy would only be payable by employers who had profit remaining after adjusting for the effects of inflation as described above. Take, for example, the case of the Bank of Ireland. In their 1982 accounts, the Bank reports contributions of £6.3 million in respect of employers' social welfare contributions. If the Bank were to be assessed on the proposed system of 5% of current cost profit, this contribution would fall to £1.14 million.

A number of other proposals are likely to benefit companies and self-employed individuals. The Commission proposes that the changes introduced in recent years to disallow for tax purposes entertainment expenses and expenditure on cars above £3,500 be dropped. These measures were introduced to reduce a method of tax avoidance which had become notorious. There is no evidence that these restrictions in any way inhibited business efficiency and why they should be removed now is a mystery — unless it is taken as further evidence of the degree to which the Commission was influenced by the business community.

The Commission also recommends the introduction of a 100% imputation system for company dividends and the removal of the surcharge on the undistributed income of "close" companies, another specific anti-avoidance measure. Both these proposals will again lead to a fall in corporate taxation.

On the credit side, the Commission has attempted to bring forward the payment of tax by the self-employed and companies. In the case of companies, the report proposes the UK system of

Advance Corporation Tax. In other words, where a company pays a dividend it must also at that time pay a proportion of its tax bill. Lastly, the Commission recommends that interest no longer be allowable as a tax deduction. Significantly, these last proposals are the only ones in the report to be rejected out of hand by the business community.

On the question of evasion by the business section and the self-employed, the Commission has postponed consideration to later reports. Some estimates of tax evasion put it as high as 8% of total economic activity or about £1,000 million this year. Obviously, if we want to extend the tax net the question of evasion must be dealt with urgently. It is a priority for the labour movement and was part of the inspiration behind the tax protests. Yet astonishingly, as far as the Commission is concerned evasion can be long-fingered and postponed for further consideration.

## TAXATION OF THE BANKS

**I**t is ironic that the principal effects of the Commission's proposals will be to substantially reduce the tax liability of the banks. As explained earlier, the introduction of the special levy on banks and the changes in employers' contributions to social welfare to a 5% profits tax will all mean substantial tax savings for the banks.

For example, in the case of the Bank of Ireland, taking current cost profit rather than historical cost profit will mean a reduction in profit assessable to tax of £39.8 million (or 64%) from £62.6m to £22.8m. When capital allowances and reliefs of £16.2 million arising from tax based lending, which the Commission proposes should continue in operation are taken into account, this would have the effect of reducing taxable profit to £6.6 million chargeable at the new low tax rate of 30—35%. All this would produce a tax charge of approximately £2 million (based on 1981/82 accounts).

This is an outrageous proposal on the part of the commission. Furthermore, as already outlined, the proposal to change the basis of charging the employers' insurance contribution would result in a fall in that contribution from the reported £6.3 million for 1981/82 to something like £1.14 million.

One of the most offensive elements of the present taxation system is the widespread tax avoidance by the banks by the use of tax based lending which results in the banks paying a real rate of tax which is substantially below that of the current

income tax rate. If it is considered desirable to subsidise companies then the way to do that is by clearly designated schemes or grants given on the basis of economic merit rather than as a tax avoidance mechanism which merely serves to undermine the confidence of the PAYE taxpayer in the system as a whole. In a report which takes equity as its base point it should hardly be necessary to point out that any proposed tax system should not just be equitable in fact but should also be seen to be equitable. The dismissal out of hand of legitimate objections to the current system of bank taxation indicates the total failure of sympathy of the Commission with the PAYE sector and of the feeling of injustice and inequity which gives rise to the PAYE marches.

## CAPITAL TAXATION

**T**he Commission recommends taxation of capital gains, inheritances and other capital windfalls at the same standard income tax rate. Taxing capital gains at the same rate as income is sensible as it immediately removes the incentive for tax avoidance in the present system. However, there is no reason why taxation of capital gains and inheritances should not be on a progressive basis, i.e., the greater the gains, the higher the rates of tax.

If these proposals are implemented, the amount of capital taxation raised is unlikely to be high. On gifts and inheritances, the amount of tax raised would depend on the exemption threshold and given previous experience, this is likely to be sufficiently high as to exclude most except the very biggest.

In relation to capital gains tax, the tax is likely to be more theoretical than actual. The reasons for this are that the Commission recommends: a) the indexation of capital gains in line with changes in the consumer price index b) that gains be taxed only on realisation i.e., when the capital asset is sold rather than on accruals basis c) that what they describe as "real losses" should be offset against all income. (This is a favourite method of tax avoidance).

All this means that the amount of gains chargeable to capital gains tax is likely to be low. In fact, there may be considerable losses to the revenue in that capital losses (which may be artificially created) may be used to offset gains and other incomes thus reducing a taxpayer's liability to tax.

The Commission does recommend the abolition of certain elements of the current capital gains tax system such as roll-over relief and the removal of the exemption from capital gains of a private

dwelling house. While these developments are to be welcomed, they will probably have little effect when taken with the essential features of the system as outlined above. Ironically, one of the offshoots of the new system might be that holders of relatively small amounts of capital, e.g., someone owning just a house, would end up paying capital gains tax while holders of large amounts of capital would be able to use the system to avoid tax by postponing the sale of assets or creating losses to offset against other tax.

Finally, the Commission makes no actual recommendation in relation to profits arising from the redevelopment of land, but does strongly hint that such profits, arising as they do from community development, should be subject to 100% taxation.

## WEALTH TAX

**D**espite receiving a large number of submissions in favour of a wealth tax, and the support for such a tax expressed by the trade union representatives, the Commission came out strongly against an annual wealth tax. They argued that if income, capital gains, inheritances and gifts were charged to income tax on a comprehensive basis, then the argument for a specific wealth tax on the grounds of efficiency or equity were weak. They also felt that administratively a wealth tax gave rise to difficulties — ironically this objection was not considered significant in regard to their new expenditure tax.

The Commission's views, or the views

of some of its members, on the whole subject of distribution of wealth can only be considered bizarre. There is ample evidence to suggest that wealth in Ireland is concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of people. To avoid the consequences of this fact, the Commission introduces all sorts of red herrings to evade the issue.

For example, they claim that pension rights should be included in any computation of wealth, thus reducing the statistics in relation to the concentration of wealth. But this totally ignores that while pension rights are undoubtedly benefits, they are neither saleable transferable and thus in no way comparable to bank balances, land and other property. In an astonishing appendix to the report on wealth distribution in Ireland, it is seriously argued that benefits to lower income groups in housing, social welfare and education should be "capitalised" and included in estimates of total wealth, thus substantially reducing the present "apparent" inequalities in the published estimates of wealth distribution.

There is no better illustration than this amazing attempt to avoid facing up to the problem of unequal wealth distribution in Ireland, to confirm for us that the Commission has, by and large, failed to propose the real tax reform that the labour and trade union movements need.

JOAN BURTON

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### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORT:

- Income tax to be charged at a single rate on all income.
- Definition of income to be widened to include capital gains, gifts, inheritances and windfalls.
- Change to a tax credit-system. Allowances such as mortgage relief, VHI and life assurance relief to be abolished and replaced by a single personal allowance.
- Indexation of profits, interest, capital gains and farm income based on changes in the consumer price index.
- PRSI to be replaced by a social security tax levied at a single rate on all income including capital gains. Employers to pay a 5% levy on profits.
- No wealth tax or property tax.
- New expenditure tax on the very top range of incomes to try and compensate for the abolition of the current progressive income tax system.

# VOICES FROM FINGLAS

Finglas, a massive Dublin working class area the size of Limerick, has been the butt of sensational headlines and a controversial *Today, Tonight* RTE programme. To discuss what life is really like in Finglas, and what the people there can do to change it, *GRALTON* brought together three people active in community and trade union work in the area for a discussion. They are: *Francis Chance*, Community Worker with the Hope Finglas Project; *Simeon Starrs*, ITGWU Chief Shop Steward in Unidare — one of the biggest employers in the area; *Tim O'Halloran*, from the community paper, the *Finglas Stringer*, and presently working on a survey into Finglas unemployment. The discussion was led by *DES DERWIN* for *GRALTON*. All speak as individuals.

**D.D.** *Has the media attention given to Finglas reflected a real level of vandalism, violence, drug abuse, harassment etc. or is it exaggerated?*

**F.C.** There are definitely problems of vandalism, crime and drug abuse in Finglas and it's important in questioning the media treatment to be clear that those problems do exist, not to be denying them or trying to paint a too rosy picture. However, it's clear that the way Finglas is portrayed in the media is extremely one-sided. The evening papers and the *Today, Tonight* focus on the negative things that are happening and the considerable efforts being made by some people within the community to change the place, build up alternatives and the like get no coverage whatsoever.

**S.S.** Certainly the media are giving Finglas quite a lot of coverage as regards minority things that go on in any area. Many new housing schemes have come into Finglas recently and you have these problems with youth and young kids getting into trouble in any area when its just getting built up. In my opinion, the media coverage *must* spoil the chances of organisations and social workers in trying to help the people in the area. When these guys and young kids read about the "no-go" areas in the papers it gives them an impetus, some innocent guys feel they then have a reputation to live up to.

**T.O'H.** On the media, I'd like to agree with the others. There was a spate of newspaper articles about Dolphin's Barn after a similar TV programme. The media seems to go from one place to another in Dublin, starting in Ballyfermot ten or more years ago. Then it went to the Inner City. Now it's moved up to Finglas.

**D.D.** *To reverse the usual way of approaching this subject, it has been said that Garda violence is causing serious concern to local youth and peaceful drinkers in pubs. Any comments?*

**T.O'H.** Well, the kids do get a bit harassed in fairly harmless activities like drinking in the open and in schools. It's harmless because they are actually going away from people so as not to annoy them. It's a bit excessive for the Gardai to come after them.

**F.C.** It's a very delicate subject at the moment. There is

definitely a serious problem in relations between the Gardai and the community, especially young people. There is very little evidence of the Gardai showing any interest in *community* policing. Community policing means a lot more than just getting bobbies on the beat. It means Gardai being drawn from the area, different training for Gardai that would help them to look at the issues which lead young people to get into trouble with the law in the first place — lack of alternatives, lack of jobs, family problems. Also the Courts are more punitively orientated, at the moment than orientated towards rehabilitation. But focussing on policing only isn't going to solve the problems.

**S.S.** While agreeing with what has been said, the police do have a job to do and we, the public, depend on them. But I do have reason to believe that the police are inclined to pick on the innocent person. When a group of youths are playing cards and they see a Garda walking through the scheme, all of a sudden the game is forgotten about. There's name calling, one thing leads to another and all of a sudden you have a battle on hand. It's got to be blamed on both sides. Parents must take a lot of blame too.

Genuinely, I have seen 12 year olds walking around Finglas at 2 o'clock in the morning. Some kids are uncontrollable, it's very hard for parents to manage. Sometimes they ring the Gardai who go wrong by grabbing the kid by the ear or whatever. I'm not saying that there's violence from the Gardai but I believe they can be a little heavy.

**T.O'H.** We expect a more adult attitude from the Gardai than from the kids. Of course it's wrong for the kids to cat-call the Gardai and generally provoke them, but we should expect a little common-sense from the Gardai in a situation where no real harm is being done.

**D.D.** *There seems to be a widespread misunderstanding by Finglas adults of the situation for the under 20s in the area. There's even the "vigilante" development. Is this serious?*

**F.C.** There always is some form of generation gap but it needs to be seen in perspective. The proportion of the adult population involving themselves in things like the "vigilantes" is tiny. They're there but they're minimal. The media reports about *adult* Finglas in just the same way as it does about young Finglas. A lot of adults are involved in running youth clubs and fund-raising for different activities but you never hear about it.

**D.D.** *It's probably wrong to try and pinpoint one particular problem as the cause of "vandalism", "youth crime" and so on, but what would you say is the main or root cause?*

**F.C.** You must go back to the question of planning. The area is almost entirely housing; only a small amount of shops; no proper siting of recreational facilities; schools coming quite late in the development of housing schemes and then the development of industrial estates coming even later again. The votes have always been in the number of houses a government produced, never in the number of community centres or playing fields they've produced.

**S.S.** The approach to new schemes seems to be: "we'll build a couple of hundred houses", then when they've built the houses, "we'll build shops", and when they've built the shops someone has a brainwave and it's "Now we'll build a school". Then they think, "What about work for these people? Oh, well they can go to Tallaght". The whole system is wrong. It should all be done in the reverse order.

**T.O'H.** I think we may be getting it wrong here. Why is there a need for planning in a working class area? Only because there isn't the people with enough money in the area to bring in the facilities that are enjoyed by richer areas without any planning. The market supplies these places of entertainment. If it was atime of full employment, with so many kids around Finglas, it would be an incredibly affluent area. The facilities would spring up overnight. The *root* cause is unemployment.

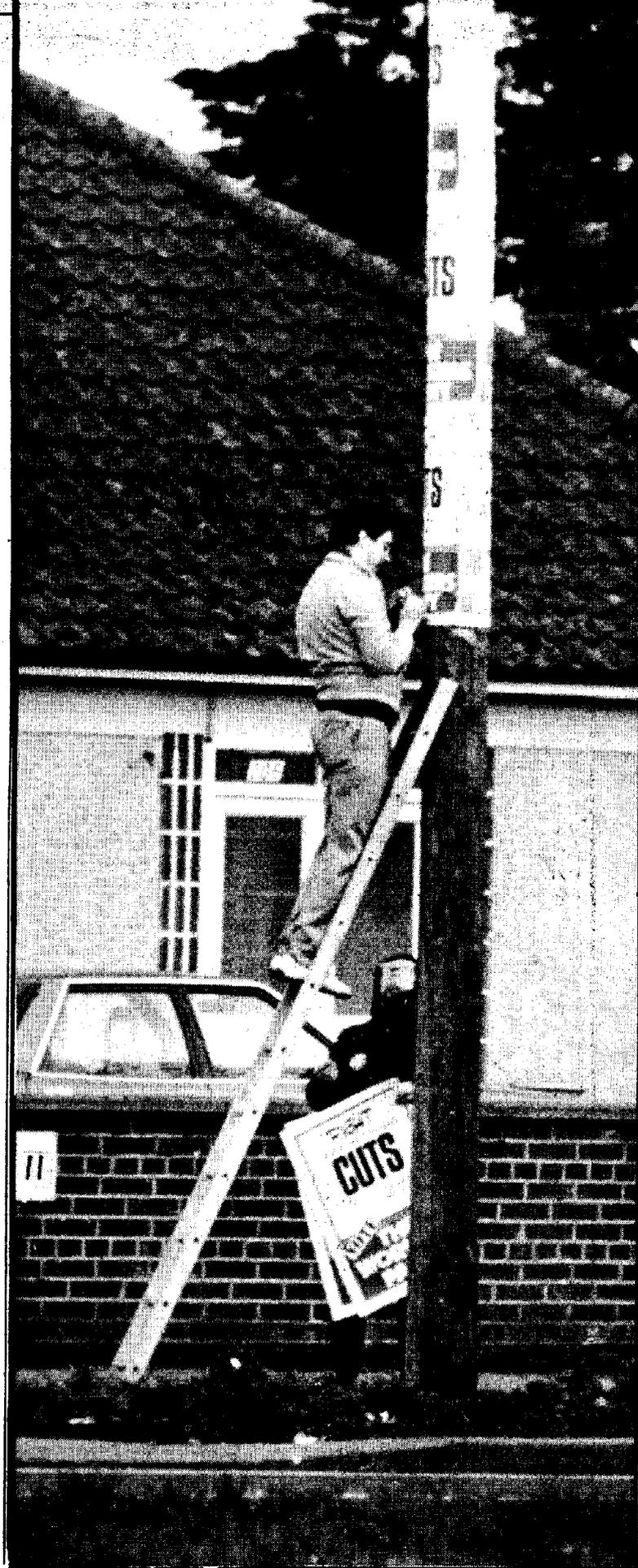
**D.D.** *Unemployment is obviously a huge problem. What's the jobs situation in the local factories these days?*

**S.S.** In my factory, Unidare, I'm very involved unfortunately in negotiations on redundancies at the moment. There are people in Unidare who are *selling* jobs. The company won't make them redundant, but they are advertising for voluntary redundancy because it saves them money. A few years ago there were 700 in my union branch in the factory, now there are only about 400. Now I'm not blaming the people that sell their jobs — money is waved in front of them. They're grabbing the "lump" and saying "I might get another job". They don't realise the road they're going down. £7,000 or whatever sounds a lot of money to them. But there's a world recession, the jobs just aren't there. It's a disgrace and shouldn't be allowed. These people are being conned into it. My advice is not to take the "lump".

**F.C.** I'd agree on this whole question of redundancy payments. There are definite arguments for looking very carefully at putting some sort of limit on them. Constantly, we're seeing redundancies, three-day weeks and cutbacks in Finglas. There's a new Manpower Office opened in Finglas. They had three jobs the first week, six the second week. That's Manpower creating jobs! The other scandal is the conditions of employment of early school leavers or kids who shouldn't be employed legally. They are being paid well below the going rate and when they get to a certain age they are let go and more taken on. Those should be permanent fully-paid jobs. Then there's the example of kids being taken on and being dismissed within a couple of days of them being due their rights under the Unfair Dismissals Act. Unfortunately, the unions in these situations are just not getting themselves together.

**D.D.** *What can Finglas people do to press for jobs?*

**T.O'H.** I don't think you can fight locally for jobs. None really expects a job to be created in their own area. It's a national problem, it's not specifically a Finglas problem. We're getting an unemployment rate of 25-30% in this survey we're doing. I'd say it's the same in Ballyfermot, Coolock or any working class area. I'm not sure that *any* of these problems are specifically Finglas problems.



*De Rossa elected . . . but the problems remain.*



The Barry Youth Club in Finglas: outside

Derek Speirs (Report)

**F.C.** One thing that could be taken up locally is some form of watchdog group to look at redundancy and short-time developments. One of the problems you have in a city the size of Dublin is that the trade unions are organised on a Dublin level; you don't have a Finglas unit of trade unions. A Finglas unit would be a good move. More trade union involvement within community areas is something which is desirable. In Waterford and Dundalk there have been some good links between the Trades Councils and the community. There can be a lot of work done by watchdogs in terms of fighting against jobs going but also in pressing for jobs in the area. Also there's the possibility of people setting up small-scale employment in the area.

**D.D.** *The attempt to put a toxic dump in Finglas was stopped by a campaign of local people. Can you tell us about it?*

**T.O'H.** Originally the West Finglas Tenants Association got it off the ground. Then it was carried on by an action group specifically devoted to the issue. They did various things to pressurise the politicians. For example, a week long picket in August. Of course, the action group eventually split in two, but it was a good campaign. It wasn't really a local problem and eventually it was solved by a national plan — some kind of treatment centre in Baldonnell, and that may be no better than the open Finglas dump itself. There are groups organised nationally on that question. I'm not altogether sure that it was local pressure that closed down the dump, I think they just had a change of gear at national level.

**F.C.** I wouldn't necessarily agree. The campaign in the area was an important example of how the people in Finglas can organise and fight. Also, the people in Finglas are linked into the national campaign and have been giving support to the Baldonnell people who are fighting the thing there. It's a good example of Solidarity.

**S.S.** A small comment. The anti-toxic campaign was a great fight. On a larger scale, factories are using dangerous chemicals

here. One was discovered in a Finglas factory. It was flying around Finglas for years until a diligent shop steward sussed it out. These dangers are all around us. The unions should be doing more to educate their members to them.

**D.D.** *Let's turn to the CIE bus service and attacks on buses. What are your thoughts on this problem?*

**T.O'H.** Some of the assaults are very vicious. It's hard to see what can be done about it. I was in a bus once when a rock came through the window thrown by a kid aged about six. The man in front of me got glass in his eyes. You can't blame the conductors, reacting to really mindless violence like that. Trouble is there's no plan by the busworkers who just react to an assault when it occurs. Then buses get restricted but CIE don't put the restrictions in the papers and you wait like an eejit for a bus that's not coming after 9 o'clock.

**S.S.** You can't blame the busworkers, many of whom come from Finglas. This is where there could be more Garda protection. Maybe you can't ask a busworker or a Garda to go into a really violent area but there should be some effort made to deal with the problem — it's really only one or two small areas, not the whole of Finglas. On the overall service, CIE has always been a disgrace. The lack of buses is effecting the shopper and the worker who has to travel from an outlying area. It's no joke having to walk from the village with a few toddlers after visiting across the city.

**F.C.** I agree that the overall service is inadequate. There's also a need for a bus service *within* Finglas to bring people from the estates to the shopping areas rather than leaving women with young kids to rely on the vans and their higher prices. There's also a need for circular buses that don't go into town. You have to take two buses to get to the child guidance clinic at Castleknock, which serves the Finglas area. As regards attacks on buses, I would again point to the need for youth facilities to attract the kids away from this type of activity. I certainly



... and inside.

Derek Speirs (Report)

understand the actions of the bus unions but the solution lies in providing alternative facilities.

**T.O'H.** The type of people that attack bus conductors are some sort of wierdo, anti-authoritarians who get excited by a uniform. I'm not sure you can get them inside a youth centre or any organised thing of any kind.

**D.D.** *Are you saying that some young kids have a kind of semi-conscious political motivation in attacking a uniform?*

**T.O'H.** Not really. There is an illusion among a certain type of youth in Finglas that they are living in Harlem or Brixton and that there are therefore legitimate targets of this kind, any sort of representative of the state. There is a small minority who believe this. You might call it political or you might call it irrational. The illusions are fed by the sensational reporting of the Brixton, Toxteth riots etc.

**F.C.** I don't see that as terribly significant in Finglas. About alternatives: unfortunately people only see alternatives as straight, organised youth clubs. But there is a need for a wide range of youth activities that are geared to providing some sense of excitement and treating the problems that the kids actually come up against. That requires specialised, well-financed services, preferably employing people from the local area. The thing is that it's not just trying to fit a difficult kid into a room with ping-pong and pool tables.

**D.D.** *It seems that the past couple of years have seen a leap forward in all types of community, youth, political and cultural organisation in Finglas. Is this true?*

**F.C.** There's certainly the beginnings of an awareness in Finglas, of action being taken. There's some quite exciting things happening in terms of people realising there's a job to be done and that's it's possible for *them* to do it. They are beginning to seek resources, grants etc. from the state bodies. But the

response from the bureaucracies is often very frustrating and people setting up a youth club, say, get very disheartened. Also the new media image, particularly that *Today, Tonight* programme, has had a shattering effect on people in the area who were trying to get things going.

**T.O'H.** One big problem about getting things started in Finglas has been the lack of somewhere to meet. The building of the West Finglas Tenants Association Hall was one of the biggest community efforts ever staged in Dublin but they haven't really been helping groups who wanted to use their facilities and space. That's why the Hope Centre is such a good idea. There's still any number of homeless groups around the area.

**S.S.** Getting tenants organisations going in the new estates of South Finglas has been hard going though. Forming these sorts of organisations needs people with experience. There have been about three different associations in the area all grappling with each other. They meant good but you need the professional approach when dealing with the Corporation and various activities.

**F.C.** There's a total lack of a focal point in South Finglas. There's no building or even shop that acts as a centre. Nothing any group trying to organise something could focus around. There are attempts at the moment to get a community centre going but the two groups working on that have found it hard to get people involved.

**T.O'H.** Let's not forget the *Finglas Stringer*. We sell about 1,000. The magazine tries to give a sense of community to the area. To give a voice to the people. It's fairly easy to get articles into — and we run some very good ones from hidden writers. We try to keep it non-political — a very hard thing to do as its main aim is to give a platform to community organisations, to publicise what they are doing. After the media blitz on Finglas, that's a very useful function.

# Books

## Inching Towards Progress

*Troublesome Business: The Labour Party and the Irish Question.* Geoffrey Bell. Pluto Press. £4.85 (UK).

Students of the Ulster Question will be familiar with the growing volume of literature that has recently emerged on socialism and nationalism in Ireland. The Irish left will probably assess Geoff Bell's latest book in that light, but it also sheds a scholarly sidelight on British Labour history. Bell's previous contribution to the debate on Northern Ireland was *The Protestants of Ulster* (Pluto Press, 1976), a penetrating, if partisan, examination of the politics and culture of his fellow northern protestants. He has also taken issue with Henry Patterson's "loyal socialism" (*Marxism Today* January, April 1982) and argued convincingly for the traditional Marxist position on Ireland.

*Troublesome Business* offers a narrative account of the evolution of British Labour Party policy on Ireland from 1900 to 1981. Bell examines the nature of the question inherited by Labour and shows that from the outset the party was uneasy in formulating policy on Ireland. Labour's ambiguity was evident in its attitude to the pre-war Home Rule crisis, and became painfully obvious in 1919-21. The party's quest for a middle ground between British government demands and Irish popular aspirations telegraphed through history its inability to apply a democratic policy on Ireland. During the pioneering days, Labour's response to the problem of fringe nationalism within the UK had been conditioned by Gladstonian Liberalism. When in power, Labour governments enthusiastically took on the burden of state interests and the seeds of bi-

partisanship were sown. Certainly, the Government of Ireland Act (1949) marked the emergence of a conservative consensus in Westminster on Northern Ireland.

However, there were sections within the parliamentary Labour Party who opposed this trend. Geoffrey Bing's Friends of Ireland group condemned the 1949 Act. In 1955 Sidney Silverman led sixty seven MPs into the lobbies against a Tory proposal to declare a by-election in Mid Ulster null and void because it had returned an IRA man. The most successful of the ginger groups was the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, which sought reform rather than constitutional change. Yet, even the CDU's achievements were limited. Despite the backing of over one hundred "prominent sponsors" it had difficulty in overcoming the inertia of parliament.

Two arguments underlie Bell's account. The first, outlined at the beginning of the book, deals with the connection between Irish self-determination and British democracy. Must the Irish rely on themselves, or would they find a natural ally in British working class? Bell lets history speak for itself. The second argument forms the conclusion, and also defines the book's ideological relevance. Labour's equivocal stand on Ireland is symptomatic of its historic failure as a socialist party. The Irish question retains its significance for the British Left as it remains a test of Labour's determination to confront establishment interests.

The historic weight behind this contention is formidable. Revolutionary groups in Britain have always accorded Ireland a higher priority than mainstream Labour bodies. During the 1970s, issues such as internment and the Prevention of Terrorism Act were taken up by the anti-statist Left, particularly the International Marxist Group and the International Socialists. Bell contends that the rediscovery of Ireland by the Labour left, in response to recent Republican successes, indicates that "the Irish national question continues to inch towards a progressive conclusion".

The most depressing feature of Anglo-Irish Labour relations has been the absence of movement towards an international perspective that would form the core of a socialist viewpoint on

celtic nationalism. The Irish might profitably consider their own failure in this respect. Irish people have long complained of Britain's inability to understand their national feeling, but rarely ponder the depths of English nationalism, or reflect on the challenge it has consistently posed to the British Labour movement. Though Bell alludes to this point, he does not develop it, and it constitutes a lacuna in analysis. However, this apart, *Troublesome Business* is an excellent introduction to the subject.

EMMET O'CONNOR

## Differing Points of View

*Reform of Industrial Relations.* Hugh Pollock (Ed.), O'Brien Press. IR£4.

"There are only two ways of looking at anything — the capitalists' way or the workers' way . . . 'Trade Union education' will act as a shield against the attacks of those who are supposedly independent — academics, the mass media and others — but who are, in reality, the supporters of big business interests." That's how John Finlay, shop steward in Rowntree Mackintosh, puts it in his contribution to this book and that is precisely where this book fails. It pretends that there is some intellectual and independent way of looking at industrial relations and dispassionately analysing its faults. It fails to see that "industrial relations" is in fact the point at which the capitalist and working classes come into daily conflict and that there can be no middle ground.

Whether or not Hugh Pollock hoped that this "contribution to the reform of industrial relations" would result in the coming together of the two sides of industry, I can't say. Certainly the trade unionists, two personnel managers and five

academics produce such varied personal comments, one would wonder just who will find any use in the book. At least the varied comments confirm the class conflict in industrial relations.

Most of the contributions lack any zest. Perhaps the authors had difficulty visualizing their audience or the editor's structures may have squeezed any life out of the articles. In the main, they are largely lifeless, academic pieces. But there are a few excellent articles, worth borrowing the book for.

John Finlay gives a solid view from below. He pulls no punches in accusing the ICTU leadership of accepting redundancies as a fact of life. Yes, the trade unions have to be reformed, but not to make life easier for the capitalist. Rather, he calls for reforms to "get the trade union movement back on the course of fighting aggressively and consistently for its members". He also scans his critical eye over issues such as worker participation and unemployment. It is refreshing to see in print criticism of what we have to put up with in trade union education. In his view, trade union education should be a critical analysis of society.

Francis Devine of the ITGWU conducts a very sobering analysis on the state of the Irish working class. He shows that the class will not be fighting back against the effects of the recession from a position of strength. His attempt to argue for a more radical Labour Party only serves to show up the irrelevance of that Party in its failure to latch on to the key aspects of economic and social forces. Industrialization, rather than strengthening the working class, seems to have weakened it. Many socialists will automatically want to reject this statement, but the article makes you think and is worth a read.

Sean Ruth's contribution, unfortunately, is a little academic. Unfortunately, because he tackles psychology from a radical, alternative approach. His "Oppressive System Model" is built essentially on a Marxist foundation. The analysis is good, the conclusions are disappointing. Radical and all as the analysis is, he ends up calling for action on an individual level, ignoring the core of working class activity, group effort. But then, that's what was always wrong with psychology.

# Books

Like Finlay, Paddy Cardiff of the FWUI also rightly says "hands off" to the employers and the State when it comes to trade union reform. Unfortunately, his concept of reform seems to be the rationalization of the trade union movement through the big unions gobbling up the smaller, uneconomic unions. There is no discussion of rationalizing along industrial lines. Effectively he accepts that the forces of the market place do and should continue to determine how trade unions amalgamate. He is so right when he points out that "officerships of even the smallest trade union carry a certain amount of power". It makes you wonder how much power the General Secretary of the third largest Union in the country has, and more importantly, how it is used?



Paddy Cardiff: "carrying a certain amount of power"

The remaining articles are boring. Readers of *Gralton* needn't wait with bated breath to hear how James Gardner would reform industrial relations in a "crusading fashion". After all he is — or was — Personnel Manager of De Lorean Motor Cars Ltd.

Fair enough to Pollock in attempting to provide a series of books (this is the second) on industrial relations in Ireland. But when it comes down to it this book just confirms that you can only see industrial relations from the capitalists' way or the workers' way.

TOM O'CONNOR

## THE GREAT DEBATE

*Abortion: The Irish Question.*

Dr. Andrew Rynne. Ward River Press. £3.50.

*The Abortion Referendum: The Case Against. Anti-Amendment Campaign.* £1.75

If you've ever found yourself stuck in the course of an argument about the Amendment, two new publications have arrived which will arm you.

Dr Andrew Rynne had a very good idea when he decided to write a book about abortion specifically for an Irish audience. The result is welcome as it represents a genuine attempt to examine the question, and the current proposed amendment, in a factual and fairly balanced way.

The format he has used is to divide the book into two parts: the first covering "Facts and Definitions" and the second being a type of debate between 12 people with some interest in the subject. The 12, which include Prof. Bonnar (of PLAC), Ann Connolly (of the Well Woman), Rev. Canon James Hartin (Church of Ireland), Dr Mary Lucey (of SPUC) and Mary Maher (of *The Irish Times*), were asked to answer 16 questions which ranged through most aspects of the abortion and amendment debates. Each question is covered by a separate chapter where the different responses are given. This section of the book is quite successful as the questions are apt and probing and the responses, for the most part, comprehensive and considered.

The first section of the book is less satisfactory, in my view, as its claim to being factual and objective is not fully justified. Throughout this part, which covers the medical,

legal, historical and political aspects, Rynne constantly refers to women "aborting their babies". As a doctor, he should know and use the medical terms for the unborn, which are blastocyst, embryo and foetus (depending on its stage of development), and not the emotive and less than scientific "baby". Similarly he uses the title "Pro-Life" to describe the anti-abortionists.

Whereas most of his factual information is accurate and concise, he is prone to statements whose supposed matter of factness conceal ignorance or opinion. For example, he claims that the slogan "right to choose" was introduced as a softening phrase to obscure its real meaning of abortion on demand. This is untrue and indicates Rynne's own failure to understand the feminist thinking behind the demand. The "right to choose" refers as much to the right to have a child as it does to the right to terminate a pregnancy and is the rationale behind the demand for abortion.

More damning, perhaps, is his insistence that there is no practical difference between legalising abortion for limited social and medical reasons and legalising abortion on demand. This means, for him, that countries such as France and Italy have abortion on demand. Such an assertion is nonsense when you consider the number of backstreet abortions still being performed in both these countries.

In a very fundamental sense, this book lacks any kind of class analysis. At no stage does Rynne consider the question of access to abortion facilities, even in countries where abortion is legal. His own opinion, which he gives at the end of the book, is that abortion should continue to be banned here, except in very rare circumstances, precisely because we can use English facilities. He does not even seem to notice that this "solution" suits one class of Irish women a helluva lot better than the other.

That having been said, *Abortion The Irish Question* is well worth getting for its information and arguments. Rynne writes well in a popular and accessible style and the book covers most aspects of the current debate in an intelligent and non-emotive way.

*The Abortion Referendum: The Case Against*, produced by the Anti-Amendment Campaign, consists almost entirely of articles

already published in the newspapers and speeches given by supporters of the campaign at public meetings. As such it is a rather dull book. The legal and sectarian arguments against the amendment form the bulk of the points made and some of these are less relevant now that the text has been published. However many of the arguments contained in the contributions are still valid and useful and Maire Wood's essay alone is worth buying the book for.

MARY GORDON

## FREE AT FIRST

*Nobody Rules O.K!* Dublin Anarchist Collective. 60p.

"The goal of a free society without a dominant class, based on equality and cooperation, is often knocked on the grounds that it is an impossible utopia. But it is only in an Anarchist society that our true humanity can be realised and once achieved it would be in nobody's interest to destroy it. It can be achieved by people believing in it — by shaking off our fear of freedom."

This pamphlet, from the Dublin Anarchist Collective, is intended as an introduction to the ideas and activities of Anarchism, and rather than provide a straight theoretical account they have chosen to produce "position papers" on five topics in which members of the Collective have had a direct and active involvement. The five topics covered are Feminism, The North, Unemployment, Crime & Prisons and the Church. The discussions on Unemployment and Crime & Prisons were to me the most interesting, perhaps because these are areas of struggle where there has been a significant Anarchist input or because these are areas where the

Anarchist approach has the most relevance. On Unemployment, the Anarchist analysis comes across as very coherent, both in terms of describing the phenomenon of unemployment under Capitalism and offering revolutionary alternatives and prescriptions for

the sentiment of the quotation above. It is centred around an examination of crime and capitalism and identifies two types of criminal acts: crime against property and crimes against people. In both cases the causes of the crimes are said to be found within



Cartoon from *Nobody Rules O.K.*

the "here and now". For example, changing the structure of the unions, organising autonomous unemployed groups and opposition to nationalisation on the basis that it is not a revolutionary demand and does not bring us any closer to Socialism.

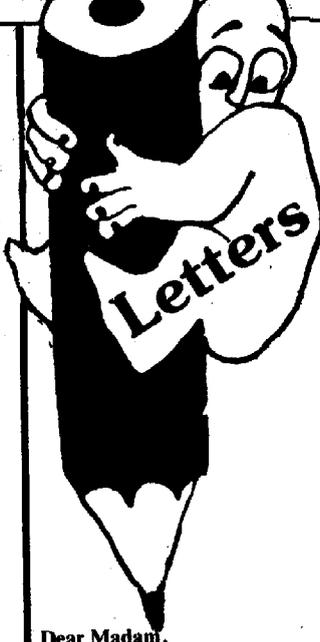
Coherence is not the hallmark of the section entitled "The North", which presents a brief history of events in the recent history of the North of Ireland: The Sectarian State, The No Go Areas, The War, The IRA. All pretty predictable stuff this, which really has only two points of interest. These are a description of the nature of the Anarchist intervention in the struggle and a frankness untypical of many parts of the Left in terms of examining the reasons for the collapse of the campaign built around the H-Block struggle. The fact that the section on "The Church" draws comparisons between Christ dying on the cross and the deaths of the ten hunger strikers in Long Kesh should give a flavour of what is a refreshing view of the role of the church in people's oppression.

Turning to Crime & Prison, this to me was the most original of the contributions and really captures

society. Agreed, but if that is the case neither of these types of crime should occur in a free society. Why then have a long discussion on how to deal with muggers and rapists in a free society? The pamphlet identifies the central question to be who decides what should be done with the perpetrators of these crimes. Surely in a free society, the central question must be why these crimes are continuing to take place; and having read the section on Anarcho-Feminism, maybe part of the problem has got to do with putting rapists and muggers in the same category.

Viewed as a collective of five essays on aspects of Anarchism the pamphlet makes interesting and informative reading. As a general introduction to Anarchism, it could have benefitted from having a concluding section which drew together the points made in the five essays if only because the person who will gain most from reading *Nobody Rules OK* is precisely the person who still confuses Anarchy with chaos.

PETE NASH



Dear Madam,

I have worked out the solution to Ireland's problems in this capitalist world. The unfortunate thing maybe that my solution is as capitalist as the problem. If it is I am sorry, but there are reasons behind the "madness".

Problem: Ireland is an agricultural capitalist country in the industrial capitalist Northern World. Ireland is not coping with the demands of this capitalist world. The reasons are obvious, the Irish are too clever to cope with a stupidity. (It might be jingoism, but at least it's Irish jingoism!)

Problem: To "feed" the industrial Society animals are subjected to industrial factory farming conditions.

Solution: Irish agricultural society strikes a blow for animals, and the people that eat animals. No factory farming in Ireland. All Irish agricultural products guaranteed "Irish", i.e., free range cattle, eggs, chickens, sheep, pork, turkeys, etc, etc. . . . Free range is expensive but "You get what you pay for!"

I have an idea that the Irish, a million years behind the rest of the

world, have not caught up on such modern ideas as cement powder in cattle feed, de-beaking battery poultry, sow strapping for life, etc, etc. . . You are what you eat. Eat Irish. Be secure in the knowledge that Irish products is wholefood produce. Support the campaign for Real Food.

I also have the solution to the abortion debate. Chop off Mick Dicks! I don't know of any Church ruling against castration. With such a policy how could any party fail in Ireland?

If your publication is non-socialist-denominational send me a hundred copies and I'll sell them. If I don't I'll send them back.

The only position you hold that I query is "that such a change of system goes far deeper than anything that can be achieved through parliamentary methods alone". I query the vagueness. What does this mean? I hope not violence!

I have issue No. 3 from Collett's in Charing Cross Road. The only place I've found your publication. I obtained issue No. 2 from the same place, unfortunately it went out with the rubbish. If you can spare the first two issues please send them. I am serious about selling future issues. Let's go!

Yours sincerely,

Mick Harrington  
87 Palmerston Road,  
Wimbledon  
London SW 19  
6th November 1982

Dear Madam,

On second thoughts cancel my request for 100 copies of your magazine. I probably wouldn't be able to sell any.

Yours regretfully,

Mick Harrington  
Wimbledon  
London SW 19  
8th November 1982

Editorial Note: This is for real.

## The Sackville String Band

Bluegrass and  
American Old Time

Slattery's

Capel Street

EVERY TUESDAY

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# YOU CAN'T EVEN BLOODY WELL POSTER NOW

DES DERWIN looks at the new Litter Act and suggests that the Left should unite to oppose its repressive sections.

You would hardly imagine that a law with the inoffensive and public-spirited title of the "Litter Act 1982" would amount, in parts, to a serious piece of repressive legislation. It has gone unopposed and unremarked on the Left, yet the Litter Act represents a major legal limitation on the practical activity of any oppositional campaign and an attack on the civil right to free speech. Meanwhile, the hypocrisy of this legislation — for instance empowering Dublin Corporation, which has presided over the destruction of a once fine city, to go after sweet paper discarders — is par for the system.

Section 7 of the Act states, "A person who is not the owner, occupier or person in charge thereof shall not exhibit or cause to be exhibited thereon any article or advertisement," (in other words a poster) on, "any structure or other land, door, gate, window, tree, pole or post which is in or fronts any public place". The big change here is "any public place".

Ireland has never been the safest place for the political posterer. In the 40's a man was shot in the stomach by a Special Branch detective for the "crime" of putting up an IRA poster. In recent times the situation for the fly posterer has been roughly as follows. There was a legal right to post in a public place. The Phantom Fly Posterer usually plastered both public and private objects and, particularly in the case of the political posterer, risked Garda intervention. Uniformed Gardai would sometimes intervene, almost always in the case of obvious private property such as a shop front window or an Adshel bus shelter. The political police would tackle all political postering to take names and addresses at least and arrests were not uncommon. While "doing" shopfronts and the like was strictly *verboten*, there was a certain tolerance of postering on hoardings and disused buildings even though, strictly speaking, they were private property. Dublin Corporation instituted for a time the "Brown Paper Man" to cover hoardings after they had been plastered. Posters neatly tied to

lamposts were always immune from law, if not harassment.

Now, the Litter Act tightens up on hoardings etc. by prohibiting posters on a structure that "fronts any public place" and, worst of all, prohibits them on any public object. The only exceptions are when placed by the owner or occupier or in three specific circumstances: you may poster in a public place for "exempted development" under the Planning Acts, for a public meeting or in relation to an election or a referendum. Even so, the posters must be taken down within seven

days of the event. There's another job for you, comrades.

Thus, such famous posters as "No National Wage Agreements", "Free Nicky Kelly", "No Evictions In The Inner City" and the H-Block "A Crime Is A Crime Is A Crime" could not now be legally fixed in a public place. Did the "Get To The Point" anti-nuke posters or those for the "Reclaim The Night" march advertise public meetings as such? The repressive potential is obvious.

A political organisation, trade union, campaign and its officers can be prosecuted for offending

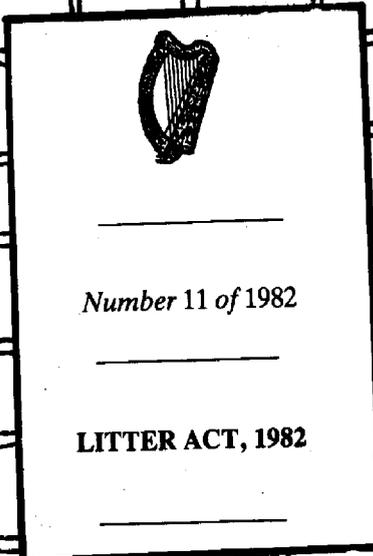
posters, stickers etc. placed on behalf of the corporate body. The same for a person on whose behalf the deed is done. Another charge for Nicky Kelly?

Section 3.2 of the Act also has its potential use against political propaganda. "A person shall not load, transport, unload or otherwise handle any substance, material or thing, or carry on a trade, in a manner that creates or tends to create litter in a public place or litter that is visible from a public place". Fine. Very hygienic. But what about giving out leaflets on the street or outside a meeting? A litter warden may fine you £5 on the spot if he or she has "reasonable grounds for believing that a person is committing or has committed an offence under Section 3."

The on the spot fines apply only to Section 3. All others lead straight to prosecution and, on conviction, to a fine not exceeding £800. In relation to both Section 3 and 7, you must also give and verify your name and address to a warden and if you refuse a Garda may arrest you without warrant. Even armchair revolutionaries may not be safe now: "Where a mechanically propelled vehicle is used in the commission of an offence under Section 3" the owner or driver shall also be guilty of an offence!

There are many other potentially repressive sections of this Act. This potential arises mainly because local authorities have discretion above the proscriptions of the Act to act on what "appears" to them to be litter. Above all — and this applies throughout the Act — nowhere is a distinction made between litter and legitimate (or previously legitimate) political activity; the broadcasting of political ideas.

The Left is notoriously difficult to unite on any issue. Yet the Litter Act physically constrains the work of all the Left. Surely on this matter we can look forward to a closing of the ranks. A united campaign for amendments to the Litter Act should be organised, even at this late stage, in order to consign its repressive sections to the "dustbin of history"



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