

THE LABOUR PARTY

MANIFESTO



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Presented to the 1979 Annual Conference of the Labour Party by the
Administrative Council.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION MANIFESTO

The policies of the present Fianna Fail Government have taken away the initiative and autonomy of Local Authorities and replaced local initiative with a centralised bureaucracy. Fianna Fail's Dublin centred bureaucratic form of Local Government is strangling local communities throughout the country. The result is that local communities are unable to help themselves despite the presence within the community of people with ideas, commitment and initiative. Problems of housing, transport, planning, physical amenities, youth facilities, local culture, cannot be properly solved because the process of contact between the local community and Dublin has become centralised and overloaded.

Local Government administration throughout the country is breaking down under the strain of increased urban growth and the lack of adequate financial resources from central government.

Labour is committed to genuine local democracy at community level. We recognise that local initiative of ordinary people can, if properly harnessed, bring about the resolution of many of their local problems. We know that the absence of local democracy prevents such initiative and has given direct cause to the increased incidents of frustration and vandalism that can be seen in so many parts of Ireland today.

The services provided by a Local Authority directly affect the lives of many people in a way that is more immediate than the policies of central government. Housing, water supply, sanitary services, as well as refuse collection, are the obvious necessities of community life which are provided by Local Authorities. In addition, vocational education, libraries, recreation and local cultural activities are also provided by the Local Authority in addition to statutory duties such as planning and development for the local area.

Labour realises that the problems of local communities will only be solved finally by the application of a comprehensive set of socialist policies to all our social ills. Labour's socialist programme which has been developed in detail, to cover the many aspects of communal life forms the basis for this short-term programme of policy action which is designed to enable Local Authorities throughout the country to begin immediately the task of attacking social injustice and promoting social policy and harmony.

Labour's national policies for Local Government will be systematically implemented by Labour Councillors throughout the country. The same policy objective and detailed proposals will be initiated in each Local Authority and will be modified and adapted to suit local conditions.

TRANSPORTATION

Labour will make our transport system work for all our people. To date, traffic congestion, mismanagement and a continual bias in favour of major road works has resulted in our transport services throughout the country becoming worse. Labour will implement a transport policy for all our people by the following measures.

1. Buses:

Bus lanes and right of way will be given to public transport.

Local bus services will be improved and extra buses will be made available to C.I.E. to enable them to improve and extend their present services.

2. Juggernauts:

Heavy commercial trucks, which now clog our towns and cities, will be required to travel through our urban communities at certain times and along non-residential routes. This will reduce environmental pollution.

Special parking areas will be assigned for them away from residential areas.

3. Traffic:

Comprehensive traffic management plans will be prepared and implemented with the Gardai to reduce congestion and delay in our streets.

4. Pedestrians:

The rights of pedestrians will be strengthened, and each town and city will create a traffic free pedestrian street in order to make shopping safe for people and their families.

5. Disabled people:

Labour recognises that disabled people have little mobility. A £10 per week mobility allowance will be sought for disabled persons.

Our urban footpaths and public buildings will be modified to facilitate people in wheel chairs and people with prams.

6. Suburban Rail:

Labour will ensure that the suburban rail in the Dublin region will be electrified and the supporting bus services modified in order to dramatically improve the public transport system in the Dublin region.

7. Roads:

Labour will publish a national roads plan which will concentrate on improving our national primary roads system. The first objective of this plan will be to proceed without delay in building urban bye-passes for those towns which are directly affected by through traffic along the national primary route system. Urban bye-passes will dramatically improve the time distance between major urban areas and will also have a beneficial affect on the environment of the provincial towns which today have to suffer the congestion of through traffic.

8. Urban Motorways

Labour reaffirms its opposition to the construction of urban motorways and will specifically oppose the Dublin Motorway proposals which have recently been put forward by the Engineering Department under the guise of the title of an "all purpose road".

9. Rural areas:

Labour knows that some isolated rural areas have no public transport service. A basic service will be provided.

Labour's transport measures will be proposed to every Local Authority and C.I.E. will have a central role in bringing social equality, by means of equal mobility, to our transport system.

PLANNING

Labour knows that our new suburban areas have suffered from the lack of proper planning. In addition, the inner areas of our towns and cities have suffered decay.

Labour will have all Local Authority Development Plans revised so that the following minimum objectives can be obtained:

1. Suburban development must be socially balanced.
2. Housing estates with fifty dwellings or more must provide as a condition of planning permission a community building for the use of the residents.
3. Housing estates will be completed and taken into charge by the Local Authority. Developers will be required to complete estates without delays.
4. Special area action plans, including housing rehabilitation, environmental improvement and new building will be prepared for the inner areas of our towns and cities.

Labour Councillors, throughout the country will lead their Councils in ensuring that planning is for all our people. Local Authorities will concentrate their energy and resources into ensuring that we plan and provide for living communities. Local participation and community involvement is to be an essential part of Labour's planning policy.

HOUSING

Our growing population is still short of housing. Labour will ensure that decent housing, at a reasonable cost, is provided for all our people. Labour Councillors on every Local Authority will propose the following immediate policy measures:

1. Housing Land:

Each Local Authority to designate and acquire sufficient land to provide for its housing needs for the next ten years. Land to be acquired at cost under Labour's community land policy.

2. House Loans:

The immediate extension of the Low Rise Mortgage scheme. The loan to be for up to £10,000 with an income limit related to the average industrial wage. This subsidised mortgage scheme to be open to all without restriction.

3. Housing Honeymoon:

For first time house purchasers a housing honeymoon, by abolishing their repayments for one year after occupation and so giving them a year's free rent.

4. Housing Energy:

Conservation Grants— A scheme of energy conservation grants for all homes to cover the cost of insulation, double glazing and other conservation measures.

5. Rented Housing and Rented Flats:

Tenants of private rented accommodation to be allowed to claim one third of their rent against their income tax.

6. Rents Tribunal:

A proper charter for flatdwellers throughout the country as well as the introduction of a system of rents tribunals in each Local Authority area. This scheme to be worked out in detail with the Department of the Environment and the Department of Justice.

PHYSICAL AMENITIES

Labour will ensure that each Local Authority provides adequate physical amenities, including basic sanitary and water services so that all our people can live in dignity and enjoyment within our community.

Labour Councillors will require the County Manager to draw up a programme designed to improve and extend the amenities of each community in order to provide a proper range of recreational facilities for our population. This programme will include the provision for environmental improvement schemes aimed at conserving the quality of our towns and cities throughout the country and improving the immediate environment for the local community and will have the following measures:

1. Every house to be provided with a proper water and sanitation service.
2. Every community to be provided with open space, under communal control, for recreation and social purposes.
3. Every town and city to have a continuous programme of environmental improvement. This will clear up derelict sites, repair derelict buildings and convert them for communal use. Historic urban areas to be conserved.
4. A special programme of landscaping to be initiated in every town and city council providing trees, ponds and planting in our all too often bleak urban areas.

This environmental programme will extend and enlarge the present small and inadequate scheme. Local people will be employed, and continuous work will be available for many of our people.

In addition to improving the quality of our environment, this programme will directly benefit tourism in Ireland.

YOUTH FACILITIES

Labour will provide a youth programme in every Local Authority. The needs of young people, who now count for so many of our population will require continuous work and commitment in each Local Authority area. Labour Councillors will directly promote the needs and interests of young people by implementing the following measures:

1. Each Local Authority to organise a work experience programme for young people.
2. Each Local Authority to appoint a full-time official with specific responsibility for youth affairs.
3. Each Local Authority to ensure that every community has a Youth Club with adequate resources and facilities.
4. Each Local Authority, in co-operation with its Vocational Education Committee, to ensure that educational needs of young people are met.

1979—INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD

Labour Councillors will celebrate this special year by ensuring that every Local Authority has a special programme aimed at promoting and helping the children in their community.

Labour will ensure that:

1. Each Local Authority will make facilities available to any community which wishes to provide a crèche for its children.
2. A full time official will be appointed with specific responsibility for children's affairs in each area.
3. Health and education services in each area will be co-ordinated and extended to provide for young children.
4. Each Authority will provide a new children's playground, specially designed as a special recognition of the International Year of the Child.

DISABLED PEOPLE

Labour recognises the special position of disabled people in our society. They are all too frequently prisoners in our unjust environment. Their homes are not adapted to their needs, they cannot move in our roads and streets with ease and they find public buildings impossible to enter.

Labour will end this social injustice and provide, by means of the following measures, for social equality for our disabled.

1. House Conversion Grants:

Substantial grants and loans to be made available to all disabled people on the basis of need, to enable them to adapt their homes so that they can live with dignity.

2. Housing:

Local Authorities to ensure that at least 4% of its new housing is designed and built to meet the needs of the disabled, particularly people in wheelchairs.

3. Housing Lists:

Disabled persons, on the Local Authority housing lists to be given special category status and to be housed without reference to points.

4. Public Buildings:

All new public buildings to be required, as a condition of planning permission, to make provision for the disabled. Existing public buildings in public ownership to be adapted to provide for access by the disabled.

5. Public Areas:

Our streets and squares in urban areas to be progressively modified to make it possible for disabled and handicapped people to move about with some ease. These measures, such as modifying footpaths and providing ramps alongside public steps will also help people with prams.

6. Public Transport:

Where possible, public transport will have special provision for disabled people including special seats reserved on all buses and trains.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Labour believes that a democratic system of local government is essential to the health of the country and to the development of the nation. The present system is now totally out of date. The original model, established in 1898, has been considerably modified and made less democratic. In addition, the substantial internal migration within the State has seriously distorted the ratio of representation to population across the country. In short, we have an inadequate system of local administration, tightly controlled by Central Government, with elected members performing largely as consultative councils.

In the larger Local Authority areas, the managerial system is totally inadequate, as well as being undemocratic. Labour believes that a radical re-structuring and re-organisation of the present local government system is required.

It is proposed that a new tier in the Local Government structure should be created which will group members of County Councils for the administration of those central government services which can best be administered on a regional basis. Social services, such as health and education, economic activities such as tourism, industrial development and agriculture, and services, such as planning water and roads, would be the responsibility of regional councils of County Councils.

Representation

Labour will equalise the ratio of representation to population throughout the country. This will result in a more equal quality of local representation throughout. Labour will recognise the substantial growth of urban Ireland by the creation of a number of new Urban District Councils and local boroughs, to provide local councils for new areas.

The autonomy of local authorities has been further undermined by the abolition of domestic rates. Labour has always argued that rates were a bad form of taxation. Labour will abolish the rating system entirely and establish a new form of financing for Local Authorities. This will consist of a statutory per-capita grant each year, plus a block development grant.

Administration

The achievement of a socially just environment will require a total transformation of the structure and form of administration of our Local Government system. Labour recognises that this is both a complex and specialist task requiring consultation and co-operation with Local Authorities, local communities and the personnel currently employed in Local Government.

Labour proposes to enter into detailed discussions with these groups to obtain a full picture of their perceived needs and requirements. In addition, the Labour councillors throughout the country form a unique source of information and wisdom which will be drawn upon in order to finalise the details of our Local Government reform proposals.

Culture

Labour recognises the intrinsic part that culture plays in the lives of every one of us. Labour will continue to support the spending of local funds on the arts within each local community. Each Local Authority will prepare a cultural budget and make funds available for the financing of local cultural activities within the community. The operation of the cultural budget will be organised with the help and co-ordination of the Arts Council.

The Arts

Each Local Authority will be encouraged to develop an Arts/Cultural programme for its area aimed at helping individuals, groups and organisations to develop their own skills in the area of Art and Cultural matters.

Each Local Authority will be encouraged to develop an Arts Plan for its community. This plan will aim at increasing activity within the arts generally and at raising the standard of performance and achievement.

Each Local Authority will be encouraged to appoint an Arts Officer whose task will be to co-ordinate and promote activity in the arts within its area.

The Arts Officer will have direct liaison with the Arts Council and will be in contact with other Arts Officers from adjacent Local Authorities.

Library Service

The Library service is an essential part of a socially just environment. Its provision throughout the country is uneven. The library service, in conjunction with existing educational facilities, provides a unique opportunity to provide for second chance education within our society.

Labour will ensure that the library service is modernised and extended to meet existing demand. In addition, the range and scope of the library service will be dramatically extended, in conjunction with the perceived needs of the local communities.

Local Museums and Galleries.

Every community must, in a developed environment have an understanding and knowledge of its own history and local culture. There is a critical need to provide for local museums and galleries within our communities in order to facilitate this need. Some towns in Ireland do have excellent museums but sadly many others have none at all.

Labour will make provision to enable Local Authorities to provide for such facilities within their areas. These centres will become local arts centres, incorporating:

- Museum
- Art and sculpture gallery
- Local library
- Art workshops
- Drama centres

In many urban areas there are old industrial buildings within the centre of the town which could be utilised for this purpose. In addition, the renovating of such buildings and their renewal would act to conserve the towns.

Urban conservation and preservation is an integral part of any local arts/cultural programme. Labour will encourage Local Authorities to develop an awareness and self confidence in their building heritage and to make provision, within their local development plans, to ensure its conservation.

Amenities

The development of amenities within our local communities, particularly the built-up urban areas, is essential if our people are to enjoy their leisure within a socially just environment.

There is a great need to encourage Local Authorities to develop local amenities adjacent to residential areas and to urban centres. Parks, play-grounds, nature trails and small animal sanctuaries all have a positive place within our environment. They are not luxuries, but essentials of life, if we are to enable ordinary people to develop and grow within our urban environment.

CONCLUSION

Labour is aware of the chronic problems of unemployment throughout the country. Labour Councillors are daily faced with the difficulties which people experience in their lives. Our local representatives have already given great service to their communities in the years past. This election programme which can be implemented by Local Authorities throughout the country will enable your local Labour Councillor to meet the needs of your community today and ensure that your children will grow up in a world of equality and justice.

The comprehensive policies which are inter-related have been designed with the expert knowledge which Labour have acquired over many years of participation in democratic politics. We have the experience and the expertise to implement the policies which are presented in this document.

The Labour movement has within its ranks specialist knowledge to develop and extend these proposals so that each local community can aspire to creating within itself the kind of society to which we all aspire.

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