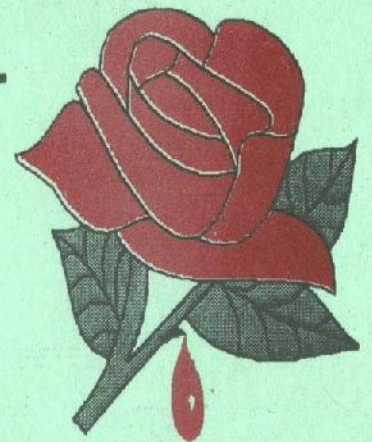


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Why the Irish Labour Party Fails



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A Socialist Worker pamphlet

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Introduction

The size of the vote for the Labour Party in the 1992 election was an exciting development in Irish politics. For it indicated that thousands of people are fed up with the main right wing parties, and are looking for an alternative.

In the cities, especially Dublin, Labour gained from a dramatic swing, whilst Fianna Fail and Fine Gael took a hammering. The last election marked a watershed in Irish politics, the monolithic support for Fianna Fail is crumbling.

It is no wonder that the right wing parties are struggling to retain working class support. For the reality of their policies has meant an increase in unemployment and poverty, and this despite the fact that the economy was growing.

The last Fianna Fail government showed itself to be blatant in taking the side of Ireland's wealthy and privileged against the working class. Whilst Goodman was bailed out by the government, to the tune of tens of millions of pounds, Charlie McCreevy cut Social Welfare twelve times. Thousands of Social Welfare recipients who no longer get support with their ESB bills have good reason to be bitter about the last government's priorities.

Nor are Fine Gael or the PDs anything other than ardent supporters of the employers. Their manifestos and speeches all emphasised one message. They were determined to reduce government spending regardless of the consequences for workers' living standards.

Labour on the other hand is different to these parties. One simple example shows this. The Beef Tribunal revealed that Larry Goodman gave thousands of pounds to Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, and the PDs - but nothing to the Labour Party.

Labour draws its support from the Trade Unions. They appeal for a more liberal, more caring society. In their manifesto they made a number of promises for workers: such as diverting subsidies from private landlords into building more public housing; opposing privatisation and an increase in Social Welfare benefits.

It is for this reason, that Labour have connections to the aspirations and organisations of the working class, that means the decision of thousands of voters to support them at the last election is a move to be welcomed. Certainly, everyone who wants to see a more equal and just society must have been delighted to see Fine Gael and Fianna Fail losing their decades old grip over the Irish population.

Labour's electoral progress will raise hopes that they will be able to bring about improvements in the living standards of the working class. The supporters of the Labour Party are now arguing with renewed enthusiasm that their strategy can work, that they can make a difference.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to show that any such expectations are going to be dashed. That for workers to achieve substantial reform, let alone a more fundamental

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change, a completely different approach to that of Labour's is necessary.

The SWM believes that there is a great gulf between the world as it is now - with exploitation, war, famine and oppression - and the world as it should be, a society which is organised in order to meet people's needs. The gulf is the existence of a ruling capitalist class, and the only way it can be crossed is in a great leap, revolution.

Most supporters of the Labour Party believe that such a fundamental change in society is impossible. The mainstream, centre-right, current of the party have settled for a much more modest aim. Their strategy is to participate in the running of the system, claiming that their influence can make a difference. Their sole goal is to blunt the vicious attacks proposed by the right-wing parties, to make cuts less deep and less drastic.

There is a more ambitious section of the Labour Party, the small left-wing group, represented by TDs such as Emmet Stagg and Michael D Higgins. They do hope to change the system we live under, they do aim to challenge the employers, the privileged and the wealthy. However, they share with the rest of the party a view that revolution is impossible.

Instead they propose what they see to be an easier alternative, to use the parliamentary system which exists in Ireland. Their aim is to get working class representatives elected to the Dail. These people can then use the governmental system to legislate on behalf of the working class, slowly but surely shifting the balance of power away from the capitalist class, until a more just society emerges for everyone.

Both these views, left and right within the party, rest on two assumptions: that it is possible to manage the Irish economy on behalf of workers; and that such legislation coming from the Dail can be enforced upon the capitalist class.

Both these assumptions are false.

Managing the economy?

The Labour Party take for granted the fact that the world we live in is a capitalist one, where a small minority of people control production. Their view is that through the right government policies the interests of the capitalist class can be reconciled with the interests of the rest of the population. For example, in order to save jobs, the Labour Party believes that it can encourage employers to retrain workers rather than sack them, especially if offered government inducements.

They also believe that through their work in the Dail, they will be able to use the state to intervene in the national economy, in such a way that the whole population will benefit. As they explained in the Labour programme at the last election:

"We have a heavy national debt already, no prudent Government, with the long-term interests of its people at heart, would set out to increase that debt by borrowing

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recklessly to finance day-to-day spending.

[But]... there is a wide range of areas of productive infrastructural development where careful and prudent borrowing, capable of producing an economic return over time is justified...

Such borrowing can and must be undertaken in such a way as to enable the debt/GNP ratio to continue to fall, and will therefore be dependent on growth and additional activity. A new and prudent approach would enable work to begin now on a host of essential projects, and would create thousands of jobs in the process."

This approach, of government involvement in the economy, is a form of Keynesianism. That is, a strategy based on the economist John Maynard Keynes' view that state intervention in the form of projects such as building roads, railways, hospitals etc, could postpone recessions and soften their impact on the working class.

Although this strategy appears to be common sense, it is not one which will stem the rising numbers of unemployed. Nor will it lead to rising living standards for the working class. Labour's approach will fail for three reasons.

Firstly, and most fundamentally, the assumption that there is a common interest between an employer and their workers is false. Karl Marx's earliest articles on economics made this point completely clear. He pointed out how for the capitalist to make profits, they must exploit the workers they employ. Far from considering the health and wellbeing of their workers, the employer sees the workers as merely an entry in the debit side of their accounts. Every extra pound spent on wages and good conditions for workers is an amount to be deducted from the eventual profits.

This exploitation is not because the capitalist is necessarily vindictive personally, but because they are part of a fiercely competitive and brutal system. Those companies which fall behind are driven into bankruptcy. To stay ahead of their rivals every manager worries about how to get their workers to work harder, longer, and for as little as possible.

The manner in which the capitalist system works crushes Labour's hopes of uniting managers and workers. Even during periods of growth there is constant struggle between workers and their managers. Whenever profits are threatened, every company looks for layoffs and speed-ups. They try to get out of their difficulties at the expense of their workers. The idea that in these circumstances it is possible to restore the fortunes of a company, and at the same time provide more jobs is simply wishful thinking.

The second reason why Labour's economic strategy will fail the working class is that just as a company operating in the interests of workers is impossible in a capitalist system, so too it is impossible for any government to run the economy of a country for everyone. Accepting the constraints of a weak capitalist economy - especially in the current long, drawn out, recession - means accepting rising unemployment and further attempts to lower workers' living standards.

The Labour Party's plan for jobs, as they themselves admit, is reliant upon the Irish

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economy growing. Yet the economy is in trouble. In particular, the National Debt at £27bn is still greater than a whole years economic activity. And this despite a period of growth from 1987 to 1991. Now that growth is more unsure, the government is faced with very bleak prospects indeed.

A revolutionary approach to the recession is to point out that the problems of the economy do not stem from a lack of demand, but low profit levels for investors. We need more hospitals, better housing, better services as well as to help parts of the world struggling with even more basic needs. Every person currently unemployed could be doing useful work meeting those needs.

The government will never set about providing such work, as it operating on behalf of the Irish capitalist class, in a very competitive world. Just as with individual companies, expenditure on welfare, or alleviating miserable conditions of life, is seen as wasted. Irish big business sees no profit in the work that is needed to improve the lives of the majority of the population, instead they want low levels of taxation, massive state subsidies, and as little Government spending on Social Welfare as possible. In brief, state backing for them, austerity for us.

To seriously set about creating jobs would mean coming into conflict with this class. It would mean for example, renouncing further debt repayments.

At the moment interest payments alone on the National Debt amount to over £2bn a year, more than half of which goes into the pockets of Irish investors. At a stroke, a government prepared to defy the capitalist class could have the money for ten new hospitals.

But to challenge the employers, to increase taxes on the wealthiest individuals and companies, would mean rejecting the view that profits are to come before all other considerations.

When it comes to the reality of taking responsibility in government, Labour are caught by their basic commitment to seeing the country become more profitable. This puts them in a position which contradicts their ambition to create jobs. They understand that the capitalist system is sick and decaying, but rather than seeing this as an opportunity to destroy it, they are concerned to patch it up. Inevitably this means supporting the demands of the capitalist class and undermining their ability to deliver on even the thinnest of reforms for workers.

The final reason why Labour will fail to manage the economy is that their belief in Keynesian type policies to solve the problems of the recession are mistaken

To advocate that within the national boundary of Ireland an interventionist government could get the economy going again, is to dream of a previous era. In the period from the late 1930s to the 1960s state intervention to protect markets for home based industries did make some sense. The world was much more segmented into national economies than it is now. But throughout this period the world market grew rapidly, production across borders becoming the most efficient way of competing.

Today, state control over companies is not enough to ensure a country's economy

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prosper. The collapse of the Eastern European economies testifies to that. Even the more modest strategy, of the government spending more than it receives in taxes in order to stimulate the economy, is not a solution to the current recession.

Such spending would be a short term flurry, which did nothing to deal with the problems of low profit levels. It would mean further government borrowing, which is already the most pressing problem for the Irish economy. There would also be balance of trade problems since there simply aren't the Irish companies making the goods that people, or even the state, would be buying.

As long ago as 1977 the Labour Party of Britain, in government at the time, gave up on a Keynesian strategy for these reasons. The then Prime Minister James Callaghan saying to the party conference "I used to believe that governments could spend their way out of recessions. Now we know that is not true."

According to their promises, Labour intends to borrow an extra £200m for initiatives that will create jobs. Any such government spending which improves the lives of the mass of the population will be welcomed by socialists. However this figure is just a drop in the ocean compared to the size of the country's problems. It is less than a tenth of the interest payments on the National Debt.

Their commitment to running the system tells us in advance that they will not challenge the capitalist class. Instead they will seek to participate in running the country at a time when to restore profit levels requires savage cuts in jobs and welfare.

How other Labour Parties failed

The proof that it is not possible to manage a capitalist economy in the interests of workers is evident in the experience of Labour in office elsewhere in the world. Given that these were majority, single party governments, they are a clear warning as to consequences of Labour's strategy.

When Mitterrand's Socialist Party won the elections in *France*, 1981, 200,000 people celebrated on the streets of Paris. Today there are 2.5 million workers unemployed, and the government has been responsible for repeated cuts of billions from public spending.

However profit levels did rise under Mitterrand. In 1984, profits soared by 24%. This was not accompanied by gains for workers but the very opposite. £6bn was cut from spending, and 100,000 public sector jobs were axed. That year workers' living standards dropped by the greatest amount in quarter of a century. Implementing

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policies in the interests of the capitalist class meant the Socialist Party being more ruthless than its predecessors.

To deflect from their responsibility the Socialist leaders pandered to anti-immigrant racism.

As a result racist attacks have increased and the nazi National Front of Le Pen has made advances.

The demoralisation of their rule meant that in 1986, Jacques Chirac's right wing party, the RPR won the parliamentary election, although Mitterrand stayed as president.

In *Australia* the Labour Party came to power in 1983. Then the combined wealth of the richest 200 people was less than 5bn Australian dollars. Today it is five times that.

Meanwhile workers have seen the value of their wages drop 7.5%. Over two million people live below the poverty line; evictions and mortgage defaults are at record levels.

In a particularly worrying example given the talk of "workfare", in Ireland, Labour has put through attacks most right-wing governments would never get away with.

Unemployment benefit has been replaced with a "Job Search Allowance" worth just £24. To get it unemployed workers must prove they are "actively seeking work."

In *Spain*, Phillippe Gonzalez's Socialist Party has done no better. After ten years in government unemployment is at a massive 20%.

They too tried to cut unemployment benefit, but were met last year with massive resistance including a general strike.

Because of the resistance to its austerity measures, the Labour Government has introduced strict anti-union laws.

Again they have tried to lay the blame for poverty elsewhere, scapegoating gypsies and immigrants for drugs and crime.

Even if the Irish Labour Party formed a majority government, these experiences are proof that they would find themselves responsible for vicious cuts and attacks on the working class.

The Labour left will agree that the party should not try to run a capitalist system. They argue that the point of electing Labour TDs is to stand up to the employers, that Labour should introduce progressive legislation regardless of the wishes of big business and the banks.

This raises the question of who it is the government rely upon to force change. A strategy of legislative change means relying upon the co-operation of top civil servants, judges and police chiefs.

Are these people neutral servants of whoever is in office?

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The state

In the eyes of the Labour Party, the driving seat of change is the Dail. Historical changes are a result of debate and resolutions passed by a majority of the TDs. If we want to be in charge of the process of change, we have no alternative but to try and get elected.

But is Leinster House the centre of power?

Surrounding the 165 TDs in the Dail is a whole apparatus of government rule: a civil service to carry through the legislation, a system of repression to enforce it - judges, the Gardai, the prisons and the army. The assumption of the Labour Party is that these people are neutral, that they will respect the legislation introduced by whoever forms the government, that they will obey the democratic wishes of the population.

This assumption is false. The people running the state are far from neutral. By and large they come from privileged backgrounds. The top state officials preside over a legal and administrative system evolved to defend the class who controls the economy, the capitalist class.

Most active army duties in Ireland consist of anti-Republican work. The remainder, of escorting money for the banks, and on occasion breaking strikes.

Laws are framed to defend the owners of wealth and property from the working class. It is perfectly legal for an employer to throw thousands of people out of a workplace onto the dole, but if the majority of the workers of a company want to get rid of their boss they won't be able to do so through the courts.

Building societies will find the full weight of the state behind them if they wish to evict people for falling behind on their mortgage payments. But it is illegal for the homeless to take over empty buildings for their use. If as a result people die of cold on the streets of Dublin, the employers take no responsibility. In the eyes of the law, it is the unfortunate consequence of being poor.

The people who enforce the law, accept its class bias. That's why you never see gardai raiding wealthy golf clubs in search of employers who've been robbing the labour of workers. It is also why Larry Goodman can get away with paying just 1% of his taxes, whilst a woman in Cork was sent to jail last year for not paying her water rates.

The existence of this unelected state apparatus is a result of our living in a society where the privileges of a tiny minority have to be defended from the rest of us. The state is a physical barrier to change in every country, but especially so in Ireland, where North and South there exists some of the most repressive forces in Europe. The troops and police are overtly on the streets in the North, but it is the South which has the highest number of police per person in Europe.

Even if the left of the Labour Party could get a majority in the Dail, eighty-three TDs are in no position to challenge this power. The capitalist class use their control over

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companies to get around progressive legislation, knowing they have the sympathy of the judges and police chiefs.

More fundamentally, the capitalist class are prepared to dispense altogether with elected governments if the stakes are high enough.

In Chile a parliamentary democracy existed from the thirties, with well established traditions of debate and electoral changes in governments. A Popular Front government which included left parties had been in office as early as 1931. Everyone, including the most radical parties accepted that the military were also committed to this democracy.

Yet on 11th September 1973 in Chile, General Pinochet led the army to round up all the radicals and working class activists, crushing workers' organisations and arresting the Socialists who had been elected to government three years earlier. Over the next twelve months 30,000 people were killed, including the president, Allende.

This was the bloody culmination of repeated attempts by the Chilean capitalists to undermine the Socialist-led government.

Their lockouts and sabotage of transport had backfired, only provoking workers to increase their organisation and control over society. Given this threat to their position, Chile's rulers turned to the military, without the slightest regard for the activities of the parliament.

Or closer to home, in Germany in the thirties, society was placed under enormous strain due to the severity of the recession. Faced with ruin the middle classes and the unemployed cast about for radical answers, and gave increasing support to Hitler. The workers in their unions, the Labour Party (SPD) and the Communist Party fought stubbornly against the consequences of the slump. And the capitalist class grew increasingly alarmed at their inability to control events.

Under these circumstances the democracy of the Weimar Republic collapsed. Sections of big business decided Hitler's movement was capable of restoring order for them. They funded it, and in January 1933 threw their weight behind him. Hitler was made Chancellor. His thugs were integrated into the state machine which was then turned to the task of smashing the Left.

Even after Hitler's appointment there were massive strikes and demonstrations of protest by workers. The tragedy of those times, was that the Labour Party leaders argued that the state was neutral. Their paper said not to develop the protest action, but to rely on constitutional and legal methods to challenge Hitler.

The significance of these examples is that they are moments when the image of freedom and democracy is stripped from the apparatus that is running the state, and reveals it not to be made up of dignified scholars ready to serve the majority, but people who share the outlook and interests of the capitalist class.

This is why Marx had a completely different approach to the state. He believed it had to be destroyed and replaced by a different type of democracy, one where those who are delegated responsibilities are accountable to the working class. This was the lesson

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Marx and Engels drew from the experience of the Paris Commune of 1871. There the workers rose up and for a brief period took power.

They elected a government, the Commune, which was responsible and revocable. It was a working body not a parliamentary talk show. It abolished the army, and declared the sole armed force to be the National Guard, in which all citizens capable of bearing arms were to be enrolled.

The police were stripped of any political function and turned into revocable agents of the Commune. Judges and magistrates were to be elected and recallable. They decided that the highest salary for any employee of the Commune, including themselves, was no more than the average workers' wage. Church was decreed separate from state and all payments for religious purposes ceased.

Engels summarised the experience:

From the outset the Commune was compelled to recognise that the working class, once come to power, could not go on managing with the old state machine; that in order not to lose again its only just conquered supremacy, this working class must, on the one hand do away with all the old repressive machinery previously used against itself, and, on the other, safeguard against its own deputies and officials, by declaring them all, without exception subject to recall at any moment.

The decisive weakness of even the most radical Labour Party is that by opposing themselves to revolution, they oppose themselves to the one force that can break through the wall of the capitalist state.

Could Labour be changed?

So far this pamphlet has shown that even if Labour had every intention of reforming society for the benefit of the working class, it would find it impossible to challenge the economic and state power of the capitalist class from the Dail.

The truth about the Irish Labour Party is that it has no record nor intention of enacting radical change. It is no exaggeration by Emmet Larkin to describe it as the "most opportunistically conservative Labour Party anywhere in the known world."

Certainly no other Labour Party has so consistently entered into government alongside right wing parties, and been so feeble in its efforts on behalf of workers.

One fact alone sums up the rotten tradition of the Party. From 1932 to 1977, 45 of its 70 year history, it was led by two men who were also members of the secretive, all male, right-wing Catholic organisation, the Knights of St. Columbanus: William Norton and Brendan Corish.

To understand the nature of the Labour Party, and whether socialists should try to change it, it is necessary to look at its social and organisational roots.

The foundations of the Irish Labour Party

Because both James Connolly and Jim Larkin encouraged the Irish Trades Union Congress to stand candidates to represent workers, a myth has grown up that the Labour Party has a radical past. In his speech in Sligo-Leitrim during the election campaign Dick Spring, appeared in front of a banner of James Connolly. This has led some Socialists to argue that the Labour Party once did stand in Connolly's tradition, and can be won to it again.

The real story is one of a disastrous beginning as far as Irish workers were concerned.

After the 1916 rising, the leadership of the Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party passed to T Johnson and D Campbell. Although close associates of Connolly's, their strategy was to consolidate the expanding union machinery, concentrating on recruitment to the union. In this goal, politics was potentially divisive, and so at the 1916 conference in Sligo, two months after the rising, no mention was made of Connolly's role, nor any appeal launched on his behalf.

The years after the first world war were stormy ones in Ireland, with a massive revival of working class organisation. Nationalist histories concentrate on the guerilla war against the British, the establishment of Dail Eireann and the civil war. These were dramatic moments in Irish society, but at the same time and connected to the fight for national emancipation was the most impressively militant movement of Irish workers.

The number of affiliates to the Irish Trades Union Congress grew from 111,000 in 1914, to 250,000 in 1920, to a peak of 300,000 in 1921. The Transport Union had an even more marked revival in its fortunes from the lock out of 1913. In 1916 it had 5,000 members, by 1918 50,000 and in 1920 130,000.

There were 28 local general strikes between 1917 and 1921. Before 1922 workers took over eight enterprises, and in solidarity with the Russian Revolution called their factory committees "soviets". In 1922 another eighty soviets were proclaimed, the most serious case being the occupation of 39 creameries in North Munster. On the land there was huge opposition by farm labourers to wage cuts.

These were times when a revolutionary approach would have gained a massive response. Even without there being a significant minority of revolutionaries a large section of the workers of Ireland were striving to copy the achievements of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. The possibilities were there for the workers of Belfast and Dublin to have fought together to bring about a different settlement to that of partition, a Workers' Republic.

Their initiative and efforts were eventually smashed by the Free State in the South,

and the Orange State in the North. Labour's role was not one of building and developing the struggle, but of helping smother it.

As the tide of struggle for national liberation began to rise, the Labour leaders in the South accommodated to Sinn Fein. In concentrating on building up the union apparatus and their property assets, which grew very swiftly, they avoided any challenge to the Nationalists. This despite the fact that workers played a key role in the defeat of the British, in particular through a huge anti-conscription strike, and a railworkers' boycott of British troops and equipment.

Rather than develop the involvement of workers further, to achieving their own demands, the leading officials kept them subordinate to the nationalist movement. O'Brien for the Labour movement sat with the Catholic Hierarchy and Home Rulers in an all class alliance against conscription.

In the general elections of 1918 the ITUC decided to give Sinn Fein a free run in the South by not standing Labour candidates. Their claim was that workers of Ireland "should willingly sacrifice for a brief period their aspiration towards political power if thereby the future of the nation can be enhanced."

In 1919 when the workers of Limerick proclaimed a soviet in the town, in protest at British army restrictions. Tom Johnson, President of the ITUC and future leader of the Labour Party, advised them to evacuate the town, as they could not hope to beat the army.

Labour did not stand as a coherent force until the general elections of 1922, when they were popularly understood to be pro-treaty. 17 TDs were elected. James Larkin, although in America was nominated, but refused to stand asking "what of Ulster?" and declaring "a Workers' Republic or death".

Larkin was marginal to the new people in charge of the Unions on the ground. They were completely adverse to jeopardising their position through raising the level of struggle, and quickly set about showing the new state that they could be depended upon.

In 1923 the ITUC report informed the new authorities that "were it not for the mollifying influence of Labour leaders and officials the present position would be infinitely worse."

The reason for this conservative approach by the Labour leaders was the emergence in Ireland of a Trade Union bureaucracy. Growth in the unions, especially after the first world war, inevitably meant a growth in full time administrators and officials. These people, staffing the top of massive union structures are inevitably detached from the rank and file, living a different life to those at work. They saw their role as negotiators not revolutionaries.

Even the radical socialist language that they occasionally resorted to, was dropped to show their respectability. At the conference of 1918, an amendment to aspire to the common ownership of the means of production was rejected as "asking the congress to subscribe to James Connolly and George Russell rather than to Sydney Webb and

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Arthur Henderson" - it received just two votes.

Ironically enough, over in England, Arthur Henderson did back the introduction of the same proposition into the English Labour Party's constitution - Clause 4 - in order to keep workers away from revolution.

In the North at this time, especially in Belfast, workers were also displaying high levels of militancy and socialist aspirations. In 1919 a shipyard and engineers strike for shorter hours involved over 40,000 workers both Protestant and Catholic, the strike committee was mainly Protestant, but the chair was Catholic. For four weeks their activities shook the authorities.

The potential existed to forge a revolutionary organisation North and South that could maintain such unity, inspired by the aim of achieving a Socialist Ireland. But once the Labour movement in the South was led into accommodation with the Free State, the struggle against partition was left to the republicans, whose goals offered nothing for Protestant workers to rally to.

As a consequence sectarianism and repression broke the movement in the North, and split the working class movement across the country. The more principled socialists in the Protestant working class were in effect betrayed by the ITUC leaders in the South, and suffered attacks and expulsion from their workplaces. The Unionists regained their grip over a population who had shown the potential to escape them.

In general the cowardly and accommodating role of the Labour Party was set from its earliest beginnings as an adjunct of the rapidly expanding officials of the Trade Unions. M Gallagher summarises the picture:

"In other words, there is no question of a radical Labour Party of 1912-22 subsequently becoming timid and reformist. In reality there was no Labour Party before 1922, and although there were radicals before that date, they were not the ones who created the party."

The point is that even at the most revolutionary period in the history of the Irish working class, Labour was a miserable failure, and not a vehicle for socialist change. Nor when such periods occur again will Labour be any better.

A history of betrayal

The subsequent history of the Labour Party gives no encouragement to those who believe that by joining, they can contribute to bringing about improvements to the lives of working class people.

Returning from America in 1923 to find a strong bureaucratic grip on the Transport Union, Larkin launched a fight from his Dublin base to expel O'Brien and a host of other officials. He explained in his paper the *Irish Worker*:

"We had the honour of initiating the Irish Labour movement. We return to find

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a Labour Party lost to all sense of dignity, manipulated by ambitious self-seekers, a feeble imitation of the English Labour Party, and which, parrot-like repeats the phrases of its prototype, but in a less vigorous manner."

The high tide of workers actions had passed, but Larkin had no patience for building what would have to begin as a small revolutionary organisation, capable of building on rank and file opposition to the officials. Instead he put himself at the head of a split in the ITGWU, the Workers Union of Ireland.

The subsequent bitter rivalry, in the face of an employers offensive did nothing to consolidate and defend working class organisation. By 1926 the number of Trade Union members had fallen to 95,000, and only 67,000 were in the two transport unions.

The depression of the thirties added to this decline. Politically Labour found a large section of their electoral support stripped away from them when Fianna Fail entered the Dail.

Before the 1932 election, the Free State remained very much a neo-colony of the British Capitalist class, who had been left dominant over Irish industry. The large farm owners' party, and government, Cumann na nGaedheal offered no challenge to this state of affairs.

Fianna Fail set out to consciously create a populist movement of industrialists and workers by pointing to the British Empire as the cause of Ireland's continuing difficulties. Labour having been a loyal opposition from the founding of the state, appeared more conservative than de Valera's party; for example, whilst Fianna fail backed a boycott campaign over the payment of land annuities, Labour called on farmers to make the payments.

When Fianna Fail had some success in stimulating Irish industry with tariff measures and winning concessions from Britain by threatening to withhold all land annuities, Labour did an about turn and began backing them uncritically. As William Norton, leader of the party explained:

"It is because we in the Labour Party have hopes that Fianna Fail will live up to their declared programme that we are going to vote for Deputy de Valera."

At the same time as giving workers no independent voice in the Dail, they also refused to back the Republicans of Spain in their fight against Franco, and more criminally did nothing to stop the growth of the Blueshirts in Ireland.

Under the leadership of O'Duffy, later to be Fine Gael's first president, and with support from the Catholic Hierarchy, the Blueshirts set about trying to repeat Mussolini's and Hitler's goals in Ireland. The IRA and the Communist Party proposed that Labour join a united front to stop them, but at their annual congress the Labour Party refused to be connected with it in any way.

In 1936, the Labour Party did adopt a proclamation that a Workers' Republic was desirable in Ireland. But how rhetorical the phrase was and how timid the Labour Party's leaders was quickly revealed. The Teachers Union, the INTO, asked the Catholic Hierarchy their opinion of the idea. When it was pronounced as objectionable,

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the term "Workers' Republic" was quickly dropped, by 89 votes to 29 at the following conference.

A small revival in the Labour Party's fortunes occurred in 1937. The continuing depression and pressure on workers living standards began to undermine support for Fianna Fail. In 1937, Labour had thirteen seats, enough to be able to bring about the defeat of Fianna Fail. Larkin was in the Dail as an independent Labour Candidate, although by now severely disheartened by the long downturn in militancy. But once again Labour backed Fianna Fail without attempting to offer any challenge from the left.

The 1938 agreement with Britain, which renounced naval bases in Ireland, was a great success for de Valera, who called an election, and won a comfortable majority. In 1941 this government passed the Trade Union Act, a serious threat to the unions. Hundreds of working class supporters of Fianna Fail were disgusted and applied for membership of the Labour Party, as indeed did Larkin. Later that year in the local elections Labour became the largest party in Dublin, and made big gains in the general election of 1943, taking eight of the ten seats that Fianna Fail lost, bringing them up to 17.

However growth was hit by a new split in the Labour movement. In protest at Labour's endorsement of Larkin's candidature, the Transport Union officials decided to disaffiliate. Five TDs sponsored by the Transport Union left to stand as National Labour in the next election, which saw the two parties fall back to 12 TDs.

The split in the Labour Party was soon joined by a split in the ITUC where a number of unions led by the Transport Union broke away to set up the Congress of Irish Unions. A division not healed until the formation of ICTU in 1959.

William Norton, the Labour Party leader led the Party into its first coalition with Fine Gael in the Inter Party Government of 1948 to 1951, and then again in 1954 to 1957.

The first government is now infamous for its withdrawal of Noel Browne's Mother and Child Scheme, which aimed at limited provision of free health care. The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church put pressure on the government, and Labour capitulated. But as William Norton had already made clear, the "Labour Party proudly acknowledges the authority of the Catholic Church in all matters which related to public policy and public welfare."

The second government was one of austerity, record unemployment and massive emigration.

That the top Union officials were also particularly cringing is clear from the Holy Year in 1950, when unions, including those with members in the North, made a presentation to Pope Pius XII. Frank Purcell, General Secretary of the ITGWU led a delegation from the CIU and presented the Pope a special bouquet of 500,000 masses, 300,000 Holy Communions, and 700,000 Rosaries as well as the address of loyalty on behalf of 200,000 workers.

Whilst the Labour Party remained a pitiful organisation, with stronger rural roots

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than in Dublin, the nature of Irish society was slowly changing. The growth of industry in the cities brought into being a new generation of workers. Trade Union membership soared to 327,000 in the Republic by the end of the 50s. This represented a higher density of organisation than in Britain.

From 1964 the number of strike days leapt, in five of the next eight years there were more than half a million strike days. Large strikes took place in construction, print, paper mills, banks and by maintenance craftsmen. Unofficial rank and file groups emerged and built a strong tradition of respecting picket lines. When the Government jailed some of the striking ESB workers in 1967, the ITUC urged their release, and paid their fines for fear of an explosion akin to that shortly to take place in France.

Inevitably the growth and militancy of the working class, especially in Dublin had an impact on the Labour Party. Membership began to grow, with the number of branches rising from 248 in 1964 to 501 in 1969. As well as by the recruitment of prominent liberal intellectuals such as Conor Cruise O'Brien in 1968.

For the first time Labour proclaimed its aim to be socialism, and applied to join the Socialist International in 1966. The new leader, Brendan Corish explained that socialism was "a belief in equality, the primacy of the community, rather than the individual and a belief in efficiency."

The confidence and hopes of the party rose consistently with their vote. From 112,000 (9.1%) in 1957; to 136,000 (11.6%) in 1961; and 193,000 (15.4%) in 1965. In 1969 Corish expected Labour to break through into Ireland's second largest party. They stood 99 candidates in the election of that year.

The election campaign was fierce, with Labour under attack for being communist and anti-catholic. Neil Blaney of Fianna Fail alleged that not only did Labour consider Cuba as a model, but would invite the Red Army to set up nuclear missiles around the coast.

Unsurprisingly Corish distanced himself from any hint of radicalism. He explained to the Wexford Press that he "had taken particular care to read his Encyclicals and reading them one finds we are much behind the ideas which Pope John propounded."

The outcome of the election was an increase in the Labour vote, but not the breakthrough they expected. 224,000 people voted for Labour (17%). Significantly they received 27% of the Dublin vote, a massive shift from their 8% support of the 50s.

As a result, the long silenced debate about whether Labour should go into coalition was re-opened. At the special conference of December 1970, a resolution was narrowly passed which argued that in coalition:

Labour is aware that it cannot expect to secure all of its aims, but believes that even their partial achievement will transform society for the better.

This argument has constantly been the justification for entering coalition. It has proved irresistible every time. For if you believe that it is possible to run the system in the interests of workers, then even the slightest participation in Government seems better than none. For a party orientated on the Dail there seems no realistic alternative

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to coalition.

Yet regardless of the make up of the Government, workers will protest, strike and demonstrate against attacks. The great objection to being in coalition is that instead of building on such resistance, and helping it succeed, the Labour Party finds itself trying to stifle and end the fight. In the process it demoralises its own supporters and gives both right wing parties a new impetus.

In 1973 Labour entered coalition with Fine Gael. They received the Ministries of Health; Labour; Post and Telegraph; Local Government and Industry. Initially their strategy seemed justified, as they had what was described as a "honeymoon period" of about a year, in which they pursued a number of popular policies. The rate of house building increased 50%, subsidies were introduced on basic foodstuffs, Social Welfare benefits rose ahead of inflation.

However the world recession that began the same year soon burst the bubble of progress. Corish's free hospital scheme was abandoned. A move to introduce the sale of contraceptives, albeit in chemists to married people, failed in a free vote in 1974. The Wealth Tax proposal already commented on, was gutted of any serious content. In 1975 and 1976 the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Bill and two further pieces of security legislation increased the police and army powers - in the name of repression against the Republicans. Labour had promised to change the legal status of women who were considered the property of their husbands, they failed to do so. Nor did they challenge the system of patronage, where lucrative state jobs and contracts are given to party supporters.

Worst of all they did nothing to help workers' living standards which were under a generalised attack from inflation, which doubled from 1973 to 1977. At the same time they presided over the loss of thousands of jobs. Unemployment rose from 71435 when the Government was formed, to 115942 by the election of 1977.

As a result of these attacks on workers, Labour declined again. Individual membership fell from 5100 in 1975 to 3474 in 1977. Their vote declined from 13.7% to 11.6% in 1977, and again to 9.9% in 1981.

Their entry into coalition again in the brief government of 1981 did them no good at all. The government was defeated upon the introduction of a savage budget of austerity measures. Labour having some responsibility for the proposed cuts, saw their vote drop further, to just 8.1% in the first election of 1982.

The second election that year saw Labour do just well enough, with 9.4%, to get back into coalition with Fine Gael. Again, the new government, which lasted until 1987, did not lead to any improvement in the position of the working class.

The three main figures in the Labour leadership today - Spring, Desmond and Quinn - were Ministers in that coalition government. There they implemented extremely right wing policies.

Spring offered huge tax breaks to the oil companies to begin exploration off the Irish coast. For workers on the other hand he offered repression, sending the Gardai in to

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attack ESB workers on strike in Cork.

Desmond allowed wealthy consultants to open a private clinic at the Beaumont hospital in Dublin, whilst he closed eight other hospitals in 1986.

The tragedy for supporters of Labour is that their expectations are constantly being betrayed by the experience of Labour in government. The leaders of the Labour Party see the arguments for coalition as being irresistible. Given their commitment to legislative change, they see no alternative than to grab all the Ministries they can.

Inevitably that means pursuing policies which attack the very people who voted for the party. The coalition today will be no different to all the previous ones, except that with the current world recession, it is likely to be even worse as far as workers are concerned. This is all the more likely as it is the right wing who currently dominate the Labour Party.

The model Labour Party

For a brief period in its history, the left made the running in the Labour Party. Following the disastrous performances in 1987, the general decline of the Labour Party membership, and the patent failure of the general centre-right strategy; the way was open for the left to win support at the conference that year in Cork.

Mervyn Taylor, the candidate backed by the left defeated Ruairi Quinn for the position of Chair of the party. Even more significantly, Emmet Stagg captured the Vice-Chair in opposition to Niamh Breathnach, a strong supporter of the party leadership.

However the left was pulling its punches. Instead of openly attacking the right wing of the party, instead of fighting for socialist ideas, they concentrated on the constitutional issue.

A motion from the ATGWU demanded that the leadership of the party be decided by conference rather than the Parliamentary Labour Party. It looked certain to win, until Party Leader Dick Spring proposed a compromise, a commission would be created to examine the issue.

Left winger Michael D Higgins argued against Spring's resolution, and for the principle of leaders elected by conference as follows:

I have worked with many different leaders and party officers, and I don't think anyone could accuse me of disloyalty or of any personal vindictiveness. The proposers of this principle are people who want to extend democracy - we must in our own party be a microcosm of the open society we want to build, and I'm worried that any extension of time would delay the day for the extension of this democratic principle.

Such a timid approach, not attacking the terrible record of the right-wing coalition

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Ministers, allowed Spring to get his way, by the narrow margin of 543 votes to 501.

After the conference Dick Spring set about smashing the influence of the left. The commission he had proposed was set up with his supporters. It met once a week for the next eighteen months to organise for the defeat of the left. When Emmet Stagg tried to use his new position to gather details of the membership of the party, he went to the headquarters but was prevented from gaining access to files by Spring and his advisor Fergus Finlay.

By 1989 the influence of the left was on the wane. Using Neil Kinnock's attack on the Militant as his example, Dick Spring opened the conference in Tralee with a vicious attack on the Militant Socialist group. 14 people who it was claimed were supporters of Militant Socialist were expelled by a majority of two to one, and the suspension of three Dublin West branches was confirmed. At the same time Dick Spring used the attack to back up a move to the right in terms of the ideas that the Labour Party stood for. In his main speech to conference he made it clear that the party's economic programme embraced the mixed economy and no longer had the aspiration of a socialist society.

The decline of the influence of the left was confirmed when Niamh Breathnach toppled Emmet Stagg from the Vice-Chair by 793 votes to 655.

By the following conference the retreat of the left had become an utter rout. In part this was due to the fact that working class resistance to the government and employers was at a record low level. Right wing officials in the unions felt completely secure.

However the collapse of the left was also due to a huge political weakness. Almost without exception, left wingers in the Labour Party believed that the Eastern European style of economies represented an improvement over the West. This fitted with their belief that socialists could take over and plan the economy from the Dail on behalf of the workers.

The overthrow of the dictatorial regimes by their own populations was welcomed by the SWM, since every step that improves the prospect of workers organising in their own interests is a step towards real socialism. For the Labour left it was a devastating blow.

At the 1991 conference Spring hammered the left. He referred gloatingly to the events in Eastern Europe, claiming they lent support to the strategy of working within a market economy. A new constitution was adopted which dropped the aspiration to hold essential industries in Public Ownership, and replaced it with the view that "the wish of the Irish people is for an open and mixed economy...where there will be a role for both a private sector and a dynamic public sector."

The new constitution also confirmed that the PLP was to play a policy making role, in other words it could ignore the wishes of conference, and symbolically, the Starry Plough was dropped in favour of the Red Rose.

The left were disarmed. Only by rejecting any view that Eastern Europe was at all socialist, but was in fact State Capitalist, could they have replied in confidence and

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tackled the principles of the right head on. Instead they had to resort to pleading for more time to study the constitutional changes.

The strength of the leadership over the party was confirmed when Niamh Breathnach moved on to be Chair of the party, whilst Jim Kemmy, another strong supporter of Spring, became Vice-Chair. Both on overwhelming votes.

The current Labour Party is as right wing as ever. Their policies are no different to those that have failed in the past. If there is to be a fight against the employers, and against government cuts, then an alternative strategy is needed. A strategy which is based on the ability of workers themselves to change the world.

Is revolution possible?

One attraction of the Labour Party argument is that it appears as realistic. A revolutionary approach on the other hand, a complete change in the way society works, from top to bottom, is dismissed as utopian. In evidence they point to the fact that they can get votes on their policies, whereas revolutionary views would only be held by a tiny number of people.

It is true that most of the time workers accept their daily routines as necessary and inevitable. Even if no one is enthusiastic about going to work, it seems as though there is no alternative, that we have no influence in the direction of society. Yet even when not overtly displayed, there is a constant struggle taking place between workers and their managers.

Just as every exploited class in history has fought back against their rulers, so too with the working class. At some point people take a stand against their oppression. It might be the arrogant behaviour of a manager; a determination to improve the level of pay; or more general issue such as deciding to support a campaign to keep open a local hospital.

At times this resistance can develop explosively, with the power to bring down the strongest dictatorship. For example, in June of 1978 the Shah of Iran confidently asserted "no one can overthrow me, I have the support of 700,000 troops, most of the people and all of the workers." By January 1979 he had fled. A strike wave led by oil workers had drawn in greater and greater numbers until the whole of the working class was united. When soldiers and the air force joined the upsurge, the Shah's regime was over.

In fact, compared to earlier exploited class such as slaves, or serfs, the working class is the most powerful revolutionary class in history. Capitalist production has led to massive and vital industries being dependent on the constant labour of workers. A few thousand railworkers can disrupt the employers of the whole country, simply by refusing to move their goods. Similar power is evident with all transport workers, as

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with engineers, postal workers, printers etc.

The argument that the working class has changed and no longer has this power is false. The nature of work is constantly changing under capitalism, but the exploitation and dependency upon the working class remains the same. Newer types of work, such as telecommunications, electronics and bank work have also brought great power into the hands of those workers.

Not only is the working class a force with enormous potential power, but the nature of exploitation under capitalism brings us together in a collective way. We have to cooperate to get work done, we have to stand together to win disputes.

It is for this reason that ideas such as "unity is strength" and "an injury to one is an injury to all" are constantly being reborn in the course of strikes and protests. It is out of such struggles that new values to those of greed and competition can be quickly forged.

The high points of working class resistance can transform people's lives more quickly in a matter of days than in years of daily routines. The German revolutionary socialist, Rosa Luxemburg, described how a mass strike can awaken the working class, revealing just how powerful we are, and how united we can be as a class.

For the first time awoke feeling and class consciousness in millions upon millions as if by an electric shock. And this awakening of class feeling expressed itself forthwith in the circumstances that the working class mass, counted by millions, quite suddenly and sharply came to realise how intolerable was that social and economic existence which they had patiently endured for decades in the chains of capitalism. There then began a spontaneous general shaking of and tugging at these chains.

In the course of changing the world, workers change themselves. They see where the different political parties really stand, the way in which the media is dominated by the views of the ruling class, the role of the police, the role of church leaders.

The fact that sweeping transformations in the outlook of workers can take place is especially important for understanding how the deadlock in the North of Ireland can be broken. In the course of large disputes in the past thousands of Protestant workers have come to hate Unionism and all that it stands for, and have come to see Catholic workers as their allies. As even in the most modest disputes, such as that to keep open the Brook Centre, Paisley and the DUP are easily revealed as being hostile to the real interests of Protestant workers. The Protestant working class have just as great a potential for revolutionary struggle, and revolutionary changes in outlook, as workers anywhere.

In the most deeply rooted revolutionary movements of workers, their actions are not just destructive of the old order, but immensely creative. Every upheaval involving millions of workers, and the collapse of the old regimes, has seen workers taking over the running of the workplaces, of their towns and cities.

In doing so they have created a democracy which is a thousand times richer than what

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passes for democracy today. For example, in 1905 in Russia a sense of intolerable grievance had built up amongst the working class, one which soared as a result of "Bloody Sunday" when the Tsar's troops opened fire on an unarmed crowd. So when the printers of Moscow went on strike, initially in order to win payment for printing punctuation marks, the conditions were such that the movement became more general.

Workers from the engineering, cabinet-making and tobacco industries sent delegates to meet with the printers and decide upon their actions. The first workers' council, or soviet, was born. Within days other towns were doing the same, soon soviets became the most important bodies in the land, as hundreds of thousands of workers joined the movement. At its height the Petrograd soviet had 562 deputies representing 200,000 workers, it became known as the workers' government.

The democracy of the workers' council is completely different to that of parliamentary bodies like the Dail.

The TDs are elected only every few years, and by such broad areas that they are accountable to no one. The workers deputy comes from a workplace where everyone knows him or her, and is recallable by their workmates.

The resolution of the TDs have little bearing on the day to day lives of the working class. The Dail does not challenge the capitalist class's control over production, that is why all government appear helpless to prevent unemployment. In the workers' council there is no separation between words and deeds, the people who produce everything in society are making the decisions.

Finally, as has been explained earlier, surrounding the Dail is an unelected state apparatus. Those appointed to work for the workers' council are elected and recallable.

Inevitably, the two types of democracy come into conflict. The situation where a revolutionary movement has brought workers' councils into being is one of dual power. One the one hand there is the control of production and society that the workers have through their committees, on the other hand, the capitalist class remains, with the generals, police chiefs and judges all determined to wrest power back into channels they can control.

This situation has happened repeatedly in modern history, for example: 1905 and again 1917 in Russia; 1918-23 in Germany; 1920 in Italy; 1936-37 in Spain; 1956 in Hungary; 1973 in Chile; 1974 in Portugal; 1979 in Iran and the Solidarnosc movement of 1980 in Poland.

The only example where workers succeeded in consolidating their organisations and taking all power into the hands of the soviets, was the 1917 one in Russia, where the Bolshevik party was vital in defeating an attempted military coup, and where having won the support of the majority of the working class, an insurrection was organised by the party in October, breaking up the old state apparatus and replacing it with a workers' government.

Elsewhere they were defeated, and on the occasions where Labour Parties existed they were decisive in betraying the revolutions. Most tragically of all, in Germany,

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where the workers rose following the example of the Russian revolution. They toppled the Kaiser and set up factory committees. Because the Labour Party was wedded to operating within the capitalist system, the leaders of the German SPD set about attempting to restore the stable order they were adapted to. In practice this played into the hands of the ruling class.

They did everything to mislead the movement, hold up the parliamentary system and belittle the workers' councils, they confused and dampened down the initiative of the masses. In the name of parliamentary democracy they organised and military unit, the Frei Corps, to restore the old order to power in towns across Germany, and where necessary to savagely repress the most active workers'. Many revolutionaries, including Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Leibknecht were murdered.

Today the decision to join the Labour Party, and work within the system can seem like a strategy to bring about gradual change for the working class. But this strategy finds itself in opposition to the real struggle of workers, and in times of revolution is a disastrous one. To achieve workers' power and a socialist society we need a different sort of party to that of Labour.

What kind of party is needed?

In their relationship to the working class there is a principled difference between the Labour Party and revolutionary socialists. The Labour Party believes in changing society on behalf of workers. Workers are the audience for the TDs' efforts, the people in whose name they speak.

From Karl Marx onwards, revolutionaries have believed that for socialism to be achieved, it has to be the act of workers themselves. That the working class are not merely victims of the capitalist system, but the force that can overthrow it.

This difference in principle leads to great differences in practice. For supporters of the Labour Party, elections are the great opportunity to achieve change. Their activity is concentrated in bursts around each elections, attempting to bring in the vote. In between elections the main Party activity is left up to the TDs' work in and around the Dail.

For the revolutionary party, as Lenin argued "the action of the masses - a big strike for instance - is more important than parliamentary activity at all times." Not only because it is through strikes and protests that reforms are won, but this activity is part of the process by which workers change themselves.

The practice of the revolutionary party is centred around workers' struggles.

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Supporting and developing solidarity, arguing from experience about the way forward. Beyond these direct activities the party has to develop clear ideas and provide answers which challenge the prevailing views of the world pushed through the education system, churches and media.

The difference in principle also reveals itself on the issue of leadership. The Labour Party is a bureaucratic machine, where the main decisions are taken at the very top of the party without reference to the bulk of members. There are annual conferences to decide policy, but these have very limited impact on the day to day activity of the Parliamentary Labour Party. Noel Browne described conferences as "exhilarating but effectively futile" and concluded that it was as though there were "two ideologically unconnected Labour parties - the socialist conference party, and the conservative parliamentary party."

By contrast a genuine revolutionary party has to be extremely responsive and democratic. It is an organisation of people who are active in trying to change the world, and because the initiative and experience of the working class movement is a constantly changing one, the Party has to be capable of drawing together the different experiences and learning from the movement.

Even the most revolutionary party will make mistakes, can be left behind by the pace of change for example, but unlike Reformist or Stalinist Parties, the regular discussion and common resolution of issues allows the whole party to test its ideas and learn quickly from experience.

Unlike in the Labour Party, where the members are dictated to by the TDs, the leadership of a revolutionary party is not separated off from the membership but on the contrary, is elected in order to take initiatives and be constantly involved in the process of changing the world. As such it is the most visible and accountable part of the organisation.

A great difficulty for any party which attempts to base itself on the working class is that workers are very uneven in their outlook. Because of people's different experiences, there is a great variety of views, and great differences in the degree to which people shake off the views that they've been brought up with through school, church, and in the degree to which they accept the ideas presented in the media.

The result is that there is always a section of the working class which is socialist, people who stand up against injustice, who are aware of what the employers are up to and are willing to fight back. At the other end are scabs, people who believe in the managers to the extent of being willing to betray their workmates, and in all probability accept sexist, anti-traveller and anti-gay ideas as well. Most workers for most of the time, have a mixture of beliefs between the two.

For the Labour Party, this unevenness creates pressures on them to avoid radical views for two reasons. One is that they see workers as the victims for whom they are trying to change things. As a result they make no effort to challenge prejudices held by workers. The other and more fundamental pressure comes from the electoral nature

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of the Labour Party, they need the votes of as many people as possible. Therefore at moments of greatest activity for the Labour Party member, canvassing during elections, they are under enormous pressure to water down any views that might be controversial, and stick to popular issues.

The revolutionary party is for most of its existence the party of a small minority. It is the organisation for the principled socialists within the working class. Because we believe that workers can change we make no concessions to prejudice. Sexist ideas, anti-gay ideas and so on divide the working class and have to be challenged.

The reason why the Labour Party has no newspaper is because they would have to say where they stand on issues such as the Norris case and gay rights. They would have to make clear their approach to the US invasion of Somalia. They prefer to be able to avoid these controversies.

By contrast *Socialist Worker* is a paper which puts the case against all aspects of oppression regardless of how popular or unpopular they are, which supports and gives a lead to campaigns and strikes, and which connects specific issues to the more general argument about the need for revolutionary change.

This approach, building on the minority of socialists, is one which can win a majority of workers to breaking from all the ideas of the ruling class. When revolution broke out in February 1917 the Bolshevik party had only the support of 2% of the deputies to the Petrograd Soviet. By October they had over 60% support. Nine months of revolution had transformed the working class and the party.

Building a party which makes no concessions to ideas pushed by the ruling class is essential to overcome the great divisions in the Irish working class. Once the Labour leaders of the South accommodated to the Free State, they lost their support amongst Protestant workers in the North. But equally, once the Northern Ireland Labour Party adopted the prevailing views, and accepted a role within the sectarian state, then it lost any connection with the workers in the South and with the Catholic community of the North. It eventually lost its own identity to the Unionists completely. The reformist tradition will never reunite the working class.

The SWM does unite socialists North and South, from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, in a party which aspires not to work within the current rotten states, but to see them smashed by revolution.

In Ireland today there is no short cut to building a united working class movement. It will happen in the course of workers themselves fighting back against their employers and governments or not at all. For socialists wishing to see such change principled and systematic work is needed, and that means joining an organisation.

The Labour Party offers its supporters only further betrayals and disappointments. The Socialist Workers Movement is a growing party, now the largest revolutionary party that has ever been seen in Ireland.

Join us and help build a real socialist alternative to the Labour Party.

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Organisation: Socialist Workers' Movement

Author: Conor Kostick

Date: 1993

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