

Election '87

Education in Crisis

USE YOUR VOTE

A USI News Election Special

VOTE FOR EDUCATION

The beginning of February saw a stepping up of student protests about the ignoring of third level education by the major political parties in the run up to the General Election. Whilst all the media hype has been about cutting the public debt, it is clear that reduction in borrowing or tax cuts will come at the expense of reduced expenditure on areas like Education, Health and Social Welfare.

MAJOR PARTIES

None of the major parties is making any moves on increasing the tax net by rooting out the employed, professional and large farmer groups who have failed to pay their share of tax. It is worth remembering that the PAYE sector pay 90.2% of income tax, and that even by the Dept. of Finance own estimates £620m is outstanding in uncollected taxes.

Each year £100m. of profits is repatriated untaxed from Ireland by multi-national companies, many of whom will leave when their tax-free status has expired.

DONATIONS AND PROMISES

Many professional or self-employed people make large donations at election time to the big parties - that is why they do not want to hurt them when in power! Instead they say that the National Debt will be paid for by students, by people on Social Welfare and by the unemployed. Fees in colleges have risen by 350% since 1980 while inflation was only 80%. Grants on the other hand went up by only 50%. Theology students, mature students or people with less than the 2/4 honours requirement cannot apply for grants at all. In March 1984 five regional colleges were promised - none have been built.

ASK THE CANVASSERS ...

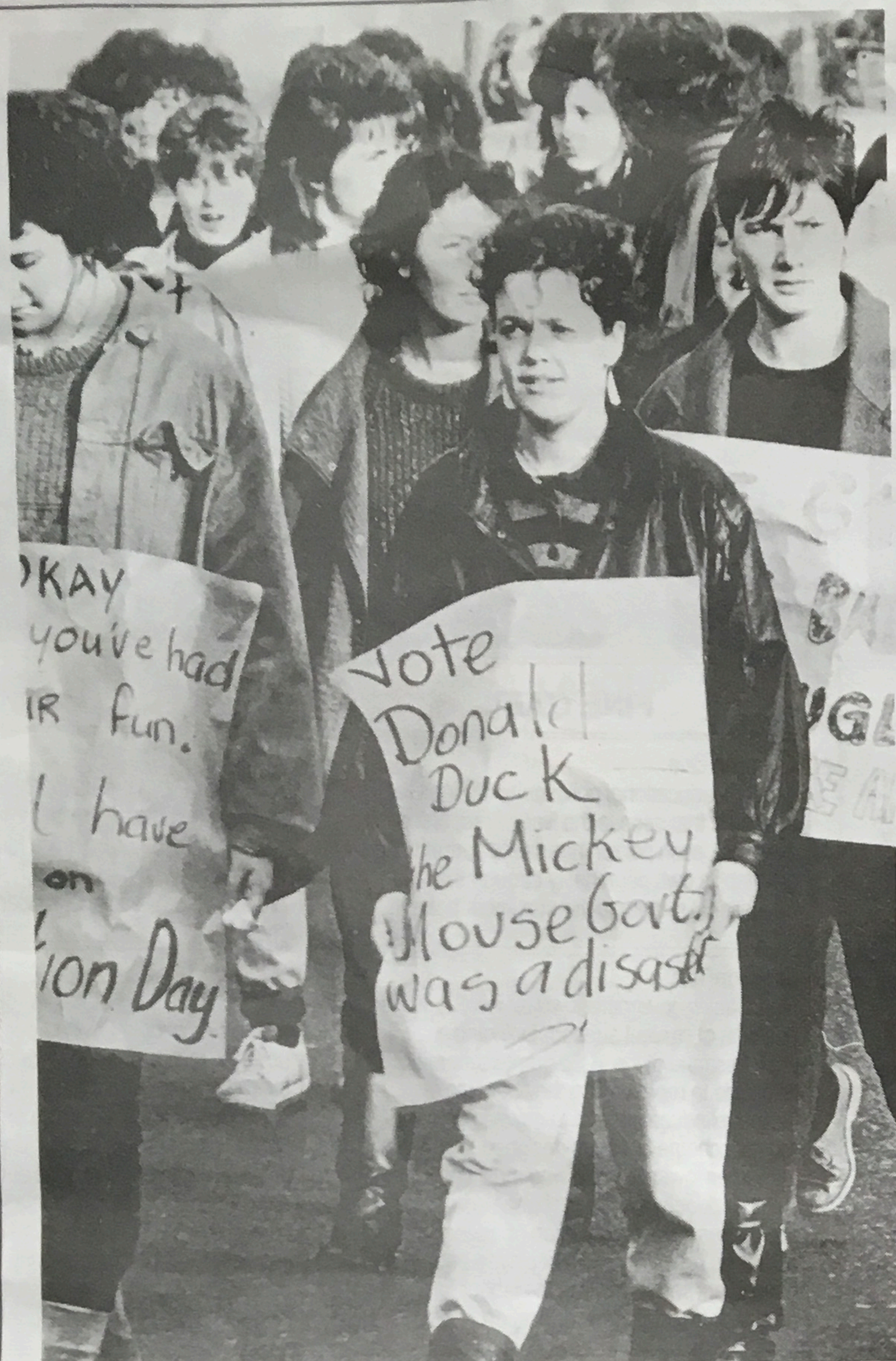
USI are not proposing that you vote for any particular party. However, we urge all students to ask politicians who canvass them what they intend to do on the issues that affect students. We suggest the following questions:

1. Will their Party fund new colleges?
2. Will they stop the vicious fee rises of the last six years?
3. Will they provide all youth with full-time education, a job or proper training scheme?
4. Will they increase student grants to provide a realistic standard of living for students?

VOTE FOR EDUCATION

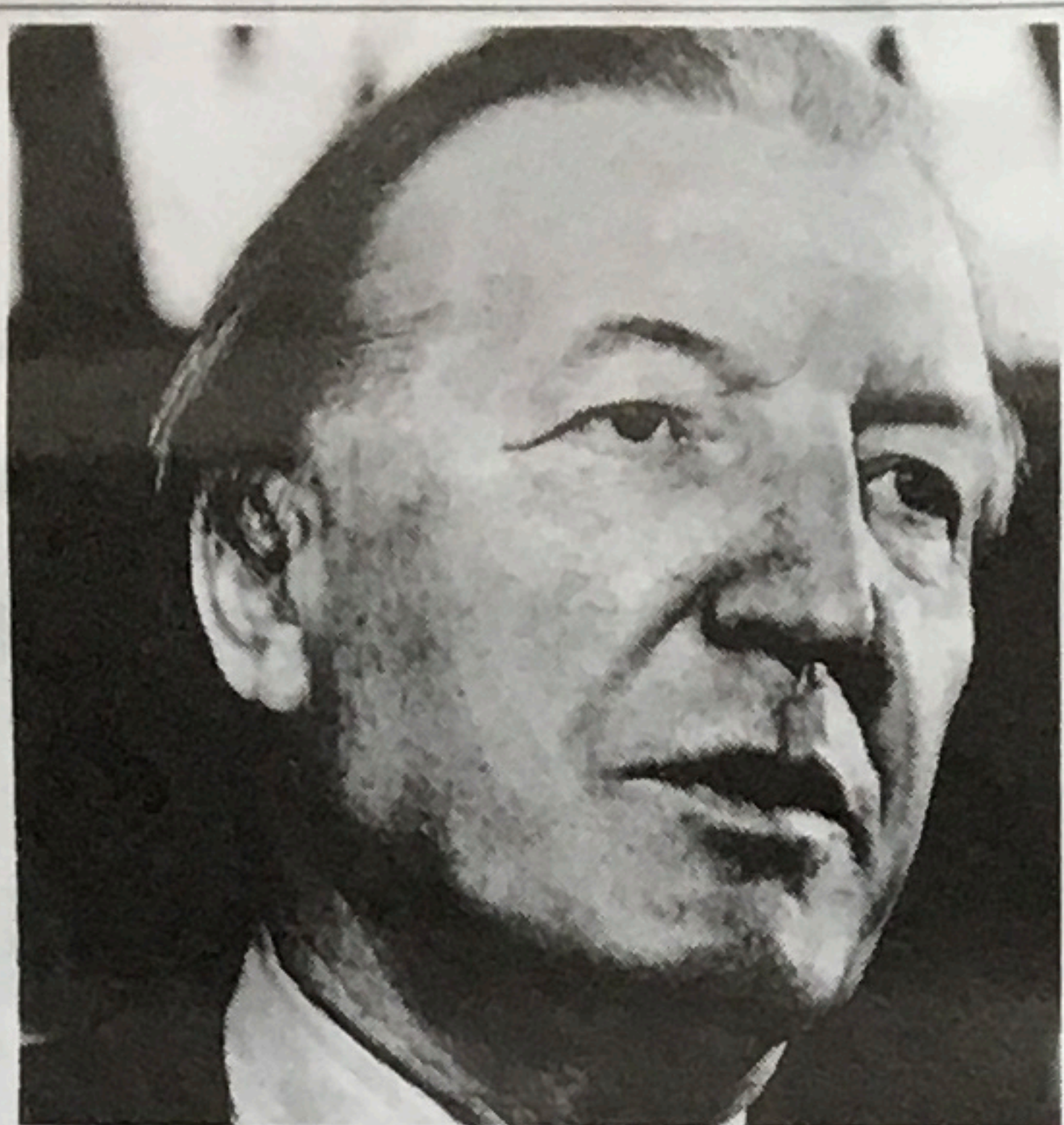
Education should be a growth area for any country trying to break out of a recession - the future depends on the availability of a highly trained young population.

Young people have a right to know specifically what each party will do. If a politician does not give the answers that you want to hear, tell him or her that they will not be getting your vote.



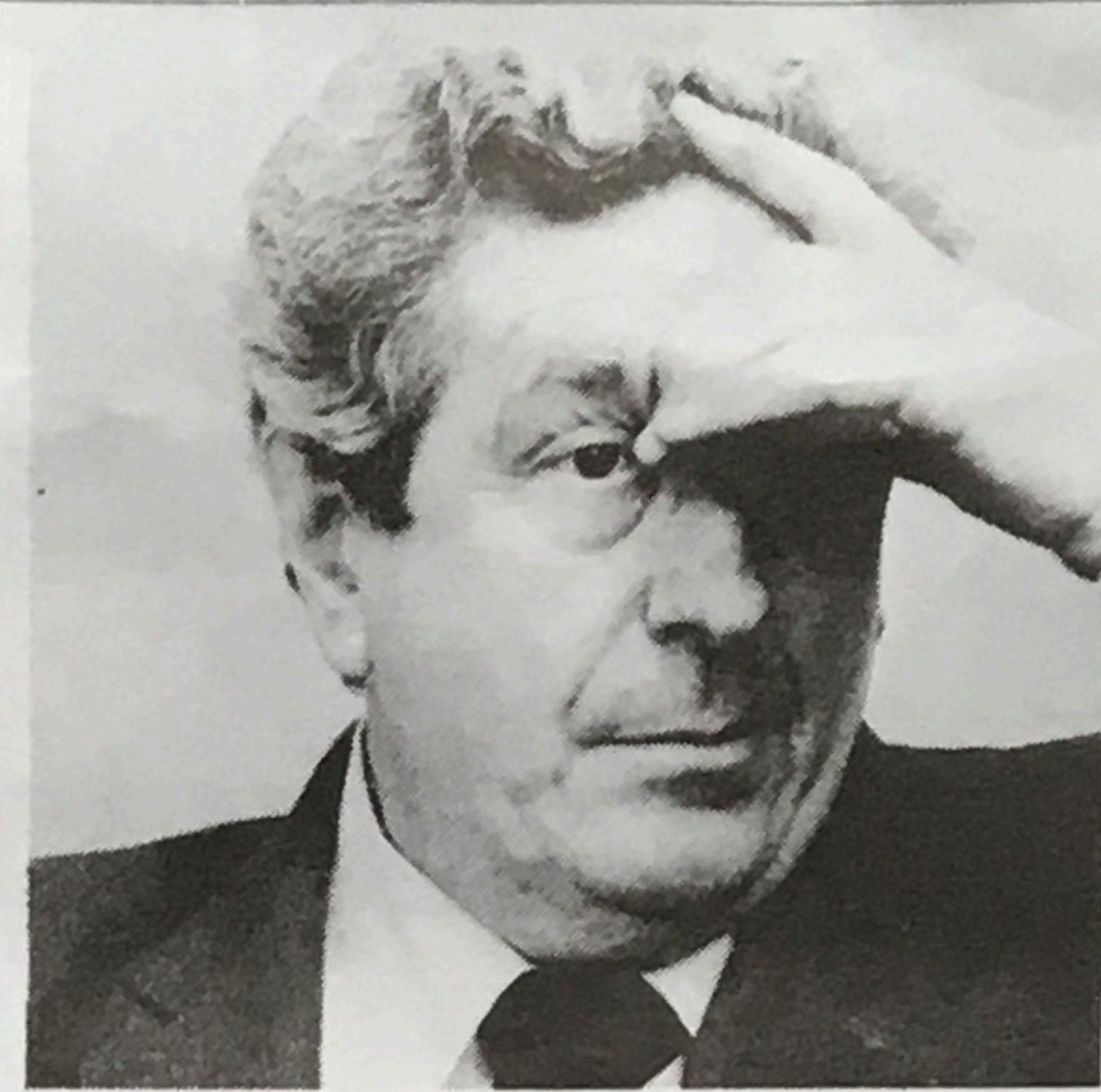
Election 87 - What the Part

To ensure that students could know where the political parties stand on educational issues pertaining to the 3rd level sector, USI last September sent a questionnaire to each party asking 7 specific questions. One party, FF, did not respond. Two parties, FG and PD's responded after the date requested. USI believes that this is disgraceful considering the substantial research facilities available to these parties. The responses of all 7 parties are summarised here.



FIANNA FAIL

Fianna Fail were the only political party not to respond to our questionnaire. On February 7 we received a letter from the party saying that "because of the financial situation" they "would not be giving any commitments". On return to office, the letter told us, "Mary O'Rourke TD says the whole situation will be looked at in view of the finances available". Enclosed with the letter was a copy of the education section of the Fianna Fail manifesto, which we have summarised on page 4 - see "Education - What The Manifestos Say".



FINE GAEL

Question One:
Yes. The educational philosophy of Fine Gael is to ensure that despite the limited resources available, each person has the opportunity to develop its own personality through the educational system to the maximum benefit.

Question Two:
Fine Gael in government will review the whole question of student support, including a reassessment of the H Ed grants schemes, with a view to reorganising the financing of third level education and to move towards grants scheme changes designed to direct resources towards those who most need them. Another priority is second chance education. We propose that a proportion of college places be reserved for unemployed people who have spent seven years in the labour force and who wish to further their education.

Question Three:
Our proposed change will mean a relation of funds in favour of the student. Within the economic constraints dictated by our financial situation we would aim to maintain and improve the level of support to the third level sector.

Question Four:
Yes, this consideration will be part of our review of the financing of third level education.

Question Five:
We propose to review it. We agree that it is not operating in the best manner at present.

Question Six:
As we mentioned under priorities in (2), second chance education on a part time basis and provision of third level for those 7 years unemployed, form part of our policy on education.

Question Seven:
It is accepted that fee increases have been large in recent years but this was necessary because of the high cost of financing third level education and decisions of govt to direct much needed resources to primary schools in disadvantaged areas. Within these constraints a 16% increase in eligibility limits in 1985. Grants are now being indexed to inflation. In line with our review of financing of third level education we will try to improve funding.



P.D.s

Question One:
Yes. we have a commitment in our manifesto to develop access to courses involving television, radio, tutorial and the more formal educational mode, the net effect of which should be to broaden the capacity of students to attend college.

Question Two:
Our priorities will include the development of access for people in lower social groups; an urgent overhaul of third level curricula to examine their relevance to modern day needs; more flexibility in the nature of courses; more emphasis on media education and off campus activities; the removal of all discriminatory bars, explicit or implicit in relation to class, colour, sex or disability; more equal representation on traditionally male or female courses; ensuring that the student viewpoint is heard on issues of course content and control.

Question Three:
We would support realistic levels of grant aid for all students, set at such a level as to facilitate as far as possible equality of access, but the exact levels would obviously have to take account of all economic factors.

Question Four:
We are not in a position to give an affirmative answer to this. It is dependent on the final development of our education policy document.

Question Five:
Yes. In principle we believe that any student should be entitled to pursue a third level education course regardless of income or educational qualifications.

Question Six:
(a) Yes
(b) Yes

Question Seven:
Unless one is in government it is impossible to be absolutely specific about precise areas in which one could put a freeze, but it is fair to say that student fees have risen dramatically over the last number of years and no one could willingly be desirous of increasing fees if that could be avoided.

USI QUESTIONS

Question One:
Do you support equality of access to third level education particularly for those from lower income groups?

Question Two:
If elected, what would be your priorities for the third level sector?

Question Three:
Given current estimated costs of going to college (approx £2734 for those living away from home and £1782 for those living at home)
(a) would you propose that the level of student grants should meet these costs?
(b) If not, what would you consider to be a fair level of grant?

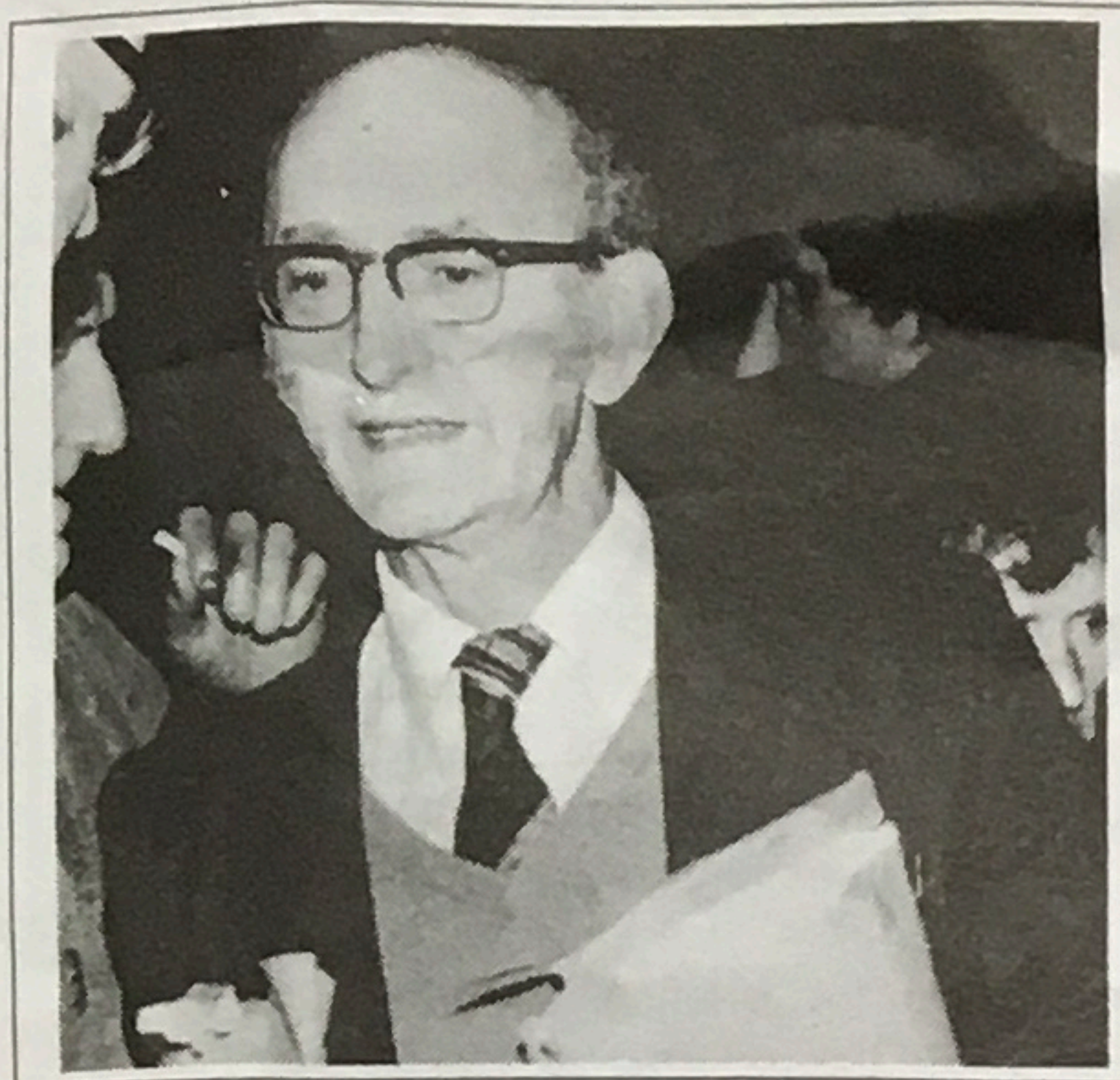
Question Four:
USI believes that the current levels of parental income which exclude students from receiving all or part of a grant are unrealistically low (particularly when compared with the average industrial wage). In this respect would you propose to raise these income levels over and above any inflation related rise?

Question Five:
USI believes that once a student has reached the required level of academic attainment in order to be offered a place in college, they should be eligible for a grant. In this respect would you propose to abolish the 2/4 honours rule?

Question Six:
USI believes that students should not be excluded from receiving a grant by virtue of age
(a) Do you agree with this policy?
(b) Do you believe that a person should be eligible for a grant irrespective of which year they sat the leaving cert exam?

Question Seven:
USI believes that fee levels have risen in a manner which is unjustifiable when compared to the rise in inflation. If elected into government, would you propose to put a freeze on tuition fee rises?

Parties say about Education



WORKERS PARTY

Question One:

As a socialist party we obviously believe in equality of access to all levels of education. We believe, however, that the cost of second level education must be tackled before equality of access to third level can happen.

Question Two:

Access: Expansion of access through building programme. development of RTCs in greater Dublin area, democratisation of access.
Funding: Education, like health and other essential social services, should be totally state funded. This can only be guaranteed by proper utilisation of our natural resources as the basis for economic growth and a reorganisation of the tax system.
Democratisation: Taking control from self appointed self perpetuating elites, and giving it to democratic representative committees.

Question Three:

The workers Party believes that the level of student grant, AnCO payments, social welfare payments, should be such as to allow the recipient to live in decency without recourse to parental support. In that context, we would support raising the third level grant to the levels mentioned in the question.

Question Four:

The Workers Party believes that the education service should be free at the point of delivery, ie grants should not be means tested. For funding policy to meet these proposals, refer to Q 2. In the immediate term, the WP will campaign to increase the means test level to protect middle income families who are already severely penalised by PAYE.

Question Five:

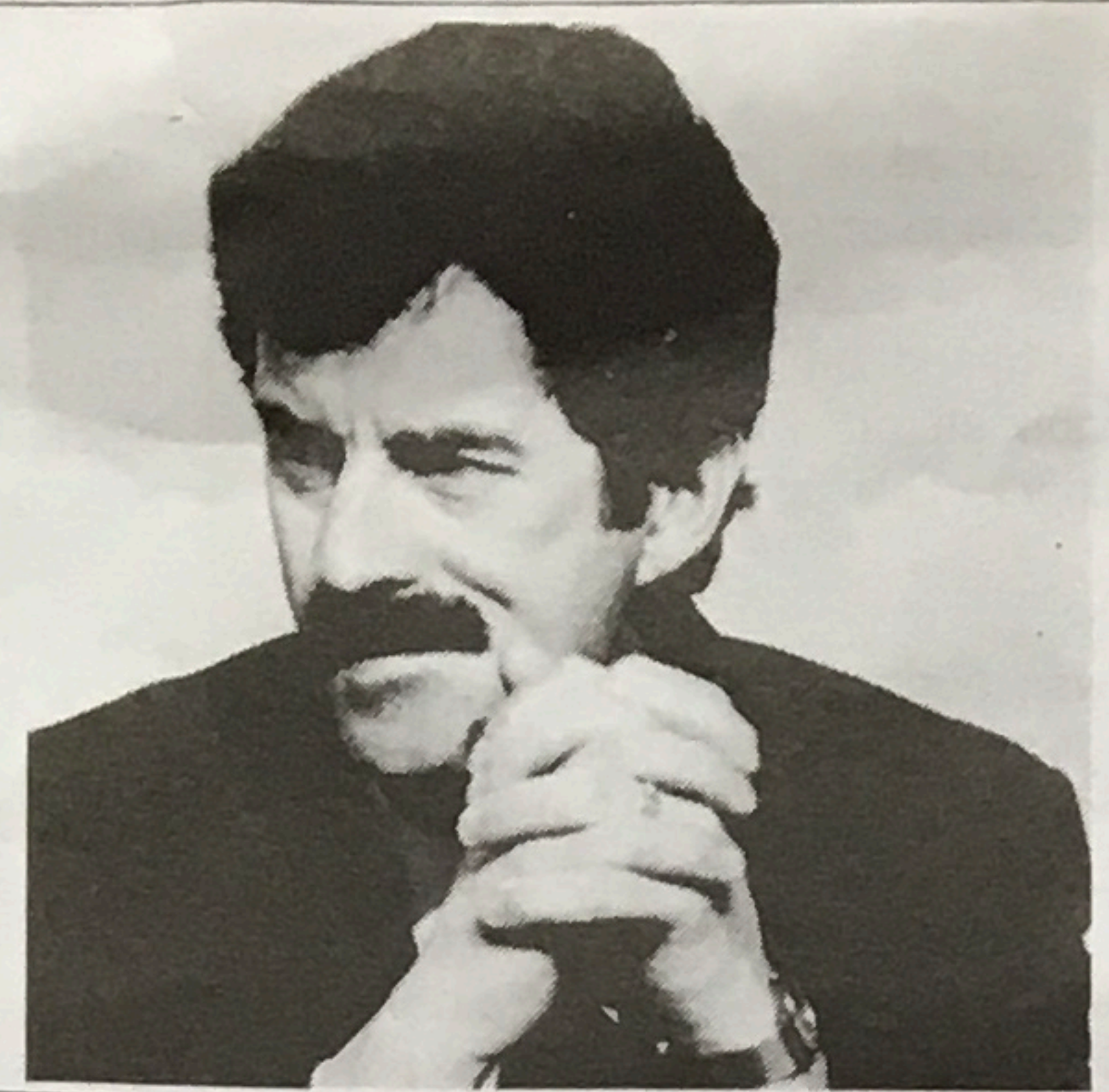
We believe that acceptance on a course should be the requirement for eligibility for a grant; there should be a rationalisation between the various grant and scholarship schemes which ensures the separation of the fee and maintenance elements, and the maintenance element of all grants should be constant.

Question Six:

The Workers Party are in favour of the active encouragement of mature students entering or re entering third level education. We believe that the present points and grants systems, which ensure that third level education is virtually the preserve of recent school leavers, is totally misguided. Entry to a course, not age or date of leaving cert, should be the qualification requirement for a grant.

Question Seven:

The Workers Party believes that in the situation of a comprehensive funding scheme for third level education, a fees element would merely be the transfer of resources from one government dept to another. However, in the immediate and medium term, we are in favour of a freeze on fees. We believe that rapidly rising fees constitute a major hurdle to lower and middle income families without effecting any major transfer of resources into education.



LABOUR

Question One:

Yes.

Question Two:

(a) To democratise third level institutions so they are under the control of academic and non academic staff, students and the community.
(b) To bring all third level educational institutes under public control, for example St Patricks College drumcondra, RCSI etc.
(c) To increase participation in third level education from those people currently under represented for reasons of social class, sex, age or geographical location, through programmes of affirmative action.

Question Three:

The Labour Party supports the raising of grant levels so that students can adequately maintain themselves and pay fees.

Question Four:

Labour would like to see all students eligible for grants, and feel that the taxation system is the best way to recover the cost, from those who are best able to pay.

Question Five:

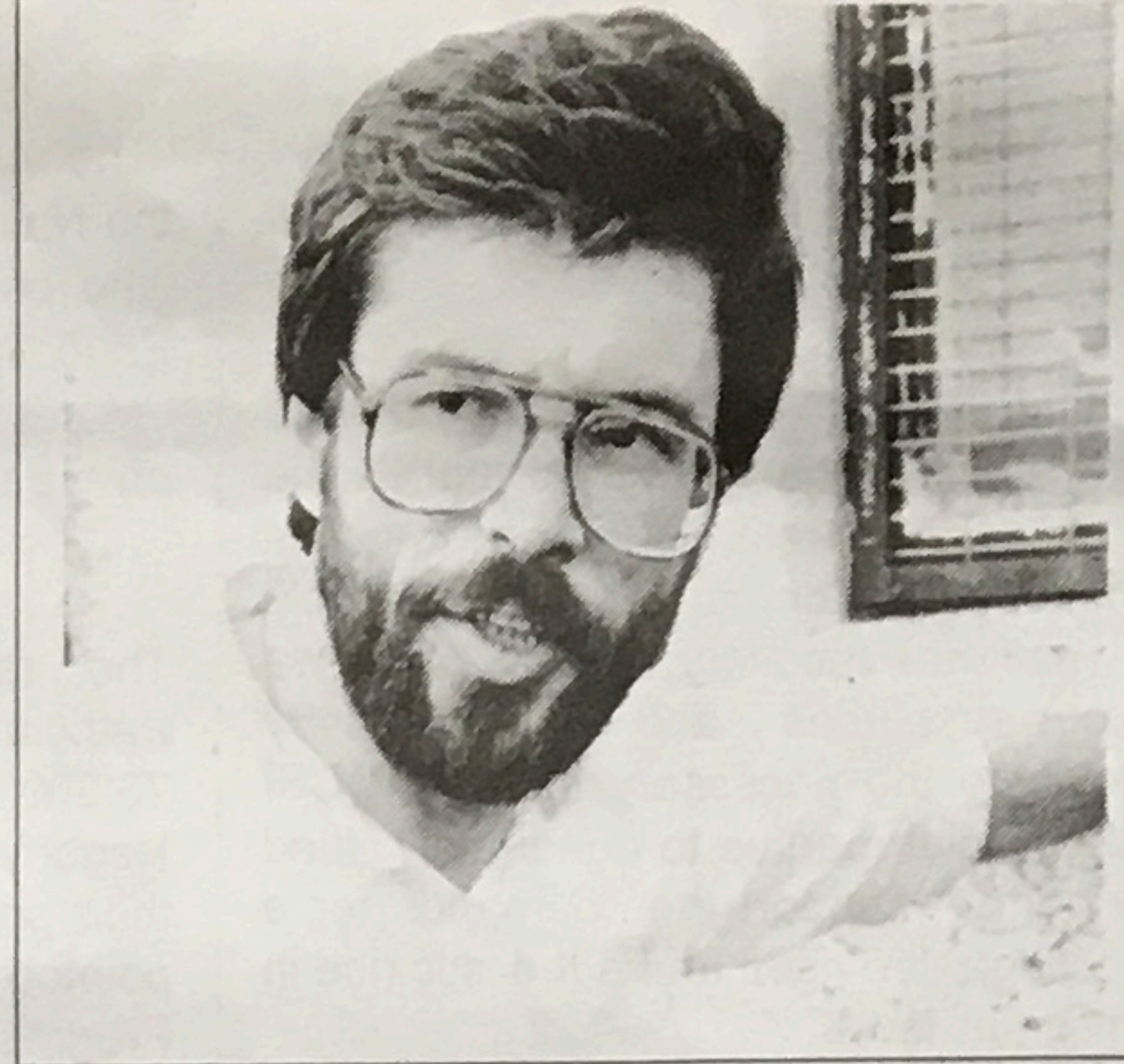
Yes.

Question Six:

(a) Yes.
(b) Yes.

Question Seven:

Any fee rise would be catered for by a similar rise in the level of student grants.



SINN FEIN

Question One:

Yes. A high standard of education is becoming increasingly necessary to create or gain employment. Access to education should be on a fully open and equal basis. High costs and shortage of places prevent this at present.

Question Two:

A first priority will be to combat the growing class bias in the education system. We will work to secure substantial increases in student grants and a freeze on tuition fees. We will examine the range and type of third level courses available to try to make them more relevant, particularly to working class young people. Making education open to everyone regardless of age, sex or class background will therefore be our priority.

Question Three:

Yes. Sinn Fein believes that the level of maximum grant (ie that given to students with lowest parental income) should cover all expenses involved in going to college. If an independent body such as the ESRI agreed that these figures are accurate we would work to raise grants to those levels.

Question Four:

Yes. Sinn Fein believes that the present means test is much too strict and this places a heavy burden on students and often their parents. The means test should be increased gradually in real terms over a period to put more and more student on grants every year.

Question Five:

Yes. Sinn Fein believes that there are no academic grounds whatsoever for the 2/4 honours rule. It is simply a cost cutting exercise which is particularly harsh as all the people affected by the rule are on very low incomes.

Question Six:

Yes. Many people who did not get the opportunity to go to college at 18 years of age now wish to enrol in courses, but the discrimination against mature students in the grants system means that most of them cannot afford to do so. Students who do begin courses will face serious financial hardship. Anyone over 25 who is offered a place in college should get a full grant.

Question Seven:

Yes. Sinn Fein believes that because of the absence of an adequate grants system, many people are asked to pay fees who cannot afford to do so. We propose that tuition fees be frozen at their present level. The grants system should then be gradually improved, beginning with the abolition of the 2/4 honours rule and the discrimination against mature students, with the means test then gradually increased until eventually nobody pays fees.



GREEN ALLIANCE

Question One:

Yes. However, we wish to replace the existing framework with a quite different arrangement of income, work and education.

Question Two:

Delay; practical experience; extension to all age groups.

Question Three:

We note you do not count the hidden subsidy of the actual cost of third level education to the community. Since the cornerstone of our policies is the provision of a basic income or citizens dividend to each individual of about £2000 per year, extra grants would depend on individual circumstances.

Question Four:

The current level of parental income is indeed unrealistically low. It has not taken account of inflation. Further, it takes no account of changes in parental circumstances.

Question Five:

Broadly, yes. But we feel that once young citizens understood that they would receive a basic income from the age of 16 or 18 the stranglehold of universities on second level schooling would become much weaker; only those with a genuine taste for study would wish to go to university very early in life.

Question Six:

Agreed.

Question Seven:

Haven't enough information to answer. We feel, however, that our present population structure has put the system under tremendous strain. We should explore taking up European places.



"Make education an issue" - USI President Patricia Hegarty

USI Actions Highlight Education As An Issue

Staat Act 1939, on suspicion of malicious damage. All four were later released without charge.

In a statement supporting the action U.S.I. President Patricia Hegarty stated that "the major political parties seem to ignore the fact that third level education can play a vital role in aiding national recovery. How can we develop our resources and our industry without providing the necessary training? USI calls on all political parties to adequately fund this sector and support the demands for a freeze in college fee rises and a realistic rise in the student grant level".

On Thursday 4th February, 25 students from the USI Dublin Area occupied the Minister for Education's office in Marlborough Street. They were physically ejected by the Gardai after an hour and a further 4 students were arrested. Three had been arrested under Section 30 of the Offences Against the State Act 1939 were released without charge after an hour. The other, USI Education Officer Peter Graves, was charged on counts of alleged assault and breach of the peace. He appeared in the Bridewell District Court later in the afternoon before District Justice Kotsouris who released him on bail to reappear before the court on Thursday 12th February.

Meanwhile outside over 1500 students from the Dublin Colleges marched from Parnell Square to the Court and held a rally outside.

The march included a group of students from the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) who performed a drama about the "death of Education" based on the death of Marat. 'Marat' suitably attired with blood was carried on the shoulders of his colleagues.

The rally was addressed by USI president Patricia Hegarty who pointed out that at least 75,300 emigrated between 1981 and 1986. Ms Hegarty attacked Fine Gael and Labour for their policy of cuts while in Government but pointed out that neither Fianna Fail or the Progressive Democrats were being honest with the students as they had failed to spell out their intentions on fee rises and grant increases. She warned that further cuts in 3rd level finances would only lengthen the queues of young people who wish to emigrate.

Peter Graves who was carried by students on their shoulders following his release dismissed the arrests as "attempts to prevent us from having a peaceful protest to further our demands". He added "we must not be put off by such attempts in our just campaign for a fairer and free education system with equality of access."

During the same week John Lawlor of Maynooth SU and Joe McCarthy of Cork RTC SU spoke to the Fianna Fail leader Mr. Haughey when students picketed his visits to Cork and Maynooth. Mr. Haughey said he would see what he could do but would give no

specific commitments although on the question of grants for theology students he said would go as near as it was possible to give a commitment for change. If Mr. Haughey is elected into power USI will make sure that he lives up to that commitment.

On Thursday 5th, public debates were held in TCD; NIHE Dublin; Maynooth and in Waterford RTC where sitting and aspiring TDs were given the opportunity to state their education policies and answer questions from the floor (USI Head Offices noted a rise in requests by the politicians looking for briefing documents on fees and grants in the run up to the various debates). One TCD student was heard to comment that he has never heard so much waffle in his life as the contributions from the major political parties.

The Officer Board of USI meeting on Friday February 6th, called for further action in Dublin on the 12th, of February to coincide with the next court appearance of the USI Education Officer. USI President, Ms. Patricia Hegarty called on all students to get involved in the action. "With the General Election we must show politicians that we are serious in our actions on education issues. USI hopes that students will come to Dublin and show their solidarity with Peter. We call on all politicians to meet our demands for a fees freeze, and immediate rise in student grants and the provisions of adequate places and facilities in the colleges.

Thousands of students from around the country took part in a series of marches and occupations and public debates as USI organised a series of protests to highlight youth and educational issues in the run up to the general election.

On Tuesday 3rd, of February 60 students from CoACT occupied the County Council Offices in Limerick. On Wednesday 400 students from the Regional Technical Colleges in Galway, Athlone and University College Galway marched through Athlone. A number of students attempted to occupy the Department of Education Examinations Branch but were prevented from doing so by a large force of Gardai. Four students were arrested under Section 30 of the Offences Against the

Education - What the Manifestos say

Fianna Fail

Most of the media criticism of Fianna Fail's "The Programme for National Recovery" has been directed at their lack of specifics. Their Education Policies follow this trend, although a number of suggestions are made for the third level sector. Firstly they propose to make third level more industry-orientated. They propose enterprise centres in all colleges and that VEC colleges move into the research field. A novel proposal is the immediate setting of a placement programme for third level graduates to be funded by the Youth Employment Agency. Fianna Fail state that "many young people now emigrate immediately on graduating, and priority will be given to keeping this valuable human resource within the economy."

On places they propose to accelerate the building of the new RTCs in Thurles, Castlebar, Dun Laoghaire, Tallaght and Blanchardstown as well as the extensions to NIHE Dublin and Limerick. No specific time-scale is mentioned and USI has already pointed out to all the political parties that these colleges will still not provide enough places, even under the modest targets set by the Coalition.

Fianna Fail also intended to 'Simplify the entry system to third level'. For any 17-18 year old aspiring to third level this will be a welcome policy. However, again Fianna Fail are short of specifics. If Fianna Fail are returned to power USI will be pressing strongly to get involved in any review of the system.

On the first and second level Fianna Fail propose to use the fall in the birth rate to reduce pupil/teacher ratio, initially at primary level and then progressively into the post-primary system. This does not offer much hope for unemployed teachers or those involved with Carysfort College who may have hoped that Fianna Fail would offer more immediate measures to improve the terrible pupil teacher ratio in the country. Fianna Fail do not state their intentions as regards Carysfort.

Fianna Fail want to encourage post-primary schools to offer a second european language in addition to French and to put more priority on scientific export markets.

Interestingly for the party who, in opposition, were most vocal in their opposition to fee rises, particularly in the VEC sector, Fianna Fail do not mention fees or grants never mind actually making firm proposals or commitments in this area. They make no mention of the Green Paper 'Partners in Education' or plans for control of colleges or student representation on such bodies. There are no commitments either to providing resources for colleges.

Overall FF education policy follows the general trend of their manifesto. They identify some important areas where change is necessary but fail to deliver the specifics. They also fail to mention the issues that affect you directly - high fees, low grants and lack of student control in education structure.

Fine Gael

For a sector which has received heavy punishment under

the Coalition, "Breaking out of the Vicious Circle" would be more appropriate if it were directed at the vicious circle of fee rises and grant cuts that have been the main plank of Fine Gael's offerings in the past. Unfortunately their 1987 manifesto offers more of the same.

They propose reviewing the whole system of third level funding and student financial support. However, they already hint that this review will conclude that full cost fees will be charged and that loans should be introduced for fees in high cost faculties, for the proportion of fees in excess of a normal Arts/Humanities fee. This will allow more money to be 'directed at those most in need' - an euphemism for increasing grants and fee payments for those whose families earn the least money by a small amount while increasing the cost enormously for everyone else. Fine Gael do not commit themselves to increasing the overall amount of money available for third level. If Fine Gael were genuinely concerned about those few working class people who make it into third level education they would expand the existing grants system and reduce fees.

Fine Gael propose an expansion of part-time courses at third level - again of course these students would not qualify for a grant or social welfare assistance. An interesting proposal is that whereby persons who have spent seven years or more on the labour market and then become unemployed will have a number of places reserved for them in university or college. In addition there are now 77670 persons under 25 on the unemployed register. The Fine Gael solution is limited only to those who have worked for seven years not to those who badly need better qualifications to give them more chance of getting a job.

There is no mention in the manifesto of the five new RTCs which were first mentioned in 1984 and have been released to the press twice since then. As far as USI has ascertained only 1 site has been purchased and no building work has started.

In its attempts to balance the books Fine Gael offers perhaps not 'vicious circles' but certainly spiralling costs. However, at least Fine Gael have mentioned student financing in their manifesto, even if USI would find their solution unsatisfactory.

Progressive Democrats

The Progressive Democrats, contesting a general election for the first time have produced a manifesto under the heading 'A Nation that Works'. They believe that education needs must be provided in a comprehensive framework.

At third level the party propose to review the grants system to take account of family size and actual financial circumstances. However, within this review they intend to look at the feasibility of a students loan scheme to supplement the existing grants scheme. USI has long been opposed to such a loans scheme which would discriminate against women, mature students and those from working class backgrounds. It would also make

students tend towards cheaper degree courses. The way to increase access in our view is to reduce fees and provide a realistic level of maintenance support. They support the development of courses through television and radio, backed up by correspondence courses and some class work with a view to encourage adult and second chance education. USI has campaigned for a long time to establish distance learning and media based courses.

In first and second level the Progressive Democrats support the allocations of greater resources in pre-school and remedial teaching as the key to helping children in disadvantaged areas aspire to equal educational and job opportunities. They also support changes in the school curriculum. They propose to assign teachers to local communities to launch a special assault on standards of literacy of young people in certain urban areas.

Like both FF and FG the PDs are short on specifics in matters such as fee rises and the provision of new places including the five new RTCs promised since 1984.

Labour

Under the heading 'People Matter Most', the Labour Party Manifesto is very weak on third level education. In fact, other than a suggestion that 'programmes of long-distance education developed' they have nothing to say at all.

Labour favour a planned reduction in class sizes in schools with large proportions of disadvantaged children, to be funded by the phasing out of state grants for fee-paying schools over a four year period. They hope to use the falling birth rate to provide resources for disadvantaged pupils in primary and post-primary schools.

Labour favour a life skills education programme and intend co-education to be the norm. They want to bring all schools under the democratic control of local education authorities and develop a single management structure.

Labour do not propose to provide additional financial resources to third level and there is no mention of improvement to facilities.

Workers Party

'Fight back with The Workers Party' is the message in their Manifesto for the General Election. On third level education they point out that many barriers exist to prevent working class persons from entering third level education - the very section of the population who pay large amounts of PAYE taxation to run the system. They believe that every person who is qualified to enter a third level course should qualify for some form of a grant and call for big improvements in the grants scheme. As they put it "those who are

better off should pay for third level education, but this should be done through the taxation system". They also point out the scandal of the lack of grants for mature students and they oppose student loans.

On adult education they call for new centres of adult education under the auspices of the VECs coupled with adequate funding and proper planning. They also support the right of workers to have time off for educational purposes and in this respect would support the implementation of the recommendations of the International Labour Organisation's convention on release from work (paid educational leave).

The Workers Party recognises that unlike other European Countries the higher education system will continue to expand. They do not however, provide specific policies with regard to the building of new colleges etc.

At Primary level the Workers Party call for an end of private or religious control of schools to be replaced by local democratic structures and want the implementation of satisfactory pupil/teacher ratios. They oppose all fees at primary school including 'voluntary' contributions and bus charges and propose a widened curriculum including life skills, sociology and the political process.

Sinn Fein

Sinn Fein whose slogan is 'For Real Change' base their educational policies on the fact that social and economic development depends on the availability of an educated workforce capable of meeting the challenge posed by technological advances.

They believe that further cuts in education spending will reinforce social inequality and result in further emigration of young people.

They believe that third level education is becoming increasingly the preserve of the better off and point out that 43% of all college entrants come from the wealthiest 13% of families.

They believe that inadequate grants and fees which have risen by at least 300% in the past five years make it financially impossible for many to attend. At first and second level they believe the various 'extras' such as books, uniforms and parental contributions place an intolerable burden on families and that most primary schools only survive because of parental contributions and individual efforts of teachers themselves.

Sinn Fein believe that education is a civil right, essential for the future of our people. They support adequate funding to cater for this right at every level of the education system.

USI February

Title: Election '87, Education in Crisis: Use Your Vote

Organisation: Union of Students in Ireland

Date: 1987

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