

# The Future is Socialism

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**A GLOBAL ANALYSIS  
BY THE WORKERS' PARTY**



THIS PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS has been a difficult time for the Party. But we are not unique among workers, socialist and communist parties in this respect. Certainly our problems had their distinct characteristics - that is only to be expected. But other parties have also suffered ideological crises, betrayal, defections, loss of morale and popular support. That we have this in common illustrates that the primary forces which have brought this about straddle the globe and should be examined as such.

This is not to run away from any special difficulties which we face but we must make sure that our analysis does not become bogged down in parochial detail that would blind us to the international dimension of the present critical situation. At the same time, if we discover common negative international features, we cannot simply leave them hanging as it were, in the air, but must seek to grasp their impact on Irish political life. If we can do this then we will be better prepared to face the extremely hard task that confronts us of building the Party into a powerful political instrument of the working class before the end of this century.

### ***Sense of despair***

It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that two dominant aspects of the past decade have produced a sense of despair in the ranks of serious socialists. One has been the growth during that period of far right ideology in the US and Britain with its global implications, and the inability of the "Left" to present any serious challenge even up to today.

Staying within that international bracket, it would be both premature and, we believe, wrong to see the election of the American Democrat Clinton as representing a fundamental sea - change in the nature of American politics. The Democrats were careful to direct their appeal almost entirely to the middle class and equally careful to stay within the ideological parameters which reinforced, strengthened and expanded "Waspish" America during the Reagan years.

There are clear parallels here with the situation in Ireland and the Labour Party in Ireland which is illustrated by the fact that there was no mention in their programme of the real vicious poverty which destroys the lives of thousands of our fellow people.

The second and even more "despair creating" feature was the collapse of all the Eastern European socialist countries. No matter whether socialists and their supporters were strong or weak, as it were, on Eastern Europe, the impact was undoubtedly significant. On its own that statement is neither profound nor surprising nor indeed were the variety of responses. It would be impossible to list these exhaustively but we can note various efforts to find accommodation with the new reality ranging from total disillusion with the socialist project, which expresses itself in various ways, to a complete withdrawal from the political process - absolute alienation.

Undoubtedly, there are lessons to be learned here not only from what has just been said but also from the conclusions that we draw from this experience. We must see to it that the conclusions are based on intense ongoing ideological debate and not simply on the mouthing of slogans no matter how new or modern they may sound.

Naturally, there have been positive responses which undoubtedly will spread. Many parties having suffered the initial trauma are, like ourselves, looking at the situation afresh and correctly setting about the serious business of theoretical renewal. And at the same time they are critically examining as far as is possible all the factors which not only led to the collapse of Eastern Europe but also saw so many comrades literally abandon, overnight, principles and ideals which they appeared to hold so fervently. It is true that there were those who did so for opportunist reasons and there are lessons to be learned from that. But that cannot be true in the vast majority of cases and we must try to establish what were the preconditions which saw honest and deep political commitment become limpid social democracy.

Possibly one of the most forthright statements, designed to appeal to former socialists, has come from the American radical intellectual JK Galbraith, in a lecture delivered in Britain recently. In it he sets out a non-ideological programme; in his own words "We are for what works best".

This is preceded by some stern advice; "In dealing with the economic system we can no longer believe there are controlling principles - socialist principles, social democratic principles, in the United States liberal principles. Ours is an age of constructive pragmatism. Issues must be decided on their merits". And then, just in case such advice makes one shift uneasily, there is a dire warning that will make all good men and women run from the aid of the Party; "There can be no escape from thought into theology".

To be fair to Galbraith he insists on a role for the State in "Job creation, welfare payments, education, job training, drug counselling, housing - all urgent needs of the underclass..." And he is, as he says, prepared to forego "support from some of the more fortunate, the community of personal contentment". Equally, he notes, without even a smile that "The rich will desert us; but they already have". *How many Irish radicals have already pointed this out?*

Galbraith rejects the "intolerable, unequal," distribution of income which "is becoming more so" particularly in the United States". His advice? "A firm stand for a more equitable sharing of income must be strongly a part of our platform". Thus he is concerned to make "more effective and more tolerant and equitable the economic system we have. Our claim is not to violent change, certainly not to revolution. It is to a socially better performance by the existing system". One wonders whether Galbraith's American "underclass" upon which "the modern mixed economy depends" will continue to perform its critical functional role on the basis of whatever they interpret a "firm stand" to mean, or will there be greater and more frequent 'Los Angeles type' social

explosions. The latter looks almost certain. Clinton may indeed be managing liberal America's Last Chance Saloon.

However, we must take Galbraith's thoughts and views seriously. In particular we must examine what the implications of his "constructive pragmatism" are for a total understanding of society.

### ***Implicit Values***

Galbraith appears to be talking specifically about the economy. To allow that would be to concede the entire socialist position. Our understanding has always been that we see society underpinned by the economy, as a network of social institutions interacting with one another. Equally we know that the profile of any given society is largely shaped by the values implicit in its economic system.

Galbraith is asking for economic issues to be treated on their merits. However, simply to accept that as a non-contentious statement would raise a number of very important questions, apart from the obvious one of what constitutes an economic issue; one of the questions that is at the heart of the conflict between capitalism and socialism.

Be that as it may we are faced with the problem of admitting the historicity of economic issues unto the agenda and the equally valid question of what constitutes the content of merit.

For example the American military industrial complex which created the most comprehensive war machine in history did and does have an economic function, measured in terms of job provision alone. And undoubtedly Research and Development in that field has led to positive benefits in civilian industry. But are we to ignore the history of that industry and its results? Are we not entitled to include the terror bombing of Vietnam under John F. Kennedy, the American military and economic backing for genocide in East Timor and the incredible slaughter carried out in the Gulf under George Bush, to mention but a few examples of one of the functions of the armaments industry - are we not entitled to include that bloody history as part of any programme to "judge on merit"?

The point here is that Galbraith's demand - and he is not alone - that we abandon our socialist principles has more grave implications for human society, as the above example illustrates, than the acceptance or rejection of mere economic programmes. And that is in no way to minimise the role of economics in human existence.

### ***The necessity of history***

His demand is to do away with history - to begin with a clean sheet. This is what is meant by pragmatism,

constructive or otherwise. Decisions are made only by reference to the immediate circumstances.

This is not only arrant nonsense, it would be viciously dangerous if we were to admit it into any aspect of the human condition - economics, politics, culture or whatever.

It would make a fundamental principle of forgetfulness and as such, taken to its logical conclusion, would spell the end of humanity.

If we were to consider to whom this principle would appeal, then it should become clearer how malign a proposal it constitutes - in this bloody century alone, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Truman, Kennedy, Sukharno/ Suharto, Pinochet, Pol Pot, Bush, Thatcher - and there are undoubtedly others - based their actions on the belief that they could create a clean sheet. The human cost is numbered in millions.

It will be argued that this is to misrepresent Galbraith. Firstly, he is undoubtedly a humane, decent man who is concerned about the deplorable living standards of millions of Americans and he abhors the corrupt individualism of the Reagan/Thatcher/Bush years. However, while as socialists we share those feelings, at the same time we have a moral and political obligation to bring forward for scrutiny what is latent in his proposals. Galbraith is no ordinary commentator. His views, particularly at this time, have universal significance. Their prescriptive character echoes Gustav Havel, "Socialism is dead". This assumption is based on the two features which we mentioned at the beginning - the dominance of capitalist individualism and the collapse of the socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

There is an interesting contradiction here; capitalism or what is called a Free Market Economy is now understood to be outside of history, that is, no other form of social configuration can replace it and on the other hand the appeal to the historical collapse of European socialism as conclusive evidence that "socialism" was a once and for all experience that will never re-emerge.

There are those who will say that the selection of the armaments industry in history is an easy target - the majority find that industry distasteful. Although if that is the case it raises problems about its persistence and expansion over time in the democratic countries. The comment from an executive in the armaments industry in the U.S. that "Human nature" being what it is, the industry [Arms] will rise again" raises the crucial question of profits or humanity. However, with the growth in international awareness of the ecological dysfunctional character of other industries, e.g. nuclear, chemical, agri-business, fishing etc., it is simply not good enough to argue for "constructive pragmatism" and judgement on merit outside of history.

***History, that is, as a critical factor in individual industries, as a component of our understanding of merit and as a reservoir of the idealistic humanism which has motivated millions in the struggle for socialism.***

## ***Problems of merit***

Let us consider the question of investment in education in Britain since the end of World War 2, for example, when the principle of equal opportunity was enshrined, up until the election of the Thatcher style Tory government. In spite of the fact that there was commitment to this liberal principle for roughly 35 years with the provision of secondary education for all and expanded access to third level it is true that the vast majority of the working class were unable to take advantage of this social change. Indeed it is equally true that the top sector of all British educational institutes continues to remain largely the same, e.g. the public schools and the Oxbridge Universities. They provide the bulk of those occupying the top 5% - 10% of British society.

Those who subscribe to modern right wing individualism would argue that this is prima facia evidence that the bulk of investment in education should go to where the returns are greatest. Based on this evidence it should therefore go to the existing top 10%.

One can also see how the argument would be reinforced by claiming that investment, above a certain level sufficient to produce a general mass of educationally adequate producers/consumers, is in effect economically wasteful. The returns just are not there.

What is clear then is that decisions to "positively discriminate in favour of the educationally disadvantaged" run absolutely counter to conservative notions of merit.

However, even if merit is qualified by "social" and this understood to mean that we cannot allow society to continue educationally along lines where the vast majority are denied opportunity, it is also abundantly clear, given the British experience, that to view education autonomously (or even relatively autonomously) does not result in a qualitatively significant change in the numbers of working class children escaping from Galbraith's "underclass" or even enriching their understanding of the human condition.

Indeed it seems obvious that "judgement on merit" is a particularly crude instrument if it is to be the sole yardstick for investment.

That is in no way to suggest that this British type of piecemeal social engineering does not bring advantages or that it should be discarded because it did not bring about the results which many of its proponents anticipated. Rather it should draw our attention to the fact that many features of modern capitalist society operate outside, as it were, of legislation, no matter how socially benign.

For socialists that is not only obvious, but it also constitutes the core of our critique of all forms of social democracy. Galbraith now articulates quite succinctly what lay and lies at the heart of social democracy's

hostility to the socialist programme. "There is no alternative to the capitalist economic system". We can expect this to be dressed up in various forms, at times even, the appeal may be to "socialism". But the reality is that social democrats will increasingly define their role as making capitalism work better and they will do this with a greater degree of public confidence than before.

In the short run it is quite possible that there will be an upsurge in support for the broad spectrum of social democratic parties, at least in Europe and North America. It is also likely that this will be accompanied by a fresh and vicious assault on socialist values led by the new lieutenants of capitalism.

### ***Defence and offence***

Already we have seen manifestations of this mood. Like Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien - "1916 should never have happened" - a gaggle of international social historians are seeking to demonstrate that "the October Revolution was in fact disastrous for the development of socialism." The Bolsheviks destroyed the great future which would have been secured by the social democrats!

This type of "if-only-theorising" would be of little consequence if it were confined to the bars and bistros adjacent to students' unions and media centres, however it is the logical progression, some would say conclusion, of the global imperialist and capitalist ideological, economic and military campaigns to destroy every physical manifestation of the socialist project in any form.

Let the record be put straight here. We do not argue that socialists, socialist states, socialist internationals did not make grave mistakes from 1917 until today. Unfortunately there were many who held to such blind dogmatism; the political damage arising from that is incalculable. For our part in The Workers' Party our relationships with the former USSR and China was carried on on our understanding of the vital importance of frank and honest exchanges. We made our position clear on a wide variety of issues ranging from Northern Ireland to Cambodia and Vietnam, China and Korea.

At the same time we must not confuse dogmatism with loyalty, both to principles and ideals. Naturally it is part of the anti-socialist campaign to insinuate just that. Note Galbraith's sly comment about escaping "from thought into theology". The accusation is clearly directed at those who believe that there can be an alternative economic system, that society is a human construct and like all human constructs it can be altered. Indeed it is we socialists who persist in rational thought, who are constantly seeking to break the chains of superstition, who refuse to believe in either mysterious guiding hands or disinterested benign objective economic or class forces. Here we need really to break out from our defensive positions and go on the offensive. And we are not just referring to Irish socialists.

Firstly, we need to combat with all our philosophical and organisational capacity the capitalist and imperialist

dogmas which are exemplified in the unthinking acceptance of vague and contradictory notions like the "free market" to the "legal right" of the US led coalition to spray Iraq with long range missiles, for example.

Secondly, we need to expand our intellectual horizons. By this we mean our thinking tends to be dominated and structured by a Euro-centric and Atlantic form of understanding. As comrades from the Communist Party of India (M) pointed out to us; European crises impinge upon them only at the margins. Paradoxically we are living in an increasingly unified yet at the same time fragmented world. And our thinking must take this into account. In the case of the vast majority of citizens in any society this will be of little consequence. That is only to be expected. Disasters, tragedies, natural or human made, will only move them to action to the degree that they, more or less, directly effect their immediate circumstances.

The human condition demands that people spend the bulk of their time getting on with the business of living. No matter how devastated an Irish mother may feel at the sight and plight of starving children in Somalia she must still concern herself virtually totally with the welfare of her own children. And that statement should not be interpreted in any sexist or racist fashion. The same is true for the half million unemployed Irish people for whom capitalism is unable to provide jobs. They may wake to the news of warring sectarian nationalisms in what was Yugoslavia; or the latest terrorist massacre in Belfast; or pictures of freezing Palestinians huddled around a camp fire in a no-man's-land because Israel cares nothing for international law or opinion; but they *still* must face the bleakness of their own empty days. We are not blind to this reality.

### ***International working class unity***

But internationalism is a central component of our socialist ideology. It is so in a manner that is matched only by one other force - our class enemy, capitalism and imperialism. Matched is, unfortunately, the wrong word, although there was a period when it did appear to be the case. From that also there are harsh lessons to be learned.

Much has been made in recent times of The Workers' Party commitment to international solidarity. Or to be more accurate, specific sections of our Party's international work have been painted in lurid colours by elements in the media since the collapse of the USSR. Naturally this had a purpose - to discredit the Party by linking it with what was a "discredited, failed, socialist system". Deluges of words poured out on this theme. There were none which sought to examine in any serious way why The Workers' Party identified with the socialist world (and still identifies with socialist states and parties seeking to build socialism). Nor was there any reference to our history of internationalism from our material support for the gallant Vietnamese to our financial and medical aid to the people of Nicaragua. It would be naive to expect otherwise.

We understand internationalism to be part of our revolutionary political heritage. It has its roots in the link



between the men and women of '98 and the inspiring slogan of the French Revolution for "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity". It is thus as much a component of our ideology as our goal of a "democratic, secular, socialist unitary state in Ireland - a Republic".

Internationalism, then, for The Workers' Party is not an afterthought. Naturally therefore as we built the Party into Ireland's first modern socialist party we established friendly relations with many parties, movements, organisations and states in different parts of the world. We identified key criteria - that they shared our views on democracy, socialism, world peace and disarmament, democratic political struggle and opposition to terrorism.

### ***Internationalism***

Let us give some examples. As already mentioned we supported the Vietnamese people in their struggle against the barbarous American imperialist aggression; we provided medical aid to the MPLA Workers' Party of Angola and we have constantly supported the African National Congress in their opposition to Apartheid and the racist South African regime; we have had as guests at our Annual Ard Fheis representatives from the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, Cuba, China, Korea, the former USSR and GDR and various parties and groups of parties ranging from the Japanese Communist Party to the Left Unity Group in the European Parliament.

Not least among our international activity was the promotion of the European Committee for Peace and Security which emerged from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Indeed The Workers' Party through the Irish Committee did more than any of our native governments to promote understanding among our people of the contribution which the ECSC process was making to preserving peace and understanding during the difficult years of division in Europe.

While clearly all these activities and associations placed us firmly on the side and within the "socialist camp" the Party at all times preserved its independence and integrity in dealing with all our foreign comrades.

At the same time we recognised both from our own history, power relations within Ireland and the need to improve communications with democratic and social democratic organisations the importance of building links in Britain and the USA. For many years we sent speakers to the United States on lecture tours explaining the importance of anti-terrorism and the struggle for democratic politics and guaranteed civil rights in Northern Ireland. It is no exaggeration to claim that our voice was the sole opposition raised in Irish-American circles to the funding of Provisional terrorism in Ireland. We cannot claim great success but we did shake the reactionary forces to such an extent that their New York based journal rejoiced over the murder of our members in Belfast by Sinn Fein gunmen with the headline "Provisional wedge against communism in Ireland." (*November 1975*)

As a party we are still concerned not only to oppose those seeking support in the United States for terrorism but

we will also continue to oppose the promotion of the McBride principles as a solution to sectarian discrimination in the workplace in Northern Ireland. On this issue we are in agreement with the Fair Employment Commission which quite correctly realises that discrimination cannot be addressed by imposed sectarian quotas and that job applicants should be treated absolutely equally on the basis of their capacity to fill positions.

### ***Winning Jobs***

In the long run our attitude is that discrimination will be ended or at least neutralised when a programme of full employment is launched in Northern Ireland. To that end at all times our supporters in America and our visiting comrades have sought to encourage would be investors, not on the basis of Roman Catholic rights or Protestant rights, but to win secure jobs for workers in the North.

Naturally Britain has been central to our international activity. For many years pseudo-radical movements such as Troops Out occupied the centre of the stage within the broad British Labour Movement. They had captured some significant support within the Labour Party, members of Parliament and Constituency branches. During that time they portrayed The Workers' Party as reactionary, pro-Unionist, timid, reformist; in fact they conducted an intensive, virulent, ultra-left campaign aimed at the thousands of Labour party members worried both by the overt and covert support of 'Troops Out' people for terrorism and the transparent naivety of their instantaneous solution.

It is interesting to note in passing that the British Trade Union Movement was considerably less susceptible to the constant barrage of propaganda coming from Troops Out.

We spent many years undoing this activity and building strong fraternal links with serious socialists in the British Labour Movement. Our programme of Democratic Devolved Government in Northern Ireland, backed by a strong legally enforceable Bill of Rights is recognised by socialists who take a genuine interest in the North as the way forward. At the same time we have supported British workers - under class attack from the Tories to the best of our abilities.

A recent sterling example of this solidarity was our political, physical and financial support for the National Union of Mineworkers. The Party throughout the whole country organised meetings, raised finance, brought miners' delegations to meet with different organisations here and in short showed our total commitment to the miners as an important section of the British working class undergoing vicious attack from the then confident, triumphalist Thatcher and her capitalist allies.

Times have changed somewhat. The British economic miracle of the '80's has been exposed for the rapacious sham that it was. Yet still the miners are subjected to the criminal economic thinking of Heseltine and his advisers. The Workers' Party remains solidly in support of the miners, not only on account of our most recent

actions but also because we remember the outpouring of kindness and working class welcome for Irish children during the 1913 Lockout.

This is not sentimentality. It is a concrete expression of working class sentiment which recognises the struggles of our brothers and sisters across national boundaries and beyond memories of ancient wrongs. It is, in other words, a small but significant regional call for a re-affirmation of that demand, "Workers of the world unite!"

It is impossible in this context not to refer to the continued success of the British Conservative party even at the height of the worst depression since the 1930's. Their victory in the last General Election confounded both the pollsters and the bulk of general informed political opinion. Just how did such a disaster take place; the extent of which is not really conveyed by the astronomical unemployment figures, three million plus and hundreds of thousands wasting their time on so called retraining and work welfare schemes. Conventional wisdom has it that unspecified numbers will remain unemployed both in the short and long term. The implications of this for society are uncountable.

### ***Right to Work***

Mass unemployment is now held to be a permanent feature of any future British society. Nowhere is there any firmly held conviction that this can be turned around to an era of full employment. Indeed if recent speeches by leading British Labour Party politicians are anything to go by, and hopefully that will not always be the case, then British working people have entered a period where the socialist philosophy which underpinned the belief in the right of all to work, has been dumped.

That may seem to some to be a harsh judgement. Anecdotes are not substitute for hard evidence, but when an old age pensioner in Northern Ireland can listen to a speech by John Smith, Leader of the British Labour Party, (*Bournemouth, February 7, 1993*) and come to the conclusion that there is little to choose between Smith's pronouncements and those of John Major then the future of the British working class seems bleak indeed.

His speech is worthy of careful study in the light of our earlier remarks about the influence of American academic Galbraith on the thinking of "social democrats". Essentially Smith's message is the same - note the following language; "finding practical solutions to our problems"; "replacing dogma with imaginative policies"; "our policies . . . must always be pragmatic and practical"; "new policies . . . rejects dogma, and embraces common-sense solutions"; "Ownership today is therefore largely irrelevant"; "For the truth today is that learning power gives you earning power and the power to control your own life".

There is much else besides, but these few quotes give some of the flavour of Smith's thinking. That is not to say that there are not many important and interesting political elements in his speech, ranging from concern for the environment to the need for a Bill of Rights and the creation of devolved regional political institutions.

Equally his demolition job of 14 years of Tory rule is worthy of note: "All the Tory hype and mythology about the transformation of Britain, about the reversal of economic decline, and about Britain leading the industrialised world has exploded. The Tory bubble has burst. The truth is that the boom of the late '80s was nothing more than candyfloss - blown away by two and a half years of the worst recession that this country has experienced since the 1930s."

However one would not have to be a socialist to make these comments - former Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath has said much the same. So we are still left with the central question what, if anything, does the British Labour Party offer the British people, never mind the working class, that differs in fundamentals from the Tories?

### ***The centrality of ownership***

Frankly and honestly, having analysed Smith's speech, one can only conclude that the BLP has adopted a 1990's version of J. Burnham's old anti-Marxist thesis, "*The Managerial Revolution*" (first published in 1941 and republished in 1970) as its so-called new thinking.

Ironically, in dismissing what Smith describes as, "a largely sterile debate about the ownership of industry and services as if privatisation and nationalisation were the only conceivable choices in economic policy", he pays unwitting tribute to the class viciousness of the Tories.

It is virtually incomprehensible that a leader of a Labour Party could deliver the following: "The mania about ownership has moved from Left to Right. The Tories' fixation is driving them to even more absurd acts of privatisation - the railways, the post office, the coal mines, and the water of Scotland - all well beyond the limits of public approval and comprehension." (sic).

No one has ever argued that these were "the only conceivable issues in economic policy"; apart from being absurd, that is, to try to trivialise an ideological position which was concerned to change the very basis on which society was organised. If Smith does not grasp this the capitalists do. Hence the grim determination they have displayed in Britain since Thatcher came to power and the equally unswerving dedication of the right in America at home and abroad to private ownership of public wealth.

Was the brutal and bloody overthrow of Salvador Allende plotted by the Chicago monetarists and the CIA just simply a knee jerk re-action to another "Marxist government" in Latin America or was it to ensure the survival of Rio Tinto and other "private enterprises"?

That is not an idle question. Particularly when we locate it within the perspective of recent events in the Middle East. How often was it said that the Bush administration would have shown no interest whatsoever in Kuwait if its economy had been based on growing carrots rather than sitting on a sea of oil?

Private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange is an essential component of capitalist philosophy and economics. Capitalists have no intention of bartering this principle, modifying it or in any way reducing its significance in modern urban industrial economies.

Once that is accepted and understood then the appalling character of John Smith's declaration becomes clear. In effect he is saying as leader of the British Labour Party exactly the same as Gustav Havel "Socialism is dead". All that remains is to conduct a memorial service after a decent time interval. Naturally one can expect a battery of articles and speeches prior to this stressing that socialism can exist independent of the ownership issue.

For example in a mocking piece in the *Guardian* (February 1993) Jack Straw MP claims that "Part 4 of Clause IV, is today almost treated with mystical reverence". And goes on to write "Charges of treachery and heresy face anyone who dares suggest it might be amended. Those who drafted it 75 years ago would be laughing."

Once again it is important to draw attention to this very specific, calculated use of language, even in these few sentences. This is worth spelling out in detail.

Apart from the fact that one would like to know how Straw is able to assess the mood, humorous or otherwise, of the authors of Clause 4, now long dead, the sentence is clearly meant to tell everyone who supports public ownership that today they are just a laughing stock. One feels inclined to remind him that the three million plus unemployed are not laughing at the failure of the British Labour Party to challenge successfully the Tories and capitalism. We also need to note the twin implications of such phrases as "mystical reverence", "treachery and heresy" and "dares suggest it might be amended".

For Mr Straw and apparently a growing number of the leadership of the British Labour Party, upholders of Clause 4 are religious mystics who cannot participate in democratic political debate or reject such debate by simply abusing their opponents as "heretics".

Naturally that puts Mr Straw, no pun intended, on the side of the angels. He is the democrat, the rationalist, the upholder of serious political debate, and if his pamphlet *Policy and Ideology* is the view of the BLP leadership, he is the new ideologue of the BLP.

Virtually simultaneously with Mr Straw's *Guardian* article, the former Deputy Leader of the BLP, Roy Hattersley set about emasculating Labour's constitution in an article in the *London Times* (23.2.93) headlined "Hattersley calls on Labour to abandon nationalisation". There are a number of interesting statements in Hattersley's piece, for example on the party name; "Certainly we could not be called the Social Democrats. That is a name for a centre party. Labour will not succeed, and may not even survive, unless it remains unequivocally on the left. The new constitution must begin with a simple statement of socialist principle." The problem is: what does it mean to be

on the left and equally what constitutes a simple statement of socialist principle?

### ***Nature of Capitalism***

One cannot help thinking that Hattersley has failed totally to understand the nature of capitalism when he advocates the replacement of public ownership (Clause 4) by Tawney's famous statement: "Socialism is the gospel of freedom - the utmost possible development of every human being and the deliberate organisation of society for the attainment of that objective (*emphasis added*).

Certainly he fails to understand the implications of Tawney when he can say: "Once upon a time slogans about nationalisation were an alternative to thought." On the contrary it was thought, Marxist thought, which pointed to the realities of ownership, wealth accumulation and distribution and their relationship to power in urban industrial society.

There are other issues which need to be dealt with in Hattersley's article, as a statement of BLP intent, eg; Northern Ireland, an "end to private property", "the suppression of the market economy" and "the failure of command economies". These are all matters of ongoing debate among socialists. But the pejorative and throw away manner in which Mr Hattersley raises these issues makes it difficult to respond adequately in this document to what are critical elements not only in Workers' Party thinking but for socialists worldwide.

Possibly one of the most telling features about the *Times* article is the contribution by a sub-editor to Mr Hattersley's picture: "*New direction: Hattersley wants modernisation to make Labour more radical*". Not too bad - new, modern and radical all in one sentence!

Interestingly enough there has been a marked emphasis on "newness", virtually as an autonomous political concept. We say that because prefixing "new" to "thinking, ideals, programme" ,or whatever seems to ensure that the content will escape serious scrutiny. Also once the claim "new" is made, to voice scepticism is to be labelled reactionary or more likely unreconstructed. At least that would appear to be the case as regards the Left.

However, there is little new or modern in the proposals coming from the Anglo-American social democratic think-tank.

Earlier we referred to Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution* as the possible classical location for the present social democratic assault on socialist values. Essentially his thesis is "that capitalism cannot continue, that socialism has demonstrably failed and that the managers (are) in the process of becoming the ruling class in society." In 1941 he wrote: "Experience has already shown that there is not the slightest prospect of ridding capitalism of mass unemployment. This is indeed becoming widely admitted among the defenders of capitalism, as well as many spokespersons of the New Deal. Even total war, the most drastic conceivable "solution" could

not end mass unemployment in England and France, nor will it do so in this country (US). Every solution that has any possibility of succeeding leads, directly or indirectly, outside the framework of capitalism". (*emphasis added*).

He is equally as trenchant on socialism: "The presumed necessary connection between doing away with capitalist private property rights, on the one hand, and classlessness and freedom on the other, does not exist." And earlier Burnham states: ". . . the assumption that the abolition of capitalist private property rights in the instruments of production is a sufficient condition, a sufficient guarantee, of the establishment of socialism - is false. These rights were abolished in Russia, in 1918. Socialism has not come about, not even approached."

Burnham allows for no exception from his dismissal of the socialist project. "In a large number of countries the reformist Marxist parties have administered the governments, and have uniformly failed to introduce socialism or make any genuine step toward socialism; in fact, have acted in a manner scarcely distinguishable from ordinary liberal capitalist parties administering the government" Wherever else one might disagree strongly with Burnham the latter comment is fairly accurate.

Central then to this part of the Burnham's thesis is;

- (i) that capitalism confronted the problem of state power, defeated the feudal system and changed the character of all other social institutions after lengthy bitter struggle, including civil war, however it now cannot cope, and
- (ii) that socialism failed where a socialist party, the Bolsheviks, came to power and elsewhere socialists in power failed to really tackle the questions of the overthrow of capitalism.

### ***What of the Future***

What then of the future? It would seem that Galbraith, Smith and other social democrats accept these fundamental positions in Burnham's critique. But more than that, as their comments about ownership illustrate, they accept totally the kernel of Burnham's argument, i.e. the future lies with a "managerial class".

Naturally the prime managers will be in Parliament. Politics will no longer be about class struggle as understood by Marxists and less ideologically coherent socialists, it will now simply be about who can best administer pragmatically. Clearly capitalism has scored a major success in persuading "socialists" that real power lies with "function" rather than "possession".

Certainly this is an attractive proposition enabling former socialists to escape from the harsh real world of constant ideological conflict and rest comfortably in the make-believe world of benign capitalism. Class struggle is at an end because the traditional understanding of the basis of the fundamental economic division in society has

disappeared by sleight-of-hand, ie. ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange is a matter of indifference.

At least that would appear to be the case being put forward by those who accept Galbraith's constructive pragmatism as the framework within which the economy must be managed.

However, to return to the question of function. It is indeed obvious that there are thousands of cases where function, due to skill and competence, confers enormous power, e.g. consultants within hospitals. Equally we can distinguish in the industrial field "super-managers" whose power is not related immediately to the issue of ownership; they occupy roles in international finance, multi-national companies and international agencies such as the World Bank and the IMF.

### ***Fundamental Requirement***

But managers are not indifferent to the question of ownership. They cannot be, both by virtue of one intrinsic aspect of their function, they must satisfy the fundamental requirement of capitalism i.e. make profits, and secondly, no matter how remote or dispersed the owners are, managers performance will be and can only be judged by the value which the market will attach to shares in any given company.

These matters are obvious. And let us also state here that as socialists we naturally would be concerned with efficient management at all levels of society and equally recognise in an age of increasing automation and computerisation that the role, influence and power of managers and managerial systems must increase. But that of itself does not remove the question of ownership from the political, economic and class agenda. We need not labour this point further, except to restate that capitalism and its bloody heir, imperialism, has no intention of "looking at the larger world and its present problems . . . without the constraints of ideology". (*Galbraith, RTE Davis Lecture, March 1993*).

If that were the case or even if it were peeping over the distant horizon, then we would be well on the road to ending the bloody reign of world terror, mass unemployment, widespread starvation, the denial of basic human rights, the exploitation of children, women and old people, in fact the displacement of the sordid capitalist ethics which are largely responsible for the present human condition. And even though we are by principle and political conviction optimists there is no light at the end of the tunnel that can be distinguished even were we to shed OUR socialist understanding. Indeed it is only that socialist conviction that enables us to continue to oppose the viciousness, exploitation and the human degradation of mass unemployment that capitalism creates.

Socialists essentially provide hope. We seek to educate, to organise and to lead into a "new Jerusalem" not only in "England's green and pleasant land" but throughout the world. We know that the precondition of shaping that



truly human future depends on our securing the social ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. For without this, capitalists, imperialists will still rule either through their managers, their parliaments or their armies. We will not surrender to such a bleak vision no matter how intellectually persuasive the arguments.

### ***What of Ireland ?***

How extensive that bleak vision is can be partially judged by a headline in the *Irish Times*, July 1993. "'No alternative to Capitalism, says Halliday.'" The speaker is professor in International Relations at the London School of Economics, but more interesting his lecture was delivered at a Dublin Summer School of the Democratic Left, Irelands latest splinter party. His advice to the enthralled audience - echoing Galbraith was, "The best we can go for is a radical interpretation of what capitalist democracy has to offer".

Essentially this will be the message delivered, more or less in the same bland tone, by the Labour Party, the Democratic Left, and Fine Gael in the Republic and by the SDLP, Alliance and the DUP in Northern Ireland; ..'mass unemployment will be always with us, the below-the-poverty-line-poor will be kept in just that degrading position and the unemployed section of the 'underclass' will be told how bloody lucky they are to have any sort of job, so touch your forelock and thank god and the boss that you take home a pay-packet.'

That such an abusive term as 'underclass' has now virtually become a household word is an indication of how pervasive negative pro-capitalist thinking is. However, here and there as well as from The Workers' Party, voices are raised saying, "enough" - there **are** stirrings of Swiftian savage indignation and we must be to the forefront welcoming those who see and speak out against the appalling consequences of capitalism.

For example, Professor Kieran Kennedy, Director of the Irish Economic and Social Research Institute (*Irish Times*, June 1993) wrote, "In Ireland we have for long tolerated human set-aside on a scale unmatched by any other European country. This human set-aside now shows itself chiefly in the unemployment figures. In earlier times it was evident in mass emigration. Both are manifestations of the same malaise, namely that we have consistently failed to find uses for our most important resource - namely people."

Later Kennedy states; "**There are no ways of significantly improving the prospects for unemployment that will not impose costs on established interests.**" (*emphasis added*).

Kennedy also believes that it is possible to mobilise idealism "in a (our) society without a strong tradition of civic culture, where pragmatism seems to rule the roost and where the image of business has been defaced by a series of scandals."

We support this optimism and agree with the societal analysis. His trenchant conclusion is one that must be

presented to the Irish people in both States. "No problem can be solved unless it is confronted by those with the power to do something about it. The brunt of unemployment is borne by those with little power, while those with power have for long been unwilling to confront the problem."

Writing to the *English Independent*, (August 1993) the economist Professor Lord Meghnad Desai endorses such thinking by calling for the former British Labour Party policy of "full employment and economic growth to be put back at the top of the agenda". (John Smith, Leader of the British Labour Party subsequently endorsed this at the TUC, September 7, 1993)

Compare Kennedy's critical understanding of the nature of power with the arrant nonsense of the one time 'Communist' Martin Jacques, former editor of the now thankfully defunct *Marxism Today* (*sic*). Writing in *The Sunday Times* (July 1993), he proclaims in an article entitled 'The End of Politics', "Power is Everywhere".

Jacques endeavours to promote himself as the ultimate apocalyptic guru - there was the end-of ideology (Tucker) and the end-of history (Fukiyama) - by cashing in on the notoriety gained by his predecessors with their chilling titles.

And he incorporates some of their views in statements like; "as we approach the end of the millenium there is, throughout the democratic world, a turn away from ideology towards pragmatism." Or his forecast that British political parties will become "looser, more porous, drawing people from outside their ranks into decision-making along the lines of the American model . . ." (*emphasis added*). The end of politics indeed, but only socialist politics.

Jacques open admiration for American parties is an interesting clue to his political allegiance but it also helps explain defections and betrayal by former leading members of The Workers' Party and also, paradoxically, points the way forward for a revitalised Party. Clearly the Party's decisions over the years to endeavour to build a strong disciplined ideologically coherent mass Party were correct. It was on that basis that electoral gains were made and the respect of a small but significant section of the community won. That this was so is underlined by the sustained efforts- both within and outside the Party- to weaken our commitment to that critical understanding and reduce (as we pointed out before) The Workers' Party to just another political party.

## ***Revolutionary Understanding***

Our revolutionary understanding was portrayed as sinister, simply because we understood the sociology of the modern capitalist state and because we also knew how to forge the political weapons to change it. Therefore it is no surprise, in hindsight, to find efforts to inject echoes of Jacques into Party organisation nor attacks on collective party leadership through the promotion of an 'individual leader' plus the creation of a parliamentary

party. That was and is the programme of those who have no stomach for the socialist struggle and its cowardly history is as old as that of socialism.

Lenin had this to say some 70 odd years ago (*Lenin: Collected Works. Vol. 30pp. 516-18. April 8,1920, " From the destruction of the old social system to the creation of the new" )*

"Defects, mistakes, blunders in such a new, difficult and great understanding are inevitable. Those who are afraid of the difficulties of building socialism, those who allow themselves to be scared by them, those who give way to despair or cowardly dismay, are no socialists."

Quoting Lenin will be sufficient evidence for those whose sole concern is to portray The Workers' Party as backward-looking, conservative and "out of touch with the new thinking". The truth content of Lenin's critical insight will be dismissed because to admit for a moment that it has current relevance exposes the 'fear, depair and cowardly dismay' of those former comrades worldwide who abandoned the struggle after the collapse of the socialist countries.

Our task then is to proceed with the ongoing building of the Party, armed with the fresh insights that these betrayals have delivered to us. At the same time we must recognise that the international chant - orchestrated by the US - of the "Death of Socialism" makes our task much harder than even in the difficult years of the past two decades, *particularly* as that refrain has been taken up by labour, socialist, social democratic, workers and communist parties.

### ***Ireland: Our Programme***

IN April 1985 the Party endorsed the following statement; "The Workers Party's long term goal is the establishment of a democratic, secular, socialist unitary state - a republic. It is our belief that the interests of the working class can best be served in such a State.

The Republic would have strict separation of church and state, would guarantee civil and religious liberties to all and would represent the class interests of the working class on this island.

To achieve this objective the Workers Party will have won the support of the overwhelming majority of the working class in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It cannot be achieved by coercion or subterfuge. The working class must want it or demand it.

The Party also recognises that progress towards that goal depends on a multiplicity of other factors- both national and international, and therefore stresses the immediate need for the establishment of democratic politics in Northern Ireland and the strengthening of democratic institutions in the Republic. (*The Case for Devolved*

*Government in Northern Ireland.) "*

**Absolutely central then to our Programme is the democratic struggle - in the short, medium and long term.**

Clearly it is fundamental if we are to undertake that work in any critically meaningful fashion that the Party must be strengthened, its resources vastly expanded, its internal education deepened, and maximum use made of modern means of communications.

These are the tasks which, while ongoing, must be dealt with with even greater determination than at present - being aware at the same time of the present mood of widespread political alienation, social and economic dread and the deliberate sustained and comprehensive projection of a social system which cannot nor should not be altered.

Our commitment to revolutionary social change has meant that we have been engaged in the broadest possible struggles throughout the country. Naturally Northern Ireland has played a major role both in the development of our organisation and our theoretical perspectives. We have consistently opposed all terrorism and sought to defend and strengthen public life in Northern Ireland. This still is our position.

### ***Northern Ireland: Facing up to the problems***

There can be no lasting political solution to Northern Ireland's problems unless the deep sectarian divisions which run through every part of the society are confronted and ended. The need for democratic structures must be addressed urgently, but we should not pretend that any political constitutional change alone will alter the fact that the community in Northern Ireland is divided into two increasingly separate and often antagonistic groups.

So long as it persists, that antagonism will surface in violence and murder, it will do so again and again. Tackling this central problem is going to be a long and difficult task, but there is no excuse for failing to get started right away. We can't wait for some nationalist or loyalist millennium - or even for a democratic devolved government to be established - before we begin working for a united community.

Whoever is responsible for organising this society - and right now that means the British Government - must confront the main areas of institutionalised structural apartheid in Northern Ireland.

- \* religiously divided schools
- \* discrimination and bigotry in the workplace
- \* sectarian division in social, cultural and sporting activity
- \* the physical separation of people into 'Roman Catholic' and 'Protestant' residential areas.

ALL of these are important and all are linked, but the will to change and the prospects for success vary.

In the field of employment efforts have been made to combat the problem of sectarianism and discrimination. Legislation is in place making it illegal to discriminate on religious or political grounds and to maintain or permit a sectarian atmosphere or climate in the workplace. The progress, or lack of it, which results is being measured and reported upon.

Tribunals sit to hear complaints about breaches of these regulations. At the very least this has led to the principle of equal treatment and job allocation on merit being publicly accepted so that even those steeped in sectarianism feel the need to deny that they discriminate. That is progress of a sort.

There are changes which could be made to strengthen this process, and there is a long way to travel before the deep seated imbalances and prejudices are removed from the offices, factories and sites of Northern Ireland, but at least a start has been made; the problem has been recognised, and work is under way to change the situation.

### ***Integrated Education***

There is a lobby - a growing lobby for integrated education, and the schools already established are welcome breaks in what had been a solid wall of religious segregation for our children.

But the efforts are voluntary and still limited in the main to areas and families where sectarian tensions are less obvious. Government help is restricted to a modest preference on the allocation of capital grants as compared with other voluntary schools.

The government has still not grasped the nettle of a properly integrated, secular, state school system and that means that the vast majority of our children remain - and will remain - divided from each other on religious grounds for the most formative years of their lives.

At best they are building lifelong friendships and forming attitudes based on one part of the community only; at worst they are developing a sense of fear, mistrust and even hatred based on their lack of personal contact and lack of knowledge of 'the other side'.

Establishing an integrated, comprehensive system of education here means challenging a great many vested interests; clerical, educational and class based. At the very least the next step should be taken - now that the government has officially recognised integrated schools as a desirable ideal to aim for.

The Colleges of Education (teacher training) should be amalgamated and a Standing Advisory Committee on the development of Integrated Education should be founded and funded to produce concrete plans for a time-tabled amalgamation of all the wasteful and divisive strands which make up our school system at present. At the same

time The Workers' Party totally rejects the vicious 'free market' approach to education. Broadly we would agree with the following comments by Ted Wragg writing in *The Observer* (September 1993) and welcome these remarks as a signal that at least some on the British Left are fighting back against the totalitarianism of so-called free market thinking;

"The market view of education has neither values nor any vision of the future. The assumption is that the good will survive and the poor will perish. Thus children with special educational needs - after the 19th century notion of 'cripple' has been buried, are now seen once more as undesirable, likely to bring down a schools batting average and place in the league table.

Education should be a well-funded service, with decent buildings, equipment and teachers; a chance for all three and four year olds to have a nursery education; a curriculum that is not a straight jacket but a challenge; a coherent system of learning that recognises and nurtures all talents - not just those of the few; a wide range of opportunities for people after they leave school, open to all - without barriers for the less privileged groups in society.

There must be a positive reaffirmation of the right of every child and adult to the best education, at whatever stage, from the cradle to the grave - irrespective of origin, wealth, social background, religion or ethnic group.  
"(emphasis added).

Wragg also says "the market will not make a fair provision for the future ..." Correct. But surely the British Left must extend this thinking to every aspect of society, if their challenge to capitalism is to be coherent.

### ***Living apart - growing apart***

Dealing with social and recreational activities is a different problem. Of their nature these are less structured, more individual and usually organised on a voluntary basis. There must be encouragement to generate understanding of the evil effects of social apartheid in Northern Ireland and the necessity to make a conscious effort to break the pattern of generations when it comes to lives and habits. No one need abandon their own traditions or culture in order to show an open mind and an open hand to someone with different interests and a different background. Courage and leadership is required from those organisations which have influence in the community and which are predominantly or entirely of one tradition or other. They must accept the responsibility to break down barriers in society and broaden the personal contacts and experience of their members.

A positive first step could be a voluntary 'self-denying ordinance' by all associations, clubs halls, cultural and sporting bodies, putting an end to the display of flags, the playing of anthems or the flaunting of provocative emblems. Discriminatory rules and regulations should also be removed.

The fact that large numbers of our people, and depressingly growing numbers, live separately in Roman Catholic or Protestant ghettos, is one of the foundations which have maintained the centuries-old divisions which should have withered away long ago.

Belfast is divided most dramatically. The ill-named 'Peace Line' snakes between large, virtually self-contained communities like the Falls and the Shankill so that Protestant and Roman Catholics can live out their lives without even sight of each other. This is not only a working class problem. As the 1991 census confirms private residential estates are also starting to reveal a growing pattern of segregation.

In Derry also there has been a steady flow of Protestants across the river to the East bank so that two cities are rapidly taking shape.

This pattern of division is increasingly mirrored in towns across the Province. In smaller rural communities the surface integration and calm is totally deceptive. Throughout Northern Ireland there are villages and townlands which are almost entirely Roman Catholic or Protestant.

There are no short term answers to this problem. That has been one of the 'successes' of the terror gangs over the past decades - they have deepened the suspicion and fear between people and force them further apart in physical terms than they were twenty years ago.

As Councillor Tomas MacGiolla, Lord Mayor of Dublin said, speaking in Lisburn, *Sept. 8, 1993* "Terrorist violence has bred counter terrorist violence. And the result is deeper division in the community than even at the zenith of reactionary Unionism.

We foretold this outcome. For once the fundamental principle of the unity of protestant, catholic and dissenter was abandoned then the road was open to the extremism of murderous sectarian nationalism."

Some progress could be made with new housing projects which could be situated and allocated in such a way as to ensure integration ( a Northern Ireland Housing Executive survey found 75% of tenants would like to live in 'mixed' estates). Experience suggests, however, that any success could be short-lived. If such projects were to work they would depend entirely on the courage and determination of those prepared to persevere with the the initial enterprises - and it is asking a lot of people to take such risks with their families and homes. What *can* be said with certainty however, is that if the prospect for integrated housing looks bleak, than the prospects without it look even bleaker.

At the same time the constitutional agenda must also be pursued - we need to promote a democratic answer to terrorism, and we need to create an administration which will be responsive to the economic and social demands

of a community facing industrial collapse and deepening poverty. The failure to make progress on these issue over the past twenty years has been a failure of politics in Northern Irealnd - and again it can be laid directly at the door of sectarian division.

### ***The failure of sectarian politics***

The political structures of Northern Ireland are as rigidly separatist as those of South Africa. Political success at the polls has always been gained by those most clearly recognised as the staunchest champions of their own tribal group. The politicians and parties that articulate the fears and the prejudices of nationalism and unionism carry the day at elections. The outcome has been a succession of failed initiatives. One project after another has been launched on a tide of optimism and good wishes, and each has foundered as the guardians of nationalist and unionist orthodoxy have sabotaged progress rather than run the risks which any new political development must bring. Given the truly conservative nature of both ideologies, this is not surprising.

They grow from and depend upon sectarian disagreements; disagreements which - however deeply seated- are usually couched in terms of the constitutional issue.

They may at times see the need for compromise, but when confronted with the immediate prospect of a concession to 'the other side' they find it safer to step back into the comfort of old certainties and tired slogans - and we have all paid a heavy price for their cowardice.

The broad patterns of a political way forward in Northern Ireland have been clear for many years now.

#### **WE NEED A DEMOCRATIC ASSEMBLY;**

- \* democratically elected by proportional representation.
- \* functioning democratically with the full participation of all the elected members in the decision making process;
- \* accountable in a democratic manner to the community through structures which ensure that those who are affected by any issue are consulted and given a hearing before decisions are made.

There are many questions to be answered as to how these ideas - which are broadly supported by the people of Northern Ireland -could be made to work in practise.

How would full participation by Assembly members be assured in a way that would be both meaningful and effective?

A committee system such as that which operated in the Assembly of the early 1980's is one well-favoured option. In addition that system gave a significant right of audience to all groups concerned enough to make submissions on the issues being debated at the various committees. If this were translated into a more powerful,



decision making framework it could ensure a unique access by people at street and community level to the processes which directly affect their lives. Once again, the most difficult issue to confront is the sectarian division which in the present political climate could poison any Assembly. There are fears of domination by one side and of subversion by the other, which have led nationalists to distrust the very idea of a Northern Ireland Assembly, and have made unionists uneasy about any weakening of the 'winner takes all' concept of majority rule. These fears must be addressed if the Assembly is to succeed.

### ***The role of a Bill of Rights***

No matter what undertakings must be given at inter-party talks and no matter what words of hope and good-will might be written into any eventual agreement, experience and realism tell us that any administration in Northern Ireland will, on occasion, behave badly. There will be prejudice and bloody-mindedness, arrogance and corruption; rarely - if we are lucky, regularly if we are not.

Therefore, there must be a mechanism for dealing with abuses of power in Northern Ireland, a means whereby those with a sense of grievance can see a legal, peaceful and effective means of redress. That is the core of the case for a Bill of Rights, a case which The Workers' Party has argued for for more than twenty years.

A Bill of Rights must guarantee equal and just treatment for all citizens of the State and offer a means to challenge actions and decisions which fall away from that standard. It must erect legal barriers to any attempt by one section of the community to override the legitimate rights of another; it must lay down the parameters of those legitimate rights; and it must provide the means whereby they can be protected and enforced. It is important also that a Bill of Rights be seen in a positive light - as a framework for democratic progress and a vigorous statement of the standards our society intends to achieve for all its citizens.

It is not suggested that the Bill of Rights should replace existing measures, such as the Sex Discrimination Order or the Fair Employment Acts, but rather that it should be a body of legislation which would incorporate these and additional legal protections.

Both the above proposals; for a Democratic Devolved Government and for a Bill of Rights, are couched here in the broadest terms.

The detailed provision which would give them reality should be the subject of wide political debate and open political discussion. These are the issues which should dominate any future political talks in Northern Ireland - how to build a democratic society where all our citizens will have the confidence to live and work together.

After so many failures, and the frustration of seeing intransigence triumph over hope again and again, many people question whether there is any point in more talks, or any real chance of getting all the political parties to

attend such a process again.

However there is one bold and important change which could be made to the failed format of past talks . . .

**They could be held in public, open to the people of Northern Ireland; transmitted on television and radio and reported in the press.**

The Workers' Party called for an end to 'behind closed doors' secrecy during 1991 and '92 and the answer was that public pressure would increase intransigence and prevent progress. What kind of genuine progress can be made if those engaged are afraid to let their followers see and hear their discussions?

### ***Democratic Convention***

A Convention of all democratic political parties, and of a wider grouping of representative bodies; trades unions, business associations, chambers of commerce, community groups, churches and cultural groups - should be convened by the government; funded and resourced by them, and the deliberations publicised daily while they put forward, discuss, argue over and perhaps even eventually agree upon, detailed proposals for a Democratic Devolved Government and a Bill of Rights.

That could be a long and acrimonious process - all the more reason for starting now.

Public scrutiny and a wide range of participants could result in more progress and will at the very least reveal to all the dimensions of the problem we face and possible paths to lasting solutions.

Nightly publicity on television could well convince reluctant politicians that this is a process they can not walk away from.

### ***Northern Ireland's Economic Crisis***

In 1985 The Workers' Party stated " the depressed state of the economy is at the centre of Northern Ireland's many difficulties . . .(we) believe that the present economic depression is tolerated only because people have been fooled into accepting the lie that it is impossible to improve the economic situation or to achieve full employment - the present high level of unemployment in Northern Ireland is intolerable.

"Unemployment is the real and most widespread suffering endured in Northern Ireland. It crosses all sectarian boundaries and enters working class homes in all areas." (*Northern Ireland Economy: A Plan for Recovery*).

Tragically, there has been no improvement on the employment front since that time. Equally there has, if

anything, been an increase in the numbers falling below the poverty line. While the prospects for long term, well paid manufacturing jobs have shrunk considerably.

And while there is no way of establishing concretely the numbers fleeing abroad, we are convinced that it is well above the 'guesstimated' 2,000 (annually) in the 1970's. Furthermore, it is clear that many of our most highly educated young people are subject both to 'push', unemployment, and 'pull' - the attraction of living in societies free from the manic sectarian terrorism of Northern Ireland.

In December 1992, in response to the Government's public expenditure plans for Northern Ireland we pointed out that. "There is not one single proposal which will enhance, or increase the numbers employed in the most critical sector of the Northern Ireland economy - our shrinking manufacturing base.

"The stark reality is that numbers employed in manufacturing in June 1979 were 145,520 and in June this year (1992) there was 97,380. Roughly a third of manufacturing has been lost (or nearly 5,000 jobs per year.)

"In the critical engineering subdivision of manufacturing again, virtually a third of the workforce has been wiped out. The Workers' Party has already this year pointed out the dangers to Shorts and the shipyard; dangers which were denied.

"Once again we stress the need for realistic ongoing government support for these economically strategic industries and a vastly increased worldwide sales division unhindered by any ideological antagonisms to such markets as the Peoples Republic of China." (*Northern Ireland: Europe's pensionopolis, December 18, 1992*).

The construction industry is extremely volatile; it has employed, at boom times, over 30,000, but now, for the first time in our history, it has fallen to below 20,000.

To some extent this can be explained in strict "economic" terms, but there is also no denying that negative Government investment policies in housing are central to this decline.

"Time and again it has been pointed out that the construction industry can make a vital contribution to stimulating growth in the economy. We therefore call upon the Government to reverse its decision, restore the Housing Executive allocation and initiate a long term plan for new homes, improvement schemes and the wiping out of rural and urban decayed zones." (*ibid*).

A further major role for the construction industry would be in a planned expansion of Northern Ireland's energy system. While it is true that we have surplus capacity; it is still high-cost energy.

A major conversion programme is necessary to bring down the cost of electricity to manufacturing industry, in order to put such industry on an equal footing with other European countries.

The Workers' Party has also for some time put forward proposals in relation to agriculture, both in terms of high quality food production and a natural fibres industry, with particular emphasis on flax and linen products.

In agriculture we cannot compete with vast agri-business, such as in the United States, so our efforts should be directed into top quality 'Green' products and away from intensive production, where we are simply one supplier among many. Obviously this also opens up job prospects in packaging, marketing and diverse methods of food preservation.

We also find it incredible that our flax growing industry has shrunk from a high point of two hundred thousands acres, to roughly 100 acres (or less than 50 hectares.)

There is a vast traditional market, and given new production techniques, an expanding one for Irish linen, which essentially means linen produced in Northern Ireland.

Clearly there is something radically wrong with our economic strategy when Italy can produce 55% of flax grown in Western Europe and occupies the key niche in the American market.

That is, however, not the complete picture. Natural fibres still occupy almost 60% of the world market, of this flax has only 2.5%. There is vast room therefore for a major production increase in Northern Ireland's flax and linen products.

We are not in the position to conduct a complete sectoral analysis of the Northern Ireland economy. That is the job of government, but we have indicated certain major strategic lines which could be most advantageously developed under a Northern Ireland Devolved Government prepared to place full employment at the top of its agenda.

But even in the present situation there is an urgent need for imaginative approaches to job creation where no possible gain to the citizens of Northern Ireland should be ruled out.

This demands greater day-to-day government involvement in shaping the Northern Ireland economy and an end to the laissez faire attitude which currently seems to dominate Northern Ireland Office thinking.

## ***Crisis in the Republic:***

## ***Political, Economic & Social***

The Workers' Party goal of a democratic, secular, socialist unitary state - a Republic, is the yardstick by which we measure the current political, economic and social condition of the present Republic.

It must be stated that the social fabric of the Republic since it first came into existence as the Irish Free State, has been grievously flawed. Emigration and unemployment have always been vicious social evils which no native government has at any time been prepared to tackle with all the powers of the state.

Naturally, there has been constant lip service, particularly at election times, usually linked to the issue of territorial unity and the revival of the Irish language. Yeats's words are appropriate; "the Best lack all conviction, while the Worst are full of passionate intensity." (*The Second Coming*).

This can be seen quite clearly when Articles 1 & 2 in the Republic's Constitution come under discussion and are defended with that 'passionate intensity' while the best of our young people are driven from the "the land where they were born".

Over 300,000 citizens are denied work, while thousands more live below the poverty line. So much for the pious annual Easter recitation of the 1916 Proclamation and its determination "to cherish all our children equally".

Behind the lip service, however, seems to loom a bourgeois political consensus which silently asserts (i) the problem of unemployment can never be really solved and (ii) emigration is a welcome phenomenon that drains off surplus labour, thereby preventing the build-up of a revolutionary dynamic in the working class.

Furthermore, the Republic's political culture, dominated as it is by a combination of nationalistic myths, pseudo-Christian values, gross individualism and Darwinian ethics, literally dismisses the unemployed and the emigrants - not as evidence of collective community failing - but as evidence of the commitment of the hardworking, successful, dedicated two-thirds to the values which sustain "the nation".

Apart from the Workers' Party, no other party in the Republic is prepared to base its political existence on securing full employment.

That is not to say that we do not have other major goals, but the point is that we recognise that the Republic will remain a deformed state, even in bourgeois terms, unless these two major haemorrhages are stopped.

In other words, the Workers' Party would have lost its *raison d'etre* if it were to declare itself even marginally in the same camp as the other political parties on these two crucial issues.

## ***A central role for the State***

As a socialist party we have always argued the case for a major State role in economic development, not only in terms of providing a positive stable macro-economic climate but also through direct participation in various industries. We set out at different times, particularly in the Irish Industrial Revolution, where the State should operate for the total benefit of the people.

Naturally there were those who scorned this approach on ideological grounds - we were opposed to private enterprise - and certainly this will have been reinforced by the collapse of Eastern Europe. However, the reality of modern Ireland is that neither native industry nor the multi-nationals have been capable of creating the number of jobs necessary to even make a dent in the critical unemployment statistics.

It is therefore reasonable to say that the advocates of "private enterprise" have been unable to come forward with any programme which will turn the present disastrous economic situation around.

That is not to say that there are not many efficient and well managed firms which are deserving of additional financial inputs to enable expansion nor that we would call for the immediate ending of subventions and other forms of relief to private industry.

But clearly there must be recognition that unless there is major State participation and initiative right across the entire economic spectrum then we will be facing the present, if not a higher, level of unemployment at the end of the century. (One forecast already predicts 400,000 out of work by the end of the century. But it should be noted that this view arises from opposition to the present government economic programme).

The acceptance of this proposal demands a complete reversal of thinking from that which prevails in government, the civil service and industry in general.

There is no doubt that The Workers' Party is not alone in pressing this "new" thinking, but as yet it has not sufficiently become the conventional wisdom displacing the anti-state philosophy of the dominant social force. Therefore a major educational (propagandising) job must be done by all who understand the urgency of the situation. For until such is the case, the critical fiscal and entrepreneurial state initiatives required will not be undertaken.

Naturally State investment decisions in recent weeks have been attacked by the Irish monetarists and advocates of privatisation. At the same time unless this massive investment is closely linked to the creation of downstream industries, particularly in the field of information technology, then criticism of the government's present plans may turn out to be well founded.

Our need here is for a new State Corporation charged with the responsibility of developing this entire field. This will not solve the problem of immediately reducing the massive numbers of unemployed and therefore Government must be prepared to create jobs on the principle that the cost of new jobs will take into account as a central concept, the reduction in benefit payments, the value of additional spending power and the corresponding increase in Gross Domestic Product.

We must once again campaign widely on the question of the exploitation of Ireland's mineral resources and their subsequent use. The Party was to the forefront in the previous campaign to end the private ownership of raw material which in any honest view, belongs to the people.

Recent developments suggest that the extent of these mineral resources has been grossly underestimated. There is also therefore a need for a State owned smelter and a development programme for downstream industries. We would envisage a joint North-South approach to this wealth, linking the whole country's engineering and manufacturing skills for the welfare of all our people.

Clearly we will face difficulties under Maastricht seeking to restrict subsidies to a range of industries over a wide spectrum. This will also apply to restrictions on capital outflow and the movement of profits, so part of any serious commitment to provide full employment will require renegotiation of aspects of Maastricht.

Our primary concern must be to generate a communal understanding that refuses to accept the inevitability of mass unemployment and emigration. While that on its own will not bring about the revolutionary social changes needed, it is the prerequisite of securing a government determined to do just that.

## ***Improving the quality of life***

'Bread and Roses' is a slogan long associated with the socialist movement. But for almost one third of the Republic's population the idea of flowers is as remote as the possibility of escaping once and for all from the degrading poverty which surrounds their existence.

Any government which seeks to promote the welfare of its citizens, without exception, must devote an adequate share of its resources to key aspects of the social system.

We cannot tolerate the absence of high quality public housing for all those who need and require it. We cannot see our children denied decent schools with full free support services, educationally satisfactory teacher-pupil ratios and guaranteed access to higher education as their abilities dictate.

Equally we must ensure a comprehensive health care system from pre-natal to old age where no one, irrespective of income, is denied necessary medical attention.

These are obvious requirements, which as we have said, constitute a minimum programme for any democratic government in the affluent Western industrialised world. We must accept nothing less.

At the same time we are confronted with a serious growth in drug-related crime largely associated with deprived urban working class areas. Drugs know no class nor geographic boundaries so we can expect to repeat the experiences of other European countries.

However, we reject the apparent current policy of 'containment' which sees the drug problem as simply another facet of the disruptive "underclass".

The Workers' Party is seeking a major intensive campaign against the drug barons in the deprived areas. This must be reinforced by both a vastly expanded Garda drugs team and an equally reinforced social-work network.

The quality of life in our society is not estimated by the above measures alone, vitally important though they are.

We must also have regard for the public ethos within which our citizens live out critical aspects of their lives. Paramount to this is the need to distinguish between what are essentially private matters of morality, and the authoritarian intrusion of the religious beliefs of one christian church into what should be essentially public matters decided by the elected representatives.

Key constitutional issues, *eg. divorce and the abortion* amendment, illustrate the need to draw a clear distinction between matters which are political and those which can rightly claim to be sacred. That is not an easy question and many of the bloodiest pages in world history have been - and still are - being written around this emotive matter.

But we have declared that a secular society is a central part of our goals; the lessons of Northern Ireland reinforce the correctness of our views. Therefore we must join with other democrats in the Republic



seeking the complete separation of church and state.

### ***International Affairs***

The Workers' Party, as stated elsewhere, has a long history of commitment to international solidarity with peoples and parties struggling to defeat colonialism and racism. Equally our history has been one of fraternal support for workers, socialist and communist parties in many different regions. All our relations have been developed on the basis of absolute equality and mutual recognition of independent status. These principles and practises have served us well in the past and there is no good reason to discard them in the extremely difficult world that socialists now inhabit. Indeed, if anything, there is a greater need to develop and maintain strong fraternal links with socialist parties, particularly throughout Europe and at the same time to revitalise our relations with the other socialist forces throughout the world.

Central to these relations must be the democratic struggle, infused with the understanding that the forces of capitalism and imperialism have had major successes and that they remain absolutely committed to the total destruction of any socialist country and the international socialist ideology.

As the European Community will continue to play a critical role in shaping the future of Ireland and the other member states, it is important that we should contribute to the creation of a new alliance of workers, socialist and communist parties within the Community, but linked at the same time to the other European states which are not members.

We were correct when we stated that we envisaged a people's Europe stretching from the Urals to the Aran Islands. We remain firmly committed to this concept and our political activity must demonstrate this. At the same time we will not support a new Euro-nationalism which would erect barriers against the hundreds of millions in the so-called Third World.

Our vision is of a socialist Europe capable of injecting massive resources into the vast areas of the world which are currently being exploited by the rich Western "democracies" and their associated international financial institutions. All the evidence of the past century firmly indicates that it is only a socialist Europe which will make the efforts and the sacrifices necessary to raise the greater bulk of humankind from the misery and degradation to which it is currently condemned by the barbarism of capitalism.

Although the Party has an extensive series of fraternal and friendly relations throughout the world, in Europe, Asia, Africa and parts of Latin America, there are still vast critical regions where we have either no contact or previous relations have been weakened. Among those regions of major importance are the United States of America, Canada, New Zealand and Latin America. While presently we are prevented by financial considerations

from sending Party representatives to these regions we must produce a regular **International Report** which will begin the critical process of building fresh ties with these regions and strengthening existing relations elsewhere.

### ***Challenge for Socialists***

The remainder of this century and early years of the next will be a period of major challenge for the socialist forces. This will come - not only from the continuing onslaught by capitalism and imperialism - aided by social democratic elements, but as is already apparent, from the virulence of nationalist, religious and racist ideologies.

We can expect these reactionary phenomena to persist as a serious threat throughout Europe and to increasingly present themselves as local and regional 'real' enemies of international monopoly capitalism. Objectively, however, they will contribute to the fragmentation of the struggle against imperialism, at a time when the internationalisation of the world economy is being intensified and consequently demands a corresponding response from the socialist forces. This is only part of the challenge which must be confronted. Politically we have witnessed the virtual demise of the United Nations, and the United States operating as the world's 'police force'. For many reasons this will not continue, not least the crisis situation within the United States itself.

The world political and economic order will remain extremely turbulent and therefore the socialist forces, of which we are a part, must seek to establish that our ideology is the only political, economic and moral answer to the ongoing devastation of capitalism and imperialism. Our concern is our own immediate situation, providing the solutions to massive unemployment, poverty, sectarianism and terrorism - building the unity of our people, challenging the rampant greed and individualism which permeates all corners of Irish society. That is no easy task.

But our international commitments do not fall into a subordinate category - they march hand in hand with our obligations to the Irish working class. Fraternal international relations are not a luxury nor an afterthought once all else has been done.

In 1848 the most revolutionary ambitious goal ever was announced by the International Working Mens' Association; "**Workers of all countries, Unite**". It was never more relevant than today.

The Workers' Party must play its part in bringing it to fruition.